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Wednesday, March 24, 2010

—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I think we have a quorum. We have some witnesses waiting, and we don't want to keep them waiting forever, so let's begin.

I would like to apologize for the lateness of our start today. There was a vote in the House, so most people have only just come.

I want to thank you for being on this video conference, and I want to let you know that because of Standing Order 108(2), this committee is doing a study on increasing the participation of women in non-traditional occupations.

We usually give you an opportunity to present for 10 minutes on your topic. This is followed by an interactive question and answer period. When we get to that point I will tell you how many minutes we have for questions and answers.

Ms. Turner and Ms. Clarke, will you be sharing your 10 minutes, or will one of you present for 10 minutes?

Ms. Ashley Turner (Industry and Community Liaison, Women in Resource Development Corporation): I will be presenting for 10 minutes, and Mary Clarke will be involved in the question and answer period as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are ready to begin.

Our witnesses today include, from St. John's, Women in Resource Development Corporation. Ashley Turner will be presenting. Our second witness, from Vancouver, is the Canadian Construction Women. Rebecca McDiarmid, president, will present.

We will begin with Ms. Turner.

Ms. Ashley Turner: I would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the session this afternoon. My colleague Mary Clarke is a community outreach coordinator with the educational resource branch of our organization, Women and Resource Development Corporation, also known as WRDC.

This afternoon I will be speaking to you about increasing the participation of women in non-traditional occupations. I'd like to begin by giving you an overview of our organization.

We are a not-for-profit organization, and our mandate is to advance the economic equality of women in Newfoundland and Labrador by promoting opportunities for equitable participation of women in trades and technology occupations in the natural resource industry.

I'd like to give you an overview of the labour market in Newfoundland and Labrador as it currently stands. We have forecasted skilled labour shortages that are projected to begin in the short term, with upcoming large-scale resource-based projects in our province. When these projects peak in approximately 2015, the demand for workers is expected to far exceed the supply of workers.

In our province, as well as on the national level, long-term skilled labour shortages are projected in relation to an aging workforce, particularly due to the anticipated retirement of the baby boomer generation, and decreasing birth rates. At the local level, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has identified supporting access for underrepresented groups such as women as a key strategy to counterbalance the expected skills gaps in our province.

Although women represent approximately 47% of our general workforce, they tend to be clustered in traditional occupations. In fact, approximately 36% of all employed women in our province are working in lower-paying traditional occupations such as secretarial work and sales and service occupations.

When you look at the non-traditional occupations, however, only approximately 2% of all employed women in our province are working in higher-paying non-traditional occupations such as the construction trades, transportation occupations, and heavy equipment occupations. In addition to this, they represent only approximately 3% of apprentices in non-traditional trades and 1% of journeymen in industrial trades. Therefore, women tend to be extremely underrepresented in non-traditional occupations within our province, as is the case at the national level.

Our organization has pinpointed several barriers as to why women are underrepresented in non-traditional occupations. Many of these barriers are similar to those that have been identified by other organizations as well. They include societal barriers, in that we receive messages every day about appropriate education and career options for men and women, and we use these messages to form biases and set inflexible standards about the suitability of men and women to perform certain types of work.

These biases become ingrained in our organizational policies, practices, and cultures, and they are reflected in recruitment, hiring, and promotion procedures. Overall, these societal and systemic barriers reflect gender perceptions that prevent the consideration of trades and technology as career options for women, since women's ability to perform this type of work is often underestimated.

This limits women's access to training and career opportunities, in that there is a lack of information and encouragement provided to them to pursue non-traditional occupations. They also have a lack of female role models in non-traditional fields, thus making it difficult for them to picture themselves in this type of work.

• (1545)

WRDC has identified these barriers. In moving forward to break them down, we first consider that women often “self-de-select” from trades and technology training programs and occupations. By “self-de-select”, we mean to choose for themselves neither to enter nor remain in these non-traditional occupations.

As an organization, we feel it is extremely important that general recruiting and retention practices be improved to attract women. Overall, the system needs to adapt to accommodate women, from a recruitment and retention standpoint. More focused recruitment and retention policies and programs are needed in order to increase women's participation in non-traditional occupations. In order to do this, however, we need collaboration on the part of all key stakeholders. This includes post-secondary institutions, government at all levels, labour, industry, and community organizations such as ours.

Our government in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as the federal government, has recognized the importance of having gender equity requirements in relation to large-scale projects in order to increase the participation of women on these projects. In relation to our offshore oil and gas industry, the Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, under subsection 45(4), states that the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, CNLOPB:

...may require that any Canada-Newfoundland benefits plan include provisions to ensure that disadvantaged individuals or groups have access to training and employment opportunities....

Our local government, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, also states in section 6 of the Newfoundland and Labrador energy plan that government will:

Require large-scale energy project proponents within our jurisdiction to include employment plans for women that address employment equity and work with other governments to accomplish the same goal where resources are jointly managed.

Overall, what we do as an organization is attempt through our various services and programs to aid key stakeholders, including government, in meeting gender equity requirements and goals. We offer gender-based analysis and planning in relation to the sharing of best practices as well as policy and program development. We also offer support to industry in developing and implementing gender equity plans. As well, we offer sessions on gender awareness in the workplace to industry and post-secondary institutions, in order to alleviate many of the barriers I have identified for you within these workplaces and institutions.

Another service we offer is employment and career services to women who are considering entering non-traditional occupations. We also offer a variety of hands-on training programs, which we feel are very important in allowing women to explore trades and technology occupations, which are of course non-traditional fields for women. We offer these programs as career considerations to both women and young girls. One is the orientation to trades and technology program. We partner with College of the North Atlantic

on this program to deliver it to women 19 and over within our province.

Another four programs are clustered beneath the educational resource centre branch of our organization. These are techsploraton, Girls Exploring Trades and Technology, Camp Group Learning for Outgoing Women, and a new program still in the curriculum development stage, Girls in Renewable Energy and Alternative Technologies. These four programs offer hands-on training to both girls and women in non-traditional fields.

In conclusion, WRDC feels that the forecasted skilled labour shortage in our province is an opportunity to move forward in new directions and in breaking down many of the barriers identified for you today. We feel that collaboration between stakeholders is key, including collaboration between organizations such as ours and government at all levels. Let's move forward together to secure the future by breaking down the barriers and offering equal opportunities to the women of our province and our country, including our daughters, our nieces, and our granddaughters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present my speech.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Turner.

Now, Ms. McDiarmid, would you begin, please, for 10 minutes.

• (1550)

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid (President, Canadian Construction Women): My name is Rebecca McDiarmid. I'm here representing the Canadian Construction Women. The Canadian Construction Women is an organization dedicated to supporting women in or wishing to become part of the construction industry, particularly in the Lower Mainland.

I believe there are benefits both to women and to the industry by increasing the number of women in construction. Unfortunately there are also a number of barriers preventing more women from entering this field. Specific reasons why more women should join construction include lucrative wages, particularly when compared to more traditional fields; opportunities for advancement based on skill—in construction I've found that the cream certainly rises to the top; long-term employment security; university education is not necessarily required; and people working in construction will always have that satisfaction of producing a product that's going to be there and evident for decades to come.

Benefits to the industry include women bringing a different set of strengths to the job site. We tend to be more detail oriented, better at multi-tasking, and gentler with equipment. This has real cash advantages for businesses when it comes to maintenance costs and replacement costs, particularly in heavy equipment.

There's anecdotal evidence that there are fewer confrontations on site, fewer incidences of fighting, that people seem to be more productive, looking towards resolution-based problem solving as opposed to trying to win. Women tend to have a better safety ethic. A woman is more likely to ask for help when trying to move something heavy, which translates into the men also feeling that they are not obligated to try to push themselves to the limit. Obviously the fewer injuries you have on any site, the better off everybody is.

Increasing the number of women in an organization will broaden the perspective when it does come to problem solving, just in the different ways that men and women think. They are able to come up with better solutions to deal with their problem. Also, by being more open to having women in the organization, companies are able to broaden the talent pool they're drawing their employees from.

Unfortunately there are some barriers to increasing the number of women in construction. There's a lack of information about available opportunities. Most high school girls are not presented with construction being a viable career option. There are misconceptions about the industry by individual women, their parents, and their teachers that it's man's work, that it's always dirty, it's always heavy, and it's too technical. That is certainly not the case. A lot of teachers and career counsellors will focus on the importance of attending university as opposed to presenting the options of apprenticeship training or trades training or technical school as an alternative to university after high school.

Employers don't always recognize the benefits of having women in their organization. This is a matter of a lack of experience with women who are able to help them out. Other barriers include job site hours. It can be difficult to arrange for child care with the hours of construction sites in general. We tend to start earlier: 7:30 in the morning to 4 o'clock in the afternoon is standard for us, and it's tricky to find child care that's going to accommodate those hours. In addition, when you have a woman working on a site, the only woman there with 60 other guys, you do get the sense that you're alone, and that can be hard on a lot of women who aren't prepared for that.

To overcome these barriers, the best way of doing that is to provide positive role models, women who have made successes of themselves, showing the next generation that it is possible. They can do it. It's going to take a lot of work, but they can be successful.

Educating the public about opportunities available in construction: it is a good paying job. It's possible to advance and advance quickly, particularly in comparison to other, more traditional careers.

Educating employers about the benefits of increasing the number of women on their site: again, this is mostly anecdotal information from employers who got their first woman on site and were amazed at the difference it made in their crews or their maintenance costs or the productivity of the work in general.

There are also supporting organizations to provide a venue for women to get together who don't have the opportunity to interact with a lot of other women during the course of the day, to compare notes and exchange stories and find some inspiration to get through the harder times.

●(1555)

One of the things I would like to bring up, which has been discussed in previous conversations on introducing quotas, mandates, or initiatives that specifically target women and increase the number of women in non-traditional fields, is that it can create a backlash when everyone is not judged by the same criteria. Even women who are well qualified and who are doing a good job are judged against this standard. This has been seen before. Law enforcement agencies and the military have tried to increase the number of female members. You can end up with nicknames such as the "powder puff patrol" or the "pink list", which refers to women who are working on site. It creates nothing but antagonism between the women and their male counterparts.

In summary, I'd like to say that both women and the construction industry would profit by increasing the number of women in the field. Current barriers to increasing the number of women employed in building trades and on-site management can be removed through education and through increasing the profile of positive role models. Having said that, programs put in place to merely increase the number of women on construction sites would not be productive and would create a hostile environment for other women who are going to be entering that field.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. McDiarmid.

We're now going to begin our first round of questions and answers. It's a seven-minute round. For the benefit of the witnesses, the seven minutes include questions and answers. If both the questioner and the responder can be as crisp as possible, we can have many more questions than we would normally have.

I will begin with Ms. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for taking time out of your busy days to agree to be witnesses and to help us with our study.

I'll pose my questions to the three of you, but one of you could answer. For the two organizations, I want to compare your responses.

My first question to all of you is this. We know that gender stereotyping has been and remains a big issue. Parents and educators still steer young girls in a certain direction towards traditional types of careers. Because of the global economy, the workplace is being shaped and reshaped through the impact of cultural differences, for instance. Different cultures have different ideas to ours on what is traditional and non-traditional. What's your sense of the impact that's going to have on any success we've achieved thus far in Canada in attracting women who come from homes where their culture is entirely different, for instance, to non-traditional occupations?

Ms. Ashley Turner: I can begin. I'm Ashley Turner from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you for your question. I think it's a very valid and a very important question when considering an increase in women's participation in general in these fields. I certainly understand where you're coming from. As you said, traditional and non-traditional occupations vary from culture to culture.

I mentioned some of the traditional occupations for women in our North American society, which are, again, types of secretarial work. Oftentimes child care and caregiving activities are considered traditional for women. Non-traditional work would be the construction trades, to which we've both referred. These may not be possibilities or considerations for women in other cultures. They may not have been encouraged to enter into non-traditional occupations on an even deeper level than perhaps we have in North American society.

On moving forward with policies or programs to actually attempt to increase the participation of women in general in these occupations, we need to take cultural considerations into account when developing our policies and programs. We need to apply them to cultures other than our North American society and other than the culture we've referred to in our presentation in order to ensure the programs are effective and no one is left out in terms of other cultures and other groups of individuals.

• (1600)

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Might I respond to that? I have been working in construction management for over 10 years and have regularly dealt with people from other cultures. Some of them are more conservative than those in the North American one.

The guys I've dealt with are much more interested in knowing you can do your job than in knowing you're a woman. The best way of overcoming any barriers from other cultures is to demonstrate competence.

As far as getting more women from other diverse cultures involved in non-traditional roles in Canada goes, again I think role models will play a key role. When they see other women leading successful careers and making financial successes of their lives, they will certainly consider construction or other non-traditional roles as being viable options for them.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Specifically with respect to the trades, do your organizations have a lot of interaction? Do you strategize on a regular basis and maybe try to have some mechanism to gauge results with respect to working with trade unions? For instance, here in Ontario the carpenters' union developed a specific recruiting and training program that's geared specifically to attracting women to the carpentry trade, which has had some degree of success.

Is that something that you pursue with the trades in your regions?

The Chair: Ms. Turner, go right ahead.

Ms. Ashley Turner: Thank you very much.

As I mentioned, as an organization we certainly attempt to work with all key stakeholders. Unions are certainly key in attempting to have women move into non-traditional trades. As we know, union lists tend to be used in the hiring process to get any workers into trades occupations.

We have started working with unions directly in our province. Many unions, locally, have started to recognize the importance of increasing the participation of women in these fields as well, and they have begun their own initiatives, which we do hope to collaborate on with them, in order to increase the number of women in their union and within trades in general.

One of these initiatives, for example, involves having a database of women who are first-year apprentices and matching them with employers to ensure that they are able to log hours towards their next level of apprenticeship. That is just one example of what a local union is doing and one example of what we hope to collaborate on with them.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: The Canadian Construction Women Association does not currently work with trade unions directly, as far as trying to track the success of any initiatives they may or may not have geared towards women.

The Chair: Now we'll go to the second round.

Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome.

My first question is for Ms. McDiarmid and it is related to the construction sector.

Several of the people here today told us that it has not been easy for women, even today, to enter non-traditional occupations, whether because of day care problems or because of equity or equality in the workplace. We have major projects that need many construction workers, in Newfoundland, Alberta, and British Columbia, where the Olympic Games took place just recently.

Ultimately, what have you done to make these places and jobs more accessible to women whose situation in construction has not made much progress for a number of years? We know that the construction sector is not an easy environment. Supposedly, men yell, and so on. The women have to deal with that. There is also the issue of harassment. Could you comment on that topic?

• (1605)

[*English*]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Are you asking about Canadian Construction Women specifically or the industry in general?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Could you tell me what your association is doing to make things easier? I imagine you are working as an organization.

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Canadian Construction Women provides a venue for women who work in all aspects of the construction field to get together and support each other in our roles. We provide excellent role models of women who run the gamut from lift operators to vice-presidents and from lawyers to surveyors. They can come together, exchange experiences, and realize that they're not alone. They can demonstrate to each other that we can be successful in construction.

In addition to that, we go to schools and trade schools to talk to students about our experiences in construction—the good parts, the bad parts, and the parts in between—particularly to give high school students an idea of what it's like and what they can expect when they join the construction industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Earlier, you talked about special health and safety accommodation in the workplace. I think that is a good example. We organize workplaces to make them more accessible not only to women, but also to men. In the past, we did not have the necessary tools, but with women coming into those places, they became a lot safer.

Ms. McDiarmid, are the laws reasonable in that regard?

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Yes, I think this is the way to proceed. I was on a construction site several years ago where there was an incredible number of women on the tools, and placing rebar, and working as electricians, plumbers, and drywallers. I was there on site as the project manager. There was a different tone to the site. Everybody was working together. I'm not going to say that it was a Pollyanna kind of situation, because we're still working in construction, after all, but the more women there were on site, the more comfortable we all felt. It was a really good working environment for me.

I know that pushing safety in construction is a good thing, generally speaking, and if having more women on site will make things safer for everybody, that's a good thing.

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I would like to look at the issue from another angle.

In the west, there are a lot of major gas and mining projects, just like in Newfoundland. And we said earlier that there was a shortage of staff and we were encouraging women to go into these areas. I would like to know how this is being done. For example, are women being accommodated? Some are probably married or single mothers. How do we make these areas easier for them?

•(1610)

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: On at least one major oil and gas project in the west, I've heard of a child care facility being provided on site, or close to the site, to allow women who are heavy equipment operators to drop their kids off before work and then pick

them up after work without having to drive three hours out of the way.

The report I heard was that it is a very successful program, so successful, in fact, that this site ended up teaching grades one, two, and three as part of their facility. The costs of the child care were offset by the savings the company saw in their maintenance and equipment replacement costs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: We have one initiative, and that was implemented by the company itself.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. McDiarmid.

We move now to Ms. Brown.

Before I do, Ms. Turner and Ms. Clarke, can you hear me?

Ms. Ashley Turner: Yes, we can.

The Chair: That's great. Feel free, when someone asks a question and you think you want to contribute to the answer, to just speak up.

Now we go to Ms. Brown for seven minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, ladies, for being here and for participating in this discussion.

As a woman who has, in the past, been in construction and whose business deals with the construction sector all the time, I have some familiarity with some of the problems. I sometimes wonder if what women are facing today in moving into these non-traditional jobs is something akin to what our mothers and grandmothers faced during the wars, when many of them moved into the munitions factories and undertook roles that were considered non-traditional. It really was the emergence of women into many of our manufacturing facilities, and some of them never went back to their traditional roles.

May I say, Ms. Turner, that I was in Newfoundland, in Gander, a year and a half ago, and I had some very interesting discussions with the skills training office about opportunities there.

Ms. McDiarmid, perhaps from your experience, I wonder, first of all, if you can tell us what kind of timeline we are talking about since women first started in the construction industry. What kind of data do we have to work with?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: What data do we have to work with as far as what?

Ms. Lois Brown: I mean data about the length of time we've seen women.... How long have we been collecting this data?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I'm not entirely sure, to be honest with you. I know there have been women working in the construction industry, in management roles, since the seventies. That's as far back as people I've met go.

Ms. Lois Brown: How old is your organization?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Our organization is 27 years old.

Ms. Lois Brown: So you've been collecting stats for some time, and we have some reliable data to work with. That's really what I'm asking.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: We don't collect formal statistics, but we do have informal polls and anecdotes dating back 27 years.

Ms. Lois Brown: With the data we have been able to collect, are we looking at injury management for women? Do we have any idea of the kinds of injuries women have on the job compared to the ones men have?

What we've seen in our business is that mostly strains, sprains, and contusions are the injuries that happen on the job. Do you have any data that indicates what kinds of injuries women might encounter?

• (1615)

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I've not seen any data that would indicate that there is any difference between the injuries men encounter on a job site and the injuries a woman would encounter on a job site.

I do know that over the past 35 years, the amount of personal protective equipment—steel-toed boots, coveralls, gloves—that fits women has increased dramatically. That can only be a result of the increased demand for female-sized safety gear.

While there's still a ways to go as far as full protection—overall aren't generally cut to suit a woman—things are getting better for us, and they continue to get better for us.

Ms. Lois Brown: That's really where I wanted to go with this. With the data we can collect on these kinds of incidents in the workplace, and particularly in construction, is there any move you see in the manufacturing sector to accommodate ergonomic equipment for women who are undertaking these responsibilities?

When I look at, say, a woman who's five foot five and maybe 140 pounds handling the same equipment as a man who is maybe 180 to 200 pounds and six foot one, the ergonomics are different. I'm just wondering if you're seeing any pattern in how manufacturing is approaching that, given the fact that we're seeing more women going into these roles.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: You're certainly seeing safety gear that's provided in smaller sizes. Now, whether that's specifically geared to women or specifically geared to smaller people is to be determined.

Is there special gear for women out there? I haven't seen it, except that steel-toed boots do come in women's sizes now. You see the occasional pink hard hat, but I'm not going to count that.

Ms. Lois Brown: Is that data that would be beneficial going forward? Is that something you would recommend needs to be collected?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I think it would be interesting to see the differences in the injuries, if there is a difference in the injuries that are incurred by men and women on-site. That would certainly be telling, as far as the way men and women do the same job.

Ms. Lois Brown: Ms. Turner, I wonder if you could add anything to that, particularly from the offshore oil perspective. Do you see any difference there?

Ms. Ashley Turner: Yes. Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to this question.

In terms of the offshore oil industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, we are actually experiencing a lag in comparison to the west, it seems. Much of what I hear from women working offshore is that the safety equipment and the personal protective equipment is not yet in sizes that fit them appropriately.

When you look at the offshore industry in particular, there is a helicopter ride from the onshore to the offshore platform. During that ride there are survival suits that are worn by the workers, women included; however, those suits are in men's sizes. They're not accommodating to smaller people in general, and they certainly don't take women's anatomy into account when designing that particular equipment.

It is slowly starting to change, and attention has been brought to it in the past year especially. However, it is still slow to come, including proper boots and proper gloves for women offshore, which has been a safety concern from our organization's standpoint, but also for the women working in the offshore industry.

We certainly feel that doing more research on personal protective equipment, how it affects injury rates and safety in general, is something that is key in moving forward in a positive direction with women in non-traditional occupations.

Ms. Lois Brown: Ms. Turner—

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have Irene Mathyssen.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. I appreciate the information you're bringing, particularly from a woman's perspective in terms of these quite non-traditional roles.

I want to start with Ms. McDiarmid. You talked about the need for mentorship and the fact that your organization does do some. You're very persuasive. You're very engaging. Do you act as a mentor? Do you get out to the schools and talk to young women about the possibility of non-traditional kinds of jobs?

• (1620)

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Yes, we've had events held at high schools. We've had events held for women at risk in the lower east side, which I've attended, to talk to people about the possibility of entering into construction.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: That's very interesting. I wanted to ask this, too. I remember some years ago there was a great whoop-de-do, a discussion, about women firefighters. The wisdom, and I use that term loosely, of the day was that women were not big enough and they couldn't do the job because they didn't have the same physical prowess.

The irony, of course, was that every woman who was making the transition to the more formal part of the educational process had already passed all the physical requirements and could indeed pull people out of buildings and use a fire hose just as effectively as men.

It brings me to this issue about the backlash and what you said about quotas or creating a situation where women needed to be hired and the backlash. If there isn't that encouragement, if there isn't that kind of opening of the door, then women aren't going to enter in. How do you create a balance there?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: By creating a welcoming work environment for everyone. If changes are made to the way child care is handled so that everyone is able to have access to it—to extend child care hours—that is going to increase the quality of life for everyone.

Similarly, when I speak to schools or to other organizations about the possibility of construction, I'll answer questions about being a woman in construction if I'm asked them. Most of my presentation is about working in construction as a person. That is one of the things that I think has served me well in my career, not dwelling on the fact that I'm different, but focusing on the fact that we're all here to do a job and I'm just another person on-site.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. Mary Clarke (Community Outreach Coordinator, Educational Resource Centre, Women in Resource Development Corporation): I'd like to address that if I could. As a certified firefighter, we get that issue all the time, but the way in which we address it is through some gender awareness in fire departments and in community, and also to point out that not every job of firefighter is to bring out that person; it's also in the operation of the pumper truck, the driving of the pumper truck. There are all kinds of other tasks—safety, paramedics—that are engaged in firefighting, so we address it through that manner.

The other thing is that with our organization we have 55 women role models on our roster right now, and my full-time job is going to schools and doing programs with young girls and young women to encourage them to go into a lot of these non-traditional careers and jobs. We also believe that if they see women in those jobs they are more accepting of them, and there's nothing better than to bring a group of girls to the fire field and show them how to use a fire extinguisher, to show them that they too can do it.

Thank you.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you. I appreciate that, and I wish you even more success with that, because the argument or the discussion some years ago was very frustrating in regard to opening those doors for women.

I have another question. One of the things we heard was that while young women may well be encouraged to take training, once they are finished that training there is a problem in terms of securing an apprenticeship, and even when they do secure that apprenticeship, once they get to the job site they might be relegated to lesser-paying jobs because for whatever reason they weren't given the opportunity.

Is that something you're seeing? Is it something we need to really pursue in terms of our report?

Ms. Ashley Turner: Yes, this is certainly an issue that we have been seeing with the women we work with and with women in general. As I mentioned around unions, there are seniority lists that the unions and the industry within our province work with, and oftentimes women are at the bottom of that list. Therefore, it is

difficult for them to get placed in a high-skills position, and oftentimes, yes, if they do get placed in a job it may be in a lower-skills position due to a lack of experience because they've been at the bottom of that seniority list.

So it's something we're working on with unions, to try to find a way around that in order to give equal opportunities to both men and women in gaining experience in trades, for example.

• (1625)

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: If I might add to that, this might be an issue that is well addressed by having positive role models for women out there and having venues for women who are just joining the construction trades or non-traditional trades to speak to more experienced women. Women in general aren't as...I'm not going to say ambitious, but less insistent when it comes to getting more responsibility. Women will tend to want to earn the place as opposed to get the place and then prove that they can do it, whereas men tend to attack it from the other side.

So it could help to have a role model who is able to demonstrate that, no, out of school you should be able to do this, this, and this, and if your supervisor isn't allowing you to do that, you need to talk to him about it or you need to talk to his boss about it, to see what you can do to get into a role that will better fulfill your needs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now move to a second round. For the sake of the witnesses, I just want to let you know that in the second round it's now a five-minute round, both for questions and answers.

We'll begin the round with Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. You're doing a great job.

I have a comment first. In a previous life, over 20 years ago, I brought a program called Women do Math to my riding, the Yukon, and we had hundreds of girls and young women in high school or junior high listen to professionals in the sciences and maths in the riding, and it was very popular and very successful. In fact, there's one coming up this Saturday, a similar thing. I would encourage any community that doesn't do such an event to do it. It's very workable.

I'm just curious as to whether any of the witnesses have any stats on absenteeism. Are men or women showing up for the same amount of time at work? I'm just talking about for regular reasons; I'm not talking about child bearing or anything because I'm going to talk about that later.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Do men spend more time in the office or on the site as opposed to women?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: No, are they away from work more often? Is there any—

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I have no statistics on that.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

Mary Clarke, I have a—

Ms. Ashley Turner: I don't have statistics either.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

I have a question for Mary Clarke. Child bearing, when it interrupts a career, obviously could cause problems with retention, women keeping their jobs. Has that caused problems? What are some of the best practice solutions that you've seen employers put into place so it doesn't cause a problem, or do you have suggestions that the government could do to help?

Ms. Mary Clarke: I'm not too knowledgeable on the stats, but in the instances I've heard of, employers have been very accommodating. We have some policies and careers where there is the right to accommodate. If they are off for much time, they will have someone do it. Or they can go on a different hour shift or a reduced work week, this sort of thing.

Some of the things we have now with the parental leave have helped a bit. We're finding that more of the men are staying home to handle some of the issues, as opposed to the women being gone constantly. A couple of places here have day cares at their employment so they can bring their children to the work sites. It's getting to be less of an issue.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Rebecca, are there any innovative solutions to either...? You mentioned the child care problem, the 7:30 in the morning problem, or when a woman takes a couple of years off for child bearing.

• (1630)

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I think my colleague in Newfoundland hit the nail on the head there. A lot of programs have been implemented by individual companies to particularly accommodate paternal leave. More and more guys are taking advantage of that, which is equalizing the playing field.

In addition, the more opportunities that companies have to provide child care close to the work sites, the more convenient and less destructive it is to the family lives of the individuals involved.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

You mentioned—

Ms. Ashley Turner: If I could interject, in research I've done on the underrepresentation of women in the offshore industry, many women mentioned that they felt taking maternity leave could hinder their seniority and ability to become promoted into a higher-level position. Therefore, from a policy standpoint, I would certainly recommend that there be policies in place to ensure that this cannot happen, and that maternity leave cannot be a ground to affect seniority, promotion, as well as hiring.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I have a quick question, Ashley. You mentioned new careers in renewable resources. Could you mention which renewable resources you're working with?

Ms. Ashley Turner: Yes, natural resources is what I was referring to, first of all. We work in the oil and gas industry, the mining industry, and all facets, including the fisheries and forestry as well.

As Mary is heading our Girls in Renewable Energy and Alternative Technologies program, I believe she could tell you a little more than I could about renewable resources.

Ms. Mary Clarke: Again, in renewable resources it's the same thing. It's having a way that if some of the electricians and these people go off for maternity leave they don't go to the bottom of the list to be called back. It's a union thing as well, I believe.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Ms. Wong.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): First of all, thank you very much for joining us for this very meaningful session. I come from the Lower Mainland. I represent Richmond, where probably a lot of you, especially Ms. McDiarmid, come from.

I understand that the real estate market is still booming and there are still builders doing a lot of construction work. Does that mean you may be able to recruit more members who are now in the construction area?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I'm sorry, but I didn't understand the question.

Mrs. Alice Wong: My question is, with the real estate market and construction work booming, would that have any effect on more women being willing to go into the building trades area?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Oh, certainly. Job numbers in construction are increasing. The past few years have been very difficult for us, as they've been very difficult for everyone, but the tide seems to be turning here. Increasingly, more jobs are available. Yes, it's a very good time for women to be getting into trades, and into construction in particular.

Mrs. Alice Wong: I understand that you've been going to schools, but have you been working with the colleges and the polytechs, such as, for example, Kwantlen Polytechnic University and BCIT? They do offer a lot of training in those areas. Has your organization been able to work with them as well?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Yes. We had a building bridges event in conjunction with BCIT in the fall. We had our members, as well as representatives from our corporate membership, go to BCIT and talk to women who were in the apprenticeship training programs and the construction technology programs. They just talked about what's it like being in construction, about how one would try to get that first job, and about some of the things that we've encountered during our years on site.

Mrs. Alice Wong: What do you think of a kind of encouragement such as builder of the year, which would be really highlighting the role model? We have women entrepreneur of the year and things like that. Do you think this highlighting of the successful leaders in those trades would help?

This question applies to all three of you.

• (1635)

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: The Vancouver Regional Construction Association currently has an outstanding woman in construction award that's awarded annually in conjunction with Canadian Construction Women. I'm not entirely sure about how long that's been going on, but it's at least 15 years.

Mrs. Alice Wong: That's nice to hear.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Yes. It would be nice if it weren't necessary, but you're right, having a woman's accomplishments highlighted.... As for some of the feedback I've gotten from some of the guys after the award ceremony, it was, "Whoa, she's pretty good!"

It just goes to reinforce the fact that there are very incredible women out there doing incredible jobs. It breaks down some of the misconceptions that men might have about the limitations of a woman working on a job site.

Mrs. Alice Wong: I also would like to applaud WRDC for having a short orientation program for women who would like to go into trades.

Do you think the colleges and technical institutes might be able to do that? Then they would have a wider range, while maybe cooperating with the two different organizations here.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: BCIT has an introduction to trades program. I think they have one geared towards everybody, and then one specifically geared towards women, where every week you explore a different trade, such as electrical, plumbing, sheet metal, and welding. You get a taste of everything before committing to one apprenticeship program—if you decide you want to pursue an apprenticeship program. Programs like that do exist.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Ashley Turner: In Women in Resource Development, we also offer a similar program in partnership with our local college, the College of the North Atlantic. Again, it is entitled "Orientation to Trades and Technology". Similarly, women do receive hands-on training in a variety of different trades and technology programs, which allows them to explore their interests prior to selecting one training program in particular to move forward with.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to move now to Madame Demers for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. McDiarmid, Ms. Turner and Ms. Clarke, thank you for being here with us. I think that your work is very important and I am pleased to find out that a number of women can benefit from it.

Last year, in the fall, when we started this study, the Building and Construction Trades Department paid us a visit. Their representative told us that there was a major congress in the spring and one of the main topics was going to be the place of women in construction trades.

Ms. McDiarmid, I was wondering whether your organization was in contact with that association and whether you were going to attend that congress. I feel it is always beneficial to work with men to work out problems. The people from that association seem to be really interested in improving the working and living conditions on construction sites so that women can fit in better.

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: Was this the symposium on women in construction that was hosted by the Canadian construction sector?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes, Madam.

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I was there, and it was an excellent venue to make contact with other groups of women from across the nation who have similar goals to ours and are trying to increase the profile of women in construction.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I was talking about construction trades but from the men's point of view, specifically the Association des métiers de la construction du Canada, and not just women, but men as well.

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I agree with you it's very important to have inclusive associations. We've certainly had men attend some of the Canadian construction women's events, and I have attended events from the Vancouver Regional Construction Association, which comprises mostly men. You're absolutely right about the personal contacts you make when you're introduced to people from other companies. It makes your professional life that much easier when you have to deal with each other on a professional level.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Ms. Clarke, Ms. Turner and Ms. McDiarmid.

Ms. McDiarmid, you talked earlier about harassment and the fact that it might cause problems for women, which would discourage them from continuing to work in those trades. In your organizations, do you provide micro-credit to women so that they can start their own businesses?

I say that because, in Laval, we started giving micro-credit. Women learned trades in plumbing, electricity, masonry, and construction. They were not comfortable with working on site and they started small businesses. Now, they are putting together a directory of construction companies run by women.

As it happens, women who live alone, like me, are very happy to have access to those women because they feel a lot more comfortable telling them what they want in the house when they come to do repairs. With them, we do not feel inferior. We feel that we can speak openly and we will not be looked down on by the person who comes to do the repairs.

Is that something you have thought about?

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: We're a not-for-profit association, and we really don't have the resources to implement a program like that, given our current status. But it is an excellent idea.

There are associations affiliated with us that are training women from the downtown east side, who are at risk or recovering from substance abuse issues, to enter the trades force. They are getting training on how to use power tools and getting comfortable working and showing up to the same place at the same time to do a standard shift of work. So we are affiliated with organizations that are getting into that sort of thing.

Ms. Mary Clarke: In St. John's we have a few women who have started up their own businesses. We have one that's doing small construction projects, and another is doing roofing. There is talk of others who are trying to start some type of cooperative so they can pool their talents and start something of that scale.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Demers.

Ms. Mathysen is next for five minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to pursue this line of questioning by Madame Demers and ask if access to capital to start these businesses is a problem for women.

Ms. Mary Clarke: I have no knowledge about that.

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I have no knowledge about it either.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I wondered, because I recall that at one time it was rather difficult to be taken seriously as a businessperson when you were starting up.

We've seen a rise in the number of businesses that have implemented pay equity, affirmative action strategies, or parental leave. Child care was also mentioned.

Last week we heard from a group of presenters that the federal government needs to be much more proactive. The suggestion was made that the federal government, in awarding contracts, could look at model employers—employers who implemented proactive workplace strategies.

Do you think that's a good idea? Do the feds need to encourage these model employers? Do they need to be more active in supporting businesses that encourage and promote women?

Ms. Ashley Turner: Perhaps I could answer that question. Just to give a comparison to our local industry rather than our local government...I guess we could use our local government's requirement as an example. Basically in the tendering process and in the contract awarding process for operating companies on large-scale projects, they do need to take gender equity initiatives and policies and programs into account when awarding contracts to contracting companies.

We have found this to be very effective in that many contracting companies now have gender equity plans, which don't necessarily have quotas in terms of targets, nor have they necessarily been firm; however, they do have criteria for supporting programs such as the ones we run in encouraging young girls and providing information to young girls and women about opportunities in non-traditional occupations and opportunities in their companies.

It has certainly been successful on that level, and I do not see why it wouldn't be successful for the federal government as well. So I do think that is one way for the government to be proactive.

•(1645)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Is it fair to say that we are seeing examples of pay equity in these particular situations?

Ms. Ashley Turner: Pay equity is not necessarily a criterion that I often see in non-federal government equity plans. It is, more so, criteria around increasing the participation of women in these fields against retraining, increased access to that training, and through inclusive language in job advertisement—criteria of that sort.

I have not necessarily seen pay equity criteria in these plans. However, I do think that is extremely important, and it would of course be for the federal government as well.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Do you think it would attract more women if they knew they were going to get this equal pay for work of equal value to which they're entitled?

Ms. Ashley Turner: Most definitely. If women are working to the same calibre as men, if they are trained and qualified to be in that position, there is no reason why they should be receiving less pay for similar work. So I am definitely on board with pay equity requirements and policies in place at all levels.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Ms. Turner, in your presentation you spoke about some of the programs and services that were available in Newfoundland and Labrador, and you made reference to GBA in terms of best practices. Could you describe that? I would like to have a sense of what that looks like.

Ms. Ashley Turner: Certainly. Right now in our organization we have a researcher on staff whose job it is to actually focus on researching best practices. She's in the process of putting together a best practices report in terms of recruitment and retention of women, which will be shared with industry and any other stakeholders who are interested.

It will basically talk about, as I said, focused recruitment and focused retention, on women in particular, without polarizing them from men but ensuring that they have equal opportunity to men and ensuring that they have a welcoming environment in the recruitment and retention process in non-traditional occupations.

That is something that is still a work in progress. However, it will contain recommendations and exemplary practices that have taken place, both here in Newfoundland and Labrador and at the national and international levels.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Turner and Ms. Mathysen.

Now we have Madame Boucher and Ms. McLeod, who will share their five minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoulo, CPC): I will give Ms. Wong a minute since she has some information to share. Then, I will take the floor.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Alice Wong: I just want to let Rebecca know that the federal government project called Women's Enterprise Society of B.C., as well as the community futures program, does exactly what Ms. Mathysen just mentioned. They provide small loans, as well as training programs, for women entrepreneurs. They give them the training first, and then they help them to get the funding and to get business plans done.

Have you heard about that, Ms. McDiarmid?

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I have not.

Mrs. Alice Wong: If you need the information, we can pass it along to your association.

About pay equity, in the area of construction, the pay actually depends very much on the seniority or the skills, rather than on where, if you're both at an entry level, if you're a man you're making more and if you're a woman you're making less. Is that the situation, or does the pay equity issue depend on the entry level?

• (1650)

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: I heard an interesting story once—and I'll try to make it quick—about three people who were working for the pay equity commission. There were two women and a man. When the initial job offers were made, they said, “We can pay you \$40,000 a year. That's as high as we can go. Do you want the job, or do you not want the job?” After six months, the three individuals were standing around talking. It turns out that the two women had accepted the job for \$40,000 a year, but the man had told the person on the other end of the line, “No, I'm going to hold out for \$50,000.” So he was getting paid \$50,000 a year at the pay equity commission, where the two women were being paid less.

Obviously the situation was rectified after it came to light, but it goes to show you that it's about negotiation. It's about setting your own standards and what you're willing to accept when you first enter into that market segment. So while it probably happens—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. McDiarmid. I just want Ms. McLeod and Ms. Boucher to know that they now only have two minutes left between them.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have a question. What you are saying is very interesting.

The meaning of non-traditional occupations can change depending on the location. Some of you said earlier that, when you visit schools to recruit candidates for employment, you do not do so by talking right away about gender in the trade. You introduce yourselves as workers in construction or in industry. You prefer to do it that way.

In the media or in construction advertisements, we often notice that it is men who are represented. So we must also change the image we have of women who enter those traditional trades.

What do you do to make girls and women understand that, when they choose a non-traditional occupation, first, it is gratifying and, second, it builds self-confidence? How do you sell them on the idea that women can enter those non-traditional occupations?

[English]

Ms. Rebecca McDiarmid: By being a successful woman in that trade, you are demonstrating beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is possible. You can maintain your identity as you wish to present that, but you're not a woman working in construction; you're a person working in construction. You're trying to reach the guys as much as you're trying to reach the girls.

Ms. Mary Clarke: Sometimes the way we do it is to let the girls actually try the trade. One of our programs is called Girls Exploring Trades and Technology, in which they build a go-cart. The girls do that camp, but then the boys in the class see it. They talk about it, and it opens up a whole new dialogue as to what girls can do and what boys can do. That's the way in which we try to change the stereotype there as well.

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's the five minutes. We do not have time for a third round, because we need to go in camera and there is a vote.

I want to thank Ms. McDiarmid, Ms. Turner, and Ms. Clarke for their presentations. It was very helpful and very interesting to see the regional differences in how things are happening across the country. I want to thank you again for helping us to form a report on this issue.

We're going to suspend to go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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