

ABOUT Women

Manitoba
Status of
Women's
Directorate



PUBLISHED BY THE MANITOBA WOMEN'S DIRECTORATE

FALL 2002

Agreement Number 40065629

Unions Focus on Women's Issues

A key factor in union work is education. By educating women about their rights and educating employers about their responsibilities, women's roles in the work place have changed significantly over the past half-century.

The Canadian trade union movement has worked for positive change for women in the workplace and the community since the early 20th century. Today, the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) and individual trade unions, such as the Manitoba Government and General Employees Union (MGEU), continue to advocate on behalf of women.

As the province's central labour body, the MFL's policies focus on general workplace issues, such as health and safety, as well as women's issues such as gender bias, promotion of women in union leadership roles and pay equity. Since 1956, the federation, along with individual unions, has been instrumental in improving women's working lives.

MFL's Women's Standing Committee promotes women's issues within the federation and is the principal connection with the women's community. It also organizes conferences and



Sheila Gordon – MGEU.

educational forums on existing and emerging women's issues.

Historically, women's efforts within the labour environment have helped bring about changes necessary to protect employment during pregnancy and maternity leave. Women were once expected to quit work after the birth of a child.

"As employers learn to make the workplace more accessible to women, they find that productivity increases and tensions ease," says Sheila Gordon, staff representative with the MGEU. "Because of women's lobbying efforts and public education, many changes (such as paid maternity leave and family-related leave) are now common in collective agreements

and employment standards legislation. The result is a more equitable work place, something that benefits everyone.

"Women have had to teach employers, along with others in the labour movement, that women's needs are often different from men's," she adds. "Now, society generally recognizes and accepts that the majority of women play dual roles."

Women are often paid employees in the workplace and unpaid caretakers of children and aging parents at home. To keep their women employees, employers have had to adopt some important changes, such as flexible time, into the workplace.

"Women have educated employers and have successfully pushed for changes to maternity leave, parental leave, sexual harassment policies and job sharing," says Gordon, who currently represents workers at Winnipeg Child and Family Services. While working with this female-dominated department, she helped implement a job-sharing protocol that works well and is used significantly.

Another important influence in improved workplaces is the

continued on page 2

Minister's Message

As Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I am pleased to address you as we celebrate Women's History Month. This fall edition of *About Women* focuses on the important contributions women have made to education. Since I am also the Minister of Advanced Education and a former university professor and public school teacher, I have a personal connection to this topic.

In the past, women were encouraged to pursue traditional careers in education, primarily as teachers. In recent years, opportunities for women have greatly expanded. Many women have broken barriers to pursue careers in management and administration. Today, it is common to see women principals, superintendents, professors, researchers and presidents of universities although not in the numbers we would like. In this newsletter, we highlight educational leaders (past and present) from different backgrounds and regions of the province. Each woman offers a unique perspective.

I believe it is important to further the advancement of women both in the workplace and in educational

settings. We have included an article that discusses the important role played by women in the labour movement in promoting and securing better wages and working conditions for women. We have also included articles that address topics in post-secondary education. I think you will enjoy the interview with Dr. Keith Louise Fulton on the evolution of women's studies programs at Canadian universities.

This issue features a review of *Celebrating Women's History*. The Women's Directorate has recently distributed this publication to all provincial high schools. The booklet highlights the numerous contributions of women which may not be recorded in standard history texts. I am sure students will find it fascinating and I trust the publication will push young women to pursue their goals.

In honour of Women's History Month, I invite you to celebrate women's contributions – past and present – by attending a reception at the Legislative Building on October 2. The celebration will include a panel discussion, featuring accomplished women educators, on women's historic and contemporary contributions in the field of education. Space is limited



so please call the Directorate if you plan to attend.

I look forward to meeting you at our Women's History Month event and I invite you to call or write the Women's Directorate to voice your opinions or share your concerns with me. ■

Diane McGifford

Diane McGifford
Minister responsible for
the Status of Women

Unions, continued from page 1
increase in the number of women with formal education and/or training. Many of them have used their education to improve their lives and the working lives of other women, through working in positions that can influence corporate and union management decisions.

While Gordon knows there is still a long road to a truly equal workplace, she acknowledges that education has had, and continues to have, an important influence on social change. Organizations such as the MFL and MGEU will continue to make public education one of their priorities in the continued struggle for women's equality. ■

Quick facts

- *Women and men are almost as likely to work in unionized employment. Thirty per cent of workers are covered by union agreements.*
- *Women have lower overall earnings than men, despite improvements in educational attainment.*

Women's Studies Bring Diverse Views on Truth and Knowledge

The quest for knowledge speaks to something about our possibilities as human beings," says Keith Louise Fulton, English Department chair at the University of Winnipeg. "It's the responsibility of the system to make that quest as open as possible."

A feminist approach in education, such as women's studies programs and the Margaret Laurence Endowment of Women's Studies, helps make this happen by creating projects and programs that explore women's perspectives of knowledge.

"There is a historical tradition of knowledge that has been developed without women," says Fulton. "Feminist approaches ask questions and correct misinformation."

This diversified approach to learning and thinking helps create an educational environment that is

more welcoming for women. A more welcoming environment encourages women to continue to seek knowledge. This knowledge helps women "take their place in the economy and opens up possibilities," Fulton adds. "Diversity reflects our identity. Women's studies really take it seriously that women are human."

The Margaret Laurence Endowment of Women's Studies provides another opportunity to encourage women in education. Started in 1984 with \$500,000 in federal funds, \$330,000 in provincial and almost as much in matching private funds, the endowment fund is now over \$1 million. Interest from the fund is used for many purposes: to hire women and help create programs and projects that encourage critical thinking and diverse versions of knowledge for women. Fulton was

the first incumbent of the chair, appointed in July, 1987.

Fulton believes women's studies programs have made a difference. "But it's been an enormous struggle... When you bring in women's experience, you challenge everything. It's huge what we're trying to do, but it's working."

While there is a difference in the teaching and learning in universities, our high schools haven't kept up. "It's extremely difficult to be a feminist in high school," she says. High schools are now challenged to draw from the women's studies work in universities to develop courses about the different power relations, perspectives and experiences of women and men in our society.

There is much more to do, says Fulton. "We're just getting started!" ■

Overcoming Stereotypes in Education

Education has given women incentives and made us aware of the fact that we are capable of more than changing diapers," says Dr. Sybil Shack, a retired teacher, school principal, women's rights activist and author.

"Education has had a tremendous effect. It's opened up opportunities for women and changed the whole social structure."

For over 30 years, Shack was a principal in various Winnipeg schools until her retirement in

1976. She graduated from high school at 14, the age at which many women left school to work and eventually marry. Instead, she went to the University of Manitoba and then qualified to become a teacher. Shack credits her parents for encouraging her to continue her education.

"It was just taken for granted that I would go to university. When you came out of high school or university there were three options. You could be a teacher, a nurse or a stenographer."

Shack wanted to go into law but was told there was no opportunity for women in law. Women were expected to marry rather than go to university. Today, women make up the majority of today's university graduates.

"This is a terrific change," she says. "The feminist movement has had a great effect on university enrolment. There are even women professors now." Shack believes that for many years, the school system kept women out of positions

continued on page 5

Management Roles are Hard-Won for Women in Education

Women's advancement and education have been strongly connected throughout history. Over the centuries, women have struggled to be allowed to read and write, gain a formal education, use their education to join the work force and have their education recognized through promotions to management positions. Even the field of education has been reluctant to recognize women as management material, making men department heads, principals, professors, supervisors, inspectors and heads of school boards over women who were equally and, quite often, more qualified.

Following are profiles on several Manitoba teachers who have achieved management positions.

Marg Lisowski
Principal of Yellowquill School,
Portage La Prairie



"It is important that girls see women in positions of authority," says Marg Lisowski. "Particularly in rural areas and farm communities where they tend to be more supportive of men in

leadership roles. It was a challenge for employers to consider women for these roles."

Lisowski is the first female principal of Yellowquill School in Portage La Prairie. The school serves 350 Portage and area students in Grades 1 through 9. Vice-principal since 1995 and principal since 1999, Lisowski has faced many challenges and changes throughout her career.

"In the late 1980s and early 1990s there were no women principals in any schools in Portage. In a community of 13,000, there just aren't the opportunities. There are fewer schools. But we are progressing," she says. Lisowski notes that today, teams of male and female vice principals and principals are common.

"Women bring a special set of skills in their roles as educators," says Lisowski. "I'm a really good listener who addresses emotions. I bring groups together in a democratic and fair way. I also do a lot of mediation." She has earned the trust of her students, many of whom visit her just to talk or to share their feelings.

Reflecting on her career, Lisowski acknowledges the support shown by parents, the community, school staff, mentors, male colleagues and her husband, who is also a principal. While she and her husband share similar jobs and concerns, she feels that his principalship was granted faster because he's a man. She also believes that through her example and ongoing efforts, the community now has confidence that women can succeed as principals.

Kathleen Woodward
Principal of Ecole McIsaac
School in Flin Flon



"In terms of men versus women in administrative jobs, I have never felt I couldn't do a job as well as a man," says Kathleen Woodward, principal of Ecole McIsaac School in Flin Flon.

Woodward's parents felt their children should be able to tackle nearly any job, regardless of gender. "We learned at an early age that each person contributed to the end product, maybe in a different way, but each was expected to contribute. My sisters and I learned to work on the farm with the animals and help with the harvest, while my brother learned to cook and clean."

So it is with males and females in professions, she says. Males and females bring different views and different ways of doing things. Woodward goes into a job with a vision of what she thinks should happen and works at making that vision a reality. She adds, "I don't worry about how I stack up against males in similar jobs."

Woodward believes she needs to keep on top of professional and curriculum developments to provide instruction and information to her staff. This presents a challenge due to the lack of professional development courses available in the north. Increasingly, she uses the Internet to remain informed and knowledgeable in her field.

Professionally, Woodward says it is important to set a good example for students, be a role model for female students and a mentor for female staff. In her personal life, she says finding a balance between work responsibilities and family is an additional challenge. "Society has come a long way. But in some ways, it's now as if women have two jobs."

Josie Audino
Principal of College Churchill
in Winnipeg



Like many working women, Josie Audino faces the on-going challenge of balancing family and work. "Family comes first, but work also comes first and trying to make time for yourself. It's a struggle, but it can be done," she says.

Audino is principal of College Churchill in Winnipeg. The school is the only exclusively French immersion high school in Winnipeg School Division number one.

College Churchill's mission is to develop bilingual students, aware of the multicultural Canadian reality and conscious of the challenges of an ever-changing, global village. "As we move towards a more global economy, communication skills become increasingly important," says Audino. "Graduates who are functionally bilingual will have greater opportunities for career advancement."

From Balmoral Hall to the inner-city, from teaching kindergarten to secondary school, Audino has enjoyed her self-described "very interesting career." She recalls teaching Grade 1 with 26 students who had never heard a word of French. "Teaching kindergarten was one of the most satisfying and rewarding times."

Moving to Wellington School in the inner city provided her with a variety of experiences. She remembers trying to reach families and finding that many had no telephone in their homes. "I made many home visits while teaching there."

For four years, Audino was vice-principal of Kelvin High School. "One of the biggest challenges was when 500 new students transferred from River Heights. We had to hire 16 new teachers," she says. "I was proud that everything went well. Teaching there was a real highlight in my life."

Audino believes in maintaining a good attitude about her career. "Most of my experiences have been positive. I have never experienced any problems due to gender. It is not an issue for me." She does, however, notice changes in today's workplace. "When I first started, there were more male than female administrators. Now there is more of a balance." ■

Stereotypes, continued from page 3

of power. She recalls that she was 36 years old and had been on staff for 15 years when she was first appointed as a principal. "Men younger and with less experience were being appointed principals. Women were appointed as a last resort," she says.

Salary differences were common when she was teaching. Women's salary levels stopped where men's began. Men even got special bonuses because they were men and women who married had to quit teaching. Gender stereotyping was also common during her career. When she was principal at Kelvin High School, two police officers arrived one morning asking to speak to the person in authority.

"I'm it," Shack replied. They insisted they wanted to speak to the principal. "I'm it," she repeated. "They were skeptical. That happened several times but that wouldn't happen today. Things have changed tremendously. Who would have thought that the superintendent of Winnipeg schools would be a woman?" ■

Reception to be held

To kick off Women's History Month, Diane McGifford, Minister responsible for the Status of Women, is hosting a reception at the Legislative Building October 2 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. The theme is women's contributions to education. The event will include a panel discussion and several education-related community organizations will be on hand.

For more information, call the Women's Directorate. ■

Tradition Influences Aboriginal Woman's Learning

A veteran administrator in Winnipeg School Division, Myra Laramee has followed a unique path on her journey to becoming principal of Niji Mahkwa School in Winnipeg's inner city.

Active at one time in the Provincial Status of Women Resource Team, she appreciated the support of women she found there. However, she soon recognized that, although they were all headed in the same direction, she needed to take a different path – through traditional Aboriginal teachings. She found that “one of the things I had to do when I went to the traditional lodge was get over my feminism.”

What took its place were the culture, traditions and values of Aboriginal people and their emphasis on the transmission of knowledge through women, who “once had the freedom to teach us properly.”

To recreate the journey of women teaching women to be women, she now uses a traditional teepee in her teaching, so children can learn from “the old women,” a title of distinction in Aboriginal culture. It is not just an opportunity to learn from them but also to honour their stories. She credits the old women “with life behind them” for bringing her back at difficult times in her own journey.

Laramee makes the influence of women felt in Niji Mahkwa School

in other ways. According to the school's Web site, “Motherhood, understood in its simplest form, is the first truth given and must be restored as a communal right and responsibility...it is the right of every adult to practise the gift of motherhood regardless of gender.” She notes that the sheer magnitude of challenges facing her children has overwhelmed more than one



Myra Laramee

teacher at her school. She could react with anger to the disparity in the lives of her children and those of others but has made a conscious choice to “promote, encourage and light the ways to love among people.”

...it is the right of every adult to practise the gift of motherhood regardless of gender.

Then, “I know my children will come to a good place.” When they are able to reclaim their power and

see themselves as part of everyone else, there will be equity, although that is a term with which she is clearly uncomfortable as it applies to women and men.

Laramee feels that, in mainstream culture, equity has come to mean women should be the same as men. In Aboriginal culture, there are distinct roles. “I do not want to be a man, but, rather, walk side by side with men.”

Although there have been losses in women's influence over the years, “blaming men for what has happened to women is not something we can do anymore. The hardest thing for the women's movement to understand is that it is women who have taught men.” There have been other influences, but “we had them first in the nest and held them closest for the longest period of time. We have taught boys to be men. When we take ownership of that fact, I might call myself a feminist again.”

The hardest thing for the women's movement to understand is that it is women who have taught men.

In the meantime, the challenge she sees facing women is to stand up and claim their power. “You don't need permission to stand up and be a woman. If you use that as an excuse, you are not doing justice to the old ladies or yourself.” ■

Get Educated about Osteoporosis

O imagine suffering a bone fracture doing an everyday task such as picking up a bag of groceries or rolling over in bed. For people with osteoporosis, even simple movements can cause broken bones. Wrist, spine and hip fractures are most commonly associated with osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis is a disease that gradually robs bones of their strength, making them more likely to break. While anyone is a candidate for osteoporosis, women are especially at risk. The main cause is loss of estrogen, which helps keep bones healthy after menopause.

The best prevention is education, says Janet Choboter at the Manitoba Chapter of the Osteoporosis Society of Canada. “We need more pre-menopausal education, even in adolescence. We are already going into high schools educating young women about the importance of good nutrition and proper exercise to build strong bones,” she says. “Establishing good habits early in life can greatly reduce risks at menopause.”

In Canada, one in four women and one in eight men over the age of 50 are estimated to have osteoporosis.

Although it’s perceived as an older women’s disease, young people are also at risk. At any age, osteoporosis can be devastating, causing painful fractures, disability, deformity or loss of self-esteem. Fear of fractures may cause people to be less active. Many cannot live independently after an osteoporosis-related hip fracture. Immobilization after fractures also means a general decline in health and increased susceptibility to life threatening complications such as pneumonia and blood clots.

Knowing the risk factors, and changing those you can, will help prevent the disease. They include limited physical activity, hormone deficiencies, certain medications, excess sun exposure, lack of calcium, smoking, heavy caffeine or alcohol use, having thin, small bones, having the ovaries removed, entering menopause before age 45 and a family history of osteoporosis. Changes like quitting smoking, reducing alcohol and caffeine, increasing exercise and getting enough calcium are all effective.

Because there are no warning signs until fractures occur, early diagnosis is important. It can help reduce bone loss and the risk of more fractures. A bone density test is the most accurate way of diagnosing the disease.

“We are trying to educate doctors to watch for osteoporosis in their aging patients,” Chaboter says. “Women with aware doctors are more likely to have an early diagnosis.”

Women with numerous risk factors, or who fracture bones with little trauma, should talk to a health professional about an osteoporosis test. While there is no cure, treatment includes hormone therapy, medication, diet and lifestyle changes.

Building strong bones in childhood and young adulthood is the best defence against osteoporosis. Adults should also learn about it. Assessing risk and taking preventive measures now can help avoid this potentially crippling disease in the future.

For more information contact the Osteoporosis Society of Canada, Manitoba Chapter in Winnipeg at 204-772-3498 or www.osteoporosis.ca. ■

History Book Review

Historically, women have made many important contributions to our country and our province that have never been recounted in traditional history books. To help address this oversight, the Manitoba Women’s Directorate produced the booklet *Celebrating Women’s History – Rediscovering our history* by

learning about the women who helped to create it.

This unique publication explores the origins of Women’s History Month, the famous five and the persons case. It also highlights political milestones and legislation affecting Manitoba women and includes information about Aboriginal women and families. On a lighthearted note, the booklet

features a word search, women’s history quiz, famous quotes and pioneer recipes for candles, soap and bannock.

To request your copy of *Celebrating Women’s History* contact the Manitoba Women’s Directorate at 100-175 Carlton Street. Phone 204-945-3476 or toll-free 1-800-263-0234. ■

New Reciprocal Family Maintenance Legislation

A B O U T Women

is a publication of the Manitoba Women's Directorate that focuses on issues, concerns, information and activities of interest to women. It is available without charge upon request.

Please notify us of any address changes or suggested contacts for distribution. Reproduction of material in *About Women* is permitted, providing the source is acknowledged. We would be pleased to receive information regarding upcoming events in your community.

Contact:

About Women

Manitoba Women's Directorate

100-175 Carlton Street

Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 3H9

Phone: 204-945-3476

or toll-free 1-800-263-0234

Fax: 204-945-0013

E-mail: mwd@gov.mb.ca

Aussi disponible en Français au site du web.

A person seeking to obtain or vary a support order involving a person who lives outside Manitoba will soon be able to start a new process in Manitoba.

This could result in a support or variation order being made in the other person's jurisdiction without making a court application in Manitoba. Under new provincial legislation entitled *The Inter-jurisdictional Support Orders Act* (ISO), the person will complete a package of forms. This package will be sent from a designated authority in Manitoba to the counterpart agency in the jurisdiction where the responding party lives. The court in that jurisdiction will consider the application and the respondent's

evidence before making a support or support variation order.

Currently, the person making the application must first go to court in Manitoba. A second court hearing is then held in the other jurisdiction. This process can take months and sometimes longer.

Other aspects of inter-jurisdictional support procedures will also be streamlined.

The new law is expected to come into effect in Manitoba in early 2003. Similar legislation will also come into effect in other provinces and territories in the near future.

Further information relating to *The Inter-jurisdictional Support Orders Act* can be obtained by contacting the Family Law Branch, Manitoba Justice at 204-945-0268 or toll-free at 1-800-282-8069 ext. 0268. ■

Quick facts

- *The income gaps are smaller between men and women without children and almost disappear among women and men who are similarly educated.*
- *The higher the level of education in women, the greater the attachment to the work force and income level.*
- *Women over 15 with a university degree represent 12.3 per cent of Manitoba's population; men represent 11 per cent.*

