



Annual Report 2008

Our Mission

The mission of Women's Empowerment is to educate and empower women, who are homeless, with the skills and confidence necessary to get a job, create a healthy lifestyle, and regain a home for themselves and their children.

Comprehensive Changes

When a woman attends our program, she will make several life changes. At Women's Empowerment, she gets back what she lost to homelessness: her health, a home, and a job.

In this struggling economy, we also meet her daily survival and emergency needs, including food, clothing, bus passes, and childcare.

Her children's needs are also met. These homeless children receive a better education because we advocate for them in the schools. Toddlers and infants spend the day with us while mom is in class; they receive healthy meals, as well as care and protection in our on-site daycare.

Women's Empowerment reached 194 women in 2008. Of these, 83 graduated from our program. Each year, more women complete our program. In the past, we graduated an average of 21 women per class. Our last two classes had 27 graduates each.

Health

A woman's life changes dramatically in poor health. She can lose her job. Her children can lose their mother. By helping her overcome barriers and access healthcare, Women's Empowerment links her to a brighter, healthier future. *In 2008, 134 women received needed health education.*

In our program, a woman will receive domestic violence counseling. In fact, *89% of the women we serve have experienced domestic violence.*

One such class covers breast exams. Ana, a mother of three young children found cancerous cells in her breast, and with our help, was able to access services to have them removed and to receive radiation treatments. With early detection, she is now healthy and able to continue caring for her children.

Another mother, referred to us by a local domestic violence shelter, had been so severely beaten by her husband that she continually blacked out during class. With our help, she

has since received the medical treatment and domestic violence counseling she so desperately needed.

Homes

When they become homeless, a woman and her children are often traumatized by life on the streets and in shelters. Fifty-three percent of homeless children have heard gunshots, while others witness fighting and extreme violence. Getting these families into homes is imperative to their health and safety.

Jackie, a former foster youth in her early twenties, was eight months pregnant and living in a transitional housing program when she came to Women's Empowerment with her two-year-old. Her poor quality apartment was costing her \$600 a month in rent, and Jackie had only \$500 a month to spend.

With help from Women's Empowerment, Jackie was able to move into a two-bedroom apartment with her newborn and toddler. She now pays only one third of her monthly income on rent, or about \$150 a month.

We helped 84% of the women who completed Women's Empowerment in 2008 find better homes.

Jobs & Financial Stability

To attack the cycle of poverty, a woman needs a job. This enables her to afford her own apartment, to receive healthcare benefits, and to be a role model to which her children will aspire.

Unemployment in our state has reached 9%. Meanwhile, resources for school such as financial aid or assistance to purchase books have dwindled.

Yet, a determined woman never gives up. In September of 2007, Kathryn graduated from Women's Empowerment. She had finally escaped her abusive husband, enrolled in our program, and took full advantage of every resource offered to her.

She persevered for a year as she sent out her resume over and over again, coming to Women's Empowerment almost daily throughout 2008 to use the computer and office resources, and importantly, to seek reassurance to continue in her search.

In October 2008, Kathryn finally found work at a local thrift store. Just two days ago, she called to let us know she had been promoted to assistant store manager! Despite the economy, our graduates stand out and are finding jobs. It may take longer than usual, but they have the skills and confidence to succeed—and they are.

In 2008, 69% of the women who completed our program found jobs, enrolled in school with the hopes of gaining higher employment upon completion, or secured a stable income through Social Security.

Survival & Emergency Needs

A homeless woman committed to turning her life around faces constricting financial choices. With limited income, does she buy groceries, a bus pass to take her children to school, or a warm winter coat? She cannot afford them all.

When she comes to Women's Empowerment, a woman no longer has to choose. We take care of these financial burdens for her by providing emergency assistance when finances are tight.

We provide bus passes, groceries and gift cards, warm clothing for her and her children, professional clothing for interviews, and hygiene products. If she has a new apartment, we work with a local thrift store to provide furniture vouchers.

We served more than 250 women and children with emergency services in 2008.

During this past year, Women's Empowerment saw an increased demand from past participants of our program. These women returned for support and emergency assistance such as grocery cards or clothing. With the worsening economy, more women are being laid off, or their rental properties are being foreclosed.

We served 175 returning women in 2008, and that number continues to climb.

Children's Needs

We help mom develop parenting skills to help her children cope with the trauma homelessness brings. Mom receives parenting classes, domestic violence counseling, and anger management courses. Over time, we witness a change in the relationship between mother and child as mom learns to talk to her children rather than yell or hit.

Meanwhile, children, the majority between the ages of zero to five years, receive health and developmental assessments from our Master's degree-level social workers. Many homeless children lack age-appropriate developmental skills (such as walking or talking), and by the time they reach eight years old, one in three has a mental disorder.

We identify these problems and prevent these children from slipping through the cracks. We link them to immediate intervention services to develop motor skills, speech, and healthy brain development. We also advocate on behalf of school-age children, ensuring they receive the special education they often require.

In 2008, our social worker accompanied Donna to a Student Service Team meeting at her daughter's school. Her first grader is significantly below grade level and had not been doing well. Women's Empowerment accompanied Donna, empowering her to articulate what problems and strengths she sees in her daughter.

In the meeting, it was determined that Donna's daughter is socially developed and has several strengths, such as the ability to memorize. However, her personal life has been difficult: she lived in foster care while mom was homeless, and has an autistic brother. The daughter may be overcompensating for her brother's autism, afraid that she might "catch" it, too.

With new knowledge of the daughter's family history, the teacher is now more patient. The daughter receives more individual attention, is starting to catch up, and has even started to enjoy reading at home. Importantly, she knows that autism cannot be transmitted like a cold.

20 children received developmental assessments in 2008.