

the **W**e news

Women Employed

fall • 2009



Women Employed Mobilizes Students to Save Financial Aid

This year, 138,000 students nearly lost the financial aid they receive through Illinois' Monetary Award Program (MAP), which provides college grants to lower-income students. Due to Illinois' ongoing financial crisis, MAP initially only received funding for the first semester of the school year, meaning that in January, all MAP students were scheduled to lose their aid. Last month, thousands of students banded together to fight for MAP funding. Women Employed's Student Advocates for Success (SAS) mobilized over 500 students

to demand that the legislature save MAP. And we won! The General Assembly reinstated MAP for the spring semester.

But the fight isn't over. Women Employed is organizing students across the state to fight for a long-term funding solution, to make sure that MAP and other programs that working women depend on are funded well into the future. Join us in the fight! Visit www.womenemployed.org to join our Action Network. If you are a working student, contact Elena Herrera at eherrera@womenemployed.org to join SAS.

Average Lifetime Earnings by Degree

College education makes a major difference in the earning potential of a worker over the course of her lifetime.

▶▶ High school degree: **\$1.2 million**

▶▶ Associate's degree: **\$1.6 million**

▶▶ Bachelor's degree: **\$2.1 million**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2002

Students speak: Why did you fight to save MAP grants?



**Griselda Romero,
Roosevelt University**

I come from a very low-income family, and I am the first generation to go to college. I lost my job in March, we lost our home, and a person cannot expect to live off unemployment alone. Jobs today require that you have an education. If I cannot continue my education, I will struggle for survival. I am fighting because this is the air that I need to breathe. My education is my future.

138,000 Illinois lower-income students depend on MAP grants to pay tuition for the 2009-2010 school year.



**Mary Bulaon,
Loyola University**

The MAP grant helped me put my son through college, and now that he's graduated, it's my turn. I spent years working and raising my children, and putting my hopes and dreams aside. I had to drop out of college once because of finances, and I'm not going to miss the boat again. At 49 years old, MAP is making my dream of a better quality of life possible. Anyone that has the ability and desire to go to school should not be turned away because they do not have the money to pay.

Advisory Group Tackles Volatile Scheduling

Elizabeth U. works in a hospital as a Certified Nursing Assistant making just over \$20,000 a year. She has two daughters, and every dollar she earns is carefully budgeted.

But even though she is considered a full-time employee, Elizabeth can't count on a steady paycheck. On any given day, if the hospital census is low, Elizabeth's shift could be cancelled. And unless she uses a vacation day, she doesn't get paid. Her shifts are cancelled so regularly that even though she never takes a vacation she runs out of vacation time covering her lost shifts. During those months, she has to cut back on basic expenses, such as gas for her car and food for her family.

Elizabeth is not alone. About half of all low-wage workers face uncertain and shifting work schedules. They are women

in retail, healthcare, hospitality, and many other jobs that we all depend upon on a daily basis. They may not know how many hours they will work in a week, when those hours will be scheduled, or whether their shifts will be cancelled. They cannot count on a regular paycheck or budget for expenses. They cannot plan

on childcare or enroll in school because they do not know day to day when they will be at work.

Women Employed is pursuing strategies to solve this problem. WE recently brought together researchers, policy experts, labor economists, and communications

specialists to discuss ways to build a case for scheduling stability, predictability, and flexibility that will lead to change on a national level.

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Our next steps are to put together policy recommendations, engage the business community, and communicate about this issue with a wider audience. For the millions of women like Elizabeth, who cannot count on their hours or their paychecks, this issue must become a higher priority.

WE Experts Train New Student Corps

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) has launched an innovative program to help more Illinoisans pursue higher education, and because of WE's unique expertise, they have called on us to help. The Illinois Student Assistance Corps is comprised of 60 recent college graduates who will help low-income prospective students explore career options, prepare for college, navigate the application process, and secure financial aid.

As part of the Corps' seven-week training, WE shared strategies for reaching out to working students. WE presented the specific challenges that these students face, such as balancing school with work

and family responsibilities, and finding reliable transportation and flexible, affordable childcare.

Navigating the complex financial aid process and obtaining sound career development advice can be major obstacles for adult students. To address these challenges, Women Employed showed Corps members how to help students use Career Coach, WE's innovative online career exploration program, to apply for college, download the FAFSA, apply for financial aid, and map future career plans. The online program can even help identify jobs that will help students pay for tuition while they are in school.

SAVE THE DATE!

The WORKING
LUNCH




May 4, 2010

11:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

**The Fairmont
Imperial Ballroom
200 N. Columbus Drive
Chicago**

Want to Have a Big Impact?

Join *Making Change*, Women Employed's monthly giving program. With a manageable monthly gift, you can make a difference in the lives of working women.

Each donation goes a long way.

- ▶ \$50 per month will enable us to work with a community college to make critical support services available to working adult students.
- ▶ \$25 per month will pay for town hall meetings in two key legislative districts to advocate for paid sick time.
- ▶ \$10 per month will provide materials for a workshop for low-income women to explore careers through Career Coach, our innovative web-based career exploration program.

How does it work? It's easy! Sign up online at www.womenemployed.org, or call Elizabeth Finlayson at 312-782-3902, x245 to get started.

WE's Work with College Improves Student Services

adult students at Elgin Community College (ECC) will soon find it easier to access information and services, thanks to the help of Women Employed. Earlier this year, WE sent mystery students to go through the application and registration processes at ECC as part of the Clear Connections Project. Based on their findings, WE shared information with the college about how they could improve the process for working students, many of whom support families and may be the first in their family to attend college.

"The information we received from Women Employed was very helpful, very interactive, and very professionally done," said Carol Cowles, Dean of Students at ECC. "We're using the report as a jumping off point for changes in how we deliver information." Those changes include training administrative staff on childcare services available to students and making

sure that information about those services is available in all their offices. The college is also preparing a single brochure that lists all of ECC's student support services, so students can find out at a glance what is available to them. In addition, ECC is conducting staff training in customer service and effective listening to ensure that all new and prospective students receive the same information and the same level of service.

Cowles is enthusiastic about the report and about the changes being made at ECC. "I would absolutely recommend Women Employed's services to other colleges! When I have spoken to other college administrators about the value we received from this program, several have said, 'I wish Women Employed was visiting us.'" For more information on scheduling a visit, contact Meegan Dugan Bassett at mbassett@womenemployed.org, or at 312-782-3902, x249.

Paid Sick Days Bill Sponsor Hears From Workers

Women Employed recently gave workers without paid sick days a chance to bring their concerns directly to State Representative Lisa Hernandez, lead sponsor of the Illinois Healthy Workplace Act. At a meeting of the Illinois Paid Leave Coalition, Rep. Hernandez heard the concerns of restaurant workers, janitors, and healthcare workers who have had to work while sick because the alternative was a lost paycheck or job. These workers struggle with the knowledge that they could infect coworkers and customers when they go to work sick. Rep. Hernandez was moved by the workers' stories and vowed to keep fighting for paid sick days in Illinois. She plans to talk to employers to hear their concerns and help overcome opposition to the bill.



IL Representative Lisa Hernandez (r), lead sponsor of the Illinois Healthy Workplace Act, listens to workers talk about the need for paid sick days.

Real Stories: Restaurant Workers

Jill

I've been working in the restaurant industry for many years. One time, I was really sick. I was congested, I had a fever, and I felt awful. I called my boss, and she said I could either find a replacement, or come in sick, or be out of a job. I couldn't find a replacement, so I went in, and as I was serving a table, I suddenly sneezed right into the person's food. Of course, I got the customer new food, and I felt terrible about it, but I couldn't afford to lose that paycheck.



Benjamin

I've been a restaurant worker for about 15 years. One day I had a 101 degree temperature, and I was in cold sweats. I tried all morning to find someone to cover my shift, and nobody would do it. I came into work with a fever, shaking, and I had to work the whole shift like that. I was throwing up in between tables, in between making drinks at the bar, and it was just atrocious. But if I'd stayed home, I would have been fired.

Students speak: What the \$205 million MAP victory really means.

Who Inspires You?

this fall, hundreds of WE supporters told us about the women who inspire them during our 24-hour “Women Tweeting Women” Twitter tweetathon. Read about their inspirations in the sidebar.

Now you can show someone in your own life how much they mean to you with Women Employed’s first-ever holiday

e-card. Visit www.womenemployed.org, give a gift in honor of an inspiring woman or girl, and send her an e-card to show your appreciation. Not only will you get to thank someone who has inspired you, but your gift will also help WE ensure that more women get a chance to reach their full potential.



From Our Tweetathon: Who Inspires You?

@DOPirovano: Reading Anne Frank’s diary when I was 13 changed my worldview and my life, informed and inspired me. She lives on.

@jstone483: I’m inspired by my mom who is going back to school in order to start a new career at the age of 49!

@veronicaeye: My maternal grandma who expected nothing less than college out of us girls.

@LilHappyHeathen: My grandma Deanna. Smart, educated, funny, girly, passionate, kind. Fully responsible for my love of politics, feminism & fun.

@Dave_in_SA: That would be mi esposa. She’s tougher, braver, kinder than I’ll ever be.