

Achievements in Women's Health under the Clinton Administration

STRENGTHENING POLICY

- **Expansion of Research on Women's Health at the National Institutes of Health.** The National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act, signed into law by President Clinton in 1993, included the permanent establishment of the Office of Research on Women's Health, and required the appropriate inclusion of women and minorities in all clinical studies and trials. This led to the adoption of similar inclusion policies at the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It also expanded research on women's health in areas such as osteoporosis, breast cancer and ovarian cancer, and contraception and infertility. A recent follow up GAO report concluded that the NIH has made significant and rapid progress in the inclusion of women in clinical studies and trials. More work is needed to ensure the analysis of data by gender.
- Other Agencies established **Offices of Women's Health**, including the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; the Department of Health and Human Services created a **Deputy Assistant Secretary for Women's Health** to direct the Office on Women's Health that would serve to coordinate and stimulate women's health research, service delivery, and education activities across HHS agencies.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- **National Women's Health Information Center.** The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC), sponsored by the Office on Women's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services, is the only combined comprehensive health web site (www.4woman.gov) and toll-free service (1-800-994-WOMAN or TDD 1-800-220-5446). The NWHIC web site provides links to more than 3,000 publications and 2,000 reputable organizations on women's health. NWHIC also provides answers to frequently asked questions on top health issues of concern to American women. Since its launch in November 1998, the NWHIC web site has received over 35 million hits.
- **Women's Health: Take Time to Care.** The Food and Drug Administration initiated a major national public awareness program, "Women's Health: Take Time To Care," in October 1999 to bring important health promotion messages to women. With women as primary care givers in the family, "Use Medicines Wisely" seeks to bring attention to better health practices among women and their families, in order to reduce the annual cost of \$75 billion in doctors' visits, hospitalizations, and lost wages resulting from improper use of medicines.
- **GIRL POWER!** Girl Power! is a multiphase, national public education campaign sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services to help encourage and empower 9- to 14-year-old girls to make the most of their lives. Girl Power! combines strong "no-use" messages about tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs with an emphasis on

providing opportunities for girls to build skills and self-confidence in academics, arts, sports, and other endeavors. It also addresses related issues such as physical activity, nutrition, and mental health.

BREAST CANCER ACTIVITIES

- In the past 5 years alone, we have committed over **\$2.9 billion to breast cancer research, treatment, services, and prevention**. Annual funding at Health and Human Services has more than doubled under the Clinton administration, increasing from \$283 million in FY 1993 to a projected \$660 million in FY 2001.
- In October 1993, President Clinton directed Secretary Shalala to establish a comprehensive strategy to fight breast cancer. Two months later, the Secretary convened a historic conference to develop a **National Action Plan on Breast Cancer**. The result is a major public-private partnership that is working to improve research, treatment, prevention, and public and health care professional education on breast cancer.
- **Mammography Quality Standards.** The Food and Drug Administration final regulations, effective April of 1999, expanded and strengthened protections that will improve the quality of mammography at facilities in the United States.
- **New Mammography Benefit.** President Clinton proposed, and Congress adopted, the expansion of Medicare coverage to help pay for annual mammograms for all Medicare beneficiaries age 40 and over. Under this new benefit, Medicare waives the Part B deductible for screening mammograms.
- The **National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP)** is a landmark program that was developed to offer free or low-cost critical breast and cervical cancer screening services to underserved women, including older women, women with low income, and women of racial and ethnic minority groups, including American Indian/Alaska Native women. On October 1, 1996, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala announced expansion of this program to all 50 states. It is now also operating in five U.S. territories, the District of Columbia, and 15 American Indian/Alaska Native organizations.
- New knowledge about the genetic basis of many forms of breast cancer holds great promise for improved prevention and treatment of this devastating disease. The discovery of **BRCA1** and **BRCA2**, the genes that cause inherited forms of breast cancer, ranks among the greatest scientific breakthroughs in medical research and in the war against cancer.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- We have also spent over **\$752 million working to eradicate domestic violence** from our Nation's homes, which reflects a steady increase in domestic violence funding each year.

Much of this funding has gone towards an increase in shelters for battered women and increased support for community-based interventions.

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline.** In February 1996, President Bill Clinton announced the opening of the 24-hour, toll-free National Domestic Violence Hotline to provide crisis assistance and local shelter referrals to victims of domestic violence throughout the country. The hotline number is 1-800-799-SAFE; the TDD number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-787-3224.
- **The National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women,** created in 1995, convenes domestic violence and sexual assault experts to provide co-chairs Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala with practical and general policy advice concerning the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act. The Council has worked to develop the *Agenda for the Nation on Violence Against Women*, which will be presented to the Nation later this year.
- **The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA),** signed into law by President Clinton as part of the Crime Act of 1994, combines tough new penalties with programs to prosecute offenders and help victims of violence. VAWA authorizes \$1.6 billion over five years to the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services to hire more prosecutors and improve domestic violence training for prosecutors, police officers and health and social services professionals. It provides for more shelters, counseling services, and research into causes of violence against women, as well as public education campaigns.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

- Reproductive health research and services has totaled over \$6.8 billion for the same time period, of which over **\$4 billion were targeted at pregnancy prevention**, including Medicare and Medicaid funding. The teen pregnancy rate for the country has fallen sharply during Clinton's presidency, down 20% from its 20-year high in 1991, to 49.6 births per 1,000 in 1999, demonstrating the success of these programs. In addition, at least 35 percent of U.S. communities now have teen pregnancy prevention programs in place, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Improved Access to Reproductive Health Information.** The federal government took steps, beginning in 1993, to ensure that all women cared for through federal family planning programs have access to complete and accurate information, including pregnancy options counseling when requested, by suspending a 1988 rule preventing federally funded clinics from providing full information.
- **Availability of emergency contraception.** Since September 1998, the Food and Drug Administration has approved two oral contraceptive products that are safe and effective for use as postcoital emergency contraceptives.

- **Topical Microbicide Initiative.** At the 11th International Conference on AIDS in 1996, the Secretary of Health and Human Services announced a new Department- wide effort to develop safe and effective topical microbicides to help women protect themselves against HIV infection and STDs. The initiative included a \$100 million commitment to research and development at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention over four years. Nearly 60 candidate microbicides (to prevent HIV and STDs among women) have gone through preliminary pre-clinical and safety testing, and new clinical trials to test at least two of these products for effectiveness against HIV are occurring right now.
- **Perinatal Transmission of HIV.** In 1994, the National Institutes of Health released clinical trial findings that a treatment regime of AZT to women during pregnancy, during delivery and after delivery can reduce the risk of transmitting HIV from mother to infant from 25% to 8.3%.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We are proud to be working toward a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to ensuring the health and quality of life of our Nation's women of all ages. As we look into the new millennium, we see a growing population of older women; by the year 2030, 1 in 4 women in the United States will be 65 or older. Women in this country will also be increasingly diverse. Ensuring that women reach old age healthier than ever is as critical to the well-being of this nation as it is to the women themselves.

The Department of Health and Human Services has developed **Women Living Long, Living Well**, a framework for women's health that seeks to address the major causes of death and disability among women in the United States of all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. During 17 public listening sessions held across the country to identify women's health needs and gaps, we heard that women's health should shift from a body part- and disease-specific approach to a more comprehensive and integrated one. These public comments indicated a great need for coordination among the layers of the public health system; partnerships involving community organizations, universities, and health providers; program evaluation and technical support; and improved information dissemination and involvement of communities.

In response to these demands, we are putting forward a package of new women's health proposals. These proposals advance a multidisciplinary, comprehensive approach to women's health through research, service delivery, and improved programs targeting the ever-changing population of America's women, and are supported by activities at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Administration on Aging, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Indian Health Service, the National Institutes of Health, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Office on Women's Health at the Department of Health and Human Services.

**Office on Women's Health
Department of Health
and Human Services**

**200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 728E
Washington, DC 20201**

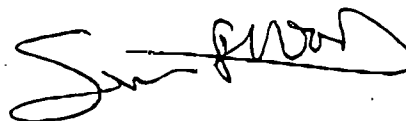
To: *Heather Howard*

Fax No.: *456-2876*

Re: *your request*

Date: *8/23/00*

No. of pages: *5* (Including cover)



Emmett J. Nixon
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REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

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In response to these demands, we are putting forward a package of new women's health proposals in FY 2001 totaling \$_____ in additional funds. These proposals advance a multidisciplinary, comprehensive approach to women's health through research, service delivery, and improved programs targeting the ever-changing population of America's women, and are supported by activities at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Administration on Aging, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Indian Health Service, the National Institutes of Health, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Office on Women's Health at the Department of Health and Human Services.

12/20/99

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Heather
FYI -
Should HRC join?
If we have an
event they should
be involved -
Keep in mind -
Shirley

THE WHITE HOUSE

July 2, 1999

Nicole - talk to
me about this

Ms. Connie Chan Robison, M.P.H.
Program Director
Women's Health Leadership
1401 21st Street
4th Floor
Sacramento, California 95814

Pam

Dear Ms. Robison:

Thank you for your letter and invitation to join the Women's Health Leadership Circle of Friends. I appreciate learning about your activities and have shared a copy of your letter and enclosed materials with a member of my staff for consideration.

With best regards, I am

Sincerely yours

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Hillary Rodham Clinton

✓ cc: Nicole Rabner
Domestic Policy Council



Connie Chan Robison, M.P.H.
Program Director

▼ ▼ ▼
Women's Health Leadership
1401 21st Street, 4th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
916/498-6960
Fax 916/443-7767
E-mail: connie@connectcep.org
—



R
cc Nicole

April 14, 1999

First Lady Hilary Rodham Clinton
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500-0002

Dear Mrs. Clinton:

I am writing to introduce ourselves to you and to seek a dialogue with you about an important movement that is taking place in communities throughout California. With the goal of creating sustainable community-based programs and policies, Women's Health Leadership (WHL) was created to recognize and support the leadership of women in communities who already are making a difference but have the desire to strengthen and build on their leadership to make even greater impact on the health of women. We are honored to have this unique opportunity to share with you the work of Women's Health Leadership (WHL) and the approximately 250 community women leaders who have been instrumental in creating this movement.

Women's Health Leadership was established in April of 1994 with initial support from The James Irvine Foundation as part of a three pronged strategy to improve women's health in California. The strategies of the Women's Health Initiative included a focus on public policy, community-based programming, and leadership development.

In your book, *It Takes A village, and Other Lessons Children Teach Us*, you head up a chapter titled, *The Best Tool You can Give a Child Is a Shovel*. In this particular chapter, you talk about your analogy of how children can use the "shovels" of life to overcome obstacles. The women of the WHL learning community are encouraged to celebrate their life experiences and to discover their "shovels". A major emphasis of the program is giving the women opportunities to voice their stories and to utilize these stories in their community work. Examples of these stories are enclosed in the "Tilling the Soil" anthology. When you read these stories, you may be reminded of the quote you cite by South African President Nelson Mandela: "There are few misfortunes in this world you cannot turn into personal triumphs if you have the iron will and necessary skills".

This "University Without Walls" provides opportunities for grassroots women to utilize their innate gifts and leadership through personal visioning, skills development, and statewide relationship building. After five years of development and implementation, WHL now has the support of The California Endowment and a community of leaders who are working on a daily basis to improve the lives and conditions of women and families throughout the state. Their unique connection as part of the WHL network provides an important opportunity to do business differently in California.

Women's Health Leadership
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916/498-6960
Fax 916/443-7767

First Lady Hilary Rodham Clinton
April 14, 1999
Page 2

WHL is undergoing a strategic planning process to expand and strengthen the impact of WHL's work in the following areas: Public policy, girls/young women leadership development, local replication, and national/international expansion. We feel strongly that the work begun in California has significant relevance for communities of women throughout the world.

We believe that your deep personal and public dedication to women, children, and families would be invaluable to our vision. Therefore, the intention of this brief introduction is to invite you into our Circle of Friends. We have enclosed some background materials about WHL. I thank you for your time in reviewing these materials and hope that we have piqued your interest. Please do not hesitate to call me at (916) 498-6965 if you have any questions. I look forward to sharing with you more about the changes that these women are making in their communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Connie Chan Robison".

Connie Chan Robison
Program Director

Enclosures

Women's
HEALTH LEADERSHIP:

**Celebrating Our Beginnings—
*Visioning Our Future***

A REPORT OF OUR FIRST FIVE YEARS

JANUARY 1999

Center for Collaborative Planning, Public Health Institute



Clinton Presidential Records Digital Records Marker

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This marker identifies the place of a publication.

Publications have not been scanned in their entirety for the purpose of digitization. To see the full publication please search online or visit the Clinton Presidential Library's Research Room.



Women's HEALTH LEADERSHIP



*A program of the Center for Collaborative Planning,
with funding from The James Irvine Foundation*



Who is the WHL Learning Community?

The learning community is made up of a diverse group of 50 women from across the state who have different ethnic, geo-

▼ ▼ ▼ graphic and cultural backgrounds. In addition to the 50 learning program participants or "peer leaders", the community also consists of faculty advisors and other individuals and organizations who help shape and implement the program and identify resources for peer leaders.

Program "alumni" can serve as trainers, presenters and mentors for new peer leaders.

About WHL Peer Leaders

Applicants will be recruited through various ethnic health networks, community-based organizations, non-profit groups, private and public health agencies, and other groups across California. The common thread that binds those selected will be their commitment to making positive community change and the ability to turn an idea into reality. Each woman will bring her own unique gifts and personal stories to the program. The women and stories presented in this brochure represent a subset of previous peer leaders and their work. They serve to illustrate only some of the experiences and backgrounds

of potential candidates. WHL hopes to foster learning across ethnic, cultural, age, educational, and life experiences by weaving together this rich fabric of diversity.

Commitment

As members of the learning community, the selected women leaders must be able to commit to the year long program. Peer leaders can expect to do some traveling depending on locations of training events and other program activities.

REQUIRED ACTIVITIES

Attendance at:

- Orientation Conference
- 2 trainings (1-2 days in length) during the year

Development and completion of:

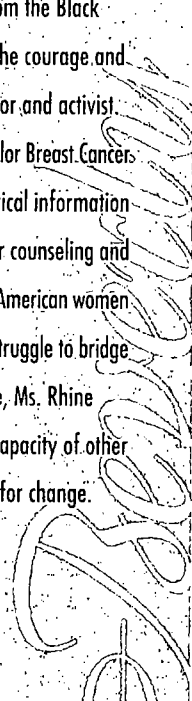
- An Individual Leadership Development Plan
- Learning project (completed within program year)
- Personal leadership assessment
- 1 Progress update
- Final Report

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 1-2 women's health symposiums during the year (1 day in length)
- Teleconferences
- Networking sessions



Having survived many of "life's pains and raging storms", Beverly Rhine's vision to "lead a posse of sisters from the Black Community" speaks in part about the courage and conviction of a breast cancer survivor and activist. Beverly's work with the Women of Color Breast Cancer Survivors Support Project offers critical information about breast health and cancer, peer counseling and emotional support for at-risk African American women and breast cancer survivors. In the struggle to bridge the gap between policy and practice, Ms. Rhine continues to support and build the capacity of other women to find and use their voices for change.



Costs

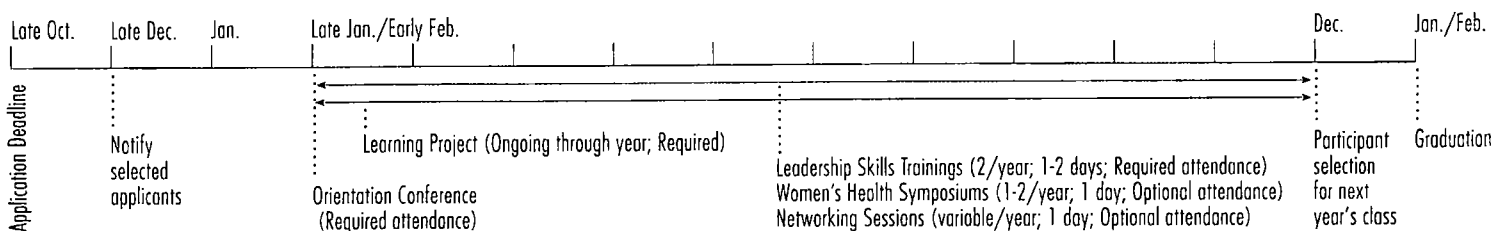
There is no direct cost for participating in the program. All travel expenses for required trainings and conferences will be paid for by the WHL program. If applicable, peer leaders will need to arrange for time off from work on their own. WHL does not reimburse employers or peer leaders for this release time. A number of small need-based stipends may be available.

Benefits

TO THE PEER LEADER

- Enhance current leadership roles and explore new roles
- Develop new or enhance current leadership and advocacy skills
- Be exposed to critical women's health issues and to top leaders and decision makers
- Be part of a statewide network of leaders, providing opportunities for peer learning, sharing, and mutual support
- Participate in development of a new model for leadership development among women

General Program Timeline



A mother of four who was formerly a welfare recipient, Gail Nickerson is now Executive Director of NorthCountry Clinic, a nonprofit community clinic in Humboldt County, where she works to meet the challenges of delivering health care to low income women and families in rural California. Gail's leadership and attention to those who are least included in the process of change has brought respect to her and to her organization. As a member of her county's Access to Care Committee, Gail helps to foster communication and partnerships as the County prepares to adapt to the changes which are coming with a managed care system.

Gail

- Obtain possible transcript notation or credit through your local College or University. You must contact these institutions directly to initiate this process.

TO THE COMMUNITY

- Create a pool of leaders who can plan for and give voice to the health of women in their communities in a culturally competent manner
- Enhance skills of women who can then take these skills back to their organizations and communities
- Be recognized by the public for community efforts
- Increase resources for community building

Program Activities

All activities are designed to encourage personal development, learning among peer groups, and maximize use of resources at the community level. The following are the core activities of the program.

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT
Leadership development is a lifelong process. Effective leaders must have the chance to "check-in" and measure their progress along the leadership spectrum. Peer leaders will have this opportunity by taking part in a self-assessment process designed especially for the WHL program.

TRAININGS

Trainings will focus on skill building and will be interactive in nature. Sample topics may include but are not limited to:

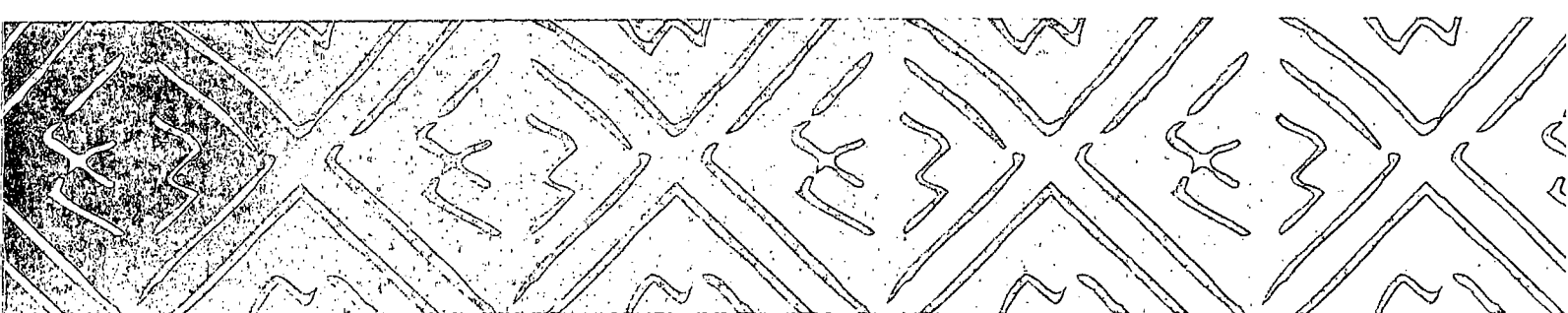
Advocacy

Communication and public speaking

Conflict management

Community organizing/development

Group process and facilitation



Media advocacy
Policy development
Project management
Resource building
Resource and time management

LEARNING PROJECTS

Each emerging leader will be asked to apply the skills and knowledge gained through the trainings and conferences on a learning project. The learning project can be done individually or with other peer leaders and should be completed within the program year. Topics/issues will be based on personal interest and resources and will be conducted in the peer leader's own community or worksite. Peer leaders will be asked to submit a report based on their experiences and learnings.

WOMEN'S HEALTH SYMPOSIUMS

Symposiums will be developed to encourage more in-depth discussions on specific women's health topics such as domestic violence, breast cancer, HIV/AIDS, etc. In addition, there will also be opportunities for sharing and showcasing peer leaders' work and expertise.

NETWORKING SESSIONS

Networking sessions will be coordinated to give first-hand exposure to leadership roles and to foster relationships and linkages beyond the duration of the

program. Examples of networking sessions may include meeting with legislators at the State Capitol or attending a "round table" discussion with key health leaders. Peer leaders will have the option to choose from a variety of events and activities.

General Criteria for Selection

WOMEN WHO:

- Are emerging women leaders in health from ethnically diverse communities
- Demonstrate leadership that focuses on improving the health of women and families, particularly at the community level
- Live in California
- Write and converse in English
- Are willing to commit to a year long learning program and attend all required activities
- Show community and/or organizational support for their application
- Are 21 years of age or older

If applicable,

- Can get work release time to attend program trainings and other activities

How to Apply

The program peer leaders will be selected by a selection committee. Selection will be based on the

written application, letters of support and the criteria discussed above.

How Do I Get More Information?

For more information about Women's Health Leadership or to obtain application forms, please contact:

Women's Health Leadership

Center for Collaborative Planning
901 F Street, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 498-6964
Fax: (916) 443-7767



As Co-founder and Director of Sor Juana Ines Services for Abused Women in San Mateo, Marcy Cisneros has been a tireless advocate for latina women and their families against the vicious cycles of domestic violence. Sor Juana Ines, borne from frustration and a sense of public duty, started out in Marcy's home as a 24 hour hotline and has now grown to six sites in San Mateo County. As an educator, activist, motivator, counselor, and change agent for women and children in her community, Marcy challenges existing systems and policies to support and give voice to the concerns of Latina women. As a result of Marcy's efforts to assess the impact of domestic violence on children, policy makers, advocates, and providers will gain a better understanding of the issues and challenges faced by abused families.



The Women's Health Leadership (WHL) Program seeks emerging women leaders to cultivate the seeds of leadership for women's health in California.

Informal leaders in communities, especially women, are crucial partners in making lasting changes which will enhance women's health. WHL is guided by the belief that successful and effective community change must begin at the community level. The purpose of WHL is to build the capacity of women who already make a difference in their communities and have the desire to strengthen and build on their current work to impact more people.

WHL will recruit 50 women each year who are emerging health leaders to participate in a one year long "learning community". Women will be selected who have the drive and capacity for making things happen and want to improve their skills to do so.

Why Women's Health Leadership?

Women's Health Leadership is one component of a larger women's health grants program initiated by The James Irvine Foundation. The overall goal of WHL is to improve the health status of low income California women. WHL seeks to make this happen by providing skill-based trainings, connecting the emerging leader to other people and organizations, and expanding their access to and use of resources. Specifically, the WHL program intends to:

- Enhance leadership capacity of emerging community leaders for women's health*
- Increase the pool of trained, ethnically diverse women to serve as resource people*
- Enlarge the network of women who can speak on behalf of women's health*
- Improve the communication system for networking and peer learning*
- Over time, improve health conditions at the community level*

"To be a leader in my community is to be somebody who has worked closely with and understands the community...Helps the individual and community with the best dignity and care." As a refugee from the mountains of Laos, Matchew Chao has overcome tremendous life challenges to work and advocate on behalf of Southeast Asian communities in Long Beach, California. As a Community Health Worker with the Southeast Asian Health Project, and as a volunteer in countless community activities, Matchew dedicates herself to serving as a true change agent and voice for Laotian, Mien and other Southeast Asian women and families.

Matchew

**Inaugural Year
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Carmela Castellano
Public Advocates, Inc.

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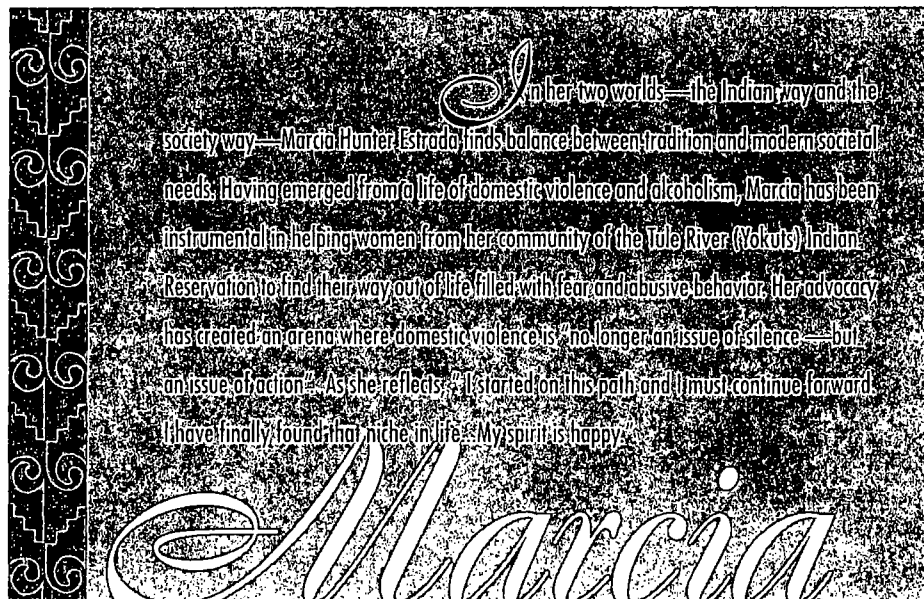
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***“Tilling the Soil”:
Reflections and Stories of Change and Transformation***

An Alumni Case Study Documenting the Impact of Women’s Health Leadership

**DRAFT
SUMMARY REPORT**

December, 1997

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PREFACE

The multiple facets of Women's Health Leadership requires an evaluation framework and approach that mirrors its dynamic and evolutionary nature. Much of the work of WHL goes beyond "quantifiable" to being "generational" in that the early impacts captured in this draft synopsis and report of the first set of case studies sets the stage for later outcomes. WHL is indeed honored and privileged to have worked with the sixteen women represented in this report which attempts to capture, in part, their journey into, through, and beyond Women's Health Leadership. While resources allowed only a small sample of the women from the first and second classes of WHL to be involved in this first case study, we are certain that the stories and the outcomes while they may differ slightly from one woman to another, are representative of the experiences and journeys of the other women leaders not captured in this report.

The work of WHL is not a point in time, but rather a journey and a process that is lifetime as are those relationships and lessons learned along the way. In this fourth year of programming, WHL has created a critical mass of community women leaders who have a common experience (WHL) and are beginning to apply this experience and the relationships built for personal, organizational, and community change. Through this case study process, WHL had the unique opportunity to examine these changes through the powerful medium of storytelling. We invite the reader to read, listen, hear, and understand these voices and the message they wish to impart.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Women's Health Leadership wishes to thank the following individuals for their vision and gift of storytelling in making this project a reality:

From the Class of 1995:

Karen Allen
Cynthia Boyd
Maichew Chao
Luz Englebrecht
Marcia Hunter-Estrada
Gail Nickerson
Beverly Rhine
Virginia Saldana-Grove

Class of 1996:

Cheryle Bernard-Shaw
Carole Collins
Mary Graebner
Najia Hamid
Virginia Mejia
Lori Quince
Susan Shimazu
Tse Xiong

A special thank you and appreciation to our consultant, Ms. Tamu Mitchell who undertook the enormous but soul-warming task of collecting these stories and mirroring them back to us for our own journey and learning;

A recognition and honoring of the many other WHL alumni and current peer leaders whose voices and faces resinate through the stories of the 16 women represented in this report;

Our appreciation to Claire Brindis, Dr.P.H. and Ella Kelly, Ph.D. for their technical assistance and support on the design and development of the case study project;

A special recognition to Ms. Fay Sady who transcribed and put down in words what the women spoke and felt from their hearts; and,

A special acknowledgment to The James Irvine Foundation for its vision, foresight and courage to take a risk in building leadership capacity of community women leaders throughout California.

THE STAFF OF WOMEN'S HEALTH LEADERSHIP

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Heather Hutcheson
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Methodology

**Women's Health Leadership
Peer Leader Case Study Project
August - December, 1997**

Process for Selecting Alumni for Case Studies

The process for selecting candidates for the case study project involved a level of objectivity and observation so that whenever possible, there would be some consistency of criteria placed on each candidate. In addition, creating a diverse pool of case study participants was important to reflect the faces and voices of the larger WHL learning community. Based on consultation and feedback from both Ella Kelly, Ph.D. and Claire Brindis, Dr.P.H., we used a "content validation" process that involves development of several criteria that represent characteristics/qualities that we feel very strongly about; "rating" or applying each peer leader against this set of criteria; then, selecting the case study candidate based on how well they met the criteria. While the case studies represent a qualitative approach to assess outcome, the stories show many tangible outcomes that are important considerations in leadership development.

Matrix that was developed:

CRITERIA									
Peer Ldr name	Creati- vity	Catalyst	Target Popultrn	Agency Sponsor	Policy vs. Service	Product- ivity	# of Indiv. Reached	Ethnic dversity	Geogra- phic dversity

Definitions of Criteria Used to Rank Peer Leaders:

Catalyst	Self-starter, motivates, inspires others to act, sparks new ideas, initiator (low, medium, high)
Creativity	Resourcefulness, expanding boundaries, moving beyond comfort level, uses assets/strengths of self and others (low, medium, high)
Target population	Specific populations being impacted by peer leader's work (i.e., children, elderly women, rural populations)
Agency Sponsor	Characterized by the nature of the organization/agency that peer leaders were associated with through work, volunteer efforts, etc. This includes descriptors such as nonprofit, private, school-based, government agency, etc.

Policy/Service	Based on review of learning projects/leadership development plans that emphasized policy (organizational or public policy), direct service or both.
Productivity	The "productivity" factor was applied first with all alumni based on their level of participation during their year in the program. Productivity was measured by reviewing case management tools and insights from faculty advisors and staff on their participation in the "required" program activities/events and submission of various reports and evaluation instruments. Alumni were first screened through the productivity factor and those who were missing three or more of the program requirements were not included in the potential list for ranking among the remaining criteria.
# Individuals Reached	Measured by whether work was with community-wide participation, one-on-one interactions, neighborhoods, etc.
Ethnic diversity	Characterized as ethnic/racial groups which the women self-identified on their application forms.
Geographic diversity	Characterized into 6 regions representing Los Angeles/Orange County, San Diego, Central Valley, Inland/Empire, Northern CA, and the Bay Area.

After this initial process, 36 out of the 51 alumni from the 1995 Class and 35 of the 41 alumni from 1996 were considered for the interview pool. The alumni pool from each class was then ranked accordingly to the criteria and process identified above. After all rankings were done, we examined the catalyst, creativity, and policy/service criteria to identify those who scored high on catalyst and creativity followed by those with a focus on policy and assigned this group a score of 1; followed by those who scored high on catalyst and creativity but had more service than policy focus. We assigned this group a score of 2 and continued this process of looking at these three criteria.

After a list of possible candidates was generated through this process, we applied the ethnic and geographic criteria to ensure that we would have a diverse group of alumni represented in the case study project. Finally, we felt that it would be beneficial to track the outcomes of the three women highlighted in the WHL video that was created in the first year of the program. We therefore added them to the list if they were not already among the finalists.

From this process, we finally developed a list of 8 - 10 interviewees (Group A) followed by a list of alternates (Group B) from which to begin contacting and setting up interviews. A total of 16 candidates were selected to participate, eight from each class of WHL. Each of the candidates we contacted agreed to participate in the project and to be interviewed. WHL has attempted to incorporate as much "objectivity" as possible into the alumni selection process for the Case Study Project; however, we fully recognize that there is still much subjectivity involved.

WOMEN'S HEALTH LEADERSHIP

Case Study Project Interview Questions

Describe to me the woman who wrote her application for WHL and then describe the woman who is sitting before me now. Did you describe yourself as a leader before the program? Has that changed?

Have you incorporated WHL into your personal and professional life since you've returned to your community? If so, what does that look like for you and your circle of women?

Are these the personal changes you had hoped for or expected? What was the most unexpected outcome of your participation in the program?

In thinking back to the WHL trainings, were there any that fell short of your needs and that you feel could have improved your capacity to do your work? At this particular point in your leadership journey, what else would you like to learn and improve upon that would help to move you further along?

Tell me about your greatest disappointment and your greatest victory in working with your community during the past couple of years. What have been the risks and the rewards? Describe WHL's role in contributing to those times.

Did you choose to do this work or did it choose you? What gifts do you bring to this work that make you the perfect person to be doing it? Has WHL played a part in cultivating these gifts? How?

How has your participation in WHL affected your organization, if at all? Has the way it provides service or the service itself changed? What about policy and advocacy activities? Do you have a vision for how to further strengthen the organization? Have you considered changing your career or your job? Please elaborate.

What is the connection between your passion for doing this work and the status of women's health overall? Has WHL played a part in that connection? How?

What would you tell other women who may be considering applying to the program? What are your suggestions to WHL for recruitment strategies? Do you have other suggestions for the WHL staff?

Does WHL fill a particular need or gap? Would it make a difference if WHL were to close its doors?

Data Analysis

Table 1: Alumni Impact by Categories of Change

	Self-confid	Leadership style	Vision	Career change	Education	Cultural Comp.	Funding	Cmty Organize	Policy	Unexpected chgs
P195	X	X	X		X					
P196		X	X	X				X	X	X
P295	X	X	X				X	X	X	
P395	X	X	X				X			
P296	X	X						X	X	X
P495	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
P595	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	
P396	X		X				X	X		
P496	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
P596	X		X	X			X	X		
P695			X			X	X	X	X	
P696		X	X	X				X	X	
P795		X	X			X		X	X	X
P895	X	X	X	X		X			X	X
P796	X	X			X			X	X	
P896	X	X	X		X	X				

Analysis of Impact Areas as Identified by Alumni

An analysis was done on each of the interviews/case studies to determine specific areas of change and growth of alumni attributable to their participation in Women's Health Leadership. Key categories of change or themes emerged from the case studies which fall into three levels of outcomes: Personal, organizational, and community outcomes. A synopsis of these themes cross-referenced to the alumni who experienced these changes are captured in Table 1. Actual names of individuals have been coded for confidentiality. These categories can be described and grouped as:

Personal/Professional Outcomes

Self-Confidence	Increased understanding and acknowledgment of one's own abilities and capacities. Risk-taking and challenging self and others to think and act "outside the box".
Leadership Style	Leading rather than managing; engaging others to get the work done rather than doing it on your own; Inclusive style and actions; facilitative rather than dictatorial
Vision	Considers the big picture; planning strategically rather than for the moment; facilitates others to vision; applies broader context to their work; looks at long term impact and outcomes rather than the short term.
Career Change	Planning or implementing a career or job change that better utilizes skills and experiences; look for opportunities for self-employment, consulting, creating own business, non-profit organization, etc.
Education	Furthering formal education such as going back to college; pursuing professional development opportunities to enhance skills, knowledge; self-study opportunities.

Organizational and Community Outcomes

Cultural Competency	Creating and/or gaining greater awareness and understanding of racial, ethnic, gender, geographic diversity; integrating the richness of diversity into organizational and policy changes regarding how planning and work is done and how resources should be distributed.
Funding	Generating funds to develop, sustain, or enhance program or community efforts; participating in the process of determining funding decisions and distribution.

Community	Developing unique, innovative ways of engaging community in the work of improving Organizing women's health; establishing trust and credibility within a community to carry on the important work and vision; knowing where to find the natural leader(s) or gatekeepers; utilizing the strengths and gifts of community members to develop community relevant solutions; developing collaborative strategies and solutions.
Policy/Advocacy	Speaking and acting on behalf of one's own needs or the needs of others to influence how needs are met; defining the parameters for decision-making and resource distribution; creating broader public impact and accountability; "nesting doll" policies where the target of policy change may be layered (e.g., policy change within organization which then may have implications for community at large.); using media advocacy for policy change.
Unexpected	Recognizing and honoring spirituality as a part of leadership and maintaining one's Changes vision; the intensity of relationship building and the power of support; playing the political game and knowing when to fight and when to let go; the isolating effects and changes in others upon moving to a leadership role.

As we apply the outcome areas to each alumni, we are struck by the interdependency of one outcome to another. The personal/professional changes and transformations such as those of Maichew who shares "(I'm) not perfect, but a person who likes to stand up and confront the situation...who likes to speak not very much, but has the guts to get up and speak when I need to." has direct implications for community-wide change. Maichew utilizes this gift to fundraise for the Iu Mien American National Coalition in which she is serving as the first woman to sit on the Advisory Board as well as to challenge city government to overturn planning policies. In both these examples, Maichew's enhanced strength and self-confidence created a path where there would be no turning back. Her inherent gifts were challenged and nurtured to grow in ways that she feels directly lead to her recent job promotion.

Often seen as intangible and nebulous, changes in how women view themselves and in the way they create more opportunities for themselves are real and connected to other outcome domains. There is almost a "nesting" effect where once the woman is confident, that confidence creates more opportunities and risk taking which in turn impacts those immediately around her until ultimately, she channels that confidence into the broader public context of community organizing and policy development. Such is the transformation for alumni, Najia Hamid who took her gift of compassion and respect for her community of elderly Afghan women into a strong and passionate voice for mental health, socialization, educational needs of Afghan women and their families. The creation of the Elderly Afghan Women's Program marked the beginning of a leadership path that has taken Najia out of her Fremont home to other communities like San Diego and Virginia where she provides consultation to others who want to replicate the program she helped to create. Her mission is to share with others the successes and lessons learned from her own experiences and to impart some skills such as grant writing in order to more effectively

realize their vision. As Najia has become more confident in her work, she feels that while asking others for help is fine, but not always necessary. She states, "Initially, we ran to the City of Fremont for help with problem solving. Before we didn't know we could do it ourselves...now we trust ourselves."

Najia has been able to also channel some of her gifts and abilities to use media as a way of advocating and promoting the women and families she works with. She follows this up by using media to put these women and families into the spotlight through interviews and news stories. Her rationale and tactic for this is to ultimately improve their emotional and mental strength so that in the words of Najia, "They are no longer invisible."

Strength in numbers and strength in diversity to combat this "invisibility" was a life changing transformation for alumni, Beverly Rhine. A breast cancer survivor and activist, Beverly was already versed in political advocacy and knew who the players were in the breast cancer arena. However, she was unprepared for the teachings and learnings from others outside of the African American community. Beverly describes herself as "an angry Black woman wanting to know what women of other cultures could possibly teach me." What she took away with her at the end of her year with WHL was a love, respect and trust for other women very different from herself. She describes herself as "a woman who has come to understand that sisterhood and compassion are colorless. Even if you don't want to, you'll catch on to the power of diversity." Beverly's new understanding and attitude about collaboration and partnership, enhanced policy skills coupled with an ever-pressing sense of urgency has resulted in the creation of two organizations and participation on two Advisory Boards that make decisions on the distribution of major dollars in California. She sees the potential of WHL in creating a network of women across the State who can mobilize to respond quickly to policy changes and legislation. "WHL exposes women to people and processes that they 've been locked out of politically or have never been exposed to...."We can change how folks do business in California, whether it's HMO's or the Legislature."

Each of the impacts highlighted above and many others expressed by the alumni who participated in the WHL Case Study project illustrate the validity and the necessity for cultivating and "tilling" the rich and inherent strengths of community women leaders. These early findings also call for a more longitudinal exploration into the work of WHL alumni. It is likely that as the network grows, we achieve a critical mass that as a collective, can create change on a broader and deeper level in communities across California. Some of this collaboration and partnering is already occurring - who knows what the next five years may bring. We hope that you the reader will stay tuned as we further explore the immense potential and energy of Women's Health Leadership.

“Short Stories” of Case Study Alumni

*"I'm grateful for what I've become,
and that's something that's very nice to be able to say.
I'm really excited about who I will be and where I'm going to go."*

--Karen Allen

Karen Allen epitomizes inspiration. She has experienced the kind of suffering and setbacks which most people never recover from, and yet she is very much alive and kicking. The losses in her private and professional life are transcended by her love of the Lord. While employed as a full-time nurse case manager, substance abuse counselor and health educator at a non-profit agency in Los Angeles, Karen spends an additional 40 hours per week at her church, Jacob's Ladder Community Fellowship in Inglewood. The passion that Karen has to help heal women and children is manifested day in and day out, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

When Karen was eleven years old, her mother passed away. As an adult, Karen began to seek out who her mother was, and what she stood for. "About three years ago, I realized I am directly my mom, everything I do my mom did...She was a nurse, she worked with women and children giving them guidance, she ran a kindergarten. I do a youth ministry at church with about 18-20 kids that I work with faithfully every week. My mom was an evangelist, too...I find great peace knowing that God had it all mapped out for me and I received it with open arms."

Coming to this place of peace, however, has truly been a journey. Sexual abuse, domestic violence, addiction, and other assaults on Karen's spirit have tested her will and her faith. At some point, she realized that she needed to focus on what was in her heart. Karen describes herself as the "totally spoiled rotten" youngest daughter of twelve children, whose father was a Baptist preacher and whose mother was "the first lady of first ladies." That is what surprises her about how she has ended up giving everything she has to others: "I think in my recovery, when I got sober, that was one thing I wanted to change, that I didn't want to need to be the center of attention, that my attention is given to others. And God just answered my prayers."

Karen had other needs, as well. Describing the woman who wrote her application to the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program, Karen says, "She was a woman who had some visions of where she wanted to go and what she wanted to do, but did not have the resources, the knowledge, the connections and networking power to pull that together and make it happen." That same woman today has all of those qualities. She is "very bold, has the confidence, has the self-esteem, has the networking, has the connections," and has put all of it to good use. Karen is proud when she describes who she is now, "My speaking skills have improved. I've matured; it's easier to listen and not always have to speak, not always have to be seen. I move quietly now, and that's kind of nice."

Karen also learned a lot about what it takes to truly be an effective leader. "I had leadership potential, but not necessarily qualification," Karen says. "I had a concept of what leadership was [before God and WHL]. With people behind me, I could start the party going, but I was not able to sustain the call of the group." What she learned is that leadership cannot lack purpose, function or structure. Purpose is sharing a common vision. Structure addresses delegating the work. Function is how the idea is going to work. Now Karen is able to put this framework into practice and make it work for her.

Looking at the whole picture of what turns a vision into a reality has forced Karen to mature in some unexpected ways. "I used to be so client-oriented, I couldn't see anything at the administrative level. And I think WHL taught me the maturity where I can see it on both levels now. That was a big goal for me, because I would have more fights in this place...and then I realized that as a leader, you must know purpose, structure, and there's a function." Karen says that the staff and faculty members at WHL inspired her, by example, how administration is necessary, and does not need to be in conflict with the goals of the organization. "I had to grow up from being just a client advocate to being both an advocate and an administrator. That's part of the growth in leadership. I only took part of the role, and now I take the full

dose of the role."

Karen continues to face countless monumental challenges, and yet she says, "In all of my busy-ness, there's an inner peace that I've never experienced before, that, in spite of all that's gone on, all that has happened, all that will be, that I don't have to react to any of that. I was very reactive before WHL; I had not matured. WHL came at a perfect time in my life, a time when certain maturities needed to happen in me, and it provoked that to happen."

Fortunately for her agency, Karen's maturity is having a positive impact on the kind of service she is able to provide. "I have more colleagues coming to me. I give more direction, I get other supervisors coming to me, and I do a lot of trouble-shooting in my own department...I think now that I'm more that manager person they were looking for, even though that's not the title I have. I'm called on a lot in different problem solving situations." She knows that she has a reputation for being the employee who will come through in a crunch, and credits her newfound maturity for this, saying, "It has nothing to do with personality; it has more to do with investment in the work." No one would dispute Karen's investment in her work. The sheer volume of it alone, between the agency and church, is staggering. Even portions of this interview were conducted on the run, starting and concluding in her downtown LA office, with a dash out to pick up an award for the church's minister somewhere in the middle.

Karen is deeply entrenched in the day-to-day direct service, as well as chipping away at problems on a policy level. Karen's agency, Homeless Healthcare, is "very much an advocacy program, starting back in 1985. We have maybe 20-25 coalitions and forums that we all participate in; we're a strong organization...For a small agency, we're kind of everywhere, but I've been narrowed down to the general relief area...We're at a high level of activity. I was really involved in the policy and advocacy before WHL." Because of this strong component in her work, she wishes that there had been even more time in WHL devoted to dialogue around policy "that could have been done on a different level, and a lot more on health issues." She explains, "I'm not saying that they lacked in anything; they worked the time to the penny, but that is what I would have liked to see...more dialogue with people who do that hands-on stuff...You don't really know the issues until people dialogue. We know there are some stories, we know there are issues, but we need to get at the behind-closed-doors kind of stuff to really advocate on behalf of our clients."

In terms of the next step in Karen's leadership journey, she feels that she now has the confidence to take a writing class. As her WHL class project, she compiled a *Freedom Guide* to assist in her Women Empowering Women group. The *Guide* helps her clients address issues such as self-esteem, identity, boundaries, isolation, and domestic violence. While self-conscious at having been assisted with the proofreading by WHL staff, Karen is proud that she recently got approval on the *Guide's* copyright. Writing is important to Karen, although it is difficult. She says, "I realize that I lack in this area, so I will be working on that." She goes on to say, "As a function of low self-esteem, the things that block you are so small, but you stack them so high! With low self-esteem, you can block yourself from every angle. But being able to write well has nothing to do with my ministry, my leadership skills, who I am, what I represent - it has nothing to do with that. I did not know that three years ago!"

In fact, three years ago, Karen hesitated to apply to the program at all because she felt awkward about being a part of a group that would include lots of women with college degrees and high positions. The most surprising aspect of WHL was "the level of respect that I got." Karen was asked to participate in the WHL video and to represent the program by speaking at conferences, and her learning group was very supportive of Karen doing her work with *whatever* level of education she had. One of WHL's goals is to bring women with diverse experiences and backgrounds together to learn from and inspire one another, so it is important that each woman feels valued in the program.

"I'm grateful for what I've become, and that's something that's very nice to be able to say. I'm really excited about who I will be and where I'm going to go. I give God and WHL a lot of the praise for that. I look back at what have been the two things that have impacted my life the most, and one is having

come to know Jesus as my personal savior, and the other is WHL." Karen maintains that those who have not personally experienced the program have a hard time understanding the effect that it has on its participants. She acknowledges that she brings certain gifts to her work: "The passion, [which] moves you in ways you never thought you would go. The vision... the commitment...the sacrifice...and the obedience." And yet she illustrates WHL's role in cultivating those gifts with the following analogy: "They've allowed me to till the soil. I think of the farmer who has a big field, who planted corn, and for three years, nothing came up. Then, one year, he said, 'Let me take the chance one more time,' and he tilled the soil one more time. And then corn came up."

Karen says that another way of looking at it is realizing that, regardless of whatever makes a person extraordinary, if they can't see what they have to offer, it's useless. For many women, she says, that is the case, and those women will not see what others see in them "until some work is done to clear away the wreckage, and a path made to help guide the way." Years of low self-esteem comprise that wreckage, and WHL, in just one year, has a way of replacing it with high self-empowerment. "WHL made such a difference in my life...along with spiritual growth, it just stripped me of all the shame."

Asked whether it would matter if WHL were to close its doors, Karen clasps her hands, takes a deep breath, and responds, "I think it would be a total loss to the women's movement and to the health care movement. It would be a major loss and it would be felt." Using herself and her clients in recovery as an example, she continues, "Just here, where I work - just with me - out of 100 women, 65-70 homeless drug-addicted women had their children taken away to the courts, and got their children back; [they] have benefited just from me being a part of WHL in that one year. I was able to advocate and teach them how to make the system work. And I'm just one person. I'm quite sure that 50 other women and the women they have touched have also benefited."

"Being the kind of person that I am, I probably would have been doing a lot anyway, but WHL boosted it even further and made it happen quicker."

--Cheryle Bernard-Shaw

Cheryle Bernard-Shaw is the Chief of Women's Health Services for Marin County. She manages the health care services for mostly indigent women, although women throughout the county are served by her work as well. Her office anticipates and responds to broad health care needs while providing direct services such as maternity support, family planning and WIC. While Cheryle is very happy with her position and what she is currently able to achieve, that doesn't stop her from dreaming about making her way to the top. Cheryle has hopes of someday working at the state or national level for women's health care, possibly even with the President's administration. "My interest will be more health care law, and addressing the inequities in health care for women. Policy is really important but who ends up writing the laws can make a big impact. A lot of lawmakers do not seem to care about women's focus; I think I could bring the legal, legislative perspective to my future work." There is no reason to doubt that Cheryle will realize her career goals, given her self-described and self-evident personal gifts of desire, energy, awareness, and the ability to pull people together and lead them forward. Cheryle's demeanor speaks to her professionalism, while her bright eyes, broad smile and upbeat personality could make anyone feel comfortable in her presence.

Cheryle has a long track record with leadership, but underwent a transformation of sorts through her participation in the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program. She explains how she saw herself before WHL, "When I'm in a group, I tend to be the one that ends up as the group leader somehow, because I put my opinions out there, but I did not really see myself as a leader the community would choose." When Cheryle applied to WHL, she was at a low-point because she had just completed a city council race for the City of Richmond wherein she didn't win; she was feeling unsuccessful as a person and depressed about the "dirty campaign tactics" she had come up against. She needed something to put her back on track and lift her spirits. Doubtful of her ability to get into the program, she decided to apply anyway. "Getting accepted to WHL was like an unbelievable dream come true...I didn't even think I was qualified to get considered among that group of women!"

It turned out that *that group of women*, the other WHL peer leaders, taught and inspired Cheryle more than she could have possibly imagined. In terms of the transformation with her own leadership, Cheryle goes on to say, "Although I was running for city council and getting accustomed to the political arena, and had interactions with my community, I really did not know a lot about the community in general, in terms of just the average, everyday person. I had not interacted with any community groups on a long-term basis, and although people knew of me because of some of the groups I had worked in, it wasn't the grassroots segment of the community. And then, going through WHL, got me more in touch with that because I was working with other peer leaders who *are* a part of the community and seeing how they operated. That gave me the impetus to do more in terms of getting more actively involved with boards, more on a grassroots level...And I feel like if I were to run again, it would be a whole different outcome because now I feel more invested in the community that I live in, and they know me. I can speak as a leader of the community."

This newfound confidence of Cheryle's is having a widespread impact on herself, her agency, her community, and statewide policy. On the personal level, Cheryle is enjoying several benefits of WHL, including greater respect and recognition from her supervisors and members of the community, support and cooperation from other WHL peer leaders in the Bay Area, and increasingly more opportunities to demonstrate what she is capable of. In general, she feels better about who she is and where she is headed: "Now, going on two years [since I graduated from WHL], I certainly feel like I'm more confident about myself and am not judging myself on my failures or the things that I'm not successful with. WHL showed me that I'm still a good person, I'm still successful, I've still arrived in terms of some of my political and career goals. So I'm not judging myself as harshly as a result of WHL."

Cheryle's agency is also reaping the benefits of WHL and, as a result, is encouraging more of its employees to apply to the program. Cheryle's supervisor "would like to see other staff members' confidence improve and their relationships with their superiors improve," as was evident with Cheryle. Other benefits to the agency have included the up-to-date, statewide information sent to Cheryle by the WHL staff; the recognition the agency has received as a result of Cheryle's more visible participation in the community's health care and policy discussions; and the positive impact of Cheryle's new approach to working with clients' communities on a grassroots level. Cheryle focused on how to work with the needs of Marin City residents for part of her WHL class project. Marin City, a geographically isolated, economically depressed, predominantly African-American community in an otherwise largely White, largely affluent county, has often been treated in ways that have demoralized and disempowered its residents. "Marin City is difficult to provide services for. With [another] WHL peer leader in Marin City, I was able to incorporate Marin City work activities with my WHL project, to share some of that information with managers here and it gave us a different approach. The planning process is much more interactive with the community now; it was a big suggestion of mine to gain community involvement. This approach has been much more successful; the community makes a recommendation now and we're much more sensitive and responsive than we were in the past."

WHL's ripple effect in Cheryle's life broadens to include the several community boards on which she has become active - among them, Planned Parenthood Shasta-Diablo, Greater Richmond Social Services - and continues all the way to the state level. From speaking on a panel at a Maternal and Child Health conference, to being appointed to the Task Force for the Office of Multicultural Health, to being approached by the director of the Office of Women's Health, at the state level, Cheryle credits her ever-expanding opportunities to WHL. "It's mushrooming, in terms of me getting more involved in my community, and at the state and local level because of my involvement in WHL."

Cheryle enthusiastically recommends the program, saying, "Being the kind of person that I am, I probably would have been doing a lot anyway, but WHL boosted it even further and made it happen quicker. It would have taken me longer to get where I am now, professionally, without WHL...[It's] gotten me respect and recognition at my job. Now I'm much more vocal about my feelings, whereas before, I was kind of reticent about sharing my knowledge...I would say that it quadrupled my impact in terms of the things I'm able to do."

Cheryle believes that having women trained and working at the grassroots level throughout the country is the way to make real changes, so her vision is to see WHL take the program nationally: "Women really are connected to family and communities and can really make the changes; it won't happen via the status quo. We are the worker bees; we can really make the changes and have an immediate impact on health care status. WHL should expand to key cities, especially cities with urban decline; there you can get the worker bees involved in miraculous changes that they have not been able to accomplish with the current leadership and current levels of funding. Also, women are perceived as less threatening and can make changes at the local level and have more chance of success."

She would also like to see WHL incorporate a more structured alumni component because, she laughs, "Nobody wanted to graduate from the program!" The personal attention, the recognition, the sisterhood between the peer leaders and faculty, the profound inspiration, the knowledge base, and the validation that Cheryle and the other graduates found in the program make it difficult to simply move on. She suggests that alumni should be utilized as recruiters for WHL, and that would help them continue to feel connected to the program.

As a recruiter, Cheryle would strongly urge other women to apply, acknowledging that she sounds like a "poster child" for WHL: "Look, do this. Run, do not walk. Get your application in! You need to do it, and see for yourself! Here's a way to get exposure to women actually doing these things and to get where you want to get, quicker...Women wonder how they can add one more thing to their plate. The biggest fear for most of us overachievers is, how can you participate in the program and

still do the other work successfully? It has been worth it for me to take a couple of things off my plate and add WHL to it. Those other things are back on my plate, and I'm better at them." She adds that she encourages others in her workplace to apply to WHL because, as Cheryle says, "We would have more visionaries here; that would make things easier for me."

It is obvious that Cheryle is sincere when she speaks about her deep appreciation for WHL and the opportunities it has afforded her. It is hard for her to imagine that WHL could ever close its doors because of the negative impact that would have. As if ready to take on the world, Cheryle declares, "There has been no vehicle, without WHL, to empower women to make a difference. This is what has been missing. The government has been throwing money at problems, but it hasn't helped. Women need support to do what they do every day that really makes a difference. With health care, some of the future issues are critical. There are no answers to these issues. Money won't resolve them, people will. People are willing to take responsibility; women can be used in this way... There is nothing else like WHL available."

*"We're a real special group who will,
up and down the State of California, make a difference.
I'm one of those people."*

—Cynthia Boyd

"I became very aware in WHL that it's not only what we do in program, but it's what we do to affect policy changes," says Cynthia Boyd, the Director of the San Diego chapter of the Birthing Project, in reference to the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program. "And that is one thing I hadn't looked at until I went to WHL. I just hadn't thought of it... a lot of women don't think about policy."

The Birthing Project has its roots in Sacramento, where one of the former WHL faculty advisors started the project in response to the alarmingly high rates of infant mortality and morbidity in the African-American community. Since its inception in 1988, it has spread to several dozen cities throughout the US, with the main goal of providing support to high-risk pregnant women – of all ethnic backgrounds – in order to increase healthy birth outcomes and healthy families.

Although the nature of Cynthia's work at the Birthing Project is primarily direct service, to meet the immediate needs of pregnant and parenting girls and women, she is more committed than ever to also take on a broader policy and advocacy role. With all of the reforms today in welfare and childcare, Cynthia knows that her clients must be as informed as possible if they are to make it. The reforms are heavy on deadlines, so women who are not prepared will certainly suffer setbacks. "It just makes you shudder to think that the little sisters act like they haven't heard about the changes at all." This year's annual San Diego Birthing Project event "Sister Fire" will focus on such reforms, as will their upcoming forum. The forum will be presented from a community perspective, as opposed to a provider perspective.

Cynthia says that her greatest victory in the past few years has been reaching out to others, or networking, which she learned at WHL. Not only did she network within the program, but also allowed her new skill to carry-over into her community. "Initially I didn't do that; I worked from my desk. But now I outreach in the community. It's a different way of collaborating, and it's more effective, [in that] you find out about other community resources." She now gets to see what other people are doing, which has changed her perspective from focusing on the individual work to focusing on the collaborative work.

Ironically, one of Cynthia's greatest disappointments have, in a sense, evolved from this networking victory. She explains, "I came back [from WHL] so motivated and wanting to excel, but some of the people I'm networking with aren't moving fast enough. I want to say, 'Come on! Come on!'" For example, when the opportunity presented itself for a community collaboration to go after a federal grant, Cynthia became frustrated because the others weren't willing to do what it would take to get the grant. "Others don't want to work nights or weekends. No matter how I tried to share my vision, they couldn't see it." Eventually, she says sadly, the opportunity was wasted. The support for her work simply may not exist where she is. "We shouldn't have to leave our community to look for that support across the freeway." Leave it to Cynthia, however, to figure out how to *create* that support. She goes on to say, "It makes me realize that I may need to develop a Maternal and Child Health Collaborative. I wouldn't have done this without WHL." She speaks as though it's already been done, but perhaps that is an outcome of WHL, too.

Other changes that Cynthia sees in herself as a result of her participation in WHL include having more confidence, going after changes more aggressively, and being able to take on several projects at once. She describes herself before the program as having been "very passive," saying, "Prior to WHL, I probably wouldn't have spoken out if something needed to be said or done." Witnessing Cynthia now, in all of her glory, decked out in vibrant colors from head to toe, with matching fingernails and a radiant personality that fills her agency, it takes a moment to conjure up an image of this "passive" Cynthia of days gone by.

Cynthia also admits to having maintained "a unilateral focus," which made it difficult at times to effectively do her job. Now she believes that her program is better implemented "because of the increased understanding of myself." At some point, she laughs, her personal changes may not impact the organization so dramatically, but because the staff is so bare bones ("It's usually just me here"), Cynthia's development is indisputably an agency development. She is very optimistic about pending staff: "Some day we *will* have a full staff, as we write those grants - getting past the cookie sales and chicken dinners."

Cynthia has good reason to be optimistic in this area. She went into WHL having no idea what to expect, but her main goal in participating was to acquire expertise in grantwriting. Self-described as someone who hates to write, she says, "I had no exposure to grantwriting; I thought it was something beyond me." On the heels of WHL, she wrote her first proposal, which was not funded. Accepting that this was a learning experience, Cynthia called the foundation to discuss her application and was given some very useful feedback for her future proposals. Lo and behold, she has since written several successful proposals, totaling nearly \$30,000. Cynthia took her goal seriously, and because of the WHL requirements, she sought out local seminars and courses on grantwriting to supplement what she was learning in the program.

Another major transformation that Cynthia is able to see in herself is the shift she made into considering herself a leader. "I would've never described myself as a leader before the program. I define a leader as someone who shares their life and stories, supports people, and encourages others to do the same." Given Cynthia's mission at the Birthing Project, this is an important definition. She explains that she incorporates WHL into her life by using its principle of sisterhood to foster a meaningful workplace. Her work is heavily based on relationships, between the volunteers (called sister friends), the clients (called little sisters), and the other community resources. Coming from a place of sisterhood reminds Cynthia how important it is to encourage the little sisters to find themselves, build their confidence, and look at where they want to be six months, two years, or five years down the road. Eighty-five percent of Cynthia's clients are 12-19 years old, which makes it that much more important that they take some chances to set a vision for their life. Cynthia is mindful, however, that you can re-chart your course at *any* part of your journey, as she was over forty when she entered WHL.

Cynthia feels very honored to have been selected as one of the initial group of fifty women statewide to participate in WHL. The experience changed and inspired her, and in many ways continues to be a part of her life. "I feel like...WHL has been the foundation for me to spread my wings...WHL still affects me. It wasn't like when we graduated, that's all and that's it. We're a real special group who will, up and down the State of California, make a difference. I'm one of those people. I like to think that."

She goes on to say, "For me, it [filled a gap] and I believe that it still does. I believe in the mission that it has to prepare women to be leaders in their own communities, from the health perspective. I really believe that! If [WHL] should close its doors, I think California loses a great opportunity to enhance women's health care - the totality of it." Cynthia would also like to see an alumni group for each local area. She believes the groups would be very strong and would enable the graduates to continue to work together to further strengthen women's health.

To encourage women who are considering whether or not to apply, she says, "It's a fantastic program for those women who want to make a change, who are already starting to make a change in their community and are interested in the health of women. WHL is the arena to give them additional momentum, to share concepts and ideas to implement the things they have talked about. And it gives them additional skills - not that they're lacking skills, because they're already doing the work - but *additional* skills...You get to network with other people who are in different counties who are doing similar things to what you're doing, and see the limits that they're encountering and overcoming. WHL will only enhance what you do."

Cynthia recognizes that she is still on a leadership journey. "I need to, again, look at my organizational skills. I get things done, but not necessarily in the most organized way. I periodically have

to remind myself about time management." Cynthia keeps another important goal in the back of her mind, too: "I continue to ask myself, 'Am I sharing enough so that I can help someone, to help them develop their own leadership potential?'" She knows that sharing experiences and feelings is more powerful than it is usually given credit, which is why she started implementing parent support groups. This gave women the space to come together and share their stories, in hopes of motivating and inspiring each other.

When it is all said and done, this is why Cynthia continues to be in this field. "My passion for doing this work is my circle of sisters and knowing how we can support one another. The drive is to say, 'We can be there for one another. You are a part of my circle. I am a part of your circle.' And since we're looking at it from a Maternal Child Health perspective, life is a journey and health is a part of that journey." By promoting the idea that we are all in this together and must be resources for one another, Cynthia hopes that her passion will impact the status of women's health overall.

*"If you have many chopsticks together, it's hard to break,
but if you have only one, someone can come and break it.
It's the same with women and the community."*

—Maichew Chao

Maichew Chao believes that one of her personal gifts is the willingness she has to *want* to do her work. "There are people that have the ability and strength to do it just like me, but it's the willingness, whether that person wants to do it or not. Some people have that great opportunity, but don't want to do it." For Maichew, that has never been an issue. She has many inspirations, from God, who gives her the strength to do her work, to her agency's project director, who powerfully motivates Maichew to improve herself.

Maichew has been working with refugees and members of the Asian Pacific community for seventeen years, practically since she arrived in the US from Laos. She began by volunteering with new refugees who needed assistance applying for public aid, accessing health care, registering their children at school, shopping, and many other things to help them start their lives over in a foreign land. From that experience, she was hired as a family outreach worker for the Asian Pacific community in Long Beach, also to help new arrivals. Many times her work was risky and scary – like getting followed by strangers and robbed in the middle of the night – but she says, "I'm still alive...I never regretted it, I'm glad I did it."

Maichew spent many years as a community health advocate and hadn't really thought how to move along with her job. However, she recently received a promotion to Project Assistant in her work with the Southeast Asian Health Project. This, she says, was the most unexpected outcome of her participation in the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program, as she attributes the promotion in part to the strengths she gained as a WHL participant.

"People don't want you to be there judging them," Maichew says. And because people don't see her that way, they have come to realize that she is someone they can trust, someone who will listen to them. Maichew recognizes that this love and trust with her community has long put her in a position of leadership, and she willingly accepts it. However, Maichew was often put in a hard position because one of the demands of leadership is working not just one-one-one, but also in groups. As an extremely shy woman, Maichew didn't know how to speak her mind at meetings and conferences. She had plenty of great ideas, but would become very nervous when she'd open her mouth to speak up. That was before WHL.

Now Maichew describes herself as, "not perfect, but a person who likes to stand up and confront the situation...who likes to speak not very much, but has the guts to get up and speak when I need to." The staff at WHL had Maichew practice speaking in front of groups because they knew that's what she needed to work on. From early on in the program, she had acknowledged to the staff that public speaking was her weakness. They pushed her to get before her WHL peers, as well as strangers, for various symposiums and public discussions. "Whenever they had an opportunity, they'd call and say, 'Maichew, can you go speak?' Of course, when you have someone behind you giving you the support, you don't want to say, 'No.'" Maichew learned to conquer her fear and has become much more confident. She says that people don't even believe her anymore if she tells them she was nervous while speaking before a group, and to Maichew, that is a tremendous relief.

Another benefit of WHL arose from her mandatory WHL class project. Maichew had been thinking for some time that she wanted to get involved with early detection of breast cancer, so she chose that issue in the Lao and Hmong community to study for her project. It surprises her even now that her project was taken very seriously by UCLA, who funded Maichew to work with their researchers. Now they are calling on Maichew to direct them in studies of early detection of breast cancer for Southeast Asian women in the Los Angeles area. As she should be, Maichew is very honored to have been chosen in this capacity.

Gaining access to prestigious institutions and funding has its advantages beyond Maichew's personal consulting career. She has found that she can use her new connections to further the goals of the organizations she is committed to, as she is now in a position to help others get funding for their projects, too. One such organization is the Iu Mien American National Coalition, Inc., for which she is very proud to have been a member since 1990 and prominently displays their plaque on her office wall. According to Maichew, the organization's mission is to integrate the Iu Mien American community nationally, and to help the individual geographic communities address their local issues. It is a way for Iu Mien Americans to meet one another and preserve their culture. Maichew has been appointed as the first woman to sit on the Advisory Board for their first conference. The other members keep stressing to Maichew how much they need her, and she is pulling through for them by finding funding for the conference through her UCLA connection. This gives her great satisfaction, and she considers it to be one of the best rewards for doing community work.

Maichew enjoys improving the lives of families in her community and is constantly seeking better ways to serve them. She knows that sometimes that means implementing policy changes in areas which affect them. For example she has been working with the local YMCA to encourage them to hire Asian youngsters. This was necessary because the Asian Pacific community had not been utilizing the YMCA's fitness facilities; their language and cultural needs could not be addressed there because they did not have appropriate staffing. On another policy front, Maichew is involved in the National Community Health Advisory Study, in hopes that she can get community workers to be formerly acknowledged by health providers, organizations and government entities. Maichew recognizes the importance of WHL's policy and advocacy emphasis, but also points out that she and her agency have been engaged in such activities for years, and most likely would have continued to do so even without the influence of the program.

Maichew's agency is fortunate to have her on its staff. It is apparent that she is perpetually in motion, and very much in demand by the community. But she also knows that her work and her agency can always be improved if it seeks to truly serve the community. Maichew believes that some improvements have been made in the quality of service her agency has been able to deliver since she completed WHL because she has grown and become stronger. "Before improving the community, you have to improve the organization, the individual [worker]. WHL does affect the individual to help them improve their work area...Many of our staff here need to learn more to gain that self-confidence and ability to handle the job, just like me, to improve themselves first before improving the community...We still have some more [or our staff] in the [WHL] program, who I can tell for sure will gain some strength like I did. So, we're going to put that together and hopefully that will improve the community." Maichew also believes strongly in teamwork. Her vision for improving her organization is to establish a system which would help the staff support each other better and work more cooperatively together. For example, one component would be ongoing team meetings to update one another, share what and how each individual is doing, and discuss how they could support each other that week.

This kind of support is part of WHL's program and it had a positive impact on Maichew. She recalls the "friendly faces, kindness and respect" which motivated her to stay in the program, although some things were difficult. Maichew didn't feel comfortable when she attended the first WHL session because she didn't see any other Asian women, and it seemed that the majority of the women were program directors or had other professional titles. She asked herself, "Am I fitting in with this program? Why am I here?" She seriously considered resigning at that time, but after the session, she went to a friend with her dilemma. Her friend encouraged her to stay, telling her that she was accepted like everyone else and that the staff would probably be disappointed if she dropped out. Maichew heeded her advice. "I stayed and I'm glad I stayed...Now I know many other Asian women who go to WHL. That makes me happy, very happy."

Although it is tough to break new ground, Maichew realizes that it was worth it because she is now in a position where she can encourage others to apply to the program and they will listen to her because she has had the experience. Maichew believes it is important to foster a core of women leaders,

giving a wonderful analogy about chopsticks: "If you have many chopsticks together, it's hard to break, but if you have only one, someone can come and break it. It's the same with women and the community." Maichew imagines how WHL is developing about fifty women leaders every year "who all learn, and they're all in different areas, programs, organizations, and ethnic backgrounds." Put them all together and the impact will be tremendous. Maichew says WHL is the only program doing this that she is aware of.

Maichew's advice to potential WHL applicants is that they should apply because it is a good opportunity and a good program. She acknowledges that many Asian women may be intimidated from applying because "they're afraid of the paperwork...it's embarrassing to use their broken English," but wants to reassure them, "Don't worry about your vocabulary and grammar. [The staff] will understand you." She knows that women just like her can benefit the way that she did, by gaining the confidence to speak up, learn about women's health, and meet new people. "The important thing is the networking," Maichew says, "You learn from [the other women] and at the same time, they will learn from you."

***"I'm not a politician and I'm not crazy about politics,
but I know that to affect lasting changes, we must influence the political arena."***

—Carole Collins

Despite the rain, the church grounds are bustling with activity: a volunteer sweeps up the large warehouse used as a food and clothing closet for the community; several adults and teens load supplies into a pick-up truck for a local health fair; family members, a pastor, and other staff breeze in and out of the modest storefront church to check the sound equipment, make phone calls and run errands for one another.

"God gave me my job - I prayed for a job where I could stay in the church and continue to work in the community. I do not mind coming to work. I love my job! I'm so lucky. My work was chosen for me and I accepted it." Discussing her story while relaxing in the pews at Christ Unity Baptist Church, Carole Collins looks right at home. And she is the first one to acknowledge that. "This is really home. I'm part of my work," and laughing, adds, "Some people think I should pay the church rent because I'm here all the time."

Carole is a Community Development Team Leader, a position based at Christ Unity through the West Modesto/King Kennedy Neighborhood Collaborative. The Collaborative's goal is to address health care in its broader sense, by addressing families' basic needs. It came about in 1991 when several concerned health care professionals, who were predominantly of color, saw a real need to provide better access to health care and better services for minorities in Stanislaus County. A needs assessment at that time revealed that housing, employment, and transportation were most important to local minority families, because they felt that if those concerns were met, they would be able to *pay* for their own health care. Access would be much less of an issue.

Carole's job, simply put, is to help families get the things they need. She coordinates and facilitates neighborhood meetings, provides outreach, makes presentations at conferences, and facilitates a Family Group Conference Model (which asserts that families should be encouraged to discuss solutions to their own problems), and will serve as lead agency for a Healthy Start program at a local junior high school, among other projects and responsibilities. "We're trying to change the quality of life — to improve it for children and families. This work will impact the community at large."

Bringing families together is an important aspect of improving the community, and the lack of after-school activities is high on the list of community needs. Responding to those needs, the Collaborative has begun a recreational program every Friday evening, in conjunction with the City of Modesto. *Fantastic Family Fridays* allow children and parents to establish or re-establish ties in a non-threatening environment while watching movies, doing arts and crafts, reading, tumbling, doing needlepoint, or just enjoying each other's company. The Hmong community will soon be offered parenting and English as a Second Language classes for the adults and native language classes for the children. There is talk of extending the program to more evenings per week, and possibly adding a gymnastics class and drill team.

Carole has always seen herself as a leader in the church community and with her family - "just in situations where I was comfortable and in control." But at some point she realized there was more to leadership than what she was accustomed to. When she learned of the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program, she was apprehensive and a little doubtful that the program would be beneficial, but excited about the possibilities because she loves to travel and meet new people, which are two aspects of the program. What she found was that WHL exceeded her expectations, helping her move forward in many ways.

Carole's areas of improvement include her self-esteem, communication skills and public speaking. She felt very inspired throughout her participation in WHL, as she learned from others whose experience related directly to her situation. She would tell herself, "If she can do it, maybe I can."

Carole's leadership style also underwent a transformation. Whereas she had previously felt like she needed to be the one in charge to feel comfortable, that perception changed. "I had to start going into situations where I wasn't - and shouldn't have been - in control. You don't always have to be *the* leader to be a leader. [WHL] helped me grow as a person because I had to step outside of those comfort zones, which, before WHL, I probably wouldn't have done."

There are several things that made Carole feel like she had a good match with WHL. She speaks very highly of her WHL learning group and faculty advisor, acknowledging that her relationship with them was the most unexpected outcome of her participation in the program. Carole felt comfortable sharing her personal stories with them, which is something she generally would not do with a group she had just met. "They were warm, they were friendly, but as a minority woman, they weren't *overtly* friendly. You know, they didn't immediately try to pretend they were my friend, or they didn't try to tell me any stories about their *Black* friends. They were just themselves, and it was like natural - every one of them different, but when we came together, it was like we'd been friends for sixteen years. They didn't try to be anybody else and they didn't expect me to be anybody else...it just felt right."

This level of comfort and support extended throughout the entire WHL staff as well, which has meant a great deal to Carole during times when she needed to talk to someone experienced with programs, grants, and community outreach. "Any time we needed them, we could call...Around here, [the WHL staff] are part of the family." To Carole, that means they leave several phone numbers where they can be reached when out of town, they come to Modesto to lend support during important times (such as a foundation's site visit) and they help put her agency's motivations into action.

WHL has also encouraged Carole to bring her entire self to her work. "A lot of programs leave out a real important piece: spirituality. WHL allows that to be a piece. There's an environment that fosters that if that's what you choose, although it's not forced." For a woman like Carole, who believes fervently that in the connection between God and her work, she needed a leadership program that could accommodate - and validate - her spiritual wellspring.

Carole is not the only beneficiary of her participation in WHL. "I acquired skills that help me do my job better. Things run smoother." A few areas that she particularly gained ground in were communication, strategic planning and time management. WHL's exercises, workshops, and assignments pushed her to work on solutions that didn't come naturally to her, and that she had to actively learn. She laughs as she tells the story of returning to her job after a WHL session in Sacramento. She and a co-worker had joined WHL together, and they both came back to their boss that Monday morning bursting at the seams with enthusiasm. "That [session] was so intense and so powerful, and ... was so full of information and inspiration and support and encouragement and laughing and crying - the whole gamut, so when we came back, we went into our boss' office and we were both trying to talk at the same time, saying, 'We want to do this,' and 'We're going to do this,' and [our boss] looked at us and said, 'Oh, my God, what have I done?! You're both so full of yourselves!' But we were! I mean, it was such a high. Unless you truly experience it, it's hard to put into words."

The fortunate thing is that Carole constructively directed that energy into her agency. At that session in Sacramento, and throughout the program, she learned the importance of policy and advocacy activities. Now she is proud to describe her Student/Family Advocacy Committee, "a by-product of WHL after going to the advocacy training." Carole helped to put this committee into place because in her community, "parents were intimidated by going to their kids' schools, so a lot of them wouldn't go." This committee helps the parents gain the confidence to get involved in the schools, learn how to put their kids on the right academic track (starting in junior high school) if the goal is a college education, and get recognition as a body that should be consulted on disciplinary issues such as expulsions.

But Carole certainly doesn't see her work ending there. She truly has a vision for improving her organization. "I just see us getting more members and more participation. More input. That's how we're going to get better." She envisions a strong media campaign that would reach more people in the

community – through videos shown on TV, newsletters, and brochures. She would also like to see a speakers' bureau of community members who are already involved, reaching out to those who have not yet joined the groundswell in their community.

Carole isn't going anywhere anytime soon. She is truly committed to her church and her community, and derives much joy from this commitment. She sees only rewards in the work she does, explaining, "You're in the community. You're there with the people and you get to hear what *they* say and *they* want and you just try to meet that need as best you can. I just really believe that our purpose is to serve."

In order to continue to serve in the most effective way possible, Carole fully acknowledges that she must continue to work on her leadership skills. That includes doing as much as she can on a political level. "I'm not a politician and I'm not crazy about politics, but I know that to affect lasting changes, we must influence the political arena. I'd like to become more skilled in doing that – at the basic level – calling them, talking to them informally, letting them know what's going on in our community, learning how to lobby and the whole nine yards. It's an arena that I've always shied away from, but now I just really don't think there's any reason why I shouldn't be doing that: Take the challenge, according to WHL. At one of the [WHL] meetings a lady said, 'It's *all* our responsibilities to do what we can do and say what we can say.'"

Carole very sincerely hopes that more women will continue to have the opportunity to grow through WHL. She believes that ending the program now would be a real disservice to the women who haven't yet had that opportunity and who ordinarily are not able to take advantage of similar trainings or workshops, such as women with limited English proficiency. "At WHL, that just didn't matter. I hope WHL has a long history."

As for the women who may be considering applying to the program, she says, "Just go ahead and do it! It's probably one of the most positive experiences I've had in my lifetime. The love and support, if nothing else, is worth it. It's like going to a spa: You get pampered. I would never have believed it if I hadn't gone through the process."

"I refer to WHL as my 'miracle grow.'"

--Luz Englebrecht

Luz Englebrecht has a philosophy that we can move away from our destructive addictions and heal ourselves if we focus on our very first childhood passions. She tells of two clients who were hopelessly addicted to cigarettes. The first, a man in his late 70's who had been smoking two packs a day, came to her accompanied by his wife and his oxygen tank. Upon asking him about his childhood dreams, he told Luz that he'd always wanted to play music; a famous musician had given him a guitar when he was very young, and it meant a tremendous amount to him. But the man did not grow up to pursue music as a profession. Instead, he became a rancher. The saddest time of the day, he recounted to Luz, was when he was out in the field and went to reach for his cigarettes in his shirt pocket -- and they were all gone.

Luz asked this man whether he could still play an instrument or sing, but his wife responded with a laugh, saying that having gnarled hands from arthritis and not enough lung capacity to breathe on his own prevented him from doing just about anything. Then Luz thought hard and suggested a harmonica. "A month later he comes back in, not carrying oxygen tanks. I mean really, this man was blowing on that little harp so much that he was building up his respiratory system...it was a magical thing that happened because he picked something that was close to his heart," Luz gushes.

Another client had wanted nothing more in life than to be a mother and a veterinarian. As it turned out, she couldn't have children and was very allergic to animals. She was a "heavy duty" smoker. Luz tapped into this woman's need to nurture and suggested that she cultivate that in other ways. The woman began growing beautiful violets in her home, for herself and to bring to people in rest homes. "She ended up doing something that was close to who she was." And she gave up smoking.

"If people can live their lives more closely to their purpose, we will have less need for addictive habits, because our focus is our gift and our purpose," Luz explains. Ironically enough, Luz knew intuitively that this approach was the answer, and yet she couldn't remember what *she* wanted to be as a little girl. Her sister helped to jog her memory, teasing, "Don't you remember how you used to pick all the leaves off the trees and crush them up and make us eat them, saying, 'these will make you feel better.'" A natural-born healer and leader, Luz says, "When people around me feel better, then I feel better. When people around me are sad or hurting, I hurt." Stepping into a leadership role from very early on, Luz's community has always known they can count on her. As a child, she would help the adults in her largely Spanish-speaking neighborhood in Santa Barbara. They came to her -- "the bookworm" -- for help with their taxes, job applications and referrals to social services.

Now that Luz is in a position where she truly can take care of the physical and emotional needs of her community, it is little wonder that people in her new hometown of Susanville continue to call or stop by when they can use a hand. For Luz, there is never a dull moment. As the Director of the Lassen Wellness Center in rural northeastern California and Co-Director of a community fitness project, Luz has her hands full. At the Wellness Center she provides clinical health education for individuals and groups addressing such issues as diabetes, hypertension, smoking cessation, and general healthy lifestyle changes. For the fitness project, Luz is working with a coalition of community agencies and private individuals to develop seven healthy initiatives for the community. Fitness is a part of the Holistic Health initiative. She is at the initial implementation of this component; because Lassen is rich with religious participation, her plan is to work with the local churches to help them bring a health-based ministry into the community.

Although there are some very positive things happening in her community, Luz acknowledges that she is facing some difficult challenges. While Lassen is a very beautiful, mountainous area, Luz describes many of its residents as having a very sedentary lifestyle. She is trying to counter that with small projects, such as teaching a Tai Chi class and starting some walking clubs in different neighborhoods. Other local problems, however, will require much more time and many more resources. "In rural communities, we are isolated with very few services...I think the isolation in the community perpetuates generation after generation of incest and sexual abuse issues, family violence, families that are second and

third generation alcohol and methamphetamine abusers...The cycle has to stop...The abuse is getting worse, more twisted and serious, and more widespread," she explains sullenly.

The problems that Luz faced on the job were more than she felt she should have to, at least without support. She describes her determination to enter the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program prior to her current position: "I was determined to find support because I didn't have that. When you're a health educator in a rural community, you're wearing so many hats...you're just out there and doing the work, and you don't ever really get an opportunity to nourish yourself." Luz not only had this deal with, but she also had to contend with working in an all-White organization. "I was the only person of color in my organization and, to top it off, I was a woman of color. They don't want to look at you," she says, "If you're educated and you have skills, they feel threatened. They don't want you to have more than they have. It was something I just learned to work with, because you have to survive; you have to keep that job." More than anything, Luz was simply hoping that WHL would provide her with a supportive network of women on whom she could depend. Little did she know that she was in for so much more.

"There's something that happened to me that year in WHL - it was about knowing my truth. It was about knowing what was right in my heart and just using that as my grounding and as my wellspring of strength and vision and keeping to it. [Also,] being able to stay focused so that I can continue to pursue the things that I hope can make a better life for my community, to continue to nurture that."

Luz describes herself at the time she wrote her application as being a lot more timid and not having the confidence to stand her ground against authority figures. This timidity, combined with her own good will, allowed her to be taken advantage of sometimes, and that was reflected in how desperately underpaid she was. One of the first changes to come about as a result of her participation in WHL was her confidence being boosted to a level where she could confront her supervisors on how much money she was making. To her surprise, she was asked to do a salary comparison and when the numbers came back, it was worse than she'd ever imagined. When compared to people doing comparable work in her region, Luz made \$10,000 less than average. Luz set her sights on negotiating a better paycheck, although this was unfamiliar territory for her. She says of the experience, "Now when I look back on it, it wasn't that I thought I was worthless...I wasn't just being passive...it's just this perspective that I'd begun to believe that when you're a kid coming from a low income background where your parents are low paid, they don't fight for higher wages because 'that's just how it is.' I must have had that written across my forehead; it just seems like wherever I went, I wasn't making an equitable wage...I was mad about it, I saw it, but I didn't do anything about it. This time I did." Unable to dispute the facts, Luz received a healthy raise. She celebrated heartily with her new WHL sisters.

In addition to being able to stand up for herself, Luz became able to challenge herself more and to have more faith in her own abilities. She acknowledges that while she often had great ideas in the past, she didn't necessarily follow through with them. Now she had developed a reputation for successfully completing what she starts. Her former CEO commented, "You know, Luz, I just know that you're this woman that's going to go out there and do what she says she's going to do!" That, she says, is a result of feeling more empowered. A perfect example of this is how she envisioned and laid the groundwork for the Lassen Wellness Center, and now that vision is a reality with her at the helm.

Luz and her agency have a lot to be proud of. Luz came into her position full of personal gifts that make her the perfect person to be doing her work. Of herself she says, "I can cross a lot of barriers. I'm a short, round woman of color...if people are really in need, I'm approachable...I really am a nurturer." She is also a former smoker; a woman living with lupus, a chronic illness; and a mother. When she goes out into the community, she is not discounted. Luz found that WHL helped her to see the value in what she naturally has to offer, and to help her sharpen the skills she wasn't using at full capacity. Some of those skills include effective grantwriting and lobbying. Without having a background in grantwriting, Luz's reaction at the end of that WHL workshop was, "Well, I can do that!" And she is now proving that by writing proposals that are getting funded "knowing that they probably wouldn't have been approved before." The WHL workshop in Sacramento on policy and advocacy also took the "dragons" out of the uncertainty Luz had for the legislative process. "I felt that I could just go sit down and write a letter to my

Congressman, or, no, not even bother writing a letter -- I'm going to call him on the phone!"

While Luz has grown tremendously on both a personal and professional level, it is evident that she has not been the only one to benefit from her participation in WHL. Luz has used anonymous surveys with her staff to gain an understanding from them about what they like and don't like about how she is leading the team. To her pleasant surprise, they are very supportive of her leadership style. That may be, in part, because she says that WHL has motivated her to nurture leadership in others. This certainly does not mean, however, that she is lowering expectations in order to reduce friction. On the contrary, Luz says that a change in her organization has been the raising of expectations, even when that means that an employee is discharged. She says that, overall, there is less tolerance for poor services. One way to ensure that the community is taking a more active role in directing the organization has been to work more closely with local teenagers. This was another technique that she learned at WHL and it led to starting a teen focus group, a teen board and teens peer teaching family planning at the clinic. Once she set her mind to this, she made sure it would happen. "You can imagine all you want about the way you think things should be, but unless you feel that you have the power to do it, it's not going to happen. I began to feel that I had the power to do it, and that if one person said, 'No,' you'd go to the next person."

Luz is a lifelong learner. She would like to go to graduate school someday. She originally thought that she would like to gain a Masters in Public Health degree, but now she is strongly considering a Masters in Social Work degree in order to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She would then like to gain a doctorate in Native American Religious Studies. "That might not be until I'm like 55 years old!" Luz laughs. While education is important, she is very mindful that education does not necessarily equal wisdom. She tells a story of one of the wisest women she knows, a mother of six who came by foot from southern Mexico to escape an abusive husband. At one point, this woman, who has a fourth grade education, gave Luz the exact same advice that Luz's therapist had just given her. It puts in perspective, she feels, that education is something, but it's not everything.

That is part of a message that Luz would like to share with other women who are considering applying to WHL. Women come to WHL at very different times in their lives, and with very different life experiences. The program is unique in that it accommodates these differences. Sometimes even an application can seem intimidating. Luz says, "Writing is something that came easy for me but I know it doesn't come easily for others. My advice is to not hesitate to go to whoever gave you that application, and ask for help. Or to call WHL and ask if there's anyone there that can help with the process." That applicant would not be the first to do so.

In fact, the participants in WHL find that getting the high level of support from the staff and other participants is the most unexpected aspect of the program. Luz felt tremendously honored, for example, to be featured in the WHL video, and to have the video capture the shack dwellings in Lassen, where many migrant families live on about \$600 a month for the entire family. "You could just exist out there and it wouldn't make a difference. [The women in WHL] understood that." Luz needed to know that other women could understand the very serious problems she was facing; they did and they nourished her. "I was on a very serious verge of burn-out. [WHL] was what I needed. I was getting discouraged because I could only do what I could do, and it wasn't enough for me." Nourished and nurtured, Luz says, "I refer to WHL as my 'miracle grow.'"

Luz's crowning moment in the program came during her last session with her small learning group. One of the peer leaders said to the group, "'And Luz, she is a deacon in my church...she is a healer'...she just went on and on... 'a minister of spirit.' She said these beautiful things, and that was really very touching. That was very unexpected. When you try to come from spirit, from who I am, I've been teased about it all my life...I felt crowned at that time, I felt like I'd been touched by the Lord, the mighty sword, or like White Buffalo Calf Woman had come and handed me the pipe."

*"I was meant to be a leader – that's just the way it is.
But I had to come through these steps to be where I'm at today."*

--Marcia Estrada

Marcia Estrada's medicine man told her, "If you believe in something, you go down fighting. No matter what it is, you go down fighting." According to Marcia, the battle is on. Marcia is the mother of *Services of Support for Women* on the Tule River Yokut Reservation in Tulare County. She created the program about seven years ago as a response to the lack of services for Yokut women. It is housed in the Tule River Alcoholism Program (TRAP). Her intention was to deliver an information and referral service, but almost immediately, it became evident that the program must also handle crisis intervention. As the only member of her staff, due to funding constraints, Marcia personally addresses issues as diverse as spousal abuse, transportation, court advocacy, employment, divorce, wills, and, clothing, food and diaper donations; she provides one-on-one counseling, home visits and lengthy phone conversations. Although she serves a dire need for nearly 500 women and their families on the reservation, at the time of this interview, she had just received notice that all funding to her program would be cut at the end of the month.

Always one for a good challenge, it took Marcia only moments to recover from the blow and start planning her strategy to regain funding. She is already beginning to galvanize the community with a petition drive, and she has called on her now-vast network of women in the field of health to mail or fax letters to the Tule River Tribal Council imploring them to reconsider the cut-back. No stranger to raising her voice against injustice, Marcia has always been outspoken and politically active. She was quite militant, in fact, during her presence in the 70's and 80's in the American Indian Movement.

Now a graduate of the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program, Marcia finds that her passion has remained the same, but her perspective has changed to encompass a larger view. A self-described "visionary," Marcia sometimes had difficulty translating what she envisioned in her mind to others that might help; her idea of transferring information was to grab a napkin and scribble down a few notes off the top of her head. Through WHL, she learned the importance of taking the time to write out what she wants to accomplish in a way that she can then refer back to her ideas and share them with others. This is important because another change in Marcia's leadership style has been to involve more people in her campaigns and to encourage and develop their own leadership skills. "I think that's the biggest difference between then and now – that I involve more people with what I'm doing." Recalling her style before WHL, she says, "It was more like helping others and now it's helping others help themselves."

Although work must begin at the individual level, Marcia realizes that the spirit of her entire *people* must be revived. Sometimes lessons in spirit are found among our youngest teachers – our children. Marcia gets a laugh out of children who have their own spirit, those who are very independent and keep their parents' heads spinning. In such a "little spirit person" she wonders how and why we drive that out of them. "Wait, wait, I think, don't kill [the spirit] because that's how our Native people were a long, long time ago and somewhere along the line, their spirit was killed. Their spirit became dim, and I see now that we have to shine our spirits, brighten our spirits to help our people." In order to accomplish this, everyone needs to know what they have to offer, and to be supported in upholding their true purpose. Recognizing how important this is was driven home by Marcia's participation in WHL, as the program exposed her to a dynamic group of women who are each doing their part to better the status of women's health in California. "I see things in a broader perspective [now,] I've met so many women in the state and [know] how powerful and how effective those voices are, and seeing how that voice of all these women can really make a difference in our lives today."

It is difficult to come together as Marcia describes if our various groups are kept isolated from one another. This has been a major turning point in Marcia's leadership perspective, in that her culture has long prescribed to a doctrine of solving tribal issues within the tribe. Describing Native peoples, she says,

"We've been just territorial, we take care of our own, we have our own area, and we don't intrude on other people unless we're asked." Now, with "the changes that have to be made," Marcia sees a real benefit to networking. She is looking at ways of getting "more of our women to recognize the need to step outside of the reservation and seek that help from others, to get educated, to get involved in the politics."

Part of the hesitancy on the part of Native women to get involved, observes Marcia, is that they are putting so many other people's needs ahead of their own. "We put ourselves last," she flatly states. But Marcia's goal is to see healthy communities by the year 2000. She has recently spent a great deal of effort in working towards that goal. For example, she caught wind of a very secretive deal that slated her tribe's river water to be channeled to Los Angeles, where it would then be bottled and shipped to Asia. All of the members of the Tule River Tribal Council were in agreement on this deal and had set everything in motion to see it come through. The only problem was that they failed to tell their constituents about the plan, or better yet, to ask them what they thought about it. Marcia was furious when she found out what was going on and launched an all-out four-day educational campaign to make sure the community was also aware of "the sale of our sacred water." In an uproar, the community signed petitions, attended the council meetings en masse and pressured six of the nine members to back down. Now, disgusted with this kind of closed-door decision-making, there is lots of talk recalling the entire council. Marcia has already been instrumental recently in removing three people from the Casino Board who, she and others felt, were making bad decisions for the community. She is also pursuing how the tribe can benefit from seeing interest on their per capita payments.

Of her political participation, Marcia says, "On our tribal level, I'm really outspoken. [I'm] being a leader in the politics part and pulling the people in a good way towards looking at these issues. So now I'm talking to people encouraging them to run for council and I'm going to run for council." Marcia has a very good chance of being elected as a new council member. In fact, she speaks to several of her political aspirations with tremendous confidence: "I'll be the Tribal Chair, I'll be the TRAP Director, I'll be the Chairman of the Board!" Given the commitment she has to her community, and the regard they have for her, there is little reason to doubt any of what she says. However, Marcia does not assume that she knows all that she should about politics. She would like to learn even more about the political arena and how to become more politically savvy.

Marcia attributes her broader outlook to participating in WHL because it helped her to see the "quiet strength" that makes women powerful. The program did not seek to replace Marcia's special qualities, but rather "enhanced" them so that Marcia could appreciate them for herself. She says, "I was meant to be a leader - that's just the way it is. But I had to come through these steps to be where I'm at today."

Marcia is sincere in her efforts, and it shows. She has a vision for improving her community through changes in *Services of Support for Women*. She wants to address the funding issue, where the program is housed, how to more effectively use agencies and individuals in a support or volunteer role, and concentrating on developing the women's assets and qualities for the overall betterment of the community. Marcia feels a desire and a responsibility to foster the natural leadership qualities found in the women she sees every day, saying that being a leader "is not just for me to keep; it's for me to share and do the same for these other ladies, to help them develop what they have. Not everybody is a leader to be speaking out in the public...but they're leaders in their own way."

Marcia traveled a path through WHL, which enriched her life and her work by helping her stay on a "high spiritual plateau." Other parts of Marcia's life path have been far more challenging, and yet they have given her the experience to truly know what many of her clients are going through. The loss of a daughter, the abuse of a husband, and the addiction to alcohol have impacted her on many levels. Her past problems with battery and alcoholism, compared with her present healthy lifestyle, give Marcia's community someone to respect for turning her life around. She says that being honest about these problems is risky, but it also takes away the ability for her community to gossip or blackmail her. She tells

herself, "You lived through all of this so that you can help others." After helping someone, she is quick to remind her that it is now *her* responsibility to turn around and help someone else.

Some aspects of Marcia's work weigh very heavy on her heart. The racism and discrimination - especially against women - for the Native peoples in her community is a constant source of pain. Marcia also feels frustrated at not really being able to help the homeless who are cold and hungry. Her medicine man taught her to *live* people's problems at the moment that she is confronted with them. And then to release them at the sweat lodge so that she doesn't continue to carry such burdens. Marcia is able to do the work at hand because of her spiritual wellspring. She says, "I wake up with the spiritual and I live it the best I can during the day, and I go to sleep with the spiritual. It's not something that I just bring out on Sunday and that's it." This spiritual love is nourished by Marcia's connection to nature. As a young girl, she would go out into the mountains and sing at the top of her lungs; that is where she felt very safe. Marcia continues to go into the mountains to provide retreats for the women in her community, along with the many other rituals that she also maintains for herself and others to take care of themselves: gatherings, giving thanks to spirit helpers, purifications, prayers, smudgings, songs, sacred herbs, and releasing with laughter and tears.

This spiritual level is a gift that Marcia says she brings to her work. WHL helped to cultivate that gift by giving her more insight into herself as a leader for women and recognizing the strength of women together. Using the analogy of twigs, Marcia says that one twig alone can be broken, but five or ten or fifteen twigs together cannot be broken. The fifty women "born as leaders" through WHL's Inaugural Class will continue to carry their power out into their communities, and each subsequent class will build the strength of the entire network by doing the same. Marcia knows that, once a part of that network, support can always be accessed statewide. "WHL gave me permission to seek help. We really can't do it all alone," Marcia says. Placing her sites on a much larger scale, Marcia enthusiastically states that she would love to see WHL operate on an international level.

*"[WHL]'s sort of like a spiritual home.
You know how there are places that you go to that it feels like
you've been there before?"*

—Mary Graebner

Mary Graebner has long considered herself a leader, albeit not in the traditional sense that has been propagated of a charismatic figure standing before a group of followers. "My concept of leadership is that you don't always have to march out in front; you can motivate other people, or you can provide your vision to other people, and if you do it well enough, they will catch the vision and you all move forward together. I don't think, you know, a leader always has to be out in front." Reflecting, Mary adds, "And this is probably, to a certain extent, how I view myself as a leader."

The nature of Mary's job requires that she have strong leadership skills. As the Maternal Child Adolescent Health Coordinator for rural Nevada County, she is responsible for advocating for the needs of women, children and teens. Not only must she personally attend to the physical and emotional needs of many individuals; she must also engage in the larger public health issues. Fortunately for Mary and those she serves, she absolutely loves her job. The ironic thing is that she had little to do with choosing how she wound up in this position.

Mary studied to become a nurse in her home country of England, not, she says in her lovely, thick English accent, because she wanted to nurse, but because she wanted to travel. That is how she wound up in Australia, where she married her husband, and in Southern California, where she began raising a family. In seeking out alternatives for her own childbirth experiences, she became involved with Lamaze. She eventually taught classes in Lamaze, wanting to promote positive experiences for other women. When she and her family later moved north to Nevada County, she had her hands full with two teens, an unexpected toddler, and an elderly aunt who required Mary's care. Mary's Lamaze experience led to some part-time work doing pregnancy tests and follow-up. Little did she know that her reputation in this area would lead to an invitation to apply as the next Maternal Child Adolescent Health Coordinator. Not truly believing her application would be taken seriously, she threw her hat in the ring anyway. She would start her new job from scratch, in 1983, and shape the program to adhere to her own vision. Well, within the State guidelines, of course.

"My work is my job and my job is my work. I do a lot of this outside of the 8 to 5 confines of this building," she explains, very matter-of-factly, in the conference room of the Nevada County Health Department. "It's more of an avocation than anything else. If I wasn't getting paid for what I'm doing, I'd probably be doing most of it anyway...I tend to do what I see needs doing and then make that fit in the confines of what I'm supposed to do...I'm supposed to be advocating for women and children, healthwise."

When Mary entered the year-long program for Women's Health Leadership (WHL), she already brought with her many personal experiences, insights and talents that made her the perfect person to be doing her job. "I think I have a fair amount of compassion for people who have a need of some kind. I had a very loving, basically protected childhood...I always knew that I was the most important thing in the world [to my family], and I find it really painful that some kids don't have that...I don't mind putting in a lot of hours and a lot of effort." Mary had been "trying to make the world a little better" for many years, building on her convictions and strengths. But she needed some support to continue doing her work, and to help her do it even better. To this end, she was delighted to find a place where her ideas and passion were respected. Referring to her statements above, Mary goes on to say, "WHL validated these sort of concepts. It's sort of like a spiritual home. You know how there are places that you go to that it feels like you've been there before? It's like that with music – it's a spiritual experience. With WHL, it's like the women's groups of the Sixties on a slightly broader based, professional level."

WHL also brought Mary an unanticipated opportunity that she hasn't had for most of her life: to develop friendships with women from non-European backgrounds. Having had limited exposure to people of different ethnic groups, other than the Indian and Jamaican women she met in nursing school, kept Mary somewhat culturally deprived. "I've lived most of my life in England or Australia or here. When I lived in Australia, they had a 'Whites only' policy (they've changed that now)... In this country, I've always lived in sort of a WASP community. And one of the things I enjoyed tremendously about WHL was the variety of people...It was tremendous. It was just so different...I just loved it." It's highly probable that Mary, who is thoughtful and interesting, provided the same kind of "variety" for the other participants in WHL.

Although Mary is quick to defend the program and encourage others to apply, she also acknowledges that she didn't get everything that she wanted out of WHL, including the kind of direction she had hoped for. Thinking back to the experience, Mary recalls, "We were given lots of opportunities to learn, and that was extremely valuable, but I think in general, I tend to be somewhat of a self-directed learner and what I was looking for was maybe for someone to tell me more what I should be doing."

The fostering of cohesiveness among the participants was also very important to Mary, and she regrets not having more time built-in to the program to further develop the new relationships. She believes this aspect is of particular consequence to women like herself from rural communities. "I would have liked to have had more contacts with the group. I really look forward to getting together with the group, and there wasn't quite enough getting together. We're pretty isolated up here, you know, if I lived in Sacramento or the Bay Area, it would have been easier to get together with people in WHL. You have to find your group that you're comfortable with and that thinks along similar lines to yourself. I think the isolation is a big problem for a lot of us who live in rural counties. I've encouraged a lot of people up here to apply...I think they'll probably get the same sense of support that I got out of [WHL]. The concept of building this group of women who are motivated to move forward - the health aspect of women in general - is such a terrific concept. The more of us that are doing that, the better.

Mary's position was designed to improve the health status of women, children and adolescents. According to Mary, participating in WHL did not change or improve the way in which her office conducts its business. Mary has wanted to change the policy and advocacy activities for some time, and has just been awaiting her opportunity to do so.

How, then, could a woman like Mary in a position such as hers benefit from participation in WHL? She feels that WHL will broaden your perspective regardless of where you or your organization is upon entering the program: "Probably more than anything else, [WHL] has deepened my commitment. Because of my job, I've always been very supportive of women. I mean that's my job, you know. I think I probably tend to look at an even bigger picture now rather than just the little narrow focus of where I am and the people that I'm working with." She elaborates, "WHL made me aware of a lot more, of a lot broader issues than I was looking at because when you live in a little rural county, the issues quite often are different than those you would encounter in a larger, urban county, although things are changing here. A lot of the issues that women are having [there] are becoming issues here."

Because Mary is very serious about addressing the large issues, she is setting her sights on some new collaborations with other health care professionals. For example, she wants to work more closely with a particular health alliance to look at the changing health policies statewide, and how she and the Health Department can make them work best for her county. She just signed up to be on several of the alliance's committees, so that her presence can have as much of an impact as possible. Such collective work is part of Mary's overall vision for improving services available and how they are offered. Describing this vision, she says, "I would like people to be much more aware of the needs of women and children, ...and what I'd like to do is have more of a voice in that group of people. I think that what has to happen is that this county has to face what's going on here and has to make some changes. The only way to do that is to keep pushing over and over and over again with different groups. This is what we need to be addressing. You can't leave these groups of people out. You can't ignore these kinds of problems. What I find frustrating is that it takes so very long."

Fortunately, Mary says, WHL is empowering women, and she expects many things to change as a result. Even Mary, who came into the program with a good deal of confidence, believes that she is even more confident today as a result of her participation in WHL. Of her participation, she says, "It was worth it for me."

In some ways, WHL has remained a part of her life, such as being able to access the written information disseminated as part of the program. She laughs that while she couldn't possibly read so much information while actually participating in WHL, she makes use of it now. "I have my stuff in file folders. I know where it is. I know how to access it when I need it. I have used it, and I also now know where to go for things that I didn't before." Still, Mary wishes that there could be more of a carry-over of the program in her life. A little dreamily, she says, "I would like to see an alumni group that gets together at least a couple of times a year - maybe one time just for your [class] and one time for the whole group. It's important to keep the impetus going, or else it's too easy to forget, to lose that sense of sisterhood and belonging."

It's also important, she says, that WHL is given a chance to remain in existence for longer than just a few years. She is mindful that things don't change in one or two years, and cites the slow-coming policy changes in tobacco as an example. The goals of WHL are beginning to be realized, but are still in their infancy. Mary says that within the next eighteen months, a tangible example of WHL's influence in her life will be evident, as her class project to create transitional housing for women is slated to become a reality.

"Before we didn't know we could do it ourselves...now we trust ourselves."

--Najia Hamid

Najia Hamid says that she chose the women that she works with, but their problem chose her. Born and raised in Afghanistan, Najia transcends the boundaries between two cultures, two societies, and two languages. As such, she was asked by an anthropologist to help with the translation for a book project on the elderly Afghan community in the US. According to Najia, the rate of depression is very high among this population, especially for the women, because many are isolated, illiterate, widowed, afraid of society, and have no transportation. It is common for them to feel cut off from their families because of the language gap – while they speak Afghan, their grandchildren generally do not. When the anthropologist saw how the women in the study responded to Najia, she encouraged Najia to work with them in a greater capacity.

Najia was drawn to the women and wanted to help them, but she knew she had some limitations. How could she lead a group when the thought of standing and speaking before people made her scared to death? How would she get to know them? How would she put together a program that would address their needs? Where would she get the courage to develop such an ambitious idea?

To know Najia now, it seems impossible that this dynamic, outspoken community leader would ever have such doubts. And it seems equally hard to believe that the Elderly Afghan Women's Program – with its 145 members -- has only been a reality for about two years. But according to Najia, she credits her full leadership development and the ideas it fostered to the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program. Najia says that WHL increased her self-confidence by encouraging her to build on the qualifications she has, and to recognize the gifts she naturally brings to this work. Najia did just that – building on her ability to make people feel comfortable by treating them respectfully and with a proper attitude – to gain the trust of the elderly women. She was able to overcome her nervousness by realizing that she's on the right path. "Now everyone says to me, 'You're not the person that you were.'" Those who have known her for years have a hard time believing that a *new* Najia has emerged. The biggest difference, however, is not *who* she is, but *how* she sees herself and her role in her community. "I never thought of myself as a leader before. Then, when I received about 50 calls to my house from people who need me, I started to see myself as a leader."

Why were so many people calling Najia? As her class project for WHL, Najia began to develop the Elderly Afghan Women's Program. "I came back from each [WHL] session full of ideas. Immediately I started writing things up, quickly, so as not to forget. I would make an outline first, then go one by one what to do. Sometimes I was waking at night to write down ideas. I was ready to do some new things." The amount of *new things* is truly staggering. Najia's goal was to help senior Afghan women move away from isolation and depression, and because so many factors contribute to this, she tackled the problem from every conceivable angle. Her program mainly consists of bringing the women together, of getting them out of their lonely apartments or houses for a few hours to socialize with others who speak their language, enjoy the same things, and understand the challenges they're facing. Sometimes these get-togethers are purely recreational such as : an outing at Golden Gate Park, a day trip to the zoo, and a trip to Lake Tahoe. Other times they are religiously centered, and involve reading the Quran and praying together. And many times, they are educational: English as a Second Language and US citizenship classes, a health fair, CPR and First Aid trainings, and legal assistance. Then there are times when the community is brought together simply to celebrate, such as the Mother's Day Celebration, which drew a crowd of 420 people and was an all-day affair. Many of the elderly women spend their time waiting with abated breath for the next event.

Najia learned in WHL that her program could be multi-faceted, in order to capture the attention and interest of all of the people she seeks to serve. By diversifying the program's activities, she can reach out to a broader range of people, including the families of the elderly women. This strengthens her goal of bringing the women out of isolation by connecting them in tangible ways with those who matter the most to them.

Involvement in WHL and with her community has brought Najia many personal rewards. She is overjoyed by the outpouring of love and respect from her community and the friendships that developed with her new WHL colleagues. "I really appreciate the WHL staff. My hope escalated from session to session. I had a good magic with them." Najia feels that the staff could see her problem areas and sent her to exactly the workshops she needed. One session, at Sacramento's capitol, focused on policy making and political careers. Being there "was like a dream" - taking pictures, participating in the conference, and meeting with the officials.

As with any position where there are great rewards, there are also considerable risks. Najia lowers and shakes her head when she speaks about the greatest disappointment she has had in working with her community: jealousy from some of its members. Najia has received much acclaim and media attention since she launched her program. This has given some people reason to be envious and unkind. While it obviously weighs heavy on Najia's heart, she is quick to find optimism in any situation, laughing, "If ten people are jealous, oh well, there are hundreds who love me. The grandmothers here tease people that if they are not treated well, they will tell Najia - so they better watch out!"

What is notable about the attention that Najia receives is that she uses it as part of a larger policy and advocacy strategy. A major part of this strategy is a media strategy to engage those she is serving in the limelight. She pushes the media to interview the women in the program because it gives them pride to be seen on television or quoted in the newspaper, and according to Najia, this improves their emotional and mental strength. "They are no longer invisible."

The Elderly Women's Program has greatly increased its visibility. Najia says that the organization has benefited greatly from WHL, with increased media attention, a more knowledgeable and effective staff, three new programs (including one for youth and one for widows), new funding, increased support from the community, and greater recognition outside of the immediate community. The Afghan community is very happy to see women leaders in charge and empowered. They are surprised. It inspires them. We want to continue to send women to WHL."

It is impossible to know where Najia's work stops and any other aspect of her life starts, as they are completely interwoven. At the request of other concerned women, she has begun to spread her program to several cities in Southern California, and has been contacted from as far away as Virginia to train others there, as well. She says that WHL helped her reach her goals in two months, and she wants to help others do the same. So she looks for opportunities to teach other emerging leaders how to find foundations, apply for grants, and attend trainings. "Then I leave them to work. As much as I can help them, it is my pleasure to do so."

Najia recognizes that one of the most important things a leader needs to learn is where to find funding because without money, it's difficult, if not impossible, to run a program. Therefore, the most important WHL training she attended focused on grantwriting, and included how to find appropriate foundations. After attending the training, she began to pursue grants and quickly received \$7,200 from three separate foundations. After visiting her program, one of them has since encouraged her to apply for a \$30,000 grant. Najia does intend to pursue that grant, but has also established excellent connections with agencies and individuals in her community who have done everything they can to help her program succeed. She says that this understanding of the importance of networking also arose from her participation in WHL.

As Najia has become more confident in her work, she has come to realize that asking other agencies for help is fine, but it's not always necessary. "Initially we ran to the City of Fremont for help with problem solving. Before we didn't know we could do it ourselves...now we trust ourselves." It has been a relief to realize that help is out there, but that many answers lie right inside the Afghan community. That is, after all, one of the reasons that Najia insists WHL cannot close its doors: "WHL must exist because it's a resource to help people in their communities solve their local problems."

As a testament to this community problem-solving, one of Najia's biggest dreams is already slated to become a reality in the coming months. She recognized early on the need to create safe, affordable housing for her seniors, where they can live close to one another and therefore break through their isolation. She drew up a plan, presented it to housing officials at the City of Fremont, and is proud to say that a site has already been approved for a 71-family and 41-one bedroom unit complex with a community room and cafeteria. Najia is setting her sight on funding an office space at the complex, so that she can be as near as possible to the women who depend on her.

*"It took me too long to see that I have rights, that this is my country, too,
and that if others want to see me as a foreigner, it's their problem, not mine."*

—Virginia Mejia

Virginia Mejia wasted no time in bringing the mission of the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program back into her own community. Recognizing the power of cultivating emerging grassroots leaders in an organized setting, Virginia adapted the WHL model to fit the needs of a group of women in her home community of Escondido. Thirteen women, who were clients at the counseling and crisis agency where she worked with victims of domestic violence, signed up for her leadership training.

Virginia came to WHL with an idea of what she would like take on as her class project, but after a few days in the program, she realized that she needed to change her plans. Seeing the potential impact of WHL, she imagined giving the same gift in a smaller package to her own community and the women there who were currently not in a position to attend the full program. Her recruits worked long hours caring for their families, cleaning houses, working in factories, and other very taxing employment. Most of them would need their materials in Spanish. And all of them would be making a sacrifice to come out on three consecutive Saturday evenings for three hours at a time to complete the training. With these challenges at hand, Virginia began translating materials into Spanish and building her curriculum. To her surprise, the women attended her project religiously, coming to each session motivated and on time. "They loved every session. It was incredible!" Even more surprising, they wanted the project to continue after completing the three weeks, so Virginia extended it for an entire year. During that time, the participants learned from Virginia about topics such as breast cancer, blood pressure, diabetes and domestic violence. It was then their turn to do research and make presentations to two to three additional women outside of the project. At year's end, eleven participants attended long enough to graduate from Virginia's WHL class project.

What makes Virginia's idea even more inspiring is the outcome it produced. At Virginia's urging to the Escondido Community Clinic, they agreed to train all of the graduates, and now all are working as health educators, or *promotoras de salud*. In a special ceremony, they were formally recognized by the mayor. As one woman expressed her gratitude, "I have been a victim of domestic violence...I thought all my job was to be at home with my husband and my kids, but I knew that there was something else that I could do." She thanked Virginia and the clinic for giving her the opportunity to serve her community.

Virginia's *mentees* wanted her to know how much her work had impacted them; without Virginia's knowledge, they nominated her for the North County Latina Association's "Latina of the Year" award. To support their nomination, they asked members of the community to write letters of recommendation and dozens poured into the Association's office – 27 in all. Needless to say, Virginia became the next award recipient. Being able to see how supported she is by her community is a reward for the work she does. Virginia says, "It's a nice feeling."

As a result of Virginia's participation in WHL, it is obvious that her community was positively affected. And for that, Virginia is very glad. But she has also been able to receive her own personal rewards for participating in the program, and they should not be overlooked. Virginia applied to WHL because she was ready to accept some changes in her life. Generally unhappy with her previous agency employment because she felt tokenized and under-appreciated, she was at a point where she could think about perhaps moving on. In order to do that, however, she needed to have her confidence boosted that she was, in fact, a valuable asset to her community. She explains, "I do value what I'm doing, but I thought that getting together with other women working in their own communities [would] give me kind of a green light that I was doing okay. I guess I needed that." She was excited to meet women from her local region of San Diego as well as from many other parts of the state. Further, WHL appealed to Virginia because of its interactive nature. Like many people, Virginia tends to learn better in a hands-on setting than in a classroom setting.

With these things in mind, Virginia discusses the changes she has experienced. For starters, Virginia was offered a position as Associate Director of the Parenting Institute. This move has provided her with more genuine support from her supervisors and staff and a pay increase which nearly doubled her salary. Virginia believes that WHL helped her make the decision to move on because "I think before I was afraid of these changes, more work and more responsibility. I think WHL gave me the strength to step out of that agency." Of her new agency Virginia says, "I've been a year here, [and] I know that they'll give me opportunities if I want to do other things," such as moving on to administer the programs in another city. Virginia is quite happy where she is and has no intentions of changing jobs or careers at this point. Because of her involvement in WHL, she feels that she is better able to serve her present employer. Not only does she have a larger pool of resources to draw on, but she is also able to make better use of her time.

As for Virginia's confidence, it has also leapt forward. She says that WHL gave her more assurance of what she could do. She says that the program treated all of the participants as if they were very special, regardless of their level of "grandeur." She continues, "I guess it has to do with self esteem. It's very hard to value yourself, especially in the Latino community, [where] it's so hard to talk about yourself. That one thing I learning [at WHL]: it's okay to say, 'Wow! I did this great!' Before, I could say in my mind that I feel good about what I did, but not aloud. Now, I think, okay, it's not selfish or egocentric, that it's okay to say good things about yourself. I didn't know that." She thought that her work wasn't on a large enough scale to have that kind of confidence.

Feeling proud of her work is more important than anything to Virginia. Although her employment pays her bills, Virginia says, "I don't see my job as 'my job,' but as my ministry." Recognizing that she lives in a very materialistic society means that Virginia needs support from others who feel the same way. She was able to find a network of other committed, impassioned women in WHL. She encourages other women "whose hearts are in the community" and also need this kind of assurance to apply to the program, saying, "You'll feel like you're not alone. I see this like a movement. Be a part of it because we all together could make a difference throughout the state."

No one would refute that Virginia is doing her part to make a difference in her part of the state. She is effectively teaching parents how to advocate on their children's behalf and how to make good decisions in their homes. Virginia comes from a place of passion about her work, which is evident to the parents who she sees, and this helps them to feel like they can trust her. She also brings a charisma which engages them so that they really tune in to what she is saying. For many parents, this is the only information they have received about how to do what is best for their children's education. Virginia tries to drive home the point that they must get involved at their children's school site, saying, "You can come to the school, but the school is not going to go to your homes," and also emphasizes changing our own behavior because that can be more effective than trying to change the whole, huge school system.

Getting people the information they need to make good decisions is a value to Virginia, whether she is doing it formally on the job or informally with younger people who seek her out for advice and direction. She knows that there are particular challenges in her Latino community, and while they weigh heavy on her heart, she understands that she is in a good position to give something back to others. "Because I had experienced many harsh times in the US, I understand my people and can walk with them better than I can help the English-speaking community. I feel it is easier for an English-speaking person here. [As a Spanish-speaker], you are treated many, many times as a foreigner, no matter how much people know I am here to stay...this is our life, our city, our country. It's hard. Because I've gone through a lot of harsh times, I like to work with my people because I understand."

Some of the issues that the Latino community faces block their access to opportunities that are available to the public at large. Virginia's greatest disappointment is that her community "doesn't have the opportunity to function as they deserve because of documents or because they don't speak the language." She adds, "I know there are a lot of people that can do wonderful things, but they have a lot of anguish like, 'Can my child go to college if I don't have documentation?'" These issues are largely political, and while Virginia says that many Latinos like herself come from countries with a history of political leaders

who are corrupted and therefore corrupt the entire system, WHL has taught her how important it is to get involved politically anyway.

Recognizing that there will probably always be Americans who want to deny Virginia her rightful place in our society, Virginia reflects, "It took me too long to see that I have rights, that this is my country, too, and that if others want to see me as a foreigner, it's their problem, not mine." The wonderful thing about WHL, she says, is that we have various ethnic groups fighting these battles in their own corners, and WHL is a place where they can all come together. She knows that a place like this, a place which "brings the pieces together" must continue to exist because it enriches and empowers the women more than they can ever achieve in their separate groups.

*"I know that even if everything as I know it today is over,
there'll be something else important to do coming right down the pike."*

--Gail Nickerson

"There was a time when my whole entire life was taken up by taking care of my four kids," remembers Gail Nickerson. She would get up at 5:45am to get them off to their separate schools, and later in the day, to their separate little leagues, working in between and after they went to bed, retiring for the night at about 1am. Now that the kids are grown, Gail has some new priorities. As the Executive Director of the North Country Clinic in Humboldt, Gail is responsible for supporting a staff of about 50-60 employees, the vast majority of whom are women. Years of life experience has taught Gail to take it all in stride. "In my own life right now," she says, "I'm working on personal serenity."

While Gail would like to think that all of the world's problems could be solved in her or her children's lifetime, she knows that that is not the reality. Therefore, it's important to do what can be done and not feel overwhelmed by what cannot. "You have to feel okay, you have to be able to enjoy when it's a gorgeous sunshiny day, that we're here in this wonderful place, and to have a wonderful life, in spite of the fact that there's lots of things to work on. You have to be able to come back to that place of appreciating where you are and *noticing* where we are and not being so wrapped up in whatever the drama, the problems." As a reminder to herself, she adds, "I've got to go out and find the opportunities to do that."

Gail is very familiar with seizing opportunities when they present themselves. With a liberal arts college education and no health care background, Gail made seemingly disconnected steps with various jobs, and in and out of welfare at some points, until she eventually made her way to a consulting position conducting feasibility studies for rural clinics in several states. That led directly to her current position administering the clinic in rural Humboldt. Gail reflects, "I always thought for a really long time that I wasn't having a career, but that I was just doing whatever I had to do to take care of my kids. But somewhere along the line, it turned out that it *was* a career, so maybe in a way, [my work] chose me." Then she laughs, "But if I didn't want it, it couldn't have chosen me, so I must have wanted it!"

With the same adventurous spirit, Gail applied to the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program, just because "it sounded like fun." Gail entered the program with few expectations, as she considers herself more of a "process person" rather than a "results person." That left Gail wide open to whatever might happen. Describing who she was before WHL, Gail says that she had "less of a mental picture" of herself, of her strengths, of who she really was. She was newly employed as the director of the clinic and new to the Eureka/Arcata health care world. "I don't think I was as effective or as clear at that point, in terms of what I can do and what I can't do." She knew that she *could* be a leader, but didn't necessarily *feel* like one because, as she says, "some of my earlier grown-up experiences didn't really promote that aspect of me."

Now, in part as a result of WHL and in part as a result of Gail's natural growth process, she is believing more in her vision - that she has a reasonable point and view and will be heard if she expresses it. She is also filling her leadership shoes, "being a bridge in a diverse group, setting a good example and being willing to say what you see in a kind way." Recognizing that this is not the "classic" definition of leadership in the "guy" ways, Gail says that she is simply interested in "bringing people together to work on the betterment of our society as a whole." After all, she points, isn't that what most people want: a society where their kids can grow up safe and healthy?

WHL improved the skills that Gail already had and introduced her to a network that she could draw on for friendship and resources. Living on the rural Northern California coast, with nearly a daylong, mountainous drive to the nearest large city has its advantages, but it can also be quite isolating. Therefore, one of the main attractions to WHL for Gail was having the opportunity several times during the program

year to get out of town and connect with other women. Part of the enrichment for Gail was that the women in the program were very culturally diverse, in contrast to where she lives. "WHL was to a large degree about making roots in a large multicultural group of women. It's more homogenous here and consequently not as broad based."

Gail goes on to say that although she is not in continuous contact with the group anymore, she still feels connected to the women. She feels as though her circle has expanded. This is important to Gail because, as a child, she didn't have many close girlfriends, and as she got older, she did not have a close relationship with her sister, either. This prompted her to *choose* who her sisters would be, and she continues to do so. It was easy for Gail to feel this sense of sisterhood with the women at WHL. She recounts inviting some of them to her mother's home in Sacramento, where they had dinner and soaked in the hot tub together. It was a wonderful, relaxing evening. Reflecting on that experience, she says, "I don't even here [in Humboldt] have a group of four women that I would get together and hang out with. Somehow when you're the director, it sort of sets you apart from a lot of people. They don't think of you when they think about who they would socialize with."

For Gail, WHL is less about promoting women leaders in the field of health as it is about developing women as leaders; anything they do from there will naturally promote healthy communities because they will be solving any number of problems locally. Therefore, bringing together women who are independently working to improve their communities' well-being can only benefit the status of women's health care overall. Gail illustrates this point when she says, "Things for so many centuries were framed by men - the issues, the discussions. I feel strongly that there should be some examples of places where it's more likely framed by women." She believes that, as a result of women getting this opportunity, the status of women's health is already improving. Citing domestic violence as an example, Gail says that people are much more likely to intervene when they see signs of abuse than they were even 15 or 20 years ago. While she doesn't agree with everything that is being done in the name of curbing domestic violence, she is hopeful that people are at least talking about the issue now.

As a result of her participation in WHL, Gail's "seizing whatever opportunities to provide leadership have become more focused." She says that she is using the WHL energy to start things in her community, such as addressing more needs of children and teenagers through the County Mental Health Board and Arcata Community Forum. She is also continuing to broadcast her radio segment, which started three years ago as Gail's original WHL project. She recently wrote a grant proposal to expand that project into a collaboration that would address children's health; if the proposal is approved, the new program will air during public affairs time.

Gail entered WHL with a broad base of skills, such as knowing how to write grant proposals. She says that in some sessions, she didn't learn any new skills, but she's not sure how the program could be done differently, given the diversity of the peer leaders. "You have to start somewhere," she says. "I was never disappointed by any aspect of WHL." If anything, she adds, she was truly inspired by the presenters and the other participants in the program. She was also surprised that WHL would provide a real validation to her about vision, "that you can envision something and make it happen." Gail was not expecting WHL to operate in part on a spiritual level. This broadened her perspective and built on some beliefs she already had. She was able to see the power of her visioning by the final session, when the next class of WHL participants were given candles by Gail's graduating class. At the first WHL session, Gail had envisioned another woman in her community participating in WHL; while she didn't know much about the woman, she had struck Gail as being an emerging leader. Gail describes passing a candle to that woman at the final session as being "very validating." To other women considering the program, she says, "Take a chance!"

Women like Gail find that their lives and their work are impacted in some very surprising ways after their exposure to WHL. Because the services and policy and advocacy activities at her clinic were already at a very high level, Gail did not return from the program seeking to improve them. Rather, she noticed how subtle changes in herself have impacted her organization and community. For example, Gail's

"interest sensor" has sharpened, in terms of what she now chooses to read, which groups she has opted to join, and under what circumstances she feels compelled to speak out. Her clinic gets associated with what she, as an individual, does. Because she is focusing more attention on mental health issues, so is her organization and, to some extent, the local health care community. Gail has also begun to cultivate her staff in leadership roles. She recently surprised herself by sharing a poem with her management team, something she doesn't believe she would have done before WHL. The closing stanza of *"Decide to Network,"* by Robert Muller, reads:

In a world of big powers, media and monopolies,
But of five billion individuals,
Networking is the new freedom,
The new democracy,
A new form of happiness

The world is changing, and for many small organizations, they are finding that there are new rules to play by. Gail says, "It's important for us to be flexible, to be engaged. Health care is in major transition. We need to figure out what we do that's unique and special, and sharpen that." Referring to the many changes in how health care for the poor is being reimbursed, she continues, "There's no guarantee really that this organization as it exists will continue to exist. If someone else can figure out how to provide care that [the clients] would prefer or if someone else can figure out how to provide care that's so much cheaper than we can and that's acceptable, then there is no reason for us to exist...And if we're supposed to survive, then we will. And if not, then we'll figure out how to dismantle gracefully. I'm not attached to our continuation as an entity unless we're doing something vital." She pauses and laughs, "Although, you know, I still want everyone to have a job." Recognizing the dilemma of struggling to keep an organization for the sake of keeping people employed, she concludes, "But you can't get so attached to a particular job that you stop doing the best job that you can and are just trying to hold on to having a job...It's for other people. Only if we're doing the best should we be here."

Taking a moment to reflect on how her life has unfolded up to this point, Gail remarks, "I know that even if everything as I know it today is over, there'll be something else important to do coming right down the pike."

*"I've always had this passion and commitment.
I can honestly say that women's health is my career,
my profession for the rest of my life."*

--Lori Quince

Like many women who find their path leading them to the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program, Lori Quince was at a crossroads in her life. Rare for such a young woman, Lori had been working at the same non-profit agency in Los Angeles for over eight years. Her life had become comfortable, but she felt that maybe it was a little too comfortable. While the position brought her the stability she needed to raise her daughter, it also brought her the inevitable conclusion that she had gone as far as she could go with her job as Coordinator for HIV Outreach Services. Lori was no longer being challenged professionally. She was also longing for new relationships with women, where she could create and nurture stronger bonds. Lori knew that the eagle's spirit was alive in her heart, but felt that she wasn't living up to her "eagle potential." She entered WHL hoping to clarify and resolve where she was headed personally and professionally.

Of that time in her life, Lori says, "That year in WHL, I felt -- and this is not a bad thing -- really alone in a lot of ways coming into the program. I certainly developed all these wonderful relationships, but I needed to be alone, too. Meditating and thinking things through was what I needed to do. I even separated myself from a lot of outside activities to take that year and really get focused on 'self,' without people tugging on me and asking me, 'What are you going to do with yourself?' There was nobody to listen to but myself."

Lori had already developed a number of leadership skills, in part she says, by being a mother and wife, but acknowledges that she "needed more cultivating." She has a Masters degree in Public Health and plenty of energy to successfully take on various projects; her employers and other community members have long seen her as a valuable asset. Lori's greatest need, therefore, was to take a look at her options and find support in pursuing them. To her surprise, that is exactly what she encountered at WHL: "The program really shaped my ideas about where I wanted to go professionally. I had excellent networking opportunities that really put me where I am today. And I had a faculty advisor that really supported me a lot and, as a result, gave me another avenue professionally. I actually left my job and took on a new position. I recognized that after the same position for nine years, it gave me an opportunity to take a leap."

Lori's new position was a tremendous leap, in several ways. As the Director of the Women's Tobacco Coalition of Los Angeles County, Lori has gone from direct service work to a position which exclusively focuses on policy and advocacy. She is thrilled that it's now her job to implement what she has learned about policy and advocacy in graduate school and at WHL. She reminisces, "I was really impressed after our (WHL) Sacramento trip -- learning about the Assembly, the whole process, digging into the bills and what they represented, and how you need to lobby to represent women if you really want change." Enthusiastically, she goes on to say, "This is exactly what I do now. In graduate school, we talked about it, but grant writing was more my focus. I'm not as interested in that now as I am in the advocacy and policy and legislation. I feel that I can really make a difference at that level. Being in Sacramento, going to DC, speaking about women's health is really where I want to be, making changes at that legislative level."

There have been other advantages to this new position, as well. Lori is proud to say that in the process of acquiring the position, she was able to really advocate on her own behalf, to decide how much she was worth to the agency and stand behind that figure. She believes that she is truly being compensated appropriately, which is often not the case in the non-profit world. For Lori, it is one of the most unexpected outcomes of her participation in WHL: "I negotiated great pay and got what I needed...knowing I am not settling."

Being paid well is about more than just the money and benefits. It is also about Lori feeling confident enough now to recognize what she deserves in exchange for what she provides, almost as a symbolic leap which carries over to how she sees the broader scope of her life. It has made her realize that she can do the work she loves while also providing for herself and her family. She is more determined than ever to think in terms of abundance. In response to what she needs now to continue her leadership journey, Lori says, "I'm looking at where I want to go as a woman, how to set my own design up. I want to make sure women are independent - financial and all - and do the best job I can and be a good mother, learning about how to set myself up for retirement...long-term planning about where we need to go in our life. We're all young now, but we need to look beyond our 30's...WHL could [teach us how to] settle into a retirement plan, set up a plan for our future saving and security. We need to make sure we position ourselves by planning for the future. Also, how we find jobs that fit our lifestyle and personality, balancing kids and work."

Lori's agency and community are the fortunate recipients of all of Lori's enthusiasm, commitment and expertise. Because she participated in WHL just prior to entering her new position, her personal strengths were enhanced by the inspiration, networking and knowledge she had just been entrenched in. Lori says that her agency meets all of her needs, and she is meeting theirs. "I can say from a leadership point of view, that I am very well respected in the agency. They know that they don't have to train me much because I came in with such a zeal for policy work. I think I added to the quality of their leadership in a serious way. I am much more independent in this job than my previous job...I meet with my Executive Director once every couple of weeks; the level of leadership responsibility shows for itself. There needs to be less checking in because they see what I do." That is a good feeling Lori, and she wants to continue to offer the agency what it needs. For example, although Lori knows that grantwriting is not her favorite activity ("I don't want to live in that space - always rushed and hurried"), she believes that her agency could truly benefit from some large grants, so she is planning on finding a way to provide that service.

Moving into the legislative arena has provided Lori with some insights into the world of politics which she could do without, but she is willing to "play the game" if it means that ultimately, women's health needs will be served. Nonetheless, it is disappointing to her to see how dishonest the political world really is. She is learning that leadership sometimes means being more savvy in her approach to people, because she needs to know who is funding various campaigns, for example, or what people really want to hear in a media bite in order to get them to respond to an issue. This is the greatest disappointment in her work, and she struggles to come to peace with these issues. Obviously uncomfortable about the position she gets put in, Lori is nonetheless resolute in her purpose: "Bottom line is, I want to help women, so I'll do whatever it takes. It's not a complete sell-out - it's the way it works."

Lori is able to cope with the unsavory politics because of the results that she sees in her community. She tells of a huge victory she recently had in developing and implementing a community forum which focused on tobacco policy. Unable to hide a beaming smile, she says, "We taught people to write letters to their mayor and district representatives and do a letter-writing campaign. We gave people insight into tobacco policies, like the latest Assembly bills. We had over 300 participants for two and a half hours! This was a major success, and was recognized by the County," adding, "I was so proud of myself - it takes a lot of energy!" Lori's reward for her hard efforts is having the community respond enthusiastically to what she provides to them.

Lori is aware that her influence is reaching beyond her immediate community. In addition to the networking that led to her new job, Lori credits WHL for a recent appointment to the Statewide Multicultural Health Task Force. "I know WHL was a key player in making that happen for me. [The WHL staff] saw that this was something that I could do...As of a month ago, I became a full-fledged member, which is a two to four year commitment. I really love it; it's really where I need to be. We meet four times a year to talk about women's health in California. Then I take that back to the community level - being the Director of the [Tobacco] Coalition and being on the Board of Directors of the Girls Club of Los Angeles."

Lori is hopeful that this passion of hers is affecting the status of women's health overall. "I'm hoping that for every job that I go into and come out of, that something good has come out of that...I'm hoping that in my commitment [to the Task Force], I will have done something for the State of California. When I worked at Prototypes (HIV prevention), there are a lot of women that I counseled that I got off the streets. With the Women's Tobacco Coalition, I'm hoping to bring about leaders and a better awareness for women, and getting them more interested in the advocacy area."

Lori attributes some of this commitment to women's health to WHL and some to her own interest, saying, "I've always had this passion and commitment. I can honestly say that women's health is my career, my profession for the rest of my life. WHL really solidified that a lot more because it's made me take leaps into women's health that reinforced that. It's made me more committed than I was before."

Growing professionally was half of the quest for Lori when she applied to WHL; growing personally and interpersonally was the other half. Lori explains that WHL helped to bring these goals together, in that she is able to share her new professional career with her new friends and contacts in WHL. "WHL people know you are friends for life; even if you heard from each other only once or twice a year, the bond is already there. It's a given that you are in a circle of women. You move on, you move around, you just move!" Lori laughs.

Because Lori still feels like a part of this powerful circle, it is nearly impossible for her to imagine the program closing its doors after its initial five-year start-up grant expires. Trying to picture this scenario, she becomes serious, frowns and says, "Ohhhh...wow...that would be emotionally hard...I feel like it's the glue to all of us to some degree. It's like a university in its own right...It's hard statewide to hold onto something...How do we do this? On our own, I don't know how we'd [hold it together]. Five years is nothing...it takes more than five years to build and maintain something...I feel like the continuity and networking opportunities would be lost...It helps you get into places, and we're not done getting into places yet!"

What that would mean for the status of women's health in California, according to Lori, is that there wouldn't be enough representatives who would know how to effectively speak out. She believes that those who would speak out would be inappropriate sources, in that they would not be authentic voices, and that could be as potentially dangerous as having no one speak to women's health at all.

*"My hope is that, as I raise my voice,
just maybe that person who's destined to find a cure to cancer
will hear something I'm saying and run with it."*

--Beverly Rhine

Beverly Rhine unabashedly admits that the woman she was upon entering the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program was a "diametrically different" woman than she is now. "I was testing the program to see if I, as a Black woman, could get accepted." Little did she know at the time -- no doubt because she was a member of the Inaugural Class -- that about a third of the applicants accepted would also be African-American. After "proving" that she could be accepted, Beverly entered the program as "an angry Black woman wanting to know what women of other cultures could possibly teach me." Having had few positive experiences on this level with women from outside of the Black community, Beverly was simply building on what life had taught her. And one of the things life had taught was that people who don't look like you may think they know what's best for you, when they don't. Therefore, the multicultural and multiracial staff of WHL was also to be challenged by Beverly, who initially distrusted their teachings on community organizing and other sensitive subjects. While she knew that she had some lessons to learn, she just wasn't sure that the people at WHL were the ones to help her learn them.

But much to Beverly's chagrin at the time, she found herself swept up in something larger than herself. She went through the process of trusting, respecting and loving these other women -- most of whom were very different from herself -- "kicking and screaming." Stripped of everything she had believed about protecting herself from "them," she describes feeling "pure nakedness." It was an experience unlike any she had experienced in her adult life. Today, she says, "I am a woman who has come to understand that sisterhood and compassion are colorless." Now it is hard for her to imagine WHL any other way. "The diversity of the peer leaders, staff and faculty is a strength," she says, "Even if you don't want to, you'll catch on to the power of diversity."

One of the reasons that being able to work closely with different people is important to Beverly is that she has breast cancer. If she had stayed in her comfort zone, she would not have had the opportunity to share information, resources, and hope with others outside of her immediate community. "Developing new attitudes about collaboration and partnerships" was the most unexpected outcome of her participation in the program. "Cancer doesn't discriminate, so health care requires collaboration. WHL helped me to form that mindset."

Beverly has worked for nine years as a Senior Crime Analyst for the Inglewood Police Department. She has also been very active in creating support services for women with cancer. She was a founding member of the Women of Color Breast Cancer Survivors Support Project. Since her participation in WHL, she has also founded Christian Women Against Cancer (CWAC). Within the past six months, Beverly has realized that she needs to focus on women's health full time. She doesn't know how she will do it, but she feels now, with 19 of her 20 lymph nodes currently affected by the cancer, that the time has come to put her full energy and attention in women's health. "I've never thought of myself as a risk-taker; I need to know how my bills are going to get paid. By me participating in support groups and advocacy and activism, that's my way of fighting back at the disease -- where I put my sadness and anger and fear. That's what helps to keep me well."

Beverly does have some idea of how she can turn her calling into her life's work, and get paid for doing it. She knows, for example, that she must obtain 501(c)3 status for CWAC so that they can be officially recognized as a private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt organization. While she is in the process of getting input on that situation so that she can complete the 501(c)3 application, she wishes that she had received more concrete direction for this process at WHL. She also feels that she could have benefited from more training in grant development. Even if it takes a while for CWAC to become grant-eligible and acquire grants, Beverly now knows that that is not her only option for paid work in women's health. "WHL helped me to understand that I can do it without the job, that I have the skills and abilities to be an ultimate consulting machine. They've helped me...respect my abilities and have the

confidence to do the things I need to do."

While contemplating the consulting possibilities, she is still actively looking for ways to promote CWAC, and is wasting no time in methodically moving forward in her work. Even areas that she had previously run away from are being conquered. For example, WHL emphasized to Beverly the need for written structure in any organization, so she has taken the time -- and worked around her dyslexia -- to print up brochures for CWAC. Having a written tool to distribute has added more credibility to CWAC, and gets more people interested in what they have to offer.

Also as a result of her participation in WHL, Beverly is honing in on her policy and advocacy skills. For starters, she is on two Advisory Boards that control the distribution of \$35 million in California, and she has been able to form alliances and partnerships there. She has also cultivated relationships with local officials and has ongoing dialogue with them on cancer-related public policy issues. Further, she is working through various levels of government to increase breast cancer screening, treatment and education of African-American women in Los Angeles County. Beverly says that focusing attention here is critical, as 30% of the total number of cases of breast cancer in California are found in LA County.

When Beverly is able to pursue her vision, women's health policy will be greatly impacted. "I want to develop a public policy network. When cancer bill comes up [in the Legislature], I would analyze it and share it with 200 WHL grads via fax and Internet, who, with their network, will bombard legislators and policy makers." This vision gets bigger as Beverly calls on her other network, the church. "I want to get as many churches as possible to establish cancer support groups for women, making it as far-reaching as possible." Beverly has already begun to make herself a resource within the churches, and the response has been tremendous. Women have flocked to her for love, support and education, and that's what she wants to institutionalize throughout the churches, by establishing the support groups. Beverly also wants to see regular health seminars in her community, and not just during Breast Cancer Month. She knows that more people would get involved to make these and other changes if they felt empowered, and she has just the idea to put others on that track: "I have a vision to do a video of local politicians encouraging community people to participate in the legislative process. It would introduce people to their own power. The video would be used in a training for emerging advocates."

Beverly has no shortage of ideas or courage to carry out her ideas, but she is feeling a sense of urgency with her time. Given what she knows about cancer and has seen with others, she lives as though her days are numbered, making each one count. Even when she is feeling low, she presses on with her work because she knows, "absolutely," that it was chosen for her. "Sometimes we have to go through problems in order to learn something and come out of the other side, perhaps to help someone else with that problem. God has allowed me to be in my sister's life to help her on her journey, to hold her hand. I went to the brink of death so that I can help others complete the journey in some degree of peace. This is how I give honor to God for His grace and mercy in my life."

Beverly is, in fact, the perfect person to be doing her work. Not only does she have 22 years experience in public policy and administration, where she has learned to blend practice, theory and application, but as she says, "Unfortunately, I bring life experiences: I have traveled through the disease of breast cancer four times...I have received the Ph.D. of crawling through the pit of breast cancer." These experiences allow her to help other women, doctors, researchers and other medical personnel because she constantly seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge that addresses quality of life and treatment for survivors. "In my passion to honor God and keep my own self healthy, I'm educating health care providers to do their job better. I'd like to believe I'm changing how research is done, who's included. My hope is that, as I raise my voice, just maybe that person who's destined to find a cure to cancer will hear something I'm saying and run with it." In this sense, Beverly's passion for doing her work is tightly integrated into her vision for improving the status of women's health overall. And she says that she

is able to stand so firmly because WHL insisted that she was the one to do so. "WHL unequivocally helped me to understand the validity of what I bring -- maverick, but unquestionable."

She wants other women to have the experience of WHL, too. "I have begged a number of women to apply. It is a wonderful place to grow, expand, and be introduced to so many things." She adds, "It has a structure that makes you sit down long enough to learn about yourself. You'll learn as much about yourself as you will about women's health." Other women may also come to define themselves as leaders, in spite of negative connotations they may have for that title, as Beverly did, because of the media and other sources. Like Beverly, they may take back that title and give it the respect it deserves, so that they can wear it proudly.

What they will find is that, if they are truly committed to their work, there will be inevitable victories and rewards, as well as risks and disappointments. In Beverly's case, she says, "My biggest sorrow is all of the women who have gone on. Out of respect for them, I made a pact to not fall into a bottomless pit of sorrow and grief. In this way, I give honor to their journey. I have lost eight women, and there are five more who are currently in the middle of re-occurrences." However, the reasons to continue are many. It gladdens Beverly's heart to help women who are fighting cancer re-direct their energy into helping other survivors; she challenges them to "reach back and help someone else." According to Beverly, as a member of WHL, there will always be others with whom these times can be shared. Whether it's the WHL staff, faculty advisors, or fellow peer leaders, there exists a "comprehensive strength of WHL, knowing that they're always there to assist me...to complete the work that needs to be done."

Beverly says that there is presently no tool that encapsulates the WHL experience, so that it can be shared with potential applicants. She suggests doing recruitment through the churches and mini conferences, but notes that even that would fall far short of the truth. What women really need to see, she says, is a piece of the graduation and the work groups and the peer leaders crying together, perhaps through a video. But short of that, interested women will just have to believe her when she says that she could never thank the entire WHL staff for the riches they have brought into her life: "They have changed my life forever." Beverly knows that her experience was not unique, in that the participants entered into a sisterhood *together*, and they will be there for one another. "There's a group of sisters out there who I just need to say the magic word to -- WHL -- and they'll do their level best to help me with anything I need."

Defending the need to keep WHL operational, Beverly states, "The vision of WHL is phenomenal. Why did it take so long?...WHL fills a gap in terms of exposing women to people and processes that they've been locked out of politically or have never been exposed to. Some women will never have an advanced degree other than a Women's Health Leadership degree." Where else can you find women without high school diplomas working alongside practicing doctors, in a setting where they are equals? The "magic" of WHL, she says, has a lot to do with honor and respect.

Beverly would like to see the program not only maintained, but expanded to include a full-time staff member whose sole responsibility would be to oversee alumni activities, including the public policy network she envisions. "We can change how folks do business in California, whether it's HMO's or the Legislature." In addition to California, Beverly believes that WHL should develop chapters nationwide, for an even greater impact. The possibilities truly are endless, which is why Beverly puts her heart into her closing comments: "I think the world would grow dark in the area of women's health issues if Women's Health Leadership were to close its doors; a tremendous resource would be lost."

"Even today I get comments from people that I haven't seen for a while about how I seem different, I act different, I look different. The feedback is always very positive."

--Virginia Saldana-Grove

Referring to substance abuse, Virginia Saldana-Grove says, "This is a major health issue for many, many women. It's a killer and it kills tragically. You die physically, emotionally, spiritually. My passion is the knowledge of how it kills. If you help one woman, you impact the status of her health *and* her children and family. It keeps building from there."

As the Executive Director of the Chemical Dependency Center for Women, located in downtown Sacramento, Virginia is able to support a staff of thirty-eight women and two men in helping thousands of women and their families on their journey to a clean and sober path. Having experienced personal history and tragedy around addictions with family and friends brought Virginia into this field as clerical support staff twenty years ago. She didn't consciously choose her work, but maintains, "I have a strong belief that I'm where I'm supposed to be."

Virginia has not been at her current job for long. In 1995, upon graduation from the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program, Virginia began her search in earnest for the perfect position. She had been working at an agency where she was getting bored because she was only managing one project, and had no opportunity for advancement. She felt that some of her skills were not being utilized. When she started getting resentful, she knew that wasn't healthy. Virginia had applied to WHL in part to help her become clear on what she wanted and to develop a supportive network. She found that it did this, in addition to giving her a boost of motivation and confidence. Her ultimate goal was to acquire a position as Executive Director, but she wanted to make sure that the agency would be a perfect match. "I believed that when it was right, it would happen." As it turned out, planning for her transition in a slow, methodical, thoughtful way that included WHL paid off. In addition to gaining the position and salary she wanted, she says, "WHL helped me to do what I wanted to do. I wanted to work where the focus was women, and women really benefited."

As is generally the case, Virginia was not only looking to move forward in her life professionally, but also personally. At that time, she says, "I did everything alone - I thought I had to." But somewhere she questioned how it might help to be in an environment with other women who could help her. She found it hard to believe that such an environment, in the form of WHL, actually existed. "I wasn't sure what I wanted to do," Virginia reflects, "I just wanted a change."

While ultimately the same person today that she was upon entering the program, Virginia did experience some significant transformations. In contrast to the one-woman show of her past, Virginia says that she now realizes her role is to guide, and that she needs others' support in order to do that. "I'm not able to do that alone. Today I'm much more willing to reach out and seek assistance." Perhaps knowing others are there to help support her, she says that she is now able to "show my stuff, speak my piece more, take more risks, and am more willing to hear others' opinions, and receive constructive feedback." These are some of the qualities that Virginia ticks off when describing what makes up a leader, and this is why she is finally beginning - for the first time in her life - to see herself as a leader, or at least as having strong leadership potential. It has been a slow transition in her mind, but as Virginia recognizes her greater confidence, her skills, and her limitations, she says, "Today I know I can be a leader."

Some changes Virginia had hoped for or anticipated and others came as a complete surprise. "I expected to enhance my skills and learn new skills, which happened. I didn't expect the tremendous support that all of the women gave each other. I mean, I knew that women were supportive of each other, but I'd never experienced it in that large of a group before and over that kind of intense period of time," Virginia says, "At the time it hit me out of the blue." In addition to the personal sharing that created such intensity, Virginia says another aspect of the program that continues to impact her today is that people

notice the changes in her. Bemused, she says, "I didn't expect for people to notice and comment on the change. Even today I get comments from people that I haven't seen for a while about how I seem different, I act different, I look different. The feedback is always very positive." Laughing, she jokes that she doesn't know why this should surprise her - Did she really think she could keep so many changes a secret?

The Chemical Dependency Center has also benefited from some changes since Virginia came on board. One of the first things she noticed was that the support staff up front needed some training to help them understand how to interact with the clients. While recognizing that it was not the staff's fault, because addicts do have crises and exhibit anger, the staff still needed to learn how important their role is in supporting addicts in the office. This training could only promote better client care, and that is one of Virginia's top priorities. She is confident that she would have implemented such changes regardless of her participation in WHL.

The changes that her organization has seen as a result of Virginia's participation in WHL are more "subconscious," she says. "In the beginning, I tried to remember to use everything I learned at WHL. Today I don't realize I'm doing it." She gives the example of utilizing a management team, saying that almost any administrative decision gets put on the table. That was something that she learned from WHL, and it makes a tremendous difference. She says that, in comparison, at her last job, nothing was done in a team effort. But at WHL, the emphasis was on people working together, and whether it was a large or small group, everyone had a voice.

The organization's policy and advocacy activities were also examined when Virginia took her position. "We've looked at our protocol - what we do and don't do for our clients. Some policies impose barriers to services. We removed those barriers." The concern was maintaining a high level of client advocacy while helping the clients to meet their responsibilities. "I don't know if I would've done this, or gotten to it as soon as I did [without WHL]."

There are lots of other changes that Virginia would like to make in her organization, given the opportunity. First and foremost, she acknowledges that each of her staff members offers something unique and special to the clients they serve. She wants to find out what that is for each person, so that she is best equipped to support them. On the organizational level, she has three important goals: 1) Increase and improve the quality of service, so that more people can be served. 2) Diversify the agency's funding base because that will allow the flexibility to provide the services that are needed. Different services will result in more success with people getting and staying clean and sober. Without blaming the public dollar, Virginia would like to move away from it as much as possible because of the attached limitations. Medi-Cal, for example, will not pay for a comprehensive treatment program and it is more costly to treat women (women make up about 85% of the agency's clients). 3) Provide education and training to as many people as possible about addictions. This is an enormous goal because, Virginia says, there are "huge misconceptions, stereotypes, and maljudgements that really keep the community at large from supporting what needs to be done to make a difference." These misconceptions include addicts not loving their children or being the only parents who harm their children. Such dangerous assumptions become harder to reject, she states, when they are constantly reinforced by the media.

Beyond any other disappointment, Virginia is most poignantly struck by the lack of support her community gives to the treatment of addiction. She labels it as biased and punitive, and says that she rarely hears talk about treatment as an option. Even in her personal life, she is impacted by the fear and denial, as neighbors and community members distance themselves from Virginia in an attempt to distance themselves from her work. Of course there is also the physical risk of working with clients who are often in crisis and can potentially harm Virginia or her staff. Virginia knows that this threat is real, but is equally, if not more concerned, with protection from the emotional risks. Given the reality of overdoses and other tragedies to be expected when the soul is in search of itself, she is careful to tend to the significant emotional needs at her agency.

Even with so many obstacles, a bright-eyed Virginia asserts, "The people, the change, the miracle - that's what keeps you going. The rewards are great, and they're here. Addicts *do* become clean and sober, and there are numerous benefits from one person becoming clean and sober and staying that way." She adds, "It keeps me humble. I could have easily been on that path - any of us could have."

In addition to monitoring her own path, Virginia, like every concerned mother, is monitoring where her daughter is headed. With pride, she says that one of her greatest victories in the past few years is that her daughter will be going to college. Not only did WHL have a role in shaping Virginia's career, but the program has also had a strong impact on her daughter, who attended several of the WHL events. Virginia says that everyone was very supportive of having her there, and that kind of "women supporting women" environment was something "she hadn't experienced before; it was very special to her."

Virginia would like to see more women have that opportunity. While she has tangible advice for the WHL program, such as ensuring that the Latina faculty and presenters are more proportionate to the Latina participants, she feels that "it is a tremendous program, a wonderful experience." As an employer, she knows that having WHL graduates in her office can only improve the services they provide. "I say it to my staff every year: Everybody apply... You'll learn a lot about yourself, and you'll be supported - not by just one person, but by many people. The skills you learn are secondary to being in the program."

Fortunately, she says, any woman can apply regardless of her economic situation. Because most women don't have thousands of dollars to spend on their leadership development, Virginia truly appreciates how WHL removes the economic barriers by offering the program cost-free to the participants. Sad at the thought that WHL may not always exist, Virginia concludes, "I've never come across another program like WHL that looks at the total woman."

*"Just having a mentor, someone to look out for you, give you a call once in a while,
that is really encouraging and gives you motivation to do certain things
that maybe otherwise you'd feel like,
'I'm too tired to do this.'"*

--Susan Shimazu

Susan Shimazu had not been out of college for more than a few years when she entered the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program. She had expected to learn some new skills in a classroom-type setting, like "just tell me the steps and I'll do it." What she expected and what she got, however, turned out to be two fairly distinct pictures. Fortunately for Susan, it was a pleasant surprise. The most unexpected outcome of her participation in the program, for example, was the camaraderie. She was caught off guard by the emphasis on friendship at WHL. Nonetheless, the experience was very educational for Susan because she was able to get to know women from very diverse backgrounds while sharing common ground with them at the same time. More than any other aspect of the program, she believes that the people who make up WHL are its strongest attraction.

WHL initially interested Susan because she was at a point in her life where she was beginning to ask herself, *'Where do I go from here?'* She had been at her job for three years and was wanting something different, but she didn't know what that *something different* was. As a Support Services Manager at Asian Pacific Health Care Venture, a non-profit agency in Los Angeles, Susan was responsible for developing the non-medical services (health education, nutrition, language education, social services, etc.) that would be made available at a clinic they were opening. Although she wanted to work with her community, she found at that time that she simply lacked motivation for her job. She was at the start of her career, and yet she felt like she had hit a plateau. Susan trusted that WHL might help put her back on track while also boosting some areas where she fell short, such as having the confidence to facilitate meetings and plan activities, or knowing when it was appropriate to speak up or just listen.

Susan was looking to be as effective as possible with the work she does. Smart, well-organized and compassionate, WHL built on her talents by encouraging her natural desire to learn and by elevating her confidence. This enabled Susan to put her new skills to good use. As she learned more about herself, the easier it became to work out some problem areas. While recognizing that there is still room for growth, she gained a better grasp on tact -- knowing when to push forward her agenda and when to use more discretion. She had also struggled with taking on more than she could actually accomplish, and was therefore grateful to WHL for helping her to establish more realistic goals. This impacted Susan's staff as well because she was able to help them establish healthy goals also.

Susan also found herself incorporating the WHL ideals into her work programmatically. For example, she had been coordinating a training program for immigrant women to encourage the development of their language skills. This was important, as many clients were finding language to be a tremendous barrier to their livelihood. Susan had initially designed the program to focus on skill building, in a classroom setting. And then she was introduced to a learning alternative: "Going through WHL and getting to know the people changed the emphasis [of the training program] in terms of what the class was like...to just getting to know the women, just as people, and getting involved in their lives." The program turned out to be one of Susan's most rewarding accomplishments; she was truly able to see how the lives of this largely first-generation group of older immigrant women had been greatly impacted. The women's families -- their husbands and children -- also recognized the accomplishments the women had made in the program and they came out to support the women in a graduation ceremony. She smiles, "The women had gained the knowledge that they were something significant and were proud of themselves." They also appreciated Susan, and acknowledged her at the ceremony with a plaque and several hand-made gifts. She describes the relationship she had with them as "tremendous."

As she took on more administrative roles, Susan moved further and further away from having face-to-face contact with those the agency serves. That feeling of being disconnected can take its toll when there is no encouragement that the mundane, behind-the-scenes work is making impact on the improvement of the community. "You see a lot of problems, but sometimes it's hard to see the result of your work in terms of real concrete, tangible kinds of things. When I used to be an outreach worker, you know, I'd meet with someone, we'd talk, they'd feel better, I'd feel better - and you can say, something happened!" she laughs. "Sometimes I'm sitting there doing budgets [thinking], 'What's the benefit of this?' Eventually somebody will be able to have a program where they'll be able to sit down with someone and work with them on solving a problem, but it's so far removed. Sometimes it just gets discouraging." Fortunately, that's where WHL came in for Susan. She was able to get the support for that kind of work by other women who were doing it, too. Referring to the WHL sessions, she says, "It's just nice to get away and be with other people who you can relate to...feeling like you really want to be where you are, but being tired. Being able to encourage each other, that was nice...having people to personally invest in you as a person." This is particularly important, Susan maintains, because of the kind of people who are drawn to social service work. According to her, they tend to "invest a lot in other people, but not so much in themselves." That's where having a WHL faculty advisor, who is supporting your visions and struggles, can come into play. "Just having a mentor, someone to look out for you, give you a call once in a while, that is just really encouraging and gives you motivation to do certain things that maybe otherwise you'd feel like, 'Oh, I'm too tired to do this.'"

Getting that boost of encouragement is especially important when it feels like even all of one's efforts in the big picture are not paying off. Just maintaining a commitment to the work is sometimes hard to do because what gets put in on one end through advocacy may not be what appears at the other end as policy. Susan explains, "What I see is that sometimes you work really hard for something. And you push it and you push it and you push it until you're ready to drop, and then someone just comes and steamrolls over you. And it's because they have money or they have power that you don't have. And it's not because you weren't passionate or you didn't try. Sometimes that's just how things are." She continues, "...that doesn't mean that you give up and it doesn't mean that it's the end, but sometimes battles are lost even though you fought hard." After all, it is impossible to know when and where the effort is going to pay off. She gives the example of having seen the production *Les Miserables*. "There's this one scene where these people are trying to start a revolution in France. And they basically just get totally knocked down and like there's nothing left of them. And yet you think about it, and it's like, well, *eventually* there was a revolution. But if you just stop and look at that part of it, it looks pretty dismal." She concludes "although there will be losses, I would like to think that because of my efforts and the efforts of others that there will be an improvement and change. I believe there will be."

Susan's director had always been very policy-oriented, and therefore appreciated that Susan returned from WHL with additional policy information. Susan says, "WHL helped me get connected to advocacy information streams." This enhanced the agency because, while they had been very focused on policy agendas for the Asian Pacific Islander (API) community, they had not quite made the connection with policy agendas for women. Susan's new network and information allowed her to overlap the API and women's policy agendas. This was a necessary leap, in that there were many radical changes and overhauls in areas that impacted both women and ethnic minority communities during Susan's year in WHL. Welfare reform, cutting off undocumented women from prenatal care, and Propositions 187 and 209 solidly merge the concerns of both groups, and address the need for more coalition-building among them. Susan is now more effective advocating on their behalf, in part because of the WHL visit to Sacramento, which gave her a clearer vision of the legislative process.

Susan is now transitioning into the next stage of her leadership development. Participation in WHL led her to re-examine her own personal definition of being a leader. She came to realize that there are different styles of leadership, and that it would work best for her to develop a balance among them. There is, for example, a difference between men's and women's leadership styles: men tend to be more top-down, authoritarian, and women tend to be more group-oriented. She is choosing to use her abilities in a different way than a man might; and that is working for her.

Another step in personal leadership development is knowing when it is time to step away from one's position in order to focus on developing more skills. During her time in WHL, Susan began to realize that she was at this point. There, she received lots of encouragement and support to apply to graduate school. They helped her prepare for the Graduate Records Examination, wrote her letters of recommendation, and generally helped her "get on track." At the time of this interview, she had left her position at her agency and was preparing to start classes at UCLA's School of Public Health in the coming week.

At some point, when she returns to the world of work, she would like to develop connections between the churches and social services. "I've always had an interest in seeing my church - or any church - start up some social services that would be linked to the church. I've found, working in social services, that social service agencies do a great job of meeting physical needs, emotional needs. And the church really focuses on the spiritual needs, so [I'd like] to see that combined." One idea is to help a church start an economic development agency.

Susan would also like to continue to support the existence of WHL. She believes that there is a tremendous need to help people understand each other's struggles in a state as diverse as California. Especially in the area of health care, women must have an idea of what their colleagues are facing if they are to support them. Susan learned that first-hand in WHL, and would like others to have that experience, too. She describes her experience learning about rural health: "I never understood rural health care until I met certain people in the program who were midwives in like the mountains. I would always think, coming from LA, 'Why do these people hate us in LA? We have so many people here and so many needs.' But after understanding [that] you have one person for, you know, 100 miles or something...OK, [now] I understand." Given the number of important propositions and initiatives having an impact statewide, Susan says that maintaining a statewide coalition for women in health care fills a significant place and is critical.

*"I cannot say no; I have to say yes...
The community needs it."*

--Tse Xiong

Tse Xiong had no idea that serving her community in a leadership role would become her life's work. Able to communicate in Hmong, Laotian and English, Tse initially came to Community Health Services in Modesto as a translator. She knew that she could serve as a bridge to those non-English speakers in her community who were not receiving proper care and services. What she did not anticipate was that her job duties would mushroom as her supervisors realized how much she was capable of, above and beyond translating.

It stretches the imagination to comprehend how Tse is so actively involved in several distinct programs, including the Prenatal Outreach program, which operates by going door-to-door; the Maternal and Child Health program, which requires Tse to make home visits with a nurse; the Professional Providers program, which utilizes Tse to do translation, home visits and case review; the Sierra Health Project for Minority Health, which provides after-school activities and parent education; a counseling for teens program, which encourages pregnant teens to pursue a diploma or GED and teaches them about family planning; and a senior health program, which provides physical exams among other services.

Why would anyone choose to take on so much responsibility? The reality is that no one else in her department speaks her languages and works in the community, so Tse gets stretched thin as demands on her time and talents continue to pile up. She says that no new employees have been hired to help with Tse's workload because, with so much involved, it is hard to recruit and train them. While there are its disadvantages, Tse doesn't complain. If anything, she considers it to be quite a victory that she is able to reach out to so many people. "I cannot say no; I have to say yes," Tse says, while going on to explain that it might be different if there were other people available to do the work, but right now she is the only one positioned to be a legitimate liaison with her community. Tse realizes how much is needed, not only by the clients, but also by the clinics, hospital and local agencies. Simply put, "The community needs it."

In recognizing that she had some needs of her own, Tse applied to the Women's Health Leadership (WHL) program. Quiet and soft-spoken, Tse says that she was having a little difficulty resolving some issues with clients and co-workers. There were also certain aspects of her work that caused problems, so she looked forward to getting some help. Not altogether sure of what to expect, Tse was hoping to learn more about "America's women's society," and how to build friendships in a network of women. Happy with the results, Tse says, "These things are happening. I changed." She feels more comfortable and confident. She is proud to have had the opportunity to work with people at many different levels. And Tse also seems relieved that it is now easier to solve her problems.

One of Tse's other hopes in joining WHL was to become a good community leader. She laughs at the thought of considering herself a leader before the program. Although she had been involved in a couple of community groups, she did not identify as a leader. Leadership, she says, is providing good role modeling for the community. But it's also being comfortable with those who need you and expanding your vision into the future. Before, Tse says, "I just knew what I was doing everyday for my job." After WHL, she stepped back and took a look at her passion for helping others and how she could best address the needs specific to her region, California's Central Valley.

In addressing those needs, Tse has found herself standing before many groups of people. Raised with traditional Hmong values in her home country of Laos, it has been a challenge for Tse to adapt to certain American values. "In Hmong community and culture, they never let a woman stand up front. Only men stand before a group." WHL helped Tse feel more comfortable with that aspect of being a leader, which Tse says, "changed me a lot." After all, it would be impossible for her to do the prenatal, parenting and nutrition education -- which are presentations done before large groups -- if she could not adopt new cultural norms. Some people in the community have maintained their traditional beliefs, and have voiced

their concerns that a man should be addressing them instead. That has not stopped Tse, who respectfully explains that "in this country, it's okay for women to be up front." This is seemingly having more of an effect than the original goal of disseminating information. In addition to educating families on specific issues, Tse has become a role model for the other women in her community. She says that they are often nervous in the audience, because they have questions and comments, but don't know how to make themselves heard. Tse pulls them to the front, so that they can get support from her while having their concerns addressed.

People in her community trust Tse, which is why she is able to have such an impact. Beyond communicating words back and forth between clients and health care providers, she is able to transcend the cultural boundaries that can create fear or hostility on either side. For example, Tse often helps parents get past their fear of going to the hospital when their children are sick, ultimately saving the children's lives in some instances. This is a tremendous responsibility, and yet it is one that Tse is proud to have. "I save the people's lives – that's the gift I give."

Acknowledging the gifts that Tse brings to her work also helps her acknowledge some areas that she would like to further develop. Tse has come to realize that, in order to take her work a step further, she cannot rely solely on what comes naturally to her. She has encouraged herself to go back to school to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Behavioral Science and now attends classes four nights a week. In addition to building on her formal education, Tse is also looking out how she can become more flexible for the community. She would like to feel more comfortable dealing with policy and advocacy issues and feels that she could always use a broader knowledge of health education.

Tse sounds hopeful that her goals are within reach. One of the hardest things, she says, is not having people believe in you. So finding a group of women with whom Tse could share her disappointments and victories, frustrations and celebrations, helped some things become "less of a struggle." It also helped her realize that she was a part of something larger than herself, and that there were plenty of women who could relate to the same things she could relate to. Tse describes her first WHL session as being a time when her eyes were opened to many women with different colors and cultures and languages coming together, holding hands, and supporting one another. This made Tse happy to know that she wasn't the only "different" one, as she so often had felt. "It's very great for me to see I'm not the only one that's different – everybody [in WHL] is different."

In hopes of inspiring them to apply, Tse continues to share her experiences with other women who she thinks would make good candidates for WHL – college students, women in her community, and co-workers. She wants them to know that it will help them be more flexible with time and more honest. It will also help them become a role model. Able to predict the excuses that women give themselves for not applying to WHL, Tse says, "Some women are very busy, they have families, they're working and they feel it's not important to them," but Tse wants to reassure them, "You're not alone. You'll meet other women who will help you." Tse still feels connected to her learning group and the WHL staff, saying that it is very easy to contact them and get their ideas; she also continues to use the material sent to her throughout the program. Reflecting on WHL's value in her own life, she continues, "WHL is a very great program for me: I learned a lot, was trained, and the WHL faculty and the workshops are very important to me." It is also WHL that Tse says has enabled her to serve so many people in so many different capacities, in that her responsibilities and caseload grew tremendously upon her completion of the program. Not only did she feel more confident and more capable, but her supervisors recognized that as well, giving her greater opportunities to support the programs.

Beyond individuals who are able to grow and learn through WHL, Tse also sees the value that the program offers on a statewide level. "Many people still need this program to support them. WHL is making a difference overall in California because the peer leaders are taking on leadership roles, and spreading information throughout their communities." If anything, Tse says, WHL needs to grow even more so that multilingual staff can be hired to outreach to the ever-increasing diversity in our state.

Transcriptions of Six Alumni Interviews

Karen Allen, 1995 Alumni

Q: Describe to me the woman who wrote her application to WHL and describe to me the woman who sits before me now.

I think the woman who wrote the application was very young in her work background and her grassroots experience; she was a woman who had some visions of where she wanted to go and what she wanted to do but did not have the resources, the knowledge, the connections and networking power to pull that together and make it happen. She definitely had the vision and the passion for the work she wanted to do, just didn't know how to do it. ...and have her own self esteem that she could do it if she was qualified to do it.

The woman now is very bold, has the confidence, has the self esteem, has the networking, has the connections, as a matter of fact, and has gotten so busy! A woman who completed the workbook (The Freedom Guide, which I wrote with WHL) and has completed a spiritual curriculum for self esteem called "The Women's Self Esteem Ministry". My spiritual ministry, which is something I wanted to do with women anyway has just taken off; I just did a workshop, the Women's Self Esteem Ministry, about 18-20 women attended; it was totally the most powerful thing I've ever done; I'm excited. It was nice to sit there in the middle of it and have people ask their leaders "can she come back next month too?". That felt good; I'm excited about what's happening. My speaking skills have improved; I've matured. It's easier to listen and not always have to speak, not always have to be seen. I move quietly now and that's kind of nice.

Q: Did you describe yourself as a leader before you entered the program?

I had leadership potential, but not necessarily qualification. Really one of the most important things that I have learned is that a leader has to know three important things: function, purpose, and structure. I had a concept of what leadership was then (before WHL), with people behind me, I could start the party going but I was not able to sustain the call of the group, but now I've learned that you must know purpose-the people you lead must have the vision that you have, you need structure-how is going to work; you have to know function-who's going to do what part and how will you delegate the work. Now in my leadership skills I'm able not just to get it started but to follow through and sustain the others and maintain position.

Q: The changes you experienced through the program-were those changes that you had hoped for or expected when you applied to the program?

Yes. In my application, one of the three wishes was to be able to be with a team of women who get out into the community, the grassroots, and talk about health education, substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, other women's issues, and that was my wish. I do that. I do that with co-facilitators, I do it alone. It's really nice that enough of you are out there now that people are calling requesting you, and that's AWESOME!

Q: What were your other wishes?

I don't remember...that one (above) was the passion, I wanted to go into the community, and I wanted to be a visible part of the community.

Q: What was the most unexpected outcome of your participation in the program?

The level of respect that I got from WHL, just being in the video, the fact that they've asked me to go and represent them at conferences and speak, "ME???? Little bitty me??" Skill wise...I think in my first session with Barbara (my faculty advisor) was that I had issues with self esteem...I always felt that I needed a college degree, (this was one of my biggest things going into WHL) to sit among the people with degrees. I still don't have a degree and I'm really tired of hearing that. It's really not necessary...the peer groups supported me, the groups are so important for that support, I really think that it was God giving to WHL to put the groups together like they did. We clicked so well. The group that I was in, the five women, was such a powerful group-sometime it's the spirit that we don't see that helps to make those decisions, so that was awesome.

Q: Have you incorporated WHL into your personal and professional life since you've returned to your community?

Oh, God, yeah! People are so tired of hearing about WHL (laughter)!

Q: What does it look like for you, in your circle of women? When you bring WHL home, to share it, how do you do that?

I see a lot of women where I was maybe three years ago that have that desire that I had to want to do something. I see the struggle in them, like when they say "I don't think I can do this..." I just want to share that there is a program that's a grassroots program that's really creating and building women and empowering women and moving women in a direction where you can be just who you want to be. I really have such a passion for WHL, that I went through a whole year of withdraw...I thought maybe I can get back in, write another application with another name (Laughter!) I realize that first year after, that I was connected to staff and so I see them as more of a big sister than of being a stepchild. I felt like a stepchild that first year "out", like they don't want me any more! But I'm a big sister. I have a message to hear, they've instilled some really important qualities in me, about who I am as a woman, about my motherhood, why I'm a sister-friend. I have a lot of passion and respect for that vision.

I still pull out my stuff from WHL, I still use it. Like in San Francisco, the "box" exercise. I use that as an ice breaker in my self esteem workshops. I have used that so many times. I have all my folders; I have all my papers. WHL is the most organized organization I have ever seen. How do Connie and them put (couldn't understand here). My only complaint is that we didn't get to spend more time in those beautiful hotel rooms. I still use the data, still use the lingo even when I don't realize it, because I use it all the time now. I still stay in touch. I have not disconnected myself. I wish we were stronger down here as they are in Northern California.

Q: In thinking back to the WHL training areas, are there any that you felt fell short of your needs and that you feel could have improved your capacity to do your work?

I wish there was more time outside of our peer groups, when we had certain topics, that there had been more individual dialogue around the topic for that day. Our peer setting was more structured because we had the ILP to work on, we had an agenda. I wish there was just more time for some dialogue, especially around policy, that could have been done on a different level, and a lot more on health issues. I'm not saying that they lacked in anything; they worked the time to the penny, but that is what I would have liked to see. Like getting outside the box (the exercise), that stands out for me because a lot of people crossed lines that day, a lot of people "came out of their box", a lot of people crossed boundaries and came out of their comfort zone. Just some time to dialogue about what that was like would have been profound.

Q: Would you describe that exercise, and what that was about?

Basically we were talking about our comfort zones, coming out of your comfort zone, and how we limit ourselves and put expectations on ourselves that might prevent us from going in a certain direction, like "we can't go there". Like people not having degrees, that was one way of thinking that kept me in a box and kept me out of an area and she taught us how to remove those barriers. It was really empowering. That may have been the one that turned the corner for me, because that was the same workshop when I presented the workbook and the video. That was a turning point for me, and I haven't turned back since. I presented to the larger group; it was real exciting to do that. It was major for me.

Q: At this particular point in your leadership journey, what else would you like to learn and improve upon that would help to move you further along?

I believe my writing and spelling skills. Now that I have the confidence, my next project is to take a writing class to improve my skills. Barbara had to really work with me on the guide, and Robin only corrected it about 700 times, but I just got the approval on the copyright on that. I realize that I lack in this area, so I will be working on that. I don't need to get the degree right now, it's not what God said I have to do, and I like it because it's what he said.

As a function of low self esteem, the things that block you are so small but you stack them so high! With low self esteem, you can block yourself from every angle. But being able to write well has nothing to do with my ministry, my leadership skills, who I am, what I represent, it has nothing to do with any of that. I did not know that three years ago!

Q: Describe to me the nature of your work.

I am a nurse case manager, substance abuse counselor, and health educator. I wear many hats! Under the nurse care manager, I do all the health care here, with a physician and nurse practitioner. When you think health care, think the total person...dental, TB, tetanus, a physical, medical problems which require a referral to a primary care physician. You look at the whole person, do a lot of advocacy work, I monitor hypertension and HIV here, all the quality

assurance. We are a comprehensive drug treatment program, so I carry a caseload between 7 and 9 clients, there too, work with their addiction, including mental health, vocational training, legal advocacy, the whole arena. I do the Women Empowering Women group, which is where the Freedom Guide came in, and we've been able to put that to full use. The Freedom Guide came out of the Women Empowering Women group, we deal with self esteem, "who am I?" boundaries violation, the myth of the batterer, a lot of domestic violence issues. The women do a lot of writing during each group and keep a notebook. They meet once a week. As a health educator, I provide education to clients and staff, whether it's dental, HIV, family planning, diabetes, stress, whatever it may be, each month.

Q: Do you feel like you chose your work or did it choose you?

My work chose me; God chose my work. I am definitely in line with where God wants me to be. In the early 80's, 1984, when I was 11, my mother died and I did a lot of work around my mom and I began to seek out who she really was. About three years ago I realized I am directly my mom, everything I do my mom did, I can't believe how awesome she was. She was a nurse, she worked with women and children giving them guidance, she ran a kindergarten. I do a youth ministry at church with about 18-20 kids that I work with faithfully every week. My mom was an evangelist, too, and a nurse. I find great peace knowing that God had it all mapped out for me and I received it with open arms. I have a passion for all that I do. I could not have chosen anything better for me to do. God really knew what I was cut out to do, so there is great passion in what I do.

Q: When I was asking about your work, you didn't tell me about these other things you do. Tell me about the church...

It's a full time job. Q: How many children do you have of your own? A: I have three of my own children. I've been with the church since it's inception...I'm the Sunday school superintendent, so there's a big responsibility for spiritual education and I am the assistant to the pastor for youth ministry. I pick up these kids every Friday night for the last six years and we go to the church or my home and we learn about God, about self esteem, saying No, don't touch my body, with a very spiritual undertone. We allow them the opportunity to vent to cry, to be children. They range in age from 4-15 or 16; there are about 18 kids. I work with another minister who is a LCSW, we have fun too, bake cookies. It's the greatest challenge in my life. My son who was incarcerated; I felt a lot of shame, at that time I felt like I needed to leave this work because I felt like a total failure. He was an A student and really doing wonderful, yet he's fallen, it took everything I had for me to stand. I know that who I decided to be, leaders don't quit. When you take on a leadership role, there's no quitting. Leaders sometimes have to stand alone in the battle...I've learned over the last 3 years! The church is very much a passion; I spend 40 hours a week there, as much time as I spend here (at work). I work with the homeless at my church, which is connected with my work here, assisting people in finding homes and shelters, food...the church is Jacob's Ladder Community Fellowship in Inglewood. I just got my national license (Pentecostal Assemblies of the World) as an evangelist, which is exciting to me because I don't know what's going to happen! I'm looking forward to traveling and ministering God's word to women and children, to be a part of the healing process. The Women's Self Esteem ministry last

weekend was such an awesome healing process. I watched women who were spiritually-fed women who did not know how to deal with battering in their home. Sometimes we get confused about what God says sometimes...whether or not to leave our husbands...I watched women cry and say "I don't want to cry anymore". It was such an experience for me to just be in the midst of the healing, to see the healing, the tears and the smiles, breakthroughs just in the matter of four or five hours. You see someone walking with their head down now their head is up just a little bit. These are the things that constantly confirm that I'm on the right path. Without a doubt, this is where I'll be.

Q: When you say that the path chose you, that God chose it for you, how did that come about?

Spiritually, the foundation was already laid. I can remember very well at the age of 9, 10, 11 years old being the psychiatrist on the phone and charging my friends 25 cents to listen to their problems; I would sit and jot notes and listen to my friends! I'm the daughter of a Baptist preacher and my mother was like the first lady of first ladies, and because of who she was, I learned not only Baptist teaching but I learned by watching the role model. People told me a lot of things, but I watched this humble woman...then I found myself in situations where I learned to humble myself and not fight. Way back when, I listened to people's problems, I was always concerned about people's problems, the caretaker instinct. That's really quite awesome for the youngest of 12 (children), with 9 brothers, who was totally spoiled rotten, a rotten brat, and here I am. You know it's God, you know?! You know without a doubt, that's who it is. My sister told the story-we grew up on an island in Florida-how my daddy would have us go to the beach and I would dig up the sand at the beach and put it in the truck of our car, because that's the only sand we could play in. Just rotten...And here I am, would give anything I have for anyone...and that, I think in my recovery, when I got sober, that was one thing I wanted to change, that I didn't want to need to be the center of attention, that my attention is given to others. And God just answered my prayers.

Q: What was your recovery like?

The first seven years was pretty much okay, it was the thing to do, I didn't lose my children, I didn't lose my home, I was just slowly going crazy. Then I had to deal with the rape and the incest and the sexual abuse in my life which I had sat on for so many years and was in total denial, and my mother's death. I think those first seven to ten years were the hardest in my recovery, just a lot of issues and dealing with a lot of things, going through a lot of things, my marriage failed, everything I earned and worked for I lost. Going out of a relationship where there's battering involved and going back into it clean and sober and being battered again, just the dynamics of that. What's this repeat going on here, what have I missed on this journey? And I hadn't dealt with it...I hadn't dealt with the incest, the sexual abuse, the battering, until 7-8 years ago.

Q: At what point did you start your recovery?

A: In 1980. I started to go through this in 1987-88. You're supposed to know something. At first, I was very focused on my kids, driven, doing community work, some theatre work. I was active

and functioning, so I think a lot of things caused me to slow down. My daughter started having seizures and my oldest son went to junior high and checked out of life. He was a straight A student, but just said, "I can't do this junior high stuff". My own stuff came up... I was very reactive before WHL; I had not matured. WHL came at a perfect time in my life, a time when certain maturities needed to happen in me, and it (WHL) provoked it to happen, provoked it in me that I was going to walk the distance. I'm grateful for what I've become, and that's something that's very nice to be able to say. I'm really excited about who I will be and where I'm going to go. I give God and WHL a lot of the praise for that. I look back at what have been the two things that have impacted my life the most through life, and one is having come to know Jesus as my personal savior, and WHL.

WHL made such a difference in my life...just stripped me of all the shame. When someone takes the video and shows it to the world...and they see something (in me) that I could not see, that was like, OH, wow! And it's not about glory. The hardest task for women is to hear "I see something in you" but that they can't see what you see in them. That doesn't happen until some work is done to clear away the wreckage. And the path had been paved...I couldn't see what they saw until some of this work was done. And now I see what they saw, and I like it too!

It's really nice! I would have thought I was being egotistical or conceited, but now, I'm worthy. God has made me worthy. I'm doing God's work to the fullest.

Q: What are your gifts that make you the perfect person to be doing this work? What are the gifts that you bring?

The passion...the passion...the passion moves you in ways you never thought you would go. The vision...the commitment...the sacrifice...and the obedience.

Q: How has WHL helped you to cultivate these gifts, if at all?

They've allowed me to till the soil. I think of the farmer who has a big field, who planted corn, and for three years nothing came up, then one year he said let me take the chance one more time, and he tilled the soil one more time, and then corn came up.

Q: In doing the work that you do, tell me what have been your greatest victories and rewards in the last few years, and what have been your disappointments in the last few years?

I think my greatest victories are when I can get a woman to engage in dialogue about her sexual abuse, and she comes back, and she doesn't run. That seems really simple, but it's not that simple, dealing with addiction. Those are the moments I most cherish. I had a woman who just graduated who came to me and said, "Karen, I'm in school, and it's only because of you that I went". That's a victory. That's a reward.

The hardest thing in my ministry...I just recently lost a young man who got shot in the back of the head...20 years old...it hurts but I say "Lord, did I do all I was supposed to do, did I say all I was supposed to say?", and then I say, "Lord, if I didn't, then I repent...forgive me". Then it

shocks me, for the next young man or young woman, like the next time I'll hear more, I'll really listen more. Those are the hard times.

I think the greatest thing, my supervisor said that I've become the mother of this agency. I don't know if it's a positive thing, it's just who I am. Another thing she said is "Karen, when a woman gets her children back from children's services, you should see yourself. You get so happy about that woman getting those children back...the love that you give, you just stroke her and say 'I knew you could do it, you're a great mom'". Encouragement is what so many people need. Every woman needs the foundation of her mother, and a lot of them don't have moms. I know the need;...if I didn't try to assist in that need... I would be worthless if I couldn't say "you've done a good job..." There's one that had her kids in the system five years...now she has her kids with her...whoa, that's awesome! Those are the successes for me; I count my successes so different from other people, it's the small things.

Q: What has been WHL's role, if any, in sharing those victories and disappointments?

I think just being a part of my creation and maturity, giving me the ability to evaluate, to see clearly, and to be non-reactive. I used to be so client-oriented, I couldn't see anything at the administrative level because I'm so client-oriented, and I think WHL taught me the maturity where I can see it on both levels now. That was a big goal for me, because I would have more fights in this place...and then I realized that as a leader, you must know purpose, structure, and there's function. There are awesome administrators that I came to respect and I think that WHL brought that. It came not so much in the groups but from the Connies and the Robins and the Ella Kellys and the Diane Littlefields, and, Katherine Hall, it came from the presentation of who they are and how they presented themselves. I saw that they're really concerned about the Birthing Project...and yet there's this other part that has to be very important, too, and I had to grow up from being just a client advocate to being an administrator, that's part of the growth in leadership. I only took part of the role, now I take the full dose of the role.

Q: How has your organization changed as a result of your participation in WHL; has service changed, or the way you provide service?

I can see the maturity in my leadership responsibility. I really get called on a lot; I get used in a lot of ways. I think when they hired me, they hired me as a manager but didn't tell anybody else, so there's a lot of conflicts with that. I wasn't as mature as I am now. I think now that I'm more that manager person they were looking for, even though that's not the title I have. I'm called on a lot in different problem solving situations, and some of my respect comes from that.

Q: Has that (your new maturity) changed the way in which you're providing service?

Definitely. I have more colleagues coming to me. I give more direction, I get other supervisors coming to me, and do a lot of trouble shooting in my own department. I'm dependable, and that they cannot deny. I'm the one in the crunch, I'm the one in the crisis, I'm the one who'll make the sacrifice, I'll go the extra distance, the extra mile, and that comes from the maturity. It has nothing to do with personality, it has more to do with investment in the work, just where I want

to go and want to learn, I'm just really open to be a sponge in my life, to absorb as much administrative skills as I can learn. I have a vision of my own program for the next year.

Q: Tell me about that vision.

It's after care for women, a Christian after care program that will deal with women who have been sober 12-15 months; you find a lot of women will relapse at 15 months because of the unfinished business such as sexual and physical abuse. The memory comes back; a lot of women don't have the foundation of tools (to prevent relapse). I've done a needs assessment (I should have done a written needs assessment instead of a verbal one, for funding purposes, I learned that from WHL!); there is a great need for this. I get a lot of calls from women; I see a picture with a wonderful old house and a kitchen and dining room; moms and their children come to the group around 5-5:30 once or twice a week, have dinner with their children, having that time with their children. Then around 7:00 the children go to do their studies, have child care, Bible study, and the moms go into a structured treatment group, therapy group. Then by 8:30 or so everyone is on their way home. There might be some children who need to stay and have baths...

Q: What kind of funds are you looking for for this?

Somebody that will let me do what I want to do and put no restrictions on me (laughter!!). I don't want anyone to take the Christianity out of it, the spirituality of it. I may need to change the "Christianity" to "spirituality". It's called "Send One Ministry". It's a ministry of reconciliation, bringing women back to themselves and back to the Lord. I'm already walking as if it already "is".

Q: Tell me about the policy and advocacy activities here at your organization, any changes that you may have been able to implement as a result of your participation in WHL.

We're very much an advocacy program, starting back in 1985. We have maybe 20-25 coalitions and forums that we all participate in; we're a strong organization. I do general relief and AFDC clients which has just changed in the past year; I used to deal a lot with children's advocacy, sexual abuse and prevention. For a small agency, we're kind of everywhere, but I've been narrowed down to the general relief area. We do a lot of work around the HIV task force; we go to the Board of Supervisors, take clients down there for rallies. We're at a high level of activity. I was really involved in the policy and advocacy before WHL.

Q: Have you considered a career or a job change?

The job change, if there is one, will be me doing the after care program. I won't go work for someone else unless I'm terminated. Then, I'll work with my vision, and in the next year or two I plan to be travelling the country, that the vision is in place and there's staff to run it, and I'll be preaching the word of God across the country. So no, I don't see myself leaving here to go work for someone else.

I have another vision: to work for Delta airlines, making about \$65,000 a year doing a drug treatment program there, have my program (Send One Ministry), at a corporation of that magnitude. I'm sure they have drug problems there but they don't really address it. I have a brother who's an addict who works for them and I know his own struggles are not taken care of within Delta. And I would be able to travel and do my ministry. I love my visions! It's "out there", but it's intact!

Q: What is the connection between your passion for doing this work and the status of women's health overall?

I see domestic violence and substance abuse as health care issues for women. It's not just medical care anymore, the pap and the breast exam...I think the domestic violence is a health care issue, they come in with broken bones, the mental status, and disengagement from themselves and their children. I think substance abuse works in the same area, as a health care issue, major. My passion is working with women who are disadvantaged who have some kind of major issue in their lives. I deal with the women who are hurt and in pain, I want the woman who wants to heal.

Q: What's WHL's role in cultivating that or in helping to make that connection, if any?

To keep training grassroots women to move out into the community and to branch out, and to follow their passions and visions. I think the education that they give and skills they teach. Like Dr. Soheir Stolba, with the proposal. I could take a grantmaking course for \$1500; she did it in a weekend in San Francisco. That gave me the basis, gave me the tools to hold on to, it's just a matter of me sitting there studying them and mastering them and practicing them, to know that I have all the tools. I think the education they gave and the instillment of what you can really do; the skies are yours!

Q: What is your advice to potential applicants? What would you tell them?

Go for it! Go for it! I was not going to apply my first year; I called at something like 3:00 in the afternoon on the deadline, I asked Connie because I was not able to bring my application over, I had mistakes in it, I said please keep me on your mailing list for next year and Connie insisted that I go ahead and send in what I had. I faxed it in, in fact I faxed three copies because that's what it said!! Unless Connie encouraged me, I can't say I would have sent it in, and I can't say I would have done it the next year, I don't know where I would have been. I really appreciate the encouragement.

I was kind of disappointed that I didn't get applications to give out this year; I think last year I got about 20 and I think 2 of the people applied, Toni Mosely is one. I give out a lot of applications. When my sister came for the graduation, there were at least 5 or 6 women from the Bay Area who were in our class, she really dug it...supports it.

Q: What advice would you give to the staff around recruitment...obviously they need to send you some applications!

They need to keep me on the review board and keep me updated on some of the changes. I would love to participate on the review board. I think the outreach to applicants-the most successful way is word of mouth. And I think to make individuals such as myself, responsible for the passion we say that we have, making us responsible to do some advocacy work and to do some outreach for WHL, and recycling...some of the old needs to do the work, to get people in.

Q: Do you have any other suggestions or recommendations that you'd like me to bring back to staff about anything else to do differently with this program to better it?

I think it's awesome. I think if they would have asked me that the year after my graduation, I would have stressed the alumni group, I would have stressed keeping us in contact, that whole "don't want to let go" syndrome. Now that I'm a couple of years older and wiser I kind of like not having the obligation...I've grown and my plate is full. I will never walk away from WHL; I would never refuse them anything. I will always be proud that I was there and that I'm a part of it, that "blood"...I think it's nice being in the first class, there's a certain specialty about that. I don't know what I can say to do different...send me another couple of sweatshirts!

I think they do an excellent job...I think they're organized, I think they're skillful, they're talented, they're creative, they're empowering, they're courageous. There's not much more they can do. They will have to be the ones to see where they need to improve...to see the weakness...I don't see it...I can't imagine...

Q: Does WHL fill a particular need or gap; would it matter if WHL were to close its doors?

I think it would be a total loss to the women's movement and to the health care movement. It would be a major loss and it would be felt.

Just here where I work, just with me, out of 100 women, 65-70 homeless drug addicted women had their children taken away to the courts, and got their children back have benefited just from me being a part of WHL in that one year. And I'm just one person. I'm quite sure that 50 other women and the women that they have touched have also benefited.

Cheryle Bernard-Shaw, 1996 Alumni

Q: Describe to me the woman who wrote her application for WHL and then describe the woman who is sitting before me now. Did you describe yourself as a leader before the program? Has that changed?

When I applied for WHL, I had recently completed a city council race for the City of Richmond wherein I didn't win, but it was a lot of growth for me at that time. I was kind of depressed and feeling that I wasn't validated as a person. So I kind of applied to WHL on a whim. I needed something that would make me feel better and also to make me feel like I am worth something, because the whole campaign process is so negative, you don't feel worthwhile because of the dirty campaign tactics that other campaigners may employ. For the most part, I was feeling pretty down. Getting accepted to WHL was like an unbelievable dream come true. To get chosen, really surprised me. I didn't even think I was qualified to get considered among that group of women! I was shocked and very happy.

Now, going on two years later, I certainly feel like I am more confident about myself and am not judging myself on my failures or the things that I am not successful with. WHL showed me that I'm still a good person, I'm still successful, I've still arrived in terms of some of my political and career goals. So I'm not judging myself as harshly as a result of WHL.

I did see myself as a self-imposed leader. When I'm in a group, I tend to be the one who ends up as the group leader somehow, because I put my opinions out there, but I did not see myself as a leader the community would choose. Although I was running for city council and getting accustomed to the political arena, and had interactions with my community, I really did not know a lot about the community in general, in terms of just the average, everyday person. I had not interacted with any community groups on a long term basis, and although people knew of me because of some of the groups I had worked in, it wasn't the grassroots segment of the community. Running for city council made me realize that was something I really needed to work on. And then, going through WHL, got me more in touch with that because I was working with other peer leaders who *are* a part of the community and seeing how they operated. That gave me the impetus to do more in terms of getting more actively involved with boards, more on a grassroots level. So now I serve on several community boards. And I feel like if I were to run again, it would be a whole different outcome because now I feel more invested in the community that I live in, and they know me. I know a lot more now and can speak as a leader of the community.

Also, WHL had some very useful trainings. The one on community organizing had people from the political arena speaking to us about the whole process of getting elected and getting ethically involved in the community. Another training was on legislative affairs. The most important thing I got from that was a bird's eye view of what the typical duties are that an elected official performs on a daily basis, and we also got a good grounding in the whole process of making a bill, from inception to actually passing it into law. I also attended some of the CEWAR activities because I got the information through WHL. That's the research arm for the California elected

women officials. That was interesting, hearing from Assembly people and local officials who attended, about some of the issues that were important to them. So that was really beneficial. The other helpful training was the time-management one, by phone. I'm not always great at keeping up with the techniques, but I did use them at least for a few months, and it did help during those few months. But what I think was most important about the trainings we had was the interaction with the other ladies, the other peer leaders. Just hearing what they were able to do with no money or little money or very few resources every time I went to a training was very motivating, not just for myself, but for most of the other peer leaders that I've stayed in touch with.

Q: Have you incorporated WHL into your personal and professional life since you've returned to your community? If so, what does that look like for you and your circle of women?

Yes, my department is part of the Maternal and Child Health program for the state, and when I attend their conferences, I see the WHL staff members there, promoting WHL. Connie [a WHL staff member] was on a committee to select speakers for one of the Maternal and Child Health conferences and she gave my name to one of the planners and I got to be a speaker at one of the programs. That was really good because I don't think that anyone in Marin County has been asked to be a speaker before, so that gave me some recognition and it was noticed by my boss and superiors. They were curious to know about my WHL connection!

And just this past week, I got some great news: that I've been appointed to the Task Force for the Office of Multicultural Health. The information on that appointment was in my WHL materials. I applied last year, but didn't get accepted. This year, I was, and I think it was a direct result of my graduation from the WHL program. I put that down this time, and not last time because I wasn't a graduate yet. I'm sure that's what made the difference because it was the exact same application, other than that I'm also teaching part time at one of the local universities. Those two things made me attractive as a Task Force member. It's gotten me a lot of recognition at work, from my boss and her boss. They're very excited about me participating on a state level on some of the health issues that affect minorities.

There are also lots of little things that have brought me further recognition, in regards to WHL. For example, they've been sending me notices about managed care, and local meetings addressing that. Without their notices, I wouldn't have known about them. At one of these meetings, I made some comments that got repeated by almost everybody at the meeting and then I got asked by the director of the Office of Women's Health, at the state level, to give her feedback in writing and to contact her. It's mushrooming, in terms of me getting more involved in my community, and at the state and local level because of my involvement in WHL.

From WHL, I've been bringing information back not only to my work setting, but also to my community, with some of the groups I have been working with. I'm on the board now for Planned Parenthood Shasta Diablo, and Greater Richmond Social Services and I just recently got off of a health care board. I use the information from WHL to prepare for a speech, or to pass on to another person, or to network with other women in the women's health field. I've gone to a

few conferences and gotten involved with other groups, because there's always information in the big WHL packets. I miss that. But I still see some of my fellow WHL alumni at various Bay Area conferences and we all gravitate toward one another, and support one another in our comments at those meetings. We tell each other what we're doing and ask for each other's support. It really has added an extra dimension to my networking and also to my visibility.

Being the kind of person that I am, I probably would have been doing a lot anyway, but WHL boosted it even further and made it happen quicker. It would have taken me longer to get where I am now, professionally, without WHL. So it's been really positive. Now that I'm a graduate, my boss mentions it to others she thinks should apply. That's gotten me respect and recognition at my job. Now I'm much more vocal about my feelings, whereas before, I was kind of reticent about sharing my knowledge. Being in WHL pushed me to the forefront because I had "inside" information now about what was going on at the state level and through the various contacts they had exposed me to. I was able to give information that the management team may not be aware of. I would say that it quadrupled my impact in terms of the things that I'm able to do.

Q: Are these the personal changes you had hoped for or expected? What was the most unexpected outcome of your participation in the program?

It's greater than I expected. Initially I expected to meet other women who are doing things and to get the motivation to continue to do some of the things I want to do, like write a book and be more of an activist in my approach to health care for women, but it's exceeded even that. I did not expect to: get chosen for a state task force, to be looked at as a leader, to get the recognition in my job. These are "extras" as a result of my involvement with WHL. And just the knowledge base: I have access to more information; I still have all the mailings and use those for meetings, etc.

This program should be throughout the U.S. Women really are connected to family and communities and can really make the changes; it won't happen via the status quo. We are the worker bees; we can really make the changes and have an immediate impact on health care status. WHL should expand to key cities (especially cities with urban decline); there you can get the worker bees involved in miraculous changes that they have not been able to accomplish with the current leadership and current levels of funding. Also, women are perceived as less threatening and can make changes at the local level and have more chance of success. WHL has a role in changing the health care status of many communities throughout the U.S., California, being looked to as a leader, can expand this program elsewhere. At conferences of lawyers which I attend, others want to have access to a program like WHL but I have to tell them it's only available in California. WHL should expand! (If they don't do it, maybe I'll do it!)

Q: In thinking back to the WHL training areas, were there any that fell short of your needs and that you feel could have improved your capacity to do your work? At this particular point in your leadership journey, what else would you like to learn and improve upon that would help to move you further along?

[Referring to question regarding training areas] No. If anything, time was an issue. There was

so much, sometimes too much information. All trainings were invaluable, there was not enough time to do all of it. Two days was too short, but then again, too long when we went all day. We needed more time to focus on each topic. I would suggest fewer topics, with more in-depth focus on the topic. Speakers sometimes were great; but I got a lot from discussion periods held with the peer leaders. Make the speakers' sessions shorter, discussion sessions with peer leaders longer. Some speakers were so good you wanted to hear more. The best seminar was at the Capitol. We all saw ourselves in those Senate seats! We got motivated and felt like we could change things. Unfortunately, I think it should have happened earlier to keep up motivation. I think they should keep it as a regular part of the program. We were "high" on that experience. It made me think about getting my political career back on track but that I need to do some planning first. For politics, you need a community base first, then plan your goals, then branch into a political career.

[Referring to question on leadership journey] What I need now is more of a mentor. If once we graduate, the program had some mentors available to us in health care or business in general, like a "big sister", someone to keep you connected to some of the experiences you've had (in the program.) Maybe a one-year mentor. Faculty members serve this purpose but their time is somewhat diverted. Maybe better to use, as mentors, non-faculty members so that they are more available. I don't want to take away from my faculty members' current involvement with the program. I also think that WHL should write a book about this program. I go to a lot of women's conferences, where good books are available. Buying these is extremely helpful and motivating. This WHL is unique and should be shared with others, to motivate them and inspire them to commit to action in their own communities.

Q: Tell me about your greatest disappointment and your greatest victory in working with your community during the past couple of years. What have been the risks and the rewards? Describe WHL's role in contributing to those times.

The greatest disappointment is seeing how "dirty politics" really plays a part in politics. Women need to know what those games are so they'll be ready for them and not be stopped by them. I think women don't have the support base from other women that they should. A lot of women I've seen will support a man just because he's a man; they still support men as authoritative figures and won't support women. I'd like to see that change; women don't see themselves as empowered to change their lives.

Another disappointment is seeing how more people don't seem to care and don't see being active in the community arena as worthwhile. When I was running for political office, people kept saying "what's in it for you?, you can't just want to do good for the community". They did not see it as something genuinely good that you wanted to do. I constantly assured people that I didn't have any hidden agenda. Maybe it is naive but I really did want to do some good for the community that I lived in. If I did not take an interest, and if everybody felt powerless, the community would continue to go downhill.

In terms of victories, just sticking with the whole process and not being discouraged by naysayers really was a victory for me. WHL gave me a little knowledge of people who had

actually achieved some of the things that I wanted to achieve, something to aspire to. The direct one on one contact with people who are actually doing things, like being elected to political office (other women), gave me courage to continue to pursue my career and political goals and to do what I can to make my community better.

It was a risk to run for office without a community base and without knowing much about the political process; WHL made me appreciate that it was a risk that in the long run has been beneficial for me. All the peer leaders are risk takers! I didn't see myself as a risk taker at first, nor did I see the other peer leaders at first. I thought, some don't have an education, money, contacts, the right language or looks. Then you heard their stories and accomplishments. Kathryn's story is very inspiring. When I found out that she was a faculty member and that I would have access to her, that was amazing. I couldn't believe I was in the same arena with her. Just being with that caliber of women, made me feel like "I can do this!" I don't need money, I don't need the approval of men, I don't need the support of the whole community, it just needs me to start. That's what WHL gave me and what I take with me now.

The biggest reward has been learning more about myself. That instead of looking at my glass as "half empty" I started looking at it as "half full". The reading materials provided by WHL gave us a personal look at women's lives and I started looking at my life in those same terms-women taking their situations and creating something out of nothing. That was really inspiring and I think that's what WHL teaches us to do. We can go talk to the governor, and do it with confidence. We have the tools, the contacts that WHL provided. Even if people don't know much about WHL, they see that there is something to it, that these are powerful women. Here are all these women out here who are warriors for their community! I think that comes out.

Q: Did you choose to do this work, or did it choose you?

I think, both. I'm the kind of person that responds to a need, but as I started responding, I got something out of it in the process. Then it became more of my choice at some point; I felt that if I don't contribute or give something back then we haven't really evolved as a race of people, or as women. It's a combination of feeling chosen and of choosing. Now I get so much out of it. Most WHL women have a high energy level; you need it to do some of the work we're trying to do in our communities. It's like finding a group of women who are very much like you but very different too, and learning something from all of them. I used to be a person who had to have the right degree, do all the right things before you could make an impact. When I saw some of the women-some might not have had a high school education- and here they are doing tremendous things in their community, it really changed my focus. Now I appreciate the contributions of everyone, not just the ones who have taken a "certain little path" to success. In fact I don't even consider my success to be that-it's more what can I do to improve someone's life other than my own; what can I leave behind that's worthwhile versus the next dollar I'm going to get. If you try to help and really have an impact, then it seems like the money just comes with it. WHL had a tremendous impact on my life. The other peer leaders I've talked to feel the same way.

Q: What gifts do you bring to this work that make you the perfect person to be doing it? Has

WHL played a part in cultivating these gifts? How?

Desire is one. Energy is two. Awareness that there is a need for something to happen that can have a positive impact. Then I think my ability to pull people together, be a conciliator and sometimes a mediator. I don't like to be in the limelight but would rather push people forward; this has the effect of having them recognize me. Some of the group processes that we've done in WHL like telling our stories and supporting the other peer leaders changed my view of leadership.

WHL has played a very big role in cultivating my gifts. It made me aware that I had things that could be considered as gifts in terms of the work I wanted to do, and made us feel unique and special. Robin and Connie and Rhodea made us feel really special and important. Then our peer leaders are making us feel special and important by letting us talk and tell our stories. That had a lot to do with getting me confident enough to share what I'm all about. Not feeling afraid to support other women. WHL had a lot to do with this for me. Kind of like a sorority but much more positive.

Q: How has your participation in WHL affected your organization, if at all? Has the way it provides service or the service itself changed? What about policy and advocacy activities? Do you have a vision for how to further strengthen the organization? Have you considered changing your career or your job? Please elaborate.

I have received a lot of recognition. I get a lot of questions from people who are interested. Like Heather Gould, who is working on a reproductive health project for UCSF. I've been trying to help her on her project and also she knew of me through WHL and approached me. Also, information I've been able to pass along that I've gotten through WHL, participation on the Multicultural Task Force, and the information that I can share with my organization and vice versa.

I am Chief of Women's Health Services, Marin County. Planning, managing health care services to mostly indigent women but women throughout the county as well. We respond to health care needs as well as provide direct health care services like maternity, family planning, and WIC. We are planning and anticipating needs but also provide direct services. WHL helped my visibility here in the organization and the ability to share information with others in my organization.

The perception was that WHL is for minority women; that gave it a negative connotation and discouraged people from applying. I was instrumental in dispelling that myth. The program is not just for minority women! My boss is now encouraging others in the organization to apply.

Q: Why?

Earlier, I was having trouble with one of my supervisors; my confidence level shot up with my participation in WHL, so she has seen the benefits for me, saying "This WHL program has been really good for you", and is trying to encourage managers in the organization to apply. She

would like to see other staff members' confidence improve and their relationships with their superiors improve.

My participation in the program has changed the way we provide services. One part of my project, Marin City, is difficult to provide services for. With a WHL peer leader in Marin City (Margo), I was able to incorporate Marin City work activities with my WHL project, to share some of that information with managers here and it gave us a different approach. Planning process is much more interactive with the community now; it was a big suggestion of mine to gain community involvement. This approach has been much more successful; the community makes a recommendation now and we're much more sensitive and responsive than we were in the past. Using the Marin City project as my WHL project has been beneficial.

[Re: Policy and advocacy activities] WHL has had an impact in terms of my knowledge base. The reading materials I refer to quite frequently. We've talked about using the alumni group as an advocacy vehicle and I've been talking with another peer leader (Marlene) about doing a breast cancer training. We talk about how we can support each other in advocating for things that are important to us both in our communities. Through WHL, I have partners that can help me do all this; I don't have to do it all. I stay in touch, get some support for doing grassroots advocacy. At work, public speaking requests come up which I can now participate in, for example, contributing information to a panel which forwards advocacy on different issues.

What I try to do with each of the groups that I work with is to include planning with other people, and at different levels. We are able to see the whole big picture this way. WHL was able to give me an opportunity to learn about the planning process but to also to incorporate a "bigger picture". A lot of our activities are not just "one shot deals"; we try to see what impact this is going to have overall. Like incorporating child care issues into welfare reform discussions, and how we can mentor women trying to get off welfare. So I've been able to work within a bigger vision, versus "my" little vision.

[Re: Changing career or job] Yes. There's still work for me here to do but I've been looking at positions that would give me broader big picture responsibility, like a statewide or national position. I've applied to work with Bill Clinton's administration; the contact came to me via WHL. Working on the state task force will probably help, as well as my contact with Kathryn Hall. I plan to call her; I'm hoping she remembers my name! Her name comes up so much as a requested speaker, she is really well thought of and well respected. I want to be another Kathryn! My interest will be more health care law, and addressing the inequities in health care for women. Policy is really important but who ends up writing the laws can make a big impact. A lot of lawmakers do not seem to care about women's focus; I think I could bring the legal, legislative perspective to my future work.

Q: What would you tell other women who may be considering applying to the program?

Look, do this. Run, do not walk. Get your application in! You need to do it, and see for yourself! I sound like a poster child for WHL! Here's a way to get exposure to women actually doing these things and to get where you want to get, quicker. I am always marketing WHL because it has

been such a wonderful growth opportunity for me. I want others to have the chance, especially here at my workplace. We would have more visionaries here; that would make things easier for me.

Q: What do you think are some of the fears about applying for the program?

Women wonder how they can add one more thing to their plate. The biggest fear for most of us overachievers is, how can you participate in the program and still do the other work successfully? It has been worth it for me to take a couple of things off my plate and add WHL to my "plate". Those other things are back on my plate, and I'm better at them. So I think if you encourage others and that the program will build upon their skills, you'll get more people interested. We had one person drop out; I ran into her at a conference and I said, "Look, this would have been great for you to finish. I can't tell you how much we've gotten..." It's added breadth and depth to my skills. She was sitting back, looking at us, really impressed.

...other intimidating factors?

That they won't be accepted, that they will have to accomplish more before they can be considered. They have high standards for themselves, and won't apply. People have to be proud of their accomplishments and know that they have had impact. Recruitment should be conducted at the local level, with community groups, maybe at local libraries, too. NAACP has access to potential recruits. Recruitment should still occur at MCH, but should expand to the community level. WHL probably doesn't have the staff to spread themselves around...use alumni for recruitment purposes.

Q: What are your suggestions to WHL for recruitment strategies?

Those (above) are the main suggestions I have. Also, putting articles in local papers, telling life stories of WHL peer leaders, would be effective. Some ideas would be the Richmond Post, SF Chronicle, and Oakland papers. This provides a human perspective to the benefits of the program. Also, use WHL graduates to talk on local cable. I also think you might want to go to some of the sorority conferences, also to local Democratic Clubs (they would know of other community groups to contact). Following up on the applications would be good. Provide personal recommendations from local WHL participants.

Q: Do you have other suggestions for WHL staff?

Use our alumni group to mentor graduates; it keeps alumni group connected. We've got to have something to do. Alumni can recruit for WHL; I think most would volunteer their time. And Alumni can be on a contact list for people interested in the program. They can call us for more information. That makes the alumni feel connected and like we have a purpose. Nobody wanted to graduate from the program!!

Q: Would it make a difference if WHL were to close its doors?

Yes, it would make a difference if WHL closed its doors, and it would be a negative difference. There has been no vehicle, without WHL, to empower women to make a difference. This is what has been missing; the government has been throwing money at problems but it hasn't helped. Women need support to do what they do every day that really makes a difference. With health care, some of the future issues are critical. There are no answers to these issues. Money won't resolve them, people will. People are willing to take responsibility, women can be used in this way. WHL closing its doors would not be good. I think they have to take it national, to get the credibility they need. Apply it to urban and rural communities in other states. Apply to The Office of Maternal and Child Health for infrastructure to expand the program.

There is interest at the national level for WHL. There is nothing else like WHL available! The Congressional Black Caucus has a health conference in December; WHL should go and give a presentation. It may be too late for this year, but maybe next year. WHL needs exposure nationally, then we will get a lot of interest.

Luz Engelbrecht, 1995 Alumni

Q: *Describe to me the woman who wrote her application to WHL and then describe to me the woman who is sitting before me now.*

I was a woman who was -I just have to tell you about the application first. I received it two weeks before the deadline and I really think it was because I was on the mailing list from attending the Women in Diversity conference at Stanford. I went to my Director at the time and said "have you seen this?..." and she said that she was going to apply for it. I said, "oh...actually, I think you're overqualified"...and told her that I was interested in applying. She wasn't very supportive; that made me even all the more determined. I had a homeless woman staying with our family at the time-she had her two little boys with her-and on Monday nights my daughter was babysitting for someone else's child and it was the night before the deadline. I was going to sit down and write it all out...I had it all planned out in my head, I thought...and I got home and the house was just full of people and there was no dinner, so I go about making spaghetti...my husband had just built and fired up a brand new hot tub for us...I thought there's no way this (the application) is going to happen...so by the time I was free to sit down and write it, I was exhausted! I thought, that hot tub is a gift, so I decided to go sit in it and it rejuvenated me. I came out of there and typed the application all up and took it in the next morning...without a grammar check! I was determined to find support because I didn't have that. When you're a health educator in a rural community, you're wearing so many hats...you're just out there and doing the work, and you don't ever really get an opportunity to nourish yourself as far as support for people doing what we're doing. Usually, in a rural community, you work for an organization that doesn't have any money to send you anywhere...I was just really feeling that in my life, that it was time to go back to school. But I had made a decision that I wasn't going to pursue my own academic goals as long as my daughter was still under my roof, in school. I get so into it, that I wouldn't have time for anybody or anything.

I was also a lot more timid, I would say. I think it's because I didn't have the confidence to stand up in front of authority figures, or people who had power, to express, for example, if I needed money for a particular campaign. In health education you always need money. I can do things on a shoestring budget, but you still need a budget! I would hold back a lot, and I think I talked to Connie about this. I worked in an all white organization, I was the only person of color in my organization and to top it off I was a woman of color. Some people don't want to look at you...if you're educated and you have skills, they feel threatened. Some don't want you to have more than they have. It was something I just learned to work with, because you have to survive, you have to keep that job.

I think that after I went through WHL, after being with women from such diverse cultures, such diverse work backgrounds and education, it was just very nurturing to me. I refer to WHL as my "miracle grow". It was what I needed. They understood. The rural community that I came from is a place where the majority of people live below poverty level. There are migrant workers that live on \$600.00 a month, for a whole family.

Who am I now...I just said goodbye to our CEO who was with us for a year and a half. He just dropped by last night and sort of summed it up, and said, "you know, Luz, I just know that you're this woman that's going to go out there and do what she says she's going to do!" Whereas before, I would think about doing it but I didn't say I was going to do it. I might want to do it, but I wouldn't say I was going to do it. I know that now, if I'm going to do something, if I make the decision, I'll do it. I am definitely more empowered. I've gone from being our health educator to being the director of our Lassen Wellness Center (part of the Northeastern Rural Health Clinics) and also co-director of a fitness grant that we just got.

Being a Health Educator is a vocation because once you're a health educator, it never leaves you. You don't go and become a waitress; you'd be a waitress and a health educator!

Q: What you are saying is that before, you would have ideas but that now you're more likely to act on those ideas?

Yes, I am. The supervisor that I had during the WHL program was very supportive of me being a part of WHL. He had a very supportive way of being. Once I submitted a report to him, and he came out and said, "what are you doing here?...you should be working somewhere else making lots of money!" He said that the quality of my work was excellent. Before, I don't think that I would have believed him. Now I have more confidence to say, "you're right...I do a good job." This (job) is where I am right now, and that's okay.

Q: Did you describe yourself as a leader before the WHL program?

I was a type of leader; I can be a leader in my neighborhood. Even from when I was really young, I was such a bookworm, and a reader, very literate, that people in the neighborhood came to me for help with their job applications, even as a young girl. And I helped them with their taxes, referred them to social services, that kind of thing (in Santa Barbara, in a Spanish speaking neighborhood). In this community now, people know Luz, particularly the migrant workers, they know that they can call me or come by the office-I'm a lot busier-they can still come and say "Luz..we need this, or I have a friend with a problem" I'm still doing that.

Q: Did your perception of yourself as a leader change through WHL?

I always saw myself as a helper, I think now I can nurture that in people, as well. For instance, we had Marilyn Powell (1996 class)-she works at our Lassen Indian Health Clinic. She went through times when she would say..."I just really can't do this". And I'd say, "yes, you can! Don't let little things be barriers that get in your way." I told her that if this is really what you want to do, then you could do it, in your own time. One winter, one of her children was very ill, and she said "Luz, I just happen to run into you at the times when I really need you the most!" I asked her what was going on and she said "my baby's been sick, and I have to move, all these things..." I asked her how her project was going and she said "Okay, but I just haven't had any time..." and I told her that there will be time. I've watched her blossom, from starting out working in the perinatal program, she's back in school now and pursuing her R.N. and I'm excited for her. It's hard to say you're a leader. I find myself hemming and hawing, beating around the bush.

Q: *Were the changes that you experienced through WHL the changes that you had hoped for or expected when you applied for the program?*

They're definitely what I hoped for. Realizing those changes and living them and incorporating them in my career and even in my home life and my community life, have been MORE than what I thought I was going to get out of the program. The connections you continue to maintain with people, the web we wove of all those fibers, all those women, is very strong. It's like a little "blankie"....!! It's a strong fabric, a strong weave. I called on Dr. Kelly a couple of weeks ago, she was very gracious and gave me some insight on some information that I needed. I called Gail Nickerson just this past week because we're going through some changes with our billing and I knew she would be a person I could ask, who might have that information as well. I keep in touch with my advisor, Nancy Cavanaugh, a lot. She's a very knowledgeable woman. I just participated in a workshop that she put on for us; we asked her to put on a grant budget workshop. She put that together for us, we spent a day and a half on that, and it was great. I looked at her, and said, "Gosh, Nancy, I want to be like you...I want to be as knowledgeable as you are!" She just knows a lot particularly from a business perspective...I've always been one of the worker bees...I don't have that perspective yet. I, as Director of the Wellness Center, just started using Stephen Covey's 7 Habits...he recommended that periodically you send out a little questionnaire to your staff about how you're doing, how you can be a better director...what am I doing right, what am I doing wrong...Everything I got back was very positive; I don't even think I would have had the confidence to send out something like that.

There's something that happened to me that year in WHL; it was about knowing my truth. It was about knowing what was right in my heart and just using that as my grounding and as my wellspring of strength and vision and keeping to it. Being able to stay focused so that I can continue to pursue the things that I hope can make a better life for my community, to continue to nurture that.

Q: *What was the most unexpected outcome for you, during that year?*

This was a very honorable thing...we're sitting in the room; it was the last meeting of our peer group. We were in Nancy's little hotel suite and we all were saying positive things about each person, and, let me see if I can say this without getting real emotional...One of the ladies said, "And Luz, she is a deacon in my church...she is a healer...she just went on and on... a minister of spirit". She said these beautiful things, and that was really very touching. That was very unexpected. When you try to come from spirit, from who I am, I've been teased about it all my life...I felt crowned at that time, I felt like I'd been touched by the Lord, the mighty sword, or like White Buffalo Calf Woman had come and handed me the pipe. I was really very honored...it was very special, very unexpected. And then I got a raise; that was also very wonderful! I've always been underpaid for what I do; it's because it's a lesson for me in life. I've had to learn to value myself, not to lessen my value. At the time, I went to my Director and told him that I was underpaid, and he said, well, do a survey, do some research...I researched Health Education positions in northern California, I put together a report and of course I had this high ideal of what my salary should be, but I found that I was underpaid by about \$10,000 a year. When I went to them with all this data...learning to negotiate and not get that attitude that I grew up with...being

able to negotiate is a good thing that I've learned. And not get so high and mighty; that was a good thing.

I want to comment a little about some of the workshops that I attended. They were very inspirational to me. They were things that I had never experienced, for example, how the California Congress works...that particular workshop offered a piece of knowledge that I didn't have before. Having someone there explain to you how the process works, how to pass a law, or make policy, took away the "dragons" about that. That was very good for me. I felt that I could just go sit down and write a letter to my Congressman, or...no...not even bother writing a letter, I'm going to call him on the phone! Sohear Stolba's workshop on grantwriting...made me think, "well, I can do that!" And knowing that she would be available to me at any time. Looking over some of the grants that have come by me, using that knowledge to make recommendations and having those grants be approved, knowing that they probably wouldn't have been approved before. Polishing it up, making it look good.

The other one that I really remember was Dr. Kelly -during the opening conference she talked about when you start your project, how to go about that, and the evaluation of it. She said "if this project is for the community, get the kids involved " I'd never thought of that. I'm such an independent person. That led to starting the teen focus group, a teen board, and teens peer teaching family planning at our clinic. A lot of changes. You can imagine all you want about the way you think things should be, but unless you feel that you have the power to do it, it's not going to happen. I began to feel that I had the power to do it, and that if one person said "No", you'd go to the next person. Before, I would just (accept a No). It's not a form of passivity, either; my way of doing things could be construed as being passive, or being a "yes" girl...I used to have a supervisor who said, "just give it to Luz, she'll make it into pink elephants"...it wasn't about being passive, it was part of my culture...this is how things are. I'll do what I can, in my own way, to make things happen. For me, to do things in my own way, from a spiritual perspective, like ceremony or prayer. There was a real big conflict between two entities in our community; I did prayer over that, I did ceremony, because I thought there was an imbalance. It's not about being passive. If I think things are really wrong, coming from (the gut), I won't be passive, I'll say, "no, I don't agree, or I think it would be better this way..." But I can also let go if I have to, not make myself crazy over it. I'm not a power monger or controller. I see people who work that way...they see how they want something to be and I'm more like "well, if it's supposed to happen that way, and if that's the right way..." and I do all my part in a good way, the good things will happen. You have to have faith.

Q: Have you considered a job or career change?

I'm going to the APHA/SOPHE conference in November; I'll participate in a workshop there for Health Educator careers. Managed care has so influenced health education as I knew it; I don't see things as continuing in the way we have done them. Technology is a big change force. I originally thought I'd go for an MPH but now I think I'll go for an MSW and become an LCSW and then I'm going to use that to put myself through my Ph.D.; I'm going to study Native American Religious Studies. That might not be until I'm like 55 years old...(laughter). When I went back to school I was 34-35 years old; I just wanted a BA. I took a lot of Native American

Religious Studies, Health Education, and counseling classes. That's where I really got into the wellness philosophy, understanding the integration between the person, people and the planet...it's something that's been woven in and out of the fabric...the fibers are becoming more plentiful.

One of the things I do with people at work when they want to change their behavior, like quit smoking or become more active, I tell them that every person is born with at least one gift; every person has a reason, a purpose for being here. There has been some research done on why people have addictions; one of the theories is that people have addictions because they are not focused on their purpose or their gifts; if people can live their lives more closely to their purpose, we will have less need for addictive habits, because our focus is our gift and our purpose. Some people can't remember their gifts...here's a hint. When you were a little kid, what did you want to be when you grew up? Try to think of before you started school, because when we get into school, we begin to get shaped not by what we want to be but by what our IQ's are, and the color of our skin, our sex, how much money....I'm trying to help people find what that is.

It's been incredible how that works. I had a man come in with his oxygen tanks who had to quit smoking and I asked him "what did you want to be when you were a little kid?". He wanted to be a musician; he wanted to play a guitar and had been given a guitar when he was little. Now this man was in his 70's, could barely breathe, needed his oxygen tanks, his hands were gnarled from arthritis. He used to play the piano but couldn't anymore, I asked, 'how about singing?' He said he used to carry his cigarettes in his pocket as a strawberry rancher. He says the loneliest part of his day is reaching for his smokes and they're not there. I suggested he try a harmonica, he did, and a couple of weeks later his wife called to say the harmonica was a great idea. A month later he comes back in, not carrying oxygen tanks, I mean really, this man was blowing on that little harp so much he was building up his respiratory system...it was a magical thing that happened because he picked something that was close to his heart. Another woman wanted to quit...all she could remember is that when she grew up she wanted to be a mother or a veterinarian, it turned out she could never have children and she was allergic to animals. She was a really heavy duty smoker. I told her that her choices told me that she is a very nurturing person, maybe there are some other ways that she could be nurturing. It ended up that she began growing violets in her home, because she lived in the snow. She ended up giving up smoking and growing these beautiful violets; she took them to the rest homes, ended up doing something that was close to who she was. I think today a lot of people lose that.

When I was telling my sister about this, she asked me if I remembered what I wanted to be when I was little. I had to say "no", that I remembered wanting to be a writer, but that was once I was in school...and she said, don't you remember how you used to pick all the leaves off the trees and crush them up and make us eat them, saying "these will make you feel better". I was always into medicine. I remember I used to go with my grandma to the reservation to play bingo; she'd get these little chips and I could use the chips to "buy" toys...I would always get doctor kits, my sister was reminding me of this. You didn't want the nurse kits; you wanted the doctor kits. I thought "Oh, my God", here's this little girl who wanted to be a healer from when she was little. When I was 12, my uncle who was really into herbs and massage, gave me a foot reflexology book and told me that I should learn how to use it. That's how it got going, not being a medical

doctor, but trying to make people feel better...when people around me feel better, then I feel better. When people around me are sad or hurting, I hurt.

Q: How has your participation in WHL affected your organization, if at all? Have services changed?

I think that people are more aware. I think, for services to really change, there has to be a change from the top down and I feel that people are less tolerant of poor service. I've seen people get fired. I'm hoping that the standard of care where I work has improved. It wasn't too bad when I was there but I did see some biases...now I think there's more balance at the table. People know I'm a watchdog.

Q: What about policy and advocacy activities. Has that changed at all in your organization?..

I was working with another woman; we had a vision of a wellness center. We've had the vision for 6 and a half years and a year ago we opened the Lassen Wellness Center. It took years of educating our medical director and our medical providers, decision makers, and staff. Something else happened...we had a director who used a team management style, we had a lot of strategic planning and visioning sessions with the staff, I would not have been a member of the management staff if it hadn't been for WHL. I really believe that. I owe that to Connie and Diane and...

Q: Do you have a vision for improving your organization?

Yes. First, we're just a handful of people who are trying to serve a growing community. I would like to see us attracting more people who have education and skills especially in mental health services, right now our therapists are booked two months in advance. We have a really big need. In fact, I'm looking for an LCSW right now. In rural communities, we are isolated with very few services. The county mental health only serves the severely mentally disturbed. We only have 4 private practice therapists in a community with about 15, 000 people; and our 3 practitioners where we work, and one person at Indian Health. So we have 8 people serving the entire county (mental health needs). I think the isolation in the community perpetuates generation after generation of incest and sexual abuse issues, family violence, families that are second and third generation alcohol and methamphetamine abusers. It's a really big problem. Right now we're working on a coalition of public health, private agencies and private practitioners putting together a system of care for severely emotionally disturbed children. We're having our first community meeting two weeks from now; it's been a long time coming. Maybe that's one of the reasons I'm growing into this focus of work; there is just such a need. That cycle has to stop; it's getting worse. The abuse is getting worse, more twisted and serious, more widespread.

I would like to see the behavioral health services aspect of our agency grow. And you have to go out of the area to get the education and training. We just hired a therapist through Reno; it took her two years. I think I'd rather go to a school in California with its cultural diversity.

Q: *Give me a better idea of what you do.*

I provide clinical health education, one on one, mainly those with diabetes, hypertensives, help people to quit smoking, help people who are seeking a healthy lifestyle. For example, this phen-phen thing had me crazy, the people coming in needed to see the nutritionist and the health educator; it kept me busy. I do group classes as well. And in the community I'm working with the coalition working on the system of care for severe emotionally disturbed children, working with COMPAC, a coalition of community agencies and private individuals who put together seven healthy initiatives for the community; it's been a four-year process. We just received a grant to begin implementing the initiatives, of which the fitness grant is a part. What we're going to be doing with that is fitness as a part of a holistic health initiative; what I will be doing is working with churches as helping them to bring a health ministry into the community. We have a very heavy religious community, Baptist, Catholic, Lutherans, Mormons, I felt that they would be a very influential part of helping the whole community to be more fit and active. Also the whole picture, less caffeine, less videos, more activity. We live in a really beautiful area. There are some really positive things going on, like girl's softball, but it's not enough. You'll have these kids being active, but not their parents. I wish malls would put their parking lots a mile away! Fresh air is important. Also, I'm teaching Tai Chi starting next month through our Wellness Center, and walking clubs in different neighborhoods.

As a Director, I'm a manager...I supervise people, go to meetings, write reports...that's been kind of fun to learn. Especially the budget workshop that Nancy put on. Learning about budget, spreadsheets...has been really interesting.

Q: *Do you feel like you chose your work or did it choose you?*

For me, I think it chose me but I also feel I chose it. I chose to come up to this area; I chose to apply as a health educator. I remember my husband telling me, "Luz, you are not just 'the health educator Luz', you are LUZ". He's trying to get me to let go of my work a little bit. I was so concerned; we were changing the program, a report came from corporate that they were going to change the health education program because of the budget. I was very upset about it; I thought that they were compromising the integrity of the program, then I thought, no, you just have to change the way you do it; you're being challenged to find a way to do it differently that still works, we may even do it better.

Q: *How do you feel the work chose you?*

I've always been organized..you have to be organized to be a health educator. I'm a detail person. And I can talk to people; I always strive to come from love. I think sometimes when people go to seek services, they're met with people who are not sensitive, they have their own walls up to protect them, and I don't do that.

Q: *What are the gifts and talents that you have that make you the perfect person to be doing this kind of work?*

I can cross a lot of barriers. I feel I'm a short, round woman of color...if people are really in need, I'm approachable. I'm like this mama that people can come to and ask for things. I really am very much a mother, a nurturer. With the fitness grant-we have a lot of morbid obesity in our community-I can reach those people. A skinny little person with her little tights on...she's not going to reach them. She's going to say "you gotta get your heart rate up" and I'm going to say "let's get up off that chair, let's do some Tai Chi..." I can reach people like that. Same with smoking, I was a smoker. Same with chronic illness, I've been there. Same with being a mom...and teaching your children to love themselves and to love one another. And they're not going to do it unless they see you loving yourself, making sure that you eat properly and role model that.

Q: *How do you think that WHL may have helped you to cultivate your gifts, if at all?*

They helped me to cultivate them by helping me to value them. Every woman in WHL that I met that year was so important...she is an integral part of her community...her experiences, her feelings, her emotions, her knowledge...are invaluable. I really began to see how important each one of those women was and what they had. That helped me to turn around...that makes me important, that makes me of value. VALUING that, see, I don't know if I can put my finger on how important that was that year that I discovered it; it was a very...trusting that truth...that happened to me that year. I can almost tell you the week...it was the last week of July...it was just something really wonderful that happened. It happened reaching out to those women and talking to them and having them talk back to me and hearing them and then going back to my job and saying "where are these people (at work) coming from???" and I'd say, "this is where I'm coming from..."

Q: *Have you found a way to incorporate WHL into your life, your circle of women?*

I talk about it all the time...we had a San Diego nurse practitioner up here who wanted to know more about it.... Wednesday I let another woman know about the application deadline...every time I came back I'd sit with my supervisor and tell him all about it and my co-worker Shirley who's the co-director of the fitness grant. She had just been through another fellowship program and I just used it a lot. When I go over to county social services...there are people who feel they can't do it, they don't have the time...I know that if I was in a flare-up with lupus, I couldn't do it. Now there's three of us...there's Marilyn Powell, Nancy Cavanaugh, and myself. We get together; Nancy and Marilyn are playing racquetball; Nancy and I talk about every day; Marilyn and I about every two weeks.

Then, there's the other women that I can call, Marcia Hunter...every time I call her, it's like "where did we leave off..."

Q: *In your work, what are the disappointments and the risks of what you do and what are the victories and the rewards of doing the work that you do?*

I think a disappointment for me was when we were without any behavioral health staff for about six months because we couldn't recruit people into the area, and part of that problem is because

the salaries are so low. Private therapists can clear \$40.00 an hour; here we are offering \$18-20 an hour...I wrote a proposal offering \$25.00 an hour and our corporate services would not approve it. It's ridiculous. That's a barrier, having administration that don't value the service or don't understand that people who needed service went without services for months...whether it's a young mom who is losing control of her children or a woman who has multi-mental illness diagnoses, or under stress and in danger of losing their job, or a couple in trouble in their marriage...we have a lot of group homes in our area...it's a way people in our county support themselves...with several foster kids. Those children have some really serious problems; they could fill up our practice and we couldn't serve them. To me it was...I couldn't go to each home to tell them to just hang on a little bit...a lot of doctors sent them to me for stress management...I did quasi-counseling where I just listened. For instance, a mom was having angry outbursts and a lot of it was her diet, sugar... That (the whole experience) was really hard. I don't want that to happen again.

Q: What are some of the rewards?

All the people who quit smoking...those are great. The rewards are when you have a mom whose daughter you've been working with who's overweight and she says, "You know, Luz, you're all she talks about...Luz said this and Luz said that..." and I say "yeah, but is she doing anything?..."

Another reward was my raise...putting together the research, then negotiating, was something I had to learn how to do. Now when I look back on it, I think...it wasn't that I thought I was worthless...I wasn't just being passive...it's just this perspective that I'd begun to believe that when you're a kid coming from a low income background where your parents are low paid, they don't fight for higher wages, because "that's just how it is". I must have had that written across my forehead; it just seems like wherever I went I wasn't making an equitable wage...I was mad about it, I saw it, but I didn't do anything about it. This time I did.

I had to call my peers and tell them every little detail....I had some good feedback from them for next time! I'm still learning that...I just put in a request for community development around fitness. The co-director said, "why are you staying in this crummy little hotel...why don't you stay in the hotel where the workshop's being held?..." I told her it's because it's \$107.00 a night and she says yeah...you're not going to save that much....I said, oh, okay. It's a different way of thinking. I feel guilty spending money when this will do me just fine.

I'm not like this woman Maya from India...they took her to a fancy hotel room in Las Vegas...she said, "how much is this room". And they told her it was \$240.00 a night and she cried and said that she couldn't stay there because that's what it took her family months to earn. She just couldn't do it.

A lot of women are apprehensive about WHL is that they feel they might not have enough education; it's not about initials...because I think one of the most knowledgeable women is this woman who came from Mexico. She left a very abusive marriage and her six children and she headed out on foot from the southern part of Mexico...I know it took her a really long time to get here. Her hope was that she'd get to the U.S. and get a job and eventually send for her children to

come and live with her. She knew if she stayed there that she was going to lose herself. When I met her, she had been here a year, spoke fluent English, and worked in a hospital and had two little businesses selling cosmetics...she had this determination and this wisdom. She knew she was going to do it. Then when I ran into her about two years after that, I was at a very low point in my life. We were at a county fair and I was looking at the rabbits and I looked up and here was the woman; she had these two young women with her and she said, "Luz! What has happened to you?...you need to get up in the morning and start with the hair on top of your head and you give thanks for your self, for who you are. You don't stop until you get to the soles of your feet; you give thanks for everything, your body, everything." I was seeing a therapist, and the therapist had just given me that homework...standing in front of a mirror and start by giving thanks for your self...I was just blown away...here is this woman with a fourth grade education and I just think that if you have a desire to serve your community in a greater way, it doesn't matter how much education you have. We've seen that in the women who complete the program. I'll never forget that time the woman (not part of WHL) told about crossing Cambodia or Vietnam with her 12 children and husband to get to the boats...by the time she got to the boat she had lost every one of her children...that woman came to the U.S. and is working in a clinic. Not everybody had easy, good lives. I know that every one of us gets discouraged and disheartened, and we don't want to go there but we just get so lost. That woman, I'll never forget her story...what am I crying about, you know??

My other advice is to not hesitate to go to whoever gave you that application, and ask for help. Or to call WHL and ask if there's anyone there that can help with the process. I would certainly help someone; I'll help them over the phone. Writing is something that came easy for me but I know it doesn't come easily for others.

Q: *Do you have any advice for staff regarding recruitment strategies?*

I just appreciate that they have a focus of diversity and balance. I honor that. Keep with that; it makes the blend. Continue doing that. Continue trying to reach rural populations.

Women who work in mental health/behavioral health for women is an area that we need...make a strong effort in recruiting women in this area.

Q: *Do you have any suggestions in general to improve the program?*

No, I just want to ask the staff's forgiveness for complaining about the big binders...it's a lot of stuff. I loved the monthly packets with the newsletters and different articles; those were really great for me. I loved the articles on being a leader.

Q: *Is there a need or a gap that WHL fills and would it make a difference if WHL were to close its doors?*

Yes, it would definitely make a difference, because we don't have programs in health that serve particularly minority women health care workers. We cannot lose that; I'm sorry. This program really made an effort to reach women of color and we just can't afford to lose that. Community

Health Workers...have evolved to prevent from paying more...but it gives women of color an opportunity to get paid for what they ordinarily do in communities. I see that they have an association now and that they're developing programs; that's really positive, but not across the board like WHL has reached women. If it made it to Susanville, that's pretty good!!

Virginia Mejia, 1996 Alumni

Q: Describe to me the woman who wrote her application to WHL and then describe to me the woman sitting before me now.

I always had a good energy to work with my community, and when I thought about applying, I thought of myself as a person that learns by doing, but not in school. My past experience has been that my knowledge and my job performance has been out of workshops or as a volunteer; when I heard about this training (WHL), I thought this is going to be good! I think they were looking for women of color working with their own communities, so I say, this has got to be for me! I needed to assure that what I was doing...I do value what I'm doing, but I thought that getting together with other women working in their own communities, was going to give me kind of a green light that I was doing okay! I guess I needed that. I feel now that after the whole year of going through the workshops, I feel that it was a great opportunity for me to meet all these women throughout the state of California working with their communities.

When I went, I thought...what is going to happen? I was kind of confused at the orientation; the experience from the first weekend was incredible to find out that the staff and faculty would give us so much time, were so knowledgeable, and so loveable, you know? They just were "there" for us. When I got there, I had an idea of what my project was going to be, but after the 3 days, I say, I have to change my project. My insight was that everything that was very good, was well done, was done in English, so I thought, I am going to have to change my project. I am going to try to translate as much as I can and pass this on to a group of women, train them about what's going on there, that it's not available (in Spanish) but while they learn in English or they're working here in the US, there will be good things that they can find. They happened to be a lot of young women. At that time, I was working with victims of domestic violence. When I came back from my first weekend, I shared with my group, and that what I liked about this program, I was looking for women who can commit to me for a year so I could do it in Spanish. Thirteen women signed up; 8 were in domestic violence support groups. I decided to do the group on 3 consecutive Saturdays; they said the best time was 4-7 p.m. because by then they have already done their duties, their children, shopping, etc. To my surprise, 3 of them were already there at 5 minutes before 4:00 p.m. - at 4:00, all of them were there. It's amazing.

I translated some of the handouts (from WHL trainings) which were about women's health issues and also about how to change legislation.

Q: Were you training them to do their own groups?

No, I was training them to be leaders. I knew they needed a base of information. I felt that I could duplicate what I knew from WHL. Then I knew that I couldn't do it...they are cleaning houses, working in a factory...but 10 or 11 of them stayed with me the whole year and "graduated". They wanted to continue after the three weeks. They loved every session. It was incredible.

Q: Have you incorporated WHL into your personal and professional life, back in your community?

I think there are a lot of things, but they are so hard to detect. So many good things were happening. I got offered a job, which almost doubled my salary! I'm not good at making changes in my life, but I think to have gone through the training...by the third workshop I got this offer. I knew it would be more work and more responsibility...what pushed me out of the agency where I was is that they didn't appreciate, or didn't know, what I was doing. They had no idea! I got this insight when someone mentioned...there was a position there...my supervisor said, why don't I (Virginia) apply for this job...my director said "well, we already discussed that...you need some knowledge or training". You know, we haven't done that and I went and asked her...I said, "you said to this person that we had already discussed that..."she was apologetic about saying that. She thought that my English was "not enough". I asked "why is this other agency offering me a position as Associate Director..and still after five years you don't know me here?..." I thought it was time for me to go.

Q: Do you feel like WHL helped you make this decision?

Yes, that is what I'm saying...I think before I was afraid of these changes, more work, and more responsibility. I think WHL gave me the strength to step out of that agency.

Q: Do you foresee other kinds of career changes in your future?

I don't see it...I've been a year here, I know that here they'll give me opportunities if I want to do other things. I spoke with the president; I am a person who jokes a lot and I was joking with him...he offered an office to another person in another city. I said to him "when are you going to give me my city?"...this is a school dropout prevention program. We get contracts from schools and we are different cities. He said "where do you want it"..I said "tell me the cities that are open" he said "Long Beach" and I said..near the ocean!! He said okay but then I said no, I think I'd like to stay here. But I know that the opportunity exists if I want it.

So the person today is more willing to go after opportunities...to make changes...?

Right. It really helps with work, I feel like they have me as a token, (at the previous agency) they need a Latina to work on their staff and I don't feel that way here. Probably because we are dedicated to the minorities, we don't go into the white community, we work where there is a very high percentage of minority students because we know there is the need. The parents need to be more in charge of their child's education, more involved in PTA's and homework, and more aware. It's a different agency which has very profound philosophy from top-down. The president is a very transparent person, beautiful man. He's 72 and retired from his previous job just to dedicate the rest of his life to the children. I don't see my job as "my job"(although I make money) but as my ministry. I think that's the way I've been doing my job for the past 10 years, but not everybody feels the same way. We are in a very materialistic society; some may see me as a very dumb person...(for not thinking so much about the money).

Q: Do you feel like this work chose you or that you chose to do this work?

It's hard for me to see the middle line...who chose who? Here we are like a family...I like to serve my people. I decided that about 10 years ago; I think they need me the most. Because I had experienced many harsh times in the U.S., I understand my people and can walk with them better than I can help the English speaking community. I feel it is easier for an English speaking person, here. You are treated many, many times as a foreigner no matter how much people know I am here to stay...this is our life, our city, our country. It's hard. Because I've gone through a lot of harsh times, I like to work with my people because I understand.

Q: What are some of your unique talents and gifts that you bring to this work that makes you the best person to do this job?

I have a passion for what I do and I guess that is reflected. I believe that people see me as a person who really believes in what I am doing. You can get compliments from people who don't know you, but when you get compliments from the families it's a different way...here we have to do planning sessions, last night I had 100 teen parents to hear a presentation...I told my cousin to come along. On the way back, she said, "you were so good". Somehow I developed this charisma to give presentations because every time, people come and tell it to the parents... I think they can see...I hope that they can see that I'm genuine and not just doing a job. I believe that when people do not have the information, you act in a different way, but when you have the right information, then your behavior will change.

That is what I'm trying to do in my job, and I think it is something that I can bring to the community, that information that I think is so valuable. It's information that the Latino community does not have. It's a very simple presentation, but then they can see if their child is at the appropriate level in school. He may be in the fifth grade, but is reading and receiving math at the third grade level. I ask, "is your child really in the fifth grade?" I explain how it works in the U.S., the school thinks you understand all this (education system) but if you don't ask the right question and when you don't go and knock on the door and show your face to the teacher, they believe that you are satisfied with what your child is doing. They don't know that you don't know. These are the things that we are going to learn (in the workshops). We teach them to advocate for themselves and that you can't really change the system because it's a big institution and it won't change fast. We can change our behavior and then we can do other things and then marvelous things can happen. If we get more involved in our child's education...there are good teachers, but they can't do their job...you can come to the school but the school is not going to go to your homes, you can go to the school.

Q: Do you feel like in any way these gifts were cultivated or increased through your participation in WHL?

It gave me assurance. It was like "Yes! You can do it..." I guess I'm too complicated; I'm a perfectionist. Often I think that what I was doing was not that big a thing...you're in your corner, you're working by yourself; nobody says "you're doing a good job" I had great feedback from the women I worked with, in the domestic violence and parenting education work I did...but it's not

the same. Somehow I guess I was looking for big things...I don't know. When I went thorough the training (WHL) and women doing their simple things, and treating all of us like we were (couldn't understand)..why do things need to be so grandeur? Why? I guess it has to do with self esteem, its very hard to value yourself, especially in the Latino community, it's so hard to talk about yourself. That's one thing I learned in the training, it's okay to say "wow! I did this great". Before, I could say in my mind that I feel good about what I did, but not aloud. Now, I think okay, it's not selfish, or egocentric. That it's okay to say good things about yourself. I didn't know that...I thought I had to do bigger things to be approved (of)...

Q: Are these the kind of changes that you had expected or hoped for, and what was the most unexpected change through your participation in WHL?

Those things are so subtle...it's not so clear for me. What's the question again...? I am not that young anymore...there are a lot of things that life has taught me. I went to junior college when I was 30-I went because every job I looked for, they said "you have to go to college..."- for two years and then I stopped. When I moved to San Diego, I had a great opportunity to be a volunteer with victims of sexual abuse, girls. I just happened to volunteer, so that work, and then working with parent education classes...I feel like at that time I got so much knowledge. Then I said I need to go to my sisters and family...then there was a point where I said okay, I feel like I'm missing a degree, to finish a B.A., and I feel like I need to put a name to everything that I know. Then I went to San Diego State, to put names, to put definitions to all the knowledge I had acquired with all the wonderful people I worked with who gave me a lot of support and knowledge. This is another dimension of my age...a younger person could give you a different definition. The things that were very important for me 15 years ago are not important anymore...you let them go, they're not important...it's very difficult for me to see, what you just asked. On the contrary, I think it was there building little by little and I've been very lucky that all the jobs I had that now I feel very good about myself.

Q: In thinking back over the WHL training areas, do you feel that there any that fell short of your needs and that you felt could have improved your capacity to do your work?

Because the quality of the staff, and I think this is not just my feeling but the feeling of many participants, that if we could have more time for enhancing our spirit, to enhance me as a woman, things like that. I have a feeling that many of the leaders that came to this (WHL), we had good jobs, we had been working with our communities, and it does help to write proposals and to see how to change legislation, but I guess, again, with the staff, with the time that we all commit, I think something that I missed that would give me more to my soul, to my being, I think I need that. You learn this, you learn that; I wish they would give us more to ourself, our soul, our being.

(At this point, Virginia says that it is sometimes difficult to express in English how she feels)

Q: At this particular point in your leadership journey, what else would you need to help you move ahead with your leadership?

I wish I would have time to do the things other than just needing to work in order to eat. I'm single, I don't have children, and I'm a one-member community.

If you had more time and plenty of money, what would you want...to help you on your leadership journey?

I'm very hungry for knowledge. I wish I had the time to read more and, at this time of my life, I'm hungry for knowledge, for wisdom. I dream myself to be an old lady in a rocking chair. Young people come to me and ask me questions...I can picture myself doing that and I could give them what they're looking for. When I turned 50, a very dear friend of mine has a daughter, and she was 24, and she asked me "what would you have done different, what can you tell me..." I was very amazed at her questions and I can see myself doing this very well...there are some women that live in Escondido, that I worked with for a year or two, they're always looking for me and I feel bad because I don't have the time. I don't know if you read (about me in the application) that I used to live in the housing co-op in Escondido and I just moved out because I didn't have time to give...we had meetings and all...there are 16 families in the co-op and some of these women I know that they look at me like their mother, I can hear them coming for advice...so I guess that's what I'd like to have more of, to feed my spirit and my soul so I can share with others. Did I answer your question...we Latinos cannot give a straight answer... we like to give stories before I tell you the answers!!

North American people get frustrated with us because we don't give them a straight answer...last night I shared in my presentation...that I had an appointment with a woman who came about a half hour late because she was having some trouble at home. The beautiful thing was, she had to explain to me, in detail, how she was explaining the process of making the enchiladas to her husband and that is why she was late! It's part of our culture...not everyone appreciates this!

Q: Tell me about your greatest disappointment and your greatest victory in working with your community during the past couple of years.

I used to work for an agency part-time, we were doing parenting classes (Los Ninos ...Educados) and those parents that went through the whole training, they made so many changes in their lives, treating children in a different way. Every time I had a graduation, the parents say all the things that they are doing differently. Those are victories. And I think, too, that when I was working in the school district, my supervisor was a psychologist and the program was going really well, we had transportation and everything...I think I have educated for ten years so maybe I have reached by now maybe 1500 families. That is a lot!

I went to Spring Valley; I found this woman in the school who was on the PTA for the Latino community and she recognized me and said "Virginia!!". So to say that I guess eventually yes, I'm going to see all the accomplishments we thought we had 3-4 years ago...we're going to keep finding (them). I guess those are the victories. And also one of the wonderful things that

happened through WHL, my project in Escondido with the 13 women...I went to talk to the Health Department director of the community clinic, and I said "what are we going to do with all these women...?" All of them received training as a health educator through the health department, so all of them are working now! They are doing surveys in the Latino community, offering information about breast cancer. One of them told me that they had to give a presentation (about AIDS) to the whole group to practice...I think that is a victory, too. I feel that I had contributed in some way; they were recognized by the clinic and the mayor was present...they invited me and I just love what one of the women said: "I have been a victim of domestic violence...I thought all my job was to be at home with my husband and my kids but I knew that there was something else that I could do"...she thanked me and appreciated the clinic giving her the opportunity to serve her community. I worked with her for close to three years, and she took the training, too. I think most of them are doing much better...that is a victory.

In May or June the North County Latina Association awarded me "Latina of the Year" in Escondido. They asked for letters of recommendation and of course the 13 women got together 27 letters of recommendation...it's a nice feeling.

Q: What has been your greatest disappointment?

That because my community doesn't have the opportunity to function as they deserve because of documents or because they don't speak the language. I know there are a lot of people that can do wonderful things, but they have a lot of anguish like "can my child go to college" if I don't have documentation. I guess it would be more political than anything else.

Q: Is there anything in the last couple of years that stands out as being particularly difficult to deal with?

You wish that the people you are serving would make a bigger change in their life but sometimes they are so entangled that I know that it's going to take them years and years of effort to really make the change. I'm not any God to really heal and make a difference in everybody. People are not ready all the time. I've heard this before...not that I am a master or anything, (in Spanish "...when the disciple is ready, the teacher will appear.") It doesn't happen all the time so a lot of times people are not ready. I feel that a lot of teachers came before me but I was not ready to make the changes, but when I was ready, I did. The teachers of pain, struggle, discrimination, self esteem...it took a lot of years to see what is my responsibility and what is not my responsibility. Because of that, I know that a lot of people are not going to make a change as fast as I wish.

About Kathryn again..."I can see that she found something and she's going to follow that star...and, I have a feeling that I've found something in my life." When you find something, it is so beautiful. You have to be positive and have a lot of faith. I felt like a lot of the changes I needed to make, I needed to be more positive. Sometimes your attitude...I have found something inside me that has taken me there. The WHL just came right on time, I was at some point in my life that I needed that. I don't know if I had had the opportunity 15 years ago it would have been the same for me. It was just on time; I guess when you're looking for something, it's there.

Q: How has your participation in WHL affected your organization, if at all?

I guess it affected more the other agency because I was working directly with women...they (the agency) were very confused about what I was doing with these women, and about me doing that (program). But they could get all the credit they want if they really knew what I did. The agency benefited..

My job now, I guess I have more information than I did. I'm more careful with my time. I try to use the ideas (from WHL); it's there and it's there all the time. They gave us such wonderful material; it was a great training. My friend Ana who lives here, too, she is a doctor in Mexico and is trying to practice here; it also opened many things for her, a lot of things that she didn't know she could do.

The agency (previous job) saw me as a token in the agency; I asked for permission if I needed to be off (for WHL) but they never looked back to me to ask what it was all about. I also didn't present it to them...I saw the training more for my own enrichment than a benefit to the agency. Because of the way they treated me, I looked at it more as something I would share with my community.

Q: Now that you're here (in this job) do you find that you are able to use the things that you learned in WHL?

It's so hard to find specific things. Working with my people, yes, but anything about politics, no, I've been very resistant to that because we come from countries where our politicians are just you know, ugly people, so I'm more conscious about writing letters to congressmen...I think I know how important it is to get involved. If I ever had more time, I would do more things. Being a foreigner, it took me too long to see that I have rights, that this is my country, too, and that if others want to see me as a foreigner, it's their problem, not mine.

(Due to technical difficulties, the remainder of the interview was conducted by phone. Please see "short story" for information pertaining to the remainder of the interview.)

Lori Quince, 1996 Alumni

Q: Describe the woman who submitted her application to WHL, then describe the woman who is sitting before me now.

A couple of years ago when I applied for WHL, I was venturing into some new territory; I was looking for something different in my life, and it was more from a personal viewpoint at first, rather than professional. Creating new relationships, new bonds with women. I was only half interested in a new career. I had exhausted (my job), in eight years, had gone as far as I could go. I also knew that there was a comfort in that job. I felt comfortable, having had my first child, and my interest was more in raising my daughter than in changing a career.

Then I was looking for a whole new way of thinking, very open to what WHL was all about. I remember writing about the eagle, in my application, because I knew that the eagle was a part of me. I was looking to create a network, a bond, with women personally, also checking out professionally what I wanted to do. I've experienced more spiritual growth, since then. Recognizing my own self, my own needs and wants, knowing now that there is no limit to what I can do. And being very clear and focused with what I want to do, given the exposure to what's available.

Q: Did you describe yourself as a leader before?

Yes, I did then and I do now. In my role as a mother and wife, and in my previous job, I felt I needed more cultivating of myself before taking on a more professional role. I recognize it even more now.

Q: What is a leader to you, now?

Being assertive, open and honest with people in what I expect. Also, the leadership that I have learned (I'm working more in policy now)-- I see a more dishonest side, working with councilmen, local leaders. I see that there's a lot of politics to the game and I don't want to turn into something that I'm not. I don't want to be completely dishonest but there are a lot of dishonest things that take place. Especially in my field of tobacco advocacy. Its a tough role; there's RJ Reynolds and some of the supervisors who take money from the tobacco interests. You have to be a bit more savvy in your approach to people. Depending on who I talk to, that complete honesty can only go so far.

I am learning the process but I am also learning the boundaries. Even with relationships, how you supervise. You want to do it in an encouraging way yet in an assertive way. How you voice your opinion has a lot to do with your leadership qualities. You don't want to be so much of an aristocrat that you can't listen to what's really going on.

Q: Were there changes (via WHL) that you didn't expect?

The program really shaped my ideas about where I want to go professionally. I had excellent networking opportunities that really put me where I am today. And I had a faculty advisor that really supported me a lot and as a result, gave me another avenue professionally. I actually left my job and took on a new position. I recognized that after the same position for 9 years, it gave me an opportunity to take a leap. After WHL, I moved to a policy position; I was really impressed after our Sacramento trip, learning about the Assembly, the whole process, digging into the bills and what they represented, and how you need to lobby to represent women if you really want change. This is exactly what I do now. In graduate school, we talked about it, but grant writing was more my focus. I'm not as interested in that now as I am in the advocacy and policy and legislation. I feel that I can really make a difference at that level. Being in Sacramento, going to D.C., speaking about women's health is really where I want to be, making changes at that legislative level.

After leaving WHL, I was immediately accepted into a program, the Statewide Multicultural Health Task Force with Calvin Freeman. I wrote an extensive application; I know WHL was a key player in making that happen for me. WHL gave me the application. They saw that this was something that I could do. Robin gave me the information and I was first accepted as an alternate, which was great. I was able to get my feet wet and pick and choose my level of responsibility. As of a month ago I became a full fledged member which is a 2-4 year commitment. I really love it; it's really where I need to be. We meet 4 times a year to talk about women's health in California. This is where I am and this is who I am. Then I take that back to the community level. Being the director of a coalition and being on the Board of Directors of the Girls Club of Los Angeles. My actual job title is Director of Women's Tobacco Coalition of Los Angeles County.

Q: Have you considered changing your career or your job as a result of WHL?

Yes, eight months after leaving the program I left my previous position and I had talked a lot with Robin as I was going through the transition. I want to build programs and implement new programs, more in the legislative aspect here in Los Angeles County. I am also doing some parenting trainings which help me in my parenting skills!

Q: What was the most unexpected outcome after coming out of WHL?

Leaving my position of 9 years and moving on to something else. It's scary. I negotiated great pay and got what I needed. Knowing who I am and not "settling". The position I left was as Coordinator for HIV Services for Prototypes.

Q: Have you incorporated WHL into your personal and professional life since you've returned to the community, and if so, what does that look like for you and your circle of women?

The incorporation I have done is two-fold. Personally I have developed more of a network with women who have become my circle of friends. I have certainly built strong relationships among women. Professionally, I transitioned in the policy piece, where I can truly say that I am doing policy and advocacy work that I have never done before.

Q: In thinking back to the WHL training areas, were there any that fell short of your needs and that you feel could have been improved?

Something that would have been good for me would be to have sessions on "Options in Public Health", including other career options for MPH graduates. I was able to pick people's brains individually but I would have liked it presented more as a "package". Encouraging women to get degrees and pursue education could have been more emphasized. Some jobs require a degree behind your name. An education track would have helped, maybe a roundtable session on what other people have done with their education (to not be intimidated by the school process, how to get certain degrees), for example, stories of women who got their Ph.D.s would have interested me. Getting contacts to write letters of support (to academic programs). As women, it's all about empowerment, and we need to have our Bachelors, Masters (degrees), and if we're so inclined, to go further. I believe the program is designed to create mentors out of us; we could mentor each other. Personally I want someone to mentor me who has a degree in my field of interest. For example, I can help by telling people what they can do with an M.P.H.

Q: What do you need now?

I'm looking at how long I will stay in my current position and I'm looking at where I want to go as a woman, how to set my own design up. I want to make sure women are independent financially and all, do the best job I can and be a good mother, learning about how to set myself up for retirement. Long term planning about where we need to go in our life; we're all young now but we need to look beyond our 30's. Someone in WHL could help us settle into a retirement plan, setting up a plan for our future savings and security. We need to make sure we position ourselves by planning for the future. Also how to find jobs that fit our lifestyle and personality, balancing kids and work. I need to learn how non profit organizations can set me up for my future, or, is it a stepping stone towards something else? I want to move to "profit" and be comfortable. After finishing my bachelor's degree, it took me seven years to begin my Master's program. It took a lot of talking to people to figure this out.

Q: What was the relationship like with your faculty advisor?

She was actually the Executive Director in my current job; she knew I was looking for policy-related work. She helped me get my current job; she was actually the person who recommended me for the position. She already knew me, knew my capabilities, and that I was on top of things and ready for something else. She recognized that it was time for me to move on.

Q: Tell me about your greatest disappointment and your greatest victory in working with your community the last couple of years. What have been the risks and the rewards?

My greatest victory occurred in my community just recently. I developed and implemented a community forum all around policy. We taught people to write letters to their Mayors and district representatives, gave people insight into tobacco regulations; we had over 300 participants. I was so proud of myself; it takes a lot of energy! People don't know, they need to be taught how to write a letter; it was great. The greatest reward was the community response to this event.

I'm disappointed that you have to play games around policy; when I go meet with Maxine Waters or Senator Watson-there are some that you can be very honest with but others that you have to be manipulative with and you can't be as outspoken and honest as you would like to be because there's a whole game to this. I'm disappointed that, for something that's so important (policy and advocacy for women) that there's a whole game to this. You can't be as honest yet you have to get the work done in another way.

I was in Oakland this last week; I wanted Channel 2 to come out and interview me about tobacco issues. A PR firm was telling me how to frame the interview, that framing the issue instead of in terms of women, to use "young women" as more of a "draw" for the media. Certain words can't be heard because people don't care. The fact that I can't say "women hurt too", hurts me. Bottom line is, I want to help women so I'll do whatever it takes. It's not a complete sell out; it's the way it works.

Q: What was WHL's role in contributing to those victories and disappointments?

I think WHL really said that women need to be in these types of capacities; I was an easy candidate because I am a doer.

Q: Do you feel like you can talk to the WHL learning community about these victories and disappointments?

Yes, I feel that I can. Fortunately, I have developed new friends who are "WHL material"; these are the women that have been in my circle who are already working with me. There have been some ongoing relationships (with WHL) but we're statewide and...WHL people know you are friends for life, even if you haven't heard from each other but once or twice a year, the bond is already there. It's a given that you are in a circle of women. You move on, you move around, you just move!

Q: Did you choose to do this work or did it choose you?

I think it chose me. I say that because, being involved with WHL I was involved in a very spiritual process too. One of my mentors said to me-I'll never forget this-a career which fits who you are should come to you at ease. The next thing I knew, I was offered this position. I'm very excited about this position; I do know that I love it and I wouldn't leave it right now. I can say

that in return, I "chose it back". All this is "so me".

Q: What gifts do you bring to this work that make you the perfect person to be doing it?

My energy and excitement; my innocence with some of the policy, I'm not too corrupted. There's a lot of "buying off" that's taking place. I keep my innocence and "newness".

Q: Did WHL help to cultivate those gifts?

The innocence is who I am, as a person. I think WHL made me challenge myself, it made me look at myself a little differently. It made me look at myself as an independent women and shape my own role individually. That year in WHL, I felt (and this is not a bad thing) really alone in a lot of ways coming into the program. I certainly developed all these wonderful relationships but I needed to be alone too. Meditating and thinking things through was what I needed to do. I even separated myself from a lot of outside activities to take that year and really get focused on "self" without people tugging on me and asking me "what are you going to do with yourself...". There was nobody to listen to but myself.

Q: How has your participation in WHL affected your organization now. Has the service changed? What do you bring to your organization now in terms of how it provides service and how it does policy/advocacy, based on what you got out of WHL?

I went into an organization that met all my needs. I can say from a leadership point of view, that I am very well respected in the agency. They know that they don't have to train me much because I came in with such a zeal for policy work. I think I added to the quality of their leadership in a serious way. I am much more independent in this job than my previous job.

How so?

I meet with my E.D. once every couple of weeks; the level of leadership responsibility shows for itself; there needs to be less checking in because they see what I do.

Q: Do you see a vision for how to further strengthen your organization?

I do. I know the organization needs more grant writers. It's not my niche; I prefer to not put that pressure on myself. I like to go out with a big bang, having brought them money in. I'm willing to support them, so I support this vision.

Q: What is the connection between your passion for doing this work and the status of women's health overall?

I'm hoping that for every job that I go into and come out of, I'm hoping that something good has come out of that and being involved in this task force is one of them. I hope that in my 2-4 year commitment I will have done something for the state of California. Within my agency, I look at it in terms of my goings and comings...I hope that I have embarked in someone's life by doing

something. When I worked at Prototypes, there are a lot of women that I counseled that I got off the streets. With the Women's Tobacco Coalition, I'm hoping to bring about leaders and a better awareness for women and getting them more interested in the advocacy area. I'm looking at the coalition of 40 women and I hope to create more leaders and create passion.

Some I attribute to WHL...some of it is just my own interest. I've always had this passion and commitment. I can honestly say that women's health is my career, my profession for the rest of my life. WHL really solidified that a lot more because it's made me take leaps into women's health that I hadn't before. It's made me more committed than I was before.

Q: What would you tell other women that are thinking about applying for the program?

I always tell them that they must be a part of this! Different women come in with different levels of interest and levels of understanding of women's health. It's good for everyone; I don't want women to be separated. I always encourage women to apply and that it is a very diverse group. Their project needs to represent them and their diverse interests. It's also a very humbling experience; you work and bond with a group of women, recognizing their differences...you love them and support them...these relationships teach you about life.

Q: What are hesitations that women have about applying and what would you tell women to counter those hesitations?

I think the hesitation might be just sitting down and taking the time to write the application...I wonder if the women feel that they're "not enough leadership" to apply for the program. I wonder if they think that they have to BE...I remember when I went through, wondering what they were looking for, thinking that they're probably looking for an Executive Director, and thinking well, I'm not even an Executive Director yet. You get in there and it's just totally unlike what you think. People need to give themselves a little more self respect and self esteem and know that they're (WHL) looking for who you are, just as you are.

Q: What advice do you have for the WHL staff in terms of recruitment strategies or techniques?

I think it's such a good program and no matter who we are, we all need it because it's so diverse in its orientation and its presentation, so you gotta get something out of it, you just have to or you're not "getting it".

I would like to see the program target women who need more encouragement to even write an application...these women you would see go from "this step" to "this step". If you don't go through the process, you're truly going to miss something. I want to see people from all over see what's available, I want to see women have more options...the women in housing developments, the women in WIC, these women also need to be involved. Regardless of where they "look" like they're coming from, they have the smartness of all of us. I would like the opportunity to be available at all levels...levels are only in your mind. Because we target the housing developments we can't assume that that woman is not capable of being a part of the project, she

needs women like us to be a part of her life, to support her in getting here. It would certainly add strength and power to the program. We MPH'ers pass this along to our colleagues, I'd just like it to filter..all over.

Other suggestions?...

I don't think so. For me, a lot of the individual one-on-one availability that WHL gave me was wonderful. It meant a lot to me to be able to call Connie; her availability is so important and Robin's availability. You guys are busy!! But to continue that level of individual attention, if that continuity could stay the same, that would be wonderful. And those great big thick packages that you send out...they kept me "in the know" statewide. I even wanted her to continue sending me packages, outside WHL, I want them to keep that up. I don't always hear.

I just used to have great conversations with Robin, and my faculty advisor. The best that they could keep that up...even Patsy (at the front?) She used to help...the woman who did hotels...Patsy. Everybody was just so nice! They didn't let us know how stressed out they were; they did a great job. And Rhodea...

Q: Does WHL fill a need or gap, and would it make a difference if WHL were to close its doors?

Ohhhh...wow...that would be emotionally hard. Wow...close its doors...that's so dramatic. I feel like it's the glue to all of us to some degree. It's like a university in it's own right...I plan on going back there and working. We need to keep the alumni going, go back and talk to our advisors, our alumni. It's hard statewide to hold onto something...how do we do this? On our own, I don't know how we'd do this (hold it together). Five years is nothing...it takes more than five years to build and maintain something. I feel that it would be losing a lot. It's like a coalition in it's own right. It takes time for people to know who you are, to circulate who you are. I think it's just now getting to the time where word is spreading. I feel like the continuity and networking opportunities would be lost. I don't think there are enough women who have heard of the program yet.

Q: Are there other programs like WHL that exist out there?

No, not that I know of. Look what's it done for me...I'm now a member of the Multicultural Task Force (statewide). It helps you get into places, and we're not done getting into places yet! I know it had like 80% to do with WHL!

Q: What would it mean for the status of women's health in California?

There won't be enough representatives...not enough women who understand yet...who don't know "how to"...people know that women's health is in jeopardy, that the status of women's health in California is at a crossroads. I think that it means that there won't be enough women speaking out on behalf of women's health...there will be men speaking out who really don't know. Someone will speak out but I don't know if it would come from the appropriate place, and knowledge. WHL teaches you "how to". A lot of women just won't know.

Susan Shimazu, 1996 Alumni

Q: Describe to me the woman who wrote her application to WHL and then describe to me the woman sitting before me now.

Before WHL, I was lacking motivation, having been at my job for three years and wanting to do something different with my life but not knowing exactly what I wanted. Also not being confident about my facilitating and planning skills. I had hit a plateau-"where do I go from here?"-that's where I was before WHL.

After WHL, I got a lot more confident professionally regarding my abilities, whether it was facilitating and planning meetings or just speaking up about certain issues. My tendency before was to not know when to speak up and when to be silent. I either erred by saying too much or not saying anything at all. Since then, I've applied to graduate school in Public Health; that was one thing that WHL helped me to keep on track...taking the GRE, letters of recommendation...just meeting other people who were very supportive and being able to share with other women. That was a good experience.

Q: How old were you when you applied for WHL?

Twenty-five.

Q: Did you describe yourself as a leader before the program and how has that changed?

I think I did. I think what's changed is leadership style. I think I've just learned a lot personally about that balance of when to say something and when not to. Reading a lot about differences between men and women's leadership styles-men tend to be more individualistic in their leadership, women tend to be more group oriented. I think learning, as a woman, how to be a leader and how to use the abilities that I have as a woman in a different fashion than a man would be.

Q: Were the changes you experienced through WHL the ones that you hoped for or expected?

I think the group facilitation skills was one thing I was looking for, and how I learned that was different than what I expected. I think I expected to learn more in terms of...I tend to be very formulaic, like tell me the steps and I'll learn them...I think one thing I learned in terms of facilitating meetings is that even though I have all the tools, that the confidence in my abilities was most important. Like how to not let others dominate the meeting, when to express my opinion in facilitating and when not to. Going through WHL and talking about my experiences with other women really impacted my ability to facilitate, versus having gone through a class on facilitation, having set things to do.

Q: What was the most unexpected outcome of your participation in the program?

The friendships; that's a strong point of WHL. Getting to know women from real diverse backgrounds yet still being able to share something in common. When I looked at the application I thought it was more like signing up for a class, not really designed for relationship building. One of the things I really appreciated was the relationship building; it was very personal, and getting to know the people was very much the richness of the experience. That was a very nice surprise.

Q: Have you incorporated WHL into your personal and professional life since you have returned to your community, and if so, what does that look like for your circle of women?

I was running a training program for immigrant women, encouraging them to further pursue their skills towards getting jobs. That was a barrier for them. Initially, the program was more focused on skills building, more of a classroom type of setting. Going through WHL changed that for me; we focused on getting to know them as people and getting involved in their lives. That was one thing that changed.

I recently quit my job; at the end I was hating what I was doing. What kept me going at work was thinking that part of why I was at that job was to maintain the friendships. Sometimes I have a hard time balancing that. What was nice is that the past few months I've been able to spend more time with the people, to have those relationships. Those will last after I leave the job.

Q: Are you considering a career or job change?

I don't know if I've changed careers in terms of where I ultimately want to be, but school is the next step. I think I learned a lot at my old job; you get to a point where it's not so challenging.

Q: Describe to me the nature of your work.

(This is a past job) When I left my job, I was Support Services Manager at Asian-Pacific Health Care Venture. We had plans to start a clinic, but in addition to the clinic/medical services there were support services like Health Education, Nutrition, Psychosocial, language...we developed referrals and provided some services. I was in charge of hiring and recruiting about five staff people; there were three support service liaisons serving as translators, and working on training around some nutrition education, things like that. It was primarily direct service. Prior to that, I used to do MCH programs, doing budget monitoring, contract monitoring at the same agency. The longer you're at the agency, the more things get added to your job! MCH is my interest focus. I've always been interested in linking social services to a church. Working in social services, social service agency does a great job of providing physical services...churches could meet the spiritual needs of people, or combining those, a church that would start an economic development agency or something along those lines. I think women's programs have always been an interest of mine and I think that will continue but probably in a different setting.

Q: Would you say that, through your experiences in WHL, that there were changes in your organization, like how services were provided or around policy and advocacy activities?

One thing that WHL helped a lot with was getting connected with different advocacy information streams. My director has always been interested in policy stuff. Welfare reform, changes for undocumented women, all this happened when I was in WHL. What really helped was being connected more, like the Network for Women and Children was something I found out about from WHL. Our visit to Sacramento to get an idea of how the budget and legislative process works, so when we write letters, what does that really mean? That was really helpful.

Q: Did that translate when you went back to work, in terms of how the organization itself was approaching legislative and advocacy issues?

I think it was more information about policy areas; my agency has always been active in looking at issues in terms of how they affect Asian Pacific Islanders. We were hooked up to how policy affects Asian Pacific Islanders but there's a whole other set of policy analysts and organizations that affect policy for women. Being a part of WHL helped me to find out about those other issues; there is a lot of overlap with barriers and problems. It was nice to be able to be hooked into "mainstream" political information and channels. I looked at how policy specifically affects women, immigrant women...

I think just in general WHL gave me a lot more motivation to do my job. When you've been at your job for a while you see the same people, the same problems, and sometimes it's hard to see the results of your work in concrete terms. It's a longer term process. When I used to be an outreach worker, you'd talk to someone and they'd feel better so I'd feel better, something happens! Sitting doing budgets, you wonder what is the benefit of all this, well, eventually there will be a program...sometimes it gets discouraging. After a while it gets tiring. It's nice to get away and be with other people you can relate to...being able to encourage each other, people personally investing in you as a person, was really nice. Social services tends to attract people who are willing to invest in other people, not so much in ourselves, so I think just having a mentor, someone to look out for you, is encouraging and motivating to do things that otherwise you might say, "I'm too tired..."

Q: Were you able to see changes in the service that you have been able to provide when you came back?

I think I was just a lot more motivated so I was able to get more things done. One thing that helped me is being realistic about my goals, through the personal plan we did. Initially, I put everything possible down on this but as the year went on, I was able to be more realistic about what I can honestly get done. That translated over to the work; setting up my own scope of work. I think it is a growing process to be able to be realistic about the things I can get done this month.

Q: Did you have a vision of how to improve your organization?

It's little things here and there, but there are certain principles that I've always believed very strongly in. Placing a value on community people's input is really important to me and giving them places where they can actually make a difference rather than token efforts. One of the areas that I've always pushed pretty hard has been the idea of community people being more involved in positions where they can actually make a difference.

Q: In thinking back to the WHL training areas, were there any that fell short of your needs and that you felt could have improved your capacity to do your work?

I would have liked to have a session on finance and budgeting. It's so important as an agency and personally...as women we need the numbers side of things too. It's important in running an agency or being a program director is being able to manage the funds and do it in a way that really increases the resources that you have. We were given a lot of program planning information, leadership information and I actually read through some of the articles finally! I have a stack of binders...

Q: At this particular point in your leadership journey, what else would you like to learn and improve upon that would help move you further along?

That's a good question. I am trying to grow in the area of...letting go of control of things. I realize that to be a good leader or manager you have to be able to trust people and let go of that control, in a wise way. Learning the ability to be able to let go of things in a way that people have the freedom to do what they've been gifted to do, and to do it well, to appreciate their work and not re-do it. Those kind of things. That's one thing I still would like to learn.

Q: What advice would you have for potential applicants to the program?

Just go for it! I think a lot of times, you think maybe you're not good enough or maybe they'll reject me..it's so much work,...these are all the things I thought about!

Q: So you think that those are the main hesitations people have...?

The time thing...what I noticed about WHL is that what you invest in it is what returns to you. It's a good place if you're at a stopping point in your life...like "I've done what I wanted to do up to this point in my life and now I don't know where I'm going". I need motivation or people to give me some direction or encouragement to pursue directions that I'm interested in.

Q: What suggestions do you have for WHL staff around some recruitment strategies for WHL?

I think they've done a great job so far; word of mouth always works real well.

Q: Do you think the women that are getting exposed to the program are the women who need to be there; should they continue to do what they're doing now, or there some women out there who should hear about it and are not hearing about it?

My impression of the women involved in the program were either women who had already attained a certain professional status in their lives, or women who were the unspoken leaders in the community, people who are not necessarily directors or visible leaders, but women who have a great deal of respect from the people in their communities who they themselves are a part of. For them to be exposed to going to Sacramento, the whole thing, that's a good thing. I was happy that there was that diversity, that I wasn't just sitting in a room with a group of Ph.D.'s and executive directors. There's much more public acknowledgment for them, as compared to women who are very committed and very much leaders but not as visible and don't have the opportunities to get sent around the state of California. I'm glad about the variety of women, that it wasn't just administrators and executive directors.

Q: How do you reach those women, how do you make sure you maintain that balance?

I think just telling their co-workers about it, encouraging them to sign up. Those are the women who would tend not to apply. The brochure looks a little intimidating; it's a really nice brochure but it's kind of...

Q: Do you think that you chose your work or that your work was chosen for you, or a combination?

I think a little bit of both. I think I've wanted to do community work since I've gotten out of college, in that way I've very much chosen to do what I do in a community setting. That has been more shaped by where I got hired...getting the perinatal project, doing the focus groups with women really interested me and helped their lives change...I always thought I'd be interested in women's issues but not really pregnancy issues, that's one thing I really didn't expect. Coming out of school, I thought I would be a counselor doing more direct one-on-one, face to face kind of things. After doing administrative work and trainings, doing a little bit of face-to-face but a little bit of administrative, I realize that's a better match for my personality.

Q: What gifts do you have that make you the perfect person to be doing this work?

I think I'm very organized, which is good for managing lots of projects. I really care about people and I think in doing community work, valuing the philosophy and principles behind what you do, to me is the key. I think if I didn't feel that way, I could probably work anywhere (and make lots more money...laughter).

Q: How did WHL help to cultivate these gifts, if at all?

Having more confidence and having more balance in how I go about doing things. Being realistic, being able to set goals that I can accomplish. I've always had a desire to learn but I think WHL really encouraged that in me.

Q: In doing the kind of work that you do, I know that there can be a whole range of emotions that come along with doing that work. Over the past couple of years, what has been your greatest victory and your greatest disappointment in doing the work...what are the risks and

rewards of doing the work?

I think one of the greatest victories was the women's program that I had been a part of. Most of the women were older than me, they all had kids, they were first generation immigrants. The relationships that I was able to develop with them was just tremendous. We had a graduation ceremony to recognize their accomplishments; it was so neat to see a lot of their husband who came...to support their wives and acknowledge their accomplishments. That was really neat. For them, to have knowledge that they did something, that was significant, and they did it themselves. We had given out scholarships and certificates, to show that they finished, that they did it well...and that they should be proud of themselves. That was a neat experience. They had given me, and the other trainer, thank yous. One of the women had made paper flowers, that was really special. To be able to see other people's lives affected; that they were excited and proud of what they did. That was a victory.

There have been a lot of disappointments. I tend to live in an idealistic way sometimes; there are certain things that, if it doesn't happen, it's very disappointing for me. One thing that was sad to see, in my office, I was one of the two oldest people in my office (in terms of years worked). When I first came, there was a real sense of family, we were friends. There was a real feeling of care, like this was not just a job. Over time, that feeling has changed, and that's been sad for me to see. It's just hard. A lot of people have left...over time, things just change.

Q: Did you feel like you could share these victories and frustrations with WHL staff, peer leaders, etc?

I tend to deal with things myself. I did appreciate Laurie, my advisor, calling me once in a while. It always seemed to be at an opportune moment when I really needed to talk to someone. Robin was really great, too, she helped me a lot with a presentation I was putting together for WHL. She wrote me a letter or recommendation. I really appreciated that a lot; I really appreciated both of them.

Q: How was your relationship with Laurie; did you feel like you would have wanted anything to be different?

No. It would have been nice if as a group we had some more opportunities to support one another. One thing that Laurie said to me during our last meeting that I really appreciated...I was telling her about this dream I have about one day starting a church-based nonprofit organization ...she told me "I could see you doing that"...for that to come from someone that has done that and who knows me pretty well...I really appreciated that a lot, that encouragement to pursue that dream.

Q: What would you say is the connection between your passion for doing this work and the status of women's health overall? Do you feel like you're impacting women's health overall?

Yes and no. Like with advocacy, what I see is that sometimes you work really hard for something and you push and you push and someone just comes and steamrolls right over it! Because they have money or power that you don't have. It's not because you don't have passion or you didn't try...but sometimes that's just how things are. It doesn't mean you give up. Sometimes there are battles that are lost even though you fought hard. I would like to think that because of efforts of other people like me that there would be an improvement and change. I think there will be, but I think there will be losses too, not necessarily from lack of trying. It's kind of like in *Les Miserables*...there's one scene where they are trying to start a revolution in France and they just get knocked down...and yet, you think eventually there was revolution. It looks dismal if you just look at that part of it.

Q: Are there any other suggestions that you have for the WHL staff for improving the program?

I think it would be nice if there was mentoring between classes. Like if someone from our class were to act as a "big sister" to the next class. I've gotten to know a few people from the year before, but it's hard unless you initiate. That would be nice. Sometimes I thought some of the speakers were a little academic; maybe it's just my personal bias. I would have loved to see more speakers who have come from the community, in terms of knowing what it means to live in a certain setting yet also have that experience of being in a top government office...maybe people like that don't exist. More people like Kathryn who have that balance. Not just book smart...

Q: Does WHL fill a particular need or a gap? Would it matter if WHL closed its doors?

I think WHL fills a significant place. In terms of having a statewide agenda and coalition of people, a lot of decisions; I think it's really critical to have a statewide network. And to bring people together across a very diverse state, is a need. I never really understood issues of rural health care until I met women in the program who were midwives in the mountains ... understanding that they have one person to serve the whole area ... that was an important thing to understand. I would have liked to see other rural areas; we always met in San Diego, Los Angeles, Sacramento. WHL is a program that recruits women from very diverse backgrounds, not just Ph.D.'s from Harvard, not just people who have "arrived" at a certain position. That women who are leaders in their communities can get to know each other and be exposed to some of the larger "forces that be".

Q: Is there anything else that you would like the WHL staff to know, or people who may be taking another look at this program to know, either thinking about applying to it, or funding it, or changing it?

I think it's a great program; it would be great to keep it going. To keep encouraging that support - they seem to be very well connected with Sacramento and Irvine Foundation-having real strong ties. I would really encourage them to maintain that; to not only have roots in the community but in other places where there are important people.

Just the people that are there...I hope they stay. I can't imagine the program without Robin!!