



The WIT program serves women in all stages of life, creating a lasting support system for participants.

You've Got a Friend

Tri-C program offers a helping hand to women

Evelyn Ramirez was sending her daughter, Emily, off to her first year of college when Emily decided to challenge her mom. Let's both earn degrees, she said.

At the time, Ramirez was going through a rough patch. Within a span of two weeks, she had filed for divorce, been laid off and lost her grandmother unexpectedly. "I felt defeated, paralyzed," she said. "I would walk the supermarket aisle and not be able to afford a gallon of milk, with four kids at home that I had to feed."

In spite of these challenges, Ramirez took her daughter's suggestion and enrolled at Tri-C, joining the Women in Transition (WIT) program in the summer of 2015. WIT helps women experiencing personal or professional challenges by offering them education and support.

Ramirez finished the program, found confidence and purpose and is now employed as an executive assistant at a Fortune 500 company while still pursuing an associate degree at Tri-C as a newly inducted

member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

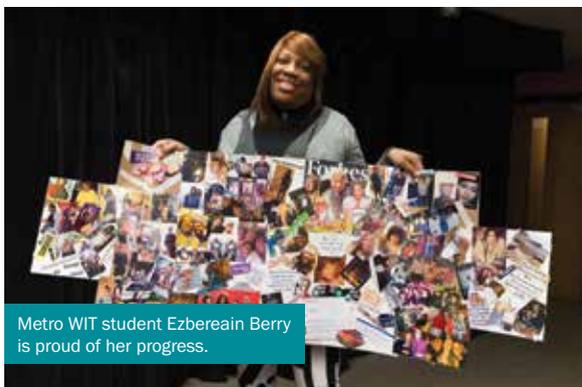
"[WIT] helped me learn to be kind to myself, to develop myself and accept where I was in my life while continuing to move forward," she said.

Founded in 1978, WIT — then known as Displaced Homemakers — was initially meant to train women who had lost their main source of income through divorce or death of a spouse. Today, WIT serves a more diverse population including single mothers, women recovering from addiction or homelessness, empty-nesters, formerly incarcerated women and even those with a degree or career who want to follow a new course.

The eight-week, non-credit program is designed to transform and empower women through education and training so they can move forward in their lives.



WIT student Hadassah Scott shows off her poster project.



Metro WIT student Ezbereain Berry is proud of her progress.

The curriculum focuses on personal development, career exploration and computer skills, with workshops that help women develop confidence, build self-esteem, identify marketable skills and explore their interests. Participants also learn about Tri-C's educational and workforce training programs.

WIT classes provide a supportive, confidential space. Participants gain confidence as they learn to draw strength from within to promote personal wellness and fulfillment.

"As women, we are natural nurturers. We know how to take care of everyone else but ourselves," WIT Program Director Cicely Campbell said. "I think it's the compassion and sense of sisterhood that have the greatest impact on our students."

Tonesia Mack felt stuck in her longtime job as a barber and stylist. "I didn't see myself growing and reaching my full potential," she said. She joined WIT in fall of 2012 to explore career options.

The open and honest discussions in class affected her personally and professionally. "We were able to express ourselves — sometimes with tears, sometimes with laughter," Mack said. "We shared our dreams and our fears, our triumphs and our trials, and it was all OK."

Mack has since earned an Associate of Arts degree from Tri-C and is enrolled in the nursing program at Ursuline College. "I see, hear and live a different me," she said.

Like Mack, many WIT participants continue their studies at Tri-C. About half are considered "college-ready" when they begin college courses, and of that number about 35 percent enroll at Tri-C. For these women, retention rates are high and the average GPA is 3.07.

"My team is often thanked for changing the life of the graduate, and I believe that we truly are changing lives," Campbell said. "The women build self-confidence and gain friendships along the way. They learn to bring out what has been inside of them all along."



Cicely Campbell

CICELY CAMPBELL, DIRECTOR, WOMEN IN TRANSITION

Introduced to WIT through a Cuyahoga County work experience program, Cicely Campbell served as a volunteer, program assistant and student advisor before becoming the WIT director in 2012. "On paper, it might appear that I have everything together. I have two degrees from two very prestigious universities, a bachelor's from Vanderbilt University and a master's from Washington University in St. Louis. However, I myself am in transition, and thus I am leading by example. I don't take that lightly," she said. "My mother

passed in 2013. Though I've been an adult for some time, I could always depend on my mother — whether it was living in her home or relying on her help to raise my son. Now I'm developing a plan for a financially sound future for myself and my son."



WIT staff members like Debra Lewis-Curlee provide women with support and encouragement when they need it most.

RUN FOR WIT

Running is a metaphor for life. Every day, extraordinary women run through obstacles to change their lives in the Women in Transition program at Cuyahoga Community College. Please join Tri-C board trustee Rachel Von Hendrix, a child of WIT, in The Rite Aid Cleveland Half Marathon May 15, 2016. All funds raised will provide scholarships for women in Tri-C's Women in Transition program to pursue degrees or certificates.

For sponsorship and other information, visit: www.tri-c.edu/give or call the Tri-C Foundation at 216-987-4868 by April 29.