

## The News Tribune

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### Success counted in women's lives

BY KATHLEEN MERRYMAN

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You could define success as Stephanie Genton does: She got help finding an important job, and she's thriving in it.

Or like Jessica Pease, you could see success as a work in progress: She received help finding her way on a student path toward a hoped-for high-tech career.

Or you could go with Diana Gallagher's assessment: She found help getting skills and confidence that have staved off depression on a long and so far unsuccessful job search.

The three women are among 15,000 who have gone through training since 1982 with Washington Women's Employment & Education. Those alumnae passed a five-week computer course, honed interviewing techniques and built professional wardrobes.

They're all invited to a WWEE reunion from noon to 2 p.m. Saturday at Owen Beach in Point Defiance Park. It should be a festive day, with food, prizes and friends.

But most of them won't show, and that's a good thing: They're too busy.

Saturdays bustle at Emergency Food Network, where Genton, 29, of North Tacoma, is volunteer coordinator and administrative assistant. She'll likely be working with a youth group, service club or court work crew, packaging bulk frozen vegetables into family-sized portions.

Before WWEE, she needed food bank veggies herself. Her husband was out of work. They had two children. They'd had to sell most of what they owned and were on public assistance.

The state Department of Social and Health Services referred her to WWEE.

"It was a life-saver," Genton said. "They gave me the skills I needed to get myself out in the workplace. I was a nanny before I was a stay-at-home mom. I needed to retrain myself. I came for the computer programs."

The food network hired her straight out of WWEE, and she worked her way up.

"I've been here for 3½ years, and it's all because of WWEE," she said.

Jessica Pease, 27, of Orting, was irritated when staff at Helping Hand House in Puyallup directed her to WWEE.

"My children were very young," she said. "I did not want to do it. I thought it was a dumb program. I already knew computers like the back of my hand."

But her confidence, social skills and drive were abysmal. She was a high school dropout whose professional wardrobe consisted of one pair of dress pants. She found help repairing all that.

"Our teachers would read inspiring things, and we would go over them in class," she said. "It was life-changing."

She believed her future was boundless, earned her GED and enrolled at Bates Technical College. "I've conquered the audio program and have a 3.86 cumulative GPA in broadcasting and video production," she said.

She's up at 4:45 to get her two boys to day care and herself to work by 7. She takes 15 minutes off for lunch. After classes and work study, she heads home at 6:30 p.m.

It's a rough road, but it leads to the future she wants.

Diana Gallagher, 54, came to WWEE in 2009 after she lost her 20-year job as a veterinarian's receptionist and was about to lose her home.

"I was very discouraged, very down on myself," she said. "I didn't have any skills."

In better economic times, her WWEE training might have landed her a job, she said, but these are hard times, especially for older job-seekers.

"Twelve percent of people over 50 are getting re-employed," she said.

That's where the rest of the program has been a life-saver.

"They did a lot of motivation," she said. "You are special. You are a good person. You can do this," is her mantra.

She used the clothing bank to build a professional wardrobe. She's moved to Moses Lake, where living is cheaper than in Tacoma.

Though still jobless, she's still afloat emotionally.

Like a job, like hectic studies, that's a success in its own way.

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#### **MORE on WWEE**

Washington Women's Employment & Education is a nonprofit job-training agency specializing in computer skills and employment readiness. Many low-income clients are referred by housing and social service agencies and receive training at no cost.

**Where:** 3516 S. 47th St., Suite 205, Tacoma, WA 98409.

**Telephone:** 253-590-0647.

**Website:** [www.wwee.org](http://www.wwee.org).

**How to help:** Donations of professional attire for women stock the clothing bank. Monetary donations are also welcome.

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