

## **North Carolina Women United**

### **Position Paper on the Issues of Displaced Homemakers**

According to the North Carolina Council for Women and Domestic Violence Commission, a **DISPLACED HOMEMAKER** is defined as “an adult who has worked primarily without remuneration to care for the home and family and who, therefore has few or no marketable skills.” There are many issues and barriers affecting displaced homemakers in North Carolina, including poverty, health care, child care, employment opportunities, education/training, legal aid, transportation, housing, and mental health. The North Carolina Legislature acknowledged the issues and concerns of displaced homemakers in 1993 by passing legislation creating a Fund for Displaced Homemakers and assigned the administration of this fund to the North Carolina Council for Women. Since that time much has been done to assist displaced homemakers yet their plight continues and their numbers continue to grow.

#### **Economic Self-Sufficiency**

According to the North Carolina Council for Women and Domestic Violence Commission, 2006/2007 statistics from July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007 reveal the following:

- There were 35 Displaced Homemaker Programs in the state funded by the Council.
- 4,896 displaced homemakers were served.
- The following statistics show the diversity among those served:
  - ✓ White (46%) Black (42%) Hispanic (5%)
  - ✓ 93% were female
  - ✓ 55% were in the 25-44 age range
- Of the total number of displaced homemakers served, 23% were placed in a four-year college, community college or trade course. 60% of these were placed in a community college.
- 1611 (33%) of the clients were employed either full (20%) or part time (13%) as a result of going through the program and gaining needed skills.
- Of the total number of displaced homemakers served, 20% obtained full-time employment and 13% obtained part time employment.

According to Women Work! The National Network for Women’s Employment, in America...

- Women continue to earn less than men and are nearly twice as likely to be poor than men.
- Women remain segregated in the lowest-paying jobs in our country.
- On average mothers earn 10 percent less than childless women and an alarming 27 percent less than men, who do not experience a similar financial penalty for fatherhood.
- 37 percent of all single mothers and 42 percent of displaced homemakers (widowed or divorced women who must re-enter the workforce after many years at home caring for their families) live in poverty.
- Single mothers, already disproportionately affected by the economic downturn, experience an unemployment rate that has risen from 6.7% in March 2007 to 7.1% in April 2008 - far eclipsing the national average.
- Employment that offers family-supporting wages, good benefits, job stability and prospects for advancement is the key to the economic self-sufficiency of displaced homemakers and especially women. Research consistently demonstrates that to succeed in these jobs, displaced homemakers must have access to education, training and job readiness programs that address their specific needs and barriers to employment.

Welfare caseloads can be reduced and tax revenue can be increased for state and federal governments by removing the challenges displaced homemakers and especially women face that slide them into low-wage jobs and limited access to education and training and by creating policies and practices that lead to economic self-sufficiency. Such policies and practices include:

- Flexible work schedules for all employees
- Benefits for part-time employees
- Increased federal and state funding for education and training
- Expanded family-related leave policies
- Social Security reform that addresses the needs of female workers

**Suggested recommendations for supporting women's efforts to obtain education, job training and economic self-sufficiency:**

- Provide adequate wages and benefits for aides in long term care facilities that would not only benefit the aging, but would also provide an avenue for living wage employment for displaced homemakers. The CNA program is an accessible education opportunity throughout the state, and provides an avenue to the workforce in less than six months.
- Guarantee health care as a fundamental right especially to children at and below the poverty level and the working poor. Many displaced homemakers would be able to accept a smaller living wage if they knew that health care for their children would always be provided.
- Expand the funding for the North Carolina Housing Trust Fund to \$50 million yearly to expand affordable housing for low income families. One of the most critical and immediate challenges for a displaced homemaker is securing affordable and safe housing for herself and her family after a separation or divorce.
- Raise the minimum wage
- Establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit
- Increase cash assistance for low-income families, public assistance and child care subsidies for families while the head of household is completing job retraining or education.

All of these financial benefits will greatly increase the odds of a displaced homemaker becoming a successful wage earner and taxpayer who can afford to support a family and end reliance on social services.