Career Pathways for Women and Girls:
Emergent and Non-traditional Occupations and Industries

Key Findings (Summary): Participant Surveys

Eight (8) Tradeswomen members of *SALT – Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen* met in Wollongong NSW in March 2011

<u>Five central factors emerge as key findings:</u>

- Women's entry-level courses are critical to build the numbers of women in trade areas.

- Tradeswomen reported high job satisfaction and are keen to recommend their jobs to other women.

- All stressed the importance of career information as a means to engage more women in trades work and study.
    - ❖ The majority of the women considered the school education system has a responsibility to provide improved, holistic career information to girls, including a more diverse range and description of occupations.
    - ❖ Careers Advisers were specifically mentioned as having a responsibility to know more about how to promote male dominated fields to girls.
    - ❖ School careers days that include input from tradeswomen and hands-on opportunities, thus helping school students examine a broader range of subject electives and pathways were also identified.
    - ❖ Emphasis the practical aspects of the work give girls exposure and opportunities to build skills and confidence.
    - ❖ Equal opportunities at work offer a critical career promotional role that would provide confidence for women to enter male dominated trades.
    - ❖ Matured aged women returning to work or seeking retraining need tailored career information about the availability of trades work suitable for older women, the small business aspects of trades work and contract and part time work.

- Education about career possibilities, advertising trades to women, being exposed to women who are in trades jobs and mentors supporting women in trade areas including exposure to women trade teachers are all considered essential.

- The workplace culture and lack of critical mass of women continues to be problematic for tradeswomen, who feel too often their skills go under-recognised resulting in additional effort, or continuous effort, to prove their ability.

Project Participants Data

About The Trades Women

Key points:

- The majority of the women came into their trade having undertaken an entry level women's program [6 out of 8] – 4 from an local on-going entry level course offered through TAFE in painting and decorating for women, and one through an on-going industry-led women's program – NRMA Jumpstart
- Only half undertook an apprenticeship
- Five (5) of the eight (8) women came into their trade as mature aged learners
- Most are self employed

Project Participant Data - Overview

	Maree	**Lorraine**	**Fiona**	**Fred**	**Brooke**	**Di**	**Jacqui**	**Cyndi**
Occupation	Painter & decorator	Painter & decorator	Painter & decorator	Fitter & Machinist	Spray painter [auto]	Painter & decorator	Painter & decorator	Sign writer
Age on entry	42	42	35	22	19	42	38	22
Number of years in trade	11	14	17	12	4	8	10	7
Employed or self employed	Yes incl. contract work	Self employed	Employed	Employed	Employed	Yes incl. contract work	Yes	Self employed
Apprenticeship participation	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Participation in entry women's program	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Participants' Comments[1]:

- *WOW course Painting and Decorating, Outreach Courses, murals, decorative effects, interior design and colour consultancy. Gained confidence and experience to enter and complete the trade course. Obtained my license and I am self-employed.*
- *This allowed me to reinvent my work skills from hospitality to painting and decorating and the opportunity to meet women that I later worked with in the industry.*
- *It was great to have the support of the group and be able to talk to people who have similar interests and experiences.*
- *This is a most self-satisfying trade. I enjoy this line of work and would encourage more females to pursue this career.*

About the Tradeswomen's Careers

The major influences in choosing a trade

Of critical importance are the factors of influence that enabled some women to select a trade career pathway. People of influence e.g. family members [2], teacher [1] and women's training programs were identified. Several women identified a change in life circumstances that led them to a trade pathway. As illustrated in the comments below, it was often a combination of factors that had an influence:

- *I became a painter because I met my second husband who was a painter. I had 5 very small children and we had no money so I started helping him. My teachers at TAFE were also great.*
- *Divorced at 42 - had experience in painting. Did a WOW[2] course in Painting and Decorating.*
- *My teacher. Encouraged me to continue onto the trade and completing it, offering apprenticeship and support.*
- *Always had an interest in painting and the WOW course in Painting and Decorating came up at TAFE. By the end of the 6 months I had decided I wanted to do the trade course.*
- *Work experience with a tradeswoman. Using my hands, being creative, learning on the job i.e. practical learning as opposed to learning in a classroom.*
- *Family, NRMA Jumpstart.*
- *Fought to do metalwork from age 12 as I went to a catholic school and 'women' don't do that trade. I have 3 sisters so I was the son and that was what I was interested in - making things that move etc was better than cooking!*
- *I was always interested in this field as my mother was a fantastic painter and decorator – I was always encouraged to lend a hand – I enjoyed being creative and being able to change certain projects.*

[1] All participants' comments are italicised as recognition of their individual voices.

[2] WOW: Work Opportunities for Women (TAFE Course)

The positive and negative features of trade occupation

Several of the women identified loving the work they do as a highly positive factor in their trade occupation.

Positives

- *more ladies feel comfortable having another woman in their homes, encouraging their friends to hire a woman to work in homes for safety.*
- *I enjoy and have a passion for what I do. Have met any people. Getting paid to do something I enjoy.*
- *Being self-employed sometimes I get jobs because I am a female and can deal with other women better.*
- *Personally I have had great feedback that being a woman and pursuing this career, encouraged, but once I prove I am capable!!*
- *Take more interest in my work - caring, helpful considerate*

While one participant referred to the 'laid back environment' of her work setting, it is unclear whether she was attributing this attribute of her work climate with it being a male dominated occupation or not.

Negative aspects of the trade occupation centred on being a woman in a male dominated field:

- *Negative people particularly because I am female.*
- *Being a woman is a positive and negative: negative – I have been overlooked for employment and winning contracts, and having to prove myself.*
- *Love the work, hate the attitude. We shouldn't need to prove ourselves each day when fully qualified. Lack of respect of fellow employees.*
- *Negatives are I have to prove myself all the time – I have to be better than anyone else not just once but constantly – lack of respect.*
- *Negative: question whether I am capable to do work alone.*

Additionally factors such as age and strength were identified as negative factors, as were occupational hazards and risks in the workplace:

- *My age [it's a really physical job.]*
- *Don't have the strength of a man when sometimes it's needed, [so I hired 2 males].*
- *– hard to start family, lots of toxic chemicals*

The trade as meeting career expectations

Not all of the women had initially sought a 'career' from their trade work but the career satisfaction level reported amongst these women is high.

- *I didn't really have expectations but it has provided me with an amazingly fulfilling career.*

Several of the women reported ambition to see career growth in their futures and had identified goals:

- *I want to go further and run a workshop but want to feel as though my input is important and not just another voice in their ears!*
- *Yes but would like to go further with it.*

One spoke about her late identification of her work as a career:

- *Would have loved getting into it at an earlier age. But didn't realize I could.*

The working climate was identified as having some career setbacks for 2 women:

- *Through my apprenticeship working as the only female in the workshop with 5-8 other males, I was not taught the same things as the men.*
- *Not being recognized as capable.*

Other comments included:

- *My trade expectations are every job is individual and the variety makes it interesting – from my personal point as a sole parent of a disabled child I have been allowed to work to my needs and schedule although offers are probably there to work more I don't take on anything I feel will overload me, physically and mentally*
- *As long as I keep up to date with qualifications and have the same drive to do well, I will continue to do this line of work.*

About Promoting Careers in Trades to Girls and Women

Recommending trade training and work to girls and women

Seven (7) of the eight (8) women would enthusiastically recommend their trade to girls and women, and 1 felt a woman should make her own decision.

However, they also contributed qualifying comments:

- *They deserve to work any trade that they feel will improve the mentality of men thinking they are better. I believe a woman can raise the expectations of a job well done and done well.*
- *.. if it's something they have a desire to do, and understand what's involved in the chosen trade.*
- *But you need to be able to stand your ground. The more diversity we have in the trades the better!*
- *All depends on them. Need to research it properly.*
- *Always recommend it but always let them know that it will be a challenge. The job isn't the challenge but the fellow employees! i.e. men.*
- *They do need to be supported until we have an equal work environment.*
- *The military forces have always had the drive to encourage females – it's all about equal!! It's a challenge!!! This is the most self-satisfying trade. I enjoy this line of work and would encourage more females to pursue this career.*
- *If that's what they want to do they should go for it.*

Critical factors identified to encourage more women into careers in trade areas

The majority of the women [6] considered the school education system has a responsibility to provide improved holistic career information to girls, including a more diverse range and description of occupations. Careers Advisers were specifically mentioned as having a responsibility to know more about how to promote male dominated fields to girls.

School careers days that include tradeswomen and hands on opportunities, along with helping school students examine subject electives and pathways were also identified as important factors.

The other most identified critical factor was broader career promotion and advertising independent of schools:

- *More information is needed in advertisements to let girls and women know there are possibilities out there.*

Equal opportunities at work were also seen as having a critical career promotional role that would provide confidence for women to enter male dominated trades.

One participant noted the short term measures directed at women as being insufficient:

- *Every initiative has been short term it needs to be long term – apprentice initiatives have been going for years – 'women's' initiatives are often very short term.*

Comments on experiences of being a woman in a male dominated trade as to how this can help other women in other industries

- *Don't be intimidated by the unknown. Everyone once educated in any field can become skilled and can offer new ideas working in their industry.*
- *I hope so!*
- *I have done school talks and discussed pros and cons. The main con is your name; if a female name is noticed, unless you stand out, you are put aside. You cut a pattern you put it together, then you fit it – describes sewing and metalwork.*
- *As I have personally done well, I would discuss my journey and prove my path that I have taken.*
- *Yes by believing it is possible – by supporting women to know and understand what the jobs are and that they can do this.*
- *I will tell my story how I became a painter and if I can do it, anyone can.*

Other trades occupations and industries identified as offering viable employment and careers for women

The following specific occupations were identified:

- teaching in their trades
- carpentry
- cabinetmaker
- French polisher
- signwriter
- engineer, and
- aircraft mechanic.

Other comments included:

- *I can't think of any occupation that women can't do!*

- *All industries would benefit. Everyone notices different things in employment, male and female.*
- *I can't think of what women can't do! Why can't men and women be involved in all areas if they wish – why does someone else decide what women should do.*
- *Anything, all occupations and industries can offer employment, the woman need to be educated, young, or old, to get out there and go for it.*

Action To Encourage And Support Women To Enter And Forge Careers In Trades

Education about career possibilities, advertising trades to women, being exposed to women who are in trades jobs and mentors supporting women in trade areas including exposure to women trade teachers were all considered essential by the women.

- *Information, Information, Information!! Women and girls need to have this available to make a career choice.*
- *Organise free seminars and bring woman who have succeeded to talk about it. Print fliers and distribute them to mission employment offices.*

Some women also suggested having a Women's Group Training Company or female apprenticeship centre, which would provide specific and tailored support, and courses specially targeting women only, or targeting women learning alongside men were recommended.

One tradeswoman additionally spoke about part time work in trades industries; as she is self-employed this flexibility has been possible for her:

- *being the parent of a disabled child ... my first priority is the care of my child.*

This availability of part time (and/or flexible) employment in trades areas is poorly recognised and could well be a realistic promotional factor to share more widely with other women.