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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I think we will call the meeting to order, it being now 3:30 and a bit.

Welcome to the witnesses.

Today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying and looking at the increased participation of women in non-traditional occupations.

Our witnesses today are from the Building and Construction Trades Department, from Dig-All Construction Limited, and from the Commission scolaire de Laval.

Welcome.

Each group will have ten minutes to present, and that's ten minutes for the whole group. That will be followed by a question and answer session, in which the time allotted is for both the question and the answer. I just wanted to tell you that.

I will begin, following the order on the agenda here, with the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, Canadian office.

Mr. Smillie.

Mr. Christopher Smillie (Policy Analyst, Government and Regulatory Affairs, Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, Canadian Office): Thank you, Madam Chairman. Good afternoon, members of the committee and fellow witnesses. Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts on your important study. On behalf of my organization, I hope to bring value to the committee, and I hope this is not the last time we will see each other.

Our organization is called the Canadian Building Trades. We represent about 550,000 organized construction workers from coast to coast to coast. Our members work in 15 different craft unions and over 50 trades. These include heavy-equipment operators, carpenters, welders, bricklayers, and everything in between. We build infrastructure: heavy industrial plants such as oil refineries, nuclear plants, schools, hospitals, and houses.

In preparation for my remarks today I found formal information and sought out first-hand accounts from our members. According to a 2008 study by the Construction Sector Council, 4% of our 550,000 membership are women. Some of the trades have a much lower penetration, approximately 2%. We have quite a number of women working as insulators, carpenters, and painters. There are fewer working as bricklayers, concrete finishers, steam fitters, and

electricians. These percentages have held true for a good while. But nationally, the industry has grown by 45% over the last 10 years. In B.C. and Alberta, our industry has increased 100%. This means that, proportionally, there has been an increase in people engaged in construction.

I want to give you some background on the apprenticeship challenges we face today. Then the challenges facing our female apprentices will be self-evident. In Canada, apprenticeship registrations are at an all-time high, yet graduation numbers have been stagnant since about 1995. There is a systemic problem with apprenticeship completion in Canada. In the case of women in apprenticeships, particularly in construction, the completion rate of apprentices is less than 1%. This means that one out of 100 entrants we have managed to attract to our trades successfully progresses through the curriculum and work requirements to get journey status. This would help explain low female participation in our ranks today.

I don't think gender has much to do with completing an apprentice program. I've put together a small list of challenges any apprentice would face in our industry.

First, there is the lack of stability. This is a reality in construction. We are cyclical in nature, and this leads to movement to other industries where work is more predictable. In a bad year, construction can get you 700 to 1,000 hours of work. In a good year, you could get more than 2,200 hours. In a very good year, like the last number of years, you could have as much as 3,000 hours. Our workplaces do not have flexible hours, nor are the conditions at some of the remote work camps ideal.

Second, there are life events. No one can control what life is going to throw at an apprentice. Illnesses, children, marriage, a family move to another province—all of these can affect someone's ability to finish the program of study. The committee will be aware of the 2001 and 2006 census numbers. These figures give us a road map of which trades we need to work on. No doubt these numbers are why the committee is taking a look at these important issues.

The third thing I discovered when preparing for this presentation is kind of scary. Decisions we make in high school affect the rest of our lives. Don't ask my wife about that. The Construction Sector Council surveyed a number of young women in their formative years and discovered that if young women were exposed to trade competencies and opportunities, they were more likely to go on to careers in the trades.

In some parts of Canada, trade or shop classes have lost favour and have in many cases been pulled altogether, because of cost factors or risk of injury to students. In Austria and Germany, where students have significant exposure to these competencies, the participation rate in apprenticeships is much higher than it is in Canada, the U.S., or Australia.

The fourth thing I found in preparation for my remarks today was some of the work the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum did recently on why women enter the trades. They outlined a three-pronged hypothesis explaining why the women they surveyed entered their trades. The first hypothesis was the expectation of steady work, the second was interest in their work, and the third was the desire for self-employment.

I have a couple of comments on the study. Again, we are a very cyclical economy, and construction is also a late responder to economic conditions. The recession in the trades is still coming, and the largest majority of certified people in Canada are not self-employed but work for small and medium-sized contractors.

So it seems as if we have our work cut out for us, educating people about what to expect as a tradesperson. As I move along in my remarks, we will look to this committee and the Government of Canada to assist.

The final thing I've brought to you are some ancillary remarks and experiences I collected from our trades and contractor partners when I surveyed them last week. Large construction companies—I would consider a large construction company as one with more than 100 employees—are making some inroads on the construction management side of our business. According to Tony Fanelli, manager of labour relations at Bantrell Constructors Company out of Montreal and Toronto, women have grown in numbers in his organization in roles focused on inspection services, health and safety, representative services, logistics, and engineering. These are all positive steps. I would consider a small construction company as a company with less than 100 employees. There the challenges are greater, as many of the above competencies are generally subcontracted out to other companies. In this case, you get who you get when you subcontract work to other companies.

From my survey of our membership, I discovered a few organizations adding value in many regions of the country. There are initiatives like Alberta's Women Building Futures, Saskatchewan Women in Trades and Technology, the Women Unlimited project in Nova Scotia, and the STEP program in British Columbia. The STEP program is the skilled trades employment program, which is a joint initiative between the British Columbia Construction Association and the Government of B.C. This program concentrates on matching employers and those interested in trades opportunities. These are formal, not-for-profit pre-apprentice programs for women interested in a career in our industry.

Of note, our construction trades in Nova Scotia donate three cents per hour of work to a group called Texploration. Texploration promotes careers in the sciences, trades, and technical and technology-related occupations, and they promote this among women in grades 9 to 12. We're launching a similar program to Texplorations in Newfoundland in conjunction with the Vale Inco smelter project in Long Harbour.

To wrap up, your invitation to speak today stimulated a number of questions in our organization in regard to how we can do things better. Here are some questions we are now asking ourselves as it relates to workforce diversity. Are our workplace tasks attractive to women, and what can we do to improve things? Is our construction culture attractive to women? If we're not an attractive culture, how do we get there? How do young women find out about construction jobs? The last questions that were stimulated are, where and how do these women get trained and who is going to help women stay in apprenticeship programs?

Going forward, the message I'd like to deliver to you is as follows. The Canadian building trades would be willing to partner and work collaboratively with the Government of Canada and the provincial authorities responsible, to initiate a pilot program with our contractors. Perhaps a construction sector council could be a vehicle to move this initiative forward. We need continued support in promoting our trades as a viable career choice for young men and women alike. That support comes from the Government of Canada: it comes through the EI system, the apprenticeship incentive grant, and tangible places like the Parliament of Canada.

If this committee can advocate in any way that there is a great future in the trades, our industry would be grateful. In the new year—I believe it's March, and I feel like a billboard for the Construction Sector Council—the council is having a symposium focused on this very topic. I believe it is in March 2010, and I think they would extend an invitation to everyone on this committee.

● (1540)

Thank you for inviting the Canadian Building Trades. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next group is Dig-All Construction Limited, Debra Faye Penner.

You have 10 minutes, Ms. Penner.

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner (Office Administrator and Estimator, Dig-All Construction Ltd.): Good afternoon.

My name is Debbie Penner. I live in Winkler, Manitoba. I am a mother of three and a wife of 20 years. I also work at Dig-All Construction, a family-run business.

The scope of our business is installing sewer and waterlines. The majority of our work is for the provincial government and the municipalities.

I am honoured to be here today to make a presentation to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to discuss the barriers that women face in the construction industry.

Currently I am the office manager and administrator for Dig-All Construction and also a shareholder of the company. Other businesses we own are Rosebrook Ltd., which is a retailer of manufactured homes, Rosebrook Place and Minnewasta Meadows, which are mobile home parks within our community.

Humbling myself many years ago, I begged my father for a chance to work for the construction company. I started in 1991, working for minimum wage, which was \$5.25 an hour. Looking after the in-house accounting and payroll, with very little knowledge or experience, slowly learning the business, I started to price jobs, order materials, and help set up the projects.

The construction companies I dealt with in the nineties were mostly family-run businesses. It is a male-oriented industry and a callous group. As a woman, I needed to be able to deal with these men on a knowledgeable level, while learning to cope with rude behaviour and discrimination against women in the industry.

At the turn of the century, the construction industry started to change. It was becoming more professional and organized, at least in the administrative and engineering departments. It continues to progress further, from the offices to the construction fields, at a very prolonged pace. As these changes take place, the opportunities continue to grow for women in the construction industry, and today there are women who fill the roles of engineers, on-site inspectors, and administrators, but as for the actual work in the construction field, there are very few. Field work is typically based on physical attributes, where men will hire men.

There used to be a large percentage of men who thought women had no place in the construction industry. This has also changed over the years. There are still the select few who feel intimidated by a woman sitting in on the construction meetings or who glare when a woman shows up at the test holes. The other day, someone asked me why the change in attitude; why is it more acceptable today than it was 20 or even 10 years ago to have women working in the construction field? I believe it has changed for many reasons.

The industry has become more professional and organized through legislation, technology, education, and training. The younger generations are now stepping into management positions, and in some cases have become owners themselves. They are raised with different ideals and standards. The economy has pressured the younger generations to realize it is very difficult to make a living as a one-income family. And technology is also making it easier for women to work in physically demanding positions.

For these barriers to be broken down, the industry has to evolve. Too many old-school employers are still against women entering the construction field. As the younger generations enter the workforce, women are becoming more prevalent in man-made environments, and I see this more and more as each year passes. Whether it is due to the development of educational courses or economic pressures for a family to have two incomes, the overall population has been forced to acknowledge that women are capable of working in male-oriented positions.

I have been a part of the industry for nearly 18 years, and since then I've become knowledgeable and have developed many lasting working relationships. I have a great deal of respect for my fellow industry partners, but when it comes to the contractors, there are still very few women involved. I hope they will encourage women who are seeking to enter the construction industry to come forward. I love the construction industry, and over the years, through a great deal of hard work, long hours, and dedication, I have proven to the

construction industry that women are capable of working in this field.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

You were very short.

La Commission scolaire de Laval.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Émond (Adult education and vocational training commissioner, Commission scolaire de Laval): Good afternoon.

This is how the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport of Quebec defines a non-traditional curriculum: "A curriculum is considered to be non-traditional when the corresponding professions under the Code national des professions (CNP) indicate a rate of female participation of under 33 1/3 %." The Commission scolaire de Laval currently offers 21 professional training programs in non-traditional trades.

The reasons for which women choose to enter trades which are traditionally male-dominated are not different from those of men. Many women choose to enter a trade because they prefer manual work, they wish to engage in physical work, they wish to create things with their hands, and they need a job in which they can move around. They are looking for concrete rather than theoretical work and they feel at ease working in a male environment. Other reasons why girls and women choose to enter a trade are relatively short training periods, high salaries and good job prospects.

When it realized that some of its female students wished to enter non-traditional areas of work, the Commission scolaire de Laval undertook several initiatives to encourage women to train in non-traditional trades, to support them in their training, and to help them enter the workforce.

We will begin by telling you about how we help women validate their choice of a non-traditional career and the training that goes with it. We will then tell you about the different measures we have taken to make room for women in non-traditional trades, and we will conclude by explaining the importance of partnerships in developing a winning strategy to help women enter trades and thrive in them.

We have several activities to validate the training given to women, and there will be more.

Information and one-day placement. Although there is a high demand for some training programs, recruitment remains a challenge. Therefore, each school year, staff and teachers from vocational training centres set up information booths in schools and give talks to students. Of course, both boys and girls are invited to meet with the professionals who are there to answer their questions. If they show clear interest in a trade, the young people are invited to the vocational training centres to be “one-day students”. They interact with the teachers and regular students in the classrooms and workshops. This allows them to try their hand at a trade and talk to people firsthand. It gives them a better idea of what they would like to do professionally and it validates their interest.

Femmes et métiers gagnants: orientation and exploration. Several times a year, groups of about 15 women visit our vocational training centres. These women are participating in the “Femmes et métiers gagnants” program, which is subsidized by the Laurentians branch of Emploi-Québec. For seven weeks, the women take stock of their personal and professional situations and explore job opportunities and training in male-dominated professions. Each group is invited to our centres to explore, learn about and become familiar with our programs. They visit every department and talk to teachers about the reality and expectations of the trade they have chosen. Those who are interested can register for a one-day placement. Last year, two such participants graduated from the Centre de formation Le Chantier, one of them in brick-laying and masonry, the other in glass assembly and installation. This year, following their participation in the “Femmes et métiers gagnants” program, two women registered for the carpentry and woodworking program at the Centre de formation Le Chantier.

“Chapeau, les filles!” is a competition in Quebec which recognizes women who have chosen to enter non-traditional fields of work.

• (1550)

For 14 years, the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and its partners have held the “Chapeau, les filles!” contest, which seeks to make women aware of the many career opportunities available to them and which support women who are training in male-dominated professions until they graduate.

The objectives are: to help women who have chosen to work in a non-traditional field to feel good about their choice; to reward their efforts; to help students overcome problems related to the fact that they are in a male-dominated environment; to help women make unconventional career choices by providing successful female role models.

To enter this contest, the young women have to write a letter describing their background, their commitment to working in a non-traditional trade, their aptitudes and what they intend to do to stay in the field. There are two tiers to the contest: the regional tier, with prizes of between \$500 and \$1,000, and the national tier, with prizes of between \$2,000 and \$5,000.

To attract participants, it is important that the centres advertise the contest, recruit participants and support them through each stage of the contest. Last year, four students from the Commission scolaire de Laval won regional awards, and one of them received a national award.

In order to continue to encourage women to enter non-traditional fields of work, the Commission scolaire de Laval will implement three activities in 2009-2010. The first is a “hands on” workshop, which will be given by the Centre de formation Le Chantier. It will be called “Madame bricole tout”. The purpose of the workshop is to help women become more independent by letting them try manual skills. During the workshops, the women will learn the basics, such as how to paint a wall, how to handle screws, nails, drills, how to put up shelves and so on. The workshop is taught by the female teachers and students at the Centre de formation Le Chantier.

Another project, called “Parcours extrême”, consists of a professional exploration kit developed by the people at Femmes et production industrielle. It is aimed at students in the grade 9 and teaches them about non-traditional trades. This year, workshops will be given in high school classes in the Commission scolaire de Laval in collaboration with the Table de concertation lavalloise pour l'emploi des femmes dans les emplois non traditionnels, the Commission scolaire de Laval and the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. This partnership is not yet in place.

The “Défi touche à tout” is an hands-on laboratory in a vocational training centre. This is a pilot project that allows students to “find their way”. The objective of this project is to help girls and boys become interested in occupations taught at the vocational training centre. This happens in a mini-laboratory setting. Learning activities are offered to students in grade 9. The activities help students find out what best suits them and which career choice is most appropriate for them. The students also receive information about the academic aspects and the nature of the course.

The three “Place aux femmes” initiatives were implemented to help women complete their courses and find a job after graduation. The first initiative helps women stick with their training. It has been available since January 2007 to any woman who is registered in a program or who has graduated from a non-traditional trade course with the Commission scolaire de Laval. Its aim is to support these women, to help them network and share their experiences. A facilitator, along with a female tradesperson, leads the activity. Telephone support and sharing opportunities are also available.

In 2007-2008, two groups were created and subsidized by Service Canada and the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

• (1555)

One group was made up of women graduates in various non-traditional occupations, while the other was made up of women enrolled in the fire safety intervention program. Following this success and based on confirmed needs, the Commission scolaire de Laval continued to offer this program with the financial participation of the Commission de la construction du Québec. Since the spring of 2008, three groups have been created.

The second measure allows access to professional resources. Two career counsellors are available for all of the professional training programs at the Commission scolaire de Laval. Also, in order to ensure that girls remain in training courses, one of our facilities, the Le Chantier Training Centre, has a professional training counsellor available to meet with all female students, starting in their first week of classes. This resource is also available, as needed, throughout the training of female students. Bianka is a counsellor herself and she looks after the girls attending the Centre de formation Le Chantier.

The third measure is an awareness activity for teachers, and all staff and students at the Centre de formation Le Chantier. It takes the form of a play that is intended to educate the public about the role of women in non-traditional occupations.

A few words about partnerships. Ensuring the retention, recruitment and integration of women in non-traditional occupations requires cooperation with various partners. Here are a few examples of projects that bring together various stakeholders for the same cause. First, an innovative project to create and provide promotional, awareness and intervention tools designed to facilitate better access by women to non-traditional occupations and fields, particularly in the construction industry. It allows us to determine the profile of the women registered and the main difficulties they experience throughout their training.

• (1600)

[English]

The Chair: Madame Émond, you are now at twelve minutes. You are two minutes and a half over time. Can you please wrap it up?

Ms. Sylvie Émond: I'm going to make a conclusion.

[Translation]

You have all the texts.

The conclusion is very important. Despite a strategy that includes a number of initiatives, it is still the case that few women work in non-traditional occupations and it can be quite difficult to keep them employed there. Because of our concern for the situation, the Commission scolaire de Laval plans to actively continue its activities in a continuum of actions to increase the number of girls and women in training and working in non-traditional occupations. The efforts made over the past few months, and that will continue to be made, in order to educate not only girls and women, but also parents and employers in our region. Clearly, all partners need to work together in order to achieve this objective.

Thank you for having listened to us.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

It's a seven-minute question round. It means there are seven minutes for questions and answers.

Ms. Zarac.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to all the witnesses. Thank you for being here.

To start, I want to congratulate the Commission scolaire de Laval. I am very impressed by everything you have done; it is really interesting. With the support, the competitions and the workshops that you have put in place, I think that you are really on the right track to increase the percentage of women in non-traditional occupations. In my opinion, it must all start with a commitment, because without one, women will drop out during training. That is why I think this is an interesting first step.

I would like to know how you develop the 21 programs you referred to. Then, how many participants have there been in those programs and what percentage of students find employment in the area in which they have studied?

Mr. René Barrette (Vice-Principal, Le Chantier vocational training centre, Commission scolaire de Laval): You are talking more specifically about the women in the training modules.

Ms. Lise Zarac: Yes, I am.

Mr. René Barrette: I may not have the statistics for all of the school board's 21 programs. I have more experience with the Centre de formation Le Chantier. These are specifically construction programs, five of which are with Mr. Smillie. They are pretty similar, including brickwork, masonry, electricity, carpentry, wood-working, etc.

Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of women taking these programs. As you emphasized earlier, it is not just the commitment that counts but also the establishment of support structures for these students. It is not always easy for women to enter the construction industry. We heard someone talk about this today.

Congratulations, Madam, for your efforts; you know that it is not always easy.

Our girls experience this on a daily basis when they register in programs. So we need to believe in them and give them the resources, allocate the resources they need to assist them in that career path.

As soon as I took this position three years ago, we immediately hired a full-time career counsellor in order to get women placed in those occupations.

Heaven knows, the construction industry needs women to set its practices straight and to clean them up. You are aware of what has been happening in the Quebec construction industry for the past few weeks. I will not go into details, because it is not what we are talking about today. I think that women have a place in this industry that is not only expected but also deserved. So we have to believe in them and put the appropriate structures in place.

With regard to numbers, the best incentive—depending on the number of applications—is to constantly adapt to what women ask for. When I have a lot of them over a given year, in traditionally male-dominated programs, we get positive discrimination. We automatically reserve up to two spots for women in programs where there are 20 to 22 spots. So, if I have enough applications to justify it, I make room for two women right away, no matter what the results of the selection test are.

•(1605)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Those females students find work without any problem.

Mr. René Barrette: Yes.

Ms. Lise Zarac: I am still worried about whether they remain in the area. Because that could be a problem, after all. It is possible that the work may be too hard, that there may be physical problems. Do you have any statistics on that?

Ms. Sylvie Émond: Yes, the majority of them keep their jobs, because they are able to complete the training. Once they are working, they are able to function.

I have here the number of graduates. Women represent 29% of all graduates. We had 107 graduates, including 31 women. This is not very representative, but I can tell you that the women graduates keep their jobs.

Mr. René Barrette: The percentage is related to the number of enrolments in a given year.

Ms. Sylvie Émond: That is correct.

Mr. René Barrette: So, a third of students take the training. We will have to check this with the Commission de la construction, but with regard to the figures, as Mr. Smillie mentioned, the problem in retaining workers in the construction industry is a general one. It is the same for men. I do not know whether the same figures apply across Canada.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes, I will come back to Mr. Smillie later about that.

I want to ask another question. Although we know that money is not everything, it is still important, I feel. Would this be one reason why women are going into non-traditional occupations, in order to improve their lives, because we know that most women earn less than men?

Ms. Sylvie Émond: Certainly. We organized a forum—perhaps Ms. Michaud can talk about it—and that was one of the main reasons mentioned.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It was one of the main reasons, was it?

Ms. Bianka Michaud (Education consultant, Le Chantier vocational training centre, Commission scolaire de Laval): Particularly for older women, women with children or women seeking stability. Often, those women are single parents, and they want to earn a decent salary.

Younger women do not choose based on money. They often do it because they want a challenge or they need physical work, it is more for those reasons.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you very much.

I have a question for Ms. Penner.

Ms. Penner, you mentioned earlier that it really used to be a men's world, but that things are improving. You talked about attitudes.

Would you go so far as to say that there may be discrimination against women, or is that too strong a word?

[English]

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: I believe discrimination is still in effect, possibly has been there from the beginning of time, and will continue to be there until people change their attitudes towards women.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It is not easy to change people's attitudes. However, you mentioned something that I think is very positive. You said that technology will change this situation. You said that a certain amount of physical strength is essential in order to work in construction, but that technology will change this situation somewhat.

Do you think that attitudes will change as the technology is put in place?

[English]

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: I believe those are two completely separate issues. Technology does make it easier for women, but the employers also have to be willing to open the doors to hire women, or women have to start their own construction businesses. So the opportunity has to be there.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You have had the good fortune to work in a family-owned business. But I am still sure that there were constraints. If you had not worked in a family-owned business, would your experience have been different? I imagine that the problems would have been worse still for an outsider. You were still the boss, to some extent.

•(1610)

[English]

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: I don't know. I haven't been there. It depends on which job you're looking at. For on-site engineers, for example, there are women coming into the industry all the time when 10 years ago they weren't there. It used to be only me in Manitoba, and now I've seen on-site engineers who have gone through their training. Anybody can apply for school. Anybody can go. So the opportunity is there, and it is up to the women to make the choice whether they want to be part of that industry, to step up to the plate and be who they want to be.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Would you agree that—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zarac.

Madame Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): No, it is Mr. Desnoyers' turn.

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

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome to this important committee where we try to reach conclusions that will produce results. It seems to me that you are a really interesting group. We need only look at what is happening at the Commission scolaire, for a start.

I would like you to tell me what the government's role is, in your opinion. We talked about the ministère de l'Éducation, and the important role it already plays. However, Ms. Penner said that legislation had helped to integrate women into the labour market.

In Canada, Quebec and in the other provinces, do we truly have the legislation we need to bring about the integration of, and equality for, women in non-traditional occupations? I am thinking of the work-family balance, child care, harassment, training and awareness. The question is for everyone.

Ms. Sylvie Émond: Perhaps Bianka can answer. She deals with female students every day.

Ms. Bianka Michaud: I am not very familiar with the legislation, but I can talk about elements of the labour market that have not changed with the times. Particularly in the construction industry, the work schedule causes problems. During peak periods, women have to work 15 or 16 hours, just like the men. Construction sites open at 5:00 a.m. and close late in the evening. Even if there are day care services, they do not cover all the hours of work. Under the rules, a child cannot remain in daycare for more than 10 hours a day, and so on. It is not always possible to get care for your children at night. That is quite difficult for women.

[English]

Mr. Christopher Smillie: Yes, you make a good point. In construction there really is no workday. It's when the work is done that you can go home. I live in Kanata. To get to Kanata these days you have to drive through a night work crew. If your employer says to you, "We're building a road this week and we're doing it between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. every day for the next three weeks, so it's 21 days on and 6 days off"—it is a very challenging work schedule for anybody. For example, for megaprojects in Alberta you physically have to go and live in these employer-provided camps.

Your question was about whether laws can help. At the end of the day, if there is a regulatory regime in place that encourages the training and encourages the development of future workers, that can't hurt. Are there laws? I can't really comment on your question about day care, but at the end of the day it comes down to the schedule of work. If I have to work 21 days on and 6 days off in a month because that's when the work needs to be done, I have to go and do it. For those 21 days I'm working 12-hour days and I'm welding pipe the whole time.

Is there a set of laws in a province or a country that can help with that kind of thing? I don't know, but at the end of the day you need a regulatory regime that promotes training and promotes building a workforce.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: In terms of workplace health and safety, for example, work stations are often changed to make things easier. This is being done in nearly all fields, thanks to various pieces of legislation.

Is this the case in the construction industry, specifically?

•(1615)

[English]

Mr. Christopher Smillie: That's a very good point on health and safety. Obviously the contractors are bound by provincial laws on health and safety. I may have exaggerated a bit when I said it was 21 days on, 6 days off. But at the end of the day, the health and safety bundle of laws is very important. If you're an iron worker and you're not harnessed to the Trump Tower they're building in downtown Toronto, it's 35 storeys if you fall. The regulatory regime of health and safety is extremely important in the business Debra and I are in.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. René Barrette: We talked about new technologies to prevent workplace accidents. For our part, in terms of training, we look very closely at new technologies. Perhaps the government could fund research to adapt work stations. It could be a kind of field of research devoted to keeping women working in non-traditional occupations. The various technologies available could be studied. We are not the only ones working in this area.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: At the Commission scolaire de Laval, do you address these issues in the courses you provide? Talking about workplace health and safety is one thing, but prevention is another.

Ms. Sylvie Émond: We addressed some of these things during a forum. We will likely do it again because it was extremely interesting. In our case, the people in the trades are the ones feeding us. The women in those trades—we are talking about women, in our case—talked a lot to us during the last forum.

Whatever the case may be, it would be useful for us to ask them that question.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Before I finish, I would like to touch on the issue of discrimination and harassment.

Christopher, in the construction trades, you see this situation on a daily basis. What are women experiencing in this regard?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Smillie: I would say it is. I'm not a woman and they won't let me near the tools. But it is something that many of our local offices deal with. It's a no-BS kind of situation where none of that is tolerated. However, what do you do when you're 36 storeys up and there's harassment? We work with our employers and the Ministry of Labour very closely to make sure that if there are complaints, they're taken very seriously and moved forward.

Debra would have a better feeling about the harassment side in the field. But generally the experience out there is that it does happen. We're trying to make it better.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Ms. Penner.

[English]

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: Harassment exists and will always exist, whether you have a different colour of skin or a different nationality. It's just part of the world. But I believe in the construction industry. I know it has changed a lot over the years. Women are more involved in the construction industry, and as long as there are more women involved, they're being respected.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think that's fine.

Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good afternoon, everyone.

What I am hearing today is extremely interesting. Some non-traditional trades are known, but not by young women. I have two daughters, two young women actually, at home. I am encouraging them to pick non-traditional occupations. I do not know whether I will succeed. There is not enough information on the subject. In fact, they do not really know where to turn.

In the high schools, students hear about nurses, paramedics, but there are very few posters encouraging our girls to go into the construction trades, for example, in masonry or mechanics.

I remember, 35 years ago, I wanted to study mechanics. But I was told that I needed to take a secretarial course first. That was not what I wanted to do at all. At the time, that was how things were, but things have changed.

Could you tell us about the programs you have developed at the Centre de formation Le Chantier, in order to recruit young women?

•(1620)

Mr. René Barrette: Over the years, we have realized that the information, although available, was not ending up in the right places. Always targeting the same audience, meaning grade 9 and 10 students, was perhaps not the best idea. We might need to tell young girls what is available much earlier.

This year, we have decided to hold workshops for kids in elementary school. For example, we talked to children in grades 5 or 6 at two different schools in the board. They come and spend a day with us. We pay for lunch and the school bus, and we get them working with mortar, with professional teachers all around. We have them do some electrical work with electricians. They get a day's training with an elementary school teacher who will review what she saw during the day and will link it with what she teaches at school with her students afterwards. In that way, any math that can be done with reference to brickwork, or calculations about volume or mass, she can do that with them in math class. If there are instructions to read in French, so that they can do the electrical work, she will go over it with them.

Ultimately, it is not just a fun time for these elementary school kids. The girls also have to put on the gear, wear a hard-hat, learn how to do things like laying bricks or spreading mortar. We are starting this year.

In my opinion, if we strike early, perhaps we will see better results over the next few years. Kids will know right from elementary school that it is possible because they will have been part of it themselves. There is nothing better than learning by doing.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Some witnesses recently said that it was very difficult to retain women in non-traditional jobs. Has your training centre done any follow-up with these women to find out whether they are still carrying on with the same trade two, three or four years later? And if they are, what factors tend to increase the likelihood of women sticking with their particular trade?

Mr. René Barrette: Those are very good questions.

We have information from the Commission de la construction du Québec, as these women are registered in an apprenticeship system and they tally up hours in order to become journeymen. This information can be quite specific and we know that the retention rate is almost the same for men and women. About 25% are still working in the construction industry after three years, which is the same rate as men. The difficulty is getting into the field.

I will tell you a story about that. We were dealing with a discrimination case last year involving a young woman who was just finishing a program study. It was not a man who stopped her from getting the job, it was a woman. A female employer told her that her husband did not approve, but she was the one saying no. Originally, she said that she did not want any female carpenters in her business because they would go on maternity leave, because they were not reliable, and so on.

With the assistance of the Commission de la construction du Québec, we intervened and the business owner was strongly censured for it. He was brought back into line. I am telling you this because it is an example of an access issue. But as soon as women get into the field, they stay just as long as men do. The difficulty is getting in.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That was my third question.

Does discrimination come from both men and women?

Ms. Sylvie Émond: Yes.

•(1625)

Mr. René Barrette: In this sector, that is true.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We are women, and we know just how unkind we can be to each other, and that is putting it mildly. It is often said that it is men who discriminate against women, but women are also guilty of it.

Ms. Sylvie Émond: And not only that, I can tell you, as I pointed out in my conclusion, that parents may also be to blame. Sometimes they have such an attitude against vocational training! It shows that they are not ready to send their children there. To them, it is not discrimination, it is just not professional. And yet, Heaven knows how much we need manual trades. That is why we write that parents and employers have their work cut out for them in this regard, as Mr. Barrette just said.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So, once more, it is a matter of education.

Ms. Sylvie Émond: Exactly.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The focus has been heavily on university qualifications and degrees. As I said, I have two daughters and I have always encouraged them to get into the trades, the “short vocational programs”, not because they are any less worthy but because I think they are trivialized and yet, that is what we need. This is what we will need in the future, hands and arms, and women are just as capable as men of doing that kind of work.

Mr. René Barrette: But there is a common thread. Lawyers want their children to be lawyers and plumbers also want their children to be lawyers.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Well, I am not asking my daughters to become politicians. I would not do that to them.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, Ms. Irene Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here. It's really quite wonderful to have the educators and those who are the practical people in terms of the trades.

I wanted to start with you, Mr. Smillie. You were talking about the transition from apprentice to journeyman and how very difficult it is—fewer than 1% of women actually make it. You said subsequently that even for young men it's difficult because of lack of stability, the cycle of the work schedule, hours and the flexibility of those hours, illness, children, and moving to other provinces. Those are certainly onerous barriers.

I'm wondering, how many men actually then complete the program, in light of those barriers?

Mr. Christopher Smillie: In terms of percentages, the information I found said between 16% and 25%, so it's still a very low number. On the acceptability scale it's still only 16% to.... It depends on which trade and where, but generally the range was 16% to one-quarter actually go through and complete a certified apprenticeship program.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I was interested in that for a couple of reasons, first because of this notion that women have additional barriers: we commit pregnancy and have children. I say that because I was denied a job when I was a young teacher because I might commit pregnancy, and I did, but I—

Mr. Christopher Smillie: Someone could accuse me of committing pregnancy then too.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: That whole notion of maternity leave, etc., is a problem. Yet you identified young men's responsibilities regarding children, and they're still doing ever so much better than young women. Is there a societal barrier here? Do we have to get past a culture, a mentality, in terms of making these jobs available to young women?

Mr. Christopher Smillie: I'm not sure, but I think it may also have to do with when you extrapolate the numbers, the number of women, actually, so it's a science of numbers, I would assume. If you have 1,000 men go into an apprentice program, 25% of them are going to make it. If you have 15 women go in, maybe only one or

two will make it. It might just be a science of numbers because there aren't as many. That would be my off-the-cuff explanation.

At the end of the day—sorry, this is a question from before—the follow-up is so important when these women and men are in their apprenticeship programs, the monitoring of these folks, who's monitoring them as they progress.

Can you just remind me of your question, again, so I don't get off track too much?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: It's simply that the barriers you described almost sounded like the same barriers that we attribute to the experience of women. How is it that 16% to 25% of young men still manage and only 1% of women?

• (1630)

Mr. Christopher Smillie: You know what? At the end of the day, I think it's about availability of work. People are looking for steady work when they're young. If the choice is between finishing the apprentice program in construction and only working 700 to 1,000 hours and working in a call centre where the work is a little more steady, that might be part of the problem.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Okay.

My husband is a tradesman, and he spent many years of his life railing about the fact that employers in Canada are not willing to provide the opportunity to move apprentices along. They're just not willing to make the investment. Is that some of it? Do we need, therefore, to provide more encouragement so that employers will take up that very important role of providing opportunity and experience?

Mr. Christopher Smillie: I don't want to offend any of my employer partners out there in the world, but at the end of the day it really is up to the individual in the field to monitor their own progress through their apprenticeship program. Because a construction apprentice might work for 10 or 15 employers during a year, there is no real consistency, so there's no adviser.

My colleague from Laval said we have advisers. That would be great if we had someone who is an adviser to a construction apprentice in the field, but because our industry is so cyclical—I'm an electrician apprentice, I go wherever the work is, and I work for many different employers throughout the year—there isn't consistency. So if no one is bringing you into the guidance counsellor, so to speak, and saying, “Chris, it's time you moved on and wrote your third-year exam,” that kind of thing gets missed, just because of the number of employers you might have.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I'm wondering, is that a failure of the system that we have in place? I know my husband had a school and he had an employer, and he was three days a week with the employer and two days a week in school. That's how he managed to attain such an incredible and positive level of expertise.

Mr. Christopher Smillie: Usually what happens is you go on what they call “block release”. No offence to the Bloc. You do your six months of on-the-job training. The good thing about our apprentices is they get paid while they're working, and then they have block release, where an employer will release 10 or 15 of them all at once to go to the classroom portion of their session. So generally as an apprentice you don't have the freedom to go and take courses when you want. It's up to your employer, and I'm not blaming them. My friends at SNC-Lavalin will get upset with me. But at the end of the day, you go on block release whenever the employer tells you. You go and do your training then.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I see a response here. I wonder if someone from Laval would like to respond to this as well.

[Translation]

Mr. René Barrette: There needs to be a more systematic approach developed with employers, somewhat like the European model. The apprenticeship system is an alternating work-study system. That requires industry to go to great lengths from an organizational standpoint in order to open its doors at the same time as training is going on. It is a tried and true system, just look at Finland and Switzerland. There is also a better job retention rate among graduates of vocational training than we have seen in Quebec and Canada for a good many years. The answer might be to try and have a far more efficient partnership with employers in the construction sector by promoting work and study simultaneously, a systematic, alternating, work-study system.

Departments of education would need to review the apprenticeship system and offer an on-the-job component to complement the in-class curriculum. These two worlds can be reconciled. There is an increasing dialogue between the two. In my opinion, we should look into that kind of solution.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Mr. Smillie was talking about the fact that there is less and less training for students in terms of the trades, because it's expensive, and I know, I came from the high school system and the shops are very, very expensive. And yet you've set up this mini-laboratory, and you've indicated quite considerable success. Is it simply a matter of making this kind of education a priority?

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, I would ask that whoever answers that question be very, very brief. You've drifted over. I've allowed it because everybody else has been allowed to drift over.

•(1635)

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Émond: I can tell you at the Commission scolaire de Laval, we are always looking to branch out. Vocational training is a large component of our programs. We are spoiled and it is clear that we are always trying to improve ourselves, to be proactive by wanting the best facilities that meet employers' standards and to make it possible for girls to succeed and to meet the demand. That is my answer to you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Émond.

The second round is beginning, and it's a five-minute round. It means five minutes for questions and for answers. I allow a little leeway, because sometimes you don't want to stop somebody in the middle of an answer. So I do let you drift a bit, but not too much.

Ms. Zarac.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a question for Mr. Smillie.

Mr. Smillie, you talked about a lot of challenges, for both men and women. We know that the percentage of female single-parent families is higher than male single-parent families. So I imagine that these challenges are even greater for women.

We know that in the future, there will be a shortage of workers, and that is why it is important to convince more people, both women and men, to turn to the construction sector where there are already shortages.

You referred to a pilot project with the government. Could you tell us more about that? What is your perception of the work that could be done with the government?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Smillie: I think this committee has sort of set the stage to examine the issue in greater light.

In terms of a pilot program, our organization and our contractor partners out there would be absolutely willing to get as much information as possible. We talked a lot about getting information to young people. Something that I see we can do together with the government side is working through our sector council, getting information to high schools, getting information to the various parties that would be interested. Even though we're in a very serious economic time in our industry, we're still very, very busy, so the demand for skilled workers hasn't really dropped off yet. We're crossing our fingers that it won't. Generally, we'll be in a shortage position in the next five to ten years again. There was something that came out that said we need an additional 200,000 to 300,000 skilled trade workers in this country.

What do I see a pilot project looking like? The most important piece that I found in my preparation for today was that if we can expose people to the benefits of a career in the trades and they get an understanding of what the competencies are, then we can make sure we have a workforce down the road. There has been good work already on the government side so far, things like the apprenticeship and incentive grant. It has been totally awesome in terms of our industry. It encourages people to move along through their program. It ends the four-year apprentice program completed in 12 years; it assists with that kind of thing. It gives people the financial incentive to move along.

How do I see a pilot program? I see it linking with programs that have been successful to date but perhaps providing more information to the people who need it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: At the moment, you are lucky because you are part of the economic stimulus effort. Perhaps you are not feeling the effects of the recession to the same extent because you are part of the solution, and good for you.

However, we know that in the years to come, there are really going to be serious labour shortages. We have to find incentives.

Have you already been in discussion with anyone from the government about your pilot project?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Smillie: This preparation was sort of the brainchild of this pilot project. I had an epiphany, so to speak, about this, and it's probably something we should be focusing on.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So this would be the beginning of the answer to your questions?

•(1640)

Mr. Christopher Smillie: *C'est ça.*

At the end of the day, we've been working with the government on a number of things through the red seal program and through HRSDC. This would be something we could fit in there, absolutely.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I have a question for Ms. Émond.

You spoke earlier of promoting the trades and going a step further by building awareness, because you said that parents are not always comfortable with their children choosing a non-traditional occupation.

That is a very sensitive issue. How do we deal with it? How do we change this mentality? How do we promote non-traditional vocations?

Ms. Sylvie Émond: One way of going about it is to work in partnerships. We have some projects in the works right now with our partners from the Table de concertation à Laval en condition féminine.

The first project will be to develop an inspirational booklet for women along the lines of "only the bold need apply". It is being put together in the Laurentides region and is part of a collaborative process aimed at helping young women get into traditionally male-dominated fields.

The booklet will be distributed in our training centres and in organizations where women are engaged in non-traditional occupations.

This activity is being funded by a new project of the ministère de l'Éducation, des Loisirs et du Sport.

The second project is a play, and it is not just for students. It can also be for parents, for everyone. We are looking for solutions that will bring people together to make them more aware of the issues surrounding skilled labour and, especially, of opening the door to women.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Hoepfner.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's really good to have all of you here today. It has been very interesting. I think we could probably just listen to you and write a good portion of our report, because of some of the things you've brought forward. Obviously we have a lot of other witnesses, but we're getting so much information from you, and I appreciate that.

I recently read a really interesting article about the fact that our society in many ways has undervalued craftsmanship and physical labour and we have valued knowledge. If we think about it in very practical terms, if we have a young person who's going for a master's degree in a certain area or someone who's going for a plumbing ticket, it seems to me that we generally put more value on the person who is getting the master's degree.

I wonder if each of you has encountered that type of attitude, because it seems to me that if that attitude is pervasive and we probably have young men who are challenged with the question of whether they really want to go into a trade because it's not as good as getting a degree at university, imagine what young women are also facing. I wonder if you are facing that or if that's an issue.

Actually, I would appreciate a response from each one of you.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Émond: I can give you a personal example.

I have a son who looked like he was heading to university. He was a computer analyst. He was really good, I must say. He was employed by National Defence, but one day, the budget was cut and his position was eliminated. He came home and announced that he was going to attend Le Chantier. Physically, he really was not the type to be working in construction. He spent his time inside, sitting at a computer.

I asked him if he was sure about his choice and he said that he was. He was sure of himself and off he went to enrol at Le Chantier where he was trained. Now he is the happiest guy in the world. He works year round on a construction site. I was blown away by it all.

This is a concrete example of a kid who came out of grade 11 with an overall average of 94%, who got a \$3,000 scholarship for college, but who ended up not going to university. He has made a success of himself by taking this training and today he is earning a living and building his own house. He is as happy as a clam.

As for women, we trained female electricians at the Commission scolaire de Laval and then we hired them. They work for us. Two years ago, as part of a staff recognition evening, one of those women was recognized for the quality of her work, by her peers, no less. That is quite the achievement. I say that we need to keep doing this. We really must value women all the time.

•(1645)

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Ms. Penner or Mr. Smillie, do you encounter the same thing?

Mr. Christopher Smillie: I've seen that attitude. In fact, it's even intertwined in some of the systems that are in place in this country. If someone applies to move to Canada, they find it difficult to be admissible because the point system doesn't give the same recognition to trades training as it does a Ph.D. So I think there are attitude issues, but there are also systemic issues in terms of the programs and policies we've had for a long time, such as the immigration system.

Our organization is concerned about labour supply, so at the end of the day, when we're forecasting and figuring out what we need to do to get the workforce that we have to provide to our contractors, sometimes we look outside of Canada, and there are even little bits of that in the immigration system.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: It is somewhat systemic.

Ms. Penner, we're both from Manitoba, where we have a shortage of skilled labourers, and we brought in a lot of new Canadians to help fill that shortage. In Winkler and the surrounding areas, the Chamber of Commerce has identified one of the main problems as a shortage of skilled labour. They have partnered with the school divisions, so that high school kids who aren't going to university will go on the trades track. After they get through grade 12, they actually have the first part of their ticket. We find that the majority of young women are choosing the cosmetology route, which is fine. It is interesting to know why they're choosing that as opposed to the trades.

I have a 15-year-old daughter, and it's the same sort of thing. She was forced to go to a presentation on women in non-traditional roles, but she did not seem at all interested in it. I think we have to accept that some girls just aren't going to be interested.

A previous presenter was here and talked about the need for more women role models, so that young women can see that they can do it, can see what a woman looks like in a non-traditional role. I think you are a role model, and that is important. I appreciate your being here and telling your story.

Did you have a role model before you got into the construction business?

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: No, there were no women in the construction industry when I started. My father was a business owner, and that's how I got in.

I believe that to make the industry attractive to women there have to be more women. You don't want to send one woman out to a construction field where there are 20 guys surrounding her. Whether it's discrimination, harassment, or whatever, are they capable of handling that type of situation? We need more equal ground, more women in proportion to men.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Penner.

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank you very much for being here today. I cannot tell you how proud I am to be from Laval and to be able to say that

Le Chantier is in my riding. The work being done there is exceptional.

You referred to a training course which is scheduled for 2010, "Madame bricole tout". That is of particular interest to me because, in my opinion, one of the factors that makes young women take the plunge and choose a non-traditional occupation is when their mothers talk to them about it.

Now I am almost 60 and I am still afraid of hammers. I have five paintings on a desk at my home here in Hull. I bought a hammer and nails but the five paintings have been on my desk for three months. I am not going to hang them up, someone else will have to do it.

As girls we learned how to play with dolls while our brothers were learning how to play with hammers, screwdrivers, pliers and so on. I think that, by offering this kind of training, and by building awareness among women's groups like Les cercles de fermières, we may have a chance of convincing more young women to opt for the non-traditional occupations.

I do not know. I am just putting the idea out there. You are already so busy that it would not be right for us to find more projects for you. But I want your success to be even greater. I am thinking in terms of a network. There are networks for business women, but is there a network for women in non-traditional occupations where they can work collaboratively and encourage each other once they get a job?

• (1650)

Ms. Bianka Michaud: We do have a program designed to keep women in the field. It is for both graduates and students. It is about an eight-week program. I know that some girls have taken this training, which focuses a lot on communication. When they have problems at work, they sort them out. There are a quite a number of women who can talk about issues and motivate each other. Several girls have taken this training two or three times because they were able to draw support from it, but with work and family obligations and so on, they end up losing contact with each other and getting a little discouraged.

But, in the long term, it could be an idea that would work.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Would it be possible to set up a pilot project? Actually, there is a Status of Women Canada program, a partnership program. It could help in keeping young women in non-traditional occupations. You can speak to Sylvie after the meeting.

We are doing this because we want to find solutions to your problems. We need you to tell us what your challenges are, your recommendations, and how we can best help you. As female members of Parliament, we are engaged in a non-traditional occupation ourselves. It is a constant struggle to effect change. We are aware of the fact that, until 30% of members of Parliament are women, there will be no change. The same was true of female cashiers: until there were women doing the job, nothing changed. We really have to work together, to cooperate, and that is why we invited you here today. We want to have as much information as possible so that we can help you to continue your excellent work.

Ms. Penner, I congratulate you, you worked in the construction sector in 1990, in Manitoba. I was working on a farm in Saskatchewan at the time. And believe me, I know what you went through. I commend you, you really are an exceptional woman. As Ms. Hoepfner said, it is good to have women, role models like you, but we need to see and get to know these role models. We would never have met you. How is that possible? Are there no newspapers, magazines, that talk about women in non-traditional occupations? I do not know.

[English]

The Chair: There is one minute left.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I am sorry, Madam Chair, you know how passionate I am.

[English]

The Chair: The one thing we will do is create a poster and have Ms. Penner be the poster girl.

Ms. Penner, I'm sorry. I will give you an extra couple of minutes for my smart-alecky comment.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: What was the question?

The Chair: A magazine, is what I think Ms. Demers asked about. A magazine or a publication that shows women in this position.

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: Any kind of literature, anything to encourage women to get into the industry, is a start. It is a hard industry, and women have to be able to stand up to the industry. I'm not saying it's just men; I'm saying it's a hard industry. When you send out crews, they go out to a specific job site. Some people are away from home for a long period of time. It is all over, right from start to finish, a tough industry. I believe that's probably the main reason why women have kind of stayed home to look after the family and the husband has gone out to work. My husband works in the industry, too, and is gone Monday to Friday and comes home on weekends. It's overall a completely different industry, when you look at factory work or anything like that. But anything to draw women into the industry is a good step in the future.

•(1655)

The Chair: Mr. Smillie, you have 25 seconds.

Mr. Christopher Smillie: That's all I need. I would recommend talking to the folks at the Alberta Women Building Futures. It's something I mentioned in my presentation. It's a joint program between Petro-Canada and the Government of Alberta. I would recommend talking to them about the literature they put out. It's sort of a growing organization in Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smillie.

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Penner, I didn't have a chance to talk to you at all and I'd like to do that. Are there any other women who work at Dig-All now?

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: Only in the administration end.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I also wondered, in regard to the supports...you obviously managed to get over a number of barriers

in order to do what you're doing. I'm wondering if you had any support within your family or the business in regard to child care or flexible hours. Was there anything available to you so you could do what you do? Obviously you're magnificent at what you do.

Mrs. Debra Faye Penner: I only took one day off after I had my babies and I was back in the office. I can't really speak to that end of it. I took my babies with me to work, and my mother worked in the office at that time, so we had day care in the office. That was a huge aspect of it. I don't know if I would have been able to go to work if that wasn't available.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: That's a unique situation, having that flexibility. It's just not there for so many women. The need for child care that can allow you to make that incredible contribution is so important.

That's interesting. Thank you for that.

We were talking about mentoring and the importance of that. I think as female legislators we understand that perhaps as much as anyone, because there are so few women. Like the women you talked about, we're subject to heckling, discrimination, and harassment. It's no different here than it is in your particular field.

In regard to that mentoring, I'm wondering, Mr. Smillie, if you know of any mentoring programs that will encourage women that you would feel comfortable about.

Mr. Christopher Smillie: In our universe, the only sort of system in place would be the joint apprenticeship and training committee, which is something between a group of the contractors in the area and a group of the trades. That joint apprenticeship committee is responsible for ironing out any issues with any apprentices in the field. I would say that's really the only linkage that a male or female apprentice would have in terms of formal linkages to employers and their program. There's a representative from a community college on those joint apprenticeship committees as well. That would be the only one I can think of in our universe, beyond any sort of ad hoc mentoring groups that are out there.

It really is about the relationship between the apprentice and the foreman who is supervising that apprentice. Is that journeyman or foreman giving them good advice and teaching them the trade, or is that person sending them to pick up coffee? At the end of the day, it really is about that relationship between the apprentice and the journeyman, where the rubber hits the road.

If we were looking for a spot where we need to improve, I would say the best place to start would be job site supervision and what we can do to ensure that job site supervision is supportive for young women and men.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I want to step back and open this up to everyone.

We've seen a rise in the number of companies and businesses. Has there been an equal recognition of the need for pay equity or the need for affirmative action and parental leave strategies? Has that been part of the discussion?

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. René Barrette: Do you mean to get women into the building trades specifically?

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: To encourage women.

[Translation]

Mr. René Barrette: This is what we have observed ourselves. These young women come to training with far more diplomas than the young men do. In Quebec, we are seeing a phenomenon that, I think, also applies across Canada: girls do better in higher education than boys. These women will have more access to high levels of responsibility and decision-making positions than the boys, who lag significantly behind in academic results.

I think that it is good that we are instituting these kinds of boards, and engaging in female-driven initiatives to open the way for other women. That is tremendous. In an ideal world, men would also undertake similar initiatives. I know that I am not directly answering your question, but if male employers are already beginning to make room for women in their operations, and there is no question about it, we are on our way to a better world already.

So I think that is what needs to be established with employers: partnerships, ways of welcoming women and their realities and, in doing so, putting an end to the tradition that says that it is always the woman who has to make sacrifices and to take time off for her children's doctors appointments. Men also have to start taking time off, they need to get their employers to understand that they need to take their children to the doctor, that their wives do not want to go and so they have to. That is how things will change.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I too would like to thank the witnesses for the very rich dialogue they've added to our study on women in non-traditional occupations.

Certainly, as I listen to you, it sounds like we actually need strategies from birth through to ongoing successful employment, with interventions all along the way to create perhaps what our vision is. It's difficult to know which is the most important in terms of creating that. Maybe it has to come from many different angles.

I grew up in a family with four girls. My father taught us to change the tires on our car—there was no way his daughters were going to be standing at the side of the road asking for help—and to dig ditches. The expectation amongst my siblings in our family was that you can and you need to be able to do anything.

So I look at that as one thing. And I guess as we look at “birth through”, I'm wondering if anyone has a sense of how we compare internationally, specifically in construction. I'm wondering if there's anywhere that's better than us.

I leave that open to anyone.

Mr. Christopher Smillie: I'll go ahead and start.

I did notice in some of my preparations for today that in Austria and in Germany, there is a focus on exposing young women to these competencies very early on. As a result, it looks like the economy has a higher penetration rate of people who are involved in these trades.

I don't have the study in front of me. I could get it and table it for you at the next meeting, if you would like, or I can send it to the clerk. You can take a look at it.

But there seems to be, from what I have read, a correlation between exposure in countries where they do expose children to these competencies—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Like what Laval is doing.

• (1705)

Mr. Christopher Smillie: Exactly, yes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Okay. Great.

Now, I can appreciate the fact that if you have a construction job to do, given our geography and climate, you tend to make hay when the opportunity is there in terms of really going for it. But in other places, to go back to our medical example, doctors do incredibly fierce hours also, and they've turned it around to do much more job sharing.

I'm a huge fan of having flexible opportunities for people. Instead of doing a 14-hour day, you have two people doing seven-hour days, working in partnership. Does the industry tend to accept flexibility in terms of...? I mean, you might need those 14 hours, but let's be more sensible about how we fill those 14 hours.

I leave that open to anyone.

Mr. Christopher Smillie: Recently, I think, with some of the changes in the economy, there has been an uptake a bit on the formal program, the work-sharing program, from the government. But generally it's a “work as much as you can, as long as you can” kind of industry. The contractor is demanding the work to be done, and the client, at the end of the day, is demanding that their manufacturing plant is built.

[Translation]

Mr. René Barrette: There is a bonus system that encourages trades people to work longer hours. There is a system that gives bonus hours so that new skills can be learned more quickly, and a wage scale that goes up as a function of the number of hours worked.

When construction workers have their plate full with work that needs to be done, they give it all they have got in order to improve their employment conditions. The notion of work-sharing has become difficult to pin down in their context. The bonus system needs to be re-designed.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Again, I would just use the example of physicians and 70-hour weeks. We've seen more women working as physicians.

As you indicated last week, when they come into that business they come into it in terms of what is reasonable and what will work in their lives in terms of the hours they put in.

Do I have any more time?

The Chair: You have about thirty seconds.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I would be very interested to hear from Mr. Smillie. You talked about having a seminar in March. How are you envisioning that and what are you looking towards?

Mr. Christopher Smillie: It's not my seminar; it's a symposium being put on by the Construction Sector Council. I don't want to speak for them, but I would suggest that the clerk or Madam Fry or even you yourself could call them and ask them for more information. They have a draft date, and I believe they're trying to do exactly what we're talking about here. I've let the cat out of the bag a little bit because they haven't announced it yet, but I made phone calls before I came here. It is in the sector council that

employers and labourers sit and deal with HRSDC on a trilateral basis.

Maybe we can request more information from them through the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming and for being patient and answering the questions. I specifically want to congratulate Mr. Smillie on having the most extraordinary gender sensitivity in his language and in everything he has said. With people like you in construction, women will come. You will change the culture immediately.

Thank you very much.

We are going in camera to discuss future business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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