Crittenton Women’s Union
Using Brain Science to Create New Pathways Out of Poverty

Presentation to CWDA, 10/9/14
Elisabeth Babcock, MCRP, PhD
President and CEO
What is CWU?
An Economic Mobility “Action Tank”

New Pathways Out of Poverty
CWU Families Have Histories Indicative of Significant Life Stress

Avg. participant family monthly income is $664

- 75% are currently homeless or have recent history of homelessness;
- 40% report a major MH diagnosis;
- 43% report a history of abuse, violence, and/or trauma;
- 35% report a physical, cognitive, and/or MH disability that serves as a barrier to work or school;
- 50% have at least one child with diagnosed special needs.
Today, Getting Out of Poverty Is a Multi-tasking Process on Steroids:  
Caring for family + Staying out of Debt + Maintaining Public Benefits + Going to school + Working full time

Over half of births are to single mothers;

Wage Gap Increasing: lowest quintile of earnings < 1/6\textsuperscript{th} of median earnings and min. wage < 1/3 of self-sufficiency;

Less than ½ of poor have more than HS education; virtually all family sustaining jobs now require post-secondary education;

Waitlists for subsidized housing and childcare are often years’ long.
Being in Poverty Creates Stress Which Compromises Executive Functioning

**Developmentally:**
Affecting development of pre-frontal cortex and limbic systems—decreasing inhibitory control, working memory, and mental flexibility.

**Situationally:**
Creating “bandwidth tax” temporarily “hijacking” executive functioning.
Common Stress-Related Challenges

• Challenges Managing Thoughts, Organization, and Learning

• Challenges Managing Behavior, Emotions, and Interpersonal Relationships

• Challenges Managing Health and Well-being
What can organizations do to help mitigate stress-related challenges?

First- adopt easy brain-science based program design improvements to:

- Environments
- Staff Approaches
- Program materials
- Program access
- Staff training
What can organizations do to help mitigate stress-related challenges?

- Personal organization strategies and tools
- Reminders/prompts
- Goals contracts
- Incentives
- Impulse/distraction control strategies
- Automatic goal-attainment strategies
- Problem-solving, goal-setting frameworks

Second- Provide participants with brain-science based tools for success:
# CRITTENTON WOMEN’S UNION’S THEORY OF CHANGE
## BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY STABILITY</th>
<th>WELL-BEING</th>
<th>EDUCATION AND TRAINING</th>
<th>FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT</th>
<th>EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER MANAGEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dependents</strong></td>
<td><strong>Educational Attainment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Debt</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No subsidy, housing costs less than 1/3 household take-home pay</td>
<td>Dependent needs met; serving as no barrier to parent/guardian school or work</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>Savings of three months’ expenses or more</td>
<td>Current on all balances and no outstanding debt other than mortgage or educational and/or car loans</td>
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<tr>
<td>No subsidy, housing costs exceed 1/3 household take-home pay</td>
<td>Dependent needs serving as minimal disruption to parent/guardian school or work</td>
<td>Minimal disruption to work, school, and/or family due to health/behavorial health issues</td>
<td>Developed Network: Consistent source of both support and leveraging connections</td>
<td>Savings of two months’ expenses but less than three months’ expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial subsidy (shallow): Paying $200 or more towards rent</td>
<td>Dependent needs serving as intermittent disruption to parent/guardian school or work</td>
<td>Intermittent disruptions to work, school, and/or family due to health/behavorial health issues</td>
<td>Emerging Network: Consistent source of support and occasional leveraging connections</td>
<td>Savings of at least one months’ and up to two months’ expenses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full subsidy, permanent housing: Paying $200 or less towards rent</td>
<td>Dependent needs serving as significant obstacle to parent/guardian school or work</td>
<td>Regular and recurring disruptions to work, school, and/or family due to health/behavorial health issues</td>
<td>Limited network: Occasional source of support</td>
<td>Savings of less than one months’ expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Homeless/co-housed with family or friends</td>
<td>Recently emergent or not yet addressed dependent needs, requiring additional attention</td>
<td>Severely limited engagement in work, school and/or family due to significant health/behavioral health issues</td>
<td>Isolated or draining network</td>
<td>No savings</td>
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<td>B. Homeless/ transitional housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homeless/ emergency shelter</td>
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*Mobility Mentoring®

**FUTURE ORIENTED DECISION MAKING**

**CONTEXTUALIZED DECISION MAKING**
Crittenton Women’s Union
Bridge to Self-Sufficiency®

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<tr>
<td>She is spending less than 30% of her after-tax income on housing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Her children’s needs are being met and do not prevent her from pursuing schooling or work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>She is fully engaged in her work and her family, and no health or behavioral issues prevent her from pursuing schooling or employment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>She has achieved a level of post-secondary education and/or training that has prepared her for a job paying enough to support her family.</td>
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<td>She has savings equal to three months’ worth of living expenses.</td>
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<td>Her earnings from her job are greater than the real costs of basic living expenses for her family, as determined by CWU’s Massachusetts Economic Independence Index.</td>
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She is a part of a strong social network, serving as an advocate, organizer, and support to others.
What can organizations do to help mitigate stress-related challenges?

Third - Coach for permanent skill gains:

• Problem solving

• Surfacing and weighing options;

• Resistance against swamping, impulse control, and weighing current actions against future ramifications;

• Improved social skills and anticipation of others’ point of view;

• Leadership and organization of groups and tasks.
Impact of Brain Science on Outcomes: MGH  Think:Kids NYC Schools

In Fall, 2013:
5,200 NYPD school safety officers received introductory exposure to Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS)

2013-2014 school year (compared to 2012-2013):
- 58% decline in arrests made in school
- 67% decline in summonses issued in school
- 20% decrease in reports of major crimes
- 39% decrease in reports of violent crimes

CPS in New York City Public Schools

Stuart Ablon, PhD.  Think:Kids, MGH 2014
Impact of Brain Science on Outcomes: PCG San Diego *Live Well* TANF Project

Employment Chart

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<th>OCT-13</th>
<th>NOV-13</th>
<th>DEC-13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed in Month</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed 20+ hrs week</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed in Month</td>
<td>Average 35%</td>
<td>Average 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed 20+ hrs week</td>
<td>Average 33%</td>
<td>Average 6%</td>
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## FY’14 CWU Mobility Mentoring Outcomes

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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Successful Goals</strong></td>
<td><strong>85%</strong> Dependent</td>
<td><strong>88%</strong> Social Supports</td>
<td><strong>77%</strong> Education and Training</td>
<td><strong>71%</strong> Asset Building</td>
<td><strong>73%</strong> Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion Rates (N=730)</td>
<td><strong>75%</strong> Housing</td>
<td><strong>75%</strong> Health</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of Goals</strong></td>
<td>Obtain child IEP; move into permanent housing</td>
<td>Stop smoking; obtain therapy; lose weight</td>
<td>Complete a semester; receive GED or college degree</td>
<td>Pay bills on time; save $; improve credit score</td>
<td>Get a new job; get a family sustaining job</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Statistical Significance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelter Prog. (498 Control: 98 Tx)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P&lt; .001</strong></td>
<td><strong>P&lt; .01-.05</strong></td>
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FY’14 CFO Program Outcomes
(CWU’s Most Intensive Mobility Mentoring Program with Average Length of Participation=3 years)

- **95%** enrolled in school *or* employed; **58%** enrolled in school *and* employed;

- **29%** graduated during the current year (72% with college degrees; 28% with trade certificates);

- **38%** are now in a family sustaining job (avg. wage **$28.03/hr**.- approx. double starting wages);

- Avg. total new participant savings **$2,085.00/pp** since program start.
Better Lives Through Science
Additional Helpful Resources

• CWU’s *Using Brain Science to Create New Pathways Out of Poverty* and *Mobility Mentoring* research briefs and the Economic Independence Exchange (shared learning group) at [www.liveworkthrive.org](http://www.liveworkthrive.org) website;

• Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University-research brief #11, *Building the Brain’s “Air Traffic Control System* and *Building Adult Capabilities* video at [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/);

Questions?

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