

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF MANITOBA, INC.

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Apprenticeship Futures Commission
Victoria Inn, 1808 Wellington Ave.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba

8:10 p.m., Tuesday, November 27, 2007

Appearing – Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba President, Maxine Balbon and Representative, Carol Thiessen, Federate Member of PCWM from Manitoba Hydro.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Apprenticeship Futures Commission.

It is widely publicized and known that in Manitoba there is a shortage of trained trades people. There are many openings, with good salaries available. We know that Manitoba will need to replace approximately 4,500 workers in the construction trades to maintain current workforce levels, and recruit over 2,500 additional workers to meet demands in the construction trades over the next ten years. The Apprenticeship Futures Discussion Paper provides an overview of the current system in Manitoba, and the Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba welcomes this opportunity to speak on one aspect of this review, and that is the appalling situation regarding the representation of women in apprenticeship. Some of the facts regarding women's employment in the trades are as follows:

- Research shows that women are disproportionately represented in lower paying jobs: 1.5% of women are employed in non-traditional trades compared to 25 % of men.
- The trades offer women better-paid and more stable employment opportunities.
- Many journeypersons retain traditional attitudes to women entering their trades.
- Where women have been able to secure apprenticeships, they have been able to complete their programs and succeed in the labour market: during WWII women functioned effectively in welding, electronics, munitions and the railway.

According to Stats Canada, the number of Apprentices by Gender, the percentage of women registered at the start of the year in 2004 was under 10%. This would include all trades. The Manitoba stats are not much better: in 2006-2007, there were only 128 women out of a total 5,053 in apprenticeship training in the trades, less cook and beauty trades, for a participation rate of 2.5%.

Obstacles to women entering the field include:

- Lack of exposure of elementary and junior high school children to the trades skills and career opportunities available

- Non-resourced recommendations for high school guidance counselors that present the trades as attractive and well remunerated careers for both men and women
- Overcoming gender based biases to women in pre-trades training
- Colleges that offer apprenticeship programs fail to offer special supports for women and have not encouraged journeypersons to take them on
- Union and employer barriers have not been broken down to ensure receptivity of women to the non-traditional trades
- The attracting, training and retaining of women into apprenticeship has not be tracked
- There has been no reconstituting, a once supported, Women in Trades support group.

The Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba had a federate member for many years, Women in Trades and Technology (WITT), which provided support for women entering the trades, and working in the trades. Supports for such a needed group no longer exists. The experiences of women who got a start from the Pre trades training, once offered at Red River College was positive, and led to women taking on further training, and good employment opportunities. Programs, such as Trade Up to Your Future need to be expanded. Part time training should be considered. We would urge the Government of Manitoba to have more opportunities for women to explore apprenticeship possibilities, to support women taking apprenticeship training, and to encourage journeyperson and potential employers to overcome traditional stereotypical attitudes. To encourage more women to consider trades training, the Government of Manitoba can help by:

1. Encouraging exposure of elementary and junior high school students to trades skills and career opportunities, and encouraging girls to continue with their math and science studies;
2. Preparing brochures and audio-visual aids featuring female role models for high school guidance counselors and parents, to use in presenting apprenticeship as attractive and well remunerated career options to young women;
3. Offering pre-trades training to women interested in pursuing apprenticeship careers;
4. Mandating colleges that provide apprenticeship academic programs to develop special supports for women entering non-traditional apprenticeship program, and to reach out to journeypersons to take on women apprentices;
5. Working with employers and unions to ensure receptivity to women workers, members and colleagues; and by
6. Creating an interdepartmental Task Force with representation of women in trades, employers, educational institutions such as Red River College and Winnipeg Tech, as well as Skills Manitoba. This task force could be used to track progress made in attracting, training and retaining more women into apprenticeship programs, evaluating program strengths and weaknesses, and
7. Reconstituting Women in Trades support group. This group could be called upon to provide role modeling and mentorship programs that are developed for women.