

## **Women in Construction Backgrounder Update – Jan. 26, 2001**

*Note: This builds on the Construction Issues Backgrounder dated October 25, 2000. Please read the October document first. This update provides some new information on progress towards equity in the West Kootenays and presents new recommendations for government support of equity – strategies that we think would fit with government's current policy and planning environment as well as with actual regional opportunities.*

### **More Good News**

#### Arrow Lakes Generating Station Project

- A number of subtle gains continue to be made. Each one seems like nothing more than an anecdote but, taken together, they show that the task of increasing the system's support for equity is slow, delicate, multi-faceted work.
- The Equity Coordinator now has access to job orders and can more effectively match job opportunities to equity candidate resumes. Timely access to the job orders is crucial to the Coordinator being able to impact hiring decisions. Access was made possible only after the CPC intervened and requested the CHC to cooperate. The Equity Pilot Project Review Committee requested the CPC intervention when the issue arose during the six-month review of the project.
- The Equity Coordinator, in conjunction with women working on-site, has developed a process for assisting the women that doesn't generate unnecessary tension with male co-workers. Given the general climate towards equity, most on-site communication between the Equity Coordinator and women arouses suspicion and can lead to teasing etc. The women have found non-threatening ways to have the conversations they need to have with the Equity Coordinator.
- The Equity Coordinator continues to break new ground with unions, the CHC and within Peter Kiewit Sons Co Ltd. For example, she recently learned that Kiewit has an Employment Equity Officer Manual and a designated Employment Equity Officer responsible for Western Canada. This individual did not appear knowledgeable of equity or open to it. Greg Dixon, Project Manager for the Arrow Lakes project supported the Equity Coordinator in gaining access to existing Kiewit resources and documents to support her role.
- Wayne Peppard has replaced Joe Cooper as Council Representative of the Allied Hydro Council. This is expected to bring to the AHC greater understanding and support for equity and, thus, a greater ability to collaborate with equity advocates on strategic issues of common concern.

#### Training and Apprenticeship Initiatives

- Selkirk College has applied to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission to establish a Women in Trades and Technology course. (see attached executive summary of the 14 point proposal). The proposal was developed with assistance and unanimous support from a community stakeholder group including representatives of unions, women's organizations, government agencies and the forestry, mining and utility industries.

- The Columbia Basin Trust has initiated a Task Force on Construction with a first meeting slated for February 9, 2001. The two areas of focus for the Task Force are training and apprenticeships, and economic development.

### **More Bad News**

- The final employment equity figures from the Kootenay Ferry Project were provided on January 9, 2001. Unfortunately, the record keeping was inadequate to provide data for specific equity groups. However, the following information was given. The number of equity group employees was 10 out of 222 employees. Equity group employees were 5 First Nations men and 5 women, one of whom was aboriginal. Total equity hours worked amounted to 7,846 out of 146,130 or 5.4% of hours worked. As noted in the previous Background, Maglio Industries representatives stated their equity targets at 15% but failed, on at least two opportunities, to either hire or retain well-qualified women.
- Formal equity targets still haven't been set for the Arrow Lakes Generating Station Project. This occurred due to an unfortunate mistake in the minutes of a meeting in March, 2000 but has still not been rectified. This illustrates how slowly the system moves to address equity without persistent intervention.

### ***What's the Problem? – A Macro View***

Up to 40% of the construction workforce is expected to retire within 5 – 10 years. The current economic climate focuses on education and skills for high wage employment, or “brains” over “brawn”. This de-emphasizes (inappropriately) opportunities available in trades. At the same time, women earn on average 67% of what men earn working full-time, year-round in the West Kootenay Boundary<sup>1</sup>. This means that women may have proportionately more to gain than men by investing in a career in trades or technical work. However, the employment systems operating on major construction projects in the West Kootenays continue to maintain barriers to equity despite stated policies or intentions to support it. To meet the demand for workers, the trades will need to become more representative of the demographics of the available workforce. In other words, the regional economy faces a looming shortage of skilled trades workers that will likely not be met without pro-active investment in trades training and labour force integration to reduce barriers for groups traditionally underrepresented in trades employment.

At a macro level, there are more benefits to equity than resolving a sector-specific, labour force transition issue.<sup>2</sup> For example, women's economic well-being is highly correlated with the health and well-being of children in the region. The West Kootenay Boundary has a higher child poverty rate than the rest of BC – 25% compared with 20%

---

<sup>1</sup> For BC, the average is 73%.

<sup>2</sup> Another rationale for implementing equity effectively (intelligently, supportively and without resistance) is that there are human and organizational costs of not doing it. If systemic inequity is able to continue and equity groups receive discriminatory treatment, individual human rights violations can occur. This is a tragic and wasteful consequence of poor human resource policies and practices. On the other hand, if employers feel pressured to respond to demands for equity by placing inexperienced workers in dangerous work situations, accidents can occur. All workers, including equity group members, deserve respectful, safe employment.

provincially. Increasing equity in construction will not be enough to eliminate regional poverty. However, making equity a reality in a traditionally resistant sector builds capacities – inter-personal and institutional relationships, changed attitudes and behaviors, networks of resources, policies etc. -- that support the goal of poverty reduction (or overall social equity).

### **How can we Fix the Problem?**

The following recommendations present a limited number of strategic, achievable, regional initiatives that have stakeholder support and build on existing work by residents, community groups and government institutions to promote equity in the West Kootenays.

These are:

1. Securing funds to continue the Equity Coordinator position (currently a pilot project) for rest of the term of the Arrow Lakes Generating Station Project;
2. Securing a corporate commitment and funding from the Columbia Power Corporation to ensure effective implementation of equity on the Brilliant Expansion Project and all future power projects;
3. Securing funds for a Regional Equity Integration Facilitator based out of Selkirk College to coordinate community development, information sharing, outreach, training access and labour force integration for equity groups to address industrial adjustment issues.
4. Securing funds for Selkirk College to offer a WITT Course on an annual basis to meet labour force demand.

#### **1. One Year's Additional Funding for Equity Coordinator at Arrow Lakes G S**

The pilot project has achieved the following gains that form the basis for further improvements in equity on that project and its surrounding construction culture:

- Developing and maintaining a database of equity candidates that is used by the employer to identify potential candidates to fill job orders;
- Developing a profile of the equity candidates to help identify areas of training that would assist the CHC-AHC to meet the terms of the collective agreement regarding training to assist equity candidates to compete successfully for employment;
- Reviewing job orders and matching job orders to potential equity candidates;
- Creating orientation materials and conducting worksite orientations for equity employees;
- Developing processes for consultation and support for equity workers on site;
- Working with other parties to identify gaps and barriers to increasing equity representation in the workforce as well as developing strategies to support equity;
- Fostering a culture that is more supportive of equity through respectful, credible action and communication with all parties including Peter Kiewit Sons Co Ltd., CHC, CPC, AHC, unions, workers, training institutions and funders, equity organizations, other industry players, First Nations, government agencies and political leaders.

These results have taken varying amounts of time to achieve and many can be considered “work in progress”. The pilot project was reviewed on October 18, 2000, revealing

significant barriers to effective equity integration from within the existing hiring mechanisms. This confirmed the need for continued pro-active equity facilitation. The cost of one additional year of funding for equity coordination and a pool of training seed money is \$50,000.

## **2. Commitment from CPC to Effective Implementation of Equity on All Power Projects**

- Employment Equity Officer built into each contract's bidding process;
- Standard terms of reference for EEO positions based on recommendations from Pilot Project;
- Equity targets to be set in advance of commencement of construction and with paid equity expertise;
- Training funding to be built into each contract's bidding process;
- Resources within CPC to monitor equity, liaise with EEOs and network with other regional labour/equity/training initiatives.

## **3. Funding for a Regional Equity Integration Facilitator**

- Convene a community-based Equity Integration Committee with representatives of unions, industry, training partners, government, EEOs and equity groups. The purposes of the committee are to build a culture of support for equity through information sharing, problem solving, collective strategizing and decision-making related to equity integration in trades and technical areas in the region.
- Coordinate outreach to schools, youth centres, employment centres etc. to promote trades and technical occupations and training, particularly for traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Collaborate with and support complementary initiatives such as BC Opportunities, ITAC, the BC Federation of Labour and the Columbia Basin Trust Task Force on Construction for example.
- Support regional training opportunities by providing employment follow-up for graduates of WITT, trades and technical programs.
- Liaise with employers/contractors, ITAC, unions, EEOs etc. to facilitate equity integration into trades and technical work sites.
- Trouble-shoot equity, training and labour force issues, identify new opportunities and bring items to the attention of the Equity Integration Committee.

The Regional Equity Integration Facilitator could achieve results with a budget of xxx of which government is being requested to contribute \$xx,000 per year. Selkirk College will contribute...

## **4. Selkirk College Women in Trades and Technology (WITT) Program**

The WITT program has high priority status for the College. The course is a 20 week orientation to trades and technology occupations where women are currently underrepresented. It has been demonstrated to be successful at increasing women's entry into trades and technical employment. Successful completion of a WITT program leads a participant in one of several directions – on-site entry level or apprenticeship employment, an entry level trades training course, or further trades, technology or technical training programs e.g. process operator program, operating engineer courses.

On November 21, 2000 Selkirk College convened a stakeholder meeting attended by 19 representatives of different community interests. The group gave unanimous support for the WITT course and seven participants provided letters of support for the proposal. A mix of players from industry, government, equity groups and unions agreed to sit on course advisory committee.

The course will require \$100,000 annually. The first course offering is proposed to commence April, 2001 in order to fit with the scheduling of entry level trades training and apprenticeship courses as well as with local work opportunities.