

What Works – Alberta

Effective Practices Related to Women and Work

June 2005

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Welcome to the *What Works-Alberta* newsletter. The purpose of the newsletter is to share effective practices information related to the three core businesses of Alberta Human Resources and Employment: People, Skills and Workplace Investments. In keeping with Alberta's 100-year anniversary celebrations, the focus of this issue acknowledges the contributions made by Alberta's pioneering women. It also highlights the continuation of that pioneering spirit in today's women as they forge their way into new workplace territories. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter!

Alberta Women are Pioneers

Women contributing to the Alberta workforce

The term 'pioneer' according to one dictionary means, "to open or prepare others to follow" and "a person or group that originates or helps open up a new line of thought or activity or a new method or technical development." From the early Alberta women settlers who worked along side their husbands farming and ranching, to the women of today who are working in non-traditional occupations, Alberta women are pioneers. They have paved the way and continue to pave the way for women to contribute to the workforce.

One of the more famous contributions that women made to the workforce occurred in the early 1900s. The 'Famous Five': Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney and Irene Parlby appealed the Supreme Court of Canada decision all the way to the British Privy Council and was successful in having women included as 'persons' in the 'British North American Act' in 1929. This helped to start improving the quality of life for all women across Canada and was the beginning of an important century for Alberta women at work.

Pioneering women have been responding to the need for skilled workers for a long time. Canadian women responded to the need for workers as part of the Second World War effort. They enlisted to work as clerks, stenographers, drivers, cooks and mechanics. Women were also hired to work in various industries such as manufacturing, trades and transport at this time.

Women today continue to respond to the need for workers. They are getting the training and support they need to help them contribute to the workforce.

In this issue, read about:

- tools to help employers recruit and retain women
- training programs to help Alberta women enter non-traditional roles, and
- support programs and resources for women in transition.

Brave Women Inspire Programs

Training programs for Aboriginal women

During the Second World War, a number of courageous Alberta Aboriginal women responded to a call for help and joined the war effort. Some responded out of a need to be patriotic or adventurous and for others it was a chance for a change in employment. In the mid-1980s a group of adventurous Alberta Women of the Métis Nation (WMN) also heeded a call for help, this time the call came from within their community. The WMN identified a need for workplace training as a priority issue for its members. The organization's primary objective was to bridge the gap between Métis women and the labour market.

The Asokan Project

The WMN began work on an initiative to develop a management-training program for Métis women. In September 1990, a proposal was developed to offer business courses that focused on skill upgrading and special workshops that dealt with issues relevant to the lives of Native women. The *Asokan Project* was approved and the first Business Administration/Accounting Certificate Program (BAACP) was developed. In August 1991, the BAACP was offered to a class of 20 Aboriginal women at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT).

The meaning of the Cree word *asokan* is 'bridge' and aptly describes the project's goal of preparing students to make the transition into an administrative and accounting-based role. The BAACP program is a 39-week program comprised of various courses from NAIT's School of Business diploma program. Added to this are various personal and cultural courses plus a four-week work experience.

Since the first class, there have been 16 subsequent graduations with over 300 Aboriginal women. The goal of the program is to have 80% of the students complete the program and 70% of the graduates employed in a related field or enrolled in further post-secondary education. Each graduating class met or exceeded its target goal. For example in 2004, the program completion rate was 85% and the post-employment/enrolment rate was 80%. One of the successful graduates from the 2004 class commented, "Your program changed my life 100%. My success is measured not only by my work, but by my ever changing attitude and greater self-esteem."

According to Tracy Friedel, *Asokan Project's* Coordinator, the delivery style of the program is the reason for the success of the program: "All of the students are in the same classes; the program incorporates cultural aspects into the training such as Aboriginal teachings, access to Elders and Métis history." In addition, NAIT has adopted *Asokan Project's* processes for participant selection and course delivery style for two new Aboriginal programs.

Since 1991, WMN and *Asokan Project* have developed partnerships with over 125 employers who act as work experience training hosts. This program is funded by the Métis Nation of Alberta Zone IV, Métis Nation Alberta Head Office, and Alberta Human Resources and Employment. *Asokan Project's* main training partner is NAIT.

To find out more about Asokan Project contact Tracy Friedel at (780) 471-7584 or visit their website at www.nait.ca/asokan.

The Tender Ties Agency

Inspired by the success of *Asokan Project's* BAACP, the *Tender Ties Agency Nursing Attendant/Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) Training Program* was created. This program was developed to help fill a need in the healthcare industry; specifically to provide Aboriginal health care clients with qualified Aboriginal nursing attendants.

The 21-week program was first offered in 1997 and includes NAIT's Nursing Attendant and EMR Training along with several personal development and cultural workshops and a six-week practicum placement at a health care facility in the Edmonton area. Many facility Care Managers have verbally commented on the high-level training the students receive from the program and in turn, have employed graduates as part of their health care team. Since the program began, 120 students have graduated and 90% or over have found training-related employment.

What makes this program unique is the focus on traditional holistic teachings integrated with medical training. The program also provides tutors, cultural teachers and support services to the students. According to Leslie Moncrieff, Program Coordinator, the *Tender Ties Agency Nursing Attendant and EMR Training Program* has made a positive difference in the lives of the students. They recruit individuals who have not had a successful education or employment history. "The program's intent is to empower Aboriginal women by giving them the confidence and skills to obtain gainful employment." She also believes the high success rate is due to the practicum training segment of the program, which provides graduates with the skills to obtain employment in the growing market.

For more information on Tender Ties Agency Nursing Attendant/EMR Training Program, contact Leslie Moncrieff at emrna@telus.net or by phone at (780) 963-8884/ (780) 720-0331.

Breaking with Tradition

Paving the path for women to choose non-traditional careers

WISEST Summer Research Program



Young female students who have completed grade 11 in Central and Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories have a unique opportunity! Through the *Summer Research Program*, an initiative created by *Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology (WISEST)* at the University of Alberta (U of A), young women are getting exposed to and excited

about different careers in the science and engineering disciplines. *WISEST's* mandate is to increase the proportion of women at higher levels of decision-making in the science and engineering fields, where they are least represented.

The *WISEST Summer Research Program* began in 1984. In 2004, there were 58 young women participants working on research project teams for six weeks in July and August. "Female students who have participated in the *WISEST Summer Research Program* have a stronger commitment to the sciences and engineering as a result of their experience," says Dr. Margaret-Ann Armour, one of the founding members of *WISEST*.

Over 50% of the students who participated in the program are employed in summer positions related to their studies during each of their undergraduate years. When compared with a peer group of students who did not participate in the program, the peer group did not have relevant summer jobs after their first year of undergraduate study. An opportunity to have relevant summer work experience as a university student is an important factor in encouraging students to complete graduate studies in their discipline and thus be a member of a pool of highly trained women.

Due to the success of the *WISEST Summer Research Program*, Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, adopted the U of A program in 1990. In addition, a similar project began at the University of Michigan and has had similar successful results.

The key ingredient for the success of the *WISEST Summer Research Program* is the commitment to improvement. Enhancements made to the program are:

- adding more opportunities for student interaction
- increasing the number and type of industries visited on field trips, and
- encouraging students from outside the Edmonton area to participate.

Booklets produced each year contain descriptions of the students' projects and event information held during the WISEST Summer Research Program. These are available by contacting Grace Ennis, WISEST Coordinator, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, either by email at wisest@chem.ualberta.ca or by phone at (780) 492-1842.

Operation Minerva

A Calgary-based organization, *Operation Minerva (OM)* is also interested in exposing young women to careers in the science and engineering areas. Driven by the fact that many girls tend to lose interest in science at about grade 8, *OM* created a model to aid in bringing young women and female science mentors together. The original *OM* model consists of a two-day conference: a one-day job shadow opportunity for the students and a one-day information and resource seminar. The focus of the conference is to increase the likelihood of young female students choosing high school courses in math and science for careers in engineering and science.

Since the first *OM* conference in Calgary in 1991, it quickly spread to other city centres in Alberta. The original *OM* model was recently changed to focus on the one-day job shadowing experience.

Prior to the job-shadowing day, the mentors are briefed about the project and are asked to choose interesting hands-on activities that bring out special aspects of the job.

"The key ingredient to making *OM* a success is the dedication of the volunteers on the *OM* Committees," says Joyce Luethy, Executive Director of Alberta Women's Science Network (AWSN). AWSN is the umbrella organization of *OM*. In Calgary, the committee is made up of science teachers, consultants, former *OM* participants and mentors. Some of the mentors are former participants who now work as engineers, science teachers or professors at the University of Calgary. A former *OM* grade 8 participant commented on her experience, "*Operation Minerva* is an experience whose effect lasts a lifetime."

This program is unique in Canada and is offered yearly in Calgary, Red Deer and Medicine Hat. More evidence that *OM* works is through the recognition it has received by others and the adoption of its model. A variation of *OM* emphasizing mathematics, is being developed in Tromsø, Norway. Starting in 2005, *OM* will embark on a three-year study to further evaluate the program.

For more information about Operation Minerva, please contact Joyce Luethy, Executive Director, Alberta Women's Science Network by email at awsn@awsn.com or by phone at (403) 282-6431.

Workplaces that Work for Women

A report on creating a workplace culture that attracts, retains and promotes women

Helping employers create a workplace culture that attracts, retains and promotes women is what the *Workplaces that Work* report is all about. This report was prepared for Canada's Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women group and launched at their meeting held in Edmonton in September 2003. The document provides guidelines to assist private-sector employers in creating workplaces that will attract, retain and promote women in high-growth industry sectors that are facing serious skill shortages.

Workplaces that Work presents a business case for creating workplaces that work for women and by extension, employees and employers. It presents strategies and highlights successful examples of effective workplaces from across Canada and explores the bottom-line results that can be achieved by organizations when they create a positive workplace culture for women.

Many employers today have a shortage of skilled workers. Hiring more women may be one way to alleviate the problem. Women are still underrepresented in many occupations. For example, in transportation, trades and construction, women represent seven percent of the workforce.

A workplace culture that is positive for women is good for all employees and employers because it helps businesses to:

- attract the best people in a time of skill shortages
- compete effectively for financial resources, investment, customers and market share
- improve decision making by having more diverse opinions around the table, and
- earn a higher return on investment through lower turnover costs, less employee absenteeism and better results for training and incentive dollars.

Along with business tips, *Workplaces that Work* includes a questionnaire, "Framework for Assessing Your Workplace"-20 questions designed to help employers assess their current practices for attracting, retaining and promoting women in their workplace. This can help them identify opportunities for change and growth.

Workplaces that Work is a free publication available by contacting Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Branch, southern regional office at (403) 297-6571 (for toll-free calls first dial 310-0000) or by fax at (403) 297-6567.



On the Journey to a Trade

Women helping build Alberta's future

Women Building Futures Society and *Skills Canada Alberta* are two organizations responding to the needs of women and employers in Alberta. They are helping women become more informed about and trained in trades and technology careers and at the same time responding to skill shortages in these areas.

Women Building Futures (WBF) is a registered, non-profit, charitable organization helping women prepare for and find employment in construction and related trades. Many industries across Canada, including Alberta are facing skill shortages in the trades. So to respond to this need, the *WBF* created *Journeywoman Start (JS)* in 1998.

Journeywoman Start

Journeywoman Start is a 14-week pre-apprenticeship training program that offers women hands-on skill training, safety certification, workplace culture preparation and academic upgrading. In 2004, 95% of the 60 women who completed the *JS* program successfully found and maintained employment. According to JudyLynn Archer, Executive Director of *WBF*, the reasons for the success of *JS* are:

- consulting with industry partners, the community, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, post-secondary institutions, construction and Aboriginal organizations
- meeting the training needs of women and their employers
- providing mentorship and retention support for graduates and their employers, and
- involving tradeswomen as instructors and mentors.

The JS program is being considered as a model by many communities across Canada, such as Vancouver, Yellowknife, Red Deer, Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray.

The success of the JS program has benefited both Alberta women and employers by:

- reducing the number of women and children living in poverty
- increasing the number of women earning a good living
- offering a pool of skilled workers to Alberta's construction industry, and
- increasing recruitment and retention of women in trades.

For more information about Women Building Futures Journeywoman Start program, contact JudyLynn Archer at (780) 452-1200 or visit www.womenbuildingfutures.com.

The Young Women Exploring Trades and Technologies Conference

Created in 2001, and hosted by Skills Canada Alberta (SCA), the Young Women Exploring Trades and Technologies Conference (YWETTC) is an event that provides high school girls with opportunities to discover and explore trades and technology careers. The one-day conference hosts 120 students from all over Alberta and is held in conjunction with the SCA Provincial Skills Competition.

The YWETTC provides senior high school girls, in Alberta, with hands-on, interactive learning events. The conference is made up of keynote speakers, demonstrations and tours to view the SCA Provincial Skills Competition events. These events range from autobody repair and welding to baking and fashion design.

Mentors are available to share their experiences, answer questions and participate in interactive round-table discussions. Participants leave the conference with more knowledge on how to get involved in training for specific careers.

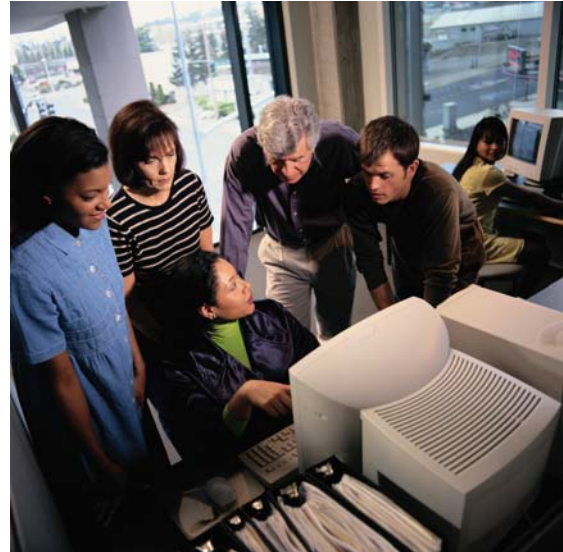
Students are asked to complete surveys at the end of the YWETTC. In 2004, 85% of the girls who completed the survey said the conference opened their eyes to new ideas of possible career paths. Feedback from the mentors was also positive and many continue to participate year-after-year. According to Tanya Wold, YWETTC Event Coordinator, the key ingredients to a successful conference are the live, hands-on skill demonstrations and interaction with female role models.

Recent enhancements made to the conference are:

- The number of speakers was reduced to allow more time for hands-on demonstrations.
- More mentors were invited to participate resulting in more careers being highlighted at the conference.
- The length of the conference was reduced to one day from two days, to minimize the amount of time students were away from school.

The 2005 YWETTC is sponsored by Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Red Deer College and Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

For more information about SCA's YWETTC, contact Tanya Wold at (780) 493-6625 or visit www.skillsalberta.com.



Building the Strength of Women in Transition

Assisting women to support themselves

Helping women help themselves is the focus of the following two programs. Both *Transitions* and *Opportunity Plus* offer women with high barriers to employment the support and services they need to gain confidence in themselves and their abilities. As well, the confidence and support from the community gives these women the courage to become independent and the financial means to support their family through employment.

Transitions to Employment

Distinctive Employment Counseling Services of Alberta (DECSA) is a non-profit organization in Edmonton that operates two programs to support women. One of these programs is *Transitions to Employment (Transitions)*. In 1991, it began as a pilot program to divert women involved in prostitution away from the criminal justice system. *Transitions'* goal is to teach skills that improve self-sufficiency and assist prostitutes and trans-gendered individuals who wish to leave the streets begin the process of changing their lifestyle and finding employment.

What makes the *Transitions* program in Alberta unique is its focus on helping clients enter a training or education program geared towards employment. *Transitions'* approach is holistic and integrated. The program includes up to 12

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Building the Strength continued...

months of individualized service and six months of follow-up support. Some examples of the services are:

- one-on-one life skills counseling
- outreach community support for medical and daily-living needs
- employment counseling to develop realistic goals
- contact with employers
- access to suitable and reliable housing, and
- clothing support for clients to attend school or work.

Due to the nature of the barriers facing this group, one of the ways *Transitions* measures success is based on the client making progress towards their goal. Other successful outcomes include placement into direct employment and/or back to school or entry into a more structured employment program. Participants that secure employment are provided with on-the-job support to ensure job retention.

Through these activities, the participants develop a sense of self-confidence and courage to make life-altering decisions and changes to their lifestyle.

Feedback received from women who have accessed the *Transitions* program is positive and portrays how successful the program was for them:

- “I have worked hard at doing well. I fell down many times but my life is worth something and these people [Transitions staff] have helped.”
- “You’ve shown me that life has so much to offer if I put my mind to it. I can accomplish almost anything.”

Transitions was commended, along with other community support partners, in the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton 1996-2001 Report. In 2001, *Transitions* was nominated for a Laurel Award, a provincial program that recognizes the innovation and creativity of non-profit organizations. *Transitions* is funded by Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

Opportunity Plus

Since the inception of *Opportunity Plus* in 1997, the program’s goal is to assist women overcome barriers resulting from family and/or domestic violence and move towards sustainable and satisfying employment.

Although the primary barrier connecting all of the participants in the *Opportunity Plus* program is a history of family violence, secondary barriers such as addictions, mental health, child care, minimal labour market attachment and low education level issues also contribute to difficulty in securing employment. The individualized approach of the program is designed to help each woman understand and break the cycle of abuse so they can move on to independence.



The *Opportunity Plus* program offers employment and support services for up to 12 months and programming specific to each client’s needs. Some examples of services are: a variety of life management and employment readiness workshops, an opportunity for work experience in the community based on their interest and skill level, and direct linkages to employers. Once placed, clients are supported for up to six-months to retain employment or stay in school.

In 1997, 80 women participated in the program. From 1998 to 2004, 883 women have completed the *Opportunity Plus* program. The success of the program is measured by looking at employment and/or educational outcomes. The success rate for overcoming barriers, finding employment or returning to school has consistently been between 65 and 70%.

For more information about the Transitions or Opportunity Plus programs, contact DECSA Intake and Marketing Unit at (780) 471-9621.

RESOURCES

for Women



Woman Today

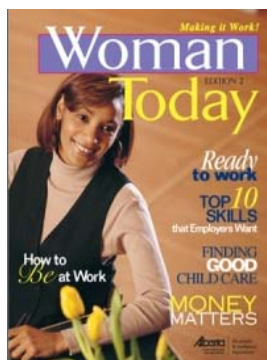
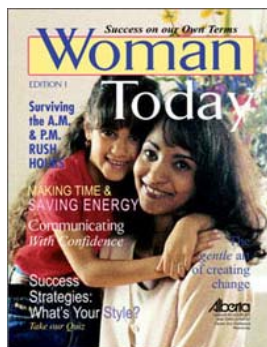
Information-packed publication for women

The magazines *Woman Today* editions 1 and 2, are bright, information-packed publications offering women information and advice to make positive life changes. *Woman Today* publications have helpful articles, real-life stories, recipes, quizzes and more.

The first edition, *Woman Today: Success on our Own Terms*, is intended for women who are going back to school or getting ready to look for work. This publication includes topics such as “Making Time, Saving Energy” and “The Gentle Art of Creating Change”. Articles provide inspiration and information on everything from setting personal goals to surviving the morning and evening rush in a busy household.

The second edition, *Woman Today: Making it Work!* is intended for women who are preparing to enter or re-enter the workforce. This magazine presents valuable information designed to help women balance the demands in their lives with confidence. Topics such as “Could Self-Employment Work for You?” and “Finding Good Child Care”, are examples of some of the articles that share tips on everything from acting professionally to delegating household chores, plus helpful advice on what to do about harassment in the workplace.

Woman Today, editions 1 and 2, are developed and distributed by the People, Skills and Workplace Resources Branch of Alberta Human Resources and Employment. To download or order a copy, please go to www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop.



Journey to Success

An Aboriginal Women's Business Planning Guide

After listening and paying attention to the needs of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs, Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Aboriginal leaders, produced the guide, *Journey to Success*. Released in January 2004, this guide contains information that reflects the input made by Aboriginal women, entrepreneurs and representatives of Aboriginal women's organizations across Canada.

Targeted for Aboriginal women thinking about starting their own business, *Journey to Success* is an easy-to-use tool that presents practical ideas and advice along with guided steps for starting a business. Topics include everything from “What do I need to know before starting a business?” to “Can I keep my business going and still have time to look after my family?” This publication, distributed to women's organizations across Canada, is available in Inuktitut, French and English.

To order a copy of Journey to Success, email your request to infopubs@ainc-inac.gc.ca or call Shbelley Munro, Policy Analyst, Strategic Policy and Planning Directorate, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada toll-free at 1-800-567-9604.

What is an Effective Practice?

We define a practice as being:

- activities, procedures
- techniques, approaches, concepts, or
- philosophies, policies or programs.

Effective practices are those practices that have been **proven** “to have worked” in achieving the desired outcomes.

Criteria to determine an effective practice are:

- data to support positive results (quantitative or qualitative)
- repeatability of results (track record over time), and
- recognition by others or other evidence to support the effective practice.

Share Your Success Story!

What Works-Alberta invites you to share your effective practices. If you have an idea for a future article, please complete the template provided. If you would like more information, please contact:

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Below is a copy of the template for submitting effective practices information. It is intended to be a guide to help compile information about your practice. We hope this makes it easier to identify and share “what worked” with readers.

Provide the name of the practice. (Examples of a practice are: a project, program, policy, technique, procedure, approach, activity or concept)
Describe the problem, situation or issue that gave rise to the practice. (What business need the practice is addressing)
Outline when the practice was first implemented.
Describe the key elements of the practice.
Explain what worked well in the practice.
Describe the benefit (or good) that has come about to either the client or organization as a result of the practice.
Provide measures of the success of the practice. The data presented as evidence should demonstrate: a track record over time, link back to the problem, situation or issue the practice was trying to address and can be either quantitative or qualitative or both.
Has the practice been recognized by others to be effective? If yes, describe the type(s) of recognition received. (E.g. awards, positive feedback from users, adoption of the practice by others, positive evaluation study)
Please identify the key contact for this project. Please list the name ONLY if you have obtained or are giving permission for this person to be contacted by the readers of the newsletter. Be sure to include name, phone number, e-mail, and mailing address.

Please complete and forward to Jacqueline Wallis at Jacqueline.Wallis@gov.ab.ca.

What Works-Alberta is a newsletter produced by the Organizational Planning and Effectiveness (OPE) Branch of **Alberta Human Resources and Employment**.



Email: WhatWorks.Alberta@gov.ab.ca



the people
& workplace
department

