

ABOUT Women

Manitoba
Status of
Women's
Directorate



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Aboriginal women face additional barriers

Of women face barriers in the workplace, then Aboriginal women face a cement ceiling and those with disabilities face double, triple jeopardy, say two First Nations women.

Gerri von Ramin and Doreen Demas have faced the challenges themselves. "The darker one's complexion and the more pronounced one's accent, the less likely one is of securing employment in the mainstream," says von Ramin.

Demas, disability advisor with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, adds that those with disabilities are just "left out of the loop. These are barriers – not simply challenges – that make finding employment and advancing in the workplace difficult."

Programs often don't meet the needs of the women they serve and some initiatives don't work out at all. Demas notes that employers may indicate their willingness to hire women with disabilities, but they won't create a physical environment that's accessible for them.

There is a lack of sensitivity, awareness and support. "Invisible barriers create isolation," von Ramin explains, "and that's compounded for women with disabilities or illness." Women with chronic diseases like lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia often don't look sick and their needs are not taken seriously.

Other barriers for Aboriginal women, says von Ramin, include lack of decent, affordable housing, access to



(L-R) Doreen Demas and Gerri von Ramin know first hand some of the barriers facing Aboriginal women.

child care and the fact that their male counterparts can access employment and advance faster than the women.

"The workplace must be looked at and changed to meet the needs of people," Demas adds. "It's a collective responsibility." Employees, unions and employers must work together and the two women suggest government should take the lead role on this issue. ■

Minister's Message

O am pleased to address you, as we celebrate International Women's Day March 8. As Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I will host a reception at the Legislative Building in Winnipeg March 8. The theme of this year's celebration is Women and Work.

Women face the daily challenges of balancing work and family. While women's participation in the work force has increased dramatically, along with the variety of work they perform, women's share of unpaid work hours – the care giving for children and aging parents, the household duties, the volunteer work – has remained the same.

“Women face the daily challenges of balancing work and family.”

Women know and statistics show that women undertake the larger share of unpaid work. This “double shift” often adds considerable stress and frustration to women's lives. Many of us feel guilty if we take time for ourselves and, for many of

us, it is a challenge to find that personal time.

As Minister of Advanced Education, I am doubly aware of the importance of education and training. I know that opportunities for education and training increase the likelihood of women being employed and provide a richer array of career options.

“Many of us feel guilty if we take time for ourselves...”

Aboriginal women, immigrant women, women of colour and women with disabilities face double or triple challenges when seeking employment. As well, entering the workforce can be quite intimidating. Here in Manitoba, organizations such as Brandon's Samaritan House and Winnipeg's Employment Projects of Winnipeg offer programs and support to these women. Both are profiled in this issue of *About Women*. I am sure you will find all of the articles informative and reflective of the challenges we still face.

International Women's Day Celebrations on March 8 are



scheduled for 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m., with the official program at 12:30 p.m. I look forward to seeing you as we celebrate our victories and move to future challenges. For further information, please call the Women's Directorate. I also invite you to call, write or e-mail the Women's Directorate. Contact details are on the back cover. ■

Diane McGifford

Diane McGifford
Minister responsible for
the Status of Women

Taking the first steps

For many women, the idea of re-entering the workforce is intimidating. For women in shelters, it can be overwhelming.

Brandon's Samaritan House gives women the confidence and skills they need to take their first steps on the road to employment.

Incorporated in 1987, Samaritan House helps victims of violence through crisis and then offers programs to upgrade their education and find decent employment. The degree of education varies greatly among shelter residents, says Samaritan House director Julie Collyer. "Some women need to learn to read, others need to finish a high-school credit to get into university."

Collyer says once residents are past the crisis stage, they need support to change their lives. Preparing to return to, or start in, the workforce is an integral part of that. Illiteracy is prevalent: as many as half the women using the shelter's education programs are unable to read. Samaritan House's literacy course allows them to learn, or improve, reading skills and then offers other programs for those who want to continue learning.

Samaritan House's adult education programs include Skills for Success, a course that partners with the Brandon Adult Learning Centre. The two-year-old course, which takes 12 women at a time, includes writing, English, time management and basic study skills. Math and computer skills are offered in

conjunction with the course. Last year, six women went on to the adult centre and one to university. This year, 10 are enrolled in Skills for Success.

"Completion of our courses means a half credit when they go on to the Adult Learning Centre," says Wanda Snow, co-ordinator/instructor with the Samaritan House program. "The skills they gain here can help them succeed at the adult centre and the half credit gives them extra time to put into new studies."

Skills for Success and programs like it are invaluable in helping women improve their lives. As women gain education, they gain confidence and the hope of a better future. To create that future, they must take the first steps into the workforce – education and training. ■

Cracker's Bistro experiment a winner

It's a Wednesday afternoon and Ennie Arnal speaks into the phone with a soft Texas accent, straining to be overheard above a dishwasher at Cracker's - The Bistro. The lunch time crowd has left, signaling another successful day in a unique life-classroom that also happens to serve great food.

In 1994, Cracker's got its launch when Arnal proposed turning a classroom at Windsor Park Collegiate into a small diner. The Texas native, who had 20 years of experience in Special Needs Education, was new to the St. Boniface School Division, but she already had an idea. Her objective

was to give mentally challenged young adults, aged 16 to 21, a chance to learn skills for independent living by operating a restaurant.

Over the next five years the diner concept was integrated into the classroom instruction Arnal gave her students. At first, the restaurant was only open on Fridays for lunch, but it proved so popular with the public, Arnal proposed that it be taken outside the school.

"I did a quick feasibility study that showed people would be willing to come out (to the restaurant) two to three times a week," she says.

After negotiating a generous donation of a year's rent-free space from Cottonwood Properties Ltd.,

Cracker's was relocated to a strip mall near the school in January 1999. The restaurant also received a startup grant from the Winnipeg Development Agreement.

Now the students in the Windsor Park program are serving lunch five days a week in a 50-seat facility under the watchful eye of a cook/restaurant manager and a supervisor. Arnal says the restaurant has proved the value of giving real-life responsibility outside the classroom to mentally challenged young adults.

"I consider it a laboratory for teaching them social and life skills, because they have to know

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Career consultant shares views on women in today's workplace

The workplace in 2002, although improved, still contains contradictions and challenges for women, says Barbara Bowes, a well-known career advisor, human resource professional and local newspaper columnist.

For the first time, women are leading Fortune 500 companies, she says, yet many are opting out of the executive circle. Women are better educated, but still lose their jobs to downsizing. They've won the right to work flex-hours, but can't manage their work and home duties in less than a 14-hour day. Larger companies have evaluations that ensure women's jobs are not undervalued, while smaller companies and family-owned businesses often do not.

"...other behaviour, such as sexual harassment, continues."

"Many women continue to put in 14 to 18 hour days until they are exhausted and begin to realize that there is more to life than work," says Bowes. "But, women in the workplace have come a long way in the last 15 to 20 years. When I had my children, there was no maternity leave. Today, we have maternity leave, parental and



Barbara Bowes, career advisor and human resource professional, says women have come a long way.

adoption leave of up to a year. Policies provide for job sharing, not just in business but also in the school system. We have flex-time, part-time and now with improvements in technology, we have employees working remotely from home."

In spite of these steps forward, other behaviour, such as sexual harassment, continues. With increased knowledge of what constitutes sexual harassment and less tolerance by women to accept this behaviour, more women are coming forward and more companies are facing law suits and their accompanying costs. "As a result," she adds, "many companies are

providing employee training and ensuring that policies are in place."

"Recruitment, training and promotional programs are now focused toward diversity rather than women."

Bowes says women's issues, as a separate entity, have been put on the back burner by government and business. "They have been enveloped by larger social issues as well as the issue of diversity. Recruitment, training and promotional programs are now focused toward diversity rather than women."

As a certified human resource management professional and a certified management consultant, Bowes holds three degrees in education. She is also president of the Human Resource Management Association of Manitoba. Earlier in her career, Bowes was recognized as the YWCA's Woman of the Year, Professional. More recently she was nominated for the Canadian Women's mentorship award. Bowes is also the author of *The Easy Resume Book: A Transferable Skills Approach* that is now distributed throughout North America. She is a regular career columnist with the *Winnipeg Free Press*. ■

Simple steps for a better work environment

Ot's important for all women, whatever their work, to make sure they use simple exercises and precautions to help improve their well-being

and safety in the workplace says Winnipeg physiotherapist Ruth Wingertner. Two of the most common hazards for women are stress and repetitive strain injury.

The increased use of computers keeps many office workers in the same position, using the same range of motions, for long periods of time. This can lead to muscle pain, strain and even carpal tunnel syndrome. To avoid these problems computer users should use a padded wrist rest and keep elbows at a 90 degree angle. Feet should be flat on the floor or on a footrest. Good posture with shoulders relaxed and a slight curve in the lower back is important.

“Adjustable furniture and work surfaces provide flexibility and comfort.”

Taking frequent breaks to stand and stretch can ease muscle aches, eye strain and stress. Performing simple stretches such as shoulder rolls and shrugs, arm circles, head and neck rotations, side stretches, ankle flexes and leg lifts can help relieve tension and relax muscles.

It is also important that workstations are comfortable and fitted



Computers have changed the workplace forever. Good posture along with adjustable chairs and proper desk heights help avoid physical problems.

with the proper equipment. Chairs should swivel, have five wheels for stability and a rounded front edge. Adjustable furniture and work surfaces provide flexibility and comfort. Good lighting reduces glare and helps avoid problems such as fatigue and eyestrain.

Employees in factories, retail stores, restaurants and many other occupations may also experience problems caused by performing repetitive motions. Injury can occur in wrists, elbows, shoulders, back, neck, hips, knees or ankles. Rest breaks and stretching can also help reduce the risk of injury and relieve stress. Some workers may face additional discomfort and strain caused by standing for long periods

of time. Proper fitting, well-chosen footwear is essential for workers in these environments.

“Rest breaks and stretching can also help reduce the risk of injury...”

In today's busy workplace it is common for workers to get involved in projects and activities and to ignore their own needs. Current research shows that incorporating these easy self-help suggestions into daily routines will result in a healthier, less stressful work environment. ■

Employment program helps jobseekers find work

Rita Chahal has come full circle with Employment Projects of Winnipeg (EPW). She first discovered EPW as a client, later supported its work as a volunteer board member and is now the organization's executive director.

"I feel privileged the board and staff have entrusted me to take EPW to the next phase of its continued growth," Chahal says. "I find my work extremely meaningful and satisfying. Every day, staff from our agency help clients discover new opportunities for themselves. We see over 3000 clients a year, all looking for a better opportunity, whether it is employment, training or some other

additional support for their personal circumstances."

There are several areas Chahal wants to expand. For example, developing a benchmark mentorship program for highly skilled professional immigrant women who, because of their foreign credentials and lack of Canadian work experience, can't find employment in their professional areas. Another initiative, The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) initiative will link clients to employers and help clients demonstrate the educational value of their previous skills and work experience through the use of customized career portfolios.

"We are also excited about promoting the trades, technology,

math and science sectors to women," says Chahal. The basic programs will now be enhanced with information, resources and career counselling to encourage women to consider non-traditional careers and occupations.

"EPW does open doors to opportunities," Chahal says. "Our staff are multilingual and many have been clients themselves. They know what it feels like to look for work, change careers or become a first time adult learner."

More information about EPW programs and services is available at 204-949-5300 or 204-949-5323; email: epw@epwinc.mb.ca; Web site: <http://www.epwinc.mb.ca> ■

In conversation with social activist Joan Johannson

Joan Johannson understands the feelings of anger and despair created by poverty because she has experienced it herself.

When a search for a book that could help her deal with poverty proved fruitless, she decided to write one herself. *Discovering the Bright Warrior - Confessions of a Social Activist* talks about what it means to be a poor Canadian today and challenges stereotypes.

Johannson hopes her book will help people living in poverty to move on from despair... "to dance and sing

and enjoy and not live in an emotionally negative space."

The author believes strongly in family values, that community members should treat each other as family, with the strong protecting the weak. Community support, she writes, enables individuals to grow and thrive and community members are obliged to help each other. Support organizations, she adds, are now being run as businesses and "market values have taken over family values."

Johannson was a founding member of Community Action on Poverty

and the Canadian Association of the Non-Employed; has served on the national boards of directors of the National Anti-Poverty Organization, Ten Days for Global Justice and the Urban Core Support Network; and works with professionals and people living in poverty on policy affecting poverty and unemployment.

Discovering the Bright Warrior - Confessions of a Social Activist is available at local book stores. Johannson welcomes comments or questions about her book, e-mail: www.brightwarrior@mts.net. ■

Consultation, outreach create priorities

Public consultations and outreach initiatives will guide the priorities of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council over the next year, says council chair Kim Clare. Last year, outreach meetings were held in Brandon, Thompson, Dauphin and Winnipeg.

Events in the community influence the council's work, she says, and shape the nature of the advice offered to government. At the Thompson meeting, for example, council heard about poverty, housing deficits, gaps in health services, lack of child care options, isolation and discrimination.

"Hearing the determination, wisdom, caring and even anger in one voice or many and seeing one face or several reflecting sometimes despair, but often strength, pride and hope, makes every community consultation an invaluable event," says Clare.

"We always leave a community with incredible admiration for the women who share their experiences with us," Clare adds. "We are honoured that women take time to attend our consultation meetings."

As well as its meetings and consultations, the council is working with the Women's Directorate and Healthy Child Manitoba to publish the sixth

edition of *Parenting on Your Own*, an excellent resource manual for sole support parents, to be released this spring.

An arms-length advisor to government, the council advises on issues that affect the full and equal participation of women in society. Council meets with individual women and women's organizations and holds bi-monthly meetings, some in rural and northern locations.

For more information contact:
The Manitoba Women's Advisory Council
107 – 175 Carlton Street
Winnipeg R3C 3H9
Phone: 204-945-6281 in Winnipeg or toll free at 1-800-282-8069. ■

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everything from handling money, to grooming and hygiene, to what's needed for the restaurant to pass a city health inspection," she says.

Usually there are 14 students in the program with three of them taking turns each day working in the restaurant. The rest of the week, Arnal is teaching the students other life skills in the classroom. Each of the restaurant employees is paid for his/her time from the common pool of tips collected from customers.

"We're pretty tough task masters," she says, but the results speak for themselves. Arnal says she has hundreds of response forms that

have been filled out by the restaurant's customers. In many cases there is praise for the staff and the food, even suggestions for adding items to the menu.

In April 2000, Cracker's received an award from Xerox Canada Ltd. for Innovation in Education. The award came with a cheque for \$10,000.

Arnal says the program has even attracted students from outside the school division.

"We were fortunate in that we were able to employ six students who would normally have been placed in recreation and leisure programs," she says.

But what Arnal finds most gratifying about her students' accomplishments is that they receive something that's often hard to come by for individuals with mental disabilities.

"I remember when one of my students was being interviewed by a television reporter and was asked what they enjoyed most about working at Cracker's," recalls Arnal. "What impressed me the most is when the student said 'I get respect'."

Crackers is located at 1079 Autumnwood Drive in Windsor Park. The restaurant is open for lunch five days a week between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. ■

Family law booklet now on Internet



The Public Information – Family Law in Manitoba (1999) booklet is available via the Internet in French at:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/family/familylawbook99.fr.pdf>

and in English at:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/family/family.html> ■



A B O U T **women**

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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

