

ONLINE LEARNING FOR SINGLE MOTHERS PROGRAM

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Institution or government agency presenting the experience:	Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor
Web-site:	www.workingwomenintransition.org

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Description

The Online Learning for Single Mothers Demonstration Project was a collaborative effort between the Women's Bureau and the Employment and Training Administration (both part of the U.S. Department of Labor) and the New Jersey Department of Labor. The program provided online learning for single mothers with school-aged children.

Objectives

Through this project, the Women's Bureau examined the feasibility of participants earning computer certification or an Associate Degree through online courses compared with traditional educational settings and methods. The courses were designed to prepare the participants for high-skilled jobs in their local communities.

Start date and time span:

2001-2003

Geographic Coverage:

Five counties in the state of New Jersey.

Target population:

Single mothers with school-aged children

Institutions and actors involved in the design and implementation:

- Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor
- Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor
- New Jersey Department of Labor
- The Center for Women and Work, Rutgers University

SUSTAINABILITY

Funding.

The program was initially funded by the Women's Bureau; U.S. Department of Labor. In 2004, the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, received a \$150,000 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to help states create effective online learning programs for low-income working people.

Non-monetary support

The State of New Jersey installed home computers with Internet service for mothers enrolled in the program and donated them to those who completed the program and passed a computer skills test.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program achievements

Ninety-two percent of the participants completed the pilot program in 2002. Participants reported an average annual wage increase of 14 percent, and several of them went on to college. Most important, all the participants emphatically reported that they would not have been able to complete a training program if it were not available at home and 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As of March 2006, the State of New Jersey had expanded the program to seven of its 29 One-Stop Career Centers and opened it to men as well. As of January 2006, the States of Maine, Massachusetts, Delaware, Illinois, Alabama, Texas, and Arizona were establishing online training programs with federal and state labor department funding and another 12 states were considering such programs.

Lessons learned.

A body of research has demonstrated that online learning, when implemented correctly, is as successful as other educational modes in instilling knowledge and increasing skills in college-educated workers.

Evaluations

The Center on Women and Work at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey assessed the effectiveness of the pilot program for single working mothers whose incomes averaged \$16,900 per year. That study, funded by the Department of Labor and the Sloan Foundation, found online learning was an effective tool by which to upgrade skills and, for a small number of women, increase earnings.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE EXPERIENCE

- “Helping Bridge the Digital Divide,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 2006, www.cww.rutgers.edu/mainPages/newsevents.htm.
- “Women’s Distance Learning,” State of New Jersey, <http://www.state.nj.us/njbusiness/small/workforce/training/wdl.shtml>