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Center for Women's internship program provides huge workforce opportunity

by [Toby Tabachnick, Senior Staff Writer](#)

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Karen Burns Sharif had been out of the workforce for about 10 years, primarily as a stay-at-home mom, when she first heard about the Center for Women's internship program for women seeking to enter or re-enter the job market.

With a background in writing and publishing, Sharif, the mother of three children, was ready to ease back into the working world and was interested in learning more about social media to make her more marketable, as her industry had changed since she was last employed.

"I knew I needed more experience before I put myself out there," Sharif said. "I knew an internship was a good way to do that, but it is hard to find internships independent of a university."

Sharif happened to be at the Pittsburgh Toy Lending Library when Lindsey Miller, the mentor and internship manager at the Center for Women, gave a presentation about the Center's services.

After following up with Miller, Sharif found that the internship program was exactly what she needed to get her where she wanted to be.

The Center for Women soon arranged for Sharif to become an unpaid social media intern at Standing Firm, an organization that educates employers about domestic violence issues. That internship has since morphed into a paid part-time job, Sharif said, and provided her with the mindset that she can do more than "change diapers and write out permission slips, and the other important stuff I do as a mom."

The Center for Women is a collaborative initiative of the National Council of Jewish Women, Pittsburgh Section and Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh. The Center recently received a three-year grant totaling \$90,000 from the Eden Hall Foundation, which will be used to expand the Center's internship program.

"We are pleased to support the Center for Women's internship and job-shadowing program," said Sylvia Fields, executive director of the Eden Hall Foundation, in a statement. "These experiences are valuable for women of all backgrounds and interests to achieve the confidence they need to succeed under new circumstances."

The Center plans to use the funds to serve more women, and offer small stipends to help with transportation and childcare costs, according to Becky Abrams, director of the Center.

“The internship program helps a woman fill in gaps on her resume, when she has been out of work for a number of years,” Abrams said. “It gives her a chance to have fresh and new experiences for her resume and to build skills or refresh old job skills.”

The program also provides women with networking opportunities as well as the chance to explore a new field before taking a permanent position in that field, Abrams added.

Since the program was launched in January 2014, the Center has seen 21 women complete internships. Thirteen women are currently placed, and eight more are in the process of finding the right internship site for their unique needs.

Businesses and nonprofit organizations that have provided internship opportunities to Center clients are varied and include the Carnegie Museum of Art, the City Theatre, the Holocaust Center of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, Pop City Media and T’s Upholstery.

Ages for a Center for Women intern have ranged between 30 and 59, Abrams said, with some having been out of the work force for as long as 15 years.

For Sharif, the internship arranged by the Center, as well as her current paid position, have been “a big confidence boost,” she said.

“And it’s nice to ease back into the workforce,” Sharif added. “Now I am part of the adult world, where people aren’t just talking about parenting tips. I am just so glad that the Center for Women is there for the women of Pittsburgh.”

>> For more information about the Center for Women, visit centerforwomenpgh.org. For information about upcoming workshops, volunteer opportunities or to host an internship or to refer a woman for participation in the internship program, call Lindsey Miller at 412-421-4400 or email info@cfwpgh.org.

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