

A Look at National Jobs and Pay

Although 2007 saw the smallest disparity ever between men's and women's full-time earnings, women, and particularly Latinas, continue to earn significantly less than men. As unemployment increases, Latinas—who are already overrepresented in low-paying jobs—are increasingly burdened by low pay and poverty.

Did you know that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau:

- On average, women working full-time earn nearly \$2 less per hour than men.
- Last year, Hispanic women earned 52.4% of the pay earned by white men.
- Hispanic unemployment increased by 2.5 % in the last year, resulting in 600,000 more unemployed Hispanics.
- Hispanic women's unemployment reached 8.3% this past August (compared with 7.7% of Hispanic men and 6.1% of the general population).

WAGES' expanding program is a welcome trend in the opposite direction. With three established co-ops and two more on the way, WAGES is growing green businesses to create economic security and healthy jobs for Latina women.

Sources: Economic Policy Institute, Institute for Women's Policy Research, U.S. Census Bureau.

Co-op members' personal incomes nearly triple; household incomes increase dramatically

Based on months of surveying members from our Oakland cooperative, Natural Home Cleaning (NHC), WAGES' impact study reveals that members' average annual incomes have nearly tripled, compared to their income before joining the co-op.

By the Numbers

- NHC members who were in the co-op throughout 2007 saw an average **70%** increase in household income.
- Since joining NHC, **74%** of members have changed the way they clean their own homes by greatly reducing or eliminating toxic cleaning products altogether.

Sitting in a circle during a business meeting last July, NHC *socias* [co-op members] listened intently as WAGES presented data showing changes in their individual and household incomes, assets and financial patterns, personal growth and education, and health and insurance benefits usage.

Co-op members analyzed their own personal success stories with great enthusiasm, based on the study's highlights. They found that their household incomes had increased 70% on average, while personal incomes had nearly tripled. Socias also learned that, by using natural and least-toxic cleaning products, their co-op prevented more than two and a half metric tons of toxins from entering our air and water in 2007.

Not surprisingly, many co-op members already had a good idea that their incomes had increased, but they were struck by how co-op membership impacted so many other aspects of their lives—and of their world.

"It's great to think about the cumulative effect that we have together—on the environment and on our families and communities. Last year I succeeded in buying a house and now I'm focused on saving money to support my family in the years to come. When you think

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Our co-ops support families in many ways. Here, Melissa and her mother Sara (left) pose with Adela and her mother Elida. All have healthy, dignified jobs as members of NHC.

Gloria, Co-op Member Since 2004



Gloria works hard to provide for her 6-year-old daughter and is at ease knowing that she has a stable job with benefits.

As a single parent coping with a thyroid disorder, Gloria knows about the advantages of decent health care better than anyone. Of all the benefits that her cooperative provides, health care is the most important to her.

Every day, she must take prescription medicines that would be financially out-of-reach without her insurance.

“Thanks to my monthly check-ups and my green job,” she said, “I feel healthy and I’m able to work hard every day to provide for my daughter Stephanie. With my co-op’s health insurance plan, I know that, should something happen, I can see my doctor within 30 minutes and I won’t have to pay out-of-pocket to cover health bills.”

“When you like your job, you go home and have time to enjoy your life.”

- said Gloria about why she enjoys being an Emma’s Eco-Clean member.

As a member of Emma’s Eco-Clean, one of the green-cleaning co-ops started by WAGES, Gloria also revels in the

fact that she is able to use products that are just as effective as toxic ones, yet do not negatively affect her health.

“At first, I switched to green cleaning with my health in mind,” said Gloria, “but now I think about the energy savings and the environment. You begin to think about saving water, using cold instead of hot, being energy-efficient in general, and making

sure you use less toxic products. Today, I notice fewer headaches, the absence of allergies, and that my skin isn’t mistreated. And of course, I also have the peace of mind of knowing that my work is not aggravating my thyroid disorder.”

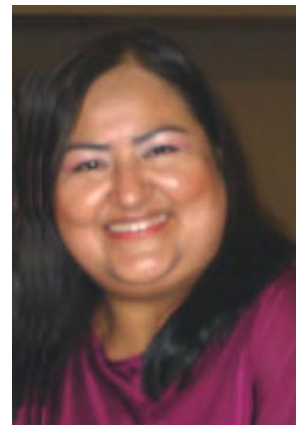
Six years ago, Gloria was struggling to make ends meet as a part-time cashier at a Smart&Final superstore where she received no benefits.

“All of my work before WAGES lacked support and adequate training, but here I have my cooperative standing behind me,” she said. “Today I am happy and comfortable. After four years, this is the job I’ve kept the longest.”

As her daughter grows, Gloria wants to be sure to impart to her the lessons she’s learned as a co-op member.

“I want Stephanie to study and graduate, of course, but when she is old enough I also want to tell her more about my work, about co-ops, and about collective ownership,” said Gloria. “I want to give her the tools and *fortaleza* [strength] that working in a cooperative provide for me.”

A Note from Emma’s Eco-clean



Maria Rosales, Emma’s Eco-Clean General Manager

This year marks the ninth anniversary of Emma’s Eco-Clean in Redwood City. Over the course of these nine years, we have enjoyed tremendous successes, including health benefits and good incomes. Recent highlights have included increased member involvement in community events and the exciting addition of disability insurance for all 26 of our members.

In June, two of our members, along with representatives from other WAGES-affiliated cooperatives, were proud to present a workshop on Latina cooperatives at the National Federation of Worker Co-ops conference. This educational and inspirational conference in New Orleans was an amazing experience. We were able to share our knowledge of cooperatives with others, while also learning many skills to improve and strengthen our own businesses.

As we approach Emma’s tenth year in operation, we will continue to provide our customers with our distinctly superior service and to introduce people to the benefits of green cleaning. Our goal is to reach \$1 million in sales within the next year. With help from WAGES and its supporters, we will strive to make our dream a reality. At Emma’s Eco-Clean, experience has taught us that, if we work together, our efforts can materialize into success.

Sincerely,

Maria Rosales
Emma’s Eco-Clean

It's Not Goodbye, but ¡Hasta Pronto!

Board members Claudia Polsky and Jason Oppenheimer have seen WAGES through a series of great gains that have turned WAGES into a proven business incubator. Now, as Claudia and Jason assume new responsibilities within their families and work, both are stepping down from the Board to make room for the next wave of community leaders and visionaries to join WAGES.

In a recent conversation, Claudia and Jason told us that, even though they are leaving the Board, they will still be supporting WAGES—in more than spirit alone!

What motivated you to join the WAGES family?

Jason: When I first found out about WAGES two years ago, I was starting a company and working on all of the issues related to a business launch. The excitement of the parallel strategic planning and growth of both WAGES and my business affected me in ways for which I'm still grateful.

Claudia: Five years ago a friend sent me a letter, requesting donations for WAGES, and what she described was so profoundly exciting that I had to do more than write a check. I had to inquire about being on the Board.

What will you do next?

Claudia: I am now working on greener solutions for manufacturing and consumer products. This includes preventing the use of toxic materials and the health risks and pollution risks associated

with that use—all things that WAGES has made me more passionate about.

Jason: I plan to continue with WAGES as a donor and advisor in order to further develop this tried-and-true method of improving people's lives. The difference WAGES makes is simply too huge for someone not to be moved by its energy and impact.

"I plan to continue as a donor for the same reason that I was drawn to WAGES' Board five years ago: it's an organization that creates positive, lasting change for low-income people and for the planet." – Claudia Polsky

Claudia Polsky now works as Deputy Director for Pollution Prevention and Green Technology at the California Department of Toxic Substances Control on issues related to creating less toxic consumer products and industrial processes. Jason Oppenheimer is Vice President of Marketing at PAX Water Technologies, the first company to use biomimicry (a new approach that mimics solutions in nature) to design highly efficient products to manage drinking water quality using less energy and chlorine. Both are also looking forward to spending more time with their children.



Jason Oppenheimer and Claudia Polsky take a break after their last board meeting in Berkeley last July.

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about all the improvements, that's when you feel it!" said NHC member Sara, who financially supports her uncle in his battle with cancer.

Socias were even more intrigued that a resounding 64% of their fellow members stated that the most important benefit of being in the co-op was the positive impact on their health.

"NHC has helped me in many ways. In the restaurant where I worked before, they used a lot of bleach, and I had a lot of allergies and respiratory problems," said Adela. "I don't have those anymore, and I don't get the same aches in my body that I used to, either. Here I feel good—physically and mentally. I feel proud to be in a green cooperative and I'm glad that my fellow socias feel the same way," she said.

During the study, one socia shared that the cooperative has helped her realize her potential as a strong woman.

"I have learned so much! I always had so much fear before," she said. "But now I know I can do things! I have become more independent from my husband. Before, if I had to run an errand, he'd say, 'Don't go, I'll take you.' But now if I want to run an errand, I just go on my own."

Composed of more than 50 questions, WAGES' individual and group interviews with NHC members covered the co-op's impact on members' financial status, personal and professional skills, and health.

"This is an incredible milestone," said Ivette Melendez, a WAGES Co-op Trainer. "That's why we exist—to make a measurable impact in socias' lives over the long-term." And Ivette should know: she has worked with NHC members since the co-op's inception in 2003.

A non-profit incubator of worker-owned, green-cleaning cooperatives, WAGES is now launching a new co-op based in the Mission District of San Francisco and has been helping its partner Monument Futures to form another co-op in Concord.

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The women of Emma's Eco-Clean recently celebrated their 9th anniversary with an awards ceremony and dancing.

WAGES Highlights

Co-op Incubation: WAGES is primed to launch its newest co-op in San Francisco by early 2009. We have also been working closely with Monument Futures to develop another co-op in Concord, pending the receipt of local funding. More than 100 women are expected to attend orientations leading to new-member trainings this winter for the San Francisco Co-op.

Strengthening Mature Co-ops: More than 75 Eco-Care clients have taken part in a customer satisfaction survey. Their feedback will inform the WAGES-led business assessment project to improve the co-op's management and to strengthen members' business skills.

Leadership Development: Last spring, several Natural Home Cleaning members acted for the first time as assistant trainers for new members of their co-op. In July, they did it again! This time, Peer Leaders led more sessions, ranging from cleaning to communication.

Community Education: Ten participants in the Oakland Workers Center's Co-op Business Class have now graduated. They received training from WAGES on business development and cooperative models and additional training from AnewAmerica and The Insight Center.

WAGES' Affiliated Eco-Friendly Cleaning Co-ops

WAGES has created three eco-friendly cleaning cooperatives in the San Francisco Bay Area that provide high quality jobs and protect the environment.

Call to receive a free estimate for services in your region!



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Emma's Eco-Clean
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