

Girls into Trades Careers Seminar Evaluation Report

for economic Security4Women

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Impact upon subject choice	4
Impact upon longer-term aspirations.....	5
Challenges and deterrents.....	6
Engagement and learning.....	6
Finding more information	6
Summary	7
Recommendations.....	7

Introduction

This evaluation report concerns a small pilot project with high school teachers and years 10, 11 and 12 female secondary students. The project centred on a forum held on 20 August 2010 by the Association of Women Educators (AWE), which included a presentation and discussion about non-traditional careers for women. Queensland members of The National Association of Women in Construction Association (NAWIC) provided leadership and were typically women who worked in or who owned businesses in the non-traditional areas. It was intended that an outcome of the presentation and forum would be an evaluation of whether the learning experience made a difference regarding the choices the girls made and if they believed they were more informed about possible non-traditional careers and the pathways that could be taken in order to gain employment in these careers.

It was also intended that the girls would know more about where to get information regarding careers in the non-traditional areas. It was anticipated that this pilot project would inform future action.

Post seminar evaluation forms from 10 participants and follow-up interviews with 8 available participants have provided much useful feedback for the future development of similar support initiatives. Participants came from five schools, one in the northern and four in the southern Brisbane metropolitan region. The schools included a co-educational flexible learning centre - an alternative non government school for young people who have been disenfranchised from education and social connection, a small non government school for disadvantaged girls, and three large co-educational high schools - two of which are in low socio-economic regions with a high level of cultural diversity.

This report provides a discussion of key points and summary of outcomes with recommendations. It is worth noting that findings here reinforce similar findings from an earlier report undertaken by Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) under the auspices of economic Security4Women (eS4W) – *Getting Real: Young Women and Girls ,Working Futures, VET and VET in schools* (April 2005). This is especially relevant in matters concerning the VET in schools sector Queensland.

Impact upon subject choice

There was general agreement that the seminar gave participants “a positive feeling about careers in the trades” and provided useful information which directly influenced decisions about career paths and subject choices.

Almost half of the students commented that until this seminar they had little or no idea about what they would do and, in various ways, described the seminar as having a great impact on their thinking about future directions.

The majority of participants, being year 12 students, reflected that it would have been most useful to have attended such a seminar whilst in year 9 or 10. They were however motivated to find more information about post-school training and access to apprenticeships. Finding this information was reported to be a challenge for these students and almost half stated that it would be useful to be provided with support for internet searches, perhaps through the provision of a website portal.

Comments included:

- *I have enjoyed it very much and it has helped me decide what to do.*
- *It was informative and very positive towards women*
- *The seminar helped because I had no idea at all before then...thinking of nothing. Lots of girls don't have any ideas because they don't have any information.*
- *It made me look at a few other choices that I didn't think of.*
- *A lot of people don't even know what half of the things are.*
- *The seminar increased my determination about girls getting out into trades.*
- *I'll decide to do the right kind of Maths for doing 'furniture' next year.*
- *I might do TAFE next year – you can do it while at school.*
- *I like the one about trains...a couple of people talked about council work on the train lines and how there is a lot of jobs... 'cause I didn't even know about that and I thought "That's another option".*
- *I wanted to be a carpenter but I thought about it and then I wanted to get an apprenticeship in tiling or plumbing. That really stood out in the actual information.*
- *It would be good to have more seminars like this in year 10...because you pick all your subjects and if I had've known I was going to do that I would've picked manual arts and working with wood. Year 9 would be good because they are changing it now so year 9's are doing all subjects so they have a chance to do manual arts as well. Do it for all years.*

Impact upon longer-term aspirations

More than half of the students expressed interest in eventually owning their own business with many reflecting on the positive examples provided by the seminar presenters. This response points to the importance of providing more information and examples of business owners in the various trades, including relevant subjects and training options.

- *I liked the carpentry presentation - the lady in business. It showed how far you can get if you try*
- *The lady who owns the business - that one was really good*
- *I'm currently working part time at McDonalds and I'm going into management and they offer a diploma in business management and they pay for me to do it so I'm thinking if I do that through McDonalds it will give me some business management skills*
- *I plan to gain an apprenticeship, work in the mines and save money. To open my own workshop*

- *My plan is to work in either trade for about 10 years then hopefully to have my own business and try and be like a women's business*
- *I think I'll stay at the job and wait until I was ready to start my own business.*

Challenges and deterrents

Some of the possible deterrents and challenges for young women entering trades were identified as the need for difficult mathematics courses, possible negative attitudes of male co-workers and employers and lack of physical strength. This feedback points to the need for continued reinforcement of female capabilities and the provision of positive examples.

Engagement and learning

All of the participants reported that they were interested in trades because they perceived them to be more "hands-on", practical and creative. Most of the students attending the seminar praised the carpentry presentation as being the most engaging and informative. They expressed the desire for more of this kind of presentation, with concrete examples and demonstrations, opportunities for using tools, photographs, videos and real life stories. The students also appreciated that these women ran their own business and felt inspired to do likewise and even be proactive about employing other women.

- *One of them really stood out to me - the chick that was running a business with her best friend and they showed us photos. They weren't just talking. It was more like showing what they did and not just saying what they did. It was more interesting, catchy.*

The students also generalised that it is useful for all students to hear a variety of people talk about their jobs.

- *It would help a lot better to listen and understand and you can ask about it like at the trades seminar. It would be good if people could come in and talk like that in the school*

Finding more information

The need for help with further research about training and employment options was an issue highlighted by all students. Although most students said they would look on the internet, they were also unsure about how to find what they really wanted, and would like some assistance with this. Some suggested that guidance counsellors and teachers might be given information links to help them guide students, or that a web portal could be provided specifically for helping young women find information about trades, education requirements, and training and employment within specific regions. It was also suggested that a broader survey be undertaken, perhaps online, to find out more about specific needs.

- *It would be a lot better to have someone to help look on the Internet*

- *I'd probably just go on the net and have a look at the jobs and apprenticeships that are going. Would be good to have a website with just apprenticeships - in Brisbane and the Gold Coast - jobs run by women*
- *It would be helpful to have information about other websites cause if you are kind of like me it would help.*

Summary

Overall the *Girls Into Trades* Seminar was a very useful experience for participants and prompted new thinking around future directions. Issues identified included the need for information and practical experience in a wider range of trades for students from years 9 – 12, responding to interest in associated business possibilities, and support for finding further information about trades and training and employment opportunities.

Recommendations

- That the Girls Into Trades pilot project be continued with consideration to extending this into a national project
- That the project includes further research for the development of the program and resources
- That resource development includes a web portal with links to information which may be used by school staff, parents and students.
- That the report be published in Redress (AWE national journal) as a means of advocating other 'education and VET on schools' groups to organise and participate in similar focused awareness and information seminars for girls in secondary schools. The report will also be published on the AWE website (with appropriate acknowledgment).
- That AWE and other relevant professional associations use the findings to lobby local education authorities and government to support action for girls to be
 - a) better informed about the range of non traditional careers available, and more importantly
 - b) provide a range of support especially for specific 'disadvantaged' groups of girls about pathways in order for them to get into careers in non traditional trades.