

Key-Note Address The Lura Bradfield Foundation

Thank you so much for having me here today, and for honoring the work of my organization, Second Chance Employment Services.

In many ways, my life follows in the footsteps of Lura Bradfield. Like Lura, I strongly believe in the power of higher education. I have earned a Masters in Human Resource Management and a PhD in Industrial organization Psychology, and I finished my PhD at the same time that I welcomed my daughter – Meghan – into the world. It wasn't easy to balance motherhood and career—especially when my husband was traveling 90 percent of the time for his job and I felt a lot like a single parent—but I knew then the value of furthering my education, and I was willing to make whatever sacrifices I had to make in order to successfully complete my doctorate as well as raise my baby daughter.

Also, like Lura, despite my own personal financial success, I have devoted my life to others—not to the pursuit of wealth. Since my early twenties, I have volunteered a great deal of my time to organizations that empower, educate, and assist victims of domestic violence, as well as organizations dedicated to educating women, teaching them English as a second language, training them to use a computer.

Like Lura, I believe that a life lived selfishly is not a fulfilling life, no matter how much personal success or personal wealth that kind of life would give me, it would never give me the feeling of fulfillment, of connectedness, and of accomplishment that I have as result of working for others rather than working just for myself. Of course, like Lura, I do believe in working hard for my own personal success, and I have attained more than I ever dreamed possible. But I know that without devoting my time and my resources to less fortunate women, all the money in the world wouldn't make my life worthwhile.

As a child, and as an adult, Lura herself was a victim of domestic violence. While I have never been a victim in the same sense as Lura, as a child I did witness domestic violence in all of its brutality. My mother was a victim of domestic violence, and, like Lura, my early experience with violence in childhood has shaped my entire life—it has shaped how I see the world, and how I see my place in the world. It has given me meaning and purpose, and as an adult I have taken what I learned as a child, witnessing my mother trapped in an abusive relationship, and I have made it my mission in life to do whatever I can to eradicate domestic violence.

Today I'm the President and CEO of my own non-profit organization, Second Chance Employment Services, a First Class employment agency serving at-risk women—

victims of domestic violence, the elderly, and women trying to return to work after staying home to raise a family.

With so many traditional employment agencies out there in America, you may be wondering why I chose to start a non-profit employment agency, and to devote it to at-risk women. Yes, there are many employment agencies and recruiters out there, ready and willing to help people find employment, but what I learned in my years of volunteer work before starting Second Chance was that at-risk women are shut out of the traditional employment processes. What I also learned is that because there already are so many employment services, there wasn't a single non-profit employment agency that offered no-cost, no-fee placement services to at-risk women.

As a volunteer I saw that there are so many wonderful organizations in America that serve victims of domestic violence in so many important ways. There are organizations that provide job training, courses in computer skills or specific technical skills, organizations that provide housing, legal assistance, psychological help, daycare, and on and on. But I saw no organization devoted to finding these women jobs. What I saw was women being trained, made-over, housed, and then left on their own to try and find a job by themselves.

It seemed to me that just when these women reached the most critical step in rebuilding their lives—finding a good job—they had nowhere to go for assistance in this process. You may wonder why at-risk women, victims of violence and others, even need special assistance in their job hunts. In an ideal world, these women would be given the same shot at employment as everyone else. But we don't live in an ideal world, and the truth is that women—whether they have been victims of domestic violence, whether they have stayed home for years to raise their children, or whether they have been unable to pursue higher education— women face serious prejudices and barriers in traditional hiring practices.

The women who have come to Second Chance have told me heartbreaking stories of dozens, even hundreds of résumés they submitted to companies and recruiters without a single call back. One client said to me: *“Résumé after résumé went out, seemingly into a black hole. I was desperate and demoralized at not getting even one interview. You see, most employment agencies aren't interested in stay-at-home moms returning to the workforce. They don't understand the wealth of skills we have to offer.”*

This phenomenon happens to all women wanting to return to the workforce, but this kind of rejection is something that a woman who has escaped a violent home is ill-prepared to handle. This kind of rejection robs a woman of her self-confidence, it cuts

away at her already fragile self-esteem, it discourages her in her efforts to better her life and the lives of her children—and all too often, the inability to find a job forces victims of domestic violence straight back into the brutal hands of their abusers.

Since childhood, since witnessing my mother being trapped in an abusive relationship simply because she couldn't support herself—or at least thought she couldn't support herself... because all women can, if given the change—I have known that the key to a woman's ability to leave her abuser is her ability to secure an independent source of income. Without an independent source of income, a woman will turn to welfare, to food stamps, or—worst of all—she will turn back to her abuser. This is why I have always known that in order to eradicate domestic violence we must empower women economically.

I'm not saying that the only means by which we can combat domestic violence is through the economic empowerment of women. Domestic violence—its causes and its consequences—are far too complex to be solved by one single solution. What I am saying though, is that without economic empowerment, without an independent source of income, any woman trying to escape a violent home will find it a virtually impossible challenge.

Yes, we need to address the psychology, the sociology, the root causes of domestic violence, and its generational consequences. But I believe in action, and the action I believe is the most important for a survivor is landing a well-paying job that will allow her to support herself, save for the future, and provide a better—violence-free—life for her children. For while it can take a survivor years to overcome the psychological scars of violence, and while she will need to further her education and become a contributing member of her community, all the while she will also need to support herself.

To this day, Second Chance is *the only* organization that provides *free* job placement services for victims of domestic violence and other women facing barriers to workforce re-entry. Through our Job Partners—companies that have agreed to give Second Chance clients not only training, but priority interviewing and access to job listings—we have been able to give our clients an inside track to meaningful employment with full health benefits. In six years of operations, Second Chance has found career-track jobs with full health benefits for over 500 women—earning incomes anywhere from \$32,000 to \$98,000 per year.

But Second Chance does more than job placement—although that in itself is quite a lot. Through our Client Partners, Second Chance has referred its clients to community organizations and volunteer individuals in order to meet our clients' every need. A

woman who has been abused for years, who hasn't worked, who has lost her home—and her self-esteem—can need so many things if she is to successfully rebuild her life after violence. With the resources of our Client Partners, Second Chance has been able to take a woman from a homeless shelter, give her a free professional make-over, job training, business attire, psychological and legal assistance, daycare, housing, and on and on and on. Through Second Chance's referral services, victims of domestic violence receive everything they need in order to land a secure job that pays well.

Besides being the only organization that provides free placement services to at-risk women, Second Chance also provides another unique services to victims of domestic violence—another service that no other organization provides—and that's Cosmetic Surgery.

Before you frown or laugh, think about this... How is a woman whose face - or arms - or hands have been grotesquely scarred by domestic violence—or whose teeth have been knocked out by a punch—EVER going to be able to find a *good* job? The fact is that many victims of violence carry visible scars of their abuse, and until now—until Second Chance—these women had nowhere to go for Cosmetic Surgery... government assisted health care doesn't cover the procedure, traditional healthcare providers don't cover the procedure either.

Besides the obvious impediment to work that scars present, visible scars also present an impediment to a woman's ability to move past the trauma of abuse, and to rebuild her self-esteem. As one client said to me when talking about her scars: “I'm very self-conscious and humiliated because of the scars my husband left on my face. Every time I looked into the mirror, I am reminded of the episode and I feel the fear and anxiety welling up within me. I also feel like everyone is staring at my scars, and it's difficult for anyone to make eye contact with me.”

With the goal of securing career-track employment for every client, no matter her circumstance, I knew when I founded Second Chance that we had to address the overlooked issue of physical scars contributing to a woman's inability to find a job. So I asked a Plastic Surgeon, Dr. Ron Perlman, to join my organization as the Chair of the Board of Directors. As a result, Dr. Perlman has provided free facial reconstructive surgery for each and every client who simply couldn't find a job without it. And again, this is something that only Second Chance does for victims.

While I am proud of the fact that Second Chance does so much that other organizations and government agencies either can't or don't do, I'm acutely aware of the fact that Second Chance can't serve every victim in every part of the country—or the world. For

this reason I have begun encouraging others to adopt the Second Chance model, and to put it into action in their own communities. For while Second Chance is expanding nationally, we see no reason why we shouldn't share our methods and practices with others so that they too can offer these unique services to more and more women, in more and more places.

The Second Chance model is easily reproduced. It has three simple components: Job Partners, Client Partners, and a team of volunteers and human resource professionals to keep the organization going and to work directly with clients, empowering them through training, counseling, advising, and providing all-important moral support.

While it is my mission to see the eradication of domestic violence through the empowerment of women, it is my dream to see ever more organizations providing free job placement services for victims of domestic violence. I care less that it is Second Chance and only Second Chance providing this critical service, I care more that women anywhere in the world can go to some organization that will do for them what Second Chance does for its clients.

I have been honored many times in the past for my volunteer work. And Second Chance has been honored time and again for its work. Indeed, I am here today because the Lura Bradfield Foundation saw fit to highlight my mission and the work of Second Chance. But all of these awards and honors don't mean as much to me as the look in the eyes of a survivor who has just landed a great job, and with it, has secured an independent source of income that will allow her to never return to her abuser again.

What makes me proud, what inspires me and drives me to do more—to give more—is knowing that in six years of operation, not a single client of Second Chance has returned to her abuser out of financial necessity.

Although Lura Bradfield is no longer with us today, her life's mission to empower women and to eradicate domestic violence continues to inspire others through the work of this Foundation. I want to take this opportunity I have today to thank you, to thank all of you involved in the Lura Bradfield Foundation for *your* tremendous contributions to the economic empowerment of women and the eradication of domestic violence. Without the support of organizations like *yours*, organizations like *mine* would have a much harder time providing our services and expanding our programs to reach every woman struggling to escape violence, to empower herself, and to provide a better, more secure future for herself, her children, and her children's children.