

Jobs for the FUTURE:

Women, Training, and Technology



Alison Roberts

Changer les attitudes et les actions qui limitent les options de carrière des femmes, tel est le défi lancé à des centaines de participant(e)s à un projet intitulé Jobs for the Future: Women, Training and Technology. Le but de ce projet est d'assurer que les femmes de l'Ontario auront accès égal à la formation et à l'emploi dans les domaines technologiques.

Changing the deeply-rooted attitudes and practices which limit the career options of women is the challenge issued to hundreds of participants in a project entitled *Jobs for the Future: Women, Training, and Technology*. The project is designed to ensure that women in Ontario have equal access to technology-related training and employment.

The *Jobs for the Future* project is being sponsored by the Honourable Robert Welch, Q.C., Deputy Premier and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, Government of Ontario. It is co-ordinated by the Ontario Women's Directorate, with the support and participation of Ministers of Education, Colleges and Universities, Government Services, Industry and Trade, and Labour.

Because the causes of traditional female-employment patterns are complex, ensuring that women have equal access to emerging employment opportunities requires the efforts of many sectors of our society. Therefore, between

November, 1983 and June, 1984, decision-makers from education, business, industry, labour, and women's groups were brought together through the *Jobs for the Future* project, in six Ontario centres. Their mandate was to set the stage for the ongoing development of specific and constructive strategies.

In Thunder Bay, Toronto, St. Catharines, Windsor, Ottawa, and Sudbury, senior representatives from each major sector determined what could and would be done in the classrooms and workplaces, by parents and peers, to make sure that the girls and women in their communities were prepared and accepted for the jobs of the future. The process will continue in November, 1984, when many of these consultation participants will join a host of others from across Ontario at a major conference in Toronto.

While the objectives of both the consultative phase and the conference are the same, the process differs. During each consultation, approximately sixty participants formed sectoral committees – that is, educators worked with educators, and employers with employers, etc., to generate strategies relevant to each respective milieu. Guidelines for their deliberations were provided by the *Jobs for the Future* discussion paper, which is available from the Ontario Women's Directorate on request. As the following excerpt illustrates, the paper was designed to elicit practical remedies to a series of issues.

Training

Attitudinal and structural barriers can impede the entry by many women to relevant training opportunities. Some of these barriers are:

- lack of necessary prerequisites in mathematics, science, and technology (in the case of some immigrant women, upgrading in English is also required)
- lack of information on training opportunities
- insufficient funds to support a family while in training
- family demands which make it difficult for women to acquire training, particularly if women are in isolated communities

To ensure that women have access to relevant training for jobs of the future,

educators can:

- provide training programs in locations and at times convenient to women, with childcare provided, if possible
- ensure that promotional materials on training programs are targeted toward women as well as men

employers can:

- provide on-the-job training for qualified women as a bridging mechanism to new skills
- ensure that information on occupations is directed toward women as well as men

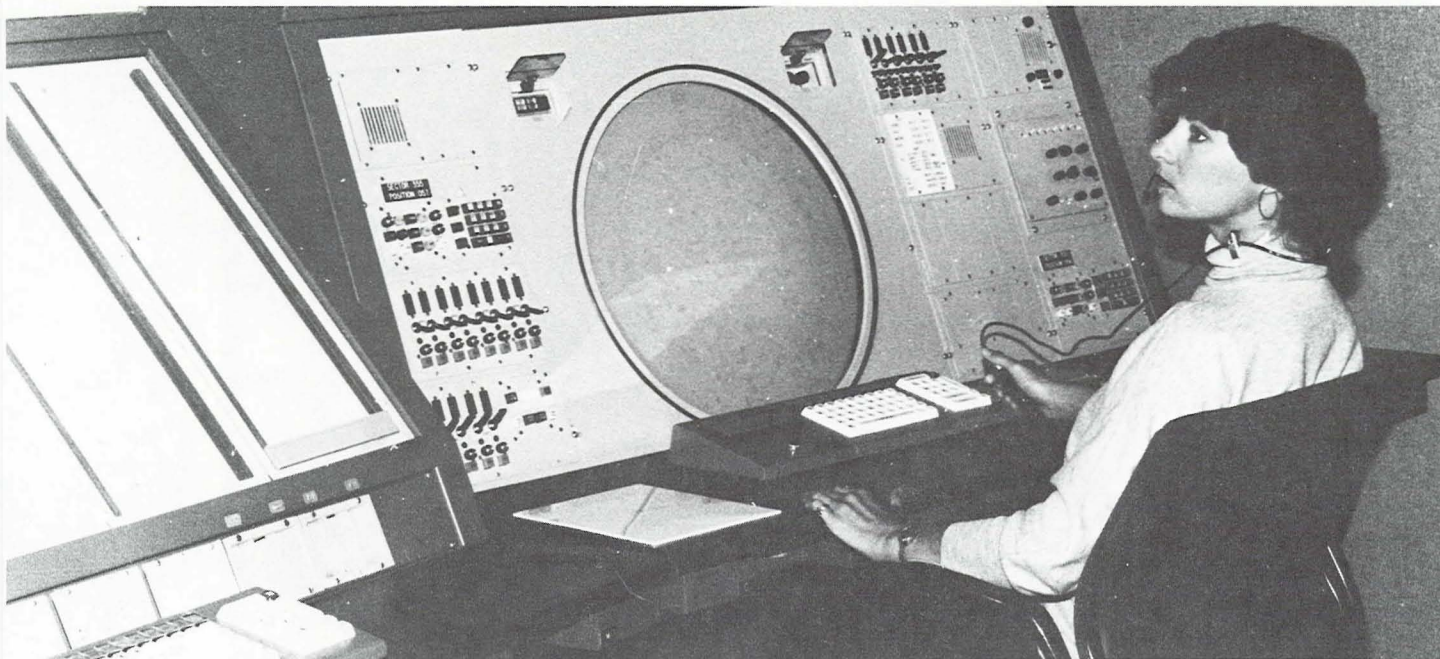


Photo: Bev Pearl

women's groups can:

- provide women with information on the jobs for the future and the need to prepare themselves for these occupations

unions can:

- provide women members with information on training opportunities

It is important to note that the consultations acted to initiate, and not complete, the strategic planning process. That is, participants formed a core group headed by key people in the region to take the issues into the community to develop responses with associates and colleagues. Subsequently, responses have been co-ordinated into community-action plans and submitted to the Office of the Deputy Premier and the Ontario Women's Directorate. These plans contain a host of imaginative yet practical initiatives which can make a positive difference for women. Here are just a few examples:

- Niagara College in St. Catharines will provide a Technical Careers Orientation program for high-school girls, unemployed women, and employed women seeking a career change.
- Women's groups in Sudbury will hold an annual Teen Conference for girls to promote new career choices.
- The business/industry committee in Toronto proposed that a "buddy" system be developed whereby companies which had established affirmative action would promote and sup-

port a commitment to that process among employers who were not involved. (The Ontario Women's Directorate is facilitating this process.)

- The University of Windsor will provide remedial math and science programs for returning female students.

Phase two of the *Jobs for the Future: Women, Training, and Technology* project is the major conference this fall. The material generated through the consultative process will form the bases for discussion at the provincial conference in November. This time, however, the process will promote co-operation among the sectors. The urgent need for such interaction, especially among business, industry, and education, was clearly defined during the consultations, and some creative responses have already been developed.

For example, last September the head of the guidance department at Thornlea Secondary School in York Region, north of Toronto, began a year-long exchange program with a personnel practitioner from Hewlett-Packard (Canada) Ltd. The teacher will spend one day each week at Hewlett-Packard, becoming familiar with new types of automation tools and with career opportunities in high-tech companies, while the person from Hewlett-Packard will meet with students to develop the same understanding and awareness – especially, of course, among the girls.

It is anticipated that further such imaginative and constructive activities will

be developed by the 250 conference participants, and that the implementation of change for women will continue long after the *Jobs for the Future* project ends in November.

If women and men are to enjoy social and economic equity, the career choices of girls and women must be aligned with emerging labour-market demands. But the equal access of women to new employment opportunities can only be ensured through the co-operation and mutual intention of educators, employers, labour leaders, governments, and women themselves. The process of change is complex and long-term, but as the *Jobs for the Future* project continues, it is clear that it can be directed and accelerated.

The *Jobs for the Future: Women, Training, and Technology* Provincial Conference will be held on November 28 and 29, 1984, in Toronto. For further information, please contact:

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