

What has the WKWA project done so far?

The early phase of the project has focused on equity hiring policies at the Keenleyside Powerplant Project. In case you didn't see the July Newsletter, here's what has happened to date.

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The employment equity project shifted quickly into high gear last month by co-ordinating a Women's Information Meeting for the Columbia Basin Hydro Projects. This involved advertising and holding a one-day meeting, June 25, as well as collecting resumes of interested women to pass on to the Columbia Hydro Constructors. They are the "employer" on the Keenleyside Powerplant project. I was joined in the organizing effort by Marcia Braundy of Kootenay WITT and Lana Grant, the First Nations Coordinator for Keenleyside.

You are probably aware that people of the region have worked long and hard to let the Columbia Basin Trust and others know that employment on the hydro projects should provide go to local people in a mix that fairly represents population demographics and an acknowledgement of area First Nations. To put employment equity into practice, equity language was incorporated into the Collective Agreement between the Columbia Hydro Constructors and the Allied Hydro Council (a grouping of 17 construction trade unions). The Collective Agreement governs all hiring for on-site work at the Keenleyside project. However, as we have been finding out, equity language doesn't translate to equity hire unless action is taken to ensure compliance.

Last year, some construction work at the Brilliant Dam achieved equity participation of 8%, which was above the targets set but which is still a low rate of participation. Staff at the Columbia Power Corporation did a lot of work to get women out on the project. The process is different at Keenleyside - it's up to the Columbia Hydro Constructors and the unions. When we arrived on the scene, there were 4 or 5 women on site out of 140, or about 3%.

In just over 2 weeks, we identified over 120 interested women and, for 40 of the most qualified women, provided them with an opportunity for a site tour, an introduction to WITT and a face-to-face meeting with representatives of Peter Kiewit Sons Co. Ltd. (Keenleyside's design-build contractor) and the unions. What emerged in the meeting is that the route a qualified woman should take to get employment at Keenleyside is about as clear as mud. It's better in some occupational areas than others, but it's complex and equity is getting lost in the mix.

What is clear is that the organizing effort needs to continue by getting an Equity Integration Committee set up, just as there was on the Island Highway construction project. That committee needs to set equity targets and monitor compliance. It will also need to look at what kind of Orientation to Trades and Technology training is needed and might be made available locally.

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Since then, Janice Logan of the Ministry of Women's Equality and Employment met with representatives of the Columbia Power Corporation to ask for the following things:

- "tangible results" in terms of employment equity in the next round of hiring at Keenleyside (should be happening in early August)
- action to get equity targets set
- funding for a women's employment equity position similar to the First Nations Coordinator, who could be on-site and able to develop specific strategies to get more women hired and bring parties together to get some WITT training happening
- long term funding for an employment equity position in the region that would assist with the longer term training and employment issues related to all of the major construction projects taking place.