

# **Pandemic heightens need for job training ministry**

November 24, 2020

CIRCLEVILLE, Ohio—VJ Sanchez doesn't mince words when she describes the significance of Christian Women's Job Corps and Christian Men's Job Corps in the life of a local church or community.

"I believe that every community should have a Christian Women's/Christian Men's Job Corps because of the great need across the United States," she said. "Why would you not have a Christian Women's and a Christian Men's Job Corps where you can reach out to the real needs of the people in your community?"

Sanchez, CWJC/CMJC consultant for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, has been involved more than 20 years with the program coordinated by national Woman's Missionary Union. But this year's coronavirus pandemic has added increased urgency to her mission.

Noting that many Christian Job Corps sites have had to put classes on hold or shift to online instruction, she acknowledged that "this COVID thing has really challenged us, as it has everyone."

However, she quickly added, "I see it as an opportunity to reach out to people who are in need and give them some hope because for many of them, the world's coming to an end in their eyes."



VJ Sanchez, Christian Women's/Christian Men's Job Corps consultant for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, has been involved with Woman's Missionary Union's Christian Job Corps for more than 20 years. Describing CWJC/CMJC as "a place where we come alongside people who are in need," she said working with the participants in the program is "the most amazing work that I've ever been involved in." (WMU photo by Pam Henderson)

Christian Women's Job Corps and Christian Men's Job Corps are designed to equip participants for life and employment through such training as high school equivalency diploma preparation, English-as-a-Second-Language classes, computer skills and job readiness skills coupled with Bible study and personal mentoring. Many sites also offer practical life skills in such areas as money management, personal relationships, parenting and nutrition/cooking classes.

Sanchez said churches that incorporate Christian Job Corps into their ongoing ministries “are able to reach out to the community around them,” simultaneously sharing the love of Christ while equipping participants with vital life skills and pre-employment training.

In her role as a statewide consultant, Sanchez helps provide training and assistance to five Christian Job Corps sites across Ohio. She also serves as the women’s director of Metro Columbus Christian Job Corps and as a CWJC/CMJC national trainer.

Describing Christian Job Corps as “a place where we come alongside people who are in need,” Sanchez said many participants enter the program “not knowing that their greatest need is Jesus.”

In fact, “most of the folks who come to us do not have a relationship with God and actually they are angry with God or they think God hates them,” she reflected. “My response to that is, ‘Let’s see what your Creator says about you.’ We open the Scriptures ... and honestly, it has to be the Holy Spirit that just opens their eyes, and they believe.”

## **Providing tools for success**

Bernadette Hocking is the executive director of The Trellis CWJC in Circleville, Ohio, one of the five sites Sanchez serves. Hocking actually began as a CWJC participant and then became a mentor and assistant director before being named executive director in 2018.



Bernadette Hocking, a former Christian Women’s Job Corps participant and mentor, has served since 2018 as executive director of The Trellis CWJC in Circleville, Ohio. Describing The Trellis as “a support system for the women to grow,” she said the program is designed to provide participants support, structure and skills for success. (WMU photo by Pam Henderson)

As a single mom with limited computer skills when she entered the program, Hocking said her path of CWJC participation, volunteering and leadership “was like the next step in my life. ... It just was a natural transition that I went through with the program.”

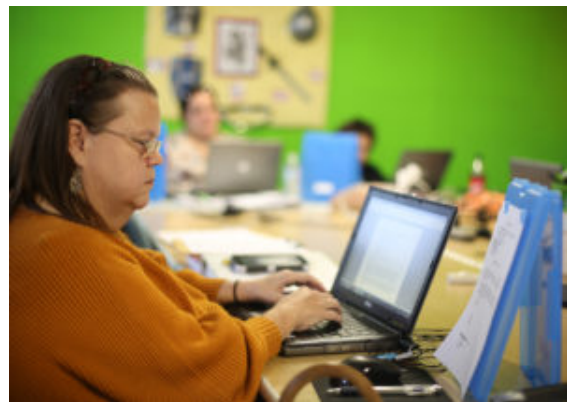
Hocking said many of the women they serve are coping with mental health issues, addictions and even suicidal thoughts when they first come to The Trellis. Their experience in CWJC “makes a huge difference because they get the acceptance here that they don’t get a lot of other places,” she added. “We see a lot of change in our women.

“I think that God had prepared me for this ministry throughout my life, throughout everything that I went through in my life,” Hocking shared. “Just knowing where the ladies have been, I can relate to them and just want to help them out, pick them up and give them the tools so they can succeed in life.”

## **Watching participants blossom**

Karen Baucum took a far different route to her involvement in CWJC, but the results have been similar.

“I took sort of a backwards path,” she recalled, starting out as a CWJC office volunteer and board member. After suffering two strokes a couple of years ago that affected her fine motor skills, Baucum asked the former director about enrolling as a CWJC participant to assist with her therapy. She said the director’s immediate response was, “I think that would be a great idea.”



Karen Baucum, a board member for The Trellis CWJC, also enrolled as a participant in the program. She said her involvement has helped her gain “tremendous insights about the program” while also providing her the opportunity to serve as a

liaison between the participants and the board. (WMU photo by Pam Henderson)

Baucum said classes in computer skills, art and nutrition/cooking all helped her improve her motor skills. “Plus, I got to see a different aspect of the program because being on the participant side, I got to see what the girls were actually experiencing,” she said. “It’s really worked well to be a liaison between the participants and the board, and I’ve gained tremendous insights about the program as well.”

CWJC “is such a tremendous outreach to the women in our community. We can offer them so much and so many of the women in our area are strapped economically,” Baucum said. “They find out that we really are here to help them and to offer support in a safe place. ... It’s just been incredible to watch how the girls grow and blossom.”

## **Becoming the person God intends**

As Sanchez works alongside Hocking, Baucum and others to enhance and expand Christian Job Corps sites across Ohio, she admits they face a daunting task. While the Circleville program is holding onsite classes this fall with social distancing, masks and other safety precautions, most of the other sites in the state are looking toward relaunching classes next spring either online or in person.



CWJC volunteer Angie Smith led participants in a Boundaries class about personal development and relationship issues prior to the coronavirus pandemic. After cancelling classes in the spring, classes resumed this fall with social distancing, masks and other safety protocols. (WMU photo by Pam Henderson)

“I really would like to see us come into the classroom” if that’s a realistic option, Sanchez said. “Many of these people are isolated anyway. There’s something about being able to see one another and just be in fellowship with one another. It really helps.”

Reflecting on the long-term impact of Christian Women’s Job Corps and Christian Men’s Job Corps, Sanchez said their overall goals remain unchanged even amid the pandemic.

“We give them the tools to be able to be self-sufficient,” she explained, as well as “resources that will assist them in becoming the whole person that God intends them to be.

“When they find out their purpose in life, they realize that they are of value and that they can do many things that they thought they couldn’t do,” she concluded. “It’s the most amazing work that I’ve ever been involved in.”

*To view a related video, [click here](#).*