



(l-r) Gabriel Flowers, Doris Boase and Julie Flowers

Education,

Socialization and Career Exploration:

– By Ashley Turner

For 32-year-old Charlene Barnes this year promises to be unlike any other. She’s trading in her apron for a tool belt and preparing to take the road less traveled. Charlene is pursuing college training in skilled trades, rather than attending university or enrolling in a more traditional college program, as may be expected of a young single mother looking to enter the workforce.

Having been born and raised in a strict Christian home in the small rural fishing village of Cox’s Cove, NL, Charlene says she felt her future path was laid out for her from childhood. “Where I come from, the women have babies and stay at home with them, while the men work.”

Taking the Road Less Traveled

Even though Charlene had initially conformed to these expectations, becoming pregnant and marrying at a young age, she is now ready to break the mold and explore the exciting opportunities that await her in the trades and technology sector – something that most young girls and women in her demographic are not typically encouraged to do.

Education and Socialization

Although women are less frequently expected to take on the role of stay-at-home mothers than they were in the past, and are more often encouraged to pursue a post-secondary education prior

to entering the workforce, there appears to be a lag in the types of education and career options they are guided to consider.

“There wasn’t much encouragement in grade school for trades, more so for university,” explains 19-year-old Julie Flowers of Rigolet, Labrador, who recently completed the Heavy Equipment Operator program at College of the North Atlantic. Julie’s experience is similar to that of many girls and women. Based on their interests and abilities, whereas boys and men are often encouraged to consider either university or a skilled trades program, the option of pursuing

training in skilled trades is less often a consideration for girls and women. As a result, women have made great gains in acquiring a university education, but are still underrepresented in skilled trades and technology college programs.

The education and career paths that men and women are guided towards are intertwined in the wider process of socialization. This means that from childhood, we are presented with messages regarding the roles we are expected to fill as men and women in our society – such as those Charlene and Julie received from a young age. We receive these messages every day from various sources, including the media, our families, peers, books, and at school. Traditionally, young boys are given toy tool sets and are expected to excel in industrial arts class, while young girls are given toy kitchen sets and are expected to excel in home economics in grade school. It is through such simple and innocent actions that society's notions of appropriate activities and occupations for men and women have become ingrained in the education system. So, the idea that men, rather than women, normally use tools and equipment to build and repair objects has translated into a view of skilled trades as men's work – leading to a lack of consideration of skilled trades and technology as a possible career path for women.

Career Exploration

Because men and women are typically encouraged to pursue specific career paths, largely based on gender, it is important to offer career exploration programs in the education system that allow students to explore a wider range of possibilities. By offering individuals the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in a variety of occupations, career exploration programs have the potential to broaden the scope of education and career prospects. This gives individuals the chance to consider taking the road less traveled by pursuing the path of their choice,

rather than the route they are expected to follow. Having completed the Orientation to Trades and Technology (OTT) program, this is precisely what heavy equipment operator Julie Flowers has already done, and having enrolled in the program this fall, this is what Charlene Barnes is ready to do.

Orientation to Trades and Technology (OTT)

Delivered by College of the North Atlantic (CNA) on behalf of the Women in Resource Development Corporation (WRDC), Orientation to Trades and Technology (OTT) is a 24-week program that provides women with the opportunity to explore education and career prospects within the natural resources industry.

After hearing about the OTT program from a neighbour, Charlene Barnes became extremely excited about the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in various trades and technology occupations, including welding, electrical, carpentry, and heavy equipment operating.

“It's a great opportunity to go in and see each field. I'm very handy,



Lisa Laurie, Millwright

especially with electrical... and I like welding!” says Charlene. Since Charlene will be able to branch into the college program of her choice after completing the OTT program, she believes she will likely pursue training and a possible career in either electrical or welding. In doing so, she will join Julie Flowers and many others who have completed this career exploration program and have subsequently gone on to pave their own education and career paths.

Receiving messages throughout

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Karen Macfie, Millwright

grade school that occupations in the trades and technology sector were “only for men,” Julie’s OTT classmates 31-year-old Doris Boase of Hopedale, Labrador, and 20-year-old Gabriel Flowers of Rigolet, Labrador, never dreamed they would one day become heavy equipment operators –

expecting instead that they would follow the more traditional path of becoming a teacher or a clerical worker. Similarly, prior to enrolling in the OTT program, close friends 41-year-old Karen Macfie of St. John’s, Newfoundland, and 37-year-old Lisa Laurie of Paradise, Newfoundland, did not expect they would one day be working as millwrights with the Canadian Coast Guard. “OTT was a huge confidence builder. It gave me a chance to see that I could do any of the trades that I might choose,” explains Karen. Echoing this enthusiasm, Lisa exclaims, “I love my job and I am very proud to tell people that I am a millwright. I wish I could have done the OTT program 20 years ago!”

This is the type of empowerment and confidence-building that WRDC aims to achieve through offering the OTT program to women who are interested in diverting from the traditional paths that have been laid

out for them, and exploring the non-traditional opportunities that are available within the trades and technology sector. As CNA Business Development Officer Cecilia Wade declares, “I think that it has taken a while to get the voice and importance of career exploration programs like OTT out there, but now that it’s out there, it’s clear that women’s career paths do not have to be just traditional.” ■

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