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Chair

Ms. Marilyn Gladu

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We are returning to our study on the economic security of women in Canada.

We have one witness today who is appearing by teleconference, but we're having some difficulty getting hold of her, so instead of going to her we'll start with Julia Deans, the chief executive officer of Futurpreneur Canada.

Welcome, Julia. You have seven minutes for your comments.

Ms. Julia Deans (Chief Executive Officer, Futurpreneur Canada): Thank you.

[Translation]

Hello, everyone.

[English]

Thank you for letting me speak to you today about how entrepreneurship is becoming an increasingly important option for all young people, but especially women. As youth unemployment remains high, more young people are becoming aware of the opportunity to start a business or to take over a retiring business owner's operation and put their own stamp on it.

Barb McLean-Stollery from Calgary is just one example. When 9/11 ended her hope of becoming an airplane pilot, she joined a Calgary aircraft-grooming business and ended up buying it with our help when the owner retired. The problem for most young people is that they don't have any business experience or assets, and they're too high risk and time-consuming for banks and other conventional lenders. Young entrepreneurs need training, money, and mentoring to launch and grow. Barb had this experience as well: who was going to lend to a woman in her twenties without a house or a car or any kind of business track record?

Futurpreneur Canada is the only national non-profit organization that gives aspiring young entrepreneurs anywhere in Canada what they need most. In the last 20 years, we've given ten thousand 18- to 39-year-olds business-plan coaching, volunteer mentors, and up to \$45,000 in non-collateral loans from Futurpreneur and our co-funder, BDC. The federal government has been a critical partner in our work since 2006, and we recently had our funding renewed through ISED.

We are incredibly proud that 40% of our Futurpreneur businesses, over 400 in the last year alone, are female-owned. This is double the national average for majority-female-owned businesses. As you probably know, since majority-female-owned businesses are more likely than others to engage in product and other kinds of innovation, it's important that we increase this average from the current and very dismal 15.5%.

Why does the rate of female entrepreneurship lag behind that of male, particularly in the growth stages? Most aspiring young entrepreneurs lack confidence, entrepreneurial skills, networks, and financing. For women, these challenges are compounded by having far fewer role models and by not being well understood by lenders. Like other young entrepreneurs, women need help to overcome these challenges. This includes awareness raising and encouragement, business-plan coaching and mentoring, as well as financing and other launch and growth support.

We have the opportunity to leverage the proven supports that exist in Canada to benefit more women entrepreneurs without duplicating infrastructure and efforts. At Futurpreneur, we consult and work with aspiring women entrepreneurs and the other organizations that support women to understand and respond to women's highest priority needs. We know that engaging young women through awareness raising and outreach, in collaboration with partners, is key. For example, we recently teamed up with BDC on a campaign promoting women entrepreneurs and the support we have available to them. It was called "Be the Boss of You", and it was one of our most popular campaigns ever. We reached over a million people through social media and generated a huge amount of interest from young women in our entrepreneurial programs.

We're also doing targeted outreach to part-time or side-hustle entrepreneurs. These are people who are working in other jobs but on the side are building businesses that employ people. This can be really appealing to women entrepreneurs, because it reduces the risks of starting up, and it lets them choose when they want to enter that business full time themselves.

Once we reach women, they need help to turn their business ideas into reality. At Futurpreneur we do this through skill-building and ideation workshops, business-plan coaching, webinars, and online resources.

We also provide loans that are generally enough to get a business started, or at least they provide a basis for further financing. Banks and other lenders take a lot of comfort in knowing that every futurpreneur has a volunteer mentor from our network of about 3,000 volunteers across the country. Like us, they know that mentoring significantly impacts the chances of someone's long-term business success, especially for women.

As more women get interested in becoming entrepreneurs and building businesses for themselves and jobs for others, governments and organizations like ours have to work together to get them the support they need to move forward. Futurpreneur Canada has long helped women to launch businesses and industries ranging from retail to food to technology, but our consultations confirm that there's a significant opportunity to expose more women to the concept of entrepreneurship as a career option, and to help them secure the financing, financial literacy, business skills, and networks they need to launch and grow businesses in Canada.

As always, we stand ready to collaborate with governments and other partners across the country to realize this opportunity.

• (0850)

How will we benefit? I want to return to Barb, who in the last 10 years has increased revenue at her company by 1,500%. She added locations and donated huge amounts of resources to help the people in Fort McMurray when they needed help last summer. Barb's growth isn't only national, it's global. She was chosen by Futurpreneur Canada last year to participate in the G20 Young Entrepreneurs' Alliance Summit in Beijing, and she has since successfully expanded her operations to China. Canada needs more Barbs.

I'm hoping that you have questions. That is the end of my prepared remarks.

Thank you and merci.

The Chair: Very good.

By teleconference, we have with us from the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba, Sandra Altner, chief executive officer.

You have seven minutes for your comments.

Ms. Sandra Altner (Chief Executive Officer, Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba): Thank you. I'm wearing two hats this morning. One is as the CEO of the Women's Enterprise Centre in Manitoba, which is part of the women's enterprise initiative in western Canada, funded by Western Diversification, our RDA. My second role—and perhaps in this venue the most important—is as chair of the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada, a group of organizations that work with women entrepreneurs to further develop their capacity to succeed, to access capital, and to achieve leadership in their various areas.

The Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba, like the other WEIs in the west, concentrates on three major areas: loans up to \$150,000,

advisory services, and training. We have been around for 20 years and probably have the greatest depth and breadth of experience in working with women entrepreneurs.

Studies have shown that women entrepreneurs respond best to targeted and tailored services from women's organizations. The WEI organizations in the west have found that one of their greatest strengths is the autonomy to meet the specific needs of women entrepreneurs in their regions.

The organization that we have founded to emulate some of the best practices and to further develop women's entrepreneurship—through the creation of a website, a portal, and a national loan fund—has about 25 organizational members at this point and represents women's enterprise organizations and entrepreneurship organizations across the country.

Some of the programs that we have developed here in the west in response to the needs of women entrepreneurs include—and this was a goal of mine that was originally funded by Status of Women Canada and continues to this day—providing financial acumen and profitability information to women entrepreneurs to increase their capacity to develop their enterprises and to further your goal, which is economic security. We firmly believe that women's entrepreneurship is one of the primary tools to do just that.

While women are starting businesses at a greater rate than their male counterparts, they're still quite under-represented in the larger business categories, the gazelles that develop through technology and innovation. We're working very hard to develop that growth aspect of our training and our supports.

Some of the programs that we have developed here in the west include—and you'll hear more about this next week from my colleague from Alberta—the PeerSpark program, which has rolled out here to Manitoba as well. It is working with growth-oriented clients who want to get past that first million-dollar mark to create jobs, to create an asset, to create wealth, and to create a legacy for their families and their communities.

Studies have shown that women who succeed in their businesses contribute a great deal more to their communities than their male counterparts in a great many ways. Support for women entrepreneurship is a support for women everywhere.

One of the things we've done here in Manitoba, which is a huge success, is an annual conference for women in leadership. This last year, we had 1,100 participants just from Manitoba. We're looking to develop that next year into rural Manitoba. There's also interest from other regions, and we are hoping to create a national conference based on some of what we have learned here in Manitoba. We'd be doing this through the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada.

We've recently put a proposal to the federal government, and I hope we can get support from all of you folks to carry it forward. It is for a national loan fund and funding for WEOC, which to date has been created off the sides of our desks and as a volunteer organization. Despite that, we have, through our own budgets and our own activities, built a national coalition to move this forward.

● (0855)

We are at this time probably the only voice for women's entrepreneurship in the country, and have already made international connections to further this goal at a global level.

There's much, much more I could tell you, but that's pretty much it, in a nutshell.

I'm open to questions.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you so much.

We'll begin our seven-minute rounds of questioning with my colleague Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thanks to both of you for your testimony on this. We talk about women and entrepreneurship, but I think what's often left out is young women. Sometimes the most creative ideas and innovation come from some of the younger people. We know also that in addition to being a woman, and being young, there are others who face even more barriers. We've talked a lot here about intersectionality. Certainly for indigenous young women, those with disabilities, and racialized young women, the numbers are even lower.

I'm wondering whether or not you see that and whether there's been any improvement over time, particularly through your programs. As well, particularly with regard to indigenous young women, at Algonquin College, in my riding, we're funding a centre for innovation, entrepreneurship, and learning. In that there is a specific centre for indigenous entrepreneurship. When I asked why that was important, they said it was because the cultural approach to entrepreneurship is different for indigenous women. It's more collaborative, and of course the money networks aren't there.

Perhaps you could both talk a little bit about how we encourage not just young women but also young women who face even more barriers because of other identity factors.

I'll start with you, Ms. Deans.

Ms. Julia Deans: I think about that a huge amount. We know that there are a lot more women to be reached to even be exposed to entrepreneurship. Reaching women who have additional barriers takes more targeted outreach. It costs more money and takes more time. We're trying to develop our own capacity to do that but to also do it through partners.

I'll use indigenous young women as an example. In northern B.C. we are currently in a partnership called ThriveNorth, which was supported by BG Group, which is now Shell, one of the LNG proponents. They said that if they were going to create a facility in Prince Rupert, they needed the people in the area to benefit from it and to have businesses. It allowed us to double down on figuring out

how to work with indigenous young women and men in these rural areas.

We found that they needed a more foundational layer of support as well, because entrepreneurship is probably a more distant concept for them than it would be for someone in downtown Ottawa. We did things like create peer circles, where young people could come together even just to talk about what owning a business would be like, or about some of the skills that you'd need. Instead of a loan, we established grants of \$1,000 so that somebody could buy a sewing machine or hire somebody part time for a few months. We learned a lot about what is needed to work with that community, and I think that's probably pretty apt across the country. We're now working to try to figure out if we can replicate that in other parts of the country, particularly in rural communities, where there's so little opportunity for some of these young people.

The other group would be immigrants. We know that you need to do targeted outreach to reach immigrants where they are, whether it's in their faith communities or community organizations. Again, that takes more targeting. It's something that we're working on. We don't have the money to do as much as we'd like, so we do it through partnerships, with immigrant-serving organizations and others. On the indigenous side, the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business would be a big partner for us.

Finally, it's about telling the stories. I can think of some of the women we've worked with in Prince Rupert who have established tutoring businesses. One won the B.C. award for young entrepreneur of the year a couple of years ago, which was tremendous. The stories are there, and we, the collective we, have an obligation to tell them. I would love it if you as members were willing to share those stories in your newsletters about people in your ridings or in your provinces who are doing these great things.

● (0900)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Ms. Altner.

The Chair: I think we may have lost Sandra. Her mike may be on mute.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: All right. I'll move to my second question.

Sandra, if you can hear us, if we can fix the technology, then jump in.

My next question is building on what you said, Ms. Deans, about the stories and the pathways. You had mentioned that there are fewer role models for young women....

Oh, I think we can hear Sandra now. I'll go to her, then to my next question.

Ms. Sandra Altner: That's excellent. Thank you.

I would agree with Julia Deans that the requirement for specifically targeted kinds of teaching is very important. Through the WEIs and through our own work here in Manitoba over the last 20 years, we have worked with women at every stage and every age.

Both the newcomers and the indigenous clients we've had, although they have very different needs and very different outcomes, are an important target for us, because they create role models in their communities. There are some courses that have been developed in Alberta that are specifically geared to teaching entrepreneurship and developing business plans in that area. Here in Manitoba, we've worked with a number of organizations, both first nation and Métis organizations, to partner in developing business plans and in providing due diligence and the aftercare to ensure that those entrepreneurs have a greater degree of success.

It's very labour-intensive work, as you can imagine, and we have very little in the way of resources to do as much as would like to do in the province. Where we have achieved successes, they have been tremendous, and we're very proud of the work we have been able to do to further these goals. This is a community that is underserved in a great many ways, and we hope that the leadership work we're doing, the conferences that we're going to be doing, and the webcasts that we'll be doing in rural Manitoba will reach a higher number of indigenous women who will be able to recognize the supports that are available to them through the centre.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Because I don't have much time left, could you give a very short answer to this question on the role models and the mentoring? Both of you mentioned it. Do you find that there's a virtuous cycle whereby the more successful the paths for women are, the more you get young women who enter entrepreneurship and are successful at that?

Ms. Sandra Altner: Is that question for me?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Yes. We'll start with you.

Ms. Sandra Altner: I would say yes, absolutely, because it's a question of comfort level. You don't want to go where you're not welcome, and you don't want to go where you don't feel that you can achieve. If you see somebody who has gone before, who has successfully navigated the business planning process and the business development process, and is actually creating a living wage and is able to hire other people, that's very encouraging to women. It's the way women work that really does create a potential mentoring situation as well as a role model to strive for. Knowing that somebody else has created success is a great impetus for one's own success.

● (0905)

The Chair: All right.

We'll go to Ms. Harder for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Ms. Deans, I'm going to start with you. Could you talk a bit about what this mentorship relationship looks like? Is this woman to woman, or could it be a man who's mentoring the woman? Also, what would be the hope of that relationship?

Ms. Julia Deans: It can be any gender to any gender. We spend maybe 15 to 20 hours with a young person in getting them ready to come into our program. Before they get our loans, we "hand-match" them with a mentor. Seventy per cent of our mentors are entrepreneurs themselves. That's the primary thing: somebody who has walked in that path before. If they're not an entrepreneur, they're often someone with financial skills and the expertise to help someone who may not have those skills.

We hand-match them with a mentor. They are generally in the same city or community, because being able to have access to one another is huge. We're looking for people who match in terms of skill sets, interests, experience, and often industry as well. You can imagine that for a restaurant owner it's pretty important to have a mentor who's run a restaurant before, as that's a pretty specialized area.

Once they are matched, they have an orientation to make sure they know how to work together. It was designed with the help of Lavalife, so it's very much about "do I email you?", "do I phone you?", and "how are we going to communicate with one another?" They have that mentor for up to two years. The idea is that they spend four to five hours a month together by phone or in person. The mentor can have no financial interest at all in their business. They're completely about the entrepreneur and helping them through rough times, and keeping them true to their plans and ideas.

We find that it's particularly in the second year where they need help. Often something has gone wrong. They've back-end loaded a lease, or something has happened, and they need that person there to say, "How are you going to change your direction to get things back on track?" We know that our entrepreneurs are still in business at the rate of 50% to 60% after five years, which is much higher than the normal average, and we're pretty sure it's because of this mentoring.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's awesome. What are some of the barriers that prevent women from...? No, sorry, let me ask this first. Do you see the number of entrepreneurs coming to you, particularly women entrepreneurs, increasing, decreasing, or staying about the same?

Ms. Julia Deans: It's steadily increasing. I think we're quite attractive to young women because we're out there in the community, we have a lot of young staff, we're really active on social media, we're very approachable, and we're very non-judgmental in saying, "We can help you figure out what you don't know". We see a steady increase in the women coming to us, and a lot of referrals as well. I think it's gone from 40% to 43% in the last year. So it's on the move. Our goal is 50%, although I'm told that, for Status of Women, between 40% and 60% is considered gender balanced. But I'd like 50%.

Ms. Rachael Harder: It seems like a pretty good number to us.

Can you tell me a little bit about what you see with regard to the FNMI women in particular? Do you see an interest from that demographic?

Ms. Julia Deans: I'm sorry, I don't know what that term is.

Ms. Rachael Harder: It's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

Ms. Julia Deans: Oh, absolutely. It varies, of course, as it does across different groups, so I wouldn't want to generalize too much. Some are a lot more experienced with entrepreneurship. I think Métis women probably are more exposed to entrepreneurship, and that's a more accepted pathway. No, the interest is certainly there, but there's a tentativeness and definitely a lack of role models in many of those communities. The interest is there, when we go to our events in Prince Rupert or Terrace or wherever, for sure. And some of them have achieved big success. I'm thinking of SheNative Goods and some of our other indigenous entrepreneurs. Those role models are invaluable.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's awesome.

I wonder if you can just answer this question briefly for me, because I realize it could end up being quite long. Can you just give me an overall understanding of some of the challenges that women face that might prevent them from entering into entrepreneurship, and how you're helping them overcome those challenges?

Ms. Julia Deans: There are four simple answers. Confidence: they don't see role models; they have parents who've said, "You're not going to be an entrepreneur because it's a terrible thing to do" or "I was and it was awful, so I don't want you to do it". Competence: a lot of kids get through school without any financial literacy skills or other skills that would help them to start businesses. Connections: where do you go, and who's going to help you? Capital: getting the money is a big issue for a lot of people, and it varies so much across the country from place to place.

• (0910)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Altner, are you there with us?

Ms. Sandra Altner: I'm still here, yes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I'm going to ask the same question of you.

What do you notice being the big challenges that women face with regard to entering into entrepreneurship? What are you noticing on your side?

Ms. Sandra Altner: I would add credibility to Ms. Deans' c-group of confidence, capital, etc., because I think women in business still have a bit of a glass ceiling in that area of developing partnerships and relationships, creating good relationships with suppliers and accessing potentially good mentors. I think there's still a bit of a gap there in creating that visible competency. Even though the competency might be there, it is not seen to be there, necessarily, in the mainstream.

Confidence is a big one. We do a lot of coaching here, and to go back to one of your questions, part of our mentorship is the professional mentorship that comes with coaching. Of our business advisers, and the advisers throughout the whole WEI system, a majority have entrepreneurship experience, and so they know what they're talking about and can provide both the intelligent business

advisory services and also the coaching part that is so necessary when you're working with women entrepreneurs. For some of the issues that women face, in terms of family balance, access to capital, and so many things that their male counterparts don't have to deal with, issues that come up very often in partnerships and family partnerships that affect the business, the expertise here really makes a difference in helping women to navigate some of those very difficult life areas that affect their ability to create a successful enterprise.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you. Very good

Ms. Sandra Altner: Sorry, may I add just one thing? The peer support is quite important, and we found that bringing people together at early stages in their businesses to work together has been immensely successful.

The Chair: Very good.

We'll go to Ms. Malcolmson, for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both the witnesses.

Ms. Altner, I want to talk a little more about some of the underlying reasons that women face barriers to their credibility, capital, connections, competence, and confidence in that list cited by witnesses here.

We heard from one of the witnesses from the Canadian Labour Congress. Vicky Smallman encapsulated it nicely, saying that we need to look at women's economic justice and not just women's economic empowerment so that we're sure that we're removing the barriers that keep marginalized women from realizing their full potential and addressing those barriers. I saw in your response to budget 2017 that you had hoped that some of the funding allocated for innovation and entrepreneurial development would be targeted specifically to support programs benefiting new Canadians and indigenous women.

I hope that you can talk with us for a couple of minutes about what you see the federal government's being able to do to help remove those barriers. That means not just focusing on empowering women, but what we can do in a focused way on the federal government's side to assist women of colour, immigrant women, women with disabilities, and indigenous women.

Ms. Sandra Altner: In the area of entrepreneurship, this is a big question. I'm not even sure how to attack it. I think a lot of the issues are issues of socialization. They're deeper and more intrinsic in our society than simply providing loans or support services to women. We need to be looking at societal changes. I'm not sure how much the federal government can do in that area until and unless we work on our educational system.

In the work that we do, we think that we're working in that direction already. Continued support from the government to agencies like the RDAs that support women's entrepreneurship initiatives; programs or projects that specifically work with newcomers and indigenous women; and the ability to include those women into the mainstream and create more of the peer mentorship opportunities.... If I could sit down and start rewriting that proposal and getting into more detail on it, I could think of four or five or six different projects that we could do on a national level through the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada that would pull together some of the work that's already been done across the country. However, there's no common voice; there's no collection of information, knowledge, and expertise.

From all of the organizations like ours across the country that have been working specifically with women for 5, 10, 15, 20 years, there's nothing there yet that can pull that together into some kind of central organization or agency or portal that can benefit all of us by sharing best practices and coming to understand all of the different regional differences and how we have each responded to those issues and found solutions that we now need to share. I don't think we need something new. We need to support and continue the work that's been done and to develop that national voice.

● (0915)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That's very helpful. Thank you.

Let's turn to Ms. Deans from Futurpreneur Canada. We are seeing that women continue to be concentrated in low-wage precarious part-time work and are still under-represented in leadership positions.

I met yesterday with the Minerva Foundation. Their 2016 scorecard for British Columbia showed that of the 50 organizations studied in B.C., only 12% had a female CEO, and there were no women of indigenous descent on boards and senior management teams. We know that many of these women are qualified to lead, but there are barriers to their being able to achieve what they're capable of, whether wage discrimination or lack of child care.

I'm hoping that you can give us your advice on what you think the federal government could do to be involved in including a diverse range of women in leadership positions, and how we can reach out to immigrant women, indigenous women, women of colour, and LGBTQ2 women.

Ms. Julia Deans: As a start, I think that ensuring that women, wherever they are in the country, have access to support to create jobs for themselves and for others is tremendous. I often say that in Toronto or in Vancouver or in Ottawa, we're in the land of plenty. There's lots happening. But if you're in Terrace, or in a remote part of Newfoundland, there may not be much there. So providing some foundational support for organizations like ours to be available and to connect those women to resources, I think, is huge.

The second piece is connection building. The federal government, whether through INAC or ISED or the other acronyms, has the ability to draw links between some of the programs that are happening. We have talked a lot this morning about indigenous women. A lot of different departments are supporting or attempting to support indigenous women. The more that connections can be built among those efforts, the better.

The third would be procurement. I think we all know that the Government of Canada and the governments of the provinces are huge procurement bodies. Stating the policy of reaching out to organizations that are led by women, and particularly women from under-represented leadership groups, can make a huge difference as well.

We had a situation in Toronto that some of the companies said they would deal only with law firms that had women on the teams or leading the teams. It just changed things overnight. It's very easy to say, "We're looking for the women. Where are they?"

The final piece would be influencing education. It's not within the federal purview per se, but the federal government is in a position to influence education policy across the country and to ensure that young women are getting access to skill development, whether it's financial literacy or communications. Coding is another example. I happen to think financial literacy is probably the key, because if young women are raised to know that it's on them to figure out that they have to take control and determine their economic future, they are going to be a lot more interested and motivated to do that, I think.

The final thing I'd say is that when you get women leading businesses, they bring up women behind them. We see it every day. One of our businesses in Hamilton—it's a bakery—won the TELUS business of the year award. It won \$100,000. One of its things from the get-go was, "We're going to pay everybody on our staff a living wage," which was huge, because in the bakery business, bakers make next to nothing, and they're all getting paid a living wage. So women, when they lead the businesses, tend to do the right thing by their women.

● (0920)

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Nassif for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Deans.

Given your expertise in entrepreneurial success, I would like to ask you a question about venture capital investments.

There are four possible scenarios for venture capital: men investing in men; men investing in women; women investing in men; and women investing in women. The last scenario, women investing in women, is the least likely to materialize.

Is there an explanation for that?

[English]

Ms. Julia Deans: I understood your question in French, but with permission I will answer in English.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: I can ask it in English if you want.

Ms. Julia Deans: No, I understood it for sure. I believe your question is, why do we not see more women investing in women?

For sure, one of the first reasons is that we don't have as many women with money to invest in other women's businesses, and we don't have women necessarily leading the venture capital and financing bodies that have the capacity to invest in other women. But I think we're seeing a bit of a change in that with organizations like SheEO and with groups like Sandra's that are stepping up, and whether it's with their own resources or galvanizing the resources of other women, are bringing resources to women-led businesses. There is definitely an incline in that and a very positive one as well. We aren't in a position to find investors for our new businesses, but we are in a position to introduce them to organizations like Sandra's and SheEO, whereby they can take things to the next level and galvanize more support.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Would you like to add something, Ms. Altner?

[English]

Ms. Sandra Altner: Yes, I would like to add to that. For a number of years now, and through several changes in government, I have been hoping for and pushing the idea of a women's-centred capital fund in Canada. We truly need that.

There have been some very successful ones in the States like Golden Seeds, for example, that probably have a significantly higher success rate than their male counterparts simply because women do business in a very different way.

I just made a presentation last week to our own provincial government for such a fund. In the the loan fund that we have in the west, our cap is \$150,000. We're working at a the of entrepreneurship. Most of our entrepreneurs aren't ready for venture capital. Maybe 5% of our clients are. When they are, it's very difficult for them to find those dollars.

We are seeing an increase in the number of women entrepreneurs overall in North America. I think five years ago only 5% of all venture capital was provided to women-owned businesses, and now the last number I saw was somewhere in the range of 12% to 13%. I know progress is being made. Part of that is because of the studies being done to show the success rates of women-owned or women-partnered businesses.

Just as we have programs specifically for women entrepreneurs, we need a fund that is specifically for women entrepreneurs.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

My next question is for both witnesses.

Do we have information about the business areas in which women are more likely to succeed or fail?

I would like to know whether we can get that information, whether it is sales versus purchasing, or goods versus services.

Ms. Julia Deans: Pardon me, but could you repeat your question?

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Do we have information about the business areas in which women are more likely to succeed or fail?

[English]

Ms. Sandra Altner: May I respond to that?

My understanding, from what we've seen here at the Women's Enterprise Centre, is that there's a success rate of approximately 75% across the board over five years among our loan clients when we do the due diligence and the aftercare. I don't know if there is a specific kind of business that is successful. I do know that women tend to gravitate to businesses that are more service-oriented, from retail businesses to HR and other kinds of business services, and less so in manufacturing and technology—although that's beginning to change too, I'm happy to say, as more women are becoming involved in STEM kinds of businesses.

I would find it hard to respond to the question and say what businesses they are more successful in. The level of success, I think, is level across the board.

• (0925)

Ms. Julia Deans: I agree with Ms. Altner. It's tricky to pick an area where women are most successful. The thing that worries me more is that we're not seeing women in growth businesses. Many women are in businesses that are creating jobs for themselves, maybe for one or two other people, but they're not creating tens or hundreds of jobs. You can do that in retail and in technology, so I think that's where we need to focus. Help women to see that they have the opportunity to grow, whether it's through getting more money or specialized advice or being introduced to export markets, and that they can succeed in whatever industry.

I'm not one of the people who thinks you have to create an app to be a successful company. I've seen a lot of successful businesses in the very normal retail and food sectors, or what have you. Whatever a woman is interested in, our goal is to help her get started and to help her take it to the next level.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: If women do not have sufficient access to resources and support measures, can we nonetheless easily access information about those resources?

Does it vary from one province to another?

[English]

Ms. Julia Deans: Absolutely.

Sandra, go ahead.

Ms. Sandra Altner: Thank you.

One of the things we feel very strongly about in the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada is that this access to centralized information does not yet exist, and we would like to be instrumental in creating that throughout all of the provinces right across the country. That's because there is so much there that women are not yet taking advantage of and that they need an introduction to or information about, or to hear stories about successes in those areas, or utilization of those programs. Actually, I think that is a very important and necessary aspect of the next step.

I would absolutely agree with Ms. Deans that the real emphasis and real importance here is the growth. For women to have a real impact on the economy and to create real economic security, we really need to be looking at the growth potential. If the supports are there to aid that growth, women need to have better access to those supports.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Vecchio for five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

Actually, I'm just going to continue with that. We talk about the real economic growth potential and about the STEM fields, agriculture, finance, and business sectors. Specifically, is there anything we can be doing, or anything that people on the ground could be doing, to target those fields to get women in them, so that there would be that growth?

Julia, I heard you mention that some organizations are saying that we must have a woman running that business, when you're talking about law firms and such. Is there something we can be doing or promoting in that regard, or is there something those organizations on the ground can be doing?

Ms. Julia Deans: I think there are a couple of things. The first is telling the stories. You hear that there's so much storytelling, but there is nothing like a young woman seeing a woman and saying, "That could be me". Also, it makes a huge difference when they don't see those faces.

The second is building the connections. We don't need a hundred organizations like Futurpreneur Canada doing awareness-raising, mentoring, financing, etc. However, we need to build the connections between them, so that a young woman sees a pathway. What Sandra's organization, ours, and others' try to do is create those pathways forward.

As well, I think the final piece would be through encouraging those industries directly to be taking steps to advance women. I think of the work to get women on boards as one example, where provincial governments and the federal government are saying, "You are simply going to have to do this. We need to see those women, if we're going to be dealing with you or sending business your way."

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Sandra, do you have anything to add to that?

Ms. Sandra Altner: I would say that we're seeing some success in the conference that we have been presenting here in Manitoba and hope to move further out into a national venue. The idea of SHEDay

to get women in front of women—successful women in business, in entrepreneurship, in academia, in life in general, and in volunteerism—to tell their stories and to tell about some of the issues they've had to deal with and some of the challenges in their lives, in order to show other women that it can be done.

It's not necessarily tips and techniques, but it is important to see someone up there whom you could become. Again, I'm emphasizing the idea of a role model.

● (0930)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's absolutely fantastic.

Ms. Sandra Altner: Last January, we had Sheila North Wilson, Grand Chief of Manitoba, tell her story. The women in the room were weeping because what this woman has overcome in her life to achieve the success she has had is extraordinary. The kind of connection that you make in those venues and in that kind of event is huge.

I would say, let's have more of that. Let's do more of that. If we can provide a model for that, because it has been so successful, we're very happy to do that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I only have about a minute and a half left.

Julia, we were talking about larger cities and the fact that there would be opportunities in them. What can we do to help with rural communities? We have to look at the agricultural side. We can look at the STEM fields. There are the finance and business sectors. Is there anything we can do to help and vitalize the women in those rural communities? What can we do to get them on board as well, since we do know this is occurring in the largest cities?

Ms. Julia Deans: One thing we haven't talked about is retiring business owners. We know that there's a huge number of Canadians who are going to retire and leave their small businesses without any leadership. That's going to have a huge effect on small towns. Encouraging retiring business owners to look at options for what they're going to do with their businesses and encouraging women to look at taking over those businesses would be one thing that we haven't talked about, in addition to the other things.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay.

Sandra, do you have anything to add regarding what we can do to get more rural organizations or more rural women involved in entrepreneurship?

Ms. Sandra Altner: To the extent possible, we work in rural Manitoba. If this committee or anybody you know has the ability to influence your provincial counterparts, one thing is that additional provincial support to reach rural communities would be very important, because our resources are thin on the ground. Particularly in Manitoba, if you look at our geography, while we try to avoid “Winnipeg-itis”, it's very difficult to get out into those small communities to do the kind of work that we can do here in an urban setting.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Very good.

We go now to the Honourable Hedy Fry for five minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): It's been very interesting to hear some of the questions that have been asked. I want to focus on three particular areas.

The first one is obviously access to capital. I think we well know that it's really difficult for women to have access to capital from either traditional banks or other banks, because the requirement to have access to start-up money is to have chattel, and most women don't. Most women don't own a house. They don't own anything, so they can't put that up in order to get the money. We've heard this time and time again.

As a result, I know that in the 1990s the federal government of the day actually started women's enterprise centres, where they gave small amounts of money to these groups—there was one in Kelowna—and allowed these groups to give women a bit of money to start up a small business, to help them to build a business plan, and then to follow them through for the first year or so. Are those things still in existence and funded solely by the federal government, with the federal government making sure that happens?

Second, what about the Business Development Bank of Canada? I know that they have not necessarily bellied up to the bar to waive some of the requirements for women to borrow money, so that's a second place we could look at. I want to hear what you have to say about that.

The third piece is child care. Obviously, when women want to go into non-traditional areas, the big thing that prevents them from that, the biggest challenge they face, is child care. Women wanting to go into the building trades, for instance, or women wanting to go into anything that requires flexible hours, have a problem.

In this budget, we've put money into child care. How do you see that best being spent to help women entrepreneurs have access to child care? They don't fit the package. If they start the business at home, then they're homebodies and they don't need to get money for child care. As for rural women who own farms or are taking over farms, because they're on a farm and they're at home, they don't qualify either. Even though they're out in the back pasture doing work, they're at home.

These are some things that I think we may need to consider in terms of how we find ways to lever the ability for women in non-traditional areas to get access to starting their businesses. Perhaps I can hear the two of you, with the chair's permission, expound on what you think we could do better.

● (0935)

Ms. Sandra Altner: May I respond to that, especially since it concerns the women's enterprise initiative in western Canada?

That was our group. It started in the 1990s. The amount of the loan at that time was \$100,000, and there was an office in Kelowna, which still exists. There was one in Alberta, one in Saskatchewan, and one here in Manitoba.

Our loans are now at \$150,000 and we're working both with start-up and growth-oriented clients. Yes, those programs do exist, and they have been very successful.

To answer the second question on whether or not BDC has bellied up to the bar, I'm happy to say that because of what we've done so far in the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada, there has been interest on the part of BDC to partner with us on loans. There has been a pilot program for that here in Manitoba. We signed an MOU back in August, and because of the work we've done in managing our own loan fund, BDC sees us as an accredited lender and thus will rubber-stamp some of our loans. At the \$150,000 level, they will provide up to \$100,000. At the \$100,000 level they will provide up to \$50,000 and cut out all the paperwork in-between, so it's a pilot program that they hope to move out across the west. Should we be successful in developing a national loan fund, they would partner with us in creating that across the country.

On your third question regarding child care, when Minister Morneau was in Winnipeg last year, I spoke about the importance of child care to the development of women-owned business. I was very happy to see that some attention was paid to it in this budget. It's nice to know that occasionally our voices are heard.

I'm not sure that answers all of your questions, but that's how I would respond.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

Julia.

Ms. Julia Deans: You're absolutely right that child care is a huge issue, but all of self-employment or employment benefits are an issue for women entrepreneurs as well. The more we can extend those to women who are in unconventional career roles, the better because we're going to see more of them and we have to encourage that. Absolutely, we have to go in that direction.

We co-fund with BDC. So if a young person comes to us and makes an application for one of our loans, which doesn't require any collateral—they don't need to have a house or anything like that—BDC will piggyback on that loan application. Consequently, with one loan application a young person can get up to \$45,000 without collateral. BDC couldn't do that without our doing that initial step. They are now co-funding over 65% of our loans, and last year we helped almost 1,100 businesses launch. Over 40% were led by women.

I spoke earlier to a campaign we've done to reach out to women to say that we're here to help you. With Futurpreneur, BDC has been a wonderful partner in that. They have really put themselves out as saying that they want to do more for women and that they are there to do that.

The final thing you spoke to was leveraging. Federal support has been huge for us, but we've leveraged it both to get support from BDC and the private sector. We're interested in leveraging existing capital. So we use our federal support to get a line of credit from a private bank and we're able to tap into private sector capital that wouldn't otherwise be going to women or other young entrepreneurs.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Harder for our final five minutes of this panel.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Ms. Deans, I am wondering if you can break down for us what we as legislators can do to better assist young female entrepreneurs—not even young, sorry, but female entrepreneurs—to enter into business start-ups.

• (0940)

Ms. Julia Deans: Use whatever power you have to influence the education that young women are getting. Look at all of the platforms you have for telling and celebrating the stories of women entrepreneurs and helping them get access to federal buying power, whatever kind of procurement it is. Also look at any place where the federal government has a platform, whether a panel like this or advertisements or delegations going on trade missions, and ask where the women are and make sure that women are visible at every level.

The final piece is supporting organizations like ours and building connections between them so that we can offer more to more people.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you very much.

Ms. Altner, I'll ask you the same question. What can we do as federal legislators to better support women entering into entrepreneurship?

Ms. Sandra Altner: Provide access to information and increased access to the programs that are already available. Encourage collaborations between and among organizations like ours and like Julia's. I was so pleased to see this gender-based analysis finally show up in the budget. I think the use of that gender-based analysis—how women utilize programs and whether those programs are sufficient to meet the needs of women—should be monitored very closely over time.

I would also say that we are seeing not only increased access to our support services by young entrepreneurs and by Indigenous entrepreneurs, but by senior entrepreneurs as well. This is an area that has not yet really been seen as a focus, but with the succession planning, with the aging boomers, and the losing of a great deal of wisdom and experience in the workplace, in the last five years, there has been a new direction of seniorpreneurs and maturepreneurs also being able to access programs and being encouraged to start their own businesses, because people are not retiring in the same way or at the same age as they were. They're working longer and they're starting businesses at a greater rate that are successful and that create jobs. It would be wrong to ignore this aspect of the community. I would point this out as an area of potential focus for your organization in the future.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Hi. It's Karen Vecchio, and I'll just take this over.

We went onto your website, Sandra, and there were opportunities for workshops and things like that. What are some of the gaps you're finding? You mentioned education and things of that sort. What are some of the gaps you feel you're having to fill, especially when women—and maybe young men—are graduating from their post-secondary programs or from high school and don't have those skills? What are some of those gaps that you're having to fill?

Ms. Sandra Altner: The biggest thing we see is financial acumen. The program, which Status of Women actually helped us to develop a few years ago and which we call My Gold Mine is essentially a program about how to create profitability and how to understand your own financial statements. It is essential not only for entrepreneurs, for a business in growth mode, but also for anybody to understand how money works, how budgets work, and how you can build assets over time. Students these days don't seem to be graduating with that kind of information. We're finding a lot of the work that we're doing here through that particular program, which has continued over time past the support that we got from Status of Women and has grown hugely, has been very successful.

The other work we do—the advisory work, the financial labs, the business plan development, and the financial projections—has been huge. There's been a huge need for that. I would say that having that as an emphasis in programs like ours across the country would be very important.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Excellent. Thank you.

• (0945)

The Chair: Excellent. That's the end of our time for this panel.

I want to thank you, witnesses, both for your testimony today and for the work that you're doing to improve the economic status of women in Canada. We're just delighted to have you.

Thank you again.

Ms. Sandra Altner: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll suspend while we change panels.

• (0945) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0945)

The Chair: All right. We are happy to resume our study of the economic security of women in Canada. We're very excited to have our panel today. From Canada's Building Trades Unions, we have Lindsay Amundsen, the workforce development lead; and from Actua, we have Jennifer Flanagan, the president and the CEO.

Ladies, we are glad to have you. You will each have seven minutes for your comments, and we'll begin with Lindsay.

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen (Workforce Development, Canada's Building Trades Unions): Perfect, thank you.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks for the invitation to appear today. Canada's Building Trades Unions is a national, non-profit organization that represents 14 national construction unions across Canada, representing 500,000 tradeswomen and tradesmen across the country.

CBTU is working towards an equitable, accessible workplace in Canada through Build Together, a workforce development program focused on the recruitment and retention of workers from under-represented portions of the population. Diversity in organizations is increasingly respected as a fundamental characteristic of an organization's ability to create an environment of involvement, respect, and connection, where rich ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives are harnessed to create value. A better-skilled and more inclusive workforce is the key to successful attraction and retention.

The Canadian construction industry has an aging workforce, and in the coming decade will lose almost a quarter of its skilled workers to retirement. At the same time, medium- to long-term forecasts by BuildForce Canada indicate that the industry will continue to grow. To fill the vacancies left by retiring baby boomers and meet the demands of anticipated growth, the industry will need to recruit and train new workers. This is an enormous opportunity for women in Canada to earn a secure living wage. Careers in construction offer economic security for women and a direct path out of poverty.

Build Together's initial program, women of the building trades, promotes, supports, and mentors women in the skilled construction trades. Women represent 4% of this industry on average in Canada, a number that has remained unchanged in decades. At our CBTU 2016 policy conference, a resolution was passed on women in trades that included a goal to double the number of women in our industry within the next five years. We hope that through our work and our partnerships with other incredible organizations across the country this number can change and that we can successfully recruit and retain women in our industry.

Build Together has challenged existing myths and stereotypes of careers in the trades, providing the space for robust conversation on how to engage women in the sector. In support of the project, Build Together has provincial platforms where tradeswomen as leaders, mentors, and ambassadors can network, engage, and support the cause at the local level. Again, we have created the space for conversation on how to engage women in the building and construction trades.

We've identified methods to defy stereotypes and amplify the strengths and characteristics of women as tradespeople. As part of our outreach, tradeswomen have attended events across the country, including trade shows, career fairs, schools, mentorship events, and networking functions. We have been featured in media outlets across the country as part of the overarching narrative of middle-class opportunities in the trades as well as the empowerment and equalization of women.

In the past, the burden fell on women to use humour to deflect discrimination or harassment, in fear that speaking out or filing a complaint would not make a difference. We believe that unions, employers, owners, contractors, and tradespeople all have to commit to removing these barriers rather than blaming someone for failing to overcome them.

At CBTU, we have demonstrated our commitment by passing a respectful workplace resolution at our 2016 policy conference, recognizing that harassment and discrimination in the workplace are behaviours that will not be tolerated by our organization and our affiliates. In support of this resolution, we introduced resources that aim to create safe and welcoming work environments. Build Together has workshops, materials, and diversity training modules that provide leadership with the information, tools, and protocols they need to enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards unwelcoming behaviour.

Change must come from the top down and from the bottom up, but most importantly from middle management—the supervisors, foremen, and forewomen who manage our tradespeople every day on the job. When workplace culture is inclusive and staff morale increases, ultimately productivity and efficiency improve. Research suggests that in environments where employees feel valued, teamwork increases, which leads to decreased absenteeism and employee turnover.

In support of our work on respectful workplaces, we'll be launching an industry-wide, industry-championed campaign, calling on levels of leadership within industry to be champions and advocates for respectful workplaces. We want to provide our communities, our members, and our partners with the most promising future in an inclusive network of building trades.

Now that I've had the opportunity to highlight the work we do, I would like to take a moment to address a barrier that I've encountered in our work with Status of Women Canada.

As outlined in the Status of Women Canada general eligibility requirements for the women's program funding, labour unions are not eligible for funding via Status of Women Canada. Other not-for-profit organizations are eligible, as well as for-profit Canadian organizations, if the nature and intent of the funded activity is non-commercial and not intended to generate profit.

• (0950)

Our office has met with Status of Women Canada on this issue a number of times over the last three years, with no resolution on this policy. There have been a number of calls for proposals that women of the building trades have missed out on, slowing down progress of our mandate, and in our opinion, the mandate of Status of Women Canada.

The latest call for proposals that we were not eligible for was the call for proposals for projects to advance gender equality across Canada. Through this call for proposals, organizations will receive funding to identify women leaders in various sectors, organizations, and communities, and engage them in local projects to advance gender equality. The call aims to identify and engage a total of 150 women leaders from across the country, to mark the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017 as we move forward.

We are disheartened that because of the exclusion that Status of Women Canada has outlined in their eligibility requirements, there will be no female leaders from the labour movement, especially construction, included in the 150 women leaders from across the country.

Tradeswomen from across the country who are leaders in their communities, in their workplaces, and in their unions and who have spent countless hours volunteering their time for the cause will not have the chance to be engaged in this project. They are working hard every day to provide solutions to the barriers women face in their industry. They are mentors and advocates who work tirelessly for gender equality in Canada, and they do not deserve to be excluded as leaders in this country.

The unionized skilled trades do not have pay equity issues, but we do have workplace cultural issues and issues surrounding child care and pregnancy in the trades. We are working to address some of these barriers, but we need your help.

We hope that the eligibility requirement can be revised and changed to reflect the important work we do in this sector; to help us continue to provide economic security for women in our country; and to reflect the inclusive eligibility requirements of other federal departments, such as ESDC and numerous other government departments.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today about the work we are doing and for hearing our recommendations on the economic security of women in Canada.

Thank you.

• (0955)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Lindsay.

Now we'll go to Jennifer, for seven minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan (President and Chief Executive Officer, Actua): Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Hello, everyone.

It is a real pleasure to be here with you this morning to talk to you about our organization, Actua, and about our work with young girls in science and technology.

[English]

Good morning, everyone. It's a real pleasure to be here today. Thank you so much for the opportunity to share Actua's work and some of our recommendations with regard to your current study.

Actua is a national charitable organization that designs and delivers programs that build confidence and skills in science, technology, engineering, and math. We support a network of 35 university- and college-based members across Canada who deliver programming in 500 communities reaching every province and territory. For 20 years we have been the national leader in inclusion programming in this area, engaging underserved and under-represented youth through national programs for girls and young women, youth facing socio-economic challenges, youth in remote and northern communities, and indigenous youth.

Our work in STEM education contributes substantively to Canada's social and economic prosperity. We all know that STEM occupations are typically associated with better employment conditions and higher pay, yet women still occupy only 21% to 23% of all STEM occupations. Obviously this is contributing significantly to the gender pay gap. The stage for this gap is set well before women enter university or the workforce. It begins when young girls learn about their world, hearing subtle and not-so-subtle messages from parents, teachers, and their peers about their roles, and often participating in very different extracurricular activities from boys.

It continues in high school, when teenage girls with higher math scores are less likely to choose STEM programs at university than are teenage boys who have lower math scores. The gap widens in university. Despite representing 59% of all university graduates in Canada, women represent only 23% of graduates in engineering and 30% of graduates in math and computer science. If we want to close this gap, we need to shift the narrative—from how girls and women must change to fit into STEM to how the context around them needs to change.

Actua's national girls program was developed 20 years ago in response to these barriers. We have interacted with literally tens of thousands of girls and their parents across the country. From those experiences we have learned a lot, and a couple of things in particular. Young girls aged six to 10 have no shortage of passion, curiosity, talent, and interest in science and technology. That is without exception across the country. That interest drops at around grade 5 or 6. At this age we see a marked decline in the participation rate of girls in our programs. That decline worsens as time moves on. The interests, behaviours, and choices of girls are hugely influenced by parents and teachers.

We now engage 10,000 girls each year through those initiatives, and do a lot of evaluation to ensure that they're effective. We see from pre- and post-evaluations that girls' confidence, enjoyment, and interest in STEM are increasing as a result of Actua's programs. This is further reflected in the larger data. Between 1991 and 2011 the proportion of women in scientific occupations increased from 18% to 23%. It's not enough, but it's a good increase. In fact increases were seen in all occupational categories except in computer science, where the proportion of women declined from 30% to 25% over that same period.

With technology now underpinning every single field, from business to health care to agriculture, digital literacy is no longer a "nice to have" skill. It has become a basic literacy. If we don't engage girls in building digital literacy, they will be further segregated and will continue not to have equal access to major areas of growth within our economy.

In October 2014 Actua launched with Google a three-year project called Codemakers. We want to transform the way in which youth are engaging with computer science and digital skills. We want to move them from their typical role as consumers of technology into much-needed roles as innovators and producers of technology. In the first two years of that project, we've engaged 80,000 youth across the country in digital skill development experiences. The demand for those programs in every community across the country is massive, but girl engagement has been lacking. We wanted to aggressively pursue changing that so we didn't go down the same path we did with our STEM programs.

Last year we had the support of Status of Women to launch another project, this one to look specifically at the issues and barriers facing girls in computer science and in building digital skills. To date we have done an environmental scan, a literature review, and expert interviews. We're in the process of doing what I think is very unique, a girl-led research piece where the girls are developing the research and then going out and conducting the research. It's putting them right in the middle of this project.

Just a few things have come out of that initially, and I would be happy to come back and share the results once we're finished. At a more general level they include the following.

- (1000)

First, learning experiences in computer science need to be accessible to girls. The systemic sexism that exists in computer science traditionally and how it has been approached needs to be addressed.

Second, girls also need support and encouragement from their parents and teachers, but the parents and teachers need to actually be trained on how to provide that support.

Finally, girls need to understand that digital literacy is a basic literacy. It's not just about becoming a computer scientist. It's relevant to all of their interests in every career path they might want to pursue.

It's clear that in order to make real change we have to focus on context, how everyone from every sector, men and women, needs to stand up and demand that the context for girls and women change. We need to have more open and transparent discussions with girls

and women earlier on about what to expect when they get into the workforce, what challenges they might still encounter, and how to overcome those things that exist within the context.

We also need to acknowledge and counteract popular misconceptions about computer science that are not going to appeal to girls.

In closing, I would like to actually commend the current government and those members of other parties who have put their support behind major federal investments in STEM outreach programs for youth. Actua has literally been advocating for this for over 20 years, and in the recent budget 2017, a new fund was announced called teaching kids to code, \$50 million over two years. This funding is essential to support organizations like Actua that are ready to scale their work to engage girls in those critical early experiences. We will not achieve gender pay equity if we do not have girls engaged early.

Moving forward, I want to leave you with three recommendations.

The first is to support and incentivize initiatives and efforts to get more women on boards, more women in senior positions in all sectors, and to profile and celebrate companies and specifically men who are fighting the status quo on this. If girls do not see change at the top, things will not change from the bottom.

Second, support initiatives that help parents, teachers, and other influencers gain a better understanding of the skills and competencies that girls require to achieve economic independence; more specific information on that is needed.

Then third, in your constituencies at the local level, support and highlight initiatives that are challenging the status quo and advancing this narrative about how the context needs to change.

That's it for our recommendations, and thank you.

The Chair: Excellent.

We'll begin our round of questioning by my colleague, Ms. Ludwig, for seven minutes.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much for your presentations.

My first round of questions goes to Ms. Flanagan. In terms of what you had mentioned about STEM occupations being roughly 20% to 23% women, and then in terms of the universities and colleges that you're working with, the 35 of them, can you tell me if you have a percentage of how much of the faculty members are women in the colleges and universities that are involved with STEM teaching?

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: I would have to get that specific information for you, but off the top of my head, I'd say it's very low, less than 20% in engineering faculties and computer science faculties. Then obviously as the professorship positions increase in stature, the numbers go way down. It's a big issue, an issue many groups are focused on, and I know women engineers across the country are battling on a daily basis.

• (1005)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you.

My daughter is just finishing university, and some of her friends, girls, graduated from engineering. I had asked them how many female faculty members there were. They said one or two. In terms of mentorship even within the disciplines, there's obviously a challenge there. Thank you.

I also thought it was really interesting when you talked about the significance of the passion of young girls between six and 10. To me that was really interesting because so often, in elementary school education, much of the faculty are women, and as the grades increase, we see a difference between men and women in terms of the teaching levels.

I know from teaching at the graduate level that we would talk about technology, but then when I would talk with the teachers who were in the masters of education program, I would learn that it wasn't integrated into the regular curriculum in the undergrad level.

Do you have any involvement with the undergraduate teaching in terms of curriculum influence or guest speaking about the importance of mentorship role models in terms of your practices to incorporate teaching into undergraduate levels for teachers who will then be teaching kids whether they are six to 12 or 11 to 18?

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: That makes so much sense. We should be teaching in-service teachers, meaning teachers in training, about these subject areas and making sure that they're not intimidated by science and technology and not passing that intimidation on. You're right that most elementary school teachers are women, but most of those teachers are very intimidated by science and technology because they've had negative experiences, or they don't have the background.

The answer is, yes, we have worked with faculties of education across the country. Within those member institutions that I talked about, they will often be called on to do workshops with people who are becoming teachers just so they have a first exposure to hands-on science. Now, it's more on the technology and digital skill development, but that is not part of the formal curriculum of most faculties of education. That's a huge issue, one that obviously we're taking every opportunity to influence. That needs to change.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you.

Ms. Amundsen, I want to ask you about the STEM panels you mentioned. We heard from the previous witness, Julia Deans from Futurpreneur Canada, about the importance of having panels. Basically, it's often the case that women cannot be what they cannot see.

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: We say that all the time.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: I use that a lot, too. I quite like it.

Well done in terms of the panels. Perhaps you could explain a bit more about them. How involved are men in the panels or in changes in the workplace culture? As much as we encourage women to go into, what we hopefully will not be calling too much longer, "non-traditional" fields, we also have to get their male colleagues on board to support this.

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: Sure. Construction is 96% male, so we have to get the men on board, otherwise it's not going to go anywhere very fast. I work for a board of 14 national construction unions, and they're all led by men. We did have one woman leader, but she retired, and my boss is male. Really these changes that we're championing are being championed from the male leadership in partnership.

Build Together is really unique in the sense that we started out by working with the grassroots, working with tradeswomen who work on the tools. We're trying to merge the top and the bottom together so that we can influence the middle management and the union halls and the supervisors and the foremen and women who do this work every day. We're trying to do whatever we can to increase the number of women in the industry, to make sure that we champion respectful workplaces and a culture that is welcoming and inclusive for everybody, including zero-tolerance policies. We hope to see tool box talks every day. They do a tool box talk every morning on safety. We want that to include respect and a workplace free of harassment and discrimination.

There's still a long way to go. I'm by no means saying that it's perfect, but we absolutely need men as champions. I think the industry champion program will be a really useful tool to recruit champions in the entire industry, who will train them on this message and provide them the tools they need to champion an inclusive workplace.

• (1010)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you.

I just have one quick question.

Both of you talked about the significance of diversity, and we have before the House Bill C-25 on diversity on boards. I will give you an example. When I was talking about the value of diversity, one comment that I had heard was, "But we want to have qualified people." If someone is female or has a different background, why is there an instant conclusion made that they're not qualified? How do we change that? We know, as a government, looking at Bill C-25, that the the boards that are much more diversified are much more likely to be successful. We know from the Toronto Stock Exchange that companies with boards that have women on them are much more likely to have a higher return at the end of the year.

Help us out with that.

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: I think—

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: Are we allowed to swear?

I'm just kidding. I know there's a transcript.

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: So x it out.

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: No, I mean not now, but when we're responding.

I think we just have to stand up and call that out.

That is just not the case; it's just not the case. I don't buy it anymore. I think we need to say very simply that's not correct. There are plenty of qualified, diverse perspectives. You just need to put the effort in and you need to look at your recruitment. We have this conversation, especially around boards, where wonderful companies that we work with are working really hard on inclusivity within their corporate culture policies, and boldly and authentically working on that. Then they have one woman on their board. They say they can't find anyone. That's baloney. You need to look at how you recruit.

The Chair: Absolutely. That's your time.

All right, we're going to do something unusual, because I don't normally ask questions, but my colleagues have said that since I have a background in engineering and construction—32 years—perhaps my questions would be meaningful.

Ms. Flanagan, on the topic of the opportunity in digital literacy, we've had the IT consortium come to the Hill and talk about the gap of 180,000 jobs in the next five years that we'll not be able to fill. I'm a huge fan of the \$50 million that was given for coding and to try to get girls into coding. My concern in the STEM areas is that although at age eight girls think they can do anything, that they can go into those areas, by the time they get to 13, they have lost the confidence or desire to enter those fields. We also see that once they graduate from university, we can't retain them in these fields. What do you think the federal government can do to help in this situation?

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: Thank you for your support of that initiative, but I also think the impact of having you as a woman engineer in the role you're in is very significant. We need more women engineers as members of Parliament.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Yes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: What can the federal government do? I think it is absolutely essential that this early engagement continues to be supported, and that we look at it not just from an educational perspective, because obviously we then get mixed up in the whole provincial/federal jurisdictional issues. That aside, we need to look at it from a skill and competency development perspective. Girls, as you said, at eight, nine, and ten, are extremely interested. They're still interested at 13, but there's just a lot of pressure in other areas and a lot of negative messaging about who can do science, technology, and engineering. A lot of peer influence is going on. We're hearing from girls how their peers are talking about these subject areas—and how they're being discouraged by their female and male friends is also very influential.

We need to not only engage them, but also we need to look at.... We know a lot now, we know the factors that influence them. We know they need role models, we know they need to have coaching, we know that when programs for girls are delivered, they need to be

safe spaces, they need to be spaces where girls can develop the skills that some of them are lacking through other means, through play and risk-taking, taking things apart, putting them back together, learning that failure is not horrible, that it has a very good use, and all the other good things they love, such as collaboration and creativity.

What can you do? You need to invest in these programs and recognize that they have to start early—it's not good enough to start in high school—and look at the specific nature of their programming. It's not just about bringing girls together and giving them hands-on science, but that we need to be making sure that we're talking to them about what they're going to encounter and the challenges they're going to face. I think we've shied away from that, maybe because we don't want to put ideas in their head before they have them, but the reality is that six- and seven-year-olds know the messaging, if you ask them. Having open conversations makes a big difference.

•(1015)

The Chair: Ms. Amundsen, my next question has to do with the construction industry. I was in the construction industry for a long time, so I do see the chronic problems there with sexism, harassment, and it being a very unfriendly environment for women to come into. That said, we're looking to get more women in skilled trades. In this regard, I was very interested when you said there's no pay equity gap, and I think that is my—

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: In unionized...

The Chair: —perception in the unionized area; that's right. I was astonished that you're not eligible for funding from Status of Women, so I'm sure Ms. Malcolmson and I will take that to question period. However, in terms of what we can do to help promote women into the skilled trades, what are the specific things you think we should be helping with?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: There's a lot being done out there. There are a lot of fantastic organizations, and the government has been very supportive of the work that organizations are doing to create awareness around opportunities in the skilled trades. We go out to schools. We talk to kids. We talk to parents. We talk to teachers. We do media profiles. We do all that we can to create that awareness.

I think the awareness is great. I was going to say don't quote me on this, but obviously I am going to be quoted on this. Now we're sort of shifting our focus to the retention piece. I think that women and girls are interested in these jobs. It's just that they get into this environment and say "whoa".

The time has expired for us to be saying that you just have to have a thick skin and deal with it. I think that's wrong, and some tradeswomen are conditioned to believe that you just have to be really tough and you just have to handle it.

There's a major workplace culture issue. There are a lot of accommodations that can be made. There are child care issues. There are pregnancy issues in the trades. I think that changing those barriers, as well as working with contractors to provide a foot in the door so that contractors hire women—we're doing that sort of work with partners in other organizations—takes a multi-pronged approach.

I think the awareness piece and the interest piece are doing well. You see a lot on women in the skilled trades these days.

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: The context issue is affecting our work far more than it did even five years ago. When women and girls go into the fields of tech and engineering, the number of stories and the high-profile media stories about how awful the culture still is for women is now re-affecting our work. Parents are saying, "Why would I encourage my daughter to go into that?" Girls are hearing those stories because they're very aware.

My answer to that question in the past would have been, "Actual really only focuses on girls aged 6 to 16. We can't do it all," but now that is so heavily weighing on our work, we have to do it. One can't happen without the other.

The Chair: You talked about the training that you're doing on diversity to try to address the behaviours that are happening in construction. I know that we give lots of training. The glazed-over expression that we got from the guys...and when they got back out in the field, nothing had changed.

Could you tell me which things you're doing that you think are effective in changing the behaviour?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: I don't know if we have that master recipe yet. I can give you, though, a Cole's Notes version of what we're trying to accomplish here.

Buildforce Canada received funding a year ago from Status of Women Canada to do a project on tools for implementing respectful workplaces, training, and policy. We're working with them—and they're working with a bunch of other groups, as well—to make sure that we don't reinvent the wheel but complement each other's work.

I think it's really powerful for all of us to come together and to come up with solutions. What I would like to do is to take those champions that we recruit in the industry, whoever they are—union members, contractors, employers, leaders, government—and provide them with the tools that Buildforce Canada comes up with and the training, test them out, see how they're working, and go back and forth on that to create the best solution.

• (1020)

The Chair: Very good.

Now we go to Ms. Malcolmson for seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to take this up with the minister.

You were extremely clear, from the perspective of Canada's Building Trades Unions, about the barriers to your being able to participate in the Status of Women funding. I'm disappointed, given what I've heard. I hadn't heard that story until this morning from you.

It is impossible to reconcile that with what I've heard Status of Women staff and the present minister say, which is that it was the labour movement that kept the women's movement alive in Canada during the 10 years the Conservatives were in power. That kind of lauding of your work is inconsistent with—

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: There's a disconnect there.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: There's a total disconnect.

I hear you. Thank you for being so clear, and I'll definitely take it up.

On a happier note, my friend Hilary Peach is a boilermaker. She's my age, and she's been in the work for a long time. She says the thing that's actually changed the workplace dynamic more than anything is a lot of young men raised by strong feminist single mothers. They're the ones who call out their fellow workers, and Hilary is like, "Oh, my God, I've been trying to teach these guys about sexism for decades." Now it's these young guys on the job, who are, thankfully, taking the load off her. That's not a federal responsibility.

I want to talk with you a little bit, Lindsay, from Canada's Building Trades Unions' side, about the shift that we're starting to see at the grassroots level with organized labour building leave for victims of domestic violence into their collective agreements. As well, in some provinces, such as Manitoba with its NDP government, and also I think in B.C. with some private members' bills there, and I think in Ontario, the same cause is being picked up. Last week in my community, I talked to some of the employees at women's shelters in Nanaimo as well as to the police, the RCMP. They were very clear that sometimes work is the most stable place for a woman who's experiencing domestic violence, and that if she can't get leave to get her kids and her rent and a new place to live organized, then she has the choice between returning to a dangerous situation and falling deeper into poverty, and that's a terrible choice.

Would you like to see a recommendation from this committee around domestic leave provisions being considered as one of the tools that we can look at to protect women's economic security in times of violence?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: I don't know if anybody would say no to that; maybe they would. But certainly I think women who are experiencing domestic violence should be able to take leave. I know there's some discussion that maybe they should take sick leave and those sorts of things. But I would say why not? Anything that protects women, especially around these issues, I think, is appropriate.

That is not something I've been working on in my files, although the beauty of having these Build Together, Women of the Building Trades programs across the country is that I can easily tap into members working at a local level with local unions, with employers, and with contractors, who can champion these sorts of things. It's definitely worth taking up.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: The BC Building Trades has been great about amplifying the Build Together campaign. It has great visuals and materials. It's very positive, again, about being able to visualize what it looks like to have women in the field and to change young minds.

I will turn now to Actua and Ms. Flanagan. We're pleased to see innovation and infrastructure spending in the federal budget. But one of the concerns I have, because women are not yet represented in some of the infrastructure fields, is that the spending could leave women further behind. This committee has had testimony from a couple of witnesses on exactly that link. Meg Gingrich from the Steelworkers told the committee that infrastructure spending should be done using a gendered lens so that it doesn't create jobs only for men, and Professor Kathleen Lahey told us that one reason Canada has fallen to number 25 in terms of gender equality is the focus on infrastructure spending that traditionally benefits male jobs.

Can you talk a bit about the importance of infrastructure spending that would have an explicit gender-based analysis, so that women aren't being left further behind and we can protect space for the next generation of workers?

• (1025)

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: That is not my area of expertise at all. What I can say is that we obviously would be supportive of a gender lens on anything. The hope and the optimism that we feel... I've never felt more optimistic than I do right now, and I've been in this field for a long time. There's a much clearer understanding of the need to engage girls, not just for gender parity's sake but because it will improve our standing across all of the innovation measures. I feel that's being well understood within the corporate sector and within the federal government.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: We like to hear about optimism.

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: Yes. We're very optimistic.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Have you been doing, on your side, any work with a particular focus on financial literacy and indigenous women? We heard from Pauktuutit, the Inuit women's advocacy organization, that it found that numeracy, bookkeeping, and financial literacy in the north represented a particular gap. It's calling for entrepreneurship programs that are particularly targeted around indigenous women. Is that an area that you've been working on?

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: Yes, absolutely. We have a national indigenous outreach program that annually engages 35,000 indigenous youth, with first nations, Inuit, and Métis working in partnership with 220 indigenous communities. That's for boys and girls.

In the north in particular, we have 50 locations across the three territories and Labrador. There, the connections to economic development are so much closer, but are completely isolated, in that kids have no idea of the economic development opportunities that are happening in their communities. Actua is playing a significant bridging role there to talk to boys and girls about who

these people are in their backyards, what the opportunities are, and what skills they need to build so they can not just understand this but become the leaders in those economic development projects.

From a financial literacy perspective, that's in everything that we do. Because we're very focused on experiential learning, we don't want to develop just science and tech skills, as schools do that quite well. We want to have youth apply those to real-world contexts. That's how the innovation muscle develops: when they actually are applying skills to something they care about. With the financial literacy piece, they're like, "Why do I need math?" In our projects, we will have them building something, for example, but they'll have to do a budget, and they'll have to learn about how money works in a business.

Obviously this is in the context of a nine-year-old or a ten-year-old, but just that first exposure.... They've never been told what financial literacy even is and why math matters and how that would affect their lives. That application is incredibly important. Then we do all kinds of other more detailed financial literacy pieces, but that first exposure is important, and it's relevant everywhere, and obviously we do it with indigenous youth as well.

The Chair: That's your time.

We'll go to Mr. Fraser for seven minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thanks very much to both of you for being here. I really enjoyed your testimony.

I'll jump right into it because we have limited time.

We've heard from a number of different panels, including today, about the importance of encouraging women's participation in STEM and growth industries. One of the things that we don't often talk about is encouraging women to join other professions within those sectors.

Recently in my own community I met with an start-up tech company. They said they were dying for people, but not just computer programmers. They said they needed people who have a B.A. and can be good technical writers, and people who have creative minds, particularly in the marketing industry.

Are there things we can do to shift the focus away from solely engineers and mathematicians in order to recognize that there are growth opportunities in those sectors generally and to draw from the immense pool of talented women going through our post-secondary education system now who are disproportionately represented, particularly in university degree programs, and could take part in these sectors? Are there things that you think the federal government could do to tap into that resource?

That's for whoever wants to tackle it.

• (1030)

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: It's a really important question. Again, it comes back to experiential learning and to talking with girls specifically about skills and competencies. Those are the things you mentioned, right? They're the things like marketing, communications, and some of the other skills that are required by these tech companies. It's not just hardcore programmers or coders but having that kind of digital literacy combined with those skills that is very important. When we're talking about major growth field areas such as artificial intelligence and other tech areas, those skills that you just mentioned are so critical, and they aren't going to be advanced by having people who are just doing coding languages.

The context is important, as is talking to all kids, but girls in particular, about how valuable those skills are, right? When I say youth, I mean those in university as well, so that's why we want to broaden the message that digital skills are not just about creating computer science jobs, but that they are important to combine with all other fields. If you're doing a B.A. and you're passionate about something else, underpin those with digital skills and then you can go and work in a start-up.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Maybe we can call it "STEAM" and not STEM, with the A in there.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: Maybe.

Mr. Sean Fraser: One of the things that I want to follow up on, and which our first panel talked about, is smaller and rural communities not having the same opportunities as big cities do. I'm from Atlantic Canada. I think it's prototypical, really, for rural Canada to have vast, very sparsely populated spaces with communities of maybe 5,000 to 20,000, or somewhere in that range, as the population centre for different areas. Is there something you think the federal government can do to create the same opportunities for digital literacy and for networking and mentorship in construction or other industries in these smaller hubs, so that we extend the benefits not just to our biggest cities?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: I'm glad you asked that. We tried to apply for an open call for proposal a few years ago. This is where the problem with the funding issue all started. We partnered with an organization in Newfoundland and Labrador called Office to Advance Women Apprentices. Newfoundland and Labrador has 13% of its women in construction compared to the rest of the country, which has around 4%, so we looked at what they were doing with their organizations. They are working with union and non-union tradeswomen across the entire province. They make it to the smaller communities. They help women get a foot in the door with contractors and employers.

They are a two-way street. They're helping employers and the contractors navigate these scary issues of hiring women, making them more comfortable with it, working them through some of the issues that might come up with having a woman on their job site. We partnered with that organization to bring the organization across the country so we could have similar organizations like this in every province to hit the smaller communities, and we weren't able to receive that funding.

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: It's really important to have that as a priority within any funding pool, for example, including with this new money that's just been announced, to make sure there is a very heavy component on remote communities in there.

For example, we have a member at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton who travels to dozens of communities across the province to deliver this programming. If the community doesn't have Internet access, then they do unplugged programming. If there is Internet access, then they work with whatever is in that community, investing in organizations that can deal with the particular challenges of remote communities and not waiting for that infrastructure to be in place but still developing and delivering programs for those kids.

Mr. Sean Fraser: We have about a minute and a half left, and I wanted to hit on a very big topic, the social attitudes and social context shift that you mentioned being an essential part of this. I met my best friend from home who is a Mountie up north and was encouraging his wife to apply as a parole officer; she's been thinking about it for years. Today when they were in the car their three-year old son said, "Daddy, don't be silly. Girls can't be Mounties", and my friend pulled the car over and had a big chat with him, but these social attitudes are rampant.

There are some obvious things we can do. Bill C-25 addresses corporate boards. We can appoint a gender-equal cabinet. We can look at board appointments and that kind of thing.

Are there other things we can do as the federal government to help inspire the communities at large to help serve as an impetus that will get the social shift moving so it's not two generations from now?

•(1035)

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: I think the work with parents and teachers is so essential, and making sure a component is there. People generally get that, but it hasn't been a component of a lot of these funding programs, so if you're working with girls, if you don't work with their parents and talk to them about those messages, many parents won't correct that. They'll just say "not really", or they don't know how to correct that. There's a huge amount of push-back.

I had an experience recently when we were getting off an airplane and my four-year old looked at the pilot and said, "Oh, my goodness, look. It's a boy pilot", as if that never happens. I had very explicitly had conversations with her to make her think that all pilots are women. It's just a shift, and people around me were pushing back. I've had that push-back all the time.

It is so important that we can cook that in, so we can do training programs for parents. It's not just about saying, "Hey, you should encourage your boys not to treat girls differently", or "You should do this". Training for parents needs to be as well designed and of as high quality as we're doing for girls. Investing in that parent piece is very important.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thanks very much.

I think I'm out of time now.

The Chair: You are, but I was interested in the answer.

We'll go now to Ms. Vecchio, for five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

Lindsay, I want to start with you because I think you are a mentor for the field you are in. I look at the work you are doing. Can you share with us how you chose that career? We realize that you had to face barriers. What were some of the things you had to deal with as you were getting into this career? When it came to the education field, what were some of the barriers you dealt with, and what kept you ongoing?

Could you make this a little more personal, looking at the fact that you've been able to mentor so many other women in this field?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: I'm not a tradeswoman, so I'll start with that. This is why I rely on the tradeswomen in the field to give me the information I need. I am from the labour movement. I've worked for a few unions before this, but I think I'm very lucky to work for an employer that is saying, "Do what you have to do and here's this platform" and believes in me and supports me. I have a board that believes in me and supports me and listens to me and takes my advice. They're all 60-year-old men, and plus—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay. Let's look at the women you are working with, then. Out of the group you're working with, what specific skills are they looking at? Are they looking at welding, for instance, or electrical? What are some of the things that you're finding women are most focused on right now, where they're kind of finding that this is where their keenness is?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: Do you mean what the barriers are, or what they're interested in?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No. Right now, when you're looking at the field of people that you're working with, what are they specifically

doing at this time? Are they doing the welding? Are they doing the —

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: Yes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Is there one field that you're finding is particularly more gripping for women to be involved in?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: There are some trades that are doing better than others in terms of retention of women. There are reasons behind that. There could be a general interest, or it could be the effort on behalf of that particular trade. There are lots of female electricians. There are quite a few female welders.

There are 60 different trades. Some trades have more women in them than others. Certainly I see a lot in the carpentry field and in welding, electrical—anything with attention to detail. We have a lot of participation in our program by those working in the electrical field.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's fantastic.

When my daughter came home a couple of weeks ago and told me that she was welding, I was so excited about it.

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: Welding is so hard.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes.

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: I'm terrible.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Well, I guess she's doing really well. To me it's very exciting, because it's opening up a new door that she at the age of 19 would never have thought about.

I'm wondering how the women whom you're working with got engaged. Do see more people graduating from these fields? When people are applying for the apprenticeship programs, are the numbers going up or are they remaining about the same?

Ms. Lindsay Amundsen: I hear from the women I work with who have been around in the field for about 20 years, and they say that things are changing, from their experience, on the job site. Where they used to be alone in the field as women, they are now seeing three or four women, maybe more. It depends. Some projects have more women than others, but certainly things are changing.

I think they could certainly change a lot more. I think the initial interest, for a lot of them, came from a family member who was already doing the trade. Now we're seeing some movement when we go in and do these presentations and go and talk to kids in schools. They do hands-on at the career fairs. You can see the light going on in their eyes when they see these women talking about their experiences in the trade. They're going, "Oh, that's cool. You can do that? Girls can do that? That's really cool."

They don't know that there are all these different types of trades in construction. They have no idea. Just making sure that they're aware of all the opportunities and options for them is really helpful.

•(1040)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's fantastic.

I'd like to go back to something that Sean mentioned with regard to "STEAM". There's this great program going on in St. Thomas. The Thames Valley District School Board will be putting 80 children through a STEAM program, where they'll be accepting high school students so they will do STEM plus the arts—the entire build. I think we can really invest in programs like that. It was great to see our local school board get on top of something like that.

Have you seen program likes this across the country, or within your field, that are being extended so that we're beginning to think outside the box and not necessarily just in the normal classroom terms, that "here's your theory, and this is how it goes"? Are you seeing more of that, either of you? Are you seeing those changes? How could we do that better in terms of education sources?

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: I think just adding the "A" is not going to do anything. People ask us all the time if we should shift to STEAM. We've always had arts and design as part of the content that we do.

You know, STEM doesn't equal innovation. STEM does not equal, necessarily, the—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: With regard to the STEAM program we're doing, I would just add that I brought the person from the Canadian Centre for Product Validation down to it from the college. He was excited because it's outside the box. They're adding this, because when I talk about the "A", they're talking about the marketing side of things, the promotional side of things, about taking a product and how you can get it to market.

So I wouldn't say it's just about adding the "A". I'm talking about it being much more inclusive than that.

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: I think that is essential. We hear from high school students across the country that they have lots of opportunity to get good science and tech skills. They have very little opportunity to apply them. That's the big challenge we have in Canada. We're great at the ideas and not great at the implementation side of things. That also comes with how we measure students. These high school students will say, "Look, I don't have support from my parents or from anyone to do anything that could affect my marks negatively." So on the risk-taking and application side of things, yes, they're very challenged. They don't have as many opportunities for that.

Programs like that, if they can create a space where they're evaluating them in a way that will still make everyone happy, I think are fantastic, and they are definitely happening across the country.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: So you are seeing things such as that happen. That's fantastic.

Ms. Jennifer Flanagan: We need to figure out how to measure it.

The Chair: I'm going to cut you off. Unfortunately, we are at the end of our time.

It's been exciting to have you both as witnesses today. We could certainly speak all day about these topics. Thank you very much for your testimony.

If you think of things that you want the committee to know, feel free to send them to the clerk.

Thank you to the committee. That was a great meeting.

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