Dr. Lynda M. Sagrestano has accepted the position of Director of the Center for Research on Women (CROW) at The University of Memphis beginning fall semester 2006. Dr. Sagrestano comes to Memphis from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois where she held cross appointments as Associate Professor of Psychology, Women’s Studies, the School of Medicine, and the Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development.

Sagrestano (r) confers with Dr. Phyllis Betts at a CROW faculty meeting in September.

Says Sagrestano, “I look forward to working with CROW’s outstanding scholars on a range of research initiatives that will continue the Center’s positive impact on women’s lives.”

The new director earned a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of California at Berkeley and held NIMH-funded Postdoctoral Fellowships at UCLA and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research interests include maternal and prenatal health, adolescent sexual behavior, HIV prevention,
From the Director
Response to Urban Poverty Requires Holistic View

The mission of this vibrant Center for Research on Women has always included a focus on gender as it intersects with race, class, and social inequality in the south. As the Center’s new director, my first order of business was to learn more about the people and places that make up my new community – specifically Memphis and the mid-south region.

In the past two months I have participated in two regional conferences which have given me great insight into the both the strengths of the region and the areas where more work needs to be done. First, I attended the Fourth National Health Disparities Conference: Why Our Babies Die sponsored by Meharry/Vanderbilt Alliance. Presentations highlighted the strides that have been made in maternal and child health, but also the disparities that still exist. In Tennessee the infant mortality rate is 9 per 1000 live births, compared to 7/1000 in the US. Memphis fares much worse, with an infant mortality rate of 14/1000, topping New York City and Dallas. African American women are three times as likely to lose a baby as white women in Memphis. Among African Americans in the 38108 zip code, the rate is 31/1,000.

Infant mortality is just one of the adverse birth outcomes that Memphis women are faced with. Prematurity and low birth weight put infants at risk for a host of health and developmental problems that must be addressed at birth and beyond, and Tennessee has seen an increase of 12% in preterm birth since 1996.

The second conference I attended was the Health and Public Housing in Tennessee Conference organized by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and cosponsored by our Center, The Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis, the Center for Community Building and Neighborhood Action, and the Memphis Area Women’s Council. This conference brought together national, state, and regional leaders to examine associations between living in public housing and the health outcomes of members of these communities. As part of a federal project called HOPE VI, Memphis is in the process of demolishing a number of substandard public housing projects and creating in their place mixed income communities throughout the city. Considering that over 90% of residents in family housing are women, many of them single mother heads of households, the implications of this transition are far reaching, not only with respect to health, but with respect to the economic self-sufficiency of the families living in public housing.

This kind of transition also makes apparent how crucial it is for the city to be looking at urban poverty from a more holistic point of view. Transportation, child and elder care, access to medical services, and much more are impacted by this transition, and each must be addressed to ensure that the intended outcomes of not only the HOPE VI but all economic development initiatives are successful.

So how do we enhance the economic self-sufficiency of women in Memphis and the mid-south region? Clearly health issues and workforce development are each crucial components. CROW will focus on both topics this year, examining the unique and overlapping ways that they impact economic self-sufficiency.

This issue of StandPoint is devoted to women’s employment and its relationship to the new “welfare” system. And on April 12th of next year, our Community Issues Forum will examine both health and structural (e.g., uninsurance, inadequate transportation, inadequate housing, inadequate childcare, and high unemployment rates) barriers to women’s economic self sufficiency. Our goal is to bring together leaders in the community to address the relevant issues and to develop policy recommendations that can be implemented in our own community.
New Bilingual Resource Available on Latino Immigration in the South

CROW announces the publication of a new report focused on Latino immigration and the changing racial-ethnic dynamics of the South.

Entitled “Across Races & Nations: Building New Communities in the U.S. South,” the report is being released at a time of escalating debate in Tennessee and across the nation about immigration policy. “The report contains invaluable information for activists, philanthropists and others who seek to understand immigration and address the needs of Latino immigrants as part of larger social justice agendas,” commented Dr. Barbara Ellen Smith, former Director of the Center for Research on Women at the University of Memphis and Project Director for Across Races and Nations.

“The number of Hispanics living in the Southern United States has exploded since the mid-1990s. In Tennessee, the Mexican-born population grew at a faster rate between 1990 and 2000 than in any other state,” Smith noted.

The legal status of immigrants and the presence of this new Latino ethnic group can be sources of conflict in local communities. “We found tensions among workers about the jobs that immigrants access, and discomfort among some long-term residents about the presence of Spanish-speakers in public spaces,” Smith said. “However, we also found many Southerners who were committed to incorporating new immigrants into their communities.”

The report is the product of a five-year collaboration between three southern research and education centers: the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee, the Southern Regional Council (SRC) in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Center for Research on Women (CROW) at the University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee.

“This project was born from our Centers’ common desire to better understand both the experiences of new Latino immigrants as they arrive in and adapt to the South, and the attitudes of more long-term residents toward new immigrants,” says Susan Williams, education coordinator of The Highlander Research and Education Center and Across Races & Nations project collaborator. “Our overall goals were to identify areas of potential conflict as well as collaboration among different groups, and to encourage multi-racial efforts to address common needs.”

The 370 page report (written in both English and Spanish) is divided into three sections. The Introduction provides overviews of both the project and the participating organizations, an analysis of the internal challenges faced in such a long-term, multi-state collaboration, along with brief histories of Latino immigration and the legacy of race and racism in the region.

“The report contains invaluable information for activists, philanthropists and others who seek to understand immigration and address the needs of Latino immigrants as part of larger social justice agendas.”

Case Studies provide snapshots of racial/ethnic rivalry and solidarity, job competition and tensions in the workplace, and descriptions of successful collaborations across racial and ethnic lines throughout the South.

The report’s final section is a collection of valuable resources including glossaries of U.S. immigration terms and policies; how to find, hire and work successfully with, interpreters; economic fact sheets; U.S. Constitutional Rights; an overview of anti-immigrant organizing in the United States; “Know Your Rights” workshop guides for immigrants; and a variety of other materials for popular education.
As we develop our new agenda in collaboration with our new director, the Center for Research on Women must increasingly integrate traditional “protest” activism – where the historical emphasis is on “simple justice” and moral arguments - with policy activism. Policy activism does not abandon these commitments, but often tackles issues where it is less clear how best to achieve justice and equality, or where we must designate priorities based in part on the most effective use of resources and anticipated outcomes.

CROW’s long term involvement with the Memphis Living Wage Campaign illustrates our traditional involvement in protest activism. The Campaign is coordinated by the Mid-South Interfaith Network for Economic Justice and Reverend Rebekah Jordan, and relies heavily on moral persuasion. While the Campaign is fueled by national (and CROW’s local) research that educates the public on who is paid what and what it costs to maintain a basic standard of living, the appeal to economic justice is front and center.

On the other hand, when we look at the full scope of the problem of economic justice, it is clear that city policies are but one part of the equation. Wages are a problem, but so are physical and mental health issues that keep women out of the labor force; education and workforce development that curtail opportunities; childcare, eldercare, and transportation. When we learn that there are 43,000 working age women in Shelby County who live below the poverty level – and 72,000 women who worked full time all year below the living wage level, the problem can seem overwhelming. Beyond supporting the living wage campaign, what form should our activism take?

This is where activism requires support from policy researchers. CROW is working with the Memphis Area Women’s Council to break down the seemingly overwhelming problem of economic self-sufficiency for women into more manageable parts. For example, we know that there are about 17,000 women enrolled in Shelby County “Families First” supervision (Tennessee’s version of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) in exchange for limited financial benefits. We know that about half of these women do not have a high school diploma, and that only one of four owns a car. We know that there is very little public subsidy available for child care once women start working full time.

Our challenge is to identify opportunities for system change that can be implemented at the local level. We must use our intellectual energy to critique the way things are, while creating the political energy to support real problem-solving for real people, right now, in this place. In the case of the Families First participants, local policy activism might advocate for more site-based, private-sector child care and employer-sponsored mini-bus routes – targeting employment districts such as the Medical Center where lower-wage women are concentrated.

To do this would require – as with the living wage – that the private sector change the way it thinks about its responsibility to employees. It may be difficult to think of an employer-sponsored mini-bus on the same moral level as the living wage. It is up to us as policy activists at the Center for Research on Women to make the link, not only between our research and activism, but between protest activism – with its explicit moral underpinnings – and the perhaps less explicit, but no less critical policy activism. Linking the two is the best way to make the greatest difference for women in Memphis and Shelby County.
CROW Research Interest Group
Looks at Adolescent Sexual Risk-Taking

Since CROW’s Community Issues Forum last December 1st (Teen Sex in the Bluff City: Examining the Implications of Teenage Sexual Behaviors on Girls' Health in Memphis), a flurry of cross-disciplinary interest has blossomed into coordinated activity on the issue of adolescent sexuality and sexual risk-taking. Entitled Examining Implications of Race, Class, and Gender on Adolescent Sexual Behaviors in the Mid South, this new project has three tiers: Research, Advocacy, and Dissemination.

“This RIG will help researchers collaborate on issues relating to adolescent sexual risk-taking and give them a forum to present their research to interested peers.”

The research branch has as its main goal the promotion of collaborative inquiry across disciplines. This process began with a second meeting of community partners on January 24, 2006, in which researchers, advocates, and community members from local schools and other groups that work with adolescents took the information and interest that came out of the forum and boiled it down into a set of researchable questions. These questions cover a holistic set of concerns surrounding the adolescent experience, starting with questions based on health concerns and branching off to include issues of abuse and assault, the needs of parents when it comes to adolescents (including generational guardians), the influence of the media on adolescents, potential education and communication strategies, and developing models to understand what issues go into the adolescent’s decision to be sexually active (or inactive).

Using those questions as a base for inquiry, the Center for Research on Women (CROW) is forming a Research Interest Group (RIG). This RIG will help researchers collaborate on issues relating to adolescent sexual risk-taking and give them a forum to present their research to interested peers. It will ask in return that principle researchers keep the group updated on their findings, stay open for collaboration opportunities, and keep their eyes on the larger goal of developing a set of best practices on the issue of reducing adolescent sexual risk-taking in the Mid South.

The advocacy branch is primarily concerned with linking the University of Memphis campus to the community through action. The Memphis Area Women’s Council (MAWC) is ideally placed to do this work, and is currently working in partnership with CROW and the Women’s Studies program in leading Girls for Change. Girls for Change is a collection of adolescent girls from around the Mid South area interested in working on a number of issues they have determined to be relevant to teen girls in this community including sexuality education, sexual harassment and assault in schools, and self-esteem and body image. As adolescents themselves, they bring to the table personal experiences and innovative ways to connect research and policy on adolescent sexual risk-taking to the adolescents themselves. Girls for Change is holding monthly meetings to plan further actions geared towards adolescent-based advocacy (see page 6 for the GFC meeting schedule.)

The dissemination branch is focused on creating a research community through the sharing of information. Regular updates in

(Sexual Risk Taking, page 19)
Research Forum Examines Psychosocial Influences on Outcomes of Teen Pregnancies

The University of Memphis' 2006-2007 Women's Research Forum series opens October 25, 2006 with a presentation by Dr. Lynda M. Sagrestano, Director of the University’s Center for Research on Women, on the impact of a variety of psychological and social factors on the outcomes of many teen pregnancies. The talk will be held at 4:00 p.m. at the University of Memphis Fogelman Executive Conference Center, and will be followed at 5:00 p.m. by an informal reception. The event is free and open to the public.

“Pregnant adolescents are at high risk for adverse birth outcomes, such as premature and low birth weight babies,” says Dr. Sagrestano. “This puts their children at higher risk for long term cognitive and developmental impairment or infant mortality. If we are to develop effective strategies to help these young mothers and their children, we have to better understand the myriad of factors that affect them both.”

Entitled “Psychosocial influences on adverse birth outcomes among pregnant adolescents,” the presentation will examine psychosocial factors that impact adverse birth outcomes among adolescents. Psychological factors, such as stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem; social factors, such as social support from family and boyfriend; behavioral factors, such as nutrition, exercise, and substance use; and contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status and cultural heritage will be explored to better understand the challenges faced by expectant adolescents.

Finally, data on the local impact of adolescent pregnancy and adverse outcomes will be used to set the stage for discussion of future directions for research and policy.

Girls for Change Tackles Sexual Harassment in Schools

This fall Girls for Change will be conducting a preliminary survey on the types, frequency, and extent of sexual harassment in Memphis middle and high schools. After identifying this issue early on as one in which Memphis girls needed information and action, the girls began working with Memphis Area Women’s Council Executive Director Deborah Clubb to design a survey instrument that can capture the kind of data they will need for a more comprehensive local study of the issue.

The survey is modeled on a national research project by AAUW entitled “Hostile Hallways” (see note at end of article for more information) which states that sexual harassment is widespread in schools and that it has a negative impact on students’ emotional and educational lives.

Girls for Change is a leadership and policy training project for teen girls initiated by the Memphis Area Women’s Council, the University of Memphis’ Center for Research on Women.
In spring 2007, our largest graduating class yet will receive their master’s degrees in Women’s Studies. But first, they will publicly present their theses or capstone projects in an event that promises to provide insight into the lives of local women, both now and in the past.

Elokin CaPece, originally interested in classics and history, was also intrigued by activism, particularly in street and political theater. “I wanted something where I could do academics and activism at the same time,” she explains. For her thesis, she is using statistics for race, age, sexual risk-taking, weight, and other factors to draw a picture of a hypothetical adolescent girl in Memphis. Additionally, she will design a city map that can help the typical Memphis teen access the resources she is most likely to need.

Crystal Hall’s M.A. thesis concerns gender stratification in the Living Wage Campaign, a movement that advocates a living wage for city employees in Memphis. She says the Women’s Studies program has helped focus her interests, especially the required Women, Race and Inequality class that introduced her to new authors and theories she would normally have never heard about. She loves the fact that faculty involved in the program are willing to work with all her needs as a student, and their flexibility has allowed her to shape her class schedule and thesis according to her interests.

Debbie Harwell appreciates how this degree program has enabled her to study “women working together with other women to make their lives better.” Her thesis, entitled “Wednesdays in Mississippi,” is about the summer of 1964 when women from the North traveled to Mississippi to ease racial tensions. Armed with interviews from the daughter of one woman who attended these events, Harwell plans to explore how these women bridged communication gaps between the whites and African Americans of the area.

Tammy Prater has enjoyed this opportunity to combine her interest in history with social activism. For her capstone project, she is completing an internship with Facing History and Ourselves, a local nonprofit organization that trains teachers how to approach difficult topics, such as racism and sexism. It also teaches middle and high school students to be more civic-minded by using events in history, such as the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement, to show how some people’s actions can have an impact on many lives. It is important for her that people be “inspired to do things in the community,” and she thinks this program encourages that ideal.

Students in Women’s Studies are also busy planning events for WCRC, the Women’s Consciousness Raising Coalition. As Natalie Davis explains, this campus organization provides a welcoming place for students from across the university to think about how gender affects their lives.

We invite Standpoint readers to attend our colleagues’ public presentations in the spring, as well as other programs sponsored by Women’s Studies and WCRC, including visiting lecturers, dance performances, and a few surprises.

Details are forthcoming at our website, http://wmst.memphis.edu.
Dr. Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, believes Sagrestano’s leadership will be a great asset for the Center, the University, and the region. “Dr. Sagrestano’s talent and experience will ensure that the Center for Research on Women continues its 20-year track record as an active and visible research base for the faculty and community partners working to understand and to better the lives and welfare of women in this region,” says Wagner-Lawlor. “Her broad interests in women’s issues will mean continued wide support for any faculty member interested in pursuing the intersection of race, class and gender—while her particular research interests in women’s health will also be able to energize the Center’s recent work on teen sexuality, domestic violence, and on neighborhood development. The College is delighted to have her on board, and we look forward to watching the evolution of this very important research and outreach center.”

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Don’t forget CROW in your list of annual charitable contributions…

Our researchers are working on issues of vital importance to women and girls in Memphis, the Southern U.S., and the nation, including:

**Teen pregnancy and sexual risk-taking**

**Low wage jobs**

**Unfair labor practices**

**Sexual harassment in the schools**

**Gender and race related disparities in health care & health research**

**Immigration**
Sudanese Women Activists Visit Memphis

The Memphis Area Women’s Council, along with staff and faculty affiliates of The Center for Research on Women, welcomed representatives from women’s organizations in Sudan to their University of Memphis offices in September. The visitors were on a fact-finding tour of women’s organizations in the U.S. and were eager to discuss their efforts to improve women’s options for economic self sufficiency in Sudan.

The women spoke of the struggles of Sudanese women for basic rights – to work, to be safe, to be represented in their government – as well as their difficulties in organizing to address women’s issues in the midst of civil war. How do you reach women in the villages with no roads, electricity, or mail system? They shared stories of women whose husbands are dead or gone to the wars and who are trying to support themselves and their children by selling tea for pennies in the streets. Many are being arrested for not having purchased the proper (and expensive) government permits and are ending up in jail.

The Memphis visit was facilitated by the Memphis Council for International Visitors.

Girls, page 6

Women and Women’s Studies Program. Through Girls for Change, Memphis girls ages 13-17 are encouraged and supported to "take charge and make change.” They learn to identify and articulate problems, conduct and utilize research, and organize with others to take action on issues they believe in. To date more than 80 girls from over 15 public, private and parochial schools in Shelby County have participated in Girls for Change.

Last year at monthly meetings and a city-wide rally the girls identified the following issues as being critical to the health, happiness and well-being of all girls in our community:

- Access to comprehensive sexuality education and pregnancy/STI prevention programs
- Reduction in relationship violence and sexual harassment in schools
- Promotion of positive self-esteem and body image

This year Girls for Change will be working to "take charge and make change" in these important areas on behalf of all girls throughout Memphis and Shelby County. Please encourage any girls you know to come check it out at the upcoming meetings.

Girls for Change
Upcoming Meetings

Saturday October 21, 2006
4 - 6 p.m., Hooks Central library, 3030 Poplar Avenue

Saturday, December 16, 2006
4 - 6 p.m., Hooks Central library, 3030 Poplar Avenue

Friday, January 12, 2007
8 p.m. - 8 a.m., Girls for Change Lock-In. Call for details.

All girls ages 13 - 17 welcome.

For more info call 678-2642 or visit www.memphiswomen.org.

To order a copy of AAUW’s publication “Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School” call 1-800-225-9998, Ext. 534
October 21, 2006  Girls for Change meeting, Hooks Central Library, 3030 Poplar, 4 - 6 p.m.

October 25  Women’s Research Forum  “Psychosocial influences on adverse birth outcomes among pregnant adolescents”; Dr. Lynda Sagrestano; University of Memphis Fogelman Executive Center, Room 123; presentation 4 - 5 p.m.; cocktail reception 5 - 6 p.m.

November 18  Memphis Area Women’s Council, Women’s Policy Action Summit, 600 Jefferson, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., free parking on site.

November 14  Women’s Academic Network, 4 – 5:30 p.m., Holiday Inn Lounge; light refreshments, cash bar

Nov. 28  “Healthy Relationships Day” – Women’s Studies graduate Teresa Diener speaks to parents and middle school students on teenage relationship violence as part of Memphis City Schools “Healthy Choices Week”; promotional assistance by Girls for Change (time, location TBA)

December 12  Women’s Academic Network, 4 – 5:30 p.m., Holiday Inn Lounge, light refreshments, cash bar

December 16  Girls for Change meeting, Hooks Central Library, 3030 Poplar, 4 - 6 p.m.

January 23, 2007  Women’s Academic Network, 4 – 5:30 p.m., Holiday Inn Lounge, light refreshments, cash bar

February 20  Women’s Academic Network, 4 – 5:30 p.m., Holiday Inn Lounge, light refreshments, cash bar

March 15  Women’s Studies: “Re-Creating Women’s History: An Evening with Alice Randall” (author of “The Wind Done Gone”) University of Memphis Rose Theatre, 7:00 p.m., followed by a book-signing. (EVENT TENTATIVE, DEPENDENT ON FUNDING)

March 17  Women’s Studies: “Good Will Dolls and Other Oxymorons: An Evening of Dance, Theatre and Stories of Survival”; performance by Professor Holly Lau (Dept. of Theatre and Dance; CROW Faculty Affiliate) and Teresa Diener (M.A., Women’s Studies, 2005) 7:00 p.m. Rose Theatre, University of Memphis. Reception follows.
Women's Academic Network, 4 – 5:30 p.m., Holiday Inn Lounge, light refreshments, cash bar

March 20

Women's Studies: Public screening of Moolaadé by African cinema's founding father Ousmane Sembene (Ceddo, Xala) award-winning film on the practice of female circumcision. UofM, Mitchell Hall Room 200 (auditorium) 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

March 23

Women’s Studies: First Annual Women’s History Month Symposium. “Women Making Change”; keynote speaker, Professor Rose Gladney (emeritus, history, University of Alabama) on “Why Lillian Smith.”

March 24

Women’s Studies: Girls for Change Film Festival. featuring Miss Lil's Camp, as well as a lecture by filmmaker Suzanne Niedland (time, location, and full slate of films TBA).

March 25

Women of Achievement awards reception, 4:30 p.m., Holiday Inn University of Memphis

March 29 & 30


April 11

Women's Research Forum  "Gender and racial health disparities in heart disease* by Dr. Cheryl Travis, Professor of Psychology, UT Knoxville, (time and location TBA)

April 11

Women’s Studies: Public lecture by Holly Shulman, Professor of History, University of Virginia "Rethinking Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Wednesdays in Mississippi and the National Council of Negro Women." Mitchell Auditorium, 7:00 – 10:00 p.m.

April 12

CROW Community Issues Forum: “Many Rivers to Cross: Health Related Barriers to Women's Economic Self Sufficiency in Memphis"; panel presentation and community discussion; reception to follow; 3 - 6 p.m., 600 Jefferson, downtown Memphis, free parking on site

May 8

Women’s Academic Network, 4 – 5:30 p.m., Holiday Inn Lounge, light refreshments, cash bar
Selected References on Women, Work and Welfare
Prepared by Jane Henrici, July 2006


benefits and $12 an hour without such benefits, based on the Living Wage study carried out by CROW researcher Dr. David Ciscel.

As the Council’s board discussed local economic activities, members who work closely with women at the lowest end of the economic scale suggested that while we continue to seek the living wage concept, we should also ascertain employment issues and barriers that face low wage local women. A board committee met with representatives from New Pathways Community Development Corporation and the Community Development Corporation Council to discuss creation of a survey that could be distributed to their clients, the women who live with these barriers and confront low wages. That led to the concept of a Workforce Action Collaborative to pool the expertise, experience and energy of groups and individuals concerned about this issue.

The Collaborative is connecting lowest-wage women with advocates, community groups, activists and researchers to identify local employment barriers and policies and procedures that need to be changed. Then together, we will train, equip and organize low-wage women and other women in the Collaborative to create a strategy to advocate for those changes.

That action agenda will be developed with and carried out by the women who face those barriers along with the Collaborative’s other partners.

“If we expect to reduce poverty and strengthen prospects for economic self-sufficiency among poor and low-wage working women in Memphis, barriers to workforce development for women need to be both well-understood by a broad range of stakeholders and policy-makers and actively confronted through grassroots pressure and informed advocacy,” said Dr. Phyllis Betts, CROW’s Associate Director for Community Partnerships and a convener of the Workforce Action Collaborative.

Barriers include both challenges to work readiness before employment (including literacy, health, and other issues that decrease the probability that education and training programs will be successful) and challenges to sustained employment and progressively more secure and sufficient wages and income after work is obtained, Betts said.

“Workforce development is especially critical here because the poverty rate among families headed by women with children in Shelby County is characteristically about 60%, while the proportion of women workers receiving wages at the estimated ‘living wage’ level is no more than 20-30%,” she added.

The Memphis Area Women’s Council is seeking out voices – ones typically not included in policy discussions – of women who live the life of temporary and seasonal jobs, low wages, no benefits and complete job insecurity.

With partial funding from a “Community Initiatives” grant from the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, the Women’s Council called together leaders from community groups that work every day with unemployed and under-employed women.

Advocates and professionals from community-based agencies, organizations and programs that support economic self-sufficiency efforts for low income women formed the Collaborative’s steering committee: the Metropolitan Interfaith Alliance (MIFA), Neighborhood Christian Centers, Seedco, the Uptown Alliance, Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis, the Center for Research on Women, Memphis Area Legal Services, New Pathways Community Development Corporation, Partners for the Homeless, The Urban Child Institute and Hope VI case managers.

In smaller sessions, Collaborative members sit with women, like Claudell, Montricia and Sheila, to talk about their challenges and what they need in order to make better lives for themselves and their children. Their wish list is familiar to all working women who are also raising kids: flexible hours, earlier shifts and most of all, better pay, better pay, better pay!

Comments from these conversations helped shape a survey that will be completed by at least 150 women representing the diverse local population, in households with children and without.

Project leaders expect survey results to tell more about the local role of the following key factors in workforce development:
Don't miss the Memphis Area Women's Council's
Women's Policy Action Summit
Saturday November 18, 2006
9:30 - 12:30 p.m.
600 Jefferson
Free parking on-site

References, page 13


This year marks the tenth anniversary of the legislation that President Clinton claimed “would end welfare as we know it” and brings millions of welfare recipients into the mainstream of American life. Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) after having vetoed two previous Congressional welfare reform acts. Having promised such reform in his campaign, he accepted PRWORA, saying it contained most of what he wanted: increased job training and supported child care to prepare welfare recipients for full time work. Thus federal AFDC was replaced with block grants to states to implement Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Unemployed mothers and their children were no longer “entitled” to federal support but could apply for partial assistance with a lifetime limit of five years.

Celebratory articles tracing the effectiveness of PRWORA appeared in a number of leading news magazines this past summer, including an op ed piece by Bill Clinton himself entitled “How We Ended Welfare Together.” Such articles lauded the decrease in numbers of families applying for TANF (over AFDC recipients) and concluded that the poor were better off than ever, now that household heads were working.

However, two recent books suggest that those accolades distort and hide the consequences of welfare reform. Based on a massive investigation of poor families (mostly headed by single mothers) in three cities, these books reveal the real and hidden costs of families’ struggles for survival. Jane Henrici, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Memphis and faculty affiliate of the University’s Center for Research on Women, worked with an interdisciplinary team of cultural anthropologists, sociologists, developmental psychologists, and public policy experts to design the research study from which these books are derived. They surveyed over 2400 poor families in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio, particularly Hispanic and African American populations. In addition, researchers conducted intensive, open-ended, ethnographic interviews over an 18-month period, observing decision-making and financial challenges. A third wave of investigation is yet to come. The scope and depth of this undertaking directly exposes nearly every claim made by those who insist that PRWORA has dramatically improved the lives of the working poor.

In Doing Without: Women and Work after Welfare Reform (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), Henrici presents nine essays that draw on the data gained principally from the San Antonio portion of the Three City Study. They illustrate how PRWORA has shifted responsibility from national “to more localized entities, and from the public to the private sphere.” (1) Particularly salient is the editor’s assertion that while federal assistance (starting with Mothers’ Pensions in the 1930s) has always recognized and honored mothers for staying at home with preschool children, the current mandate supports only those women willing to engage in work training or full time employment while their children are young.

The essays in this collection find that single parent households survive in one of four ways. (1) They combine various assistance programs like food stamps, SSI, Section Eight housing, and private charity to get by on a minimum or low-income wage. (2) They make ends meet by sharing expenses with a family member or friend. (3) They receive financial support off the books from family members or a boyfriend. (4) They form “networks of reciprocity” to give and receive
Memphis Area Women’s Council

Women’s Policy Action Summit to set next agenda

Violence at home, harassment at school and insecurity at work confront many Memphis women and girls on a daily basis.

At the Women’s Policy Action Summit set for Saturday, November 18, 2006, the Memphis Area Women’s Council will announce a new campaign to address harassment at school, results of research into workforce barriers for lowest-wage women and proposals to address gaps in domestic violence prosecution.

“Our work with girls from middle and high schools, public, private and parochial, made it clear that they are being harassed at school,” said MAWC executive director Deborah M. Clubb. “But no one has told them that the law guarantees them an education free of that kind of bullying, teasing, taunting and touching.”

The Council, a nonprofit dedicated to local policy change to support women and girls, will invite the community to join in new action projects to assure equal access to opportunities and a safe environment for all women and girls.

“We are gathering local research and data in our three focus areas to guide us to the roots of the problems,” said Sonja White, president of the Memphis Area Women’s Council. “With that data in hand, we invite women from across the community to join in strategies to make change. Sometimes that’s a conversation with a policy maker; sometimes that’s support of new legislation or it might be making women’s voices heard in other ways.”

Already, MAWC’s board and volunteers, working with community partners and agencies, are making change. Action projects that were launched at MAWC’s first Policy Action Summit, held in April 2004, included:

- A Court Watch in the Orders of Protection hearing room documenting needs of domestic violence victims and court staff
- “Stop the Hitting” campaign to support a ban on corporal punishment by the Memphis City Schools.
- Support for a living wage for employees of Memphis city government, companies with city contracts and employers granted property tax freezes

Outcomes so far:

- Memphis City Schools banned corporal punishment.
- Private space is now designated for domestic violence victims to meet with their advocates. New signage directs victims around the Criminal Justice Center.
- MAWC Action Alerts urged members to contact state legislators for support of an increased penalty for breaking Orders of Protection and it passed.
- Memphis City Council granted the living wage to all full-time city employees on July 1, 2006, and to tax freeze recipients starting Jan. 1, 2007. The vote on the living wage for city contractors is set for mid-November.

The Summit is free and open to the public, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at The Urban Child Institute, 600 Jefferson. Secure parking is available and the building is wheelchair accessible.

WHAT: Women’s Policy Action Summit 2006
WHEN: Nov. 18, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
WHERE: 600 Jefferson, The Urban Child Institute
Adjacent parking; wheelchair accessible.
Free and open to the public.

MAWC is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to local policy change in women’s health and health care, economic self-sufficiency and educational equity and reform.

MAWC is a 501(c) 3 organization

Donations to MAWC are tax-deductible as allowed by law and memberships are welcome.

For action updates and other information see MAWC’s website, www.memphiswomen.org.

Memphis Area Women’s Council
c/o Center for Research on Women
337 Clement Hall,
Univ. of Memphis
Memphis, TN 38152
678-2642

Deborah Clubb
Executive Director
Memphis Area Women’s Council
services, as well as engaging in barter, odd jobs, and trades. These strategies, noted by an earlier generation of scholars, remain in place after PRWORA because most work these women find does not pay a living wage. Many find themselves losing or quitting jobs when family needs overwhelm their ability to perform in the workplace. Almost all the women surveyed suffered from stress, unmet health or nutritional needs, and feelings of not being able to be a good mother. They worried about the quality of day care available. Contrary to the proponents of PRWORA, these women “are not seamlessly transitioning into economic self sufficiency.”

Two essays that this reviewer found especially meaningful were Lillian Salcido’s chapter “Looking for Home.” Unlike most studies of “welfare mothers” that concentrate on African American women, Salcido concentrates on the aspirations and struggles of Latina women. She finds the middle class ideal of home ownership is a powerful motivator for Hispanic women, though it remains nearly an impossible reality even in the low-cost San Antonio housing market.

“The Difference that Disabilities Makes” by Debra Skinner, William Lachicotte, and Linda Burton pulls data from the forty-two families in the three city study who have a child with a disability. Using narrative case studies, they poignantly illustrate the impossible task of meeting with doctors, nurse practitioners, physical & speech therapists and early interventionists while trying to hold down a job. The kind of mothering required by special-needs children “is valorized in middle class Moms,” yet is punished in those who need TANF because they are expected to work (or attend school) while managing the disabled child. This unpaid work goes unrecognized and child care for seriously disabled children is almost non-existent.

Making Do should be required reading for all who supported the adoption of PRWORA and all who have any voice in setting state TANF requirements. These essays would be more accessible to the public at large if the methodological information were limited to the introductory essay only and purged from each of the eight essays that follow.

Writing with Ronald Angel and Laura Lein of the University of Texas, Dr. Henrici has also co-authored Poor Families in America’s Health Care Crisis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) from the same Three City Study. In this work the authors concentrate on the San Antonio respondents and examine the struggles poor families face when they try to access the health care system, usually without private insurance. They assess how living with uncertainty about medical care affects work productivity and quality of life, and they argue that researchers have ignored the unavailability of health care as a major contributor to the instability of planning and follow through that often characterize the families in the study.

Survival strategies are nowhere more critical than in how one learns to access health care and how well one navigates the myriad regulations, providers, stipulations, deadlines, and paperwork. The toll this takes on the working poor is tremendous. Attempts to secure universal health care in America date back to President Harry Truman in the 1940s, yet continually fail in the U.S. Congress. While admitting that the probability of passage of such reform remains slight, the authors argue that the U.S. must join the rest of the developed world in providing an expanded safety net for the most vulnerable and must recognize that lack of sufficient health care will continue to hamper efforts to put and keep women in the workforce.

The authors’ use of narrative rather than quantitative data makes their work especially accessible to the lay readers and the extensive bibliography makes this a great resource for anyone investigating the American health care crisis.
community publications (like StandPoint) and through community networks form the bulk of this branch’s activity at present, but plans for a separate publication and another meeting of community partners are in the works.

Armed with local data about adolescents, ranks filled with researchers interested in adolescent sexual risk-taking, and invigorated with adolescents demanding change, the work that began with the Teen Sex in the Bluff City forum continues on, getting progressively more pointed, more collaborative, and more able to link hand-in-hand with the community.

by Elokin CaPece, M.A. candidate, Women’s Studies
Enclosed is my contribution to support the work of the Center for Research on Women.

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Researchers at CROW examine problems of social inequality as they relate to gender, race, class and sexual orientation.

Based in the College of Arts & Sciences, this nationally recognized Center collaborates with scholars in psychology, history, sociology, anthropology, economics, health sciences, public administration, communications, the arts and other fields. CROW researchers also partner with government agencies and non-profits to address specific community needs and concerns.

CROW’s brand of action-oriented, community-based research strengthens the public’s understanding of women’s experiences in Memphis and contributes to local, regional and national policy discussions.

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