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Decent work

As a nation do we continue to champion the value of 'work' while ignoring the declining availability of decent work and the barriers to it that girls encounter in school?

This was one of the questions raised by women at a recent forum hosted by economic Security4Women, a national women's alliance.

Women educators, academics, public servants and members of women's organisations met at the Women's College in the St Lucia Campus of University of Queensland to consider if and how education and training approaches could improve the lifelong economic wellbeing of women, the overarching goal of economic Security4Women. This is a summary of the outcomes.

1. Education and training do not guarantee economic security in the short or long term.

It was agreed that:

1. While women have the right to education, options and results, there needs to be more done for these rights to result in better outcomes.
2. This was a timely discussion with attention being paid to the structural changes taking place in the domestic economy as a result of changes in the global economy, for example, retail shopping moving on line and having a direct impact on employment in the local retail industry.
3. Decent work is not insecure, casual work and casual work is not always a bridge to permanent work; for many women it is a trap with limited pathways out.
4. Insecure work can be found in all industries and occupations; at all levels including the higher education sector where it is affecting academic staff with high levels of education and training (See attached presentation: Kaye Broadbent).
5. Education and training needs to be creating steps and pathways into decent work.

Decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

Viewed in June 2013 at <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

6. Change will require a more informed and representative dialogue between women and governments; with industry and employer bodies and possible industrial action in collaboration with the trade union movement and professional associations.

2. How education and training could improve the economic outcomes for girls and women

It was agreed that we need 'Career Exploration' for girls and young women that provides strategic pathways as they transition from school into adult life. These pathways are often made up of steps that include: study, employment, parenting, unemployment, underemployment and life skills and combinations of all of them.

The following suggestions were made with a focus on secondary education

1. Permanent school based programs are needed to attract young women into those non-traditional jobs and industries with better pay and conditions: examples to build on include RoboGirls; Girls into Trades; Girls into Hard Hats; Supporting Teenagers with Education, Mothering and Mentoring program (STEMM).
2. We need school based programs for girls that are set in the context of their long term economic wellbeing with modules around gender segregation in the labour market, pay and conditions; employment rights; financial literacy; non-traditional jobs, industries and introductions into technologies.
3. School-based career guidance needs to be updated and widened to ensure girls get exposure to a range of careers and the opportunity to explore many; it also needs to start with students at younger ages in primary school and Years 7 & 8.
4. Keeping the focus on female students, career exploration needs to be set in context of the factors that influence career choices: family; subjects liked; cost; transport and community while exploring what they need for long term economic security and a strategic pathway to that end.
5. Programs need to reflect the different circumstances and provide positive impacts for girls with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and or CALD backgrounds.
6. It is important for school based programs to create and maintain links with: local employers and Chambers of Commerce and Industry; industry associations; employee associations; non-government organisations; other schools; family; teachers; the wider community as well as a range of individual women working in non-traditional occupations and industries.

3. The National Plan for School Improvement is "gender blind"

While many young and older women continue to find themselves trapped in low wage and insecure work, gender needs to be acknowledged in the NPSI.

1. Student outcome benchmarks need to be disaggregated by gender and subject stream to demonstrate that girls will have access to equal employment outcomes as a result of their education;

2. Loadings should be available for programs that encourage girls to explore non-traditional occupations and industries;
3. Gender needs to be acknowledged in the process of meeting student needs as girls and young women do experience barriers to decent work and require additional support while the wider community comes to embrace gender equity.

What next?

economic Security4Women engages actively with the Australian Government to increase awareness of and reduce the rate of occupational segregation and gender based discrimination in employment. We believe one of the causes of this segregation is the lack of a “gender lens” being applied to the public policy portfolios of Education, Training and Workplace Relations, Social Inclusion and in the COAG Indicators.

We will contact the relevant members of government to ensure they are aware of these barriers to women’s economic security (above) and the solutions proposed at the forum:

- The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for Education; Minister for Workplace Relations
- The Hon Brendon O’Connor MP, Minister for Employment
- The Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Employment Participation
- Senator the Hon Kim Carr, Minister for Higher Education
- The Hon Julie Collins MP, Minister for Status of Women, Minister for Community Services, Indigenous Employment and Economic Development
- The Hon Kelvin Thompson MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Schools

We will also contact the relevant shadow Ministers and spokespersons:

- Senator the Hon Eric Abetz, Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
- The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training, Manager of Opposition Business in the House
- The Hon Sussan Ley MP, Shadow Minister for Employment Participation
- Senator the Hon Brett Mason, Shadow Minister for Universities and Research
- Senator Michaela Cash Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women, Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
- Senator Fiona Nash, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education

Follow up with the relevant State and Territory Ministers in collaboration with member organisations as appropriate.