

# Participating For Change

Prepared for the

Women's Employment and Training Coalition

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April 2000

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the women, community-based agencies, agency staff and federal and provincial staff who contributed their time, expertise and experience to this project.

We especially thank the women who conceived this project and raised the money to complete it;

- Cathie Cookson
- Yasmin Jamal
- Emily Mak
- Jo Rekart

as well as the WETC Steering Committee members;

- Marcia Braundy
- Marnie Marley
- Jo Rekart
- Ronnie Sun

who gave generously of their time and energy.

Our special thanks go out to Bonnie Evans, editor extraordinaire, for her final editing work.

This research project would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Status of Women Canada. We thank Lorraine Cameron and Agnes Lui for their continued faith in WETC's work.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1.0 Executive Summary
- 2.0 Introduction
- 3.0 Project Objectives
  - 3.1 *Methodology*
- 4.0 Policy and Legislative Issues
  - 4.1 *Employment Insurance Act*
  - 4.2 *Labour Market Development Agreement*
  - 4.3 *Impact on Women's Access*
  - 4.4 *Women's Employment Advisory Committee*
- 5.0 Community Issues – Barriers to Access
  - 5.1 *Community-based Trainers*
  - 5.2 *Participants in Training*
  - 5.3 *Marginalized and unrecognized sectors*
  - 5.4 *Rural women*
- 6.0 The Role of WETC
  - 6.1 *Background – the Herstory of WETC*
  - 6.2 *Restructuring the organization*
  - 6.3 *Funding*
  - 6.4 *Establishing Priorities*
- 7.0 Recommendations

## APPENDICES

- I Terms of Reference: WEAC
- II Participant Profiles
- III WETC Members Interview Responses
- IV Focus Groups
- V Provincial Policies and Programs
- VI Participant Recommendations
- VII Interview Questionnaire
- VIII List of Regional Women's Centres
- IX Letter to the Ministers
- X WETC Flyer

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women's Employment and Training Coalition (WETC), founded in 1985, is a coalition of individuals, community groups and organizations from both the Lower Mainland and other parts of British Columbia who are involved in women's employment and training issues.

In 1999 there had been several changes both in the internal workings of the organization and in the external context in which it operated that led WETC members to conclude that a re-evaluation of the goals and efficacy of WETC was in order. WETC applied for funding to conduct that evaluation as well as to research current issues around women's training and employment. The objectives of the project were:

- Through consultation with community groups, governments, and institutions establish the relevance of WETC.
- Create a herstory of WETC based on interviews and past reports for use during the consultation process.
- Examine the impact of the LMDA and EI reform on women's training and employment.
- Determine priorities, and explore and develop a framework and action plan for both the rebuilding of the organization and for continuing the tradition of advocacy on behalf of women.
- Use the information gathered in the course of our research to lobby for the reinstatement of WEAC.

Because of the broad scope of the project, we employed a variety of research techniques to meet our objectives. We reviewed written documentation from WETC files, and interviewed current and past WETC members. In researching current issues we interviewed individual women, community-based training organizations, women's centres and government officials. We also researched relevant government policy and legislation. Our methodology was participatory and action-oriented and resulted in substantial information-sharing and the building of new coalitions around issues of mutual concern.

We found that the new Employment Insurance Act (EI) and the on-going devolution of powers from the Federal to the Provincial government through the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) both presented serious barriers for those women who are from poor, immigrant and other marginalized sectors. The Employment Insurance Act has eliminated many women who previously had access to training through its benefit programs. There are serious questions arising from the LMDA around the status of the Designated Group Policy formerly in place in federal programs. As well it is unclear when the process of devolution will be complete, and what changes in the way programs are implemented will take place.

There was a general feeling among the participants in our research, that consultation around these issues had been either inadequate or non-existent. The sudden termination of the co-chaired policy forum, the Women's Employment Advisory Committee, which included WETC members,

and federal and provincial representatives closed off one of the few lines of communication left to these women.

There was a palpable sense of frustration and urgency in the conversations we had with community-based trainers and the women they serve. They cited a number of barriers faced by women, both generally and specifically. Many of the staff from the training agencies have been involved in training and employment programs for an extended period of time, and have had enough experience in dealing with shifts in government policies, agencies and programs to have gained an historical perspective. Their perception, corroborated by the stories we heard from training participants, was that program policy is increasingly removed from the day-to-day reality of the women who need these services. The increasing sense of pessimism that pervaded the discussion of these issues reflected their feeling that their issues are increasingly ignored by both policy-makers and the public at large.

Community-based organizations that specialize in the delivery of training and employment programs serve large numbers of poor and marginalized people, many of whom are women. Women's centres deliver services directly to women, and in some cases children. The staff of these organizations are highly skilled and motivated professionals. These organizations have experienced serious problems as a result of both the changes in government delivery systems and the more generalized cut-backs in budgets within the social service safety net.

Education and information-sharing played a key role in securing the cooperation of the women who participated in our focus groups. Many of the women we interviewed were from immigrant communities and had English as a second language. For some it was an introduction to the concept of advocacy, and for many it was their first experience of looking at their roles and responsibilities through a broadly democratic and specifically Canadian lens.

There are several sectors of women workers whose exclusion from the normal safety nets is nearly complete. For these women, nearly all of whom are immigrants, issues of the LMDA or EI benefits are irrelevant as are considerations of access to training. Those sectors include domestic workers and the industrial home workers. These women are not only excluded from training and employment programs, but from basic employment standards and labour legislation.

Rural women also face special issues of physical isolation and dependence. Representatives from regional women's centres told us that programs and policies are developed with urban objectives in mind, and that rural voices, needs and issues are ignored

While it is clear that women have made important gains in the last fifteen years, it is equally clear that those gains have primarily benefited educated women from the middle class. Women who live in poverty, immigrant women, First Nations women and other women of colour, and women with disabilities still face significant barriers to training and employment, as do women interested in accessing training and jobs in trades and technical fields.

There was general agreement among all of the people we interviewed, including representatives from both the federal and provincial governments that there continues to be a compelling need for advocacy in order to reduce or eliminate those barriers.

WETC's historic role in providing a framework for a broad coalition of organizations concerned with barriers to training and employment for women is as relevant today as ever. The challenge for the organization is to find an effective way to continue in that role. The recommendations for reaching that goal are as follows:

- ◆ WETC needs to explore alternative structures to build a province-wide organization that ensures collaborative community-based partnerships. Alternative technologies such as the Web sites, email, and teleconferencing, should be explored in order to maintain effective communication with its membership.
- ◆ Federal and provincial governments acknowledge the value of the role WETC plays in representing women's issues. WETC should apply to either or both levels of government for core funding in order to ensure the coordination of efforts and the stability of the organization.
- ◆ The mandate of WEAC should be expanded to include an examination of all provincial and federal policies and programs through a gender-based lens.
- ◆ WETC needs to continue its role in the dialogue among labour market partners as the advanced education and training system devolves and re-evolves, in order to provide insight and feedback on the issues affecting women and the barriers they face in gaining access to training and education.
- ◆ WETC should develop a short-term action plan that focuses on the issues surrounding the LMDA and the EI Act.
- ◆ WETC needs to find ways to be more visible and pro-active in the community.
- ◆ WETC should establish long-term priorities for action through broad-based discussion with community groups – possibly through the vehicle of a province-wide forum and/or electronic networks.
- ◆ WETC should work to ensure the development of initiatives that specifically target women who face multiple barriers, i.e. women with disabilities, First Nations women, women of colour, immigrants, women of low socio-economic status, and single mothers.
- ◆ WETC should collaborate with community-based training organizations and educational institutions to develop supportive learning models such as mentoring programs that provide women with employment, and viable education and employment opportunities

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Women's Employment and Training Coalition (WETC) is a coalition of individuals, community groups and organizations from both the Lower Mainland and other parts of British Columbia who are involved in women's employment and training issues. Formed in 1985, membership in WETC is open to individual women as well as groups that support the equality rights of women and that are concerned with women's employment and training issues. Members of WETC represent a broad range of organizations including private, college and community-based trainers, First Nations organizations, organizations for women with disabilities, women's centres, WITT organizations, and union and government representatives. Over the past fifteen years, WETC has acted as an advocate for women, and advisor to government on those policies and programs that have an impact on women's access to training and employment. An unfunded volunteer organization, WETC has a remarkable track record of success in its efforts to remove barriers that affect women.

By 1998 there had been several changes both in the internal workings of the organization and in the external context in which it operated that led WETC members to conclude that a re-evaluation of the goals and efficacy of WETC was in order. WETC, like many other women's organizations in the 1980s, had experienced internal dissension over issues of power and voice. As a result some women left the organization. As well, the work culture in Canada was shifting. Women had far less time available for volunteer work, and employers were less likely to allow them to incorporate their work with WETC into their workday. All of these factors meant that fewer and fewer women were carrying an ever larger burden for the organization. And finally shifts in policy around equity issues as well the protracted process of devolution of responsibility from the federal to provincial government hampered the effectiveness and focus of advocacy efforts. All of these factors led WETC to apply for funding that would allow them to place their organization in a historical context, examine current training and employment issues as they affected women, and determine the role of WETC in the future.

## **3.0 PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

Initially, the WETC steering committee applied for and received funding to research the continued relevance of their organization using as a framework, the provincial document, "Women's Employment Strategy: Options for Initiatives," which had been a consultation paper of the provincial Ministries of Employment and Investment and Women's Equality. However it quickly became apparent that the compelling issues in current government policy centred on the changes to the Employment Insurance Act, (EI) and the devolution of responsibilities to the provincial government through the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA). The implications and very real consequences of those changes were of paramount importance both to trainers and educators and to the women they served. As a consequence, we focussed on the implications of those two policies in our discussions with community groups and government agencies.

The sudden and unexpected dismantling of the Women's Employment Advisory Committee (WEAC) a jointly co-chaired policy and program discussion forum between WETC, the federal

government, and more recently the provincial government, added another objective to our work. Thus our final objectives were:

- Through consultation with community groups, governments, and institutions establish the relevance of WETC.
- Create a herstory of WETC based on interviews and past reports through the production of a report and flyer.
- Examine the impact of the LMDA and EI reform on women's training and employment.
- Determine priorities, and explore and develop a framework and action plan for both the rebuilding of the organization and for continuing the tradition of advocacy on behalf of women.
- Use the information gathered in the course of our research to lobby for the reinstatement of WEAC.

### ***3.1 Methodology***

Because of the broad scope of the project, we employed a variety of research techniques to meet our objectives. WETC had no previous written history or evaluation, and so in order to document the herstory of the organization itself, we reviewed minutes from meeting, briefs to policymakers, funding proposals, conference reports, and information sheets. We also interviewed previously active and senior members of WETC and documented their experience with the organization and its work. Specifically we interviewed five women, three community representatives and two from colleges and universities. We asked them to reflect on the positive contributions made by WETC as well as the limitations of the organization and its advocacy efforts. (See Appendix III). We also examined WETC's role in the context of our interviews with individual women, community groups, and government officials.

In order to meet two of our other objectives – those of understanding what the current issues are in women's employment and training, and determining the ongoing relevance of WETC as an advocacy organization, we used written questionnaires in face-to-face and teleconference interviews, and organized focus groups, as well as doing a thorough search of current research documents, papers, reports, and legislation. Interviews were conducted with individuals representing community organizations, including eight Women's Centres from around the province, and government staff, both federal and provincial. We also interviewed individual women in focus groups who had or were participating in training or employment programs.

We were particularly concerned that our findings reflect the diversity of women in British Columbia. Immigrant and refugee serving organizations are among the leaders in the non-profit sector providing training and employment assistance for women, and we included a number of those organizations in our research.

By expanding the research beyond the Lower Mainland, we were also able to identify, support and integrate the efforts of those working on similar issues in more isolated areas of the province, in part by including them in a face-to-face policy session with regional and local HRDC officials, Status of Women Canada, and other WETC members.



A complete list of the community organizations, individuals, and government agencies interviewed can be found in Appendix II. The questionnaire used in our interviews is reproduced in Appendix VII.

From the beginning this has been a participatory and action-oriented project. Because we were examining current issues with a variety of people who are actively involved in organizations that deal with those issues, the project became a forum for discussion and the exchange of information. Initially, community groups were slow to participate. Many of them were struggling with major issues of funding cutbacks, staff changes, and workplace stress. As well we found that there was a divergence in the understanding that various groups had of the issues – especially the implications of the LMDA. A few had no knowledge of the Agreement, while others were very knowledgeable about its implementation and its consequences. Our approach with the individual women participants in training included the sharing of information. The information they received about the purpose of our project, and the questions we asked engendered dialogue about the roles and responsibilities of women and women-serving organizations as well about as the role and meaning of advocacy.

During the course of this project, important changes continued to occur in policies and programs that have an impact on women's training and employment, and so WETC continued its work as advocates for women, especially around the LMDA and the changes to EI. As the training-based research participants became aware both of the implications of changes in government policy, and the role of WETC they began to feel a part of the project, and to understand its benefits for them. Individual staff and agencies realized that the lobbying work done by WETC enhanced their own lobbying efforts around issues of access for women. This sparked keen interest in the project as well as bringing together a new coalition of groups around a common purpose.

The sense of empowerment gained by participants in this process was a demonstration of the efficacy of the methodology used – not just to gain information for our own use, but to enhance the experience of the participants, and to expand and focus advocacy in support of women's access issues.

#### **4.0 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ISSUES**

Women in need of access to training and employment face a multitude of issues. In some cases they are issues that have an impact on all women; in other cases, the issues are specific to, or exacerbated for, particular groups. For example, many immigrant women lack the necessary English language skills or certification to enter the workforce at more than the most basic level. Ironically, it is for these women, who face so many other barriers, that the impact of the changes in EI legislation is greatest. For all women, however, the implications of the LMDA and the changes to EI rank as two of the most serious obstacles they face in obtaining the training necessary in order to obtain meaningful employment.

The problems already surrounding the EI Act, and especially the LMDA were exacerbated by the abrupt termination of the Women's Employment Advisory Committee (WEAC). This jointly co-chaired committee between the Federal government, WETC, and more recently the provincial government, was a forum for discussion of policies and programs as they affected women, and its suspension meant that an important channel for advocacy had been cut off. Thus the reinstatement of this forum became a component of our work.

#### ***4.1 Employment Insurance Act***

The EI Act replaced the Unemployment Insurance Act in 1996. Under the new Act a worker has to accumulate between 420 and 700 hours of insurable work in order to qualify for benefits. A first time worker, or one who is returning to the workforce after an absence from the workforce of two years must accumulate 910 hours of insurable work. The benefits have been reduced to 55% of a claimant's weekly earnings with a new maximum of \$750 per week. Training programs provided under the EI Act will, after the completion of LMDA negotiations, fall under provincial administration. Until that time HRDC will remain as the delivery agent for EI programs, and policy and programs issues will be co-managed by both the provincial and federal governments.

Not only are there increased barriers for women who are no longer eligible for either EI benefits or training, but there is also a significant shift in the way in which training is delivered that not only has an impact on women seeking training, but on agencies delivering that training as well. Historically the training and employment programs offered by community agencies have been funded through Project-Based Training. Using this system, the Federal government paid the agency directly for the development and implementation of programs. This system has been abolished under the new Act. Under the new system, EI eligible clients go to a Training Assessment Centre, where they are expected to submit their own training plan, including cost estimates to the assessment worker. That worker, after assessing the client and the plan, decides if it is suitable. She then negotiates the costs with the client, who is expected to contribute either monies or in-kind services as her contribution to the training. (In kind services, for example, might include the client agreeing to ask a family member to do childcare – rather than having it provided. She could then claim to be contributing the equivalent of childcare costs to her training program.)

#### ***4.2 Labour Market Development Agreement***

The LMDA was signed on April 25, 1997. It is a framework agreement between the Federal government and the Province of British Columbia that allows co-management of Canada's employment benefits and support in a manner complementary to provincial employment programs. The partners to the agreement are Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC), the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT), and the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR). All parties cooperate in the planning, priority setting and design of EI Labour Market Development Programs (referred to as employment benefits and support measures (EBSMs)). Currently six other jurisdictions, including Quebec, have provincial delivery agreements, and one other, Ontario, is in negotiations.

The LMDA is a two-phase initiative. The first phase implemented co-management of and shared responsibility for the active labour market programming (EBSMs) available under Part Two of the EI Act. According to the Greater Vancouver LMDA News Bulletin, these programs include:

- Targeted Wage Subsidies
- Self Employment Assistance
- Job Creation Partnerships
- Employment Assistance services
- Training Purchases

The second phase, currently being negotiated, could result in the Province having full delivery responsibility for EI labour market programs. This could include the transfer from the Federal government of approximately \$766 million over the next three years, as well as the transfer of 375 federal employees. Negotiations centre on just how clients would be served under an integrated system and what resources would be available to provide such service. At this time the Federal government has not confirmed program allocations beyond 2001.

Funds that historically were available under the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) are not to be part of the eventual transfer of funding to the province, and are not administered under the Federal/Provincial agreement. This includes funding for Income Assistance, for immigrants, people with disabilities, and Aboriginal people.

### ***4.3 The Impact on Women's Access***

The new EI Act has had a profoundly negative effect on women's access to benefits, including access to training. Compounding the problem has been the cut of funding from the Consolidated Revenue Fund and subsequent shift of the onus for training to the EI Fund and its emphasis on private institutional or non-profit fee-for-service programs.

A recent study from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) estimates that, based on Statistics Canada figures, the percentage of unemployed women eligible for EI benefits dropped from 70% in 1989 to only 31% in 1997, and the most recent EI Monitoring and Assessment Report (March 1999) states that there has been a further 20% decrease in women receiving benefits since 1996. There is a perception in the community that only full time workers are eligible for benefits under the new Act, and the CLC study seems to corroborate this perception. It shows a system in which benefits are shifting from marginalized part time or seasonal workers to full time workers between jobs. It points out, for example, that while the overall number of maternity claims has dropped since the implementation of the new Act, the amount of each claim has risen. Kevin Hayes, chief economist of the CLC is convinced that further study will show that the poorer the worker, the less likely she will be covered by EI.

All of this means that women who were once eligible for Unemployment Insurance, and therefore for training are not longer eligible. This is particularly true for part time non-standard and

marginalized workers such as seasonal workers, domestic workers and home-based piece workers. These women no longer have the opportunity to improve their economic conditions through further training or employment programs. Frequently such women have the necessary skills for better jobs, but lack the Canadian credentials that formerly could be obtained through employment programs. All too often such women have no choice but to take low paying, and, at times, illegal and/or unsafe jobs. Many of them are subject to pressures to work for less than minimum wage, to forgo holiday or vacation pay, or to work long hours without legal overtime compensation.

In addition, the shift from Project-Based Training means there are significantly fewer training programs in the non-profit sector which traditionally had delivered the bulk of services to the poor and marginalized members of society. Several large immigrant and refugee-serving institutions in the Lower Mainland were so concerned about the impact these changes would have on their client population, that they commissioned a report on the implications of the change from project-based training (Transitions: An Analysis of the Impact of Funding Purchase and Case Management Changes on Immigrants, Employment Eligible Refugees and Immigrant Serving Organizations: Martin Spigelman Research Associates).

In his report, Dr. Spigelman estimates that three immigrant serving agencies (MOSAIC, ISS and SUCCESS) stand to lose \$3 million dollars from their budgets along with the attendant lay-off of highly skilled and experienced staff. Along with the agencies involved, there is significant risk to the people they serve. Many mainstream organizations are not equipped to handle the diversity of languages needed to provide training, and many immigrants are intimidated by the English language skills needed to integrate into those institutions. In the new training regime these same people are expected, as Dr. Spigleman points out, “to advocate for themselves and to navigate the maze of federal, provincial and institute rules, regulations and requirements; . . . [and] to fully understand their strengths and weaknesses, assets and liabilities in the Canadian context, or to research their training needs relative to the demands of the Canadian labour market.” He concludes that, “Very simply, many immigrants and refugees do not yet have the skills and experience needed to be sophisticated consumers. . . .many immigrants and refugees are more likely to be disempowered than empowered by the individualized funding model. . . .” While Dr. Spigelman’s report focuses on immigrants, his conclusions are equally true for all marginalized women, immigrant or otherwise, in British Columbia.

The barriers imposed by the EI Act are compounded by the protracted negotiations surrounding the phasing-in of the LMDA. In theory, a provincial delivery agreement would support the development of a coordinated and integrated labour market strategy that met the needs of unemployed British Columbians, and at the same time assisted communities in transition and supported provincial priorities and directions. However, the Agreement and the transition process have in themselves become an obstacle for community-based organizations and clients due to the constantly changing rules and personnel. The organizations were caught between a system without clear guidelines and communications, and clients who interpreted the problems as yet another cutback to the social services system. For example, the LMDA specifically refers to a “Skills, Loans and Grants” employment benefit, which requires a client contribution in cash or in kind. This only increases the barriers for women living in poverty who do not have the resources, nor the capacity to take on a level of debt in order to secure training.

Of especial importance to WETC and other groups advocating on behalf of women, was the exclusion of the “Designated Groups Policy” from the new agreement. This HRDC policy was designed to ensure that training dollars were directed to those most disadvantaged in the labour force. WETC’s lobbying efforts to reverse that exclusion did secure the addition of one sentence, “Equity principles with respect to the members of under represented groups will be respected in the design and delivery of programs and services.” However the definition of “Equity principles” has not been clearly defined either federally or provincially. WETC felt strongly that the Federal and Provincial governments had failed to apply a gender-based analysis in the development and implementation of this Agreement along with its attendant services and programs as well as in the development of the Federal EI legislation. This lack of analysis led many to have reservations about the level of commitment or understanding on the part of the province to deliver programs previously managed by HRDC under the Designated Group Policy.

#### ***4.4 The Women’s Employment Advisory Committee (WEAC)***

In 1985, members of WETC began to build a consultative dialogue with senior representatives in the BC and Yukon regional office of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (now HRDC). In 1989 this informal process was formalized into the Women’s Employment and Advisory Council (WEAC) with terms of reference and regular quarterly meetings. (See Appendix I.) WEAC gave WETC and the women it represents a direct line to policy and program development and a potential for influencing and shaping that policy. For the regional federal officials of CEIC/HRDC, WEAC represented a useful opportunity to consult with a broad range of women’s groups.

In the Fall of 1998, during a period of time when WETC was attempting to get clarification of how the Designated Group Policy and the principles of employment equity for under-represented groups would be defined in the new LDMA, the Regional Director of HRDC wrote to the organization informing them that WEAC would not be meeting until further notice. This abrupt closure of a significant communication line was seen by WETC and other community groups as yet another barrier to devising policies that enhanced rather than worsened women’s opportunities to gain training and employment. Through an intensive lobbying effort, WEAC was reinstated, and both provincial and federal officials interviewed, expressed a strong interest in working with WEAC in the future in order to ensure that the principals of employment equity are part of future program delivery systems.

## **5.0 COMMUNITY ISSUES – BARRIERS TO ACCESS**

There was a palpable sense of frustration and urgency in the conversations we had with community-bases trainers and the women they serve. They cited a number of barriers faced by women, both generally and specifically. Many of the staff from the training agencies have been involved in training and employment programs have had enough experience in dealing with shifts in government policies, agencies and programs to have gained an historical perspective. Their perception, corroborated by the stories we heard from training participants, was that program policy is increasingly removed from the day-to-day reality of the women who need these services.

The increasing sense of pessimism that pervaded the discussion of these issues reflected their feeling that their issues are increasingly ignored by both policy-makers and the public at large. A complete list of the issues and recommendations that we heard from participants in included as Appendix VI.

#### *4.1 Community-based trainers*

Community-based organizations that specialize in the delivery of training and employment programs serve large numbers of poor and marginalized people, many of whom are women. Women's centres deliver services directly to women, and in some cases children. The staff of these organizations are highly skilled and motivated professionals. As mentioned above, these organizations have experienced serious problems as a result of both the changes in government delivery systems and the more generalized cut-backs in budgets within the social service safety net. This means greater work loads for staff, and cuts in service to clients. Follow-up with clients is often completely eliminated, and supports such as childcare, and food or transportation vouchers are no longer available.

Some agencies have suffered extensive staff cut-backs, and staff stress levels are very high. With the termination of Project-Based Training, agencies have experienced significant loss of staff and budget – in some cases as many as 75% of training programs have been lost. For those that remain, the length of approval process for clients to get into training has increased by eight to twelve weeks. And the approval process at the Training Assessment Centres has been very low – as low as 2% of the clients who apply for specific training.

The agencies see all of these factors as evidence that the government emphasis is on short-term, quick-fix planning that lends itself to superficial measures of agency performance, rather than on the kind of long term building of networks and support for women that are the hallmark of a successful and permanent transition into the labour market.

They pointed out that there is a need for more gender-based programs including both skill-based training programs and career exploration programs. They also made it clear that training in isolation would unlikely to be successful – that the participants needed solid support and networks in order to succeed in the labour market. They felt strongly that programs needed to be holistic in their approach, providing counselling and childcare, and other support services that were built on the history of the individuals and their cultures. They advocated mentoring for women of all ages, and heightened awareness of opportunities in technical fields such as trades and technology. They pointed out that apprenticeship levels among women are at only 6% (the majority of which are in hairdressing, cooking and food and beverage serving), and that measures needed to be taken to overcome social and cultural attitudes towards women in more technical and well-paying trades.

Staff who worked with immigrant women were particularly concerned about the early socialization of girls in immigrant communities. They felt strongly that more preventative and educational work needed to be done. Sexual harassment is an issue for all women, but immigrant women, who may be unaware of their rights, or whose cultures dismiss such issues, are especially vulnerable.

These workers were very aware of the need for community involvement in the design of programs, as well as the need for cooperation in the sharing of information and data among agencies, groups and clients. They also felt strongly that there was a continued need for a sectoral organization that could advocate on a provincial level. Among the trainers we interviewed, all were aware of the work of WETC and/or WEAC, and most had worked with one or the other of these organizations from time to time.

## *5.2 Program participants*

Education and information-sharing played a key role in securing the cooperation of the women who participated in our focus groups. By explaining clearly what we were doing, what the role of advocacy meant, and through providing concrete information and examples that related to their daily lives, we were able to gain their trust. Many of the women we interviewed were from immigrant communities and had English as a second language. For some it was an introduction to the concept of advocacy, and for many it was their first experience of looking at their roles and responsibilities through a broadly democratic and specifically Canadian lens.

We gave them practical advice in answer to their questions – about financial counselling, about dealing with the Financial Aid system, and what their rights as citizens or landed immigrants were. By providing these concrete examples of advocacy, we helped the participants understand the role of an organization like WETC, and they began to feel like a part of the project and to gain a sense of empowerment. Some of the women began to understand the socio-political context of their circumstances, and others, who already had this awareness were given another vehicle with which to make their voices heard.

The women interviewed were concerned about access to further training and education. They talked about their daily lives as a continuous struggle to meet basic needs for themselves and their families. They talked about the lack of support for good quality, affordable childcare, or any form of infant care. They told stories of government workers who treated First Nations and minority women with disrespect. They pointed out that most of their family income went to pay for housing which often meant increasing debt loads. These women were as aware as any other British Columbian that good jobs required highly skilled workers, and they expressed their frustration at their inability to get access to such training. For some immigrant women, who do indeed have those skills, imported from their countries of origin, the frustration was with the refusal of employers and regulatory bodies to recognize their credentials and/or provide Canadian experience. First Nations women talked about the many issues of poverty and racism that they face including illiteracy, addictions, and their struggle to regain their status.

It was fascinating to note that among each of the focus groups there were usually two or three women who were born advocates. They understood the policies and how they played out in the grassroots community. They knew they were marginalized and also knew the historical and political roots of their oppression. They had a clear sense of confidence in their understanding of reality, and strong motivation to make changes in their personal lives and those of their communities. Their response to questions of how to improve the lives of women like themselves

was simple and direct: “Until racism and oppression of the poor becomes a priority, nothing can change.”

It was clear that, for these women, WETC’s role as an advocate and as a catalyst of educational growth and change was a welcome and useful one.

### ***5.3 Marginalized and unrecognized sectors***

There are several sectors of women workers whose exclusion from the normal safety nets is nearly complete. For these women, nearly all of whom are immigrants, issues of the LMDA or EI benefits are irrelevant as are considerations of access to training. Perhaps the two most important examples are the domestic worker and the industrial home workers.

The experience of immigrant Filipino women is a case in point. The plight of these women who work in Canada as domestic workers is well documented in the report, “The Filipino – Canadian Women’s National Consultative Forum: Towards Filipino Women’s Equality”. These women are recruited as temporary contract workers through the federal “Live in Caregiver Program (LCP). Although these women are one of the most highly educated of all immigrant groups, they remain one of the lowest paid. Despite having, like all immigrants, to pay the \$975 immigrant landing fee, they suffer restrictions applied to no other group. Their contract requires that they live and work for 24 months during a three year period within their employers’ homes. They are the only group of workers in Canada so restricted. They are frequently exploited by their employers, but have no recourse under employment standard or labour laws.

The situation is similar for women who do industrial piece work in their homes. Traditionally these women were garment workers, but with the advent of home assembly of other products such as computer components and leather goods, the sector is expanding. According to the Industrial Home Workers Report (1994) 97% of these women are members of visible minorities. They are targeted by employers who frequently expect them to work from 12 to 16 hours a day for as little as \$3 per hour. Like the Filipino domestic workers, these women have no recourse under current employment standards legislation, nor are their employers subject to garment industry standards for conditions of employment or pay.

### ***5.4 Rural Women***

Rural women face special issues of physical isolation and dependence. A woman without a car is often totally dependent on others for even routine chores and appointments. Attending a training session often means lengthy travel in bad driving conditions. For these women, public transportation is a vital issue. Like many of their urban sisters, they also lack adequate child care facilities, and in small resource-dependent towns, jobs are scarce. The general downturn in resource industries, and the collapse of the fishing industry, has meant high stress levels for families dependent on those sectors. The impacts on the family include an increase in alcohol abuse, more domestic violence and marriage breakdown. Representatives from women’s centres in those regions told us that programs and policies are developed with urban objectives in mind; that rural voices, needs and issues are ignored. They pointed out that there was no regional



consultation in the development of the LMDA, and that women-targeted programs, and exploratory programs for trades and technical training are disappearing.

## **6.0 THE ROLE OF WETC**

While it is clear that women have made important gains in the last fifteen years, it is equally clear that those gains have primarily benefited educated women from the middle class. Women who live in poverty, immigrant women, First Nations women and other women of colour, and women with disabilities still face significant barriers to training and employment.

There was general agreement among all of the people we interviewed, including representatives from both the federal and provincial governments that there continues to be a compelling need for advocacy in order to reduce or eliminate those barriers.

WETC's historic role in providing a framework for a broad coalition of organizations concerned with barriers to training and employment for women is as relevant as ever. The challenge for the organization is to find an effective way to continue in that role.

### ***6.1 Background – the Herstory of WETC***

WETC is a 15-year-old advocacy organization for women. The organization has evolved from a Lower Mainland ad hoc group serving a small sector of women's concerns to a provincial structure with new mechanisms in place that facilitate the inclusion of greater diversity in women's voices and experience.

No written history or evaluation of the organization exists, although the work of the organization has been documented in extensive minutes, briefs and conference reports. Of particular help was a paper written by Lucy Alderson in July 1994. It describes WETC's mandate and membership and begins with a brief outline of the context for WETC's inception. This document as well as interviews, minutes, briefs to policy makers, agendas, funding proposals and information sheets were used to prepare this herstory.

In 1985, a broad coalition of women's organizations in the Lower Mainland of BC created the Women's Employment and Training Coalition to "present issues and concerns about the training and employment of women" to Flora MacDonald, then Minister of Employment and Immigration. This was at a time when the Conservative federal government had begun to tie labour market training to its economic strategy (Witter, 1991). The Parliamentary Task Force on Employment Opportunities for the 1980s focussed ten out of its sixteen recommendations on education and training within a context of labour market demands (Selman, 1991, p. 284). This created great concern among many groups. Colleges and vocational institutes believed their role in training was being usurped; equity groups worried that programs would focus on critical market shortages and not on essential skills such as language training and adult basic education; and labour unions felt that efforts to target training based on predictions of future need were doomed to failure in an ever-shifting economy. Butterwick (1993, p.iii).

Given these factors, women in many organizations were becoming more vocal about the inappropriate match between employment and training programs and the reality of women's lives. WETC advocated actively with both provincial and federal officials to create a training system to meet the real needs of women.

Initially WETC members came from the college system and from community-based training programs. Eventually participants were recruited through word of mouth and came from many sources to attend WETC meetings.

Membership included women's organizations (mainstream, immigrant and visible Minority organizations, first Nations employment and training organizations, disabled women's groups, and women's centres), college and university representatives, private trainers, women in trades and technology, union and government representatives. Initially, many members were able to attend WETC meetings as part of their jobs, but as work patterns changed, more and more members had to do WETC work on their own time and at their own expense. The result was a decrease in volunteer work hours but a growing demand to continue WETC work and its mandate.

In 1985 members of WETC took the initiative, on an ad hoc basis, to build a consultative dialogue with BC and Yukon regional representatives of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC now HRDC). In 1989, these informal and ad hoc meetings were formalized into the Women's Employment and Advisory Council (WEAC), with regular quarterly meetings and its own terms of reference. For WETC, WEAC represented a direct line to policy and program development. For regional CEIC leadership, WEAC represented a useful opportunity to consult with a broad range of women's groups, and to hear feedback and recommendations as to the limitations of their programs.

During the first five years of WEAC's formal life, WETC members raised issues about women's trades and technical training, equity targets within program areas, and uneven implementation of programs throughout the region. At WEAC meetings, WETC members consistently pushed for access to educational opportunities through appropriate bridging programs for women. The meetings provided WETC members with a more in-depth rationale for the policies of CEIC/HRDC and information about new program developments which could then be passed along to member organizations. In addition, background information provided by federal representatives on HRDC programs have assisted women to advocate for the full intent of the program at the local level. For instance, training for women in trades and technology has had a broad implementation history in Canada. Discussions at WEAC and information-sharing through WETC and Women in Trades and Technology have assisted many organizations to provide a range of trades and technical training for women in BC, based on the National Standards developed by WITT National Network's Industrial Adjustment Services (IAS) Committee. (WETC, 1989 - 1994).

By 1994, members of WETC, which included college, community-based service providers and equity groups, realized that women's needs within training programs were being interpreted within a dominant policy framework that focussed on reducing spending, matching workers to the market and privatizing training programs. Programs for women were developed based upon a

“thin understanding of women’s needs, one which focussed on women’s lack of training and job experience and ignored the structural inequalities of the labour market and women’s different racial and class struggles.”(Lucy Alderson ).

Based on this understanding WETC members articulated the following goals during the process of setting up the B.C. Labour Force Development Board as they participated in the selection of equity representatives to that Board:

- To communicate and build networks with other interested groups and individuals on issues affecting women’s employment and training regardless of physical disability, race, class, age, or sexual orientation.
- To create and support a BC Women’s agenda on employment and training.
- To ensure women receive their fair share of federal and provincial training dollars.
- To monitor government proposals, policies, and programs and assess their impact on women.
- To develop strategies in response to public and private proposals, policies, and programs that affect women

Over the course of its history, WETC has been successful in its efforts to affect policy in a number of areas. Some of their accomplishments are listed in the table below:

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Policy/Issues lobbied</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<b>1985</b>	<b>Trades and Technology Training for women</b>	<i>Developed and promoted Exploratory and other trades/technical program within government and community-based organizations</i>
<b>1989</b>	<b>Language Instructions for Newcomers in Canada</b>	<i>Succeeded in making the eligibility criteria more flexible</i>
<b>1989</b>	<b>Project Based Training Programs</b>	<i>Resulted in changes to the eligibility criteria which increased availability of long-term training programs</i>
<b>On going</b>	<b>Designated Group Policy</b>	<i>Used and promoted DGP as gender lens for all new initiatives and policies</i>
<b>1993</b>	<b>National Training Standards</b>	<i>Worked to develop National Training standards with the National Women’s Reference Group.</i>
<b>1994</b>	<b>British Columbia Labour Force Development Board</b>	<i>Led the way in establishing an equitable and fair process to select the representatives for all the designated groups on the BCLFDB</i>
<b>1997</b>	<b>Industrial Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC)</b>	<i>Organized a provincial campaign which resulted in legislation being passed to increase the representation of under-represented groups in designated trade’s occupations within the mandate of ITAC</i>

<b>1998</b>	<b><i>Coalition for Principals of Equity Consultation</i></b>	<i>Established a process for a community consultation inclusive of equity groups and Lower Mainland HRCC's. Produced a "How to Manual" that promotes workable representation of community groups.</i>
<b>1998/99</b>	<b><i>LMDA</i></b>	<i>Lobbied for inclusion and definition of Equity Principles in LMDA</i>
<b>1999</b>	<b><i>WEAC</i></b>	<i>Successfully lobbied for the reinstatement of WEAC.</i>

By the mid 1990s, involvement in WETC had begun to diminish, and much of its energy was consumed by internal conflict. Women of colour and white women members went through a struggle over the principles of sharing equal voice and power. After some extremely difficult discussions and workshops some white members decided to leave WETC. Those who remained continued to work toward the development of a framework that honoured the principles of inclusiveness, and the commitment to share power and voice. The work on these issues continues to evolve.

As a result of these internal divisions, WETC's advocacy work lost some of its momentum, and that reality combined with the busyness of women's lives meant that a very few members had to take on the organizing and advocacy work of the organization in order to keep it alive. It was at this juncture, that the organization began this work of evaluation.

The women we interviewed who had been involved with WETC over the years gave a variety of reasons for their participation, their motivation to continue, and what they learned from their involvement in the organization. They also cited a number of accomplishments of WETC, both on a community and personal level. A list of their comments can be found in Appendix III. However here are a few of them, along with the points others made.

- *"Women were coming together and working on influencing the policies. Exciting times, energy around the issues. . ."*  
Gave opportunity to women to work with others who faced similar challenges and issues. Gained knowledge and experience to work with women from diverse background and perspectives.
- *"Through [my work] I got involved. We [staff] had concerns around eligibility criteria . . . we lobbied through WETC and got some results."*  
Organizations that had issues around training programs, for example rigid eligibility entrance criteria, or curriculum that was not inclusive, used the WETC forum to raise the issues and get local responses or solutions.
- *"It played a very significant role in my intellectual and person development."*  
WETC (and WEAC) provided a supportive atmosphere for women involved in work to learn and use advocacy skills. They have developed leadership skills, public speaking

skills, and have learned to work in teams and to be change agents. They have also learned the mechanics of preparing briefs, gathering information and research, and networking, as well as learning to think in creative and innovative ways to create change. This has helped women to develop vast experience and a thorough knowledge of the political systems.

- *“As an immigrant woman I had no voice, I was seeking recognition for the struggles I was going through . . . I could never have learnt about Canadian politics and the women’s struggles in any better or quicker way. This helped me to integrate in this society. It created opportunities for women who started from the grass roots to go on to work successfully at the community, provincial and national level.*
- *“We helped people focus on specific issues and shifted the criteria for the funding which was provided.”*  
It played a critical role in helping to educate the frontline staff in and out of government about policies and informed the policy makers about client concerns.

Many of the women who worked with WETC went on to work in other related areas. For example:

1. Three women were chosen from BC by CLOW to sit on CLMPC National Task Forces on Apprenticeship, Entry-Level Training and Social Assistance Recipients;
2. Two women were selected to participate on the National Women’s Reference Group on Labour Market Issues;
3. One woman was selected to participate on the national LINC policy Task Force;
4. One member went on to become the National Coordinator for WITT;
5. One member went on to become President of Community College;
6. One member was selected to represent education and community-based training on British Columbia Labour Force Development Board.

It appears that the work of evaluation and renewal has come at an opportune time for the organization. The dialogue with women and organizations that formed backbone of our research has provided new opportunities for coalition-building and partnerships. If WETC can build on those opportunities, and resolve the technical issues around structure and communication, it should be able continue as a dynamic and effect agent for change in the sphere of women’s access to training and employment.

## ***6.2 Restructuring the Organization***

Since its inception in 1985, the work of WETC has been carried out through the device of monthly meetings and the work of a steering committee. All of the women and organizations involved in WETC have volunteered their time and expertise, and meeting space and administrative supports were provided by Douglas College. However as the pace of modern life became more hectic, the women involved in WETC found it more and more difficult to make time commitments to the work of WETC. As well, WETC, like other women’s organizations found itself caught up in the struggle to find a balance in representation from visible minorities and other marginalized groups.

There is an ongoing need for the women of WETC to find ways of maintaining connections with grassroots community organizations and to ensure their representation in the group. The organization must also find means of effective communication that can include women who have neither the time nor the means to attend monthly meetings.

### ***6.3 Funding***

Like so many social service organizations, WETC has relied solely on the volunteer commitment of women. And like those other organizations, it has seen a serious diminishing of that commitment. The reality of women's working lives has changed. Job insecurity, increasing workloads, and the reduction in real income, have all eroded their ability to participate in volunteer organizations like WETC. It is unlikely that such work can be maintained at the pace and quality of previous years without at least one paid coordinator.

### ***6.4 Establishing priorities***

Any organization with limited resources must make hard choices in establishing priorities, and WETC is no exception. The number of issues that affect women's working lives could otherwise overwhelm the organization and fragment efforts to effect change. Priorities must be established through a process of wide consultation among both its member groups and other community organizations, and action strategies should be implemented in coalition with other groups seeking the same outcomes.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- WETC needs to explore alternative structures to build a province-wide organization that ensures collaborative community-based partnerships. Alternative technologies such as the Web sites, email, and teleconferencing, should be explored in order to maintain effective communication with its membership.
- Federal and provincial governments acknowledge the value of the role WETC plays in representing women's issues. WETC should apply to either or both levels of government for core funding in order to ensure the coordination of efforts and the stability of the organization.
- The mandate of WEAC should be expanded to include an examination, through a gender-based lens, of all provincial and federal training and employment policies and programs.
- WETC needs to continue its role in the dialogue among labour market partners as the advanced education and training system devolves and re-evolves, in order to provide insight and feedback on the issues affecting women and the barriers they face in gaining access to training and education.

- WETC should develop a short term action plan that focuses on the issues surrounding the LMDA and the EI Act.
- WETC needs to find ways to be more visible and pro-active in the community.
- WETC should establish long-term priorities for action through broad-based discussion with community groups – possibly through the vehicle of a province-wide forum.
- WETC should work to ensure the development of initiatives that specifically target women that face multiple barriers, i.e. women with disabilities, First Nations women, women of colour, immigrants, women of low socio-economic status, and single mothers, and women interested in training and jobs in trades and technology fields.
- WETC should collaborate with community-based training organizations and educational institutions to develop supportive learning models such as mentoring programs that provide women with employment, and viable education and employment opportunities.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Terms of Reference: WEAC**



## APPENDIX II

### Participant Profiles

#### *Profiles of Community Agencies who participated in the research:*

These agencies are non-profit, community-based agencies. Established a quarter century ago, each provides the full range of settlement, integration and employment training services for immigrants and refugees.

Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS),  
#622-333 Terminal Avenue  
Vancouver

MOSAIC  
1522 Commercial Drive,  
Vancouver, BC  
V5L 3Y2

SUCCESS,  
Burnaby and Career Development and Resource Centre  
#100-5021 Kingsway, Burnaby, BC  
V5H 4A5

Surrey Delta Immigrant Services Society  
#1113 - 7330 137<sup>th</sup> Street,  
Surrey, BC  
V3W 1A3

YWCA Focus,  
535, Hornby Street,  
Vancouver, BC  
V6C 2E8

Aware

#### *Profiles of Individuals who participated in the research:*

Ten women were interviewed who have delivered training and employment programs for the last six to 15 years in community-based agencies. They have worked as Employment Counsellors, Coordinators, Managers, Directors and Advocates. The individuals interviewed have a thorough knowledge of their clients' needs, language, culture and the systemic barriers they face.

Due to their long experience working in this field they understand the history of social policy and programming initiatives which gives them insight into the current climate and impacts on the clients. These women have also had experience directly or indirectly working with WETC's advocacy work. As part of the agency, staff have attended WETC meetings at different times. – usually to get information and/or to advocate on certain issues pertaining to the agency/clients.

***Profiles of Clients in different programs:***

Fifteen women (clients) who are on either Social Assistance or EI were interviewed. Some of them have vast experience and skills from their past – in particular immigrant women who had prior experience as professionals in their countries of origin, but who have had to start from the bottom with entry level jobs in Canada. There are no laddering systems for language upgrading or professional and technical upgrading. These women raised the following issues when talking about the barriers they face:

- Women need better financial assistance as what they are receiving is not enough to pay for child care, living, and school expenses.
- Getting information was difficult and understanding it was complex. Most workers do not have time to answer their questions.
- If you take a loan you are cut off from assistance and this issue had played out differently with different women clients depending upon their level of assertiveness.
- You did not receive any training or upgrading till you had your landed immigrant papers in hand.
- You had to be 10 months on assistance before you are eligible for training or upgrading. This wait led to depression, isolation and other long-term consequences.
- It seemed that if you were poor you were further penalized and had to pay your way to school. Whether you chose upgrading or not you still remained financially in a condition of poverty.

***Profiles of Regional Women Centres:***

Eight Women's Centres were contacted via phone and email and interviewed about their programs and initiatives in the area of women's access to employment and training. The centre's are very diverse in their services, delivering literacy, employment, violence, youth, senior women and school age programs; economic development initiatives; and social programs and advocacy work.

The following centres are currently involved in projects which are related to employment equity:

1. **West Kootenay Women's Association**, is involved in an employment equity project working with the Columbia Basin power projects and other municipal construction which represent significant economic development opportunities in the region, particularly in es for trades and technical employment. There is some Equity language in collective agreements, and they are advocating for a long-term Employment Equity Coordinator position within the Columbia Power Corporation and the Columbia Basin Trust.

2. **Howe Sound Women's Centre** is involved in doing a research project called "Women LED Leadership, Literacy and Economic Development". The goal of the project is to find out information that leads to delivering women's cooperative programs.

3. **Penticton & Area Women's Centre** completed a project on the Labour Market Development Agreement. They presented their concerns to the Hon. Pierre. S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources).

4. **Sunshine Coast Women's Centre** lost all of the funding for their employment programs and are now delivering programs via a private organization.

***Women interviewed from these Women's Centres raised the following critical concerns:***

- Most urban policy makers and committees do not hear rural issues.
- Their issues range from lack of public transportation to few employment and educational opportunities available in the regions.
- Women-targeted programs are no longer being funded.
- Trades and technical training programs are disappearing as they are not supported by HRDC or the province. No regional community consultation about the LMMA.

***Profiles of Government interviewees:***

The Ministries and their department involved in the research project were as follows: Federal: Human Resources Development of Canada (HRDC), Human Resources Centres of Canada (HRCC); Provincial: Ministry of Human Resources (MHR), Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT), (Skills division and Policy Service Division), The Ministry of Women's Equality (MWE), and the Industrial Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC).

Individuals in a variety of positions were contacted and interviewed by phone.

## **APPENDIX III**

### **WETC MEMBERS INTERVIEW RESPONSES**

***Personal comments of how women got involved:***

"I wanted to know more about Training programs for women especially, Bridging programs for women. I met two women who connected me with WETC because they were on the board

of Canadian Congress of Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) which is a national advocacy group. It was useful to tap into the grassroots training programs and government policies.”

“I developed integrating workplace seminars and in 1983, I developed a Women in Trades program at Selkirk College. I was concerned about women’s participation in the trades and technology program and these concerns lead me to WETC.”

“Through Surrey Delta Immigrant Services I got involved, We (staff) had concerns around eligibility criteria of immigrant women which we lobbied through WETC and got some results.”

“My work at Douglas College and CCLOW of which I was a BC Director made it possible for me to participate at WETC.”

“Personally interested in this work as it coincided with what I was doing at the graduate school. From the feminist perspectives women were coming together and working on influencing the policies. Exciting times, energy around the issues and we were recognized groups by the federal and provincial government.”

“I was a client in the program and did not agree to some of the teachings in the program this led me to seek WETC where I received support to change the situation at the implementation level.”

“As an immigrant woman I had no voice, I was seeking recognition for the struggles I was going through but the government system seemed too complex and intimidating. I could never have learnt about Canadian politics and the women’s struggles in any better or quicker way. This helped me to integrate in this society.”

***What motivated women to volunteer their time and keep coming back?***

“Even though what I was learning was not directly related to my work. I stayed involved as the work and women involved were very interesting. I realized that organizing for women’s voice at the advocacy level was important.”

“In part guilt, the need for this work being carried on was very critical. The policy makers do what they want but women’s voice has to be carried on. To be involved with women who were passionate about these issues. Met great people through the group.”

“Learnt a great deal about policies and personal experience at all levels.”

“It played a very significant role in my intellectual and personal development.”

“Issues were related to everyday concerns for the clients, focussed on employment and training. Concerns were addressed.”

***Supports needed to attend the meeting:***

“Job allowed flexibility and the location was very convenient.”

“Had access to child care.”

“Work of WETC was part of my job / mandate.”

***Community Advocacy and networking:***

“On going support for Women’s training programs and also provided support, information, networking opportunities to women working in this field.”

“Providing a supportive environment for women to learn and practice advocacy skills.”

“Creating opportunities for women to come together which might not have happened.”

“Influenced the policy making process and the direction it was going.”

“Helped people to focus on specific issues and shifted the criteria for the funding which was provided.”

“We did not change the ideology of funders and policy makers but closed the gap between policy makers and people who did the work e.g. LINC.”

“Supported women’s employees inside the government and advocated for them from outside.”

“Kept members up-to-date on policies and information.”

“Kept government cognoscente of the fact that there is other point of view. WETC was able to influence and change things e.g. BCTAB, we took lead role on having a very grassroots and representative process in selecting a representative for the board.”

“Formed allies in the government and the community.”

“Needs of women were represented in training and the program curriculum etc.”

“Women’s participation grew to be more diverse as time went on. Initially WETC was dominated by white working middle class women, slowly others started to participate. WETC’s reputation in the community grew.”

***What I learned from the experience :***

“Learned from the experience of working with a diverse group of women so have gained knowledge and respect for different perspectives. I am aware of my privilege and want to make the most of it so I can contribute in making the community a better place.”

“Gave a sisterhood connection to others who were looking at similar issues and facing challenges which I could not find living in the rural community. “I am an advocate, it gave me a forum in which to advocate with people who were colleagues.” It broadened my social cultural views, gave me a place to practice what my belief system says is appropriate, to work with diverse women which ultimately both prepared me and allowed one to return to work more effectively as a National Women in Trades and Technology (WITT) coordinator.”

“Personal issues of Surrey Delta Immigrant Services (SDIS) in Surrey were addressed at WEAC, empowerment to go and advocate at WEAC, for the correct information and lobby effectively for change at the local HRCC level.”

“Seeing dynamics between cultures and how different level of understanding raises conflicts.”

***Reasons women stopped participating at WETC:***

“Advocacy work did not produce concrete results. It was difficult to visualize or measure change. Even paid work had similar process and outcomes which made it hard to volunteer where any measurable outcomes were not felt.”

“Most of the work is hard to measure and so could not see tangible products and this was difficult, as members wanted to see direct results of the hard work they had put in.”

“Struggles around who we represented as well as race and class issues.”

“Lack of administrative support, a paid individual is required to coordinate the membership meetings and mail-outs.”

“At times it felt we were not meeting a need because women were not coming. Remaining members did not have time to reflect on issues and carry on the daily advocacy work at the same time.”

“Fear of becoming insular, but not letting that happen and concentrating on the advocacy issues.”

## APPENDIX IV

### Focus Groups

To further explore the issues women are facing in the community, focus groups were organized in four agencies. The participants in the focus group meeting were clients with the exception of SUCCESS where we interviewed staff members from various programs.

#### Immigrant Services Society: Stepping Up Program for Women

Program Length and type : 20 weeks. Pre-employment program for immigrant women who are survivors of abuse.

Number of Women: 12 women were present

#### YWCA Focus

Program Length and type: 5 weeks program and additional 5 weeks added for single mothers.

Number of women and type of program: 8 women were present and it was a Job search program funded by federal government.

SUCCESS: Staff of various Employment and Training programs, Counsellors, Coordinators etc.

Number of Staff: 16 men and women.

AD HOC WOMEN'S GROUP: 10 women from Women's Centres and Advocacy organizations from outside the Lower Mainland.

Organization	Program	Length of Program	Number of Participants
Immigrant Services Society	Stepping Up Program for Women (Pre-employment program)	20 weeks	12
YWCA	Focus (Job Search Program)	5 weeks	8
SUCCESS	Various	n/a	16 (staff - men and women)
Ad Hoc Women's Group	Various, in each of their constituencies	up to 32 weeks	10, representatives of administrative and activist staff

**The following issues concerning women were raised in the focus groups and face to face interviews.**

***Issues concerning policies and programs:***

- Programs for women were cut back about 4 years ago, in spite of the fact that, time and time again, it has been proven that these programs eventually help women to get back to decent paying work.
- Long term, skill-based programs have been eroded.
- Need to assist women and single mothers to become self sufficient.
- Workplaces are not supportive of child care costs.
- Sexual harassment is a major concern at the workplace.
- Concerned about issues of early years of socialization of girls, more preventative and educational work needs to be done. Decline in the % of female apprenticeship is due to misconceptions and social environment. At present it is 6%, but the majority of these are in hairdressing, cooking and food and beverage serving). Information and exploratory courses should be accessible and provided to all who need it. Immigrants should also be able to access information and assistance in their own language.
- Literacy issues especially for English as a second language are not given priority.
- First Nations women have a low rate of literacy and are poor. One of the reasons suggested had to do with a 1960 policy in which women in grade 8 dropped out of school as they lost their status, and could not return to school. (there was not time to investigate the facts of this). Other issues included active discrimination, addiction etc.

***Issues impacting clients:***

- Workers in the provincial offices do not treat First Nations and visible minority women with respect.
- Lack of support for transportation and day care.
- Increased financial debts for clients.
- Lack of good quality child care at reasonable rates. Infant/toddler care is not available.
- Affordable housing, as 56% or more of disposable income goes to the rent.
- Employment and jobs are in high skilled sectors, and clients do not have access to this training.
- Lack of willingness by employers and professional bodies to recognize prior experience and education.
- EI is redistributing income from marginal part-time workers to full time workers between jobs.

***Issues impacting non profit agencies:***

- More coordinated efforts should be put into the internal and external referrals.
- Agency staff have a vast knowledge and experience of clients backgrounds and the barriers they face. That knowledge and expertise will be lost to the community and to government



if the programs are not funded in an ongoing fashion, i.e ad hoc To a large extent this is already happening in the agencies and the impact on the clients is devastating.

- Staff and clients undergoing stress and mental health issues.
- Lack of follow-up with clients. Only group work formats are available for counselling, so individuals who need one-to-one service do not have access and do not do well in a group situation.
- The administrative and documentation process to get into training is too cumbersome.
- Emphasis on short-term, quick-fix planning which saves dollars for the government and is viewed as a performance measure for program providers does not serve the long-term needs of clients.
- Lack of recognition of foreign credentials and lack of prior learning assessment recognition (PLAR) lead to frustration and severe underutilization of talents and skills. No coordinated services are available in this area.
- The approval process to go through the government hoops have increased the processing time for clients to get into the training programs by 8 to 12 weeks. For eg. 35 clients are referred to TAC (for-profit, contracted-out assessment service), on average only 3 are approved over a period of a couple of months. This is an average example for most agencies these days. There is a great time and effort spent by the agencies to select the right clients yet the government worker only accepts about 2% of the clients. This forces the agencies to choose potentially more successful candidates rather than those most in need of services, and even in this case, the contractors goal is to eliminate the greatest percentages from eligibility.
- Government-funding no longer covers the cost of transportation and food. Some agencies get food vouchers from Health Canada or agencies like the YWCA will provide their own.
- Cutbacks on agencies have been so intensive for eg. from 19 employment and training programs, only 4 have been left.

## APPENDIX V

### PROVINCIAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

MAETT'S goals (1999-2000 Business Plan) are to;

- \* ensure equitable access to advanced education and training for British Columbians.
- \* enhance the relevance and quality of advanced education and training .
- \* enhance employment opportunities for British Columbians.
- \* encourage flexibility within the advanced education system.
- \* govern the advanced education system and the training system in a responsible and responsive manner.
- \* develop and support Ministry of Human resources.

The Post secondary Education Division has a number of specific initiatives and programs relevant to women's employment and training issues.

Safer Campuses Initiative.  
Improved Access to child Care Initiatives.  
Charting a new Course.

A number of curriculum projects were carried out during the 1990's including, Inclusive Curriculum, Gender and Diversity, Orientation to Trades and Technology, and Refitting the Classroom, Working with Diversity.

Other Programs:

Prior Learning Assessment  
Adult Basic Education  
Open University Degrees  
Provincial Learning Network

***Expressed areas of concern the Province hopes to continue to work on with WETC:***

- Interventions and supports for under-represented groups can be scaled back during difficult economic times.
- Women who are first nations, women of colour, immigrants and/or women with a disability, face multiple barriers to employment and training.
- Employment disadvantages for women are reflected substantially in the occupations they work in and in their employment income.
- Labour force participation is generally lower for women than men between the ages of 20 - 24 years.
- In the lowest paying trade of barbering/hairdressing/beauticians, women represented 83 % of all apprentices. Wages in this trade are close to a minimum wage. In the highest paying trade (An Industrial instrument mechanic/millwright/boiler maker women make up only 1% of apprentices).

- Women have lower distribution than the total population in management positions.
- Decline of pay in some sectors and lack of benefits, which especially affect women.
- Changing patterns of work and working hours.
- Move away from programming from targeting special needs groups except youth at risk.
- Shift from type of programming.

***Industrial Training Adjustment Commission's (ITAC ) Current Status:***

- Working on seamless transition from k to12 to post-secondary entry-level trades training, sectoral partnerships, etc.
- Interest in forging links between students and trades-related occupations.
- Future opportunities for GETT camps for girls.
- Encouraging Industry and Community-based pilot projects
- Currently delivering a (Trades Program) Exploratory at North Island College
- Supporting First Nations women's construction project
- Working on partnering with Federal government and other colleges, NGO
- Encouraging women to participate in high tech occupations working with PLAR at present, organizing National Forum-PLAR '99, continuing to work on projects for immigrants
- Interested in partnership with WETC in future.
- Concerned about issues around early stages of socialization of girls, more preventative work, education and awareness, needs to be done.
- Issues of gender and race a priority.

## **APPENDIX VI**

### **PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

***Recommendations: From the client and agency perspectives.***

- Training has to be more flexible, open, inclusive, include more mentoring for all ages.
- The rate of success is higher when women can learn in groups that understand their culture, history and needs.
- Need career exploration programs for women and skill-based training programs.
- There is no longer a framework and requirements on how you become a private trainer.
- Gender-based programs should be developed and implemented.
- Programs for women should be holistic in their approach and counselling, child care, supports should be part of delivery, this is essential to see any positive outcomes.
- Provide training for individuals who are not employable and need the supports.
- Share information and data between advocacy groups, agencies and clients.
- Reporting systems should be simple and less time consuming.
- Include grassroots communities in the decision making process

- Form an advocacy group for women at the provincial level.
- Women who have access to solid support / networks make it into the labour market
- Programs that are holistic and build on the history of the individuals, culture and spirituality can find the strength to make it to the next steps. And eventually pursue further education or employment.
- Some of the skill shortages in the Trades and Technology fields should be addressed by providing women training in the required fields.
- Women apprentices are paid while they are training, these opportunities should be encouraged from the Ministries and Agencies.

***Recommendations for the LMDA agreement and Policy:***

- Principals of equity based on the Designated Group Policy are integrated in the LMDA agreement and protected by the national standards so when the full devolution of training from the federal to province happens these principals of equity are not eroded.
- In the revised delivery and implementation of employment and training programs, accessibility and equality (as defined in the Principles ) are constantly tested and accounted for.
- A provincial WEAC should be formed to assess all policies and strategies with a gender-based lens. This work should be supported by WETC members, Status of women, Ministry of Women's Equality.

## **APPENDIX VII**

### **PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### **Discussion questions for the interviews with key community agencies, individuals , and government.**

These questions have been divided in to three categories, namely (1) Common questions which will be discussed with all participants. (2) Questions specific to government (3) Questions specific to the community.

#### **Common Questions :**

1. What is your involvement with women's employment and training issues?
2. Have you heard of WEAC (Women's Employment Advisory Committee) or WETC ? Or have you worked with WETC or benefited from the work they have done?
3. What do you think are the most important issues for women's employment and training today?
4. What is your current involvement in government policy and or program negotiations / lobbying?
5. How do you establish what emerging issues are for women's employment and training needs ?
6. How do you address these issues ? From government and community perspectives ?
7. How is the on going transfer and devolution from the federal to provincial government affecting your services to the community ?

#### **COMMUNITY:**

1. Have you heard of WEAC or WETC ?
2. What are the issues or concerns for individual women seeking employment / training ?
3. How is the on going transfer and devolution from the federal and provincial government affecting your services to the community ?
4. How is your community responding to this ?
5. What do you see as gaps or barriers encountered by women ?
6. Who is getting success ? Why

- 7. Who is not getting access ? Why ?
- 8. What kind of training is being provided, e.g.

Career Exploration-----  
 Job Search Programs -----  
 Computer Programs-----  
 Skill Based Training Programs -----  
 Pre-employment Training Programs-----  
 Trades /Technical Programs -----  
 Job placement Supports-----  
 Other-----

Program	length	Women	Men	Ministry name-Funding	Outcome/Suc cess defined

- 9. What percentage of women in your knowledge do not have access to employment and training opportunities ?
- 10. Have you ever participated in a provincial or local WETC reference group ? Was it successful, Why ? / Why not ?
- 11. Why did you discontinue participating at WETC meetings ?
- 12. Is there a way that a local women’s advocacy organization could assist in moving your issues forward ?
- 13. Would someone be able to participate from your organization ?
- 14 In what way ? explore options like discussion circle, website electronic media ? That would enable us to bring the issues forward to the government ?

**Government:**

- 1. What is the current status of the devolution from the Federal to the Provincial government ?
- 2. What is the link between your Ministry / agency and Employment and Training for women ?
- 3 Have you heard of WEAC or WETC ?

4. What percentage of women in your knowledge do not have access to employment or training services ?
5. What women's employment strategy or policy is in place and is working in the current times ? Or describe your commitment to the programs for Women.?
6. What do you see as obstacles for Women accessing training and jobs ?
7. What do you see as WETC 's evolving role ?
8. What are the current initiatives around women's Employment and training ?
9. In what way and on what issues are you consulting with women ?

Your participation is truly appreciated. Thank You.

**APPENDIX VII**  
**REGIONAL WOMEN'S CENTRES**



**APPENDIX IX**  
**LETTER TO MINISTERS**

**APPENDIX X**  
**WETC FLYER**

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

HRDC	Human Resources Development of Canada
WETC	Women's Employment and Training Coalition
WEAC	Women's Employment Advisory Committee
LMDA	Labour Market Development Agreement
CEIC	Canada Employment and Immigration Commission
EI	Employment Insurance
UI	Unemployment Insurance
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
LCP	Live in Caregiver Program
MHR	Ministry of Human Resources
MWE	Ministry of Women's Equality
MAETT	Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology
ITAC	Industrial Training Adjustment Commission
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
CLOW	Canadian Congress of Learning Opportunities for Women
WITT	Women in Trades and Technology
BCLFDB	British Columbia Labour Force Development Board
BCTAB	British Columbia Training Adjustment Board
EBSM	Employment benefits and support measures

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