



FOCUS For 2015

SHE MATTERS: We Listen and Iowa Wins State Tour

On February 17, the release of SHE MATTERS: 2015 Issues & Actions report took place in the rotunda of the State Capitol in Des Moines. The report called for unified initiatives to remove the barriers that are keeping women and girls from economic self-sufficiency, leadership, safety from violence, developing women-owned businesses and advancement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers.

The press event was the kick off to a day-long focus on informing, unifying and acting on issues impacting Iowa's women and girls' success. Following the press event, individuals and organization leaders from throughout the state participated in round-table forum to discuss action steps they could take to positively impact the priority issues affecting the lives of Iowa women and girls.

The Iowa Women's Foundation was an instrumental partner in creating the report. The IWF improves the lives of Iowa's women and girls through economic self-sufficiency. Over the next six months, IWF will host the SHE MATTERS: We Listen & Iowa Wins tour across Iowa.

The purpose of the tour is to deepen the understanding of the report's economic self-sufficiency findings by learning how they play out in communities across Iowa. IWF will also gather stories and ideas about

current and potential initiatives that improve the lives of Iowa's women and girls.

IWF will compile all of the focus group discussions into a report which will be used to inform our work, including grant-making and affect public policy. We'll also share the report with policy makers, advocacy organizations and the broader public.

Stayed tuned for more information on this tour and where we're headed!



OVATION:

A Tribute to Iowa Women and

Girls!

Honor someone you know - and, by doing so, help improve the lives of women and girls across Iowa.

When you honor a woman or girl through a tribute in *OVATION*, you:

- Introduce an inspiring female role model
- Tell a story about the amazing effect women and girls have on our towns, businesses, families, schools and more
- Contribute funds that help IWF make grants to organizations across Iowa
- Strengthen our communities, socially and economically, by strengthening the women within them
- Have the opportunity to attend a festive event introducing and recognizing each year's honorees

If you would like more information,
please contact dawn@iawf.org, call 319-774-3814 or
visit our website at www.iawf.org

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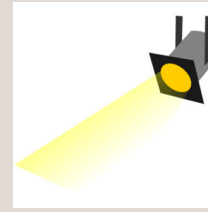


Run Like A Mother

Chicks for Change

Run Like a Mother is a 4 mile run/walk that takes place the Saturday before Mother's Day in Cedar Falls. It is one of the largest road races in Cedar Valley and attracts more than 500 runners each year. Mark your calendars for May 9, 2015. The run will take place at Island Park. Watch for more details from the IWF and check out the *Run Like a Mother* Facebook page.





Grantee Spotlight

The Iowa Women's Foundation focuses on two of our grant partners this month.



ACCESS

Assault Care Center Extending Service and Support

Next Step: Women's Job Readiness Program

By Erin Becker

ACCESS (Assault Care Center Extending Shelter and Support) addresses both the roots and impact of domestic and sexual violence. Through the Next Step program, the organization is taking that vision beyond a front-lines, crisis situation response and helping survivors who have reached physical safety answer a challenging question: what's next?

"There's a misperception that women in these situations only face physical violence, but there can also be economic abuse," Virginia Grieshemer, shelter program advocate for ACCESS, said. "Many of our clients haven't been allowed to work, and their partners try to control them."

The Next Step program is designed to help survivors navigate the transition to financial

independence. "Definitely the primary concern is safety, first and foremost," Linda Munden, shelter director, said. "Then we try to empower individuals to become independent financially and employment is the first step."

Next Step helps women in Greene, Boone, Story, Marshall, and Tama counties. The group kicked off with an informational meeting February 4. They'll meet twice a month and topics will include job searching, the job application process, resumes and cover letters, interviewing, work culture, and training.

The inspiration for the program came from a former ACCESS client who was having a tough time with a job search. "The person who inspired this group was a client who was in shelter some time ago, who had 20 job applications out and interviewed five times and wasn't getting any callbacks," Grieshemer said.

After ACCESS offered some application advice and helped conduct mock interviews, the client was soon offered a job with benefits in the medical field.

"Close case management and individual attention really does benefit people," Grieshemer said.

Next Step is using the IWF grant to buy laptops, license technology, and buy gas cards, healthy snacks, and bus tickets for participants. The grant also helps pay program employees.

One of the important services the group provides is helping participants understand that they do have many career skills--even if they've never had a job before.

Ellie Havlik, AmeriCorps housing and economic justice advocacy specialist, explained a bit about the interviewing skills the group discusses in class.

"We try to coach attendees to talk about the skills they've built that they can bring to the workplace. Someone who's been a stay-at-home mom for six years understands how to do financial management, budgeting, paying for diapers and school and all those things that are necessary," Havlik said. "We try to shift the focus to-what are the skills you've built in your environment?"

This is an especially important realization in Story County, where competition for entry-level positions can be tough, given the large supply of cheap student labor. "We help coach attendees with how they can market themselves," Munden said. "They can tell employers-I'm a stable community member. I'm reliable; I'm dependable. And that makes them appealing as potential employees."

The group rose from demand from ACCESS clients, and survivors have had a hand in the planning and curriculum design. Using an interesting inventory, Next Step staff assessed the group's interest in different job skills and activities, including field trips to businesses and local colleges, mock interviews, and guest speakers.

"We found it was very helpful in trying to get a feel for what these women wanted to accomplish within this program," Griesheimer said in an email. "Hopefully it will instill a sense of ownership since we are doing all we can to incorporate their suggestions."



Cedar Valley Friends of the Family Housing Stability and Financial Empowerment By Erin Becker

After you've fled your abuser, how do you rebuild your life?

Cedar Valley Friends of the Family (CVFF) helps survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and homelessness in eastern Iowa begin to answer this question. "When you think of a domestic violence shelter, there's a lot more to it than you'd necessarily think," Casey Herkelman, grant and development director for CVFF, said. "It's more than a roof over the survivors' heads-it's a connection to where they are, what they need in that moment."

Through the Housing Stability and Financial Empowerment program, CVFF assists survivors as they work toward securing safe housing and steady employment.

In the case of Darlene (name has been changed to protect privacy), an elderly survivor of domestic violence, CVFF became a crucial factor in helping her advocate for herself when looking for housing. When Darlene found an apartment that met her needs and her budget, she didn't pass a credit check, and the landlord told her she couldn't move in.

With a little extra assistance from CVFF, Darlene was able to craft a letter explaining how her debt and delinquent accounts were due to the financial abuse she'd endured. She hadn't

been allowed to access her own Social Security funds-but now, she had access to her own money, and CVFF was helping her with a monthly budget and a financial plan. Upon receiving the letter from Darlene, the landlord agreed to let her move into her new home.

"Without our diligent housing advocacy and budgeting assistance, Darlene would have lost that housing opportunity," CVFF wrote in a letter about Darlene's case. "It was powerful to see financial advocacy working in action and preventing a survivor from losing her housing."

Darlene is just one example of how personalized assistance and a focus on financial empowerment can help women not only move forward from crisis situations, but also thrive.

"For victims, allowing them that financial freedom, teaching them about the possibilities that are out there-for us, that's been really cool, to see the effect," Herkelman said.

CVFF developed a once-a-week class for small groups of women-clients, former clients, and those who have been referred by other shelters in the area-who are looking to improve their financial literacy and gain skills for job searching and developing their careers. The program also features close case management, direct housing assistance, and crisis counseling.

Herkelman explained that CVFF makes sure that survivors are ready for this program before having them begin these classes. "You learn as you go what you can offer to people at different points on the spectrum," Herkelman said. "If you're not safe right now, for example, you're not really thinking about the future."

Topics in the classes include developing a budget, how to interact with a landlord, and making a savings plan. "The women have great questions in class. They have a lot of goals, and they should," Herkelman said. Each session runs for a few weeks, and CVFF gives attendees a cash incentive to encourage participation. The IWF grant helps pay for this cash incentive, as well as the stipend for the program coordinator. "Because we have grown so much, the budget was really tight last year," Herkelman said.

Herkelman added that the IWF grant has been instrumental in keeping the program going. "It's so important that we have the support of the IWF, and our volunteers, and all the other sources," Herkelman said. "With help, we really can work toward a future without violence. And working toward giving women the tools they need to be independent is really the only way we're going to get there."

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* indicates new in 2015

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