

(Status Of Women Canada rejected this project)

Gender, Trades and Technology - A composite approach Project of the West Kootenay Women's Association

1) Issue to be addressed:

The need for complex solutions to women's economic security, particularly in the area of successfully integrating women into technical work, is essential in this time of skill shortages in many industries, where they are causing great concern. Demographics have shown the reductions in numbers of traditional trades workers due to lower birth rates, and parents have encouraged their children away from trades/technical work and into more white-collar employment (Walsh, 2004). A December 2007 Business Insight survey by PriceWaterhouseCoopers tells us 62% of Canadian private businesses say "the shortage of skilled workers is slowing the growth of their companies," more in the West than in the East.

UNESCO's November 2007 report on Science, Technology and Gender notes, "Women and girls around the world are excluded from participation in science and technology (S&T) by poverty, lack of education and aspects of their legal, institutional, political and cultural environments. "Women in Construction Trades: A Strategic Plan to Promote Women" (WIL, November 2007) states "*The representation of women as a proportion of all those employed in construction has grown little since the late 1980's. The percentage of all women employed in this group has remained between 2% and 3% since 1978*¹." A report in the November 17, 2007 Vancouver Sun lauded the doubling and tripling of numbers of apprentices across Canada, but noted in one sentence, at the end, that the percentages of women construction apprentices remain at 3%; a 2007 Simon Fraser University research study² confirms that women in male-dominated apprenticeships make up between 1%-3% of the total. The lesson here is "***(w)ith unprecedented activity in the construction industry combined with the current and future labour shortage the importance of addressing these challenges to successfully attract, recruit and retain women in the construction industry is now critical.***"

Governments/agencies continue to fund reports and recommendations, but the cycle goes on. The 2005 Canadian Apprenticeship Forum published their findings with separate reports on how barriers impact each of the designated equity groups: women, aboriginal people, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities. Rarely has a report been as comprehensive and specific, describing the scope of generic and group-specific barriers and their contexts, i.e. societal, employers, educators and counsellors, unionized and non-unionized settings, and government. While the barriers are well-described, only passing reference is given to solutions.

2. Identification of Need:

One solution identified in recommendations listed in reports from the past 21 yearsⁱ includes exploratory hands-on trades and technology programs for women, which

¹The Construction Sector Council, Winter 2004.

² Mayer, H., & Braid, K. (2007). *A Winning Ticket: Women in Trades in British Columbia and Yukon* (Research). Vancouver: Simon Fraser University.

include a whole system of developmental training that responds to systemic deficits in information, and socialization that has limited the choices and directions of these women in the past. The provision of such additional skills would compliment initiatives currently available and operating in the Kootenay region, such as the STEP programⁱⁱ at Selkirk College, designed to provide students with basic technical knowledge and basic hands-on skills in a number of trades areas –First Aid Level 1, Fork Lift Operations and WHMIS training. What is missing are the additional supports/training women need to respond effectively in technical training and on the job.

WITT National Network, working with the Canadian Construction Association, the Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Council (CARS), Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, working technical women and educators across the country, developed National Standards for Exploratory and Trades Specific Courses for Women (attached), which include not only technical hands-on training , but also identifies personal and professional development; occupational health and physical fitness; handling issues such as workplace culture and responding effectively to harassment; labour standards; career exploration/development; and components of communication that will prepare them for a variety of work environments in the future. All of these are essential preparatory experiences for those entering technical training and work. Several women in the West Kootenays have come into the Nelson Women’s Centre asking for such a program. It could well be a tip of the iceberg of women looking for economically and physically satisfying work

Another important solution is follow-up and support for the women as they engage with employers in seeking and finding employment. Such an effort requires a multi-faceted approach including working with employers, and providing role models and mentors for the women seeking work. As well, in view of the long term, ensuring a continued supply of interested and engaged young women, exciting introductory hands-on tools experiences would be very useful. These elements can all contribute to resolution in Canada of both skilled labour shortages and economic equality for women.

3. Involvement of participants most affected by the issue:

3a) Preparatory courses:

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CLBC, 2005) ((CLBC), 2005)tells us: (C)ommentators have noted that initiatives aimed at promoting apprenticeship to women have not succeeded in raising the number of women in apprenticeship programs...there are notable exceptions..., such as the many projects undertaken by various chapters of Women in Trade and Technology (WITT). But overall, there is an impression that women are not receiving the right sort of information about the trades and apprenticeship. Moreover, women do not receive opportunities to take exploratory or pre-employment courses to foster or develop an interest in the trades and learn the crucial coping skills that enable women to thrive in [technical]occupations (SaskWITT, 2001; WITT-Alberta, 2000;)

This project will recruit local women who have been trained to ensure the program we provide meets the needs identified in their own experience, while at the same time adhering to the National Standards developed by WITT, and recommended in a wide range of reports. Exploratory hands-on trades and

technology programs that include personal and professional development for successfully handling the new environments will better meet the needs of women in the Kootenay area to increase women's participation/retention in technical fields.

3B) Workshops for employers, unions, educators:

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum ((CLBC), 2005)tells us:

[It is desirable to] develop cultures within workplaces that are more tolerant and welcoming of women, Aboriginal people and other equity groups. Diversity training at the workplace level and flexible work arrangements to accommodate child care are among the initiatives to be explored in this area; but they must be accompanied by a commitment from employers, unions, and others that discrimination and harassment are not to be tolerated. (2005, From the full report, p. 57)

Deeply entrenched attitudes in families, schools and society at large about what constitutes "man's work" and "woman's work" have a pervasively negative influence on women who might otherwise form an interest in the skilled trades and actively pursue this interest.

With a few notable exceptions, discrimination and stereotyping in hiring practices, classrooms and workplaces is perceived to continue to pose significant barriers to women entering the trades (CLMPC, 1990; SPR Associates, 2002A; Grzetic, 1998;) (Italics in original)

These barriers include:

- Biased or discriminatory hiring practices (Grzetic, 1998);
- Stereotypical perceptions of women's abilities (Grzetic, 1998);
- Isolation or segregation of women in male-dominated worksites (SPR Associates, 2002A);
- Unequal pay for women performing similar jobs as male co-workers; and
- Sexual harassment

And

[A]ttitudes and expectations about gender appropriate occupations are inculcated equally strongly in boys and young men, reinforcing resistance in the workplace on the part of female tradespersons' future male co-workers. (CLBC, 2005)

Employers, unions and educators will be consulted regarding their understanding of what may be needed to shift the sense of welcome for women in their respective organizations. Face to face discussion of what is needed may include anti-bullying and harassment workshops to develop understanding of what constitutes these activities, and practice in handling the situations should they arise; clarity in what constitutes bias, where it comes from, and again, what do we do to handle it to create a welcoming environment. Women in their organizations will be asked to provide input.

3C) Listing of Role Models and Mentors:

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CLBC, 2005) tells us:

The presence of strong role models—such as women who teach or work in [trades and technical occupations]—is perhaps one of the strongest remedies to deeply ingrained societal attitudes about gendered work (Madsen, 1999; SPR Associates, 2002; WITT-Alberta, 2000). Female role models are able to relate to girls and young women convincingly on a number of issues by encouraging them to develop their mathematical, scientific and technical interests, providing advice and support about entering the [technical] workplace, and dealing with difficult co-workers or non-supportive family members (SPR Associates, 2002). As a result, women who have been positively influenced by role models are more likely to believe that math, science and engineering careers are compatible with family and marriage responsibilities.

Role models for early decision making, and Mentors for ongoing success in trades and technology have proven to be important keys to recruitment and retention for women in trades and technology³. It is often difficult to identify and recruit women to perform in these roles. It will be a component of this project to identify and recruit women in the Kootenay region who are willing to act as role models and mentors in their geographic areas. This can feed into the Women in Trades project undertaken by the BC Construction Association.

Women who have the capacity to be role models and mentors will be consulted about what assistance they might need to do this more successfully, and, in collaboration with other groups involved, such programming will be developed and put into action.

3D) Work with Greater Trail Community Skills Centre to develop GETT Camps and explore funding for the camps through the Industrial Training Authority. Girls Exploring Trades and Technology summer camps have proven to be an effective method of developing acceptance of and interest in technical areas for young girls, who then maintain their maths and sciences, and go on to trades/technical training in secondary school, college and on-the-job (Burkhart & Associates, 2001; Hawkins, Mackenzie, & Shirley, 1999).

4. Project Goal

To create a comprehensive regional program in collaboration with The Greater Trail Community Skills Centre, Kootenay Career Development Society and Selkirk College, that enables and fosters the positive experience of women integrating into technical training and work, leads to greater economic security for the women involved, and contributes to solutions for the Kootenay district and Canada's skills shortage crisis.

5. Project's Objectives

This project has 5 objectives:

- A) Women who enter programs such as Selkirk College's STEP Program and other technical training will be more effectively prepared for success in technical training/work through elemental personal/professional skill development, occupational assessment/fitness training, and career planning.
- B) Local employers, unions and educators will be made aware of solutions to skills shortages and be better prepared to welcome and retain women working and training in their establishments.
- C) A Kootenay listing of role-models and mentors for schools and working women will be established in collaboration with other groups such as the B.C. Construction Association.
- D) Communications networks with provincial, national and UN international organizations working towards the same goals will be established, experiences and practices shared and discussed.
- E) With the Greater Trail Skills Centre, develop and explore funding for GETT summer camps for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls, e.g. the Industrial Training Authority

³ Women in Leadership Foundation. (2007). *Women in Construction Trades - A Strategic Plan to Promote Women* (Research). Vancouver: Women in Leadership Foundation.

6. Concrete results

A) 24 women will be prepared to enter exploratory technical training and trades training courses, knowing what lies ahead of them and having developed the personal and professional skills to succeed. All of them will have made informed career choices for further training or employment.

B) At least 25 local employers and trainers will understand the components of a plan to create a welcoming work environment for women in technical fields. Many of them will have taken advantage of workshop assistance to improve performance in their settings. At least 12 of them will have provided work experiences for women in the program. Although it is not possible to project exact numbers of women who will ultimately benefit, we expect the ripple effect to be substantial.

C) A listing of West Kootenay trades and technical female role models and women willing to be mentors will be created and distributed to all area middle and secondary schools, hopefully linking to the work of the BC Construction Association and the 2007 Simon Fraser University conference efforts. Those listed will benefit from the social network available to them. The role models will receive information assisting them to be effective speakers in the schools, and many young people will benefit from access to women workers who will attend in the schools on career days.

D) Funding will be found, and at least 16 girls will participate in week-long GETT Camps in Nelson/Trail, expanding their career options and directions.

Work Plan: Coordinator often includes the work of the Admin. Support Staff.

7. Rationale for SWC Funding

This project focuses on elements for women's success not traditionally found in training/employment programs. By working with Kootenay Career Development Society, the Greater Trail Skills Centre, Selkirk College, and other agencies focusing on training and employment, and providing these additional components, we are working towards fulfilling Status of Women Canada's mandate to improve women's economic autonomy and well-being, leading towards gender equality. These other organizations are funded by Service Canada, and the B.C Provincial Government to provide some of the training and services we will utilize. By adding the focus on women's specific needs in trades and technology through Status of Women funding, we hope increase their potential for success. Historically, the West Kootenay Women's Association has focused in the area of increasing women's success in trades and technology through several projects: the Employment Equity on the Columbia Basin Power Projects initiative, which educated many and worked collegially with Columbia Power Corporation executives, increasing their opportunity to meet the hiring targets we helped them set; extremely successful Girls Exploring Trades and Technology Camps; participation in the Women's Ad Hoc Committee on the Columbia Basin Trust, which resulted in Employment Equity being included in the Trust's Mandate and Operational Plan; and sponsoring the educational tour of the DVD, Men & Women and Tools, providing the venue for participants to engage in open discussion of concerns and solutions to these challenges.. We have gained the respect and financial support of the surrounding communities, local employers and agencies, which enables us to engage with them in training and hiring women in technical fields. Those women who have worked on our past projects continue to participate in WKWA activities and are resources to this current project.

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ⁱ (Rosalie Silberman Abella, 1984; Rosalie S. Abella & Queen's University (Kingston Ont.). Industrial Relations Centre., 1987; Allied Hydro Building Trades Council & Columbia Hydro Constructors, 1993, 1999; Axworthy, 1980; Beck, 2000; Bohnen, Booth, & Klie, 1991; Booth & Murch, 1981; Marcia Braundy, 1986, 1992; M. Braundy, 1994; Marcia Braundy, 1997a, 1997b; Marcia Braundy & WITT, 1989; Brooks, 1986; Bryson & de Castell, 1999; Bryson, Petrina, Braundy, & de Castel, 2003; Canada, 1995; Carriere, 1995; Cauley, 1981; CLFDB, 1994; CLFDB & Employment), 1994; C. L. F.

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ii The Selkirk College STEP Program: Upon completion of the 11-week Skilled Trades Exploratory Program (STEP) for Women, the students will have gained basic technical knowledge and basic hands-on skills in the following trades: Electrical, Millwright, Machinist, Welding, Carpentry and General Mechanics. The students will also have gained a basic knowledge of subjects such as Trade Math, Trade Science, Drafting, Blueprint Reading, Layout, Measuring Practices, Rigging and Fasteners & Fittings. The students will also receive training and certification in Occupational First Aid Level I, Forklift Operation and WHMIS.

The Skilled Trades Exploratory Program (STEP) will also provide the students with the opportunity as a group to visit industrial worksites within our region to see where and how tradespersons perform their work.