

How We Know Comparable Worth is Worth It

by Lois Haignere

In 1987 comparable worth adjustments (reclassification to higher salary grades based on the gender/race predominance of those in job titles) were made to 239 NYS job titles. All of the employees in these job titles, over 47,000 of them, received raises.

Let's look at just 6 of these job titles and imagine the impact on the lives and families of those receiving these increments over the last 20 years.

1987 Comparable Worth Adjustments-Selected NYS Civil Service Titles

Title	Number in Job Title in 1987	Before Salary Grade	After Salary Grade	Before Salary Grade Job Rate	After Salary Grade Job Rate	One Year Salary Increase at Job Rate	Estimated* Income Gain Per Person After 20 Yrs
Library Clerk2	208	7	9	\$18,449	\$20,521	\$2,072	\$55,675
Library Clerk3	45	11	14	\$22,946	\$27,033	\$4,087	\$109,819
Food Service Worker 2	813	7	9	\$18,449	\$20,521	\$2,072	\$55,675
Food Service Worker 3	57	9	13	\$20,521	\$25,585	\$5,064	\$136,072
File Clerk, Typist, Clerk	6325	3	6	\$15,071	\$17,472	\$2,401	\$64,516
Principle Clerk	372	11	14	\$22,946	\$27,033	\$4,087	\$109,819

*Includes a 3% across-the-board annual increase

The chart above shows that 208 people working in the job title Library Clerk 2 were raised from salary grade 7 to salary grade 9 increasing their income by over \$2000 a year for an estimated 20 years earnings increase of over **\$55,000**. But the 45 Library Clerk 3s were found to have even more salary disparity and were raised from salary grad 11 to 14 for an annual increase of over \$4000 and a 20 year estimated earnings increase of over **\$109,000**. The same patterns are true for the Food Service job titles. Three 1987 clerical job titles, File Clerk, Typist and Clerk were raised from salary grade 3 to 6, increasing the salaries of over 6000 state employees by more than \$2400 a year for a 20 year estimated income gain of more then **\$64,000**. Maybe these pay equity adjustments made it possible for someone to buy their own home or put a child through college.

The state can be proud that it made these corrections 20 years ago and so can the counties, cities and school districts that also made pay equity adjustments 20 years ago when the issue was receiving the attention it deserves. But many counties, cities and school districts did not make adjustments then and have not done so since. And, *because there has been no legislation requiring it*, the State and most if not all of the rest of the public sector in NYS have not restudied the issue in over 20 years. Biases can seep back into salaries over time if there are no systems in place to prevent it.

Those who have been working in job titles traditionally done by women and people of color, approximately 20% of whom are men, who received no comparable worth adjustments 20 years ago, are losing both money and the related feelings of value and self esteem, daily. I am proud to have been a part of what was done 20 years ago. But I know now that we made a big mistake in not passing pay equity/comparable worth legislation as has been done in other countries. When there are no legal protections the pressures of business as usual will prevail.