

Empowerment program at YWCA faces cuts



Suzette Wenger / Staff

From left, King Knox, Kristina McVey and Tricia Nabors discuss the New Choices program at the YWCA on Monday.

Alternate funding sought for New Choices

BY DAN NEPHIN
Staff Writer

Crystal Barr knew she wanted to be a nurse. What she didn't know was whether she could be one.

A lack of confidence and feelings of low self-worth tied to being a single mother had been holding her back, the 27-year-old Lancaster city resident said.

But several years ago, Barr decided she wanted to be more than a material handler at R.R. Donnelly. She also was motivated by wanting to be a strong role model for her daughter, Malia, 9.

"I just wanted to show her you could go further in life. I didn't just

want her to see that coming from her dad. I wanted her to see that from her mother, too," Barr said recently, explaining Malia's father is studying for his master's degree.

While looking at Lancaster County Career & Technology Center's nursing program online, Barr came across the New Choices program. It offered help for single mothers and, potentially, scholarship money.

Barr enrolled in the 10-day program run by the technology center and held at the YWCA Lancaster.

She took personality and aptitude tests and talked about her

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goals and life.

"It wasn't just about the job thing. They helped you with issues in your life that might be hindering you from going further," Barr said recently.

In July 2010, with \$1,000 in scholarship money, Barr enrolled in the technology center's licensed practical nursing program and graduated in August. She's now working at Lancaster Pediatric Associates.

"I love it. To me, it just doesn't even feel like work. I look forward to it every day," she said.

But now, the program which has quietly helped women for nearly 30 years is facing a challenging financial future, according to officials.

Several years ago, the program had an annual budget of around \$178,000 and a staff of five. Current state funding is \$31,000, and, after recently laying off an employee, the program has one staffer, director Tricia Nabors said.

"The good news is, we have had a very fully funded, active successful program for so long that we didn't have to advertise for and, therefore, not a lot of people in the general community knew about it," said King Knox, president of the Lancaster County Career & Technology Foundation.

"That was the good news. . . Now it's the bad news because nobody knows who we are. And we need money," he said.

Since 1985, the program has helped more than 2,500 women and an estimated 3,500 children, Knox said.

"The common theme of our student is lack of formal education, consequently lack of job skills which limits the access of occupations that provide self-sufficient, wages," Nabors said.

The program is intended to educate clients about community opportunities, Nabors said.

- "We provide an opportunity for women to come in, get educated, obtain some job skills and reduce the need to be on any type of as-

sistance," she said.

People who complete the program go on to good jobs, Knox said.

"... We're seeing individuals with full-time jobs earning \$16, \$18, \$20 an hour or more, depending on their chosen profession, with benefits," he said. "So they're off the public roll, so to speak. They're out of the cycle of poverty and welfare. And that's the whole point of this."

With state funding declining, New Choices is having to look elsewhere for resources.

"Now our strategic direction is to have New Choices funded through a combination of private and community funds," he said. "And if we get some state money, fine. If we don't, we want the program to be self-sufficient."

Knox estimated New Choices would need about \$175,000 to \$200,000 annually.

He acknowledged funding won't easy to come by.

Last year, the career and technology foundation hosted its first major benefit for New Choices. The Taste of 'Success, a culinary competition, raised about \$40,000.

The foundation, the Junior League of Lancaster, Franklin & Marshall College and the YWCA are sponsoring this year's Taste of Success, scheduled for March 23 at the Hamilton Ballroom at Wheat-land Place.

Kristina Me Vey, presidentelect of the Junior League, said New Choices dovetails with its mission.

"The Junior League's mission is developing the potential of women, improving community and promoting volunteerism," she said.

Knox said the program is talking with community organizations, foundations and individuals about funding.

"With this program, Lancaster wins, without it, Lancaster loses," he said. "You're looking at millions of dollars added to the local economy through 100 or more women every year with higher paying full-time jobs and benefits."

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