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Displaced Homemaker Program

OCC helps women define new goals

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

Women in Oakland Community College's Displaced Homemaker program ended with Decision Day last month.

On Decision Day, the class's "women in transition" were to take control of their lives and begin shooting for the goal of their choice. And, apparently, most of them did just that.

Better than half of the women who finished the class in both the morning and evening sessions already have enrolled in school in pursuit of new careers. And some of those women will be eligible for tuition assistance under the program.

Another high percentage have made concrete decisions with clear-cut directions to get them into higher-paying jobs.

"We have women moving out of jobs they hate, and women moving into non-traditional jobs," said Joan Maloney, who led the six-week session, which was taught by the Orchard Ridge Campus staff. Since the first session went so well, registration is starting up for a second session, for a different set of women, she said.

"We knew things were going well," Ms. Maloney said of the state-funded program that is offered without charge to women who are in a quandary about the next direction to take in their lives.

"But because of the way the sessions are structured, we really didn't realize how well until we heard these women's decisions."

THE REQUIREMENTS for getting into the next Displaced Homemaker program will be spelled out at an eligibility meeting at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 6, in OCC's Womencenter, Room 308, on the Farmington Hills campus.

Ms. Maloney stresses that present income is not a factor, and neither is age.

The program is designed, for the most part, for divorced or widowed women who have either worked solely as a homemaker, or worked only part time or in unskilled jobs, and who now find themselves in the position of having to support themselves.

But the program admits those women who are in a shaky marriage, those with a terminally ill husband, or others who for any reason believe they will one day have to be self-supporting.

Twelve women who qualify will be admitted into the morning session, and another 12 will be admitted into the evening session, which begins the week of Jan. 11.

The limited number is mandatory because so much of the program is individualized.

"THERE IS NO MAGIC TO THIS," Ms. Maloney said.

"This is a working program with a lot of responsibility placed on the participants. We ask for a lot of soul searching and some homework."

'We're introducing a brand-new way of thinking that is liberating, but may be very scary.'

— Joan Maloney

JVS aids clients with jobs, image

By Shirlie Iden
staff writer

Many women go through life waiting to be rescued again and again.

Eileen Holzman would like to help them "draw on untapped inner resources, rescue themselves, and take control of their lives."

Mrs. Holzman, a Southfield resident, is an advocate/vocational counselor in the Displaced Homemaker Program at the Jewish Vocational Service.

Formerly she worked for four years with Gloria Kennedy in Southfield Community Placement.

Mrs. Holzman says the Michigan Department of Labor awarded grants two years ago for displaced homemaker programs.

"Now there are many cuts in funds so they want to spread the services," she says. "There are nine displaced homemaker programs where there were three before, but with the same money to run them."

The crux of all the programs is to get women who need to support themselves and families into the work world.

"Displaced homemakers are those persons who have been homemakers for 10 or more years and have lost their primary source of income through divorce, death or total disability of their spouse," Mrs. Holzman explains.

"THIS IS the definition of the Department of Labor. They have limited work skills and must have been unemployed at least three months."

In addition to the lack of work skills, displaced homemakers find the transition from caring for family members at home to the job market a difficult one emotionally.

At the Jewish Vocational Service, Gail Stewart and Mrs. Holzman are taking applicants now for the program which will be ongoing.

"Our agency doesn't have the limitations of some social agencies. We have alternate funding. The women can get vocational counseling and placement help even if they are not CETA eligible."

Jewish Vocational Service will help anyone in the community and there are many who simply fall into the cracks of eligibility.

Born in Brooklyn, Mrs. Holzman came to this area as a small child. Her father, a tool and die maker was involved in the defense industry.

"I graduated from Cooley High and entered Wayne State University at 17," she says. "But I soon dropped out, went to work and married my husband, Howard, who was then in service."

She worked as a secretary and then became a homemaker herself after the birth of their children, Ethan and Emily. Holzman, a former teacher, now runs a Southfield photography studio.

"ALWAYS in the back of my mind was a desire to finish my education," she says. "But before that dream was realized, I went into business when the kids were old enough."

"That Silly Girl" was the name of a maternity clothing store she ran in Oak Park. After a few years in business, she sold the store to her partner.

"I used the money to pay for college tuition because I was determined to pay for my own education," she says. "I'm the kind of person who's

'What I'm hoping to do is to have an instant impact to give them self-awareness, to make them more introspective. I give them knowledge of how to do something and they must go out and do it.'

— Eileen Holzman

still searching for fulfillment. I really haven't grown up yet."

Back at WSU, she earned a B.S. degree in family life education, later going to work at the Southfield agency. During her tenure at Southfield Placement, she earned her M.A. degree in guidance and counseling.

"When I think about displaced homemakers, I'm looking at too many people my own age who but for the grace of God would be displaced homemakers too," she says.

"One woman told me she has to accept the fact that life isn't fair even though she did everything expected of her all her life."

Many women in the program are widows who have been kept home to nurse ailing husbands for months or years, and then find themselves alone and without resources.

JEWISH Vocational Services has already completed one series of Displaced Homemaker Classes and will begin another on Jan. 4.

"We'll work four days a day for two weeks with our clients from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on career exploration and planning," she says. "Then comes a three-week session on job search skills which will run from 9 a.m. to noon twice a week."

"The whole idea is a short term goal of an entry level job. Some clients will be encouraged to get academic training, that is, if they have two or more years of education or some other means to fund it."

Mrs. Holzman is hoping to have an instant impact, to give clients a new self-awareness, and to be more introspective.

"I give them some knowledge of how to do something and hopefully, they go out and do it."

Mrs. Holzman stresses that services in the JVS program are based on the ability to pay. No person shall be denied services who cannot pay a fee.

SERVICES provided include information and referrals for supportive services; in-depth vocational assessment and vocational counseling; job seeking skills; job survival skills training; group counseling; a job club; access to job banks; and referrals to training programs.

Most of the women she sees are from 45-60 years of age. They are from every social and economic class.

Already, Mrs. Holzman notes some success. One woman is pursuing a career as a masseuse; one is volunteering in a gerontology program and may decide to further her education.

"People can call us anytime," Mrs. Holzman says. "Groups will run continually through next August."

JVS is at 25900 Greenfield Road. For information call Mrs. Holzman at 967-0500.

Women and poverty, women who work — myths and truths

Carol King, a leading feminist and presently placement coordinator for the Displaced Homemaker Project at Macomb Community College recently gave testimony before the Social Services and Youth Committee of the Michigan House of Representatives.

The following is excerpted from her statement.

By definition, displaced homemakers are those persons who have been homemakers for 10 or more years and have lost their primary source of income through divorce, death or total disability of their spouse. Their children are grown, therefore, they are ineligible for AFDC and receive no child support.

There is a pervasive myth about these women whose husbands are gone. Everyone knows some man who was "taken to the cleaners in the divorce." This poor man is the object of pity as we imagine him cleaning out his bank account and signing his paychecks over to his ex-wife for alimony.

Everyone hears about those cases and believes them to be the rule. In fact, they are the exception.

ALIMONY is granted in only 14 percent of all divorces and collected only 7 percent of the time.

The other myth is that of the world-traveling "welfare widow." Her husband has left her well taken care of with his insurance and pension. The fact is that 75 percent of those people living in poverty are women. It is well known that women outlive men, therefore, the majority of those poor older women are alone.

These are the women who turn to General Assistance and these women are clients of the Displaced Homemaker Project.

The average age of our clients is

'Alimony is granted in only 14 percent of all divorces and collected only 7 percent of the time'.

— Carol King
placement coordinator,
Displaced Homemaker
Project

49 years old. These are women who followed all the rules. They got married, quit working to take care of their husbands and rear their children.

They struggled to make ends meet during the lean times. Now, when the children are grown and they should be reaping the benefits of years of struggle, they are cast aside.

All along, everyone has told them that motherhood was a noble calling, that homemaking was a worthy pursuit. Now, they answer ads in the paper and are told they have no experience and no skills.

THEY MAY have a home, maybe a car but no income to make house payments or put gas in the car. Sometimes, an ex-husband will come through with a house payment but, more often than not, these former wives have been relegated to the past. They are considered burdensome if they ask for help.

The only place left for them is General Assistance.

As of October 1981, there were 112,423 people receiving GA benefits in Michigan. Of these people 41 percent (46,630) were females and 58 percent (65,793) of these women are between 41-65 years of age.

These are our clients.

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