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Chair

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin

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● (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP)): Good afternoon to everyone and welcome to the 33th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today, we will continue our study on improving economic prospects for Canadian girls.

Before we begin, I have to announce that the witness who was supposed to testify at 4:30 unfortunately could not make it. Ms. Jessica Danforth, from the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, will therefore not be with us today. So the committee will end its meeting earlier, that is, at 4:30. In fact, Ms. Danforth is at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. We will try to invite her again at a future meeting.

For the first part of our meeting, we have, via video conference, from Halifax in Nova Scotia, Ms. Tricia Robertson from Techsploration, and Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour, the President of the Board for the Canadian Centre for Women in Science, Engineering, Trades and Technology.

Ms. Ashton, you wanted to speak?

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Can we invite Ms. Danforth at an upcoming meeting on the same subject we are studying now?

The Chair: Yes, we will try to invite her next week, if she is available. There should not be a problem.

Ms. Niki Ashton: If she cannot come to the meeting where we will be discussing this issue, could she send her observations to the committee, and explain to us why she was not able to appear today?

The Chair: If Ms. Danforth cannot be available for this study, we will ask her to send us her observations anyway. I presume that committee members agree with Ms. Ashton's suggestion.

I believe that is the case, so we will now move on to the testimony from our guests, beginning with Ms. Robertson. You have 10 minutes to make your presentation, and then we will move on to Ms. Armour, who will also have 10 minutes. Then, we will go to questions by committee members.

Ms. Robertson, you may begin. You have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Tricia Robertson (Executive Director, Techsploration): Hello. Can you hear me?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Yes.

[*English*]

Ms. Tricia Robertson: My name is Tricia Robertson. I'm executive director of the Techsploration program and I have been since its inception in 1998. I have been researching policies, procedures, and collective agreements, and have developed programs related to women in science, trades, and technology since the late 1980s.

I'm going to tell you about the Techsploration program. I think it's a good way to lead into the types of recommendations you're looking for. Techsploration was built from an idea. It began 14 years ago, because we believed if you wanted—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Robertson, I have to interrupt you. The interpreter is indicating that the volume is very low and that it is very difficult to hear you. Can you please speak into the mike?

[*English*]

It's your mike, probably.

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Someone's looking at it as we speak.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You may continue, Ms. Robertson. We will see whether the interpreter can hear you.

● (1535)

[*English*]

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Techsploration was built from an idea. It began 14 years ago, because we believed if you wanted to make a change in the number of women in science, trades, and technology, you had to reach the young women. As a result, Techsploration provides young women from diverse backgrounds in grades nine through twelve with opportunities to learn about careers in these fields. It also helps them to understand the significance of high school math and science to their future careers, and it helps them create awareness about the critical role of work in their lives.

Techsploration gives young women the opportunity to enhance their public speaking, presentation, and report-writing skills. They also learn about communication, leadership, and teamwork—all skills that employers want. It helps “techsplorers” to increase their levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, and cultural awareness, but more importantly, Techsploration provides information. Information is empowering and absolutely changes lives.

The success of Techsploration is the result of the collaboration and commitment—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Robertson, I have to interrupt you a second time. I apologize. The interpreter is indicating that you're speaking much too fast. Can you please slow down a little?

[*English*]

Thank you.

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Okay. I'm a self-taught person who does speak very quickly.

Techsploration gives young women the opportunity to enhance their public speaking, presentation, and report-writing skills. They also learn about communication, leadership, and teamwork—all skills that employers want. Techsplorers increase their levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, and cultural awareness, but most importantly, Techsploration provides information.

Information is empowering and it absolutely changes lives. The success of Techsploration is a result of the collaboration and commitment of teachers, parents, elders, role models, governments, industry, unions, and professional associations, all working together to develop ongoing community partnerships.

Techsploration is a not-for-profit organization. It is governed by a volunteer board of directors and eight committees. It began in 1998 as a pilot project. Now, this year, we have over 40 schools in the program, 350 role models—teachers and volunteers—who participate each year, along with 3,000 students. This year, more than 50 program events were held around the province. It begins with the annual launch and briefing session for teachers. It's a kick-off for another year. It's an opportunity to brief our teachers.

It is followed by the workplace tour, or "Techsploration goes to work", where each school team, which is comprised of six grade nine girls, meets their assigned role model at a workplace to learn about her career and her workplace environment. At their workplace tour, they might go up in helicopters, spend a day on a tugboat tour, go to a laboratory, learn how to weld, or go on a forensic dig.

Once they have completed their workplace tour, the next part of the program is "Techsploration goes to school". During this time, the Techsploration team share their research and workplace experience with students at their school. Everyone benefits. This includes not only the young women, but the young men, teachers, and guidance counsellors. They all have the opportunity to learn about careers as they meet role models in a round-robin event.

The round-robin workshop is a key feature at all of our events. Each role model sets up a station with props. Small groups of students rotate from station to station as they meet the role models, participate in hands-on activities, and have the opportunity to ask questions.

The final part of the program is a large conference. We have three of them. This is the opportunity for girls on the school teams to hear what the other teams have learned about. They also participate in a round-robin workshop where they meet the role models from each assigned team.

Finally, we have an alumni event. It is held each November for the girls in grades 10, 11, and 12. This is one opportunity for these young women to participate in a huge round-robin and meet many more role models. For example, last year we had 28 role model stations.

That's a snapshot of our events.

We also have a resource tool that we developed called "women in action web videos". It's a resource tool. It's featured on our website at Techsploration.ca. Essentially, it's a snapshot of a role model's life and her career in two minutes. We currently have 30 online. We will have 60.

We have another special project. It's our new website and portal. It was three years in the making. We just unveiled it in December. As a result, Techsploration now has the ability to reach more young women. We also have sections of our website dedicated to each of our stakeholder groups, including alumni, teachers, role models, sponsors, and volunteers at our board and committees.

The next phase is yet to come. This is Techsploration in the future. It is our long-term strategic goal. It means instead of reaching more than 3,000 students, by developing online workshops, we'll have the opportunity to reach thousands more who are unable to participate at the 50 events. It also means that there will be a way to keep in touch with the young women of Techsploration after they graduate from grade 12. It will help us to measure the impact of our interventions. It means we will be able to develop new tools that will assist the young women and enable them to make more informed careers decisions.

● (1540)

We have three partners in the Techsploration program, including the community college, WITT Nova Scotia, or Women in Trades and Technology, and the apprenticeship training division of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education.

Techsploration exists because of our 38 sponsors. They represent an incredible example of collaboration and commitment. The chief thing is that they provide not only financial resources but role models and volunteers for our boards and committees and events. They also provide in-kind support.

Our sponsors recognize that their commitment to Techsploration is also a commitment to families, to our communities, and to the next generation entering the workforce.

To wrap up, we will be celebrating our 15-year anniversary this fall. We're looking for ways to incorporate the first International Day of the Girl Child as well as the theme for International Women's Day, which is "Connecting girls, inspiring futures".

I would like to wrap up with a quote from one of our Techsploration alumni. She said:

> The most important thing I learned from Techsploration is that no matter who I am, a girl, boy, black or white, I can be anything I want to be. I learned something from every role model, which I will take with me through life.

We have four recommendations. One is to promote role modelling through a government-led campaign to promote awareness and counteract the negative impacts sometimes experienced by women from supervisors and peers.

We'd like to engage young women in taking a lead role in this study. For example, what works for them? What doesn't work for them? We'd like to provide an opportunity so that they continue to talk about the stories after they've been on a workplace tour.

We would like to do more role modelling on the website. We want to develop video conferenced workshops between role models and schools to promote science, trades, and technology careers. The workshops would continue to highlight the importance of math and science, the significance of work, and the way to make choices.

Finally, somewhere along the line we talked a lot about balancing work and family, but it seems to have fallen off the radar. For young women, this is very important when they're studying or when they're working. We need the government to focus on a campaign to help them balance work and family issues.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Robertson.

We will now move on to Ms. Armour.

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour (President of the Board, Canadian Centre for Women in Science, Engineering, Trades and Technology): Thank you very much.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: Thank you.

I appreciate this opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I'm representing the Canadian Centre for Women in Science, Engineering Trades and Technology, and also WISEST, at the University of Alberta.

For 30 years now, since WISEST began, we've been asking the basic question: why are so many girls not choosing careers in the trades, engineering, the sciences and technology, which would give them so much more security and better economic prospects than many of the service jobs they're in?

We know, as Tricia has told us, that many of the girls don't know about the possibilities that are open to them and they also see very few women role models in the areas they might be interested in. So they exclude these areas as possible areas of work they can do, not even recognizing that there's no reason they shouldn't do them.

We've realized that within schools there's not a lot of opportunity to learn about trades and even to learn about engineering. When we ask young women here why they chose engineering as a career we very often get the answer that their mother or their father or an uncle or a close family member was an engineer, so they understood what engineering was about. Or perhaps they've been in one of the programs that WISEST runs and have learned about engineering. So our question was, what can we do to change this?

There were several answers, one of them being that hands-on experiences, the kinds of things Techsploration does, real experiences in trades and professions and in engineering, and imitating role models and mentors makes a tremendous difference.

The example of the program that WISEST has run is we invite grade eleven girls to come and spend six weeks working in a research group at the University of Alberta during the summer, and we pay them for this work. They have the opportunity of joining a group and discovering one of the areas in which engineers of all disciplines can work. We find that this intrigues them, because now they begin to understand how the work that engineers do relates to their own life. They meet women engineers and scientists, and often at the end of the six weeks they come and say “This is science, this is engineering. I can do it.” So they discover it's something they want to do and something that's relevant to them.

This program has about 60 students who come each summer, and it has a parallel program at Memorial University in Newfoundland. It's one that can probably provide a very appropriate template for other colleges and universities to have students. We feel it's a very good program because it uses resources that are already present: faculty members, staff members who are doing research, who can have young women come and join them, and they can be the role models for them.

The WinSETT Centre is also involved in programs working to give girls an experience of science, engineering, and the trades. We've had young aboriginal girls come to a science laboratory and make nylon. They are usually wearing nylon, or their shoes or backpacks are made of nylon, so they're doing something that means a lot to them, because they realize this is something that's relevant to them.

● (1550)

I was very delighted when two young women who were here a year ago asked to come back and brought a whole group of their schoolmates with them from two reserve schools about two hours west of Edmonton, and then took great pride in showing the rest of their friends how to do the experiment in the lab. They had bought into it. They had become excited by science.

The WinSETT Centre has now also developed a prototype of a five-day trades and technology camp for aboriginal girls. This has already been tried in a high school in Saskatchewan with great success, and we're hoping to run this again in other high schools, in as many as we can, for the aboriginal girls in grades 10, 11, and 12. It will provide what we believe is tremendously important, real hands-on experience, so that these girls can understand "This is something I can participate in; this is something I can do."

I should say that when we had the aboriginal girls in the chemistry lab, once they became comfortable in the lab we saw they have wonderful hands. Because they're so used to baking bannock, doing things with their hands, when they came to make nylon they probably did the best job I've ever seen of any schoolchildren. It shows that giving them experience with tools so they can understand what the trades are like, they will feel this is something they can do.

There are so many aspects in which we can make a difference in the number of girls choosing these professions and trades. I mentioned that when we asked our young women why they have chosen engineering, they often say it's a family member. I can't help thinking that if we can attract women into the trades who are mothers —and I know there are groups across Canada working to do this with women who are living at a very low income level being encouraged to take training to be in the trades—then we have a mother who is a tradesperson. Her daughters are then much more likely to consider going into trades because they have that role model and a very close family member involved in it.

Finally, if we are encouraging these girls to go into areas we've been talking about—the trades, the sciences, engineering, technology—we have to try to make sure that the workplaces they're entering will welcome them. One of the areas the Canadian Centre for Women in Science, Engineering Trades and Technology has been working in is to try to ensure that workplaces are both inclusive and respectful, so that when the girls move into the workplace they don't feel this is not a place they want to stay in.

We've developed workshops for current employers using a tool called a checklist of strategies. It looks at the kinds of things that might make their workplace less than inclusive and then we work with the employers to remove whatever problems they might be having with respect in the workplace.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Armour, you have one minute to conclude.

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: I'm sorry, what did you say?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have one minute to conclude your presentation.

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: Thank you.

Those workshops help to make the workplace respectful and inclusive.

To sum up, the factors we are working on through WISEST and the WinSETT Centre are to provide hands-on experience to girls in areas in engineering, science, and the trades that they might not choose; to allow them to meet women practitioners as role models and mentors; to bring more mothers into those areas so they can influence their daughters; and to have welcoming workplaces.

We really believe this will enable girls to make career choices that will greatly improve their economic prospects.

Thank you.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move on to questions.

We will begin with Ms. O'Neill Gordon. You have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to our witnesses. You certainly have given us lots of food for thought with the experiences you have shared with us this afternoon.

What you told us indicates the different careers and opportunities you are making these girls aware of. No doubt these opportunities will be profitable to these young women in making career decisions. I applaud both of you for the work you are doing and the initiatives you are all taking to make this happen for the betterment of young girls.

Our committee is also working towards what's best for Canadian girls and women—economic prosperity, participation, and leadership. We're looking for changes we can make. This is what we are trying to focus on for the betterment of young girls.

Can you tell us what our committee should focus on to improve the economic participation, prosperity, and leadership of aboriginal girls in Canada?

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: The young girls should have the opportunity to meet with aboriginal women who are already in the professions and the trades. We had a group of young aboriginal girls we were talking with about being in the trades, and we brought in a woman who was aboriginal and who was a carpenter. She talked with the girls and it made a huge difference to them. Here was someone they could identify with who had already shown that this was possible and even profitable. I think meeting aboriginal women who have been able to make a career in areas that many of the girls have not thought of is very important.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Thank you.

Tricia, do you have something to add?

Ms. Tricia Robertson: We have three first nations community schools, and we've had more that are involved with Techsploration. The first school began with us at its inception—the Waycobah school in Cape Breton. There's an awesome difference between how things were when the school began with us and how the young women and the teachers participate in the program now.

There are so many things that are important here. When the young women come to the community college, the university, or to other schools, they learn from the young women in the schools as well as from role models. Sometimes we have first nation role models and sometimes we don't.

One thing that was really interesting last year was that for the first time we started to pair our schools. Our Eskasoni First Nation community school hosted one of the teens from another school. After the teen left, the Techsploration student went to school at Eskasoni. They emailed us to say how excited the teen was to be at a first nations school for the first time. The same thing goes in reverse. This year the girls were at our Whitney Pier school and all of the girls at Whitney Pier and the other kids got to meet the teen from Eskasoni. These are opportunities that they probably wouldn't have had otherwise.

● (1600)

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: A mentor and a teen showing them examples would certainly be a great benefit to them all. Girls will definitely experience some challenges along the way. I wonder if you can provide some insight into the unique challenges these girls are likely to face with regard to doing their best and trying to achieve economic advancement, prosperity, and leadship.

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: One of the things that we have found, and we have for a number of years now, is first nations girls coming to the WISEST program—the one I was talking about where they come and spend six weeks at the university—from a distance are quite hard for us to keep in touch with and to continue to mentor. For example, we had one young woman from Fort Good Hope, which is about 200 miles south of Inuvik on the Mackenzie, and when she went back to her school, it was quite hard for us to keep in touch.

When the girls are here, they have that group of 60 as a community, and when many of them from the city go back to their schools, there are two or three of them who have had the same experience. But girls from the first nations communities going back are usually the only girl who has come from the community, and it's hard to go on providing the mentorship and support that encourage them to continue. We find it more difficult to make sure that they continue post-secondary training after grade 12, either in the trades or at the university. That's a difficult one.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Thank you very much for all you have provided here today.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now move to the members at the other end of the room.

Ms. Ashton, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Ms. Robertson and Ms. Armour, for your very informative presentations. I think we all definitely appreciate the work that you've done when it comes to promoting the importance of role modelling, and the work that you've done to make that a reality.

When we look at the statistics of women involved in engineering, mathematics, and natural sciences, there are some pretty disappointing trends overall. I was part of the status of women committee in the last Parliament when we looked at women in the trades, particularly, and some of the reasons behind that. When we look at the overall statistics of women in these fields, we notice that in 1987 only 19.5% were women when it came to these occupations. Moving forward to 2009, just a couple of years ago, that percentage only went up by a couple of points, and is now at 22.3%.

I'm familiar, as somebody who has women engineers in my family—and male engineers as well—with the kinds of programs that are out there. But it seems to me that there's more to it in terms of the barriers that women face. Could I ask you, Ms. Robertson, what kinds of barriers do women face, beyond the lack of role models when it comes to entering these professions?

Ms. Tricia Robertson: I believe that the biggest barrier of all is the lack of role models, so I'm perhaps not answering the question the way in which you would like it to be answered, but the number one barrier to young women is the lack of role models. I think that's where government really needs to take a lead to help promote and get more role models in these activities. For example, within government departments, there are all kinds of engineers. If there were the opportunity for them to provide these engineers to go to things like Techsploration, and to go to school and program events, it would make a huge difference. I've seen first-hand—

● (1605)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Actually, Ms. Robertson, sorry, I just do want to get through some more questions. I certainly appreciate your answers based on the work that you know well.

I would like to focus on one of the points you raised—and I know that because of the ten minutes you perhaps didn't have time to go into it: the work and family balance. To me, that seems to entail slightly more than role modelling, but I'd be interested in knowing the kinds of barriers existing in that respect that we need to be tackling to encourage more women to enter these professions.

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Actually, balancing work and family is a huge barrier. There are a lot of young women who actually graduate from engineering but when they have families they leave the profession. The main reason cited is that the work environment is very unfriendly for young women with families. That is definitely a major barrier.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for raising that.

I ask because when we did study women in the trades, one of the issue that was raised quite often was the lack of accessible child care. I know coming from a largely industrial part of Canada, with a lot of young families and very few affordable child care spaces, that's an issue I hear of quite often in my area.

Do you think that ensuring affordable and accessible child care would be a way women could more easily find a balance when it comes to work and family in such professions?

Ms. Tricia Robertson: There's absolutely no question that accessible day care would make a huge difference. When it comes to the trades, there's also a lot of shift work involved, so part of the problem is 24-hour day care. That would be another area that needs to be looked at.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

If I can move on to Ms. Armour, you made reference to the important work that you do with young aboriginal women and girls. Do you have a way of tracking how many of the girls who go through your program end up going into engineering or the trades?

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: Yes, we are doing that. We find that about half of them are coming back and going into...well, into engineering. The work that we've started with the girls in trades is more recent. Having young women come into the summer program, we started that in 2000, so it's ten years old, but usually only one or two or three young aboriginal women have come and been part of the WISEST summer research program. About half of them are coming back to university and continuing in some kind of post-secondary education, which is probably higher than would have been if they had not had the opportunity to participate in the program.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Ms. Armour.

If I could follow up, given that you work with girls who come from the reserves, we've heard a lot about the inadequate situation when it comes to schools on reserve. Do you believe that supporting education, when it comes to the maths and sciences on reserve, would be a way of encouraging more young aboriginal girls to enter such programs?

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: Yes, I believe it would be. We notice a very large difference between the high school for aboriginal girls that we have in the city of Edmonton at Amiskwaciy Academy and the girls who come from schools that are on reserves or are remote. The background of their education is very different. They're coming with a disadvantage from their education in the reserve school, yes. And I say that with sadness.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Armour, I have to interrupt you. Thank you.

I will now give the floor to a member from the government party.

Ms. Ambler, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our guests for coming in today and for providing such wonderful insight into this subject for our study.

I'd like to begin with a quick story, if you'll allow me, just to tell you what I do. I'm sure most of us members of Parliament at one time or another speak to classes, particularly in Ontario, in grade five and grade ten, because part of the students' curriculum is civics. So I often find myself speaking to grade five and grade ten students.

A few months ago I visited a grade five all-girls class, and I began the way I usually do, by asking how many of them planned to grow up to be politicians. I don't think I've ever had anyone actually raise a hand and say yes, because they don't think of themselves as future politicians when they're ten years old.

So in this grade five class of girls.... I guess my point is I think in some ways the trades and engineering and sciences are kind of the same. There aren't enough young girls who see themselves 20 years into the future as politicians or engineers or scientists, whereas even as young as grade five many of them can think of themselves as teachers, for example. That's one I can think of off the top of my head that is for whatever reason more encouraged in young girls.

That turns in my mind into a question of age and how important it is to "get them young", shall we say. So high school is a great place to start. Do you find that by grade nine there's already that stigma or unwillingness to look at a career in engineering or science? Or do you find that this is early enough, that grade nine is young enough to get started?

Ms. Robertson?

● (1610)

Ms. Tricia Robertson: I think the earlier you start, the better it is, of course. I think it is really important that grade nine be the latest that you reach the young women. At grade nine they're making important course choices, such as which math or science course to take, so we really want to work with them in that area, and that's one of the things that all our role models do.

At this point in time, they're very willing to listen. In fact they're eager to hear about all of the different careers. If you hear the young women talk about the women they've met, the role models they've met, either at our events or in the workplace, and how excited they get about it and how much detail they can tell you about it, it's not too late.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That's good to hear.

And in fact you mentioned in your presentation that Techsploration, the program, was a collaboration of many groups, including teachers and employers, but you also mentioned parents. May I ask how parents are involved in your program?

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Parents are involved in our programs in a number of different ways. For example, a parent may be one of the chaperones to work with the teachers to bring the girls to our events. We've had many parents involved in the program who get very excited to hear about the opportunities that their daughters wouldn't otherwise hear about.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you. That's great.

I was wondering if there was the aspect of asking the parents at home to maybe steer girls into reading for pleasure books about science, books of that nature, as opposed to other books they might want to read. But it doesn't sound as if that is part of the program specifically.

● (1615)

Ms. Tricia Robertson: No, at this point it isn't. When we begin our online workshops, parents are definitely one of the targets we want to reach out to. I think that parents definitely need a lot of assistance in that area. If they themselves haven't been exposed to careers in sciences or in engineering, and they know very little about it, they too are at the same disadvantage that the girls are because they haven't met women doing these jobs.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Exactly.

With regard to the 38 sponsors you mentioned, I am curious about the funding. Do the sponsors...? Are they only the workplaces that the girls visit?

You mentioned in-kind donations. Do they also fund with dollars and that kind of backing as well?

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Our sponsors are really involved in the program. Of the 38, it's all on varying levels. They all give us some kind of financial funding, but the really important thing is that we also receive role models from their workplace. We receive representatives from the employers to work on our committees and they provide role models for our different events, which is absolutely huge. And they give them time off with pay to do this in many instances.

When they're a smaller employer that's a little different. So they might give them the time off,ut we might end up giving them a $50 honorarium for working with us that day.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Robertson, I have to interrupt you. Unfortunately, Ms. Ambler's time is up.

Ms. Sgro, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you very much.

To both Ms. Robertson and Ms. Armour, thank you so very much for the great work you're doing on behalf of women and girls in Canada. I'm sure that much of the work you're doing is not just focused on engineering and trades and so on, but it probably encompasses so many other avenues that you are not even aware of. It has impacted many of the young women.

Ms. Armour, in particular on the differences between the education that our young women are getting on reserves versus what they would be getting in the local schools in Edmonton and elsewhere, could you talk a little bit about the amount of difference you've seen? You indicated earlier there was a significant difference in their level of education and the quality of education they had received on the reserves. Can you elaborate a bit on that?

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: Yes.

So often in the schools in the city there is a specialized teacher for each area, so they're getting biology from someone who is well trained in biology and they're learning physics from someone who has a physics background. When you go to rural schools as well as schools on the reserve, it's usually one teacher who is teaching a very large number of subjects. There may be only one or two students who are interested in those particular subjects. The students are not having the chance to interact with one another and learn from one another. I think that's making a very big difference.

It's a difficult problem to overcome, because one realizes it's very difficult to have a large cohort of teachers in a relatively small school.

Hon. Judy Sgro: That quite possibly leads to the fact that so many children end up leaving the reserves and going to the city. But if they don't do that it seems to be so much harder for those aboriginal children to really move forward unless they choose to do that.

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: Yes, that's right.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Ms. Robertson, Techsploration sounds like a wonderful program. Actually even the name is a little bit interesting, to look at the name and think it would be intriguing for a young woman to ask what it's all about. So you started out with a particular name that I think they might pay attention to, to just try to get some extra interest.

Where else are you able to offer that program, or have you had a chance to partner with some other parts of Canada to try to get it in a variety of other areas?

● (1620)

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Actually, last year I was in Newfoundland because Techsploration was celebrating its tenth anniversary in Newfoundland. A few years after Techsploration began in Nova Scotia, we assisted them with starting the program in Newfoundland, and it has been really successful.

We have several committees, and one of them is our expansion committee. We're seriously discussing how we can develop what we call a chapter package, so that if somebody wanted to start Techsploration on Monday morning in Ontario, they would know what information they would need, and what kind of memorandums of understanding we would have to have. We're in the process of looking into that.

We also want to put the information online. We have this fabulous new website and portal that will facilitate that now. That would also make it a lot easier for another province or organization to access our materials and resources.

Hon. Judy Sgro: It would probably move along much faster as far as establishing chapters, in whatever form they would be presented, if it were available online.

We're very fortunate to hear from you today. It's certainly very encouraging.

Do you have an opportunity, Ms. Robertson, from what you are seeing in this Techsploration avenue you're working on to talk to the universities about how they could attract more women into university and the sciences and so on?

Ms. Tricia Robertson: We have a really broad network.

We've just partnered with Mount Saint Vincent University. They looked at Techsploration "Women in Action" videos online. They liked them so much, they approached us to do a partnership. As a result, they'll be providing fifteen videos over the next five years in that area.

We have an industry liaison person from Saint Mary's University. They're actually one of the sponsors of Techsploration. We have a representative on our board of directors. We have the Techsploration-Saint Mary's scholarship. There is a lot of conversation going on there. We work with a lot of first nation committees and even the elders in the community to find out how we can help young women from that specific area.

We have a lot of diversity in all of our committees. There are women from diverse backgrounds. We also look into how we can provide more young women with opportunities that are very specific to their needs. They're all amazingly the same, though. They need encouragement. They need women who are role models, who take an interest in them.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you, Ms. Robertson.

Ms. Armour, you mentioned about young women leaving their profession. Even though you get them into engineering, let's say, then they have a family, and then, for whatever reason, they end up having to quit the profession. Have you spoken to the engineering association, as an example, about the need for providing women with more flexibility and better opportunities to balance the family and pressures of work? Might that encourage them to stay in the profession longer?

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: Yes, indeed. This is one of our major concerns. We're working with the provincial professional engineer associations, as well as Engineers Canada.

There are two concerns here. One is yes, women who have children sometimes leave the profession and don't come back. Moving to something else—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I will have to interrupt, Ms. Armour. Unfortunately, Ms. Sgro's time is up.

I will now give the floor to a member from the government party.

Ms. Bateman, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you both so much, Ms. Armour and Ms. Robertson, for the work you do, for the remarks you shared with us today, and for the very concrete and positive steps you're taking and have taken to help young women.

In fact, Ms. Armour, I'm particularly impressed. You actually referred back to what we are trying to achieve as a committee here, the economic outcomes piece, and I appreciate that.

In your remarks, both of you spoke about how young women make choices. I believe, Ms. Robertson, it's one of the pillars you're...one of your programs—how to make choices—one of the criteria you're looking to explore.

I think it's fascinating. We had a dean from the business school of the University of Western Ontario, which is a prestigious business school. I guess it's called the Ivey School now. She said that sometimes women don't choose to even put their hands up. When you actually ask them what they think, they have something wonderful and concrete to contribute to the discussion.

I'd like the views of both of you, but Ms. Armour, perhaps we can start with you, in terms of how you see helping.... Take a moment to build on your remarks about choice, because I think that's the essence, and perhaps the opportunity for young women.

● (1625)

Ms. Margaret-Ann Armour: I'm absolutely committed to allowing people to make choices. But they only make choices if they're informed. Obviously I would never have chosen to be a mechanical engineer, because I didn't know what a mechanical engineer did when I was growing up.

What we're trying to do is provide very concrete information in such a way that it intrigues young women, and they say "I want to find out more about this." We're not saying that you should be an engineer, you should be a scientist, or you should be brain surgeon. We're saying here's what it's about; why don't you try this? And then when you come to choose your career, you have information; you have knowledge that you can base your choice on.

I would just mention that there are so many systemic barriers. You were saying that a young woman doesn't put up her hand to provide the information that she might have that could be very useful to the discussion. This is one of the problems, that we're still socialized a little differently. We don't always meet the expectations of society, when in fact we are doing extremely well in the choices and careers that we're making but we don't push ourselves forward quite as much. That's a stereotype, but we know that it's still true. And it's quite important, in the engineering profession particularly.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Thank you so much for that.

Perhaps, Ms. Robertson, you could build on.... It was one of the pillars that you described as part of where you're going this next year: how to make choices.

Ms. Tricia Robertson: Sure. There are a couple of things in that regard. One is that if a young woman takes every advantage to participate in events with Techsploration from the time she's in grade nine right through to grade twelve, she will have met 140 different role models in various careers. That really helps her to make choices.

She also has the opportunity, as she goes through this process, to learn, for example, what she doesn't like. We had a Techsplorer alumna telling us last week—she was presenting at a workshop with us—that she had learned that she didn't like outside work. It was very important for her to know that before she decided that she might become an electrician, for example.

Another thing that's really important is that we need more women developing our curriculum. They understand what the systemic barriers are for the young women—why they're not putting up their hands and perhaps how a question needs to be framed differently.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Okay. You—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You only have 10 seconds left.

[*English*]

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I just want to thank you both so much. I look forward to talking about the role-modelling piece, perhaps another time.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This ends the appearance by our two witnesses.

I would like to thank Ms. Robertson from Techsploration and Ms. Armour from the Canadian Centre for Women in Science, Engineering, Trades and Technology. Have a good rest of the day.

We will now continue in camera to talk about future business. I will therefore suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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