

Women's Opportunity Center

Where Growth is the goal, Myths are shattered, Strengths are revealed.



“

The barriers to equality are deeply ingrained and complex. Overcoming them will not be easy. However...when women and girls are empowered to live to their full potential, everyone benefits exponentially.

~Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation~

”

*Empowering Women~
Inspiring Change*



COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

10.22-12.23



2022-2023

Gender continues to significantly influence how women interact with the world, shaping both their experiences and society's responses. As highlighted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, achieving equality faces deep-rooted and intricate barriers. These hurdles, where gender intersects with race, class, and sexuality, are complex and often hidden, yet incredibly harmful to women. Thus, our commitment to empowering women and helping them realize their full potential remains vital. Acknowledging the multi-dimensional path toward gender parity, our initiatives revolve around four core pillars: Personal and Professional Development, Networking, Advocacy & Activism, Community Building and Outreach. These domains are the cornerstone of our endeavors to dismantle the obstacles that prevent a more just and inclusive world for all women.

What's new

Personal & Professional Development

Ready, Set, Go and **Ready, Set, Go+** are comprehensive programs supported by a partnership with the NYS Department of Labor. These initiatives are dedicated to aiding eligible women in broadening their horizons and achieving social, emotional, and financial goals self-sufficiency.

- **Ready, Set, Go** caters to women focused on securing employment as their primary objective. Participants benefit from complimentary private coaching, online courses, workshops, and access to professional attire through the Dressing Room. This program is tailored to assist clients in obtaining suitable employment opportunities.

- **Ready, Set, Go+** is designed to empower women navigating through complex circumstances, particularly those disentangling themselves from abusive relationships. It offers personalized sessions, workshops, and online courses that equip participants with essential skills and information, such as assertiveness, financial literacy, effective communication, goal setting, basic computer skills, career exploration, job application assistance, interview techniques, and attire guidance, including shopping at the Dressing Room.

Managed through our **Mary Durham Boutique**, the Dressing Room is a vital component of our comprehensive service model. Women enrolled in our **Ready, Set, Go or Amunet** projects who can't afford a suitable wardrobe are able to take advantage of personalized assistance in selecting appropriate and attractive clothing free of charge.

150 New enrolled clients

423 Active Participants

#DreamsWithWOC



Business Builder, developed thanks to generous donations and bolstered by assistance from Tompkins County, came into being in January 2023. By serving women at different milestones of their entrepreneurial adventure, from those with thriving home-based businesses or polished ideas to those still wondering if a business endeavor makes sense, we're creating a nurturing environment that meets various needs. This approach ensures that women at any stage of their entrepreneurial quest can find invaluable guidance, resources, and mentorship to advance their goals and aspirations.



- **Ready, Set, Dream** is specifically designed for women in the process of refining their business ideas and developing comprehensive business plans. It serves as a platform for nurturing entrepreneurial aspirations, aiming to support women throughout their journey toward becoming successful entrepreneurs.



- **Mentorship Project** Our mentorship component connects women with home-based businesses and those ready to start their businesses with seasoned women business owners who can provide knowledgeable support and guidance

The initiative, **“Project Amunet”** aims to address the needs of women experiencing abuse, particularly those who may not identify as victims due to societal perceptions that primarily associate abuse with physical or sexual violence. This initiative recognizes the equally harmful effects of emotional, psychological, financial, and verbal abuse, even if less visible. By acknowledging and supporting victims of these forms of abuse, Amunet creates a secure environment for them to confront their situations. The initiative goes beyond emotional support by providing a safe space and administrative assistance to navigate community services, serving as a crucial lifeline for individuals seeking to break free from toxic situations.

Empowering women in such circumstances not only helps them regain control of their lives but also lays the groundwork for a safer and more promising future. Amunet is a comprehensive solution that understands the multifaceted challenges faced by those in abusive relationships. It is designed to complement existing domestic abuse emergency and shelter services by reaching out to women who may be struggling but hesitate to burden current service providers, believing others are in more urgent need of assistance. The proposal seeks to offer independence and security to women in their journey towards a better life.

Networking Initiatives

WOC-sponsored events that promote women-centric endeavors giving attendees an opportunity to expand business, professional or social contacts:

- **Celebration of Women**-Owned Small Businesses: Mingle, Nosh, Pop-Up Shop October 2022;
- **Mentorship Mingle**: April 26, 2023 and December 1, 2023
- 7 monthly **Breakfast Mingles**-Human Services workers need support, too! May-June and August-December 2023

Advocacy & Activism

Social media posts, blogs and calls to action that shine a light on local, state or national issues, which create obstacles to a woman's health, wealth or safety. This past year, the Women's Opportunity Center has sponsored, organized and publicized numerous events related to domestic violence including:

- **International Women's Day Panel**, March 8, 2023
- **CNY Women's Summit** 2023, March 8, 2023
- **16 Days of Activism**, Why Do They Stay panel, December 6, 2023
- **The Many Faces of Domestic Abuse** radio campaign, Nov. 27, 2023 through March 31, 2024



Collaboration and Community Building

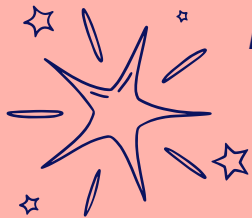
Mary Durham Boutique's (MDB) focus on recycling and resource-sharing creates a positive impact by bridging the gap between women with financial means and those on limited incomes.

Mary Durham Boutique (MDB) is dedicated to sustainable fashion by reselling gently used quality apparel, shoes, jewelry, and accessories.

The MDB Cares program, launched this year, exemplifies their commitment to the community and the environment.

Unique initiatives include:

- "Thru the Door," where women in need can select a starter wardrobe with no questions asked;
- "Sharing N-2-N," providing toiletries and apparel to schools and nonprofit agencies;
- "Only If You Live Here" Pop-up Shops offering no-funds-needed shopping events for residents in various facilities and
- "Monthly DSP Breakfast Mingle," fostering collaboration among nonprofit professionals in client services.



MDB Cares served over 12 community organizations & over 220 individuals.



2023-24 Board of Directors



Sarah Johnson, Chair

Over the course of a long and varied work life, Sarah was a book buyer for an independent bookstore, a traveling sales representative for several publishers, and assistant director of an information systems department at a New York City nonprofit.

While living in NYC, she completed her undergraduate work in English Literature and in 1990 moved to Ithaca to pursue graduate studies in human development. Post graduate school, Sarah managed an infant research lab, provided technical support to users of a national database on child abuse and neglect and was active in employee affairs. At a community college, she worked with nontraditional students enrolled in programs typically dominated by the opposite gender.

She retired after serving for more than eight years as Operations Director at the Women's Community Building in downtown Ithaca. In retirement, she has been an active community volunteer and continues to be interested in women's welfare and education. Her current philanthropic interests center around narrowing the growing gap between the rich and the poor.



Susan Barnett, Treasurer

Susan Barnett is immediate past Chair of the Board of the Women's Opportunity Center, and current Treasurer. She has been a board member since 2012. Born in England, she moved to the U.S. in 1985 and has lived in Ithaca since 1993. She worked as a Management Consultant for McKinsey & Company and recently held a position as a Visiting Fellow at Cornell University. She has degrees from Cambridge (B.A., Psychology), Harvard (MBA), and Cornell (M.A. & Ph.D., Developmental Psychology).

Susan also serves as the Treasurer for the Golden Opportunity Tutoring organization and is a member of the Village of Cayuga Heights Zoning Board of Appeals. She enjoys running, biking, playing soccer, and skiing in her free time.



Nancy Oltz, Secretary

Nancy Oltz has been a WOC board member since 2013. She is a lifelong Ithacan and retired from Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit in 2017 as Manager of Operations following a 40-year career in local transit. She is active in the community beyond her work with the WOC, serving on the Gadabout board of directors for 35 years.

Nancy is married with one daughter and two grandchildren. She enjoys the many community events that Ithaca has to offer, as well as spending time with her family and friends.



Deirdre L. Hay

Deirdre is a lawyer who works at Cornell Law School's Career Development Office, counseling mostly foreign students in career opportunities in the U.S. and overseas. She works with students to develop job search strategies, provides career guidance regarding effective resume and cover letter writing, and prepares students for interviews.

In 2023, Deirdre taught a business law class at Cornell as an Adjunct Professor. She was President of the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York (then 4,300 attorneys) and co-founded the Finger Lakes Women's Bar Association, which worked with WOC. As a lawyer and feminist, her most recent case was promoting the Equal Rights Amendment. Deirdre and her husband, George, have three children and a horse farm on Asbury Road in Freeville.



Tamer Elshourbagy

Tamer Elshourbagy is the Managing Director of Investments & Strategy for Market Street Trust Company. Tamer is responsible for managing, developing, and implementing investments for families, individuals, and institutional investors with \$2B in assets under management.

He has 25 years of investment experience in portfolio management and fundamental investment research. Prior to joining Market Street Trust Company, Tamer spent 5 years with Tompkins Financial Advisors as a Vice President and Senior Portfolio Manager. At TFA, he managed \$4B in assets under management across a number of multi-asset investment strategies for high-net-worth clients and institutional investors.

Prior to Tompkins Financial, he served as portfolio manager and head of research for John Ullman & Associates with oversight of \$1 billion in assets under management. Additionally, he spent over 10 years with Brandywine Global Investment Management as an equity analyst for the firm's large cap value strategies and assets under management of \$7 billion.



Janis Graham

Janis Graham graduated from Vassar College in 1978 with a B.A. in English. She has led a career as a women's health journalist. Starting out, she lived and worked in Manhattan as a writer for Self Magazine and freelance writing for notable publications such as the New York Times.

After moving to Ithaca with her husband 30 years ago she began writing freelance—but continued her work debunking myths on women's health. In her writing career, Janis has authored three books—Your Pregnancy Companion: Month-by-Month Guide to All You Need to Know Before, During, and After, Breastfeeding Secrets and Solutions, and The Athletic Woman's Sourcebook: How to Stay Healthy and Competitive in Any Sport.

Since retiring as a journalist, she continues her passion—writing about and advocating for women's issues. Janis also enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren and hiking and running. Janis has been with WOC since 2023 as a part of the Strategic Planning team. She also serves on the Ithaca Health Alliance Board and is a member on the Dryden Zoning Board of Appeals.





Naya Sou

Naya is a financial advisor. She desires to spread knowledge of how to use money as a tool to empower your life and serve others. This passion brought Naya to WOC in 2023.

Her interest is in helping women to develop financial literacy and become confident in money management. Beyond helping women get by, she wants to help her community members thrive. Her knowledge and experience are in both advising and education.

Born and raised in Vietnam, she moved to New York City with her family in 1997. She went on to receive her B.S. in Geology from Rutgers University and a M.S. in Teaching from Pace University. After graduating, she taught in the Bronx at the high school level. There she learned a great deal about serving disadvantaged communities.

After moving to Ithaca with her family, she served as an academic advisor at Cornell University where she once again worked with students. Naya saw that, even at the Ivy League level, many students were greatly affected by concerns around financing their schooling and did not have the financial literacy skills that would give them more confidence in managing their money. Naya is currently working on a financial planning certification program at Boston University and currently works as an advisor for Forum Financial Management.



Carla Baudrons

This is Carla's first time on a Board of Directors, and she couldn't be more thrilled to participate.

Her somewhat "unique" (for Ithaca) perspective as an "uneducated" woman, raised in poverty and cultural isolation in East Tennessee, has given her the opportunity to see the world and engage life experiences with curiosity and hopefulness.

She's worked in the service industry, screen printing, graphic design, retail, fashion, construction, marketing, event coordinating, and more - currently holding the title of "Donor Relations & Marketing Coordinator" at the Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes.

When she's not at work, Carla delights in spending time with friends, creating art, and playing "Dress-up."