



“I have never been treated as well as I was [at Wardrobe for Opportunity. In these clothes I feel like I can accomplish anything.”

-David, employed as a Plumber Apprentice earning \$15/hour

SUMMARY

Wardrobe for Opportunity is a volunteer-driven nonprofit organization that provides professional clothing and career support to low-income jobseekers in the Bay Area so they can become economically self-sufficient. Founded in 1995 to address often overlooked, yet critical barriers to finding and retaining employment, WFO has served over 14,000 low-income jobseekers. Through our **Professional Dressing Program for Women and Men, Pathways to Opportunity Career Advancement, and Days of Pride** programs, we provide our clients with the tools they need to project the positive image, self-confidence, and self-esteem necessary to find and maintain employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency. With locations in Pleasant Hill and downtown Oakland, we serve Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. In 2006, we served 1,712 low-income jobseekers, including 375 men.

STATEMENT OF NEED

Studies show that employers make hiring decisions in the first five minutes of an interview. Seventy-five percent of the first impression is visual¹ and confidence during the interview is one of the main traits employers value. In spite of their motivation, training and technical skills, many women and men on public assistance cannot find work or stop working shortly after being hired. Reasons for this failure include lack of confidence in interviews, a poor self-image in the workplace, and the need for skills to advance in their careers.

¹ Seitz, Victoris, Ph.D. “Image Making,” BeautyWalk.com, 3/11/2003.

A growing body of evidence is showing that the situation for black men is getting progressively worse. Studies released by Harvard, Columbia and Princeton in March 2006 report that the “huge pool of poorly educated black men are becoming ever more disconnected from the mainstream society.” In response to this growing plight, experts are suggesting the importance of “programs that teach life skills like parenting, conflict resolution and character building, as well as job skills.”²

Most of our clients have faced significant challenges including poverty, domestic violence, drug abuse, disability, racism, sexism, immigration, homelessness and single parenthood. 80% of our clients are single parents; over 70% receive government assistance; 80% are nonwhite; 85% are 18-45 years old, but we have served clients from 17-71 years of age. All of our clients are referred from partner agencies that serve low-income and disadvantaged people who are seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce.

SOLUTION: WARDROBE FOR OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS

Professional Dressing Program for Women and Men

WFO receives referrals of qualified clients from over 70 partner social service agencies that are actively helping jobseekers prepare for and find jobs. During an initial appointment with a volunteer ‘personal shopper,’ a client receives two complete outfits including shoes and accessories for their upcoming interview. Once the client has been offered employment, they can return to WFO for a ‘working wardrobe’ which consists of enough clothing appropriate to their position to dress for the first few weeks of work. Each consultation helps the client gain a more positive sense of self, enabling them to project the image of a confident applicant and employee. Approximately 70% of our clients find employment with an average wage of \$12 per hour.

Pathways to Opportunity Career Advancement Program

Providing professional clothing is crucial to helping low-income jobseekers, but getting the job is only the first step. Through our Pathways to Opportunity program WFO is helping entry-level working women advance their careers, including gaining higher wages and greater responsibility in the workplace. The seven-session workshop includes training in conflict resolution, goal setting and effective communication. Clients graduate with action plans designed to help them with specific goals such as negotiating a raise and starting a savings account.

Developed in 2001, Wardrobe for Opportunity has assisted over 350 women in developing the skill set necessary to advance their careers and lay the foundation for a successful future. We are proud to report that this workshop really is making a difference:

- On average, salaries increased from \$8.73 to \$10.32 during the workshop

² Holzer, Harry, economist at Georgetown University and co-author with Peter Edelman and Paul Offner, of “Reconnecting Disadvantaged Men” (Urban Institute Press, 2006).

- Average paid working hours rose from 20 to 24 hours per week
- 11% of the participants received a raise during the workshop
- 44% of the participants gained responsibility at work
- Only 17% of the participants rated themselves as having excellent goal setting skills at the beginning of the workshop, and by the end of the six sessions, 58% of the participants felt they had excellent goal setting skills.

In addition to the statistics we gather, we are also listening to what our graduates are saying. Ruthie McGilberry, a December 2006 participant wrote an extraordinary poem that she read at graduation, part of which is excerpted here – enjoy!

*I have this new found confidence
 I let it show, I love it, it's evident.
 I took the chance to participate
 And now, I can effectively communicate
 When I feel the need to ask why
 I sneak it in because I clarify
 I see a problem before being involved in it
 And I now know how to prevent it.
 Dealing with issues that involve you and me
 Because now I'm on my pathway to opportunity.*

Interview Clinics

To assist our clients in gaining access to jobs, we designed the Interview Clinics to bring together jobseekers with employers such as Target and Albertsons for a day of intensive career preparation that includes interview and career workshops, and mock interviews from local employers.

A recent Interview Clinic brought together six clients primarily from referral partner Opportunity Junction, a nonprofit in Antioch that provides computer training, with 16 employees from Renoir Staffing Services, a job placement agency that specializes in the real estate industry. Our clients received a workshop on best practices in job searching, and practice interviewing. Two of the jobseekers were invited for second interviews at Renoir and we are eagerly waiting to hear the outcome!

We look forward to continuing to connect our clients to interviews and jobs through our Interview Clinics, in partnership with our referral organizations and local employers.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Wardrobe for Opportunity has locations in Pleasant Hill and downtown Oakland so we can serve both Contra Costa and Alameda counties. We have two full-time and five part-time staff, and 9 energetic and committed Board members. WFO enjoys a widespread reputation for leadership, innovation and quality among local and national non-profits. We utilize volunteers at every level of our organization who give their time and support to

ensure there is a safe, nurturing place for low-income jobseekers to obtain the assistance they need to successfully enter the job market and take control of their lives. **Over 200 community volunteers annually contribute over 8,000 hours of their time, dedication and energy to our programs, which is valued at over \$150,000.**

We also depend on gently-used, work appropriate clothing donations and accessories from hundreds of individual donors throughout the Bay Area. Through seven dropoff locations, we receive clothing and accessory donations year-round. We also purchase larger-sized clothing and shoes for women and men to ensure that we are able to serve every client that walks through our doors.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Wardrobe for Opportunity depends on our generous funders and community supporters to ensure that thousands of low-income, Bay Area jobseekers are able to receive high quality professional clothing and critical training to advance their careers. Our greatest expenses include salaries, rent, the purchase of larger-sized clothing and shoes for women and men, and funds to put on our Pathways to Opportunity workshops.

We are extremely efficient with the funds that we spend. For example, our part-time Resource Development Coordinator oversees 200 volunteers, who in turn provide over 8,000 hours of volunteer time each year, which we can value at over \$150,000. Our rent expense, while significant, enables us to have two top-notch locations that are accessible by public transportation for our clients and volunteers. And though we receive hundreds of clothing donations, the majority come in women's sizes 2 – 12, while two-thirds of our female clients are size 14 and greater. Similarly, it is difficult to receive big and tall suits, shoes and belts for our male clients. As a result, we must purchase clothing and accessories to complement our donations so we are able to serve every client that walks through our doors. And finally, our Pathways to Opportunity workshops take place in donated classroom spaces, but require funding to pay for our high quality trainers and curriculum materials.

Your investment in Wardrobe for Opportunity directly helps a low-income jobseeker or entry-level worker gain the self-confidence and self-esteem that is so critical on the path to economic self-sufficiency.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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