

# Tech Cluster Ventures into Social Change

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By Stephanie Hiller  
WeNews correspondent

*The Women's Technology Cluster is known for helping business-world women. But now it also supports endeavors such as Upwardly Global and Girls for a Change and incubates them as they grow toward self-sufficiency.*

(WOMENSENEWS)--Jane Leu was working for a national refugee resettlement agency in New York when she noticed that many professionals who immigrated to the United States were strikingly under-employed.

In a visit to a chicken-processing plant, for instance, she saw doctors and engineers cutting up chickens in frigid rooms.

After two more years of witnessing many examples of this kind of underemployment, Leu started a venture in a corner of her kitchen to teach immigrants--mostly female--about the U.S. job market so they could get jobs that better matched their qualifications.



Amber Nystrom

"We're able to change stereotypes," Leu, the founder of Upwardly Global, told Women's eNews in a phone interview. "When people think of a woman from Peru, they don't think of a microbiologist." Instead, she says, they think of a maid.

Upwardly Global--or UpGlo--is the kind of organization that, in the past year or two, has begun attracting the interest and help of the San Francisco-based nonprofit Women's Technology Cluster.

The Women's Technology Cluster was launched in 1999 by the Three Guineas Fund, a San Francisco-based foundation that aims to ease women's access to capital.

## **Tailor Business Tactics to Nonprofit Ventures**

In 2002, the Cluster launched its Social Enterprise Institute. The idea was to transfer and tailor business-sector tactics to social-change ventures. The

organization's efforts are designed to address three commonly difficult areas for nonprofits.

"When we started this project, we asked what's missing for this sector, and we identified three key elements: community, lack of capital, and a curriculum of best practices to measure up against," says Amber Nystrom, project director of Social Enterprise Institute.

To provide ventures with the training they need, the Social Enterprise Institute ran an 11-week intensive training last summer for the leaders of 11 organizations dedicated to various aspects of social change. Participants received training in making pitches and then had the opportunity to meet with the Women's Technology Cluster's network of partner businesses, including such big-name funders as CitiCorp, Calvert Foundation, Ashoka, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Participants included Dr. Victoria Hale, founder of OneWorld Health, the first nonprofit pharmaceutical company in the United States; Judy Koch of Bring Me A Book Foundation (providing books to low income families) and Wardrobe for Opportunity, distributing professional attire to disadvantaged job seekers. All but one were led by women.

"All the enterprises have women founders or women senior managers and focus on the needs of women," says Nystrom. "There is a disproportionate number of women in the nonprofit sector by nature of this arena and its focus. When you invest more in women, they tend to invest in the community, in the family and on education."

### **From Kitchen Table to Downtown Office**

For UpGlo, the support has meant moving from her kitchen table to a downtown office after two years' incubation at the Cluster.

"One of the reasons I moved to the Women's Tech Cluster in 2002 was that we were going to hire a staff member," recalls Leu. "Having an office seemed important in establishing a more rigorous work environment. It really gave us a presence in the nonprofit community." In addition, she says, "people at the WTC helped us out with basic stuff like setting up bookkeeping and how to get health insurance."

The incubation led to funding from the Draper Richards Foundation and Three Guineas Fund, both in San Francisco.

UpGlo now serves 80 clients from 35 countries, offering workshops and professional mentors to acquaint immigrants with U.S. competitive hiring practices and especially the necessity of self-promotion in order to get ahead.

Former clients work at Oakland Business Development Corporation, California State Automobile Association, Bank of America, Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, Stanford University Medical Center, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and other major Bay Area employers. In total, they have already helped more than 100 immigrants and refugees.

One of them is Alicia Juarez, an electrical engineer with a doctorate from Mexico who sought UpGlo's help after searching for a telecommunications job for more than a year. To make ends meet she was working part-time at a fruit and vegetable market.

Upwardly Global went over her resume, introduced her to professionals in the industry and then guided her through the offer and salary negotiation process until she landed a \$60,000-a-year research post at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

### **Helping Girls, for a Change**

Girls for a Change was the second group to receive a crucial boost from the Women's Technology Cluster. The group was initiated 2001 by a coalition of women's groups in Silicon Valley that were brought together by Niko Clifford to provide leadership training and mentorship to young women in diverse communities.

"There's a huge gap between economically disadvantaged people in the community and the upscale population, especially in Silicon Valley," says Clifford. "Getting out of the low income neighborhood into another arena was tough to beat."

Clifford's program brings together large groups of girls--1,200 at their kickoff convention last October--for leadership training in such skills as critical thinking, problem solving, resource development and networking. It then provides each girl with professional mentors and access to a database of organizations and individuals they can search to find expert assistance in how to implement their ideas for social change.

Thirty teens have since developed social-change projects in their communities. One group in East San Jose started a school-based recycling program, funded by selling produce from a community garden they helped start. Another group in the same area staged a performance about rape and molestation for the student body, followed by a panel of service providers for victims of rape, leading to a "pretty hot discussion on the issue of rape on their campus."

Clifford's team is just graduating from its incubation at the center, where Clifford has found "incredible mentors, a lot of skill-based training, a safe environment to grow." The group has also received a \$300,000 general operating grant from Draper Richards in San Francisco that will allow them also to set up a new program in another state, which has yet to be selected. The second leadership convention was held in February in San Jose.

"Once I started to interface with the financial industry and venture capital," says Clifford, "I saw it's definitely an old boys' network. Not as many women are giving money. With 13 to 15 percent of the U.S. Congress made up of women, decisions tend to overlook the needs of women. That's why we're doing Girls for a Change. There will be 100,000 women in 10 years who are really poised to sit at those decision making tables."