



The SIROW Voice

Community-based collaborative research, working toward a society in which the wellbeing of women and families is paramount, resulting in their equity, empowerment, and prosperity since 1979.

Introducing the New Women in STEM Student Council

By Jill Williams

While women have made great strides in the sciences and engineering, they remain drastically under-represented in many STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields. For example, at the University of Arizona, we know that women make up only 15% of students majoring in Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering and only 14% of those pursuing Computer Science majors. This is despite the fact that women make up more than 50% of UA undergraduate students overall. Addressing these disparities requires a multi-faceted approach that involves both piquing the interest of young girls in STEM fields, while also supporting the retention and success of female students once they reach the UA. This January, SIROW's Women in Science and Engineering Program received funding from the UA Office of the Provost to establish a student-directed council aimed at better supporting women in STEM fields and fostering the institutional change necessary to create a campus culture that facilitates the development of diverse and inclusive STEM departments and colleges.

This new council is called the Women in STEM Student Council (WiSSC) and is directed by a board of 9 current UA students (both graduate and undergraduate). With support of the WISE Director, the Council will develop and implement programming targeted at female-identifying students across STEM majors and colleges, while also working to develop policy proposals aimed at larger institutional change.

This month, WiSSC board members worked with WISE staff and members of the student group Women in Optics to host a day-long symposium aimed at helping female students gain the knowledge and skills to succeed along their academic paths and into the workforce. The symposium featured a keynote addresss by Cyndi Atherton, Science Program Director at the Heising-Simons Foundation; an interactive workshop on identifying your strengths and using them in resumes and interviews by Iwona Palusinski of the Aerospace Corporation; and two panels featuring successful women in STEM from academia and industry. All of these events served to provide attendees with different perspectives on how they might overcome challenges they face and negotiate the challenges of being women in male-dominated fields.

Next academic year, WiSSC will be launching a series of programs including a one-on-one mentoring program to link UA students to mentors in industry and academia and a series of panels and workshops focused on mental health. If you are interested in knowing more about this initiative or getting involved, email WISE Director Jill Williams at JillMWilliams@email.arizona.edu.



WiSSC Executive Board composed of undergraduate and graduate students.

Homeless Women Face Health Issues, Violence

by Rosi Andrade and Franziska Frank

How are women becoming homeless, and how is their health and well-being affected? A recent white paper by SIROW reviewed the existing literature for answers, adding to the body of knowledge with new findings from interviews with homeless women at Sister José Women's Center in Tucson, Arizona. Sister José Women's Center is a nonprofit shelter, providing drop-in services (e.g., breakfast, showers, laundry facilities, pillows and cots for daytime resting, visiting outreach from local agencies, free Wi-Fi, leisure activities during the day) and overnight shelter. [READ THE FULL REPORT](#)

The literature survey pointed to several key things to understand about women's homelessness, the researchers said. These include:

- Simply moving women into housing without a transitional period of support and recovery results in recurring homelessness.
- A majority of homeless women are domestic violence survivors. For many women, domestic violence is a precursor to homelessness.
- Alcohol and drug abuse is not only a cause but an effect of homelessness.
- Exposure to multiple stressors takes a toll on homeless women's physical and mental health, which can create a cycle of failures, making it harder to work, seek employment and find stable housing.

Interviews with homeless women in Tucson echoed those findings. Based on 50 interviews conducted in 2017 at Sister José Women's Center, researchers reported additional detail about their specific needs and challenges:

- Fifty-three percent noted they were considerably to extremely troubled by physical or medical problems including autoimmune (lupus, arthritis, diabetes), respiratory, high blood pressure, or physical or mental disabilities. Many suffered from health conditions such as hearing loss, dental issues, post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety and chronic pain.
- Access to quality or even basic health care among homeless women was limited. Copayments, scheduling and attending medical appointments, and getting and filling prescriptions presented significant obstacles.
- Sixty-two percent noted they were considerably to extremely troubled by problems finding work. This was greatly impacted by not having a permanent address and shelter to keep their personal items or pet safe, as well as lapses in work history.
- More than 80% of the interviewed women reported having experienced domestic violence, and about two-thirds experienced additional violence in the community.
- Though they showed a variety of histories of substance use and other drug abuse, and many had participated in detox treatment at some point in their lives, only a small number of women reported ongoing substance abuse, mainly alcohol and crack cocaine.
- Thirty-three percent said people wanted something from them, including money or sex, in exchange for shelter and protection.

Sister José Women's Center and the SIROW are working together to use these data to implement new programming supporting women's pathways out of homelessness.

For more information, contact Rosi Andrade at rosia@email.arizona.edu or Franziska Frank at franziskafrank@email.arizona.edu.



Rosi Andrade, PHD, and Franziska Frank, MA



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Southwest Institute for Research on Women

MISSION

Develop, conduct, and disseminate collaborative outreach, education, intervention, and research projects of importance to diverse groups.

GOALS

- Engage in collaborative feminist research on topics pertinent to the lives of girls, women, and families;
- Develop and conduct outreach, education, service, research, and trainings with regard to mental and physical health, sexuality, legal matters, education, workforce, equity, diversity, and other issues;
- Address social inequalities and group-based disparities;
- Examine and support women's contribution to literature, the arts, and Southwest heritage;
- Advocate for women and families by linking researchers with community organizations and policy makers;
- Identify, illuminate, and disseminate research on girls, women, families, and gender differences.



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SIROW Main Office, UA Campus

University of Arizona
925 N Tyndall Ave
PO Box 210438
Tucson, AZ 85721-0438
520-621-3839

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