



# **STATE OF EMPLOYMENT FOR** **WOMEN IN WAKE COUNTY**

*A Report to the Wake County Board of Commissioners*

**Prepared by the Wake County Commission for Women**

**February 1, 2016**

# STATE OF EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN IN WAKE COUNTY

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# State of Employment for Women in Wake County

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### I. Introduction

At the request of the Wake County Board of Commissioners, the Wake County Commission for Women (“WCCW”) spent the past four months researching how women in Wake County are faring in the work force. Issues explored in depth include what impediments women are currently facing in seeking and obtaining well-paying part-time and full-time work; whether income disparity exists between the sexes in Wake County; and why women struggle after returning to the work force and whether existing programs are meeting this need. The WCCW also conducted a survey of nearly 300 women who are either unemployed or seeking better paying part-time and full time jobs. The data from the survey conducted in November 2015 provides “real-time” reflection of the state of employment for women in Wake County and lends support for the recommendations made within the body of the report.

### II. Findings

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

For women seeking to return to work who have been out of the work force for some period of time due to illness, child rearing or caretaking of a family member, the WCCW identified very few programs focused on helping women get their skills up to speed. There was even more of a dearth in those programs that focused on women with less education. Additionally, ageism was cited as a consistent reason that women could not find good paying work.

WCCW also researched three obstacles to employment that affect a number of women in Wake County: 1) educational attainment level; 2) lack of access to affordable quality childcare; and 3) mental health issues. While having higher levels of education increases the economic security of both women and men, the economic risks of not completing secondary education are greater for women. The research reveals those women who have only a high school diploma or did not finish high school make substantially less than their male counterparts with the same limited education. The median annual earnings of women who have not completed high school are approximately \$13,000 compared to men who earn approximately \$18,500 —both of which is

well below the \$48,107 annual income that a family of one adult and two children needs to cover basic living expenses such as housing, food, childcare, health care and transportation in Wake County.

In addition, Wake County has some of the highest childcare costs in the state – the annual cost for a five star childcare center for an infant/toddler is almost double the annual in-state tuition for a North Carolina public college. The average fees for year-round childcare in Wake County range from \$12,792 (for an infant/toddler in a five-star childcare center) to \$5,352 (for a three-five year old in a one-star family childcare home). By comparison, the average annual in-state four-year, public college tuition and fees in North Carolina is \$6,970 for the 2015-2016 academic year.

### **III. Recommendations**

The WCCW report provides the Wake County Commissioners with a number of specific recommendations for improving the employment canvas for women in Wake County. Some of these recommendations include:

- 1.) Creating and encouraging work place flexibility in order to close the income gap between men and women.
- 2.) Offering Return to Work programs and paid internships for women in Wake County and incentivizing private companies to offer paid internships that target women who have taken a break from work in both professional *and* non-professional careers.
- 3.) Combining existing GED programs with more college-level programming to increase the educational levels of the female labor market of the more than 79,000 women in the county.
- 4.) Partner with and incentivize private companies to help ease the significant financial burden of child care for their employees.

The Wake County Commission for Women believes that there is much to be done in this area and looks forward to working with the Wake County Commissioners in creating more opportunities for gainful employment for the women of Wake County.

# State of Employment for Women in Wake County

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## INTRODUCTION

At the request of Commissioner Caroline Sullivan and the Wake County Board of Commissioners, the Wake County Commission for Women (hereinafter “WCCW”), undertook the task of researching how women in Wake County are faring in the work force. Issues explored in depth include what impediments women are currently facing in seeking and obtaining well-paying part-time and full-time work; whether income disparity exists between the sexes in Wake County; and why women struggle after returning to the work force and whether existing programs are meeting this need. The research and data identified within this report was provided by the Wake County Human Services and Community Services Departments; as well as data from numerous publicly available sources, which are cited within the body of the report. In addition, the non-profit organization Dress for Success of the Triangle (hereinafter “DFS”), allowed WCCW to conduct a survey of DFS clients focused exclusively on employment-related issues. That survey was completed in November, 2015 and yielded responses from 273 women in the County.<sup>1</sup> Information gleaned from that survey will be used in the report and cited accordingly. This “real time” information opportunity lends some valuable insight into the issues facing women in the Wake County workforce today.

## I. Demographics and Statistics of Working Women in Wake County

According to 2014 U.S. Census data,<sup>2</sup> there are approximately 998,691 people living in Wake County.<sup>3</sup> Approximately, 51.3%, or more than 512,400 of those residents are females.<sup>4</sup> While females make up more than half of the population of Wake County, the data reveals that women not only make less money, but also encounter more challenges in finding work than their male counterparts. This is despite the fact that women are better educated in this County than men.

In reviewing available 2014 data of Wake County residents between 16 (the age during which one is considered eligible for work in some capacity) and 64 years of age, there are over 346,000 women that fit this criterion. Of that group of women, only about 262,000, or 75%, worked in some capacity over the past 12 months.<sup>5</sup> By comparison, of the 329,000 men that were of eligible working age in Wake County, almost 85%, or 280,000 worked in some capacity of the past 12 months.

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<sup>1</sup> The DFS survey results can be found at Appendix 1 of this report.

<sup>2</sup> The 2014 Census data was the most recent data available.

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau. (2014). Wake County North Carolina, Population. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/37183.00>

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> US Census Bureau. 2014 ACS 1-Year Estimates. C23022: SEX BY FULL-TIME WORK STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS FOR THE POPULATION 16 TO 64 YEARS)

## A. Number of Working Women in Wake County

In 2014, 72% of the women working in Wake County worked more than 35 hours per week. 22% percent of women worked between 15 and 35 hours per week; and slightly more than 5% of women in Wake County worked between one and 14 hours per week.<sup>6</sup> When comparing this data with the numbers of working men in Wake County, one finds that 84% worked 35 hours or more; 13% of men work between 14 and 35 hours per week; and nearly 3% of the men work between one and 14 hours per week.

We surveyed clients of Dress for Success and asked specifically whether women who identified as working part-time: “Wished to be working full-time?” An overwhelming **two-thirds** of respondents answered “yes” that they wished they were able to obtain full time employment.<sup>7</sup> Some impediments to why women have not been able to obtain full time employment will be explored later this in this report.

## B. Education Level of Women in Wake County

WCCW also researched the education levels of men and women over the age of 25 in the county. Overall, Wake County boasts some very good education numbers, with 49% of the women in this county having a college degree or graduate degree in 2014. That compares closely with 50% of the men in the county obtaining a college or graduate degree.<sup>8</sup> As of 2014, over 90% of women over 25 years of age in Wake County have received their High School degree or GED equivalent as the table below demonstrates (*See Table 1*).

**Table 1**

Wake County Educational Attainment	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Population 25 years and over	654,899	311,393	<b>343,506</b>
Less than 9th grade	3%	3%	<b>3%</b>
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	4%	5%	<b>4%</b>
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	17%	17%	<b>17%</b>
Some college, no degree	18%	17%	<b>18%</b>
Associate's degree	9%	8%	<b>10%</b>
Bachelor's degree	31%	31%	<b>31%</b>
Graduate or professional degree	18%	19%	<b>17%</b>

Source: US Census Bureau. 2014 ACS 1-Year Estimates. Table S1501: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> See Survey Results from Dress for Success attached as Appendix 1

<sup>8</sup> Id.

### C. Career Fields in which Women Work

WCCW also reviewed what sectors of the workforce women are employed. That research revealed that in 2014, 69% of women are employed in private, for-profit companies and self-employed in incorporated businesses; 9% work in a non-profit setting; and 17% work for local, state or federal governments and close to 5% are self-employed and not incorporated.<sup>9</sup>

According to the data compiled by the Long Range Planning Section of the Wake County Planning Development and Inspections Division, the breakdown in the types of jobs women are working in is revealing when it comes to discussions about wage equality.

The following table demonstrates the fields of employment which men and women in Wake County were engaged in during 2014 (*See Table 2*).

**Table 2**

Wake County North Carolina, Fields of Employment	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
<b>Management, business, science, and arts occupations:</b>	251,129	49.70%	50.30%
Management, business, and financial occupations:	101,779	54%	46%
Management occupations	70,023	60%	40%
Business and financial operations occupations	31,756	39%	61%
<b>Computer, engineering, and science occupations:</b>	57,417	74%	26%
Computer and mathematical occupations	35,452	75%	25%
Architecture and engineering occupations	14,216	83%	17%
Life, physical, and social science occupations	7,749	51%	49%
<b>Education, legal, community service, arts, and media occupations:</b>	61,748	32%	68%
Community and social services occupations	8,087	32%	68%
Legal occupations	7,323	41%	59%
Education, training, and library occupations	33,926	25%	75%
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	12,412	46%	53%
<b>Healthcare practitioner and technical occupations:</b>	30,185	27%	73%
Health diagnosing and treating practitioners and other technical occupations	21,536	24%	76%
Health technologists and technicians	8,649	35%	65%
<b>Service occupations:</b>	77,509	50%	50%
Healthcare support occupations	8,605	10%	89%
<b>Protective service occupations:</b>	10,289	71%	29%
Fire fighting and prevention, and other protective service workers including supervisors	7,019	71%	29%
Law enforcement workers including supervisors	3,270	70 %	30%
Food preparation and serving related occupations	30,886	56%	44%
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	15,640	65%	35%
Personal care and service occupations	12,089	27%	73%

<sup>9</sup> Source: Wake County Long Range Planning Section, Wake County Department of Planning Development and Inspections.

<b>Sales and office occupations:</b>	131,216	43%	57%
Sales and related occupations	66,757	53%	47%
Office and administrative support occupations	64,459	32%	68%
<b>Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations:</b>	27,447	96%	4%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	972	75%	25%
Construction and extraction occupations	16,900	99%	1%
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	9,575	93%	7%
<b>Production, transportation, and material moving occupations:</b>	36,819	72. %	28%
Production occupations	15,937	59%	41%
Transportation occupations	13,248	80%	20%
Material moving occupations	7,634	87%	13%

#### D. How the numbers compare to Wake County Government as an Employer

Wake County Government is one of the larger employers in the County. As such, WCCW researched the number of female employees hired by Wake County Government in order to see how that compares with the data for the County overall and we are very pleased with the findings. The research shows that Wake County not only employs a majority of women, but that the number of women employed in management positions exceeds the County-wide statistics. For example, in 2014, 66% of the management positions in Wake County Government are filled by women. Even more impressive is that 39% of Department Heads are women at Wake County Government. Our research found that 60% of the full time employees are women, and 93% of the part time positions in Wake County Government are filled by women. Women also make up 64% of the salaried employees of Wake County.

#### E. Median Incomes of Women in Wake County

WCCW also looked at income levels for women in Wake County. That research revealed that in 2014, the *median* earnings for women over the age of 25 is \$34,809. Men in Wake County earn a median income of \$50,137. This significant disparity in median income exists *despite* similar educations.<sup>10</sup> What is concerning is that the income disparity becomes even more distinct as the education level of women increases. For example, while a woman with less than a high school degree earns approximately 67% of what a man with less than a high school degree earns (a difference in income of approximately \$6,000/year), a woman with a graduate degree earns approximately 56 % compared to her male counterpart (a difference in income of over \$40,000). (See Table 3.)

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<sup>10</sup> Id.

## II. Income Inequality and its Effect on Women

The issue of income inequality between men and women continues to receive widespread attention in the media. While this issue is not limited to Wake County, as demonstrated below, there is a clear wage gap (almost 30%) between men and women in the County. As demonstrated by research gathered by the Long Range Planning Section of the Wake County Planning, Development and Inspections Department, the median earnings for females over 25 in Wake County is \$34,809, over \$15,000 less than men. The table below (Table 3) demonstrates this disparity which exists in income levels between men and women. It cannot be overstated the significance of education on one's earning ability and that issue is addressed in Section IV of this report. However, even the most highly educated women in the county (those with graduate or professional degrees) still make **substantially less** than their male counterparts (*See* Table 3).

**Table 3**

<b>WAKE COUNTY MEDIAN EARNINGS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2014 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)</b>			
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>
Population 25 years and over with earnings	40,821	50,137	<b>34,809</b>
Less than high school graduate	16,970	18,993	<b>12,811</b>
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	27,175	30,038	<b>21,642</b>
Some college or associate's degree	34,881	40,798	<b>29,189</b>
Bachelor's degree	51,365	63,442	<b>41,578</b>
Graduate or professional degree	66,976	91,687	<b>51,197</b>

*Source:* US Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

On a national level, in 2014, female full-time workers made only 79 cents for every dollar earned by men, a gender wage gap of 21%.<sup>11</sup> The research reveals that over a woman's working lifetime in the United States, she will also be paid 79 cents for every dollar earned by her male counterpart.<sup>12</sup> The issue of income disparity is even more relevant given a family's reliance on the woman's income which has increased substantially between 1967 and 2012. The percentage of mothers who brought home at least a quarter of the family's earnings rose from less than a third (28 %) to nearly two-thirds (63%) between 1967 and 2012. The Institute for Women's Policy Research has determined that if everything stays the same, the projected year that women in North Carolina will close the gender gap is **2064**.<sup>13</sup> Based on these statistics, one can argue that income equality is not just important for women, but frankly critically important to the well-being of Wake County families.

<sup>11</sup> Hess, C., et. al (2015). *Status of Women in the States: 2015*. Institute for Women's Policy Research, pp.37-62.

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

## A. Reasons the Wage Gap Exists

There is no one reason why the wage gap exists. The wage gap can be explained in part, by a combination of economic, social and educational factors. For example, women tend to gravitate towards more low-paying fields such as education, social work and health care. Men on the other hand tend to gravitate to jobs in the technology, engineering and science fields, which are generally better-paying careers. In addition, research has shown that women's majors in college tend to lead to careers which pay less.<sup>14</sup> There is also significant research which reveals that because women tend to take off more time during the course of their career to raise children or assist in the caretaking of their families, their incomes will suffer because of it.

However, when you analyze all of the data surrounding the choices women make, there is research which suggests that these "choices" do not completely explain the gap in income. For example, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has studied this specific question:

*Yet not all of the gap can be "explained away." After accounting for college major, occupation, economic sector, hours worked, months unemployed since graduation, GPA, type of undergraduate institution, institution selectivity, age, geographical region, and marital status. Graduating to a Pay Gap found that a 7 percent difference in the earnings of male and female college graduates one year after graduation was still unexplained.<sup>15</sup>*

Similarly, according to data compiled by Claudia Goldin, a Harvard University labor economist and reported on by Claire Cane Miller:

*Rearranging women into higher-paying occupations would erase just 15 percent of the pay gap for all workers and between 30 and 35 percent for college graduates, she found. The rest has to do with something happening inside the workplace.*

*Take doctors and surgeons. Women earn 71 percent of men's wages — after controlling for age, race, hours and education. Women who are financial specialists make 66 percent of what men in the same occupation earn, and women who are lawyers and judges make 82 percent.<sup>16</sup>*

This research revealed that a significant factor in the wage discrepancy within the same profession has to do with workplace flexibility. For example, for those fields like law and medicine where long hours are required in the office and hospital, and there is little flexibility about which hours must be worked, women's incomes are shown to fall behind men. Similarly, for those professions where there is an inherent premium on "face time;" women's incomes are shown to stay below men. Those occupations and fields which are unrelenting in their required time commitments will be more detrimental to a woman's income, especially if she is trying to

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<sup>14</sup> Bardaro K (2009). *Majors by Gender: Is It Bias or the Major That Determines Future Pay?* [www.payscale.com](http://www.payscale.com), Dec. 3, 2009

<sup>15</sup> *The Simple Truth about the Gender Gap*. American Association of University Women. Fall 2015 Ed.

<sup>16</sup> Miller C. (2014). *Pay Gap is Because of Gender, Not Jobs*. New York Times, April 23, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/24/upshot/the-pay-gap-is-because-of-gender-not-jobs.html>

balance her family and work obligations. Educating employers about the effect of work place flexibility on income inequality would be helpful to begin reversing this trend.

## B. How the Wage Gap Affects Women of Color

WCCW was also interested in whether the wage gap is more prominent for women of color. The short answer is “yes” and clearly supported by all of the research performed in this area. For example, the American Association of University Women in their report entitled: *The Simple Truth about the Gender Gap, Fall 2015 Edition*, identified the following:

*Education improves earnings for women of all races and ethnicities, but earnings are affected by race and ethnicity as well as gender. White women are paid more than African American and Hispanic women at nearly all education levels.<sup>17</sup>*

The chart below, created by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, while reflective of the country as a whole and not just Wake County, further demonstrates this point and the discrepancies within race and ethnicities on income equality issues. Income inequality is systemic in every nationality as Table 4 below demonstrates. Asian American women, while still earning well below their Asian male counterparts, do boast a median earning income higher than women from all other nationalities. Hispanic women are earning the least. *See Table 4, Median Annual Earnings for Women and Men Employed Full-Time, Year-Round by Race/Ethnicity, United States, 2013.<sup>18</sup>*

**Table 4**

Median Annual Earnings for Women and Men Employed Full-Time, Year-Round by Race/Ethnicity, United States, 2013



Notes: For women and men aged 16 and older. Racial groups are non-Hispanic. Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Source: IWPR analysis of American Community Survey microdata (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Version 5.0).

<sup>17</sup> *The Simple Truth about the Gender Gap*. American Association of University Women. Fall 2015 Ed.

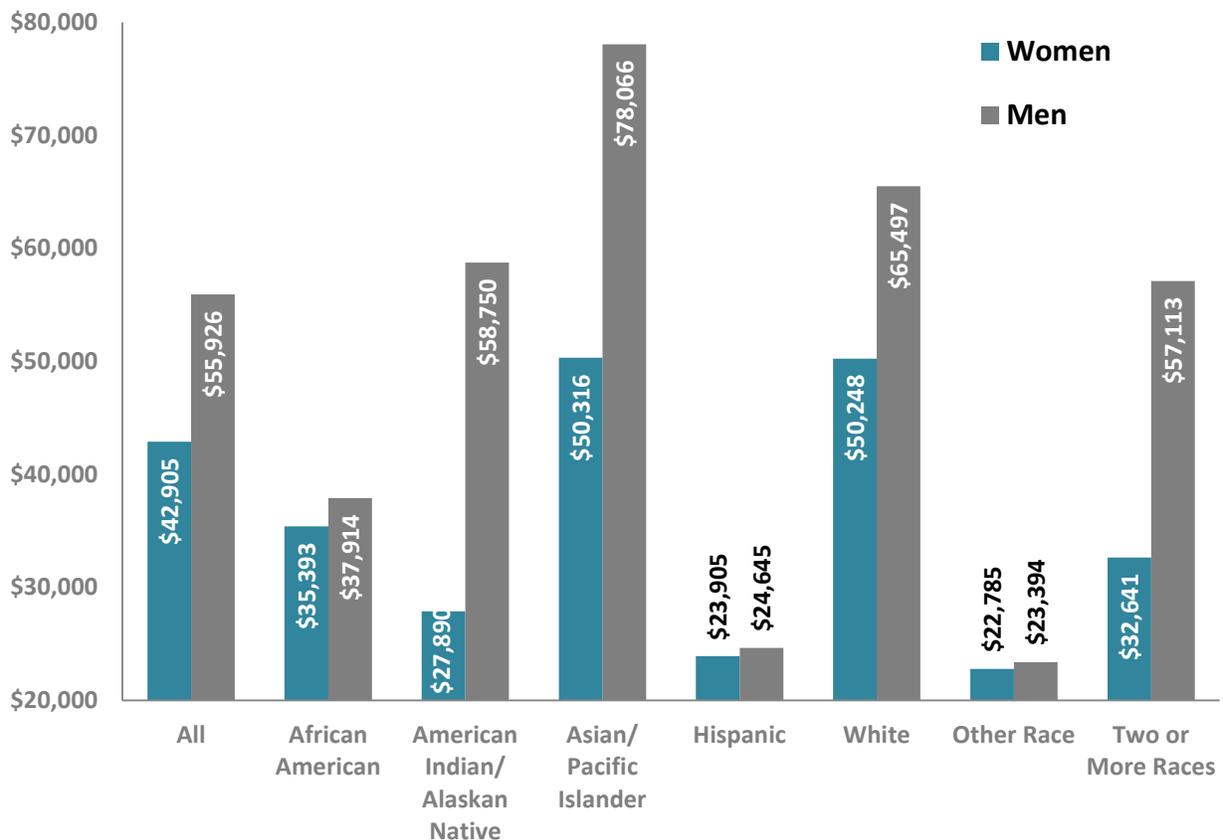
<sup>18</sup> Hess, C., et. al (2015). *Status of Women in the States: 2015*. Institute for Women’s Policy Research, pp.37-62.

**C. Median Annual Earnings for Women and Men Employed Full Time, Year Round by Race/Ethnicity in Wake County**

The WCCW also reviewed the available data for median earnings by race/ethnicity for men and women in Wake County. Like the trends depicted on a national level above, the same significant discrepancies in median earnings exist for women in Wake County. As the chart below demonstrates, Asian women are earning above the median in Wake County, but over \$28,000 less than their male counterparts. African American and Hispanic women in Wake County are earning less than the median earnings for all races in the County. Like the national numbers, Hispanic women are earning well below the median incomes for Wake County. These numbers support the need for programing targeted specifically to Hispanic and African American communities.

**Table 5**

**Median Annual Earnings for Women and Men Age 16 and Over Employed Full-time, Year-Round by Race/Ethnicity, Wake County 2014**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table B20017: MEDIAN EARNINGS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2014 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS) BY SEX BY WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS FOR THE POPULATION 16 YEARS AND OVER WITH EARNINGS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS.

## D. What Can Be Done to Close the Wage Gap?

### 1. Creating and Encouraging Work Place Flexibility

Part of the interesting research conducted by Harvard labor economist Claudia Goldin included her review of those occupations and fields where men and women had less income disparity.

Ms. Goldin determined from her research that those occupations where employees can easily substitute for one another have the smallest pay gaps.<sup>19</sup>

*“Jobs in which employees can easily substitute for one another have the slimmest pay gaps, and those workers are paid in proportion to the hours they work.” Claudia Goldin, Labor Economist*

Ms. Goldin’s research has shown that creating and allowing for more flexibility in the workplace may go a long way to reduce the gap in pay.<sup>20</sup> She used the pharmacy field as an example, where the smallest pay gaps are seen. Can employers be more creative in allowing employees to work in teams? Can we help employers create work environments where employees have the ability to back each other up as needed and therefore provide them with more flexibility to work around family’s schedules? We think the answer to both questions is “yes.” While not every profession would have this luxury, in this age of advanced technology, it makes imminent sense to try to be more creative in working with our employees.

### 2. Stronger Equal Pay Regulations/More Transparency in Discussions about wage

North Carolina has not passed its own version of the Equal Pay Act.<sup>21</sup> Wake County and its citizens can lobby the state legislature to pass the equal pay act, such that women will be paid equally to men for doing the same or substantially the same position. Further regulations protecting women who speak up to an employer when they are not being paid similarly to a man would also assist in creating parity in income.

### 3. Support Programs Aimed to Encourage More Women into Technology, Engineering and Science Fields

There are a number of programs in Wake County whose mission is to help women and girls develop an interest in the technology, engineering and science. Wake County can work to partner and publicize information about the availability of these programs to help elevate more women into these fields.

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<sup>19</sup> Miller C. (2014). *Pay Gap is Because of Gender, Not Jobs*. New York Times, April 23, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/24/upshot/the-pay-gap-is-because-of-gender-not-jobs.html>

<sup>20</sup> Id.

<sup>21</sup> However, employers in North Carolina with over 15 employees who are engaged in interstate commerce are subject to the federal Equal Pay Act. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/equal-pay-laws.aspx>

#### **4. Job Training/Effective Negotiation Skills**

There has been much written about women's lack of confidence and initiative in negotiating on their own behalf. Through job training programs, Wake County can assist and train women in not only job-seeking, but effective negotiation skills so that they can begin their position with a fair and equal salary. This can be done in conjunction with existing Wake County job training programs and in partnership with non-profits such as Dress for Success of the Triangle.

### **III. Issues Women Face when Returning to Workforce after some Absence**

Returning to a career after an extended break from the workforce seems to be an issue that disproportionately affects women versus men. Historically, this problem was recognized as early as the 1970s when the Displaced Homemaker program was developed by the State of North Carolina. During that time, due to the increased divorce rate, many women were unable to find jobs after spending time as a homemaker. In 1979, the Displaced Homemaker program was started and the program's goal was to "assist men's and women's efforts toward economic self-sufficiency and emphasize the identification of careers that will provide long term support and a realistic, livable income for families."<sup>22</sup>

The Displaced Homemaker program was eliminated by the North Carolina Legislature for the 2014-2015 year and is no longer being offered. The N.C. Council for Women published data on the number of individuals enrolled in the Displaced Homemaker program in the 2013-2014 year. In Wake County, 252 individuals were enrolled in the program. In Wake County, this program placed 56 individuals in jobs with 27 full-time, 27 part-time and two disabled. The program also placed 31 individuals in educational or training programs with two in four-year colleges, seven in community colleges, 17 in trades and three in other training.<sup>23</sup> With the elimination of this state-funded and long running program, there are likely women who are being underserved and would benefit from a similar type program offered by Wake County.

In order to obtain an understanding of the current issues facing women in Wake County, we asked Dress for Success to allow us to survey their clients on the prevalence of this problem.<sup>24</sup> Some of the pertinent results are addressed below.

#### **A. Survey Results around Return to Work Issues**

According to the survey, approximately 70% of the respondents had taken a break from work for six or more months during the past 10 years.

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<sup>22</sup> *Successful Practices for Displaced Homemaker Programs*. NC Council for Women, NC Department of Administration. Jan. 2011, p.6.

<sup>23</sup> 2013-2014 Statistics, <http://www.councilforwomen.nc.gov/stats.aspx>

<sup>24</sup> Dress for Success survey. See Appendix 1.

**Table 6**

<b>Survey Question: Have you needed to stop work at any point in the past 10 years for six or more months?</b>		
<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Yes	70%	167
No	30%	72

Of the 239 respondents, 183 told WCCW how long they had to stop work. Although the survey defined an extended break as six (6) months or longer, some women responded with breaks as short as one (1) month. Three (3) women responded that they had been out of work for 15 years but, in the majority of responses, the duration was much shorter. Some women responded that they had multiple extended breaks during the last 10 years.

The survey results also shed light on the reason women had stopped working as follows:

**Table 7**

<b>Survey Question: If so, what was the reason?</b>		
<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Illness	25%	46
Child Care	26%	48
Parent/Senior Caretaking	10%	18
Lost job and not able to find another one	52%	95
Other	32%	58

Once the women decided to return to the workforce, an overwhelming majority, approximately 81%, faced barriers to finding employment according to our survey.

**Table 8**

<b>Survey Question: Did you face any issues obtaining employment after the period of not working?</b>		
<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Yes	81%	178
No	19%	41
<b>Total Number of Responses</b>		<b>219</b>

We also asked women to provide information regarding what barriers they faced to employment. The women could check as many categories as they believed applied. Their responses to this question are below.

**Table 9**

Response	Number of Respondents
Inability to get interviews	129
Skills not up to date	81
Prejudice due to extended break	91
No access to technology/email for job search	14
Other	65

Sixty-five women responded that they faced “Other” issues in obtaining employment after their extended break. Among those “Other” reasons identified include:

- Age discrimination “companys (sic) only want the 20-35 year olds”
- Not enough professional jobs
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of clothes for work
- Criminal record
- Disability
- Over-qualified
- Lack of experience
- Homelessness
- Religion
- Race
- Foreign training

### **B. Age Discrimination Cited as a Barrier to Employment**

Even though we did not include age as one of the barriers to employment in the survey, the respondents told us that age discrimination was the predominant “Other” reason that women felt they could not obtain employment. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission keeps statistics on the number of age discrimination charges filed by individuals in each state per year. The number of age discrimination filings in NC over the last several years is as follows: FY 2009- 1,052 claims; FY 2010- 994 claims; FY 2011- 991 claims; FY 2012- 934 claims; FY 2013- 849 claims; FY 2014- 864 claims.<sup>25</sup> However, these numbers only represent the number of men and women who actually filed charges with the EEOC. The filings likely do not adequately represent the degree of the problem, since not everyone who experiences age

<sup>25</sup> [http://www1.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/charges\\_by\\_state.cfm#centercol](http://www1.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/charges_by_state.cfm#centercol)

discrimination takes the step of filing a complaint. The Dress for Success survey identified age discrimination as a significant barrier to women in Wake County finding employment after an extended break. Community programs offered by Wake County to raise awareness about age discrimination may be helpful.

The Dress for Success survey did attempt to identify programs that women felt might be beneficial in helping them obtain employment after an extended break. The women were asked to check those programs they thought would be helpful. Their responses are as follows:

**Table 10**

<b>Survey Question: Which programs might be helpful in assisting with finding employment after an extended break?</b>		
<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Paid internships	79%	186
Unpaid internships	23%	55
Skills/technology workshops	72%	169
Resume workshops	57%	134
Interviewing skills workshops	58%	137
Other	24%	57

Respondents in the “Other” category had the opportunity to write in programs they thought might be helpful in their job search after an extended break:

- Dress for Success
- Wake Technical Community College classes
- InStepp Program
- Workforce Development
- Assistance with transportation: “Gas cards or bus cards”
- Mentors
- “On the job training would be great for me at this phase in my life.”
- Career Fair Networking Events
- Second chance employers making themselves known

### **C. “Returnships” and Other Existing Programs**

There is a current trend towards “returnships” that target women who have been out of the workforce for childcare or other reasons and would like to re-enter the work force now that their children are older. These programs are much needed and overdue; however, the research revealed that these programs seem to be aimed only at professional women who have college degrees and are highly qualified, except for their extended work break. There are private companies who currently offer these programs in Wake County and they should be commended for their efforts; however, it should be noted that these programs are highly competitive. For example, MetLife is a Triangle company that offers a program that targets “talented individuals

who have taken an extended break from the workforce.”<sup>26</sup> In Wake County, there appears to be a need for programs that assist women who do not have professional degrees to re-enter the workforce, especially with the recent elimination of the Displaced Homemaker program.

#### **D. Summary and Recommendations**

Wake County can help raise awareness regarding age discrimination by both employers and the employees potentially affected.

One way Wake County can assist women after an extended break from the workforce is by potentially offering Return to Work programs/paid internships for women in Wake County government since the County is one of the largest employers in the area. In addition, Wake County can partner with and incentivize private companies to offer paid internships that target women who have taken a break from work in both professional and non-professional careers.

### **IV. Challenges Women Face to Gainful Employment**

Many female job seekers experience more than one barrier to employment during their careers, which can make finding or keeping a job more difficult. Based on the results of the Dress for Success survey and our own research, WCCW will focus on six barriers to employment which women in Wake County face:

- Education attainment level
- Lack of affordable, quality childcare
- Mental health issues
- Lack of Transportation
- Previous conviction records
- Substance abuse problems

WCCW’s research identified three primary obstacles to employment that affect a large number of women in Wake County: 1) educational attainment level; 2) lack of access to affordable quality childcare; and 3) mental health issues. Further within the report, WCCW will explore how lack of transportation, conviction history and substance abuse problems affect women in this county from seeking gainful employment.

#### **A. Lack of Education**

##### ***Key findings***

- From 2012-2014, approximately 17% of women living in Wake County have a high school education and 7% never graduated high school.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.metlife.com/careers/your-development/returning-tp-wprl/index.html>

- The median annual income of women who have not completed high school is approximately \$13,000, nearly at the poverty level.<sup>27</sup>
- In 2014 more than half of the women who only have a high school degree or its equivalency lived in poverty.

Wake County is known nationally for its large population of residents with advanced degrees. Between 2012 and 2014 in Wake County almost half of the county’s female population received a bachelor’s degree or higher and 17% of its women aged 25 and older held a graduate or professional degree. However during that same period of time, roughly 23% either have only a high school education or did not finish high school (See Table 11).

**Table 11**

S1501: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Wake County								
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
	2014 Estimate			2013 Estimate			2012 Estimate		
Population 25 years and over	654,899	311,393	<b>343,506</b>	635,054	301,764	<b>333,290</b>	618,006	293,615	<b>324,391</b>
Less than 9th grade	3%	4%	<b>3%</b>	4%	5%	<b>3%</b>	4%	4%	<b>3%</b>
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	4%	5%	<b>4%</b>	4%	5%	<b>4%</b>	5%	5%	<b>4%</b>
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	17%	17%	<b>16%</b>	16%	16%	<b>17%</b>	17%	18%	<b>17%</b>
Some college, no degree	18%	17%	<b>18%</b>	19%	18%	<b>19%</b>	19%	17%	<b>20%</b>
Associate's degree	9%	8%	<b>10%</b>	8%	8%	<b>8%</b>	9%	8%	<b>9%</b>
Bachelor's degree	31%	31%	<b>31%</b>	31%	31%	<b>31%</b>	31%	30%	<b>32%</b>
Graduate or professional degree	18%	19%	<b>17%</b>	18%	18%	<b>18%</b>	16%	18%	<b>15%</b>
Percent high school graduate or higher	92%	92%	<b>93%</b>	92%	90%	<b>93%</b>	92%	91%	<b>93%</b>
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	49%	50%	<b>49%</b>	49%	49%	<b>49%</b>	48%	48%	<b>47%</b>

Source: US Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

Lifting the educational attainment and labor market prospects of the more than 79,000 women in the county (23%) who have only a high school diploma or did not finish high school at all is a challenge, but one certainly worth pursuing considering what is at stake.

While higher levels of education increases the economic security of both women and men, the economic risks of not completing secondary education are greater for women. As Table 12 shows, women who have a high school diploma or did not finish high school make

<sup>27</sup> Poverty level for a one-member household is \$11,770. 2015 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/15poverty.cfm> | Updated: January 21, 2015

**substantially** less than their male counterparts with the same limited education. The median annual earnings of women who have not completed high school are approximately \$13,000 compared to men who earn approximately \$18,500 —both of which is well below the \$48,107 living income standard annual income that a family of one adult and two children needs to cover basic living expenses such as housing, food, childcare, health care and transportation in Wake County.<sup>28</sup>

Between 2012 and 2014, approximately 38% of women with a high school diploma live in poverty compared to 23% of men. In 2014 alone more than 50% of women who only have a high school degree or its equivalency live in poverty compared to 36% of men. The median earnings for women 25 years and older who are high school graduates is \$21,642 compared to \$30,038 for men (*See* Table 12).

**Table 12**

POVERTY RATE FOR THE POPULATION 25 YEARS AND OVER FOR WHOM POVERTY STATUS IS DETERMINED BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVEL	Wake County								
	2014 Estimate			2013 Estimate			2012 Estimate		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Less than high school graduate	30%	23%	<b>38%</b>	28%	23%	<b>35%</b>	31%	23%	<b>39%</b>
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	15%	13%	<b>16%</b>	12%	11%	<b>13%</b>	12%	11%	<b>12%</b>
Some college or associate's degree	7%	4%	<b>9%</b>	7%	6%	<b>7%</b>	8%	7%	<b>9%</b>
Bachelor's degree or higher	4%	3%	<b>5%</b>	3%	3%	<b>3%</b>	3%	3%	<b>4%</b>
MEDIAN EARNINGS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2014 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)									
Population 25 years and over with earnings	40,821	50,137	<b>34,809</b>	40,803	48,951	<b>35,430</b>	41,012	49,488	<b>34,208</b>
Less than high school graduate	16,970	18,993	<b>12,811</b>	17,417	19,850	<b>13,399</b>	16,340	18,124	<b>12,270</b>
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	27,175	30,038	<b>21,642</b>	24,157	26,317	<b>20,892</b>	28,021	32,028	<b>22,344</b>
Some college or associate's degree	34,881	40,798	<b>29,189</b>	32,706	40,639	<b>30,071</b>	32,804	41,418	<b>28,599</b>
Bachelor's degree	51,365	63,442	<b>41,578</b>	51,016	69,377	<b>41,446</b>	50,733	65,722	<b>40,725</b>
Graduate or professional degree	66,976	91,687	<b>51,197</b>	68,096	90,606	<b>52,744</b>	69,605	91,428	<b>52,731</b>

Source: US Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

## B. Lack of Affordable, Quality Childcare

### Key findings

- Wake County has some of the highest childcare costs in the state – the annual cost for a five star childcare center for an infant/toddler is almost *double* the annual in-state tuition for a North Carolina public college.

<sup>28</sup> Sirota, A. and E. McLengaghan (2011). *Making Ends Meet After the Great Recession: The 2010 Living Income Standard for North Carolina*. NC Budget and Tax Center. <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=making-ends-meet-after-great-recession-2010-living-income-standard-north-carolina>.

- The average fees for year-round childcare in Wake County range from \$12,792 (for an infant/toddler in a five-star childcare center) to \$5,352 (for a three-five year old in a one-star family childcare home). By comparison, the average annual in-state four-year, public college tuition and fees in North Carolina is \$6,970 for the 2015-2016 academic year.
- Eighty percent of Wake County children eligible for childcare subsidies do not receive them due to lack of funding.

Job seekers with children need access to reliable and affordable childcare in order to find and maintain employment. The high cost of childcare is a burden for families at many income levels and can be a significant barrier to employment. Women who cannot afford childcare may decide to interrupt their tenure in the labor market, which in turn reduces their earning potential and undermines their ability to provide for their families. Alternatively, women may have to place their children in low-quality or unreliable childcare.

Several decades of research clearly demonstrate that high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produce short and long term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development. High-quality childcare can predict academic success, adjustment to school, and reduced behavioral problems for children in early grades. Studies demonstrate that children's success or failure during the first years of school often predicts the course of later schooling.<sup>29</sup>

Finding affordable, high-quality childcare can be a significant challenge for families in Wake County. In January 2015, the North Carolina Division of Child Development Early Education released its subsidized childcare market rates (the amount that a childcare center or home may be paid through subsidy funding for childcare services) for childcare centers and family childcare homes. No matter the category – from a one star home facility to a five star childcare center - Wake County consistently has some the highest market rates in the state. Only Durham and Orange Counties have the occasional rate that is higher than Wake County (*See Table 13*).

**Table 13**

Location	Child Care Centers		Family Child Care Homes	
	Monthly Subsidized Market Rates for Infants/Toddlers		Monthly Subsidized Market Rates for Infants/Toddlers	
	One Star Facility	Five Star Facility	One Star Facility	Five Star Facility
Durham	\$544	\$965	\$469	\$673
Mecklenburg	\$536	\$870	\$446	\$618
Orange	\$513	\$1,080	\$550	\$755
<b>WAKE</b>		<b>\$1,066</b>	<b>\$536</b>	

<sup>29</sup> *A Call for Excellence in Early Childhood Education*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, November 16, 2015. <https://www.naeyc.org/policy/excellence>.

	<b>\$592 (highest in state)</b>	<b>(2<sup>nd</sup> highest in state)</b>	<b>(2<sup>nd</sup> highest in state)</b>	<b>\$757 (highest in state)</b>
Average for other 96 counties	\$423	\$723	\$381	\$509

Source: NC Division of Child Development Early Education, January 2015

The average fees for year-round childcare in Wake County range from \$12,792 (for an infant/toddler in a five-star childcare center) to \$5,352 (for a three-five year old in a one-star family childcare home)<sup>30</sup>. By comparison, the average annual in-state four-year, public college tuition and fees in North Carolina is \$6,970 for the 2015-2016 academic year.<sup>31</sup>

Childcare subsidy services make a huge difference for families and children. This financial assistance helps parents pay for childcare so they can work or attend school. Currently, childcare subsidies are a mix of state and federal funds and administered by the county. Parents who receive subsidies must pay 10% of their income to the childcare provider. Prior to 2014, there was a sliding scale for parents and they paid eight, nine or ten percent of their income.

Table 14 illustrates the significant demand for childcare subsidies that is not currently being met. While approximately 20 of Wake County children eligible for childcare subsidies are being served, roughly 80% of eligible children are not receiving the financial assistance they need to attend high-quality childcare centers.

**Table 14**

<b>Wake County</b>			
<b>Availability of Childcare Subsidy Services</b>			
	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2013-2014*</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>
Children eligible**	26,749	23,846	23,753
Children served	4,472 – 17%	5,581 – 23%	5,052 – 21%

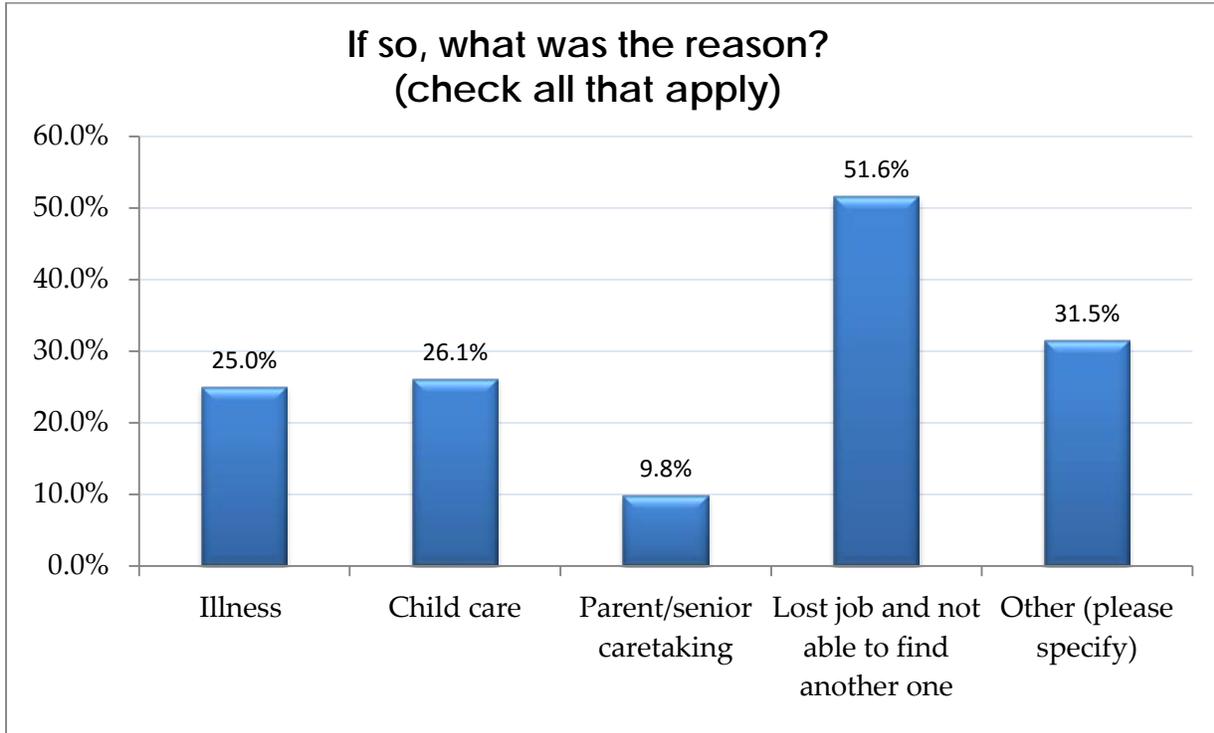
Source: Data compiled from the NC Child Development and Early Education website \*2012-2013 numbers are not available on the NC Division of Child Development website. \*\*Includes children under 11 whose parents are working.

<sup>30</sup> NC Division of Child Development Early Education Subsidized Child Care Market Rates for Child Care Centers, January 2015 [http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/pdf\\_forms/center\\_market\\_rate\\_table\\_effective\\_01012015.pdf](http://ncchildcare.nc.gov/pdf_forms/center_market_rate_table_effective_01012015.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> The College Board (2015). Annual Survey of Colleges. <http://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/2015-16-state-tuition-and-fees-public-four-year-institutions-state-and-five-year-percentage>.

Access to childcare has a direct impact on whether women are able to work or not. More than 20% of survey respondents indicate that childcare challenges forced them to stop working for longer than six months (See Table 15).

**Table 15**



Source: Dress for Success Survey, Appendix 1

### **C. Mental Health**

#### *Key findings*

- 53% of Wake County residents who receive mental health services through Medicaid and the State Health Plan are women. Of those women, 34% are seeking treatment for depression, 19% for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 18% for bipolar disorder.
- More than half of the women who sought mental health care through Medicaid and the State Health Plan are unemployed.

Individuals with mental illness are a diverse group of people, with a wide range of talents and abilities. They work in all sectors of our economy, from the boardroom to the factory floor, from academia to art. Employment not only provides a paycheck, but also a sense of purpose,

opportunities to learn and a chance to work with others. Most importantly, work offers hope, which is vital to recovery from mental illness.

Negative stereotypes of mental illness are rampant in the workplace. Many people find that disclosing their mental illness has a chilling effect on hiring and career advancement.

Table 16 shows that in Wake County for those consumers who receive mental health services through Medicaid and the State Health Plan, 53% are women.

**Table 16**

Wake County				
Mental Health Consumers Served 2/1/2013 – 10/31/2015				
Funding Source	Female	Male	Unknown Gender	Total
Medicaid	11,680	9,680	3	21,363
State	6,324	5,401	1	11,726
Wake County	1			
Grand Total	18,005	15,081	4	33,090
<b>Total Unduplicated*</b>	<b>16,825</b>	<b>14,338</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>31,167</b>

Source: Data compiled by Alliance Behavioral Healthcare. \*Some consumers received services via both State and Medicaid funding.

Of the identified women who seek mental health care, depression is the number one reason for seeking care (34%) followed by post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, psychotic disorder and anxiety. Regardless of disorder, more than fifty percent of these women are unemployed (See Table 17).

**Table 17**

Wake County										
Five Most Frequent Mental Health Disorders from Medicaid and State Health Plan										
2/1/2013 – 10/31/2015										
	Depression		PTSD		Bipolar		Psychotic Disorder		Anxiety	
	1		2		3		4		5	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total	5,795	3,390	3,155	1,766	3,028	2,000	1,502	1,593	1,460	918
Unemployed	56%	57%	54%	43%	63%	62%	54%	54%	55%	47%

Source: Data compiled by Alliance Behavioral Healthcare

## D. Lack of Transportation

### Key findings

- 24% of Wake County women ages 16 and over live in households with access to only one car.
- 2% of Wake County women ages 16 and over do not have a car.

Transportation is necessary to nearly every aspect of daily life. It enhances both physical and economic mobility and is a key factor in workers' ability to find and retain employment.

For most single parents who must work full-time under current welfare initiatives and who have children needing childcare, use of a car is the most practical means of transportation. The difficulties of getting to the childcare provider, then to work, back to the childcare provider and home contribute to job retention problems, particularly for single parents lacking a family car or a valid driver's license.

**Table 18**

SEX OF WORKERS BY VEHICLES AVAILABLE for Workers 16 years and over in households	Wake County		
	2014 Estimate	2013 Estimate	2012 Estimate
Total:	514,255	491,260	473,229
<b>Male:</b>	<b>268,453</b>	<b>256,821</b>	<b>253,104</b>
<b>No vehicle available</b>	<b>4,524</b>	<b>4,547</b>	<b>6,197</b>
<b>1 vehicle available</b>	<b>45,627</b>	<b>47,772</b>	<b>43,732</b>
2 vehicles available	126,754	124,847	130,826
3+ vehicles available	91,548	79,655	72,349
<b>Female:</b>	<b>245,802</b>	<b>234,439</b>	<b>220,125</b>
<b>No vehicle available</b>	<b>5,232</b>	<b>4,541</b>	<b>3,964</b>
<b>1 vehicle available</b>	<b>60,980</b>	<b>57,896</b>	<b>54,398</b>
2 vehicles available	110,767	107,614	106,331
3+ vehicles available	68,823	64,388	55,432

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2012, 2013 and 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

Table B08014: SEX OF WORKERS BY VEHICLES AVAILABLE

Between 2012 and 2014 Wake County has seen a slight rise in the number of women 16 and older who do not have access to a car. Men of the same age, on the other hand, have seen a decrease in those without access to a car. Twenty-four percent of women live in households with only one car compared to 20% of men (See Table 18).

In Table 19, the data shows that bus ridership for Wake County women 16 and older getting to and from work has risen slightly in 2014. In contrast, during that same time period, bus ridership for men 16 and older getting to and from work has decreased from 1.2% in 2012 to

.09% in 2014. Additionally, Table 19 shows that men are more likely to walk to work than women.

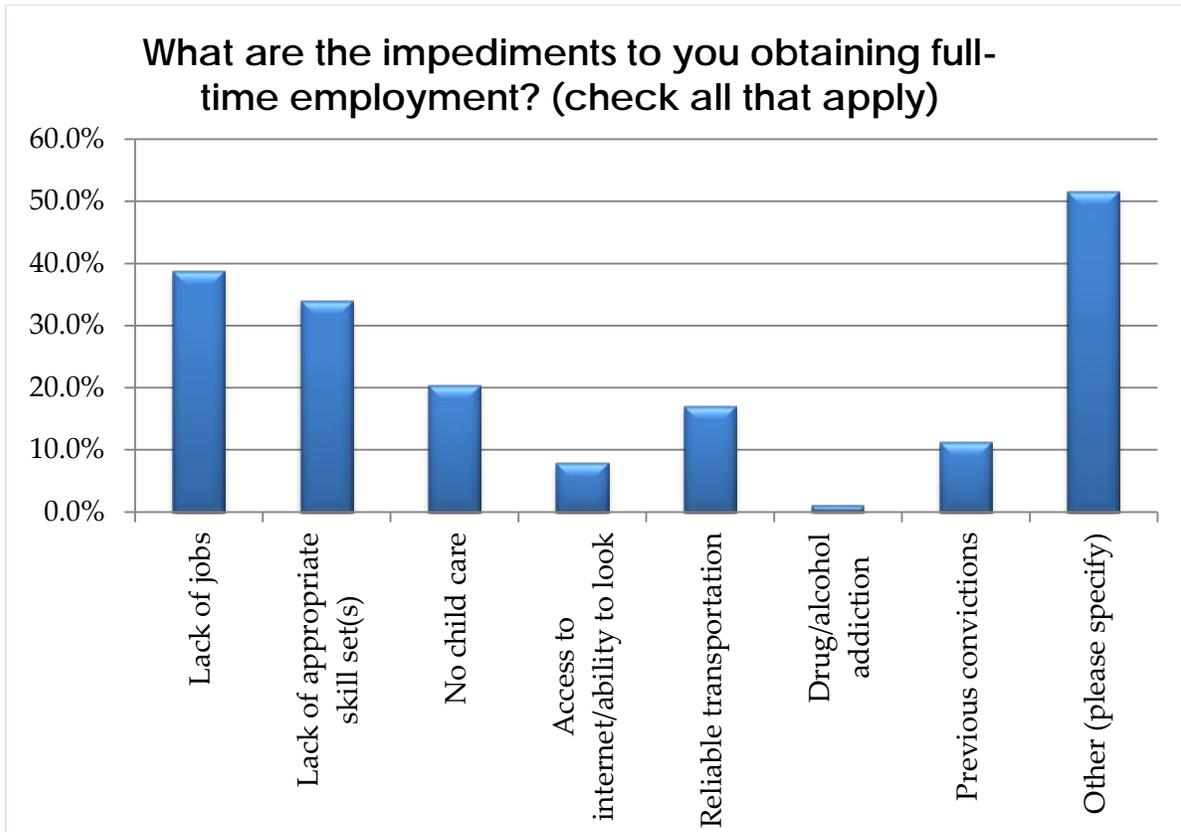
**Table 19**

SEX OF WORKERS BY MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO WORK  for Workers 16 years and over	Wake County		
	2014 Estimate	2013 Estimate	2012 Estimate
<b>Male:</b>	<b>269,047</b>	<b>258,053</b>	<b>253,787</b>
<b>Public transportation (excluding taxicab):</b>	<b>2,509</b>	<b>3,906</b>	<b>3,553</b>
Bus or trolley bus	2,465	3,842	3,228
Bicycle	758	342	1,854
Walked	4,430	4,786	3,177
Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	3,695	3,930	3,989
Worked at home	20,508	17,009	17,879
<b>Female:</b>	<b>246,685</b>	<b>235,420</b>	<b>221,613</b>
<b>Public transportation (excluding taxicab):</b>	<b>3,736</b>	<b>2,094</b>	<b>1,977</b>
<b>Bus or trolley bus</b>	<b>3,736</b>	<b>2,094</b>	<b>1,865</b>
<b>Bicycle</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>536</b>
<b>Walked</b>	<b>2,890</b>	<b>3,200</b>	<b>2,505</b>
<b>Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means</b>	<b>2,292</b>	<b>1,986</b>	<b>1,509</b>
<b>Worked at home</b>	<b>17,770</b>	<b>14,797</b>	<b>14,005</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2012, 2013 and 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.  
B08006: SEX OF WORKERS BY MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO WORK

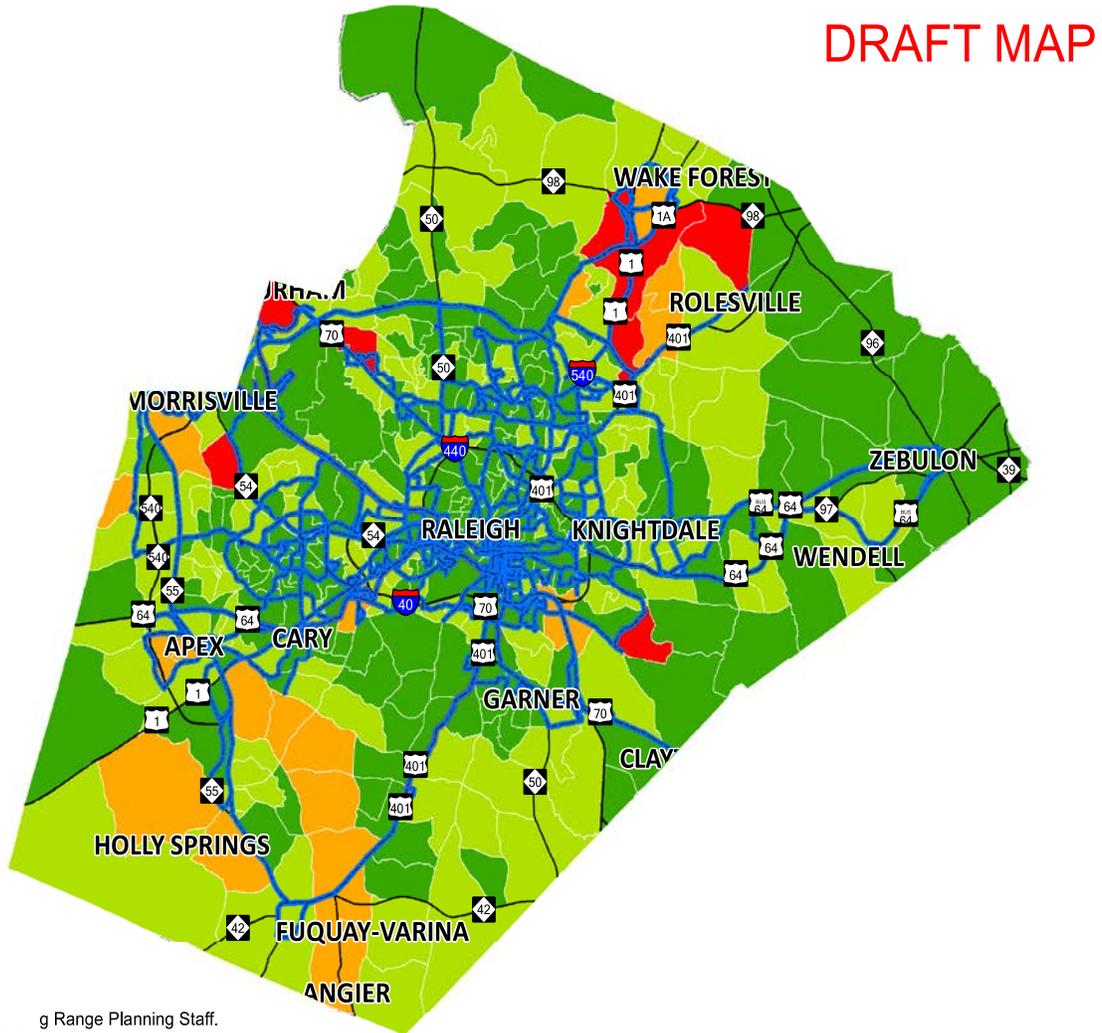
Reliable transportation is identified as a barrier to full-time employment by almost 20% of survey respondents. (See Table 20).

Table 20



Source: Dress for Success Survey, Appendix 1

The map below shows where women in Wake County live overlaid with current public transportation bus routes. Of particular interest are the orange and red sections of the map, which are the areas with the highest density of female residents but the fewest public transportation options. Existing bus service offers options to those women who live within Raleigh city limits, but is demonstrably more challenging for women living in communities outside of Raleigh.



## E. Substance Abuse

### *Key findings*

- Of the women who sought substance abuse treatment through Medicaid and the State Health Plan, 40% sought treatment for alcohol abuse, 35% for opioids (which includes heroin) and 20% for cocaine.
- More than 60% of these women are unemployed.

Employers are increasingly sensitive to the negative consequences of substance abuse. The economic costs associated with substance abuse include lost productivity from turnover and absenteeism, high healthcare costs as well as criminal justice costs. Preventing drug use in the workplace and supporting employees in recovery are vital to ensuring a healthy, safe, and productive workforce.

One of the best predictors of successful substance abuse treatment is gainful employment. Due to this, and the fact that substance abuse disorders can be a barrier to employment, it is imperative that vocational services be incorporated into substance abuse treatment.

In Wake County for those residents who received substance abuse treatment through Medicaid and the State Health Plan, 40% were women (*See* Table 21).

**Table 21**

<b>Wake County</b>			
<b>Substance Abuse Consumers Served 2/1/2013 – 10/31/2015</b>			
<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
Medicaid	1,281	1,122	2,403
State	1,454	2,718	4,172
Grand Total	2,735	3,840	6,575
<b>Total Unduplicated*</b>	<b>2,466</b>	<b>3,675</b>	<b>6,141</b>

Source: *Data compiled by Alliance Behavioral Healthcare*)

Note: \*Some consumers received services via both State and Medicaid funding

Of those women who sought substance abuse treatment, 40% sought treatment for alcohol abuse, 35% for opioids (which includes heroin) and 20% for cocaine. Regardless of the substance abused, more than 60% of these women are unemployed (*See* Table 22).

**Table 22**

Wake County						
Three Most Frequently Abused Substances from Medicaid and State Health Plan						
2/1/2013 – 10/31/2015						
	Alcohol 1		Opioids (includes heroin) 2		Cocaine 3	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total	1,005	1,733	867	894	501	504
Unemployed	63%	57%	68%	57%	70%	63%

Source: (Data compiled by Alliance Behavioral Healthcare)

**F. Discrimination Against Job Applicants with Criminal Records**

*Key finding*

- Of the 5,000 Wake County residents released from prison between 2012-2014, 10% are women.

One of the marks of successful rehabilitation for a former convicted felon is gainful employment. But workers with past felony records often do not pass initial screenings within job applications that ask job seekers to list previous criminal records. What is generally a box to be checked on a form can close the door to employment opportunities for many potential workers who are not given the opportunity to explain themselves, or show that their record is not a reflection of their ability to do the job.

There is a substantial body of research that has examined the reciprocal relationships between employment and crime. This research demonstrates that individuals who are unemployed are more likely than those who are employed to engage in criminal behavior and that individuals with a criminal record have poorer employment prospects than those without a record.<sup>32</sup>

Between 2012 and 2014, almost 5,000 Wake County residents were released from prison. Of those residents, 10% are women and the vast majority of them are men (90%), *see* Table 23. During that same period of time, the numbers show essentially the same picture for Wake County residents entering prison. Almost 5,000 residents were sent to prison, and of those residents, 10% are women and 90% are men (*See* Table 23).

<sup>32</sup> Decker, S.et. al. (2014). *Criminal Stigma, Race, Gender and Employment: An Expanded Assessment of the Consequences of Imprisonment for Employment*. U. S. Department of Justice. Arizona State University. Jan. 2014.

**Table 23**

SEX OF RESIDENTS <u>EXITING</u> PRISON	Wake County		
	2014 Estimate	2013 Estimate	2012 Estimate
Total	1,653	1,629	1,614
Female	162	183	172
Male	1,491	1,446	1,442
SEX OF RESIDENTS <u>ENTERING</u> PRISON	2014 Estimate	2013 Estimate	2012 Estimate
Total	1,721	1,679	1,480
Female	175	176	152
Male	1,546	1,503	1,328

*Source:* Data compiled from the A.S.Q. Custom Offender Reports from the NC Department of Public Safety Office of Research and Planning

*Eleven percent of DFS survey respondents say that previous convictions are keeping them from full-time employment. One respondent shared how a 10 year old misdemeanor charge that never resulted in a conviction was keeping her from being hired.*

## **Recommendations to Help Women Overcome Employment Barriers**

### **1. Facilitate Access to more Educational Opportunities for Women**

There are numerous GED programs in effect currently, but combining those programs with more college level programming would do a great deal to increase the educational levels of the female labor market of the more than 79,000 women in the county who are so affected. Wake County Human Services and Wake Technical Community College (“Wake Tech”) partner to provide GED Instruction to Wake County residents. Wake Tech provides the instructors and Wake County provides the learning sites. Using this existing program, Wake County can add college level courses to work on overcoming this educational deficit.

### **2. Support Programs that make High-quality Childcare Affordable**

Currently the childcare subsidy money that comes from the state and federal government is only meeting the needs of 25% of children in Wake County who qualify for the financial assistance. Wake County can incentivize companies and work in partnership with employers in Wake County to help ease this tremendous financial burden on families.

### **3. Recognize that Mental Health Challenges for Women are Significant**

Wake County must work together with the mental health community to decrease the stigma associated with mental illness and to encourage individuals to seek help. Further, Wake

County can incentivize and work in partnership with employers that offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), which typically offer a certain number of free mental health visits and are completely confidential to help encourage women to get the help that they need.

**4. Support the Recommendations for Expanding Public Transportation**

The recently released Wake Transit Plan includes recommendations that will greatly expand public transportation access across Wake County within the next ten years. Of particular importance are those recommendations that will expand service for the communities outside Raleigh. To view the plan in its entirety, visit [www.waketransit.com](http://www.waketransit.com).

**5. Support and Fund Substance Abuse Treatment Programs for Women**

Wake County should support substance abuse treatment programs that incorporate vocational services as part of its program because one of the best predictors of successful substance treatment is gainful employment.

**6. Implementing Fair-chance Hiring Strategies and Encouraging Local Businesses to do the same**

Nationwide more than 100 cities and counties have adopted what is widely known as “Ban the Box”, which is a policy that removes the conviction history check-box from job applications. This allows employers to consider a job candidate’s qualifications first, without the stigma of a conviction record. These initiatives provide applicants a fair chance by removing the conviction history question on the job application and delaying the background check inquiry until later in the hiring process.

## CONCLUSION

Women residing in Wake County encounter a plethora of challenging issues when it comes to seeking good paying jobs. Just some of them have been addressed within the body of this report. The Wake County Board of Commissioners can help address these issues. One suggestion is to allow WCCW to identify those organizations in Wake County that are already working to alleviate some of these problems, and for the County to publicize the work of these groups so that more women in Wake County can take advantage of programs already in place. Another recommendation is to consider hiring a think tank such as the non-profit Institute for Women's Policy Research to further research and address the needs of women in Wake County. Given that over 500,000 women reside in Wake County, it would be informative for the Commission to engage such an organization.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Wake County Commission for Women

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