



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 077 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

—
Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Everybody, we're going to get started. We look to have a quorum here. Some members will be joining us shortly. We're going to continue with our study of the economic security of women in Canada.

Today we will have two guests on our first panel.

Carolyn Van is the director of youth programming for Canada Learning Code. Bonnie Brayton will be here shortly.

We may have to mix it up a little until our second panellist gets here. After the presentation, we may go to questions, but we'll see how it goes.

To begin, Carolyn, I give you the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms. Carolyn Van (Director, Youth Programming, Canada Learning Code): Thank you for having me here today on behalf of Canada Learning Code, and please note that I'll be happy to answer any questions following my statement.

As the youth programming director of Canada Learning Code, I have the great privilege of working with my team to develop and provide accessible technology education experiences for the youth of our nation, particularly young girls.

I have the lived experience of a woman in STEM, particularly the “T” in STEM, the technology side. I am able to teach digital literacy skills at the post-secondary level, and I have held positions within organizations requiring me to hire for technology-related careers. This experience has helped me to understand just how problematic the gender gap is in this nation, and it ultimately led me here, with Canada Learning Code, to address this issue in a very systemic design lens on education.

The stark reality of the gender gap in technology is made evident by taking a quick scan across the room in your average computer lab classroom, by looking at the teams who build all the mobile applications we use on a daily basis, and by considering some research.

Studies state that women represent less than 25% of technology roles within Canada, and that of those women who make it in the industry, 25% are exiting the industry due to sexism or the experience of unwelcome workplace environments—all this while women make up half of our population. This is a problem.

Women are key decision-makers in Canadian households. Women are influencers of our next generation of scientists, technologists, engineers, and mathematicians. Actually, women represent the larger proportion of educators in our classrooms.

Because technology is an ongoing and ever-growing driver of innovation within multiple industries, we have an opportunity as a nation to minimize the gender gap and to ensure that we are working towards a more prosperous and unified nation.

How can we address this issue? There is no one causal factor. It is very complex, very systemic, and therefore there is no one solution to all of this.

What we do know, however, is that the causes of the gender gap in technology have nothing to do with biological differences. In fact, while many of us doubt it, there have been numerous research studies out there to demystify this. There is zero evidence that there are aptitude differences in math between women and men.

What we should be assessing is the design of things. What I mean by this is the design of experiences that we are all exposed to from the moment we are born. These are the experiences that shape what we feel we are capable of doing and what we can do. They shape our understanding of how the world works, of what leadership looks like, and of who can play a role in developing new technology.

We must empower women and young girls to feel confident, to equip them with the skills and knowledge to go beyond being consumers of technology and become creators.

We believe at Canada Learning Code that tech education can play a significant role in this. With Canada Learning Code, we have the privilege of designing accessible, inclusive learning experiences for women and young girls, who make up two groups of Canadians that have been historically marginalized and under-represented.

We have programs for adult women. The ladies learning code program aims to provide beginner-level technology experiences for adult women along with mentorship from those in the industry.

Our youth programs are all about sparking the curiosity and interest of girls at an early age, and then providing support along the way as they bloom towards adulthood.

• (1105)

Our programs for teachers are for educators of all sorts, which are meant to equip educators with all of the resources, the skills, the confidence, and the training to enable them to introduce digital literacy within the classroom at the primary school level.

As we work towards having equity, diversity, and inclusion by being better represented within the workforce, at Canada Learning Code we really hope to continue to grow that pipeline within the workforce and education with young women and girls.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Fantastic. Thank you very much.

As we can see, Bonnie is not here yet. I'm going to ask the clerk if there's a way that we can divide some time, because I know the first person with their seven minutes may actually have questions for Bonnie, as well.

Clerk, is there anything that has been done in the past?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-Hélène Sauv ): We could do half. Instead of seven minutes, we could do three minutes each.

The Chair: Instead of doing the seven minutes, is it okay that we'll start with three minutes? Then we can go back to allow those members to question the second panellist.

Okay, that's fantastic. Everybody is good with that,

We're going to move on with the first three minutes of questioning for you, Carolyn, and that's going to be Marc Serr .

Marc, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serr  (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for your presentations and the work you do.

We have heard from witnesses who talked about high school programs and programs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM. They told us that the breakdown of girls and boys in those high school programs is about 50-50. At the post-secondary level, however, there is a gap, since fewer girls and women enrol in those programs.

I would like to hear your thoughts on this. What more can we do at the high school level to change the decline in enrolment of women and girls in STEM programs, especially in technology?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Van: Sure.

We know that the interest in STEM for young girls drops off at around 12 to 13 years of age, which is a significant problem. There seems to be a lot of interest from girls in areas of STEM leading up to that age and then there's this drop-off that happens.

Something that we currently have with our programs, which we'd like to see more of, is more technology education experiences, along with a community for those girls between the ages of 13 to 17 to continue to nourish and support their interests as they look to apply to post-secondary institutions in areas of STEM. By providing that ongoing support, that mentorship, and that community, we hope that teenage girls can continue to learn and to connect with other young girls to help with that drop-off rate.

•(1110)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serr : Thank you.

You also said you offer teachers workshops about programming. I would like to hear more about that and what you recommend that we consider in order to determine what could be done as regards teacher education and training across the country.

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Van: Sure.

We know that to keep technology education only at the curricular level is not enough, quite frankly. At Canada Learning Code, we believe strongly in getting technology education into schools at an early age. With all of our experiences teaching thousands of youth across our nation to code, we are taking all of our very hard lessons learned, packaging them up, and providing educators with content and with in-school workshop training on professional development days to really help teachers feel confident. We give them the knowledge to smash some of the myths that they have and some of the fears that they carry about introducing computational thinking within elementary schools.

Our programs are free for teachers. We can travel across Canada giving workshops to educate groups of educators. Whether you are an educator in school or a Girl Guide leader, we have in-person workshop training for that and we have all of our content and helpful resources online at no cost on teachers learning code.

The Chair: Thanks very much. You have so much information.

Turning over to our CPC members, is it Rachael or Martin?

Martin Shields, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I find the topic very interesting at the school level. Being an old guy, I remember the fight between the calculator and the slide rule.

A lot of the time this comes down to school board decision-making regarding policy about what they allow and how they allow technology into the classroom setting.

You're mentioning something totally different, so I believe that you may be focusing on the wrong place. If you want to change policy, you need to convince school boards and administrators, who are the people who make these decisions, to get it to that level.

Would you like to make a comment about that?

Ms. Carolyn Van: We're very aware that to solve this issue it's going to be a multipronged approach. Something that we are currently focusing on is to try to not allow the lack of, say, Internet connection or computing equipment to be a barrier to teaching computational thinking. Our team is faced with the huge task of being very aware of what the current situation is and getting very creative in designing solutions, so that a teacher who has a classroom with none of these resources can still introduce computational thinking in some way. We're trying to design education that is as barrier-free and as obstacle-free as possible.

Mr. Martin Shields: I very much appreciate that, as well as working at the grassroots level and building those skills for the classroom, but then you go to the academic side, where new teachers are taught by an older generation that is less familiar with that technology. You then have another side that isn't doing it, and has never done it, and they are the people who are teaching teachers to be teachers. How are you addressing that one?

Ms. Carolyn Van: Currently we're just starting to dig our claws deep into K-to-12 computer science frameworks in various provinces. We're looking to map a lot of our education design to those frameworks. This way, as an educator adopts this tweak in the curriculum, it is more easily digestible. It will also ensure that we have thoroughly thought of everything that needs to be met within the curriculum and designed for that.

• (1115)

Mr. Martin Shields: We have 10 provinces with 10 different curricula, and this is also a challenge you have. Are you approaching this differently provincially?

Ms. Carolyn Van: Yes. We have met with a couple of ministries of education to start the conversation on how we can address this. We've met with the ministry of education in Ontario to start moving towards that, so we're starting the process.

The Chair: Excellent, Carolyn, thanks very much.

Since I've been allowing them to go closer to three and a half minutes, we're going to do the three and a half minutes.

Please go ahead, Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you so much for your work, and to your whole team for the impact you're having. It's really helpful for us.

I'm going to read two recommendations from one year ago, October 18, from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. It did a focus on Canada's success, or lack thereof, in adhering to its United Nations commitments around eliminating discrimination against women. This happens only once every five years, so it's a really good touchpoint for us.

They've made two recommendations directed at Canada that I think will resonate, so I'd like to get your perspective on whether your group would be happy to see these recommendations reflected in our final report.

There are two of them. The first one is in 37(b):

The Committee recommends that the State party...

(b) Strengthen its strategies to address discriminatory stereotypes and structural barriers that may deter girls from progressing beyond secondary education and enrolling in traditionally male-dominated fields of study, such as mathematics, information technology, and science;

The second recommendation is in 39(b):

The Committee recommends that the State party...

(b) Adopt effective measures, including skills training and incentives for women to work in non-traditional professions, and temporary special measures to achieve substantive equality of women and men in the labour market and eliminate occupational segregation, both horizontal and vertical, in the public and private sectors, and adopt quotas to enhance the representation of women in managerial positions in companies;

It has the non-traditional as well as the secondary to graduation.

Do you have any reflections on whether, if Canada took those measures, it might help advance representation of young women, especially moving into STEM fields and coding?

Ms. Carolyn Van: I mentioned earlier that the drop-off rate is quite high—it's 25%—for adult women leaving areas of STEM due to experiencing sexism and unwelcoming workplace environments. We are seeing a lot of those women getting involved in mentorship programs, including ours. We have many organizations that are huge supporters of our organization almost solely to have their staff become active as mentors for these young girls and for these young people.

We see young girls making it through post-secondary institutions in a STEM-related field and graduating, but then they don't see women represented in areas of leadership in those fields, and they take another route. Again, we're happy to see adult women getting involved, recognizing that's the case, having conversations with their organizations to ask, "How can we ensure that we keep our women within our organization", and contributing back to the next generation through mentorship and involvement with their programs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to continue with the three to three and a half minutes, with Pam Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I'm going to let Emmanuella take my time because my questions were focused on DAWN.

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Is she coming?

The Chair: We still have her on. If she comes, we'll have her for 11.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay, and if you could indulge me for just a moment, Chair, I just wanted to welcome the young people in our audience today. I have two young people from Toronto and Mississauga, and I see the group has grown in this meeting, so I suspect that other members do as well.

The Chair: As Pam indicated, we have members from the Boys & Girls Club, as well as Big Brothers Big Sisters here today.

Welcome to the committee. I hope that you learn lots today. Please feel free to speak to any of the members following the session.

Thank you.

We're now going to Emmanuella for three and a half minutes.

• (1120)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Welcome to our committee and thank you for being with us today. I'm a high school teacher as well, so I've seen a lot of these issues in my classroom and a lot of the differences between girls and boys at the high school level.

You said that at age 12 girls will lose interest in technology, coding, and science in general, and also at age 12, a girl's self-esteem and confidence plummet, whereas a boy's will increase at that age. We see there's a huge difference there, and this puts girls at a complete disadvantage. What are the things that your program is doing to attract and keep girls in the program, to continue down this path?

Ms. Carolyn Van: Specifically, a big part of our program for high school girls goes beyond helping them develop computational skills. A great deal of it involves building that community where these girls can connect. We also bring them to conferences, and we get them involved with developing technologies through some of our partnering organizations.

We foster a community environment where these girls can learn to work together. We also expose them to communities and working groups, where they have the opportunity to work with people who are not like them. Our kids learning code program is as important as our girls learning code program, because it exposes these girls to an environment of working with a community of all genders. That community aspect is huge for teens. We also work with high school teachers. We visit high schools and primary schools with our code mobile, which is our computer lab on wheels, to help teachers learn how to continue that community aspect with the girls in their classrooms.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: By community aspect, do you mean that you have partnerships with companies in their communities?

Ms. Carolyn Van: Yes, we have partnerships. For example, we have partnerships with Google where Google will run some sort of event specifically for teen girls. They are after-school and weekend events, to accommodate high school girls' schedules. So yes, we partner with organizations.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Obviously, a lot of the barriers are caused by stereotypes. Do you address these specifically? How do you go about overcoming these obstacles?

Ms. Carolyn Van: We address this in the design process. We ensure that when we're designing technology education we are considering all sorts of diversity in thought at the table, and yes, that also means that women are part of that design process, our instructors and our mentors. We ensure there's a good distribution of diversity, gender diversity within that, and we also ensure that in the events we bring these girls to or that they get exposed to there is female representation within the STEM leaders they are learning from.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you very much, Carolyn.

We're now going to move to Rachael for three minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate the presentation you've delivered here today.

Can you talk about how you promote your programs, women in code and girls in code? How do you get the message out to Canadians and get them engaged in what you have to offer?

Ms. Carolyn Van: Truthfully, a lot of it has been word of mouth. We do active outreach to specific communities that we feel are significantly marginalized and underserved. That could be a lower income area, an area that has been deemed by census data to have a higher population of at-risk youth. We specifically reach out to organizations that represent those communities to encourage involvement. Thanks to our funding partners, we also have scholarships that we can offer these young people.

We're finding that specific outreach plays a critical role as well in ensuring the participation of the people in our programs.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Can you comment on some of the positive outcomes you're seeing? You have ladies who code and girls who code. You're taking them in from various age groups. For the girls, what are some of the positive outcomes that come from having been part of the program? Also, for the women, what are the outcomes you're noticing?

• (1125)

Ms. Carolyn Van: A lot of our youth are experiencing the road map of our programs. For example, we have a young woman named Chloe. She entered our road map through being a volunteer for the program girls learning code. Girls learning code is for 9- to 12-year-olds. She signed up to be a mentor and knew nothing about code at all. She just started mentoring and being there as a support system for this young girl. She then graduated to become part of teens learning code. She was actually part of the design process for creating what teens learning code is, which is for high school girls. She went from being a mentor and knowing nothing about code, moving to teens learning code, and continuing to be a mentor for young girls. She has now graduated to become part of the ladies learning code community as she is in her later years of high school. She has been applying to computer science at post-secondary institutions.

That is a story we hear time and time again from many girls within our program. They enter our pipeline having no understanding of code or computational thinking or any areas of STEM, and then they make specific decisions with regard to their professional careers to continue down that path.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Carolyn. That's wonderful.

We're going to switch to Eva for three minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Van, for your presentation. Your work to encourage women to pursue STEM studies is very important.

Are the events and workshops regarding programming that you hold and the education programs regarding programming similar to other post-secondary learning environments or are they different?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Van: They are different. Something we notice when really assessing how technology education is taught in your traditional classroom is that there is a lack of opportunity to take advantage of providing a bigger social and collaborative learning environment. When we think of computer science, we think of a classroom set up as rows of computers and a teacher at the front of the room. Our classrooms are designed differently. While that set-up is there, there's a lot of moving around within the classroom. We do a lot of unplugged, offline activities to teach computational thinking fundamentals. It's a lot more social and very creative.

One of the things we love about our programs is that they're project-based. It's not learning to code just for the sake of learning to code. It's more one of thinking about an issue that you see in the world. What do you want to tackle? What problem do you have with the world today? Then you start using technology as a tool to build awareness or to solve that problem.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Ms. Van, I would like to ask you a more specific question.

Are you referring to existing programs or have you developed your own programs?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Van: These are programs we have designed with our team to implement through ladies learning code and our youth programs and teachers learning code.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Madam Chair, do I have any speaking time left?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Van, how can better technical knowledge help women succeed in other sectors of the economy, and not just in STEM fields?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Van: This is an interesting question. When we work towards our teachers learning code program, the goal is to teach teachers how to introduce computational thinking to those beyond the usual suspects, those beyond the youth who would be naturally inclined to be interested in areas of STEM. For example, we teach teachers how to integrate computational thinking within history class, art class, music class, or gym class. In the end, computational thinking involves the sequential step-by-step scenarios of an action. That's something we're having a lot of fun with these days. We want teachers beyond science teachers and math teachers to be able to introduce these concepts to their classroom.

• (1130)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'm feeling concerned about our witness. The last time she appeared before the committee, she had difficulty accessing the building, and also security.

I'm sure the committee team is on that, but I want to make sure we know that she's not stuck somewhere.

The Chair: I'm going to let the clerk address this.

The Clerk: I received communication from the witness earlier today that there was trouble leaving Montreal, so that would be where the lateness comes in.

The Chair: Okay.

Sean.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): I would hate to suspend and miss out on a great opportunity. If we could just keep burning through until the witness shows up, that would be my preference.

The Chair: Since that seems to be the situation, we can continue.

There's one Conservative, one Liberal, and one NDP, and then we can go back to the top and start our third round.

We have three minutes with somebody from the Conservatives.

Martin or Rachael, who would like to start?

Mr. Martin Shields: I'll go.

The Chair: Okay, Martin, go for it, for two minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields: You brought up a topic, and it's basically what I would call thematic learning, in the sense of using all of the skills possible to learn about a particular topic. Thematic is bringing all the skills, and part of that would be computational.

Where I find that does occur is at the elementary level. Beyond the elementary level, as people get more specific in their subject areas of instruction, it lessens.

Have you dealt with that particular challenge?

Ms. Carolyn Van: So far, we have not encountered that.

Most of our work, currently at least, is at the primary school level. We are just starting to work with high school teachers. Most of our experience right now is with the primary school level.

Mr. Martin Shields: Which can be thematic, because it's not subject specific to the instructor.

Ms. Carolyn Van: Right, yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is there any possibility that you might be more successful in—

Ms. Carolyn Van: Yes, we're looking to work closer with more and more educators.

Through our teachers in the code community, a part of that process, a part of designing a lot of those solutions, involves, to a great deal, a lot of our workshops for teachers learning code. Part of that involves having an open discussion of what we, as an organization and other like organizations need to design for high school teachers to be a better resource.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm just going to interrupt.

At the request of Bonnie, she's going to appear with our next panel.

We're going to continue with Carolyn.

We'll continue with these rounds, and then we'll do the next three.

Martin, you still have two minutes left, if you like, because I did interrupt.

Mr. Martin Shields: Rachael, do you have anything?

Ms. Rachael Harder: I do, but if you do, you can go.

Mr. Martin Shields: In the sense of the workshop strategies, the challenge, in the sense of the population of instructors, is you had mentioned that the majority of instructors are female and not male.

How does that, in the sense of working with you in that relationship, understanding that the end goal is to change that mentality of the lower number to get it up to a higher percentage, what role have you played, working with the professionals who are in there, to recognize that?

Ms. Carolyn Van: Could you clarify your question?

Mr. Martin Shields: The majority of instructors, as you mentioned, as I know, are female. The goal is to increase the participation of females in the computational area. Have you had any discussions with the professionals who are involved in providing that instruction?

Ms. Carolyn Van: We currently have not entered that level of assessment.

As you mentioned, and from something I shared earlier, a lot of our instructors are from industry. For example, we will have the senior software developer from Google come to instruct our young girls.

We haven't mapped our assessment in research to assess what the impact of that is within the organization.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Martin.

We're going to switch over to Bernadette Jordan, for three minutes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you so much for appearing today. It's a really interesting conversation.

I'm going to move a little from Mr. Shield's point.

The majority of teachers are women, and yet the struggle you have is getting women to learn code. Is that kind of a catch-22, where now you have to teach the teachers so they can teach the girls?

• (1135)

Ms. Carolyn Van: Absolutely. It hasn't been easy. A lot of our teachers in the code initiatives address those barriers that these teachers, specifically these female teachers, are facing.

I think as adults—whether you are an educator, a mom, a mentor—we carry our own fears and beliefs and perceptions of how the technology industry works. When we are in a classroom full of teachers, they are learning as much as the youth in our classrooms.

Women were a huge part of the history of computational thinking. I think women have been, again, marginalized, underserved, and kind of erased out of the history books in relation to computational thinking.

A lot of our education for teachers involves making them aware of the history of technology, and addressing some of those fears head-on in terms of why there is this hesitancy and fear associated with teaching computer science.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: You said you used computational thinking outside of the STEM fields, and you were talking about physical education, art, and music.

Can you elaborate on that? I find it fascinating.

Ms. Carolyn Van: Sure. We worked with an elementary school teacher last year to develop a lesson for her students on sharing with the classroom who in Canadian politics they felt has had the most impact on a certain area. In your typical politics class or history class, students would write a book report on it in a word document or in a journal. We empowered this teacher to guide her students in telling that story through building a website or creating a Wikipedia page on the person.

That's an example of how we would do that.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you.

The Chair: Sheila, you're up for three minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thinking about what the federal government can do, tell me what recommendations you'd like to see in our final report to move the field ahead. Sometimes that's around bringing provinces and territories together within a common framework.

Tell us what recommendations would buoy your organization.

Ms. Carolyn Van: More support for teacher training would be helpful. Again, we know that to redesign our approach to computational thinking in terms of education at the extracurricular level is very limiting, so more support on the practical side of equipping our educators across Canada to be able to implement this in their classrooms would be helpful.

We have the honour of having conversations with teachers on a regular basis. This involves hearing a lot of their frustrations with the support they have. They wish they could have a little more practical support, and we are happy to be the organization to help educators through that.

We'd like more support and funding at that end, as well as any support we and organizations like ours could get to get creative in redesigning the approach of computational thinking education within schools, and to the point I brought up earlier, working around a lot of the things we currently see as obstacles.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: We've had a number of witnesses at committee talk about the important role the federal government could play when it's spending public dollars, for example, that it reserve some slots, whether they're apprenticeships or jobs, for training groups that traditionally have not been represented in that field.

Is that a conversation that comes up?

Ms. Carolyn Van: That is a conversation that comes up both within the education system and in working with organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs, the YWCA, and the libraries. Libraries are another group that we are increasingly starting to work with.

I've had a conversation with the OLA, the Ontario Library Association, and the equivalent in various provinces, to have training for school librarians as well as public librarians.

We love working with libraries. When it comes to accessibility and inclusivity, we feel they have a really good handle on the pulse of the needs within their communities, so we certainly regard librarians as key educators that we need to work with as well.

• (1140)

The Chair: I'm going to change things up, because we like to be fluid here in this committee today.

Pam brought forward the great idea of maybe suspending now and then starting 10 minutes early, since Bonnie would be able to do her brief during that time, if that gives you ample time to relax.

Carolyn, we have had excellent conversations with you. If there are any other questions, we'll be sure to forward them to you. We really appreciate that.

Sean.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have a quick question.

I don't know your availability, Ms. Van, but if you were planning on sticking around....

Would it be possible for her to just sit and take questions in the second one, or is that out of order?

The Chair: I don't see that being.... That would be a decision for the committee.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I don't want to presume her availability.

The Chair: We're going to have three or four panellists, but if you wish, I don't see that being an issue.

Is there any discussion from the committee members, if she's available?

Carolyn, are you available?

Ms. Carolyn Van: I'm available.

The Chair: Wonderful.

We're going to suspend until 11:50, and then we'll get started with Bonnie's brief. We'll be joined by the other two panellists as well, and then we'll have the four panellists.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1150)

The Chair: Welcome back. We have new panellists joining us.

I would like to welcome Michael Holden, Elise Maheu, Justine Akman, Nancy Gardiner, and Bonnie Brayton to the panel.

Carolyn, thanks for sticking around, and taking some more questions.

Michael is the chief economist, and Elise Maheu is a board member and director of government affairs with 3M Canada. They are both under Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. We also have Justine Akman and Nancy Gardiner from the office of Status of Women Canada.

We're going to begin with Ms. Brayton, for 10 minutes. She is with DisAbleD Women's Network Canada.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton (National Executive Director, DAWN Canada, DisAbleD Women's Network Canada): Good morning.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we're gathered on the territory of the Algonquin people, and that we are in a time of truth and reconciliation with the first peoples of Canada. By so doing, we are also acknowledging the overrepresentation of our indigenous peoples in all systems of oppression.

I have submitted a fairly lengthy brief to the committee, which has not been translated, but the clerk will eventually circulate it to you. It's very fact-based. I really didn't think today was the day to stay super focused on facts, because the facts are irrefutable. The poorest people in this country, the highest rates of unemployment, from an intersectional perspective, belong to women with disabilities and deaf women, without question.

I do have a few facts I can highlight, but I thought it would be more important, again, to invite you to read and review the report when you have it, because the statistics are fairly solid and compelling. In fact, the Government of Canada has, by three UN bodies—the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and under CEDAW—essentially been told that it has been failing women and girls with disabilities and it is time for action.

[Translation]

As mentioned in the call for briefs from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we will focus on the realities of disabled women who are poor, income-related statistics, as I noted in the report, their employment readiness, and working conditions in order to examine the impact on their well-being.

[English]

About 1.5 million women in Canada are unemployed. Of those, 629,000.... Actually, I'm going to stop with the statistics. I said I wasn't going to do it, and I won't, because it's too difficult to do.

There were a few that I thought were important to mention. When we're talking about the situation of women with disabilities, we're talking about women with disabilities having an average revenue of \$4,000 less than non-disabled women. Again, in a juxtaposition of women and poverty, women with disabilities have an important difference in income.

I have another statistic that is important when we're talking about intersectionality.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Let us recall that, in 2007, the federal report on disability estimated the rate of disability in aboriginal communities at over 30%. That was reaffirmed in the report by Amanda Burlock, which indicated a higher prevalence of disability among first nations women as compared to men, and also among women who are not first nations.

I would add that racialized and disabled aboriginal women are overrepresented among poor women.

[English]

In terms of the focus of my presentation, it's to actually speak about women with disabilities who are invisible to this committee, to data and statistics. The reason I do that is this is where we need to go in terms of better understanding those women who are invisible. I'm speaking specifically of homeless women. I'm speaking about women with traumatic brain injuries, many of whom have experienced traumatic brain injuries through violence. The data is beginning to show, as some committee members who've heard me present before on the issue of violence know, that the number of women who become disabled through violence is much higher than is currently understood.

I remind the committee of women who are trafficked. Again, when we are talking about the data, you can assume that between 25% and 35% of women who are trafficked, whether it's for labour or sex, are women with disabilities.

I remind the committee of trans women with disabilities, racialized women with disabilities, and those intersections, and how important it will be for you to think of not just black women, indigenous women, or women in prisons but to always think from an intersectional perspective, and to understand that when that intersection includes disabilities, they are the most marginalized.

In terms of recommendations, with the limited time we have, I bring forward a quote from Sebastian Buckup of the International Labour Organization. He states:

This is useful to indicate that people with disabilities are less productive not because they are "disabled" but because they live and work in environments that are "disabling". This is of crucial importance to the message the analysis wants to transmit: it makes economic sense to create an environment that is supportive for people with disabilities.

Of course, our federal government is coming forward with new federal accessibility legislation that will touch on some areas of our lives in that regard. I understand, too, that the federal government and all of you, and your most important work, need to be working with your provincial and territorial counterparts on this issue, because these things, programs and services, are delivered through provincial and territorial labour market agreements. It's important to see this as an opportunity to really begin focusing on the populations in your discussions in terms of who is most affected.

It's about 10 years ago to this month—it's a little longer than that now—that our first presentation was made by my president and me. That was in 2007. In that presentation, we mentioned several things that I find still have a great deal of resonance today: separating income programs for disability-related supports and services; creating a stable environment in which persons can move between paid employment and income support with ease; increasing the sick leave benefits for unemployment insurance; extending the definition of employment support and accommodation to the domestic sphere; forums for information exchange and support groups which provide a valuable resource for women with disabilities trying to enter the labour market, and societal attitudes.

DAWN Canada is currently piloting the first employment program for young women with disabilities in Montreal with our partners

from the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work. We're only about six months into this program, and again, it's the only one of the four pilots that is focused on women and girls exclusively.

Early evidence bears out what is very clear, which is that it is really important to understand the intersection of disability and gender has a huge impact on employment. The unemployment rate for some women in this country, in the maritime region for example, is up to 75%.

I could belabour the point of poverty, but again, the point's been made. When we're talking about indigenous women with disabilities, we are absolutely talking about the very worst off.

Coming back to those forgotten women, episodic and chronic illness...and some of the data that I had was one of the other things. There are two pieces. One is from Michael Prince and Yvonne Peters, who did a study with the Council of Canadians with Disabilities on poverty:

● (1200)

[Translation]

More than four in ten disabled women in low-income households or 43.7% do not receive at least one of the support services required for their daily activities, such as meal preparation, household tasks, errands, finances, personal care, mobility inside the home, and so forth. The same is true for less than one disabled woman in three or 30.7% of women with income above the LICO.

As I said, I provided you with a comprehensive, precise report including detailed statistics.

[English]

The bottom line, ladies and gentlemen, is that the poorest and the highest unemployment rates belong to women with disabilities and deaf women in this country.

I could sit here and provide resources. I could provide statistics, but what we really need is leadership from this committee. We've had some important leadership from the federal government, including from Status of Women Canada and the minister. Placing women with disabilities as one of the most important groups to address, from both a social and an economic perspective, must be something that you support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Bonnie.

We are now going to Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. We have Michael Holden, chief economist; and Elise Maheu, board member and director of government affairs for 3M Canada.

You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Michael Holden (Chief Economist, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters): Thank you very much.

As you mentioned, I am the chief economist for Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. Elise, in addition to being the director of government affairs at 3M Canada, is also a member of our national board and the chair of our women in manufacturing working group.

We are here today to talk about the need to improve female representation in the manufacturing workforce. Elise and I will be sharing our time.

Manufacturing is vital to the Canadian economy. It employs 1.7 million people, accounts for about 70% of our exports, and directly contributes 11% of our national GDP. When spinoff effects are included, close to 30% of all employment and all economic activity across the country relies on domestic manufacturing.

However, manufacturers face a number of challenges preventing them from realizing their full potential. Among them is that our members are struggling to find workers, especially in the skilled trades and in STEM fields: science, technology, engineering, and math. Addressing this issue is one of the top priorities of our Industrie 2030 national strategy to double manufacturing output and exports by the year 2030.

Attracting more women to manufacturing is the best way to solve this problem. Women hold 48% of all jobs across Canada, but only 28% of jobs in manufacturing. The situation is not improving. Female representation in the manufacturing workforce has been unchanged for about 30 years. This is not a situation that is unique to Canada; it's similar in advanced manufacturing countries all around the world. The gender imbalance in Canada is even greater in production-related jobs. Women hold less than 5% of jobs in the skilled trades, and less than one quarter of all jobs in STEM fields. These are exactly the occupations where manufacturers tell us their labour and skills shortages are most acute.

Through Elise's leadership, CME is undertaking a major initiative to address this problem. We released our first report about two weeks ago here in Ottawa. I am the author of that report, and Elise is leading the effort on implementation and next steps. We have brought copies of our summary report, if anybody is interested in picking one up at the end of the meeting. There is a longer version available online as well.

With the time that I have, I want to provide you with a brief overview of our key findings and then pass the floor to Elise to talk about the path forward.

At the outset, I want to say that our goal with this report was not just to increase labour supply for manufacturers, but also to open the door to new and exciting opportunities for women. Manufacturing has a lot to offer. Compared to the national average, manufacturing jobs tend to be more secure, are more likely to be full time, and pay better. Across Canada, average weekly earnings for women are about 76¢ on the dollar compared to those of men. In the skilled trades it's 82¢, and in STEM fields it's more than 86¢.

The report I have brought here today is focused on what women have to say. We conducted a survey in August and September asking women with first-hand experience in Canadian manufacturing a series of questions about their current work environment, the challenges and obstacles they face, and, most importantly, what they think needs to be done to attract more women to the sector. Our report and action plan were developed directly out of these survey findings.

The first and most important of these findings was that women in manufacturing like their jobs: 80% would consider remaining in the sector if they could start their careers all over again. The vast majority would support their daughters' pursuing a manufacturing

career, and 91% thought that more women would be interested in manufacturing work if they saw what it actually looked like.

At the same time, women identified a number of specific obstacles that are contributing to the existing gender gap. There are three problem areas specific to the manufacturing workplace itself.

The first of these is sexism and a male-centric workplace culture. Many women, we found, are uncomfortable with the male-dominated work environment in manufacturing, and many feel they have to work harder than men to prove themselves. In fact, the gender gap in manufacturing may be, at least in part, a chicken-and-egg problem: women avoid careers in manufacturing because there are not enough women with careers in manufacturing.

The second is opportunities for promotion and advancement. We found that a significant number of women leave manufacturing jobs because they see few opportunities for career advancement. They also see women under-represented in executive leadership and feel that men have greater access to promotion opportunities.

Third is work-life balance. Women in manufacturing told us that they struggle to balance their work and family commitments. Many say that they have quit manufacturing jobs for this reason. Those with families fear that unavoidable commitments will hinder their career advancement.

Finally, there are two other issues that women told us need to be addressed. The first is that manufacturing continues to have a reputation problem. People cling to an outdated view of manufacturing work as being dark, dirty, and dangerous. Survey respondents told us that this perception causes women to overlook manufacturing opportunities. Second, women told us that the school system does not do enough to encourage young girls to pursue an education in STEM fields and the skilled trades. They believe that attracting more girls to these programs is critical to closing the gender gap in manufacturing.

With that overview, I'd like to turn the floor over to Elise.

● (1205)

Ms. Elise Maheu (Board Member and Director, Government Affairs, 3M Canada, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters):
Good afternoon.

I want to talk a little bit about the women in manufacturing working group. We launched that at CME last March, because we had the first female chair of CME, for an organization that is almost 150 years old. The goal was to attract more women in manufacturing. One of the first things we decided to do was to have a survey to be able to have actual data from the Canadian market. Out of that we identified five areas where we believe action is needed to attract and engage women in manufacturing.

The first is that more high-profile female role models are needed to inspire and encourage young women to pursue a career in manufacturing. Women need to see other women succeed. Nearly 37% of survey respondents said that one of the most effective ways to attract more women in manufacturing is to have more visible role models. Women under 35 were considerably more likely to say that female role models would help attract more girls in manufacturing.

Second, young women need more exposure to modern manufacturing facilities to gain a more accurate perspective on career opportunities for them. Misconceptions about manufacturing need to be addressed. Nearly 61% of women surveyed believe other women would be more likely to consider a job in manufacturing if they had a better idea of what it is like. We need to address this outdated view that manufacturing would be repetitive, dull, and dreary.

Third, efforts to encourage young girls to pursue an education in STEM fields and skilled trades need to be improved. The biggest roadblock preventing the gender gap in manufacturing from narrowing is that there are simply not enough women out there with the right qualifications to work in production-related jobs. Only about one in 20 certified tradespeople are women. As well, many companies are actively trying to recruit more women to manufacturing, but these efforts will have little impact unless we first increase the number of women available.

Fourth, businesses need to make their workplace culture more inclusive. Women enjoy working in manufacturing, but they point to challenges in two specific areas. The first is the gender gap itself, that Mike referred to as the chicken-and-egg problem. The survey is clear that the existing gender imbalance discourages women from considering a career in manufacturing. As well, 30% of women say that a male-centric workplace culture is what they like least about working in manufacturing, and 30% think women avoid manufacturing because of the current gender imbalance.

Businesses also need to find creative ways to improve work-life balance for their employees. Many women struggle with finding an appropriate balance between work and their personal life. Shift work, which is very common in many production-related jobs, discourages some women from even applying for manufacturing jobs.

In the coming months, CME will actively engage with business, government, and other stakeholders to look at developing solutions. For example, we can work together to promote careers in manufacturing to girls and women by providing higher visibility of women in manufacturing role models through events and online campaigns of sharing profiles. This can also include a series of videos and planned visits showing careers in manufacturing and modern manufacturing facilities, to expose them to the opportunity and dispel the myth of manufacturing being dirty and dangerous. We

can also share our success stories around promoting the accomplishment of women in manufacturing.

Finally, we can support organizations that help bring young girls into STEM, organizations like FIRST Robotics and Let's Talk Science. For example, for close to a decade 3M Canada has been working with Let's Talk Science, a charitable organization that supports learning and skills development from kindergarten to grade 12 students across the country, to help youth and girls to get engaged with STEM and connect with career role models. Also, 3M is a founding partner of Canada 2067, a national initiative to rethink the future of STEM education in the country.

Our hope is that in a few years the participation of women in manufacturing will not be a challenge, but rather a strength inspiring the competitiveness and growth of Canadian manufacturing internationally.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now move to Justine Akman and Nancy Gardiner from Status of Women, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Justine Akman (Director General, Policy and External Relations, Office of the Co-ordinator, Status of Women): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hello everyone.

[*English*]

I'm very happy to return to this committee. We were here at the beginning, so it's great to have watched your study through the last several months and to have the opportunity to appear again at the closing end of it.

[*Translation*]

This study is timely because promoting the economic security of women is essential to promoting gender equality and ensuring a better future for women.

As you know, although we have made real strides, there is still more work ahead. The barriers to economic equality that Canadian women face include systemic discrimination in the form of bias. There is also colonialism, which affects aboriginal women in particular, and traditional social norms that make women primarily responsible for providing care.

[English]

This study will be helpful as we work collectively to achieve equality for all women, particularly for those most vulnerable, including indigenous women, visible minorities, people with disabilities, youth, and rural women. Achieving equality for all groups of women requires a collaborative effort across the federal government, but also with provincial and territorial governments.

The private sector and civil society also, of course, play a significant role. For this reason, Status of Women has recently launched a new call for proposals for projects that address institutional barriers that limit women's economic security. The call for proposals, entitled "Support for Women's Economic Security", will fund projects that address the economic security of women across Canada under two separate themes.

The first theme is building partnerships to address systemic barriers. It invites organizations to work together to address the institutional barriers that hold women back and limit their economic security. These barriers include the accessibility of child care, the wage gap, and pay inequity. The second theme is increasing private sector leadership and investments in women. It requires organizations to form partnerships with the private sector to implement solutions that advance women's economic security. Through these partnerships, the private sector can play a leading role in helping to advance gender equality in Canada.

Status of Women Canada has also issued a call for proposals, entitled "Addressing the Economic Security and Prosperity of Indigenous Women", for projects to support the economic security and prosperity of indigenous women in Canada. This call invites organizations to foster collaboration between indigenous women, indigenous organizations, their communities, and the private sector to support the economic security and prosperity of indigenous women across Canada. These collaborations will build on the strengths of indigenous women, identify opportunities for their economic success, and address issues that limit these opportunities.

These targeted investments through the women's program complement the broader suite of Government of Canada initiatives to address the barriers to women's economic equality. Those of you on the committee who know Status of Women will know that we're really a very teeny agency. We have to work with all federal governments to push the bar on this issue. Since Status of Women Canada last appeared before this committee, we've continued to advance work with our federal partners. Progress is being made on pay equity in the federal jurisdiction. We've been working with Treasury Board Secretariat and the labour program. We've heard from a wide range of stakeholders. Going forward, we'll be incorporating these perspectives into legislation that is due to be tabled in 2018.

Pay equity is only part of the challenge to addressing the gender wage gap. Work is continuing to progress on the early learning and child care framework as well as dedicated funding for on-reserve child care. We're also supporting our federal partners in their efforts to increase women's participation and success in key economic fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as in the skilled trades. Additionally, Status of Women Canada is supporting the development of a progressive trade agenda that

promotes gender equality and the engagement of women and diverse populations.

We're also continuing to engage our provincial and territorial counterparts through the forum of FPT ministers responsible for the Status of Women to identify collaborative actions that can be taken to address the gender wage gap, including through data collection. Achieving economic equity for women requires the participation of a wide range of actors working toward sustainable solutions that meet the lifelong economic security needs of women in Canada.

• (1215)

Going forward, to address women's economic security and their equal participation in the economy, it will be imperative to continue to encourage and engage leadership across government; to create and support interdepartmental and interjurisdictional networks to facilitate, among other things, the collection and sharing of disaggregated data; and to encourage collaborative partnerships between government and indigenous leadership and communities, non-governmental organizations, institutions, and the private sector.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are ready for our rounds of questions.

We'll start with Bernadette Jordan for seven minutes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing here today. My first questions are for Mr. Holden and Ms. Maheu.

You did a survey and you said the top thing that you heard was sexism in a male-dominated sector is one of the challenges. How do you address that? Based on what you've heard, and knowing that this exists in the workplace, it's not enough to attract more women; you have to deal with the problem that's there. Do you have programming in place to try to help deal with the issue of a male-dominated workforce and the sexism that is taking place in the manufacturing sector?

Ms. Elise Maheu: As we said, we actually started the group this past March and the first thing we wanted to do was the survey to have a base to start with. Now that we have these data... We had identified a couple of things already before we did the survey, which is we said that it's a male-centric culture so we have to get more women. It's kind of a chicken-and-egg thing. That's why we say we have to look at girls in STEM and have girls and young women come to operations to see that it's actually a job they would like to do.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I hear what you're saying. I'm questioning the chicken-and-egg thing. If the people who are there have identified a problem, my question is, what is being done to address the problem? It's not so much how you attract more women so you don't have the problem, but if the problem exists now, how do you address it?

Mr. Michael Holden: As Elise mentioned, the report that we came out with is two weeks old. The intent with that was largely problem identification. Now that we've done that, we're about to move on to those kinds of next steps to address those issues. It's something that businesses themselves have to take responsibility for, absolutely. We had a conference that included a panel on discussing issues of attracting and engaging women in manufacturing. That was on October 25, I believe. One of the key messages that came out of it was that this is a business's responsibility to fix this problem, absolutely, and how we do that is something we're in the middle of taking a hard look at right now.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: When you did your survey, you surveyed women. Was there any movement to question the men about the behaviour in the workplace?

• (1220)

Mr. Michael Holden: One of the things that we did with this survey was.... It's impossible to control exactly who is going to respond to your survey, so we did ask a number of filtering questions that we'd get different kinds of responses on, and one of those was so we could filter out men. We had 826 respondents of which about 78% were women. I think that leaves about 180-some men who responded.

On a few of the questions we did look at that to see whether there were any differences, and there were and they were interesting. For example, I can't remember the exact numbers off the top of my head, but let's say around 30% to 35% of women identified a wage gap between men and women. The men did not. Women thought they had to work harder than men to prove themselves. The men disagreed. Those types of findings were consistent. I think for us it speaks to the magnitude of the challenge, because you have to not only address the problem, but you also have to address the fact that the men who are there appear not to see a problem.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Would you be willing to share that survey with us?

Mr. Michael Holden: Absolutely. In fact, if you go to the CME website, we have a larger version of this report there and the appendix has detailed survey results. If there is more information that you would like that is not in the survey results, I'd be happy to provide that as well.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Perfect. Thank you.

Ms. Gardiner and Ms. Akman, there has been, I believe, \$18 million in funding for the 50 projects for empowering women. One of the things we heard from Ms. Brayton is the intersectionality and the challenges facing women with disabilities. Will that \$18 million and 50 projects be able to help address some of the concerns that are there? I didn't hear you mention that when you were talking about the programs that you're looking for funding for.

Ms. Nancy Gardiner (Senior Director General, Women's Program and Regional Operations, Office of the Co-ordinator,

Status of Women): Thank you for the question. I just started with the organization about four weeks ago now. I had the privilege of meeting with Bonnie. There's definitely a need to understand the intersectionality of the issues that we work on. In terms of the projects that you mentioned, there were approximately 50 projects. The projects talk about how we're actually advancing the issues that we are addressing. Some of the projects focused on specific areas of interest, disabilities being one, indigenous women another, recent immigrants another. Overall, the projects look at the issue at large, and many of the projects have that dimension to them. But we agree with Bonnie that focus is required in certain areas of the population for sure.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Go ahead, Marc. I'm going to share.

Mr. Marc Serré: Well, thank you.

Carolyn, who are the private sector partners that you indicated for your program?

Ms. Carolyn Van: We have organizations representing all areas of innovation as it relates to tech. TELUS is one of our partners. Google is one of our partners. We have quite a few. We have GSC Game World, which is a game development company that is part of Electronic Arts Inc.

Mr. Marc Serré: Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, if you get an opportunity to look at the Canada Learning Code program, maybe you could promote it to your members. If you're looking at long-term engagement, women in manufacturing, and what they're doing with the partnerships they have, it would be fabulous to try to promote it so that they could better teach teachers in the schools by having that link with members of the manufacturers association, too.

The Chair: Absolutely.

We're now going to Rachael Harder for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thanks so much for being with us today.

My first question is for Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

You talked a lot about the culture of the workplace and trying to re-establish it so that it is more friendly to women in that environment. I have a few questions along those lines.

First, what advantages have you seen to hiring women? What positive attributes do they bring into the workplace?

Mr. Michael Holden: When we did the main report of our...the one that this is based on, there were a number of issues—I should say benefits—that came up in the research related to that. One was the increase in innovation and productivity that comes from having women in the manufacturing workforce. A lot of that relates to new ideas and new perspectives that people bring to the table.

It's as clichéd as "out-of-the-box thinking" especially if you're used to having a number of people who are all men and are used to thinking, acting, and doing things in the same way. That's one of the main benefits. The other is just the social interaction that comes from having women and people from different cultures, different ethnicities, and different genders work together in a collaborative way.

I think those are the main benefits, in addition to just the straight-up labour supply needs.

•(1225)

Ms. Rachael Harder: I find the question an interesting one, and here's why. I believe that if those in upper management understand the benefits of hiring women and are able to put language to those benefits and champion those women, then the men throughout the company will lay hold of those claims, and they too will join forces. However, if those at the top end of management cannot articulate that well, you don't have a hope of drawing other women into that company and being able to make them feel safe and included in that environment. That's a very important question for all industries to be able to answer.

My next question has to do with something else that you brought up, which is to help improve the work-life balance for women and to help create an environment where a woman would be able to manage both her home and the different demands on her, as well as to work within the company and advance its well-being.

To be able to accommodate that can come at a significant cost to the organization or the company. I'm just wondering how you're finding that and what that cost might be going forward, in order to meet some of those demands.

Ms. Elise Maheu: Actually, at 3M we have a program called flexibility. The organization is more efficient and effective when we have such a program in place than when we don't. That's one of the things that we've already established.

Our CEO was a Catalyst award winner last year because we have a program for women in leadership. Again, it has been established that the more diverse your workforce is, the more profitable your company actually is. He's been putting a program in place that every subsidiary in the world is working on.

I think it's a misconception that if you have flexibility you are actually going to be less profitable. It's true that in manufacturing there is a very significant issue, which is shift work. It's not the same as the office work that we have to deal with, and there's really no golden answer right now, but it's definitely something that companies will need to look at and try to find a solution for.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's true.

The other thing I want to tackle is the shifting culture within the workplace. This must take place at the management level, but it needs to make its way throughout the entire organization. I'm of the opinion that language around empowering women, championing women, coming onside with women is really important. Are you finding this in your organization? How are you moving that forward?

Ms. Elise Maheu: There are mentorship programs that are being done. When you have an overall objective of advancing women in your organization, you can see that some programs are being put in place. For example, our global head of manufacturing just toured the manufacturing sites in Canada, and he said that we should have more women in manufacturing. He's been setting targets for each of the plant managers to come forward with a plan.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I had the opportunity to tour the Irving shipyard in Halifax.

Ms. Elise Maheu: Yes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: This is one of their initiatives as well. They're wanting to draw more women into the field, into the skilled

trades and manufacturing. It's phenomenal, absolutely incredible. I had a tour of the facility and I got to see the work they're doing. The way that they talked about their female employees was incredibly visionary, positive, and empowering. I really appreciated that, and I think they're seeing a lot of success come out of it.

I grew up with a father who was a skilled tradesman and a mom who actually took the women in trades course and was an electrician. She had the opportunity to work in the field. We're talking about in the 1990s, and she was the only woman on most work sites back in her day. But she had a boss who was a man, and he took the opportunity to champion her whenever he could. In times when there were few jobs available, my mom was always employed. My mom always had an easy time finding a job because of the mentorship and the championing of those male colleagues of hers.

I think there is a lot to be said for that. My mom, being a woman, was very detail-oriented and did her job to a standard higher than that of many of her male colleagues.

I have one last question, and that is—

•(1230)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Ms. Rachael Harder: All of 15 seconds. I don't have a question, then.

Thank you so much for coming.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to Sheila Malcolmson.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair, and my thanks to the witness from DAWN, DisAbled Women's Network.

We've heard testimony at this committee about the difficulties women face when they do part-time work. Unemployment insurance does not accommodate them. One specific example is a cashier. A full-time cashier typically works just 25 hours a week. A woman in that situation will never be able to apply for unemployment insurance, and this has collateral impacts on her life. Can you talk about women living with disabilities and how that affects them?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Thank you, Sheila, for bringing this forward.

It's an important situation to look at. Women with disabilities who are employed typically are in jobs that are hard to retain. Because they are in lower-paying jobs, if they are employed at all, they are likely to be challenged in accessing opportunities to move forward and just in obtaining the basic necessities of life. You're talking about the working poor at the most profound level when you're talking about people in these kinds of jobs. Women in these situations often have to choose between their disability supports and child care.

The other point I'd like to make is that many women with disabilities, because they do not have good prospects for employment, end up in unpaid caregiving roles. The number of women with disabilities in unpaid caregiving roles in the Canadian context is quite shocking. The data show that upwards of 60% of unpaid caregiving in Canada is done by women with disabilities.

To understand this problem requires a great deal of familiarity with the challenges these women are facing in their access to employment, the kind of employment they are being offered, and the opportunities available to them.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Can you talk more about what federal changes we could see that would bring more income stability during working life but also into retirement?

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: A couple of things are coming forward. Flexible work arrangements is one that I think is very important. The changes to EI from 15 weeks for sick leave would be a critical one. The best illustration of that—I don't know if you heard from anybody from the breast cancer community. Again, I spoke earlier about women with episodic and chronic illnesses. The example I would give is that 15 weeks of unemployment insurance against 30 weeks of treatment means you don't stay in the job market. That's a fairly high-level example.

Certainly when you talk about a woman with disabilities who may either have part-time or precarious employment, she's not getting unemployment insurance, which is the other point you're making. So basic income and basic income security are the other things that have to be addressed, both at the federal and at the provincial and territorial levels.

We don't have income support that recognizes some people. We have welfare or social assistance and then we have employment. We don't have anything that recognizes there is a community and a population for whom we need to provide a decent guaranteed minimum income.

• (1235)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thanks very much.

This question is for Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. As a barrier to women's entry, did you hear about the difficulty of accessing affordable child care and particularly something that can accommodate shift work? We heard a lot of testimony from women's groups that it's not just nine to five, but that women working shift work need to be able to drop kids off at any time.

Mr. Michael Holden: We did. In the barriers that were listed we had two that overlapped. One is the work-life balance, and one is whether they thought they could meet family commitments without damaging their current and future career advancement.

We didn't delve into the solutions end of it, specifically about the child care and day care issues as we designed the survey. One of the challenges that we have is to try to get as much information as possible without beating people to death with 85-question surveys, which I've been guilty of in the past.

It was implied in the family commitments responses, which scored high on women's lists of important issues or obstacles that they face, but not specifically on child care itself.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Your organization's advocacy would be helpful on that. For the next chapter that would be terrific.

Status of Women Canada, we've lost track of how many organizations have said they would love to see a return to the old funding model that recognized from the federal government perspective that, for example, domestic violence shelter operations

and a number of other front-line operations that are being delivered by the NGO community cannot survive with program funding, given that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments are not offering services secure, operational, multi-year funding. Countless organizations have said that's a barrier. They are innovative. They are collaborative, but they are burned out filling out the next innovative funding application.

You're doing great program funding. I recognize that, and we've been hearing that. Could you talk about what you're hearing about the appetite to return to that model, which was in place 20 years ago or so?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds to respond.

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: As I said, I'm a recent addition to the organization, but since I've arrived, definitely we've heard that loud and clear as well.

Speaking with Bonnie and colleagues, it is a challenge that organizations face. The idea of sustainable funding or funding for capacity building or funding to provide organizations with the support they need to continue to do the great work they do every day on the ground has been raised as an issue.

From the department's perspective, we've heard those concerns. The minister has heard the concerns as well when we've met with organizations. We hear those ideas, those challenges that organizations face, and we understand where they're coming from. We need to take that into account when we're looking at what types of projects or funding we are putting in place to allow these organizations to do the great work they do on the ground every day.

The Chair: Nancy, thank you very much. It's all good.

We're going to Sean Fraser for seven minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll begin with you, Ms. Van. Thanks for staying for the extra panel. There are two things I want to explore with you. There is only a short period of time, so perhaps you could keep the answers tight.

First, in June of this year, Minister Bains announced the CanCode program. I believe that your organization was on hand, along with Actua and Kids Code Jeunesse. It was going to create 500,000 opportunities for children from kindergarten to grade 12 to train in code and to provide funding for 500 teachers as well.

Is this the kind of program that helps you to do the good work you're doing, or are there different kinds of programs we could use to support your organization?

Ms. Carolyn Van: Yes, that is definitely an example of the kind of work that supports some of our goals.

We believe in working with organizations such as Kids Code Jeunesse to establish allies to enable us to broaden our reach to educators across our nation. Again, engaging educators through CanCode certainly mirrors the initiatives that really move kids forward.

• (1240)

Mr. Sean Fraser: There are some jurisdictional issues about us getting into schools. Is this an effective way to go through the back door to make sure the programming is being delivered where it needs to be delivered? Is it a “give you the resources and get out of the way” kind of thing?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Carolyn Van: Yes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: You raised an issue that's deeply troubling to me, and not just for coding and the computational fields, but for professional industries generally, and that's the high rate of women departing partway into their careers.

There are also problems getting in, but I've seen it in law, even where a majority of the students who are graduating are female. A few years in.... There are a number of reasons why it may be the case, but from the federal government perspective, we're going to make recommendations to the government to say that this is a problem it needs to tackle. What can we ask the government to do to help different professions, including coding, keep women in the workforce so they can reach those higher levels?

Ms. Carolyn Van: I think this speaks to some of the comments that were made earlier. We're seeing more organizations adopting specific initiatives and, in some cases, specific departments focused on EDI—equity, diversity, and inclusion—and what that looks like within the organization.

In anecdotal conversations that I'm having with women in areas of STEM who do hold senior-level positions within organizations and are on the brink of being part of that 25% who leave, what keeps me hopeful is knowing that there are organizations that are really starting to understand the deep-rooted needs that these women require to remain in these organizations.... We're also finding that some of the private sector partnerships we have are empowering a lot of these adult women within organizations to stay in the organizations they are in, knowing that young girls, with their newfound awareness, are looking to them as role models and need to see people within these organizations who look like them.

Mr. Sean Fraser: If I may, I'll shift gears to Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, who are at the table.

Thank you very much for being here. I appreciate your testimony.

I recognize that the survey you did was largely a fact-finding mission and that it's right out of the gate, so I don't expect you to have all the answers, but the timing for us is somewhat urgent because we're going to be launching a report on the issue of promotion and advancement within the workforce.

Building on the testimony we just heard, how can the federal government work with our private sector partners to help them allow women to succeed within the different industries?

Mr. Michael Holden: In addition to what was mentioned earlier, which I completely agree with, there are a couple of specific areas where we're looking to partner with governments.

One is that at the end of the day, it comes down to a labour supply issue. We need more women to be choosing the types of educational programs that will lead them to these kinds of careers, and we want

them to want those careers. I think there is an opportunity to work together on promoting STEM and the skilled trades for girls. What that might look like is something that we're interested in talking about and having a discussion on.

The second one is this whole issue of opening manufacturing doors and showcasing female success stories. I think you mentioned women seeing themselves in executive positions and seeing other women succeed. That is something that especially the younger respondents to our survey were very much in favour of. They thought that would make a big difference.

Mr. Sean Fraser: On the first issue, you said that you want to have these discussions. To find the right solution, do you think that having a consultation with the federal government and private sector partners would be a good next step to identify what the real solutions are?

Mr. Michael Holden: I think so, yes. We are going to be working with Status of Women Canada. We've made note of the initiatives that you mentioned earlier, and I think that we'll be making some submissions for those programs as well.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Has anyone in the private sector assessed the cost of inaction? You mentioned that there's enhanced productivity and innovation when you bring women into the workforce. If I do a quick opportunity cost assessment in my mind, I want to beat my head against the wall, because the cost of inaction seems far too great to ignore. Is this anything the private sector has assessed?

Mr. Michael Holden: Not to my knowledge, no.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay.

Very quickly, going to our department officials—I think I have less than a minute to go—you mentioned the need for a progressive trade agenda. Economic growth is great. Gone unchecked, it won't really help that many people. It will mostly help people who don't need the help. By building a progressive element into our trade agenda to ensure that women also benefit, I think we're going to see benefits, but how can we pursue international trade in a way that will ensure that the benefits aren't essentially going to the patriarchy?

• (1245)

Ms. Justine Akman: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Sean Fraser: A minute to smash the patriarchy. Go for it.

Ms. Justine Akman: This should be easy.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Justine Akman: As you're aware, as probably the whole committee is aware, a progressive trade agenda is a very new concept, and Canada at the moment is showing real leadership in this area.

There are some very specific and concrete things that can be achieved through a progressive trade agenda. I think about the issues of supplier diversity, about encouraging more women in STEM, about ensuring that trade in the natural resource sector does not lead to increased violence against women in trade agendas, and a whole slew of other things that the government is thinking about actively. I should add that even just collecting appropriate data and ensuring that there is good research on all of the various aspects of trade and gender would be a huge leap forward in this space.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Justine. I don't know how you did it. You ended right at seven minutes. Perfect.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Martin Shields, you're on for three minutes. Well, I'm going to give you five.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming today. I really appreciate learning about it.

One of the things I do have experience in is I spent a number of years as the token male with 35 women in a work site, so I've been on the other side. The male washroom when I came in was used for a storage room.

To the manufacturing side, one of the pieces of my career was having a lot of experiences with parents of high school and junior high kids. I would be encouraging junior high and high school kids to look at apprenticeship programs and work experience starting at 16. By the time you're 20, you have your ticket. By the time you're 30, you own your own business. It's a career path to owning your own business.

My biggest challenge was the parents. In surveys we did, in talking with them, their kids were all going to university.

Have you had any experience with that?

Mr. Michael Holden: Absolutely, yes. Not related to this specific study, but the work that we're doing on female representation in manufacturing is building on a national strategy, which I mentioned in passing, that we developed last year. One of the issues there was the general labour supply and shortages in the skilled trades.

One of the foundational problems that we identified through that was exactly what you mentioned, the fact that there is a social bias that leads people away from manual labour, away from the skilled trades, and towards going to university. It's social status, for better or for worse, that a university education is higher than education in the skilled trades. It shouldn't be that way. None of the labour market outcomes information that you could possibly want supports that as being necessarily true, but it's the situation we're in. That's one of the issues we're definitely looking at trying to address, but it's not an overnight process.

Mr. Martin Shields: No, that's a systemic problem. In a sense, we're in a position where, as we're moving forward and looking at job creation, job supply, and people to do those jobs, it's something that, whether the government takes it on in the sense of working in a partnership to promote that, we need to do something different to

change that systemic problem, or we'll be facing shortages. As was said earlier, we're losing because we don't do this.

Mr. Michael Holden: There are a couple of areas where we could better communicate the benefits of working in the skilled trades. One is the pay is very high. The amount of student debt that you might go into is relatively low. There's huge demand. The work that you would be doing is very flexible. You can do that kind of work, generally speaking, anywhere in the country. Yes, it's something that needs to be addressed, and it's something we're working on.

Mr. Martin Shields: On that last piece, mobility, there are so many challenges in the professional moving from provinces, but the tickets in the trades are so much more flexible in the sense of mobility. With our younger generation, that is something that's of interest, yet it's not something that is ever brought to their attention to any extent. The mobility, in the sense of what skilled trades bring to people, is really an advantage compared to the professional ones we have, and the barriers we have from province to province in this country.

The Chair: You still have a minute and a half.

Mr. Martin Shields: Good.

You have done this. You're just there getting it. But if you were to say tomorrow that you had two or three strategies you would like to implement, who would you involve?

● (1250)

Mr. Michael Holden: We had a list of five specific strategic initiatives that we wanted to be working on: high-profile female role models, exposure to manufacturing occupations, encouraging girls to enter STEM and skilled trades. That one for sure is number one. If we're looking for a long-term solution to this problem, that is a critical step. That's the number one area. There's also working on an inclusive workplace, work-life balance and flexibility, those as a group.... It's one thing to attract girls to STEM positions, which is what we're trying to do, but they also have to actually want those jobs. I think part of the issue here—and this is one of the subjects that came up in a panel discussion we had about this.... There are benefits. This has to be portrayed as a positive experience for women.

First of all, it has to actually be a positive experience, and that message has to come out. It's not about there are hardly any women working in skilled trades so they should totally go do that. That's not going to work. Nobody's going to listen to that message. But talking about it in a positive sense, such as here's what it can do for you, here's what it looks like, here's what you can get out of it and this is a rewarding career, enrolment is increasing—if it is—and pointing at those kinds of positive messages is what is needed.

Mr. Martin Shields: You need a partner.

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

We're going to move on. We can ask those questions after.

Emmanuella, you're on now for five minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I'm going to split my time with my colleague, Ms. Damoff.

My questions and comments are directed toward Ms. Maheu and Mr. Holden.

I feel as though sometimes one of the main barriers women have, in my view, is themselves. I know this is the worst thing to say in front of the status of women committee, but I really do believe we've reached a point at which things are pretty equal when it comes to what we're allowed to do, and when it comes to what's written down on paper.

I think the attitudes women have and men have are often the things that are the barriers. I don't want to make reference, but my colleague said before, when referring to her mom, that one of the main reasons she was always in a job was because of her male mentor. I feel we often attribute our success to males and don't take the ownership ourselves; whereas men take on that ownership. If they succeed it's because they succeeded, and it's because they did the work; whereas women are often thanking others for their success. That's one of the main issues I see.

For the women who are in the manufacturing field, is there anything in your program that addresses empowering women and making sure they feel there's a support group within their company, for example? Are there ways to have them supported in order to make it a more positive work experience for them?

Ms. Elise Maheu: Yes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Sorry it was long.

Ms. Elise Maheu: For the first part it's something personal. When I grew up my mother was the one who told me I could do anything I wanted. When you start from that perspective, it opens a lot of doors, but it's true that manufacturing is quite intimidating. When you get in a plant, it doesn't feel like an environment where a woman wants to be. I think that's kind of a.... For example, at 3M we have those circles, but from the survey, half of the women who have one were saying it was useful and the other half were saying it was not useful.

Mr. Michael Holden: Specifically, we had a couple of questions in there about women's networking groups and about whether or not those were useful to women. We were a little bit disappointed with those results, to be honest.

First of all, a fairly large number did not have access to women's working groups, whether they were formal or informal. Those who did tended not to be active participants. For those who did participate, as Elise mentioned, about half and half was the split between seeing value.

We have to do additional work in this area to figure out what the problem is because, on the surface, it seems like the kind of thing that should help do exactly what you said, but women who have been involved in those things were not seeing results. We have to dig deeper to figure out why.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

Pam.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Bonnie, thank you for being back again.

We as a society have done an abysmal job of employing people with disabilities. We seem to think it's okay to have people living with disabilities working for free rather than working and being paid

for meaningful employment. While working as a cashier may be a reality, the fact is there are women living with autism, women in a wheelchair, or women who are blind or deaf, who aren't able to use their skills or often even their education. That's another issue. One of the things we've heard is that providing subsidies to employers does not work.

Can you comment on how we could educate employers on making their workplace accessible through things like flex hours? It's not expensive for them.

You only have about 30 seconds to do that.

• (1255)

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: Thank you.

Wage subsidies need to be studied to better understand, because there are a lot of different types. I have seen some that I think become important levers for giving people access to employment where they haven't been given access before. Again, it's because of the kind of discrimination people and women with disabilities face in the workplace. Not getting those opportunities unless there's a wage subsidy on the table can be a reality.

The other reference made to the sheltered workshops is something we in no way support. We see this as a regressive approach that was taken around the idea that these make-work projects were better than just sitting at home. People and women with disabilities have the same skills as any other person. It is fundamentally about providing access through transportation, which is a key issue, as well as the concept of universal design, including many different contexts around different sectors. It is understanding that accommodation is a human right, and educating employers about the fact that they have an obligation to provide equal access to employment. Supporting somebody once they are in the work environment is critical.

The Chair: We are 45 seconds over.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: I have one statistic to share.

The Chair: Go for it.

Ms. Bonnie Brayton: The Canadian Human Rights Commission reviews complaints at the federal level. Sixty per cent of all human rights complaints in Canada were disability-related. Among those, the highest number was employment. The data is there. The policies need to be addressed.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming today: Bonnie Brayton from the DisAbleD Women's Network Canada, thank you for getting here from Montreal; from the Canada Learning Code, Carolyn Van; from the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, Michael Holden and Elise Maheu; and from Status of Women Canada, Justine Akman and Nancy Gardiner.

Thanks very much for participating today. We really appreciate it.

The meeting is adjourned.

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