



REPORT TO  
THE WAKE COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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# **WAKE COUNTY TASK FORCE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WAGE ISSUES FOR WOMEN**

JUNE 22, 2017

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2016, the Wake County Women's Commission released the Status of Women's Employment Issues in Wake County report. The research yielded some surprising results: that there is a significant gap in income between men and women in Wake County. This disparity in income exists despite similar educations and becomes even more distinct as the education level of women increases. While a woman with less than a high school degree earns approximately 67% of what a man with less than a high school degree earns (a difference in income of approximately \$6,000/year), a women with a graduate degree earns less than 56% of her male counterpart (a difference in income of over \$40,000).

The report recommended that the Board of Commissioners form a task force to further study these issues and develop specific action steps to remove obstacles women encounter as they try to obtain or maintain jobs. In April 2016, the Wake County Board of Commissioners approved the appointment of 16 members to the Wake County Task Force on Employment and Wage Issues for Women (hereinafter the "Task Force").

Wake County is fortunate to have such a committed group of women join the Task Force to do the hard work of looking into very complex issues. The first question that they wanted answered was how Wake County's gap compares to the gaps of our peer counties, Travis County, TX and Suffolk County, MA--all three counties are state capitals with large universities and are economic hubs for their states with major technology companies, as well as research and development firms.

The data report prepared for the Task Force by Meredith professors McLennan and Manzo revealed more disappointing conclusions: that the gender gap is higher in Wake than in our peer counties of Travis and Suffolk. Wake County has the largest wage gap between men and women at all educational levels. This knowledge informed the Task Force's work both by illuminating the seriousness of the issue and also by giving examples of how other counties are addressing these disparities.

These employment issues are complex, including the gender wage gap as well as lack of affordable childcare, lack of transportation, ageism, lack of necessary job-specific skill set among many others. In order to narrow the focus of work, the Task Force decided early on to address the following issues:

- Exploring reasons for the wage gender gap and what can be done to close it;
- Partnering with companies, government entities and nonprofit agencies to create return to work programs--paid internships for women interested in returning to the workforce after taking time off to care for children, an illness or a sick family member; and
- Developing methods to better educate women on the tactics of proper salary negotiation so they understand the best ways to advocate for fair wages, good benefits and appropriate time off.

This report reflects ten months of meetings and additional research conducted by the Task Force and includes specific recommendations on how Wake County can begin to address this complex, multi-faceted yet incredibly important issue. It is our hope that the members of the Wake County Board of Commissioners will take the recommendations of the Task Force and begin to these complex issues, which, if unaddressed, will have long lasting negative ramifications on the economic health of our county.

The Task Force has made a number of recommendations within this report that include the creation of a Collective Impact Initiative ("Wake Invests in Women") to Focus on Closing the Wage Gap and the Creation of Return to Work Programs in the County. In addition the Task Force has recommended that support for county-wide negotiation training and workshops focusing on teaching women how to properly value, negotiate and articulate their worth. Finally the Task Force recommends that the Board of Commissioners consider expanding return to work opportunities in Wake County.

We appreciate the Board of Commissioner's attention to this important initiative.

## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2015 then-Commissioner Caroline Sullivan asked the Wake County Commission for Women (hereinafter "WCCW") to research and report to the Wake County Board of Commissioners how women in Wake County are faring in the work force. Issues explored in depth include what impediments women face in seeking and obtaining well-paying part-time and full-time work; whether income disparity exists between the sexes in Wake County; and why women struggle after returning to the work force and whether existing programs are helping with their struggles.

Among other data points, the WCCW researched for its report the median earnings for women in Wake County. That research revealed a significant gap in income between men and women in Wake County. For example, in 2014, the median earnings for women over the age of 25 was \$34,809. Men however earn a median income of \$50,137. This significant disparity in income exists despite similar educations. The income disparity becomes even more distinct as the education level of women increases. While a woman with less than a high school degree earns approximately 67% of what a man with less than a high school degree earns (a difference in income of approximately \$6,000/year), a woman with a graduate degree earns less than 56% of her male counterpart (a difference in income of over \$40,000).

For women who have been out of the work force for some period of time due to illness, child rearing or caretaking of a family member, the WCCW's report identified very few programs focused on helping women update their skills in preparation to return to work. There was even more of a dearth in those programs that focused on women with less education.

Another key obstacle to employment for women in Wake County is a lack of education. Nearly 25% of women in Wake County have a high school diploma or less. Without the basics, combined with college coursework or advanced training, their earning potential is severely limited. Statistics from 2014 show more than half of women in our county with a high school degree or less are living in poverty.

A number of recommendations were made to the Board of Commissioners when the report was presented in February 2016. One those recommendations was to form a task force to further study these issues and develop specific action steps to remove obstacles women encounter as they try to obtain or maintain jobs. In April 2016, the Wake County Board of Commissioners approved the appointment of 16 members to the Wake County Task Force on Employment and Wage Issues for Women (hereinafter the "Task Force").

Since May 2016 the Task Force met monthly to discuss and develop strategic initiatives to combat wage and employment issues facing Wake County women. As the WCCW's report showed, there is no clear-cut reason why women are paid less than men in Wake County. These employment issues are complex, including the challenges listed above as well as lack of affordable childcare, lack of transportation, ageism, lack of necessary job-specific skill, set among many others. In order to narrow the focus of work, the Task Force decided early on to address the following issues:

- Exploring reasons for the wage gender gap and what can be done to close it;
- Partnering with companies, government entities and nonprofit agencies to create return to work programs- paid internships for women interested in returning to the workforce after taking time off to care for children, an illness or a sick family member; and
- Developing methods to better educate women on the tactics of proper salary negotiation so they understand the best ways to advocate for fair wages, good benefits and appropriate time off.

## MEMBERS OF THE WAKE COUNTY TASK FORCE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WAGE ISSUES FOR WOMEN

### CHAIR

**Caroline Sullivan**, former member, Wake County Board of Commissioners

### MEMBERS

**Jo Allen**

President, Meredith College

**Barrett Brewer**

Member, Wake County Commission for Women

**Beth Briggs**

Executive Director, Dress for Success

**Lily Chan**

President, Asian Focus Corporation

**Adrienne Cole**

President and CEO,  
Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce

**Tashni Dubroy**

President, Shaw University

**Kate Day**

Vice President, Global Workforce Enablement,  
Global Technology and Operations, MetLife, Inc.

**Jill Wells Heath**

President and Chief Executive Officer,  
Calyx Engineering

**Irene Gonzalez**

Chair, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

**Gayle Greene**

Executive Vice President, WakeTech

**Monika Johnson Hostler**

Chair, Wake County School Board and Executive  
Director, NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault

**Jackie Terry Hughes**

Wake County Commission for Women and owner,  
JTH LAW

**Regina Petteway**

Director, Wake County Human Services

**Hilda Pinnix-Ragland**

Vice President, Duke Energy Progress

**Jeanne Tedrow**

Executive Director, Passage Home

**Pat Sturdivant**

Executive Director,  
Capital Area Workforce Development Board

Special thanks to the following individuals for attending various task force meetings over the past ten months and serving as resources to the group's work:

**Benita Clark**

Representative, Wake Tech

**Beth Dehghan**

Founder and President of WomenNC,  
NC Committee for CEDAW/CSW \*

**Dara Demi**

Wake County Communications Director

**Paulette Dillard**

Representative, Shaw University

**Carmen Frazier**

Project Manager, Wake County Task Force for Women

**Jim Hartmann**

County Manager

**Christina Lisicki**

Intern, Wake County Task Force for Women

**David McLennan**

Professor, Meredith College

**Whitney Ross Manzo**

Professor, Meredith College

**Cassandra Watford**

Finance Officer, Wake County Human Services

**Faye Wilson**

Representative, City of Raleigh

**Brenda Wilkerson**

Representative, Capital Area Workforce  
Development Board

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\* Special thanks to Beth Dehghan and CEDAW for meeting with Commissioner Sullivan and sharing helpful information regarding women's rights here in Wake County and abroad.

## I. WHY THE GENDER WAGE GAP MATTERS TO THE WOMEN OF WAKE COUNTY.

To enable the Wake County Board of Commissioners to understand why the gender gap matters to all men and women in Wake County, we thought it best to hear from members of the Task Force who explain the importance of these issues, in addition to a resident of Wake County who has been impacted by these issues and who shared her story. The video can be viewed here: [https://youtu.be/v9y\\_z8CdcKo](https://youtu.be/v9y_z8CdcKo).

## II. HOW THE TASK FORCE FULFILLED ITS MISSION

The Task Force met monthly for ten months and formed working groups focused on issues which directly affect Wake County women's employment, including what can be done about the gender gap and how Wake County fares comparatively; exploring whether return-to-work programs can benefit women trying to re-enter the work force; and exploring what other cities have done to try to address these issues.

### A. Creation of County-wide Compilation of Job Training Resources

One of the first items the Task Force wanted to better understand, was the landscape of existing profit, non-profit and governmental job training programs and resources for women in Wake County. After determining there was no current women-focused compilation available, the Task Force, with the assistance of an intern from the Capital Area Workforce Development Board's *Backpack to Briefcases* program of NCWorks, began to research available job training resources for women, including resources from state and local government, profit, and non-profit offerings. The database will be hosted on the Capital Area Workforce Development Board website as well as the Wake County Commission for Women's website. The database includes current job training resources, with additional detail regarding where the program is located, the target focus of the training (i.e. teens, women-only, Latino, disabled, etc.) and provides some additional details about the location of the program including readily available contact information and website data<sup>1</sup>. A copy of the excel database and accompanying Word document with further details is attached to this report as Exhibit A. In addition, the Wake County Commission for Women have committed to keep the job training database up to date and useful to Wake County citizens.

### B. Further Research into the Gender Wage Gap in Wake County

#### 1. Comparative Analysis Conducted into Wage Gap

You may recall that the Wake County Commission for Women's report on the *State of Employment for Women in Wake County*, focused its analysis in part on the median incomes in Wake County based on available census data. The Task Force thought it helpful to undertake a more detailed review of this issue and how it could affect Wake County economically, in particular its ability to attract and retain top talent. The study, requested by the Task Force and funded with the assistance of the Wake County Commission for Women, was conducted by Professors David McLennan and Whitney Ross Manzo of Meredith College. Professors McLennan and Manzo examined the gender pay gap in Wake County and looked at three key variables that affect the pay differences: race and ethnicity, education level, and type of work. In addition, the Meredith Professors compared Wake County wage data for men and women to two other counties often considered to be comparable and competitive to Wake County - Suffolk County, MA (the Boston area) and Travis County, TX (the Austin area). Although these counties have differences in terms of demographics, they are all state capitals and economic hubs for their states with major technology companies, as well as research and development firms<sup>2</sup>. The data was derived from the Census Bureau data contained in the 2015 American Community Survey to determine median pay.

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Pat Sturdivant and the N.C. Works program who introduced us to Christina Lisicki, the Task Force intern who put together this comprehensive database.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 1 of *Wake County Task Force on Employment and Wage Issues for Women Report*, attached as Exhibit "B."

The comparative report prepared by the Professors McLennan and Manzo, reveal a number of relevant conclusions. Note the highest gap for each county is highlighted in yellow. The highest gap in each demographic level compared across the counties is in bold. All numbers represent median salary.

### Education Level<sup>3</sup>

Out of five education levels noted, **Wake County has the highest wage gap in all of them (100%)**.

	WAKE COUNTY			TRAVIS COUNTY			SUFFOLK COUNTY		
	Male	Female	Gap %	Male	Female	Gap %	Male	Female	Gap %
Less than high school graduate	\$21,513	\$12,723	<b>40.86</b>	\$21,825	\$14,461	33.74	\$22,768	\$17,960	21.12
High school graduate	\$30,568	\$22,232	<b>27.27</b>	\$27,977	\$23,309	16.69	\$29,537	\$22,677	23.23
Associate's degree or some college	\$40,310	\$30,075	<b>25.39</b>	\$37,202	\$29,814	19.86	\$39,662	\$30,902	22.09
Bachelor's degree	\$65,963	\$40,269	<b>38.95</b>	\$54,752	\$38,918	28.92	\$52,295	\$44,184	15.51
Graduate or professional degree	\$82,654	\$50,093	<b>39.39</b>	\$76,400	\$46,857	38.67	\$70,014	\$55,012	21.43

<sup>3</sup> See p. 2 of *Wake County Task Force on Employment and Wage Issues for Women Report*, attached as Exhibit "B."

## Type of Work<sup>4</sup>

Out of 12 fields of work outlined by the Meredith Professors, Wake County was found to have the highest wage gap in nine of them (75%).

	WAKE COUNTY			TRAVIS COUNTY			SUFFOLK COUNTY		
	Male	Female	Gap %	Male	Female	Gap %	Male	Female	Gap %
Management	\$87,825	\$61,328	<b>30.17</b>	\$80,906	\$60,912	24.71	\$80,263	\$57,206	28.73
Business & Financial Operations	\$67,104	\$50,560	<b>24.65</b>	\$68,636	\$60,379	12.03	\$64,950	\$50,286	22.58
Computer, Engineering & Science	\$82,943	\$62,370	<b>24.80</b>	\$65,807	\$52,216	20.65	\$77,700	\$53,215	31.51
Community & Social Service	\$40,816	\$40,755	<b>0.15</b>	\$41,918	\$40,146	4.23	\$37,754	\$36,150	4.25
Legal	\$105,023	\$49,353	<b>53.00</b>	\$94,438	\$64,175	32.05	\$109,097	\$66,617	38.94
Education, Training & Library	\$43,355	\$34,272	<b>20.95</b>	\$40,323	\$38,512	4.49	\$41,707	\$39,517	5.25
Arts, Entertainment & Sports	\$44,435	\$27,795	<b>37.45</b>	\$41,526	\$39,393	5.14	\$37,211	\$32,475	12.73
Healthcare	\$82,002	\$50,846	<b>37.99</b>	\$65,477	\$61,220	6.50	\$69,811	\$53,132	23.89
Service	\$20,918	\$15,308	<b>26.81</b>	\$24,669	\$18,984	23.05	\$20,147	\$15,328	23.92
Protective Service (Fire, Police)	\$40,886	\$33,329	<b>18.48</b>	\$48,983	\$28,129	42.57	\$41,987	\$30,459	27.46
Sales & Office	\$37,748	\$27,880	<b>26.14</b>	\$35,312	\$30,009	15.02	\$35,658	\$27,568	22.69
Natural Resources, Construction & Maintenance	\$28,202	\$21,400	<b>24.12</b>	\$35,548	\$38,370	-7.94	\$25,568	\$30,632	-19.80

The professors drew the following conclusions in comparing Wake County, Suffolk County and Travis County<sup>5</sup>:

- In terms of race and ethnicity, Wake County has the largest wage gaps between men and women for whites and Asian, and was close to having the largest wage gaps for blacks and Hispanics.
- Wake County has the largest wage gap between men and women at all educational levels, in comparison to the other two counties.
- Across the various work categories used by the United States Census Bureau, Wake County has the largest wage gaps between men and women in three-quarters of the groups.

The professors concluded that Wake County has a significant pay gap problem—one that is worse than in the Boston and Austin areas. The complete report prepared by the Meredith professors can be found at Exhibit B to this report.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 3 of *Wake County Task Force on Employment and Wage Issues for Women Report*, attached at Exhibit “B”.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*



## 2. Survey Administered to Wake County Companies

To better inform their work, the Task Force also solicited input from Wake County employers (for-profit and non-profit organizations of all sizes), regarding gender-related compensation issues and questions relating to existing programs for returning women to the workforce and diversity initiatives. A confidential online survey of employers located throughout Wake County was conducted by The Novak Consulting Group in March, 2017. The survey requested gender, race, job category and compensation information about the employer's workforce. The survey was intended to be more informational than statistically accurate. A total of 25 employers representing over 25,000 employees responded to the survey. These employers provided gender, race and job category information for all employees within their workforce. It should be noted that some employers chose not to provide compensation information.

Several key findings emerged from the responses<sup>6</sup>:

- A low survey response rate and the presence of an outlier among the respondents make drawing conclusions about the data challenging. Only 25 organizations responded to the survey. Of the compensation data provided, a wage gap of six cents was reported.
- However, when one large employer that had a disproportionately significant impact on the survey is removed from the analysis, a wage gap of 28 cents was reported across the remaining survey respondents.
- The gender wage gap that exists within the responding organizations differs by job category. Overall, women in the Administrative Support Workers earned nine cents more than men, and women in the Laborers and Helpers job category earned five cents more than men. The largest pay gap exists in the Craft Workers job category, with women earning 69 cents for every dollar earned by men.
- Based on the survey, first-level management and sales jobs possess the most gender diversity. Two job categories employ the most equal split of men and women: Sales Workers, and First/MidLevel Officials and Managers. The Laborers, Administrative Support Workers, and Technicians job categories are the least equal when it comes to gender diversity.

Overall, among responding organizations, the highest levels of the career ladder are less racially diverse. The Executive/Senior Level Officials and Managers, Professional, and First/Mid-Level Officials and Managers job categories are the least racially diverse. The Service Workers and Laborers and Helpers job categories are the most racially diverse.

This was the first effort to collect meaningful compensation data from local companies. In the future, with greater public awareness surrounding the issue, we see opportunities for more engagement from companies that will produce higher participation. This data will provide valuable information as to how local companies are paying their employees. A complete copy of the Novak report is attached as Exhibit C.

## 3. Learning From Boston's Experience in Closing the Gender Wage Gap

In 2013, the Boston Women's Workforce Council ("BWWC") was formed to find a better way to advance women in the workforce. The team concluded that closing the wage gap would have the most widespread impact on women in Boston. The BWWC is a public-private partnership that has been personally endorsed by Boston Mayor Martin Walsh and is focused on making Boston the "premier place for working women." In fact, Mayor Walsh in 2014 created the Office of Women's Advancement to oversee the spectrum of issues pertaining to women. Members of this Task Force spoke with the Executive Director of the BWWC as well as a member of the Office of Women's Advancement about their work, challenges and successes of their efforts. Boston has some creative initiatives that Wake County can learn from.

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<sup>6</sup> See p. 1 *Wake County Task Force on Women and Employment – Employer Survey Summary*, attached as Exhibit "C" to this report.

- **100% Talent: The Boston Women's Compact:** This is a voluntary initiative which employers who sign the compact agree to commit to accomplishing three goals: a) understanding the root causes of the wage gap; b) closing the gap using self-assessment tools; and 3) benchmark and evaluate successes and challenges and agree to contribute data through a confidential third party reporting group. To date, 175 organizations have agreed to sign the Compact.
- **Free Negotiation Training:** The City of Boston partnered with the American Association of University Women in a five-year plan to offer training to more than 85,000 women by 2020.
- **Best Practices Workshop:** The Boston Women's Workforce Council hosts an annual Best Practices conference. Their second annual conference was attended by 200 companies and served as a forum for Boston area employers to exchange ideas and policies of what was working in their respective organizations and what was not. The BWWC then compiled some of the best thinking from this meeting and shared the highlights with the group and any Boston employer looking to better their practices.
- **Academic Partnership with Boston University's Hariri Institute for Computing:** The BWWC, the city of Boston and Boston University created a collaboration to focus on these issues. In particular the Institute of Computing has worked with the BWWC to develop a secure software platform that uses privacy analytics to enable aggregation of real wage data. The BWWC just released a report earlier this year providing its first collection of wage data. They received data from 69 employers, which reflected approximately 11% of the greater Boston workforce and will help to serve as a benchmark for wage data discussions.

### C. What Can be Done to Close the Gap

Most researchers and economists agree that the gender wage gap was not created nor can it be solved by a single action. Rather, the causes of the gender wage gap are multi-dimensional and complex<sup>7</sup>. A recent report issued by the Congressional Joint Economic Committee *Gender Pay Inequality-Consequences for Women, Families and the Economy* noted:

One of the most startling factors is that a lack of family friendly workplace policies in the United States essentially means that millions of American women are penalized for becoming mothers and caring for their children. Although some larger American corporations have instituted such policies in order to retain highly educated and skilled employees, most companies do not offer policies that would make it easier for women or men to step out of the workforce or reduce their hours to care for their children while enabling them to return to full-time work without compromising their earning potential. This dynamic is a major contributor to the gender pay gap.<sup>8</sup>

We know that inflexible or rigid work schedules also lead to a gender gap, and that women are more likely than men to take off work to care for a sick child or family member. Women who cannot afford full-time quality childcare are forced to work part-time jobs. Others who have fallen out of the work force come back to work at a much lower rate of pay and with stale skill sets. As previously reported in the *State of Employment for Women in Wake County*, (presented to the Wake County Board of Commissioners in February 2016), there are a multitude of issues, which contribute to this continuing gap in pay. The Task Force has identified a number of initiatives, which may assist in closing the wage gap.

#### 1. Comprehensive Education Campaign focused on Raising Awareness about the Wage Gap

- **Best Practices Annual Workshop:** The goal of the workshop would be to educate private and public employers and raise awareness regarding the wage gap. The workshop would develop best practices and policies to promote wage equality similar to what Boston has done. Teaching employers to avoid the practice of asking for salary history; why it is important for employers to focus on flexible work

<sup>7</sup> P. 17, *American Association of University Women, The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap*, Spring 2017.

<sup>8</sup> See p. 18, *Joint Economic Report to Congress, Gender Pay Inequality-Consequences for Women, Families and the Economy*.

schedules, and the like, would all work to serve these interests. We think the chamber groups would be a good fit to host these workshops and have had some preliminary conversations with the Raleigh Chamber, which was supportive of the concept.

- **Annual Award Program for Wake County Employer Making Most Strides:** Develop specific benchmarks to measure and then annually honor those Wake County employers who are making the most strides in improving workplace equity for women.
- **Wake County Leads the Way with an Equal Pay Audit:** Wake County can help lead the charge in women pay equality by reviewing their own records and create communications campaign to show the county has taken this step and the benefit of others doing the same. Encourage private employers to conduct equal pay audits, and ostensibly “peek under their own financial hood” to assess whether equally qualified men and women are being paid the same.
- **Annual Wage Gap Data Analysis:** Consider partnership with a local university to collect and assess annual employment data on earnings, equity and mobility for women in the workplace in order to benchmark the progress.

## 2. Negotiation Workshops Initiative to Eliminate/Minimize the Gender Wage Gap

- Focus on teaching women how to properly value, negotiate and articulate their worth in the job market. Work on closing the gender wage gap by equipping women with the right negotiation skills. Include follow-up tools to measure women’s future negotiating success.
- Partner with Meredith College and the Wake County Commission for Women to provide at least two to three negotiation training workshops within the 2017/2018 calendar year to educate women of all ages and all backgrounds, and teach them the skills to engage with potential employer about requesting appropriate starting pay and ensuring that pay stays competitive. The first such workshop is scheduled for September or October of 2017 and will be sponsored and run by Meredith College. The Wake County Commission for Women has also committed to hosting a 1-2 negotiation training workshops within 2017-2018.

## D. Return-to-Work Programs:

### Why They are Important and How They Can Help Women Move Back into the Work Force

#### 1. Background on Return-to-Work Programs

Returning to a career after an extended break from the workforce disproportionately affects more women than men. A 2013 national study by the Pew Research Center showed that 42% of mothers with some work experience reported that they had reduced their work hours in order to care for a child or other family member at some point in their career, while only 28% of fathers said the same. Similarly, 39% of mothers said they had taken a significant amount of time off from work in order to care for a family member (compared with 24% of men). Mothers were about three times as likely as men to report that at some point they quit a job so that they could care for a family member (27% of women vs. 10% of men).

The Pew Research Center study also found that women who had experienced extended job interruptions were much more likely than men to say that this interruption had a negative impact on their careers. For example, women who took time off at some point in their work lives to care for a child or other family member were twice as likely as men who did the same to say that this decision hurt their careers overall (35% vs. 17%). Similarly, among those who took a significant amount of time off from work to look after a family member, 32% of women compared with 18% of men said doing so hurt them professionally<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/01/women-more-than-men-adjust-their-careers-for-family-life/>

Here in Wake County, women experience much of the same. The non-profit entity *Dress for Success of the Triangle* (hereinafter “DFS”) allowed the Wake County Commission for Women to conduct a survey of DFS clients focused exclusively on women’s employment-related issues. That survey was completed in November 2015 and yielded responses from 273 women in the County. The data collected from this survey lends some valuable insight into the issues facing women in the Wake County workforce today.

According to the survey, approximately 70% of the respondents had taken a break from work for six or more months during the past 10 years. Once the women decided to return to the workforce, an overwhelming majority, approximately 81%, faced barriers to finding employment according to our survey. The DFS survey did attempt to identify programs that women felt might be beneficial in helping them obtain employment after an extended break. Approximately 79% of respondents said that paid internships would be helpful to them. A complete copy of the Dress for Success survey is included as Exhibit D of this report.

To address this growing population of women who have taken an extended break from employment, there is a current trend towards developing corporate “returnships”<sup>10</sup> specifically for women who have been out of the workforce and would like to re-enter. These programs are much needed and long overdue.

Return-to-work programs offer *paid* short-term employment contracts. The returner takes on significant assignments based on her skills, interests and experience. The returner is also given training to bring her skills up to date, making her more marketable at the end of her contract. The employer gains from the attention focused on business-critical issues and gets a low-risk opportunity to assess whether the returner is a good fit for a permanent role at the conclusion of the program.

## **2. What’s Happening in Wake County Currently**

On a national level, more and more companies are offering return-to-work programs to ease the challenges for women returning to work after a long break. These companies include the likes of Goldman Sachs, IBM, Paypal and GoDaddy. But, in Wake County, very few companies are offering these opportunities. One company that does and has been successful doing so is MetLife, which currently offers a return-to-work program called Act2.

Act2 is a 10-week paid internship filling an existing job vacancy, so participants are able to experience working at MetLife as an associate while having a direct impact on the business. Throughout the ten weeks, they receive feedback and guidance from managers and coaches who assess performance on a regular basis. Based on their successful completion of the program, Act2 participants may then have the opportunity to continue on at MetLife in a permanent role.

The Wake County Board of Commissioners funds several organizations that can help women find employment after an extended break. While these programs do not specifically target women only, they do provide valuable resources to any jobseeker.

The Capital Area Workforce Development Board oversees six NCWorks Career Centers across Wake County that bring together an array of services in one location to help individuals find employment and access education and job training. For most job seekers, the Capital Area Workforce Development Board provides work-based learning opportunities. The two main types of work-based opportunities are on-the-job training (OJT) and work experience/internships. With OJT, the partnership between the Board and local companies allows potential employees to be hired without 100% of the skills needed for a job. The company hires the individual as a regular full-time employee and works with NCWorks to develop a training plan to train the employee on the additional job skills needed. During the training period, the company is reimbursed up to 50% of the employees wages. The maximum training period is six months. Since the beginning Capital Area’s 2014 (July 1) program year, 489 people have participated in OJT, 19 (40%) of which have been women.

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<sup>10</sup> The term “Returnships” is trademarked by Goldman Sachs.

With work experience/internships, the Capital Area Workforce Development Board pays 100% of the participant's wages, including workman's comp. The Board uses this program more for participants who have limited or spotty work history. However, the work experience/internship program is used more sparingly because of limited funding. Since 2015, 59 people have benefitted from this program, 37 (62% of which have been women).

Another important resource in our community for women is Wake Technical Community College. Wake Tech offers college-level classes and GED programs, so that students can further their education to obtain better jobs, as well as participate in job training programs that allow them to update their skill set.

Today, Wake Tech serves approximately 30,000 in curriculum (for-credit) programs. Of the 30,000 students in the curriculum programs, 55% are women. More than 15,000 of the curriculum students currently take at least one online class – that's more than half of Wake Tech's student body and more than any other North Carolina community college. Of those students taking an online class, 61.1% are women. Of the 6,378 Wake Tech students who take only online classes, 66.3% are women.

Wake Tech also offers Human Resources Development (HRD) courses that provide employability skills training and assistance for adults who are trying to find employment, transitioning back into the workforce or working to redefine their professional niche in today's global market. These classes are designed to address current needs and trends of the complex and constantly changing workforce. All HRD courses are fee-waived for qualifying individuals who are unemployed, "underemployed," or who have received notice of layoff or pending layoff. Of the 4,133 students in the HRD classes, 57% are women.

The Task Force studied local returnship opportunities and identified available county programs that help women return to the workforce. The Task Force also met with a representative from Strayer University (online learning center) who presented a new concept the school is exploring for an online site to help unemployed and underemployed women find jobs while furthering their education through an apprenticeship program.

Several members of the Task Force (Dress for Success, Wake County government, Wake County Commission for Women, Wake Tech, Wake County Human Services and the Capital Area Workforce Development Board) agreed to partner with Strayer University and submitted a grant application to several local foundations seeking funding to start a pilot project here in Wake County. At this time, no foundation has funded the grant request, so the program has not been started. A copy of the grant proposal and detailed explanation of the pilot program can be found in Exhibit E of this report.

### **3. What can be done to support Return-to-Work programs in Wake County?**

The Task Force identified a real need for return-to-work programs aimed at both professional and non-professional women in Wake County. The data show that taking an extended break from employment makes it much harder for women to become employed again. To address this issue, we recommend:

#### **Working to Increase the Number of Local Companies that Offer Return-To-Work Programs:**

- Identify and recruit 20 local businesses to begin offering their own return-to-work programs for women.
- Create a public/private collaboration with Met Life and host seminars for local businesses on its Act2 program to share the mechanics of the program and success stories and to answer questions.
- Encourage the 12 chambers of commerce in Wake County to educate their members on the benefits of return-to-work programs.
- Promote the creation of these new programs to women across Wake County.
- Track the hiring and retention rates of the women who participate in these programs.

### **Supporting and Promoting Renewed Return-to-Work Partnership:**

Through their work together on the Task Force, Dress for Success and the NC Works Career Center have committed to strengthen their partnership and are now focused on a pilot-type program to find employment for ten Dress for Success clients. Partnership components include:

- Identifying ten women who have not worked in more than six months and who are looking for full-time work.
- Providing work-based learning opportunities through NC Works.
- Tracking success of these women in finding full-time employment.

As a result of the research around return to work programs, Dress for Success has articulated a new goal of referring 100 women veterans to NC Works over the course of the next year.

### **Developing a Communications Plan to Reach Women Considering Returning to Work:**

- Partner with the Wake County Public School System to reach women with school-aged children who may be ready to return to work but may need to further their education or update their job skills to do so.
- Promote free and low-cost educational and job training opportunities available across the county.
- Identify organizations that communicate with women, including local museums, community centers, churches, YMCAs and childcare providers.
- Partner with Cooperating Raleigh Colleges to have its member institutions commit to expanding their online learning offerings, making it easier for women to learn from home.

## **III. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE WAKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

### **A. Creation of Collective Impact Initiative (“Wake Invests in Women”) to Focus on Closing the Wage Gap and the Creation of Return-to-Work Programs in the County**

We know that the answers to the concerns presented in this report cannot be resolved by focusing on one solution. Rather, it requires a broad cross-section of leaders from government, education, the non-profit community and Wake’s business community to create effective, collaborative solutions to these important concerns.

We recommend that Wake Technical Community College, under Dr. Greene’s leadership, be the backbone organization of this collaborative. We recommend that monies for one additional full time staff person be allocated to the Wake Tech budget to support the creation and organization of this collaborative. We believe the Board of Commissioners should consider a three-year contract position which would provide enough time for the collaborative to organize, create the vision and strategy, determine the support needed around the strategy, establish measurable goals across the collaborative, and cultivate community engagement and ownership.

We expect that if the Board of Commissioners approves the contract position, that individual can also support the additional initiatives recommended in this report including:

**Wake County Equal Pay Audit:** Wake County Government can conduct its own internal “equal pay audit” and communicate this initiative to Wake County employers to demonstrate that Wake County is leading the charge in women pay equality. This would include a communications campaign to encourage private employers to conduct “equal pay audits.”

**Annual Wage Gap Data Analysis:** Conduct analysis of annual employment data on earnings, equity and mobility for women in the workplace. Potential partners include SAS, Wake County Human Resource Management Association, and local colleges and universities.



**Hosting Annual Best Practices Conference and Annual Award:** The workshop would develop best practices and policies to promote wage equality similar to what Boston has done. Teaching employers to avoid the practice of asking for salary history; why it is important for employers to focus on flexible work schedules, and the like, would all work to serve these interests.

## B. Support County-Wide Negotiation Training Programs and Workshops

The Board of Commissioners can support the creation of county-wide negotiation workshops similar to what Boston has done. With the county's support, we can set measurable goals of training 250-400 women per year. The Wake County Commission for Women has already agreed to provide support for one to two negotiation training workshops over the course of the next year. Meredith College has likewise agreed to present the first negotiation workshop, which is currently being scheduled for Fall 2017. The Wake County Commission for Women will work with Meredith College staff members and organizations such as the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to ensure that its content is focused on teaching women how to properly value, negotiate and articulate their worth in the job market.

Wake County BOC can assist by: support this initiative by lending communications and enrollment support for these workshops, and by providing a location to hold the workshops, which we expect to be free for residents of Wake County.

## C. Expand Return-to-Work Opportunities in Wake County

There is no question that Wake County needs more programs focused on helping women return to the work force with the education and skill sets they need to succeed. We are recommending the Board of Commissioners' support of the following initiatives:

- **NC Works/Dress for Success Women Veterans Commitment:** Endorse publicly Dress for Success's goal of referring 100 women veterans to NC Works over the course of the next year and assist Dress for Success in identifying and recruiting veterans.

Wake County BOC can assist by: promoting this partnership and encouraging other organizations to find ways to help women return to the workforce after an extended absence.

- **Increasing the Number of Local Companies that Offer Paid and Structured Return-to-Work Programs:** Identify and recruit 20 local businesses to begin offering their own paid return-to-work programs for women.

Wake County BOC can assist by: agreeing to the creation of a collaborative and funding of a staff person under the direction of Wake Technical Community College. In the alternative, Wake BOC can encourage its economic development arm to address this issue and pilot a return-to-work program.

## IV. CONCLUSION

A copy of this report with all relevant exhibits are at each of your desks.

We very much appreciate the opportunity to present the conclusions from the Task Force on Wages and Employment Issues for Women, and we appreciate your attention and time.

## EXHIBITS

See Exhibits A-D at [www.wakegov.com/womenscommission](http://www.wakegov.com/womenscommission)

### Exhibit A – Countywide Compilation of Job Training Programs

### Exhibit B – Meredith College Report

### Exhibit C – NOVAK Consulting Group Employer Survey Report

### Exhibit D – Dress for Success Survey Results

### Exhibit E – Grant Application to the Triangle Community Foundation

A Public/Private Partnership:

Closing the Inequality in Pay & Education for Women in Wake County through Apprenticeship

#### Project Snapshot

A new collaboration between the Wake County Task Force on Employment and Wage Issues for Women, Dress for Success Triangle, Wake Technical Community College, Strayer Education, Inc, MetLife and local businesses to pilot an online, single platform that empowers Wake County women by providing an online employment assessment, access to job openings at local businesses, coaching, a network of support, paid apprenticeships, educational credentials and ultimately their GED or Associate's Degree.

#### List Collaborating Organizations

- Dress for Success Triangle
- Wake County Government and the Wake County Task Force on Employment and Wage Issues for Women
- The Wake County Commission for Women
- Wake Technical Community College
- MetLife, Inc. (Global Technology & Operations)
- Strayer Education, Inc.
- Wake County Human Services
- Capital Area Workforce Development Board

#### Define the Problem

Women represent 51.3% of the population in Wake County yet they not only make less money they also have a more difficult time finding meaningful work than their male counterparts. A 2014 study by the Wake County Commission for Women found that the medium income for women over the age of 25 was \$34,809 while the medium income for men was \$50,137. The gap is especially significant among women of color. This disparity in income exists even though they have obtained similar education levels. More concerning is that the income disparity is even more significant as the education level of women increases. The study found that there were very few programs available to help women return to the workforce to improve needed skill levels.

These women face tremendous challenges, especially those returning to the workforce after a period of time due to illness, child rearing or taking care of a family member. They have a difficult time upgrading their skills, especially those with lower education levels. Also women who have been laid off in their 50's represent a new generation of the unemployed and underemployed. **The number one obstacle to employment reported in the study is their educational attainment levels or lack of specific skills needed in the current marketplace, especially technology.**



At the same time, business struggles with retention in critical roles, in some cases 50-70% annual turnover, costing between \$4000 and \$7000 for every \$12-\$18 per hour employee that leaves. What's more, US business spends nearly \$500 billion annually on staff learning and development activities, yet only 8% of CEO's report a tangible result.

There is a clear opportunity to bring women off the sidelines through a structured work/learn program to create positive impact for both the individual and for business.

### **Propose a Solution/Innovation**

**Project Impact** re-imagines pathways for women into the workforce and discovers hidden talent in our community. Our program offers a relevant-to-the-workforce employer sponsored education, a support structure that is encouraging and empowering and outcomes that are connected to realistic and measurable business results. Different from other offerings in the community, Project Impact creates personalized pathways and combines employment and degree attainment with behavior and business competency development to create a scalable solution to unlock upward mobility for the women that are being left behind in our community. Our mobile-first user friendly platform is intuitive and easy-to-use. We provide actionable resources for women in Wake County to enter the workforce and simultaneously to create workforce relevant skills.

Women who participate in the online platform will:

- Assess core strengths and aptitude for available work/learn opportunities.
- Discover & secure work/learn opportunities that link to their core strengths.
- Earn a debt free credential: GED or Associates Degree.
- Learn critical work and life mindsets/behaviors that support success.
- Connect & Network with other women to build a support infrastructure for career success.
- Gain confidence in themselves and the value they bring to our community.
- Receive career coaching and mentoring to help them through the process.
- Enroll in soft-skill development courses at Wake County Technical Institute.
- Sign up for relevant networking events and business success workshops available throughout the Triangle region.

The pilot addresses two of the three recommendations from the Wake County Women's Commission report:

1. Offer return-to-work programs and paid internships for women and incentivize private companies to offer paid internships leading to employment to help them find meaningful employment and economic security;
2. Combine existing GED programs with more college-level programming to increase the education levels of the unemployed and underemployed women to raise their income levels.

### **Describe the Collaboration**

- Dress For Success provides access to 1200 unemployed and underemployed Wake County women seeking employment and economic security, a network of support, career development tools, image and career coaches for one-on-one engagement.
- Wake County Technical College: GED attainment and business acumen courses. Utilizing the existing platform for GED attainment and soft skills courses Wake Tech will connect the women to the specific curriculum and classes the corporations are looking for in employees, through easy enrollment options.
- MetLife, Inc.: As the lead corporate partner, as well as a company that currently offers an apprenticeship program, they are guiding the pilot to make sure business objectives are addressed and incorporated, improve access to other businesses, and jobs.
- Strayer Education, Inc.: Developing the scaleable platform, program management and on-campus (3 locations in the Triangle Area) for online courses to complete degree programs.

- Wake County Commission on Women provides access to Wake County Government, Commissioners and leadership at the County level.
- Wake County Human Services is actively involved in advancing the health and well being of individuals in the County and working to alleviate many of the obstacles facing women and their families.
- The Capital Area Workforce Development Board helps with planning and administering workforce initiatives designed to provide employers with skilled workers and offer citizens training and employment opportunities.

### **Share your Goals**

We plan to pilot a cohort of 100 women in the spring of 2017. Success is measured by the participating woman being successfully enrolled in a debt-free degree program, employed by a partner employer with access to courses that develop critical business skills needed by their employers.

With this initial success we plan to reach out to a larger group of local businesses and increase participation and funding through business partnerships and expand a fall 2017 cohort to 500. The goal is to connect with major corporations who will partner in the program and agree to participate in the program.

Once the pilot is complete we will work with other nonprofit referral agencies to enlist additional participants. Success will be measured by participants finding livable wage jobs where they can grow, obtain benefits, and long term economic security. The Wake County Women's Commission is committed to addressing the wage gap between men and women and people of color in the county and raise awareness about how to solve wage inequity.

### **Outline your Plan for the Future**

Once our pilot cohort is complete, we will host a series of "Business Learn" events with corporate leaders from across the Triangle area to participate through the sponsorship of employment opportunities dedicated to this program. We are encouraged our platform has strong possibilities for growth because we have tied business need, retention in high turnover roles, with the education attainment needs of the community to create a win-win. Our affordable model for business maximizes retention and offers women an opportunity to earn a debt-free degree while at the same time earning a paycheck. Creating upward mobility for women through work experience and degree attainment, this program will empower those who have largely been left behind by a system that can be difficult to navigate. A central focus of our digital platform is "ease of use" and to create clear, safe and actionable pathways so women can more easily connect with outcomes that will drive personal success.

Corporate partners will pay a small fee per Work/Learn Apprentice to support the employees as they work and learn the specific skills sets needed by the corporation.