

Member of the Month – Suzanne Matthews

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Meet the April 2019 FWA Member of the Month and see what she is doing in the Financial community.

Please tell us about your FWA journey so far!

I officially joined the FWA twenty years ago after participating in several events. I became a member for the following reasons:

- I wanted to connect with more professional women in finance outside of my work environment and learn from them.
- I wanted to commit to the organization in an area where I could give back while leveraging my passion for teaching.



Suzanne Matthews

I therefore joined the FWA Financial Backpack Program where we bring together volunteers to present workshops and case studies on financial literacy to young high school students. It is a privilege to serve as Co-Chair of the Financial Backpack Committee, and I'm fortunate to work with a fabulous Co-Chair, Lindsay Starr, who has done so much to build this program from the beginning. Since it began about 20 years ago, Financial Backpack has grown and expanded to many high schools in New York City. I love this program because it's a very flexible and rewarding: volunteers can sign up for one or several financial literacy workshop(s) and polish their presentation skills by delivering in the evening(s) or on weekends. Our high school students are always very motivated and excited to learn about financial literacy and they use very quickly the tools and tips that we provide them.

What do you think sets the FWA apart?

Throughout my career I have seen organizations like the FWA come and go. The FWA is clearly an organization with a solid history and is here to stay. Also, it's an organization where there is something for everyone's growth and leadership aspirations, thanks to the Committees and the numerous volunteer opportunities within each of them.

I had a chance to go on this year's international trip to India, one of the FWA's signature events. It was a fabulous trip with a rich combination of business content and cultural awareness. Through this trip, I strengthened my existing FWA connections and made new ones. A truly unique feature at the FWA and I highly recommend it!

Tell us about your career.

I started my career as an English teacher then worked within the non-profit sector focusing on dance company management. After a few years, I realized that I wanted to take that experience into the for-profit sector. That's when I went to Columbia Business School and began to pursue a career in the financial services sector.

In my early banking days, I started as a Relationship Manager at Bank of America and worked my way up to Managing Director after various roles in different industry sectors. This broad experience was invaluable, because I learned about managing global relationships, building teams, and closing deals. Despite several mergers, I had very supportive managers (most of whom were men) who helped me grow within the organization and earn greater responsibility.

I then moved to HSBC Securities and led a team responsible for public sector entities, including US government agencies, sovereign governments and central banks. While at HSBC, I introduced the bank to the FWA, and helped bring HSBC on as a President's Circle firm. The next year, the FWA was able to apply for and win a \$900,000 grant from HSBC to fund the Financial Backpack Program, which made it possible to create a dedicated curriculum.

After leaving HSBC Securities, I decided to pursue financial literacy on a full-time basis and started up a consulting practice doing personal finance education. This led to opportunities to work with organizations, such as the Muriel F. Siebert Foundation and the YWCA of Greater New York. I was also awarded a consulting contract with Westchester County, which involved designing financial literacy programs within the County Executive's office. This led to my current position at Westchester Community College as Director of the Center for Financial and Economic Education (CFEE). CFEE is funded by JP Morgan Chase and is dedicated to delivering a broad array of financial education programs to students, faculty and the community. Thanks to this role, I have also become an adjunct instructor in the Business Department, which takes me back full circle to my early career in teaching.

The organizations and opportunities I received in financial literacy have all happened thanks to the FWA network. This network of professional women is an incredibly valuable resource, especially when it comes to career development.

Who is a source of inspiration and strength in your life and why?

I love literature, and Jane Austin is a novelist who I greatly admire and take inspiration from. Though writing in the early 1800s, she had deep insights into women's roles in society and their economic status. I consider her to be an early feminist, because she portrayed strong and outspoken women who found a way to rise above their status in life. She still has great relevance for today!

What are the top three takeaways learned from your experiences so far?

- 1) 50% of success in life is about showing up.
- 2) Always have a plan for life and career, and allocate your time according to criteria, such as what's meaningful or not meaningful, or what's urgent vs. what's not urgent.
- 3) Always find ways to keep learning intentionally and think about what impact volunteering has on your life.

Please share us something else about you.

I am a Shakespeare fan and go to Cambridge University in the U.K. every summer to take a Shakespeare course, as part of their International Summer School. It's great way to connect with students and educators from around the world.

Previous Member of the Month