

The YWCA Hammer Program is a comprehensive career development program for young women ages 16-21 who are out of school, parenting, and vulnerable to a range of barriers associated with long-term poverty. The Hammer Program has the following goals: (1) to exit graduates prepared in the hard and soft skills necessary for successful integration into non-traditional careers in the construction and related industries, and (2) to help young women develop the skills, confidence, and personal vision to become self sufficient adults.

Founded in 2002 with funding from the Workforce Investment Act, the Hammer Program is specifically designed for young women who are most impacted by the long-term effects of poverty, poor education, reduced opportunity, early responsibility, and underexposure to the world of work. Young women attend the Hammer Program full-time, Monday through Friday, and are engaged in five primary activities: (1) job readiness, (2) work experience at the construction site, (3) classroom and lab training in hard construction skills through the NCCER curriculum, (4) GED and academic enrichment, and (5) life and leadership, skill development. Six of eight graduates of the pilot year of programming have been placed in construction related jobs. The second year of programming begins in October with twenty new participants.

The Hammer Program is innovative in the following ways:

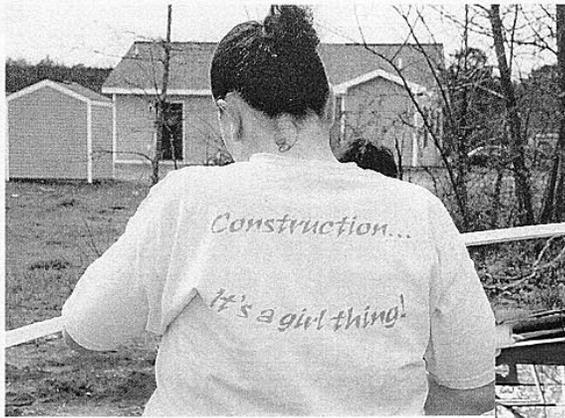
Replacing Barriers with Supports and Relationships: The YWCA has a unique commitment to provide comprehensive support that breaks down barriers and opens doors to opportunity. Through the provision of training wages and supportive services such as full time childcare, bus fare, education, and counseling, the Hammer Program is addressing the concrete and visible barriers associated with poverty. Extensive interaction with adults, whether Hammer Program adult staff or women professionals in the construction industry, removes the sense of personal and professional isolation and opens doors for healthy decision-making and career choices.

Experiential Learning and Transformation: The Hammer Program is about more than helping young women with skill acquisition. The Hammer Program is about transformation. A highly intensive program, the Hammer Program recognizes that real change is not learned in the classroom. Real change is "learned" through living. Designed to be a living workshop, young women participants are challenged to learn, practice, and integrate new skills into their daily lives. In order to learn construction skills, young women build houses. In order to learn work readiness, young women participate in a simulated and structured work environment. Young women in the Hammer Program experience feelings of being skilled, capable and knowledgeable about what they have to offer employers, their families and the world. These feelings become the motivator for showing up for work and for themselves.

Economic Empowerment and Increased Access to Opportunity: The YWCA believes that women must be able find jobs with long-term stability and mobility and that an investment must be made to help prepare women to earn a living wage and not a minimum wage. The Hammer Program is part of an emerging movement to pre-prepare women for higher paying non-traditional jobs in order to promote long term economic empowerment and equity. Once prepared, women must have access to jobs and industry partners such as Associated Builders and Contractors, B.L. Harbert International, National Association of Women in Construction and Alabama Power are working with the Hammer Program to increase opportunities for women to gain and maintain employment in the industry.

Through the Hammer Program, the YWCA seeks to both promote the economic self-sufficiency of young women and to build the capacity of the construction industry. The Hammer Program hopes to become the training program of choice for placing and retaining young women in entry-level positions, with job stability and mobility, in the local and commercial construction industry.

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HAMMET PROGRAM

