

OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

Positioning a Nonprofit to Build The OC Workforce of Tomorrow

Today's workforce is quite different than 27 years ago when WHW was first formed.

In 1993, **Women Helping Women** was incorporated as a nonprofit organization to provide professional apparel to survivors of domestic violence so they could successfully enter the workforce. Back then, a professional outfit and completing a paper job application were the basic requisites of a successful job search.



By Trina Fleming
CEO
WHW

Today's workforce is also very different from the day I arrived in 2010 as director of operations. At that time, the unemployment rate was 10% and the organization was adopting a workshop model to serve more people, including men.

Since 2010, we have expanded to provide a full suite of employment readiness services to prepare job seekers for a competitive edge. We've gone from three services to 18 different readiness workshops and 12 different computer workshops offered monthly, a weekly job lead email and a professional development library.

With Orange County's current unemployment rate hovering at or below 3%, our programs help job seekers navigate the landscape by uncovering the hidden job market with a professional network and savvy use of LinkedIn—two top ways to find employment.

Despite the low unemployment rate, the demand for our uniquely curated services remains constant with job seekers referred by over 80 nonprofit partners, word of mouth, and online searches. We also have relationships with dozens of small, midsize and large companies who forward job leads to bring efforts full circle.

Still, the world of work continues to change.

The challenge of staying ahead of workforce development trends has required research, development and planning. Studies, such as the **Workforce Indicators Report**, the **Community Indicators Report** and the **Annual Report on the Condition of Children**, help provide an environmental scan and insight into what may be ahead for Orange County workers and job seekers. Additionally, working with volunteer subject matter experts and developing strategic partnerships with other nonprofits, businesses and community leaders has been critical to our longevity and success.

Today's job search has already been impacted by technological advances and new ways of working. Tomorrow's job seekers will need much more than a great LinkedIn profile and the ability to make small talk.

While vocational, digital and technical skills will continue to be in demand for most industries, employers are looking for individuals who possess a high level of emotional intelligence, who are also critical thinkers and courageous innovators. These are what we call soft skills and they will be in demand across all industries. In most cases, they will be the determining factor as to whether a candidate gets the job, keeps it, and advances.

Additionally, these soft skills are usually transferrable, and as new opportunities present themselves, those possessing this acumen will find it much easier to transition into new career paths.

This gap in soft skills is one of the main barriers to employment that we see today, particularly with first-time job seekers and those re-entering the workforce who find themselves unprepared to suc-

ceed in employment.

WHW is lessening this gap with enhanced internal education programs and partnerships with community colleges and vocational training providers.

We measure our impact by how many of those we serve get jobs and by how much their household income increases because of those jobs. Last fiscal year, 1,244 men and women participated in WHW's programs, each attending an average of seven workshops. The result was that 1,107 of them were employed within an average of 90 days of coming to WHW, increasing their household income on average by 318%.

Our staff doesn't achieve these numbers by ourselves. Hundreds of community volunteers contribute, including corporate volunteers such as **Capital Group, Pacific Dental, Comerica, Pacific Life, Citizens Business Bank, UPS, Ingram Micro, PIMCO, JP Morgan Chase, Kaiser and Salesforce**, to name a few.



WHW holds dozens of workshops to teach people how to get a job

These companies provide volunteers who lead workshops and give advice on professional attire. They also work behind the scenes, hosting clothing drives, working in our donation center, making follow-up calls to job seekers and many other tasks. Their brain trust, real-world know-how and care-in-action are priceless manpower that gives us the ability to move lives forward.

In my fourth month of being WHW's CEO, I find it an awesome calling and a great honor to be a positive steward in the lives of others. We believe that a good job can change everything, not just for a job seeker, but for their family and our entire community. It is this belief that drives our small yet nimble staff to serve this unique population.

We are proud to be part of a large community of caring problem solvers, evolving and positioning ourselves to serve the workforce of tomorrow, knowing that soon, tomorrow will be today.

Editor's Note: The Business Journal's annual charity guide supplement is in this week's print edition.

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