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The Phoenix Rising Program

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The Phoenix Rising Program is a Life Skills pilot program within the Work First Department at Edmonds Community College, in an urban community north of Seattle, Washington. It is specifically designed for women who are victims of domestic violence and receiving Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) through the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The goal of this program is to provide the educational support needed by these women to become stabilized and self-sufficient. Goal setting and career planning are essential components of this self-sufficiency program. Once family stability is achieved, the students transition either into academic or professional/technical training programs at a local college, or into living wage jobs.

The theoretical frameworks that support this program combine Anticipatory Guidance, an interactive process used within the nursing field, with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Transformational Learning Theory and Strengths-Based Learning. These modalities are used to guide the student, in a transparent manner to a new way of thinking and living as they recover from the physical, social, psychological and financial trauma of domestic violence. The students learn to make choices that have a positive impact on how they resolve identified barriers and rebuild their lives. This results in a significant change in their definition of self-worth and self-efficacy. The nine steps of Transformational Learning Theory perfectly describe the process the students practice as they learn a new way of thinking and living. Students experience a significant negative event (domestic violence); that leads them to realize they were operating on some false assumptions. They examine their thinking within the structure of the class; recognize they are not unique in their false assumptions; learn to reframe and retest their perceptions; establish a new course of action, and begin to implement, and continually assess that plan. The instructor facilitates the process and models strengths-based feedback, which is often contrary to what they have been lead to believe about themselves by their abusers.

The class meets 12-15 hours per week, as required by DSHS participation guidelines. It is facilitated by a Life Skills instructor who teaches effective communication skills, strategies for navigating change, managing stress and resources, financial literacy, as well as the dynamics and effects of domestic violence on families. Students learn the skills of self-advocacy, and are encouraged to identify and meet family needs through community resource networks. They examine their role in the abusive relationship and develop the interpersonal skills necessary to maintain healthy personal boundaries, and a safe environment. Realistic career planning and preparation are the final step in the course. Students prepare to transition either into a living wage job, or into a career training program at one of two local community colleges in the area.

Phoenix Rising is going through its first evaluation since its inception three years ago. Ninety-three women, have enrolled in the program. Some have described it as both life-saving and life-changing. A number of women chose not make the transition into work or school. Some returned to the abusive relationship. The evaluation will examine data regarding those who entered college and the work force after leaving the program. It will also analyze the students' perception of the impact of the program on the resolution of their domestic violence issues.

This is a challenging population to serve, with significant needs, barriers, and resiliency, whose very lives sometimes depend on their success in this program. Retention in training and

education programs is problematic with these women, due to compounding issues such as lack of housing and transportation, financial constraints coupled with the impacts of violence on learning,. There is limited research on the correlation between self-sufficiency and the incidence of domestic violence. There is even less data available on the effects of violence on learning in adults; nor are there studies on factors influencing career development retention and completion for this population. Further data analysis will inform recommendations for research as well as specific program modifications and development.