



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Career Wardrobe Announces New Location and Expanded Programs For Women and Men

PHILADELPHIA – In its 20th year of empowering women in Philadelphia by providing free or low-cost professional clothing and job search support services, Career Wardrobe announces plans to expand programs ensuring that more people, including men and underemployed women, have access to services they need to transition to sustainable employment.

This fall, Career Wardrobe will be co-locating with its successful 5-year old upscale resale shop The Wardrobe Boutique at 1822 Spring Garden St. in the Logan Square/Fairmount section of Philadelphia. Combining locations will give the organization a 9,000-square-foot footprint that includes office and boutique dressing space for both men and women. The move will also give the organization increased capacity to open its program to those who are suffering from long-term unemployment and in danger of falling into poverty.

“This is more than just a move,” says Executive Director Sheri Cole, who has been leading the agency for 15 years. “It solidifies our agency as an innovative social enterprise that uses clothing to empower women and men to transition to employment. As a Philadelphia-based organization, we base our programming on what our community needs. For the last few years, we have seen that our community needs access to services regardless of their income level or public benefit status.”

Individuals who do not qualify for public benefits may be unable to qualify for a referral to Career Wardrobe. Historically, 60-75% of Career Wardrobe’s clients are directly referred through the PA Department of Human Services because they receive welfare benefits. But many

unemployed individuals do not qualify for public benefits because they are not primary caregivers of school-aged children or have served time for convictions that make them ineligible for welfare benefits. Along with the new space, Career Wardrobe’s new model will make it easier for these individuals to access the organization’s services without a state referral.

Executive Director Sheri Cole says if Career Wardrobe can help more unemployed individuals in our community at the moment they lose their jobs, we can help decrease poverty rates and use of public assistance in Philadelphia.

“If we can help people shorten the length of their unemployment, we can help them to not need public benefits like food stamps, Medicaid, and welfare,” she says.

Earlier this year, Career Wardrobe piloted two programs which will become permanent at the new location, the **Open Access Program** and **Make It Work for Men** dressing program.

Through the **Open Access Program**, any unemployed woman, including students and the newly unemployed, are able to receive a professional outfit, resume review services and job search advice from the organization for a small fee, much like a healthcare co-pay. That program has proven very successful with more than 350 of the organization’s 3,000 clients self-referring to Career Wardrobe in the past year.

The **Make It Work for Men** pilot allowed six partner agencies to refer unemployed men -- most of whom were either homeless or returning to the community after incarceration -- for core professional clothing pieces: shirts, ties, and belts. Due to space constraints, men had to “make it work” with their own shoes and pants. However, in the new location, men will have their own dressing suite separate from the women’s boutique, and the organization will provide full professional outfits for men.

Along with clothing services, Career Wardrobe offers professional

development education programming that is free and open to the public. Seminars focus on job readiness skills such as communication, time management, problem solving, self-advocacy and financial literacy.

The organization's future plans include creating a work experience internship program for women re-entering the community out of incarceration. The program will use the boutique as a way to offer retail and customer service skills and verifiable work experience.

Career Wardrobe is one of the nation's largest independent community-based nonprofit organizations that provides women in transition with professional clothing and educational opportunities to help them successfully find employment. Career Wardrobe's mission is to empower women in transition by providing programs, which inspire the confidence necessary to achieve self-sufficiency and pursue a productive career. Since 1995, Career Wardrobe has empowered nearly 80,000 women.

Clothing donations are accepted daily at The Wardrobe Boutique, which is open Monday-Friday 11am-7pm and Saturday 11am-6pm, and monthly at partner locations in East Falls and Haverford, PA. For more information, please call (215) 568-6693 or visit www.careerwardrobe.org.

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