

OCCD President's Award

Vicki Bowen Hewes, Executive Director of Dress for Success Columbus, founded the Columbus affiliate in 2007.

Dress for Success Columbus promotes the economic independence of women in need by providing professional attire, a network of support and the career development tools to help women thrive in work and in life. All programs and services are free of charge for every woman assisted.

Dress for Success Columbus serves job-ready women, by referral only, from more than 125 non-profit organizations, including job-training programs, domestic violence missions, homeless shelters, local places of worship and, beginning in 2013, from the Ohio Reformatory for Women (ORW) in Marysville.

Their programs including Interview and Workplace Wardrobe Suiting, Career Center, Going Places Network, and Professional Women's Group. The Suiting Boutique and Career Center area housed at the agency, located at the corner of Fifth Avenue and High Street in the Short North District, 1204 North High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43201 – 614-291-5420.

The Going Places Network was presented at Marysville ORW in 2013, and Professional Women's Group workshops are hosted at sponsoring corporate training centers, such as Huntington Training Center in Easton.

Their Suiting Boutique is merchandised with professional apparel for women of all shapes and sizes. Inventory includes suits, separates (jackets, pants, skirts), tops/blouses, medical scrubs, footwear, hosiery, jewelry, handbags, scarves, accessories, tote bags, season appropriate outerwear, personal care items (toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner), and cosmetics. Most of their clothing and shoes are gently worn; undergarments, personal care items, and cosmetics are new.

Whether new or used, every item available at Dress for Success Columbus has been donated to their mission by an individual or corporate partner in the community. Over 8,000 unique donors have contributed more than 100,000 items for the Suiting Boutique and Career Center since their launch in 2007. Each donated item is inspected by teams of trained volunteers who sort through and determine what career apparel to keep. Items deemed not appropriate for work are saved for one of their semi-annual sales, whose funds further help the mission. Men's and children's items are donated to the poor through local churches.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Dress for Success Columbus. In 2012, over 300 volunteers contributed more than 14,000 hours of service with the mission. They host monthly Volunteer Orientations to engage community members interested in helping with the effort. Volunteer opportunities include personal shoppers who work one-on-one with clients to select interview and employment apparel, donation sorters, career center counselors, special events committee members, administrative/data specialists, grant writers, Professional Women's Group presenters, Going Places Network facilitators, mentors, and board members. Volunteer

on-boarding includes shadowing an experienced volunteer until the new team member feels confident in their role.

The mission of Dress for Success Columbus resonates with so many diverse individuals in the community because everyone can understand the importance of professional mentoring, at all levels, whether someone is just starting out or reentering the workforce after having sustained a career but getting off track along the way. The volunteers understand the importance of treating every woman equally and with dignity.

A great deal of dedication, strategy and planning is invested to ensure that, when a woman walks through the doors of Dress for Success Columbus, her perception of the mission and herself are elevated. They want to encourage women to regain their dignity from the very first interaction, and they are very intentional about every aspect of a client's experience.