

West Kootenay Women's Association – Employment Equity Project Highlights 1999 - 2001

Support for Women in Trades and Technology

Major Construction Project - Arrow Lakes Generating Station

- Successfully advocated to the Columbia Power Corporation to fund an Employment Equity Officer at the Arrow Lakes Generating Station projects. The EEO helps maintain an up-to-date roster of women's resumes and helps match resumes with job orders. She also provides an orientation to new workers, distributes anti-harassment information and is available to any woman working on-site.
- Obtained seed money for training of equity candidates. EEO levered seed money to provide on-the-job training for two women – one warehouse trainee and one cement mason trainee.

Major Construction Project - Kootenay Lake Ferry

- Assisted Maglio Industries to recruit women and advertise their job opportunities through women's organizations in the Kootenay-Boundary region.

Regional Consultation on Construction Issues – Columbia Basin Trust

- Participated in CBT Task Force on Construction consultation.
- Collaborated with other stakeholders to advocate for government funding of a Labour and Equity Integration Facilitator to address equity issues and ensure smooth workforce turnover in industrial and trades occupations

Women in Trades and Technology Program – Selkirk College

- Assisted Selkirk College to apply for government funding for a WITT course.

Influencing Employers' Equity and Human Resource Management Practices

Research into local "best practices"

- Interviewed over 20 employers, human resource managers and union representatives from around the region to find practical examples of employment equity programs and policies. The research also identified employers' needs, employment equity success stories and potential role models.
- Summarized the best practices in a short document entitled "Who's Doing What for Employment Equity in the West Kootenays – Employers, Managers and Unions".
- Created a "business case for equity" that outlines a corporate approach to equity and diversity. This was distributed to employers and human resource managers.

Meeting Employers' Needs about Employment Equity

- Worked with Selkirk College and the Greater Trail Community Skills Centre to identify employers' needs for education on leadership, equity and human resource management
- Presented session on equity to West Kootenay Human Resource Management Association
- Created and distributed outreach recruitment directory and guidelines for hiring a diverse workforce

Media Stories about Local Women doing Exciting and Influential Work

- Hired professional writer to conduct interviews with women
- Two stories written and submitted to West Kootenay Weekender and two stories in progress
- Profiled two women CEOs of post secondary institutions and a international garment union organizer, all of whom live and work in our region

Community Relations and Strategic Partnerships

- Developed excellent working relationships with many key players in the community.
- Project advisory committee included 22 people from 10 different West Kootenay communities, representing First Nations, education, training, health, small business, major industry, women's groups, community advocacy and government.
- Developed strategic partnerships with Columbia Power Corporation, Columbia Basin Trust, Community Futures Development Corporation, Selkirk College, Greater Trail Community Skills Centre, West Kootenay Human Resource Management Association.

Employment Equity Project Highlights – 1999 to 2001

1. Encouraging Equity Best Practices by Employers

Research into "Who's Doing What for Equity":

- 22 interviews of employers, human resource managers and unions to determine regional best practices to support equity
- Compilation of equity resource materials
- Documentation of research findings – this region's best practices
- Presentation of results at International Women's Day, 2000 and to the West Kootenay Human Resource Management Association, March, 2001.

Research into local employers'/HR managers' needs for professional development on equity, leadership, diversity and HR best practices.

- Conversations with representatives of economic development, education, health and other sectors
- Collaboration with Selkirk College and Greater Trail Community Skills Centre
- Presentation to WKHRMA on March 1, 2001 to facilitate networking between HR managers and training institutions
- Floated the concept of an Institute for Leadership, Equity and Diversity

Research into equity best practices, the business case for equity and an employers "tool kit"

- Reading, on line research and conversations with leaders in the equity field to identify the corporate rationale for equity and simple measures that enhance equity
- Documentation and promotion of the business case for equity
- Creation of an Outreach Recruitment Directory and Guidelines for Hiring a Diverse Workforce, customized for the West Kootenays
- Identification of web site opportunity – gap in government service to business around human resource management practices
- Negotiation with HRDC to create a project to develop a web site with equity and human resource best practice information, tailored to meet the needs of business/organizations

2. Communication to the Public and Key Audiences

Media Articles on Women's Success Stories

- Negotiated with experienced writers
- Interviews conducted with Marilyn Luscombe, Helen Sebelius and Laura Carter
- West Kootenay Weekender has agreed to first publication, March, 2001

Presentations to Groups

- Board of Directors of Columbia Basin Trust
- Construction Task Force of Columbia Basin Trust
- West Kootenay Human Resource Management Association
- Kootenay Women in Trades and Technology Annual Meetings
- West Kootenay Women's Association Annual Meetings
- Display for West Kootenay Women's Festival, 1999
- Presentation to HRDC Consultation on Careers and Labour Force Opportunities for Women, Vancouver, December, 1999

3. Equity in Construction

- In collaboration with Kootenay WITT, identified issues, needs and strategies to promote equity
- Secured CPC funding to advertise opportunities for women on Columbia Basin Hydro Projects which generated over 130 expressions of interest
- Coordinated one day Information Session for Women, June 25, 1999 attended by 40 women interested in and relatively qualified for work on the hydro projects
- Conducted follow-up to ensure smooth facilitation of equity on-site
- Developed terms of reference for an Employment Equity Officer (EEO) position for the Keenleyside Powerplant Project
- Successfully advocated for \$50,000 funding for EEO and training seed money for a one year pilot project
- Participated in monitoring pilot project and helped initiate changes in the job order communication process of Columbia Hydro Constructors
- Assisted initial outreach and monitored equity in construction on Osprey 2000 ferry project
- Developed relationships with employers, contractors, unions, training agencies and government to gain support for equity initiatives
- In collaboration with Kootenay WITT and the Keenleyside EEO, successfully advocated to Selkirk College to establish a Women in Trades and Technology course
- Assisted the College to develop proposal to ITAC and Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology
- Developed extensive briefing papers for MLAs on equity in construction
- Advocating for annualized funding for WITT course – secured support of local MLAs
- Participated in Columbia Basin Trust Task Force on Construction
- Identified collaborative strategies to support equity and workforce transition in trades
- Secured support from Selkirk College and Columbia Power Corporation for a Labour and Equity Integration Facilitator
- Secured 6 months additional funding from CPC for the EEO position at Arrow Lakes Generating Station (formerly Keenleyside)

4. Linkages to Women's Health and Poverty Issues

- Shared briefing document from Advocacy Centre at HRDC consultation in Vancouver
- Assisted WKWA to develop successful proposal to promote women's economic equality and reduction of poverty and its impacts on women's lives
- Helped WKWA develop relationships with key players in health promotion

5. Linkages to Youth Issues

- Conducted 9 research interviews with work experience coordinators and guidance counsellors to identify needs related to promotion of employment equity
- Provided information to the Nelson Youth Centre on human rights training for youth
- Contacted all youth centres in the region for inclusion in the Outreach Recruitment Directory
- Requested by JV Humphries School in Kaslo to participate in career event

6. Community based Project Direction

- Identified and recruited participants for a project Advisory Committee comprised of a diverse range of key players from across the West Kootenays
- Held 4 meetings over the 2 years to solicit advice on project priorities, strategic direction and monitoring/evaluation of work to date
- WKWA/WITT Steering Committee accepted Advisory Committee input on all occasions so the community was able to strongly influence the project

Employment Equity and the Columbia Basin Hydro Projects

What is equity?

Equity means treating all people fairly. It means having fair employment systems, like recruitment and hiring, as well as non-discriminatory attitudes and a welcoming workplace. It means achieving a balanced and integrated workforce that reflects the diversity of our society, and provides equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes.

Equity does not mean treating everybody the same. For example, men and women have real differences. Treating people the same ignores those differences. Equity means recognizing differences and taking them into account in a fair and reasonable way. *“Sometimes Employment Equity means treating people the same despite their differences, sometimes it means treating them as equals by accommodating their differences.”* (Judge Rosalee Abella, Royal Commission on Equality in Employment)

The construction trades have historically been almost all male. The typical way things are viewed has been through male eyes and experiences. The systems and attitudes developed in this environment are set in place to meet males needs and can often be unfair and discriminatory towards women. Over the years, many interested and competent women have found it hard to enter the trades – some have made it, far more have been discouraged by their reception and have moved on to other fields. Fortunately, that’s been changing.

Why have equity?

These days, unions know they need a membership that is more representative of the population. This means encouraging and accommodating more new faces - like interested women, First Nations and visible minorities. It means making sure that those people are treated fairly.

Having women on the job can benefit all workers. Sometimes it changes the tone and helps introduce new ways of doing things, perhaps techniques that may reduce the risks of injuries. Successful crew leaders assess and utilize the skills and attributes of all of their workers when assigning work. Clearly, men bring new ideas too – this just says that diversity is a benefit.

What does equity mean in practice?

At Keenleyside, the collective agreement has provisions for:

- Setting equity targets for the employment of women, visible minorities, First Nations and people with disabilities;
- Hiring qualified local residents who are women, visible minorities etc. to meet those targets (qualified First Nations people may be hired from outside the local area);
- Setting up bridging and outreach programs to make sure that women and others can get the training they need to become qualified.

Why all this? Because these are the kind of pro-active steps it takes in the construction industry to create fairness.

At Keenleyside, the so-called “equity groups” are not the only ones receiving special measures to create fairness. The collective agreement promotes regional equity by the preferential hiring of local residents. This is intended to create fairness for local people the way “equity hire” creates fairness for women and others.

To create equity, it’s important that people’s attitudes are open and supportive. Even the best system will still be unfair if the people in it have discriminatory attitudes. This takes time – you can only feel how you feel. Hopefully, by understanding what equity is all about, you will be able to support it. Again, because construction sites have been almost all male, usually there are not many women on site even with equity measures. It helps if workers are welcoming of all viewpoints and particularly sensitive to those of women and anyone else in the minority on-site.

Employment Equity Project Loose Ends -- March, 2001

1. Encouraging Equity Best Practices by Employers

Employers' Tool Kit for Equity – Web site with BC-wide promotion

- Awaiting HRDC approval of funding and Request For Proposals. Equity Coordinator will help with creation of a project team and advisory committee to propose to HRDC.
- WKWA to receive electronic files of all documents produced to support this work – e.g. the Who's Doing What reports, Guidelines for Hiring a Diverse Workforce, Business Case for Equity

West Kootenay Outreach Recruitment Directory

- Electronic distribution to take place by March 31, 2001. WKWA to receive electronic file.

Professional Development in Leadership, Equity and Diversity—An “Institute”?

- Selkirk College, the Greater Trail Skills Centre and the West Kootenay Human Resource Management Association will carry the ball forward from this point on. This was discussed on March 1.

2. Communication to the Public and Key Audiences

Success Stories in the Media

- Writer to develop two to three more articles under contract. The timeline may need to extend past March 31.

3. Equity in Construction

Selkirk College Women in Trades and Technology Program

- Selkirk College is in the driver's seat now.

Columbia Basin Trust Task Force on Construction

Columbia Power Corporation confirms support for a Systemic Approach to Equity Advocacy for Continued Support for Equity in Construction in the West Kootenays Labour and Equity Integration Facilitator

- The Equity Coordinator and representatives of Kootenay WITT will stay in touch with these initiatives and contribute small amounts of time, on an honourarium basis, when/if they are needed as a catalyst for next steps.

4. Linkages to Women's Health and Poverty Issues

WKWA's next Multi-Year Proposal to Status of Women Canada

- WKWA is in the driver's seat here.

5. Project Evaluation and Reporting

- The Equity Coordinator will facilitate a project evaluation by the Advisory Committee and WKWA. Final report to Status of Women Canada will be submitted by March 31. This includes the final budget and list of expenditures.

6. Handing over Files

- WKWA will receive the written files and most resource materials. Some may be handed to Selkirk College or Greater Trail Community Skills Centre where appropriate.