WV WOMEN WORK INTRODUCES WREN

Naming Things

Naming things is how we make sense of the universe. Francis Bacon coined the phrase ‘knowledge is power’ and there is power in naming things. Giving something a name allows us to communicate about it and makes it real.

For over 20 years West Virginia Women Work (WVWW) has supported and advocated for the education, employment, and economic equity of all women. Our Step Up for Women programs have become well-known in the region. In addition to Step Up, WVWW has held career fairs, offered tutoring, supplied work wear & tools to women, provided employment referrals, acted as a bridge to specialized services, and so much more.

We have created a network of individuals, workers, employers, educators, resources, and service providers that have quietly worked to empower women. While the change this network has made over the years is authentic, the communication and tangibility of it was arduous because it didn't have a name. If only there was a simple way to explain the women’s resource and empowerment network we had created...

Becoming Real

WVWW is proud to announce the Women’s Resource and Empowerment Network (WREN). WREN is not a new program; it is the name for what our network does outside of our Step Up Programs. It is what we and our partners have done since the beginning. Our hope is that by naming the efforts we have enacted, we add structure and power to WREN. Our goal is to provide more empowerment opportunities to women by expanding the network and providing enhanced services. In short: WREN is real.

Now that we are real, WREN will focus on transformations, not transactions. WREN is opportunity, not obligation. WREN will concentrate on creating and quantifying a support network for all women, regardless of participation in our Step Up Programs. WREN will be an authentic network of folks throughout the region that have a desire to enact genuine change in the lives of women by offering support for their education, employment, and economic equity. These WRENs know that by supporting women, they are not only assisting the individual, but they are also strengthening families and enhancing communities.

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- Who are WRENS?
- Why is there a need for WREN?
- How will we implement WREN?
- When & where will WREN take place?

Call to Flight
WREN is a network of individuals and groups that advocate for the education, employment, and economic equity of all women by lending their expertise and giving to their ability. WREN includes tutoring, workshops, trainings, networking events, outreach, career services & placement, and other creative ways to empower women. WREN adds efficiency to getting resources to those who need them most. By streamlining and focusing on our partner network, we can provide enhanced services more often. WREN will work to address the obstacles women face by creating a social infrastructure that encourages women to pursue education and employment opportunities that traditionally they may not have the access or reassurance to engage in.

"Real isn't how you are made. It's a thing that happens to you. It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time." The Skin Horse, Margery Williams Bianco, The Velveteen Rabbit

Who are WRENs?

WRENs are workers, companies, organizations, educators, students, counselors, friends, and family that want to assist women in overcoming obstacles to employment and education. WRENs are all ages and have a variety of education, socioeconomic backgrounds, careers, and life experiences that give them unique insight into ways we can advance women.

WRENs might donate funding, time, or expertise. A WREN knows a person that works at a company that partners with an organization which can provide a resource a woman needs to overcome a barrier. A WREN removes the six degrees of separation and combines it into one quick connection for women. A WREN sees opportunities to combine resources and amplify their impact.

You are a WREN.

WVWW Announces New Staff

Carol Phillips - Executive Director
Carol has worked her entire career in non-traditional roles including 16 years as an environmental scientist. Her skills and enthusiasm will allow WVWW to be unstoppable in furthering our mission.

Dara Britton - Financial Manager
Dara has over 20 years of accounting experience in the areas of non profit, local government, & public accounting. She has a passion for helping women achieve their life goals and will be a perfect fit at WVWW.

Heather Shockney - Content Creator, Media Coordinator, & All Things Tech
Heather comes with a background in freelance writing, social media management, software development, and photography. Her creativity & diverse experience are vital to our goal of reaching new partners and empowering all women.
Why is there a need for WREN?

Women in West Virginia often face inequities and barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. Barriers may include domestic responsibilities, lack of social infrastructure, undervalued non-institutional learning, inadequate access to technology, restricted financial capacity, traditional and cultural customs that steer women away from education and higher paying employment, and unfamiliarity of support systems available. These imbalances make it tougher for women, in particular rural and economically vulnerable women, to achieve economic independence.

West Virginia ranks at the bottom in the nation in both the Employment & Earnings Index and Poverty & Opportunity Index. WV ranks 46th nationally for the share of women living in poverty and dead last for women's labor force participation. The states ranking has remained the same since 2004 and the outlook for improvement is bleak. WV’s 2021 poverty level (15.8%) is higher than the national average (11.4%), 34.5% of employed women work in low-wage jobs, and 19.8% of women in the state are in poverty. Men are 2.5 times more likely to work in higher paying jobs such as STEM occupations and the skilled trades than women.

More than ever, the pandemic has highlighted the need for programs that empower women by removing barriers and providing access to education and employment. It is estimated that the pandemic will push 96 million people into extreme poverty, of whom 47 million are women, and this poverty surge will widen the gender poverty gap with more women pushed into extreme poverty than men. Millions of women have either been forced to or have needed to stop working since the start of the pandemic. The Center for American Progress reports that the risk of mothers leaving the labor force and reducing work hours to assume caretaking responsibilities amounts to $64.5 billion per year in lost wages and economic activity. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows that trends have made it more difficult for women than men to stay at work and that women are leaving the labor force at four times the rate of men.

The number of workers has stagnated since May 2020 due to many factors including a surge in retirements, pandemic related concerns, the cost of childcare, and the education/skills required for specific jobs. During this same time, the demand for workers has returned to 99% of pre-pandemic levels. The number of job seekers is growing more slowly than the economy, and productivity (how much a worker can accomplish in any given period with technology) is not increasing quick enough to make up the difference. This has resulted in a boon for workers but has become a crisis for a growing number of industries that are faced with staffing shortages. Companies are struggling to find talent to fill their positions in the most unusual job market in memory: an economy with too many jobs.
Wrens are very energetic birds that fly very fast. They have loud and often complex songs, sometimes given in duet. Wrens were first recorded in Anglo-Saxon times. There is fossil evidence from the last ice age, 10-120,000 years ago. The wren feeds mainly on insects, eating the larvae as well as the adults. The principle threat to this bird comes from the cold weather. Wrens do not migrate, so prolonged periods with sub-zero temperatures and snow covered ground can severely reduce populations. The House wren has one of the largest ranges of any songbird in the Americas. It breeds from Canada through the West Indies and Central America, southward to the southern most point of South America. King Friday the XIII in Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood had a pet wren named Trog. Trog was a wooden wren on a stick and had his own song.

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**How will we implement WREN?**

**WREN will provide resources to women in various ways including:**

- **Job Posting & Employment Referrals:** WREN will post vacancies online, refer women to positions they are qualified for, and identify skills training necessary for employment.

- **Tutoring:** WREN will provide GED and secondary education preparation and tutoring in person and virtually.

- **Training Workshops:** WREN will host training workshops for various certifications such as OSHA10 and Forklift Certification both in person and virtually.

- **Career & Education Exploration Events:** WREN will hold in person and virtual events that provide women with information on career types, education availability, and real experiences from women in nontraditional roles.

- **Resume Assistance:** WREN will assist women with resume development, formatting, and submission.

- **Career Closet:** WREN will obtain inventory and provide women with the workwear, PPE, and tools needed for nontraditional employment.

**WREN will empower women in numerous ways including:**

- **Fun & Functional Networking:** WREN will organize creative networking events bringing together employers, educators, job seekers, students, and WRENs from all walks of life.

- **Risk Outreach:** WREN will conduct outreach to young women that are at risk or in need of guidance, including those aging out of foster care, in detention centers, and in rural areas with limited opportunity.

- **Specialized Referrals:** WREN will refer women to experts that can assist them in obtaining specialized resources such as domestic violence awareness, addiction counseling, financial aid, and other community resources.

- **Content Creation:** WREN will create social & technical content related to the education, employment, and economic equity of women that will benefit students, educators, workers, and employers.

- **Technical Assistance:** WREN will coordinate and develop solutions for employers and educational institutions in achieving their diversity and employment/enrollment goals by providing technical assistance and enhancing processes.

- **Recognition:** WREN will recognize the success of our partners and celebrate that success through public acknowledgement, awards, blogs, and social media posts.
When will WREN take place?

WREN is already in place thanks to the dedication of WVWW staff and the partnerships they have cultivated over the years. We are currently offering tutoring and resume assistance, technical assistance, as well as employment referral services. We are working to compile a list of people and partners in our network in order to streamline the services offered. We hope to collaborate with partners in 2022 to host training workshops, virtual career & exploration events, and begin a celebration campaign to recognize the accomplishments of women and their supporters.

Our 3–5-year goal is to have brick & mortar locations in targeted areas, in addition to a mobile team, which will allow the Career Closet, Risk Outreach, and Specialized Referral Services to reach their full potential. In 5 years, we envision WREN as the program folks go to when they need information or resources related to women’s education, employment, and economic equity.

"I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and when and How and where and who." Rudyard Kipling

Where is WREN?

Due to the pandemic, WREN has mainly been on virtual platforms. As we emerge from the pandemic era and start rebuilding our communities, in-person WREN events will be hosted in the WVWW Morgantown and Charleston locations.

We hope to open additional locations and have a mobile team that meets women where they are, but until then we will work with partners to utilize the space they have available to host events. WREN will be present at career fairs, educational events, and industry meetings. We may even spread our wings at your local farmer’s market or festival.
West Virginia Women Work, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, strives to help women in West Virginia earn a living wage. Our mission is to support and advocate for education, employment, and economic equity for all women.

The primary focus of the organization’s activities has been to help women explore, train, and secure employment in nontraditional occupations, especially the skilled trades.

Equity. Empowerment. Education. Enrichment.

Call to Flight

For over two decades, WVWW has worked to develop resources and networks that empower women. In 2022, WVWW is making WREN real. Our goal is to formalize and add structure to WREN this year.

Looking to the future, we want WREN to have added physical locations to better serve rural areas, to offer exponential assistance to women working to improve their education & employment opportunities, to be a platform for celebrating partners, and a team encouraging women on their journey to economic independence.

We ask our existing partners and new WRENs to help us make this vision real. There is no contribution too small. You can assist WREN by providing financial support, offering resources, participating in events, volunteering services, and sharing information about our work. Without you, WREN cannot fly.

Where to find us

West Virginia Women Work
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Morgantown, WV, 26501

(304)-598-0114

wwwomenwork.org