



WOMEN IN TRADES, TECHNOLOGY, OPERATIONS & BLUE COLLAR WORK

## Herstory: The WITT National Network

### How did we get here?

Many women through many generations have got the job, done the job, and made room for other women to join them! The WITT National Network is a formal expression of that will – our herstory shows years of work to improve opportunities for women across the country. Many of our current members have been working to increase the successful participation of women in trades, technology, operations and blue collar jobs since the late 1970's.

WITT's herstory is traced to the 1980 **Women In Trades** conference for tradeswomen and their labour market partners in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The participants decided against forming a National Network at that time. Many of us were still struggling to complete our apprenticeships and build our local women in trades (WIT) organizations to develop and provide information and assistance to other women and advice to local colleges, governments, employers and unions to effectively integrate women in trades.

Across Canada in the early 1980's, there was an increase in pre-trades and pre-technology programs for women; local WIT groups organized briefs to college boards and governments, and school career days with trades and technical women speakers.

Then, just as the Employment Equity Act was requiring action on the part of employers and unions, trades exploratory programs for women were being cut back without an evaluation of their effectiveness. Employers were saying "we can't find any women," women were saying "no one will hire us," the government was saying "women aren't interested." It was time to bring everyone together, to begin a dialogue that would respond to all of our needs.

Kootenay WITT organized the second National WITT Conference, **Surviving and Thriving – Women in Trades and Technology & Employment Equity**, in Naramata BC in 1988. Women working and training in trades, technology, operations and blue collar work (TTO/BCW) gathered with their female advocates for two days of sharing stories and strategies before being joined by the employers, unions, government and educators to look at what was being done in industry and what still needed to be done to increase and enhance women's integration into these fields.

Participants voted unanimously to support the development of a National Network, to move forward the many recommendations from that conference. The next year the steering committee met to work on a structure for the organization. The National Coordinator was elected to speak for – and negotiate on behalf of the organization. Marcia Braundy, a carpenter and the conference organizer, was elected.

Work began on structure, on the Project for a National DataBank Inventory of TTO/BCW women, and in 1990, the WITT Industrial Adjustment (IAS) Committee was formed, using a traditional government program to create a new model of bringing together all those with a role to play in moving the issues forward: WITT women, business and labour, educators, and provincial and federal government personnel.

### The WITT National Network:

❖ began the design and groundwork for the national databank, funded through Innovations at Employment and Immigration Canada. Development was completed in 1990, with data collection assistance agreed to by over 100 provincial officials, colleges, institutes, and many employers and unions.

❖ produced an updatable annotated bibliography of "Programs, Materials and Initiatives to Recruit and Retain Women in TTO/BCW," undertaken by employers, unions, WITT groups and educators across the country, with the addition of role-modelling programs and A/V materials.

❖ with support from Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and an ad hoc national committee of experts, developed and continues to promote the **National Standards and Program Development Guidelines for WITT Courses and Trade Specific Courses for Women**. Human Resource Development (HRD) BC/Yukon Region has set these as the standard by which they will fund courses, and HRD National has agreed to set them out in the Chair's Planning Guidelines to all regions. WITT and its affiliates have promoted and achieved a significant increase in the numbers of WITT exploratory and trades specific courses for women in the public and private sector.

❖ produces a Newsletter which highlights useful, productive initiatives taking place across the country, and calls to attention actions that are detrimental to our work.

❖ undertakes specific activities such as co-sponsoring a conference on Native Women in TTO's; promotes the development of sexual harassment policies and procedures for institutions and industry; spearheads a campaign to ensure the integration of TTO/BCW women in Infrastructure development projects around the country; provides support bringing "equity in apprenticeship" issues and recommendations to attention provincially and nationally and supports and assists WITT women and WITT groups to effectively engage in activities that will move our issues forward.

❖ held the 1992 National Conference "Surviving and Thriving II - The Sequel", as the founding conference of the Network, and to identify and promote innovative and effective undertakings by ourselves and our labour market partners.

Since 1988, WITT has grown from six groups to over 40 groups across Canada, each working in different ways on similar issues. Regional conferences have taken place in Ontario, WITT's Western Region, Prairie Region and in Newfoundland. Women working and training in TTO/BCW have experienced many barriers over these years, some have been overcome, and many challenges are yet ahead of us. Much of our success has been due to networking, sharing information and ideas, and working together. We have shown that when we are "at the table" to identify the issues and focus on solutions, our labour market partners benefit from that experience.

In 1992, the WITT Advisory Committee and our IAS Committee developed a strategic and operational plan for the years 1992-1997. The Strategic Plan demonstrated to us how all the work we had been engaged in fit together, and indicated the need to ensure a voice for WITT within the industries covered by Sectoral Councils which engage in human resource planning and development. In 1993 we invested in a Needs Assessment with those Sectors and our WITT women, completed by Terry Lister and Marli Ramsey of Price Waterhouse. This clarified the work to be undertaken.

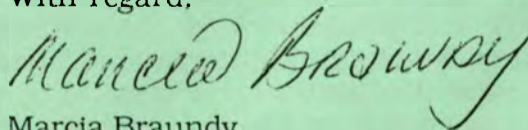
Successfully coordinated by Louise Nichol, our proposal for this work was submitted and accepted: we have signed the agreement which will bring the **WITT National Network Human Resource Council** into being - a vehicle to use our collective expertise and our tools and materials to assist unions, employers, WITT women and educators to constructively make our training institutions and workplaces better places for women from all the designated groups.

We will implement the databank, to assist with recruitment and role modelling activities, market and use our new self-administered checklist, **Integrating WITT - Strategies to Welcome Women In Trades, Technology, Operations and Blue Collar Work**. We will assist sectors with image campaigns which include WITT women, provide seminars, workshops and resources. And most of all, we will identify and support WITT women to sit at the table, to examine issues with our labour market partners and bring their own experience to bear in creating innovative solutions to the human resource issues that face our country today and in the coming years.

Today, we are at the 1994 National Conference, Building Bridges - Building Partnerships. Together, we celebrate our herstory: our struggles, our accomplishments and our strengths. We support ourselves and each other, individually and collectively.

We are also moving forward again, with our new National Coordinator, Maggie McDonald and new Sector Council and Education Administrators, Louise Nichol and Jill Jones. We look forward to more successful ventures by and for WITT women.

With regard,



Marcia Braundy  
Your almost past  
National Coordinator

June 10, 1994