

HFTFS PRIZE 2017

APPLICATION PART 2

READING #1

HARBOR FREIGHT
TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

Attracting More Female Students Into the Skilled Trades

Adapted from [“Enough Said: Young Women Talk about School, Work and Becoming Adults: Why We Should Listen and What We Can Do”](#) by Vermont Works for Women, May 2013.

The cultural and social context of family and community shape what young people learn about careers and influence their ultimate trajectories. This is particularly true for young women who grow up in poverty.

“The social networks of women living in poverty tend to be smaller and more limited, strained, homogenous and insular than those of their higher income counterparts,” notes a 2012 report by the Crittenden Women’s Union, a Boston-based nonprofit dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty. “Since this type of social network is primarily comprised of others in similar socio-economic positions, it is not a likely source for career or educational opportunities.”

Deliberate and consistent exposure to role models, to higher education, and to a range of fields and career opportunities is essential if young people are to make informed decisions about school and work. Important, too, is information about careers that require post-secondary training but not a college diploma, given the high cost of most four- year degrees. Indeed, if only 20% of all young people graduate from high school fully prepared for academic college, as research suggests, 80% of high school graduates need to know about other legitimate options and career pathways.

Those in our listening sessions talked in exasperated terms about what adults assumed they already knew—about career paths and opportunities or about themselves. “There’s the tech center where

you can get a taste of a trade and learn things that can help you in the future,” mused one participant, “but it’s not like they are making you (try it) so enrolling has to come from your own self-awareness—like, I know I want to be a mechanic so I’m going to take the auto class...It’s all on your own shoulders.”

Indeed, how *does* one know she wants to be an auto mechanic if she hasn’t handled a socket wrench or crawled under a car?

The obvious answer: exposure. In all of the listening sessions we conducted, participants talked about wanting to interact more with “real people,” to hear their stories about what they do, and what they feel passionately about.

How can we expect our children to make the most of their lives if we limit their points of reference to what they already know? Our children need to meet successful professionals who love what they do. Our children need to hear their stories, touch their tools and see where they work. We would argue that while important for all students, this experience is especially critical for girls.

Vermont Works for Women, an organization that advocates for gender equity and workforce development, was founded by a carpenter who believed that the absence of women in her field wasn’t due to lack of interest—it was because women didn’t imagine carpentry was an option.

While secondary schools, colleges and employers have taken steps over the past two decades to encourage women and girls to consider nontraditional fields, women accounted for over 95% of kindergarten teachers, librarians, dental assistants and registered nurses in 2009. They composed less than 4% of all carpenters and 1% of electricians or automotive technicians.

Each of us must reach out to the next generation in as many ways as we know how—as classroom speakers, as formal and informal mentors, by hosting visits at work, by hiring interns or providing summer jobs. Women in nontraditional fields have a particular responsibility to do this: Their stories can open eyes; their passion can inspire; and their encouragement can fuel determination and hope.

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