The Back - to - School Survival Guide for women
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by Nora D. Randall

B.C. Network of the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women
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The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW), founded in 1979, is a national, voluntary feminist organization with networks in every province and territory in Canada. CCLOW stresses equality between women and men by promoting equal participation in our educational, political, economic, legal, social and cultural systems. To overcome discrimination based on gender, age, race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation, CCLOW focuses on improving educational and learning systems.

CCLOW supports formal, non-formal, lifelong and experiential learning and adult education based on feminist principles of equality.

Background:

The idea for this guide started a few years ago when the New Brunswick CCLOW network published Breaking the Barriers: Women and Continuing Education, a handbook for women interested in returning to school.

"I said to my teacher, "You can't give me a multiple choice test. I'm middle-aged. I'll answer essay questions. I showed him studies that backed up what I was saying and he agreed with me."

Several CCLOW BC members thought that a similar handbook would be very useful for British Colombian women. As adult educators, counsellors, and researchers, we knew that one of the biggest struggles facing women who were thinking of going back to school or getting further training was to find information about programs and support services.

We also knew that information and counselling services for women were disappearing as funds for public services were being decreased.

Over two years ago several members of the BC network began the process of developing this guide. Hundreds of hours of volunteer effort were required and many CCLOW members were involved. CCLOW-BC owes a great deal of thanks to our inspired writer and researcher Nora D. Randall.

We are also very grateful to Priti Shah for her advice on how to make this book useful to immigrant women and for writing the first drafts of the chapter, I want to work in Canada.

As we developed the book we realized that the task of creating a handbook that could address all the issues women face as they think about going back to school was enormous.
We hope that this handbook is useful to a wide variety of women who are in many different situations, but we know there are limitations.

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"You have the right to be treated with respect. You're paying a lot of money for your education, you should get something for it."

Siobhan

For information:

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We hope that we have not forgotten to mention any- one who helped us, but our memories being what they are, we apologize to those we've overlooked.
Imagine you are standing outside one of the fifty entrances to the West Edmonton Mall. If you have never been there, imagine the biggest mall you know, double it in size and add an ice rink, an amusement park, a porpoise pool, a wave pool with water slides, and a Chrysler dealership.

Now imagine that a large part of the mall is undergoing renovations - some shops are closing, others opening, some are moving, some are changing how they look. Now imagine that you don't have a standard body shape and even before you go in, you know that in that whole amazing pile of stuff there's going to be very little that fits you.

This seems to be the position of women who want to go back to school to upgrade their skills or to retrain in a different career. There are a lot of programs and a lot of information out there but by the time a woman has figured out what she wants to do, what is available to her, what she has time for, what she can afford, and what programs she can get into, the field has narrowed down quite a bit. I would say that "Lots of stuff - few choices" is the central contradiction for women seeking education or training.

This is why I think the mall is a good analogy. You can use your mall shopping tactics to find what you want in the education and training fields. Even if you hate malls and refuse to go in them, you still shop. If you can shop, you can "access the system."

At this point you might be wondering, "Why bother?" Well, you might find exactly what you're looking for and be thrilled to bits or you might find something even better that you never even dreamed existed. Also, unlike most things found in a mall, education really can change your life.

Finding the education you want is more of an adventure these days because of the renovations. The field of education and training is changing in response to changes in the job market and in technologies. Job market experts are encouraging us to think of education as a lifelong process. This is not a new idea but it's a good idea. Some of the women I talked to were years ahead of the experts in figuring this out. When their educations were interrupted by marriage, children, ill health or lack of financing, they just waited until their lives opened up a little and then they went back to school - as many times as it took.

I've talked to a lot of women who've gone back to school, some who were just learning to
read, some who were working on their PhDs. When I asked them if they had any advice for women who were thinking about going back to school, they had plenty. But every one of them said, "Do it."

It's not that they didn't encounter difficulties and frustrations, but these were outweighed by their growing self-confidence, their increased skills, their expanded network of friends and contacts, and, in some cases, their access to better jobs. As Van said, "Action leads to more action and it makes you feel better."

Another comment women made quite frequently was that they wished they had investigated a bit more before they chose their program. Once a woman narrowed down the field and decided what course she wanted to study, it was hard to take the extra step of checking out similar courses at other schools to see if she had found the best one for her.

I have also talked to women educators and career counselors. Their overview of the field of education and training confirms the experiences of women going back to school.

**How this guide is organized**

This book is organized so that first you look at yourself -- how you learn, how you gather and think about information. Then, you look at the job market. Next, you look at the things in your life that you'll have to organize in order to be able to go back to school — your time, your family, transportation and money.

Every woman's experience is going to be different. I couldn't possibly cover them all in this guide. What I have done is pick four starting points where women are likely to have the most trouble finding what they need — women who don't know what they want to do, immigrant women who need help getting into the Canadian system, women who need their high school diploma to move ahead, and women who want to get post-secondary training in the trades and technologies. If none of these is your starting point, there is still a lot of useful information in this guide about the training institutions — school boards, colleges, universities and institutes, Employment and Immigration Canada, private institutions and distance education.

This is not the whole story, but it will give you ideas about how to find information and how to organize it so it's useful to you and leads you to what you want. Throughout the guide there are stories about how different women have dealt with different situations. These stories, I think, tell the fullest truth about how the system works, and will probably be the biggest help in figuring out what you can do when you come up against problems.

The last word here goes to Heather Watt, a boilermaker who spoke at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). She said, "Along the way you're going to run into people who are going to tell you 'You can't do that.' Don't believe them."
Where do I start?

You start with what you want to do. Even if you don't know what you want to do, you can start there. You can say, "I want to find out what I want to do." The clearer you can be about what you are looking for, the easier it will be for you to find it.

Learning styles

One of the first things to do before you go looking for the training course for you, is to give a bit of thought to how you learn. Do you like to talk to people or do you like to figure it out for yourself? When you want to know how to spell a word, will you look it up in the dictionary or call out to whoever's in the next room?

When you get a new kitchen appliance, do you read the instructions, or do you just start using it and see what happens? If it still doesn't work, do you read an appliance repair book, or call up the place that sold it to you or a friend who has one just like it?

The answers to these questions can help you figure out the best way for you to begin. Should you start by reading brochures and pamphlets?

Would it be better to call someone to ask for information? Or, would you like to start by talking to a woman who has done it?

These answers can help you decide which learning situations would be best for you — seminar/discussions, classroom/lectures, independent work in a lab with a tutor available, or studying at home with a tutor available by phone. If distance education is your only choice and you do better in groups, maybe you can find a friend to take the course with you.

The shopping list in your head

Gathering information about training and education is like shopping at a superstore. If you don't want to be wandering around with a glazed look in your eye at closing time, you take a list.

In fact if you're really organized, you figure out what you're going to cook for the week, you look at the recipes to see what ingredients you need, you check your cupboards to see what you already have, and then you make a list of what you need to get. If it looks like you might run out of money, you put a check next to the things you have to have.

"I saw my friend out in the parking lot at Woolco and she said she was going back to school, so I decided to go too."

Jennie
Then, when you get in the store and are faced with hundreds of choices, you have a list to remind you of what you want. A list could save your life.

A sample shopping list for training and education might look something like this:

**What do I want?**

Personal information

- What do I like to do?
- What do I not like to do?
- Would I be willing to move?
- Would I be willing to work shifts?

Career information

- What kind of jobs are there?
- What kind of work does a mechanical engineer (for example) do?
- What kind of education do you need to be one?
- What kind of salary can you expect to make?

Labor market information

- What industries are expected to grow?
- What jobs will need to be filled in the future?

**Where can I get training?**

- Does this school have a good reputation in the field I want to go into?
- If I have to change schools, will I be able to transfer my credits?

**How can I pay for it?**

- Will Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) sponsor me?
- Can I get scholarships, bursaries, or grants?
- Can I get a loan?

One difference between shopping at a superstore and shopping for education is that with education it's better if you take it a little bit at a time and don't try to find everything in one trip. What you find out along the way may change your mind about what you're looking for.

If you have a plan, you can always change it. If you don't have a plan, it's too easy to become over-whelmed by all the possibilities. Try to keep it simple, eliminating what you don't need as you go along.
**How to ask questions**

Asking questions is an art form. Fortunately, everyone is creative. What you want to do is ask the question that will cause the person you are talking to to give you the piece of information you are looking for at that moment. Try to avoid getting too much unnecessary information.

For example, if you say to an information person, "I want help finding out what I want to do. I don't know what kinds of jobs there are now, or what I would be good at," there is a good chance that they will direct you to career and labor market information, career exploration courses and projects, and counselors.

If, however, you say, "I want to know how your system works," there are three probable reactions. The information person might be speechless, or might start asking you questions to try to figure out why you want to know, or they may launch into a detailed explanation of the system which will be impossible to remember and mostly beside the point. You don't need to know how the whole system works to get what you want out of it.

If you focus on the thing you want to know, it makes it easier for the person who's trying to answer your question.

Another thing to remember when asking questions is that things change. No answer is carved in stone. A secretary told Sarah she couldn't start in January but that she should talk to the director anyway. The director told her she could start in January.

As you get further into the process, information changes. Diane was told at an EIC training information session that they did not fund night courses. When she called the course she was interested in, she found out that it was an exception. This particular course did run at night and was sponsored by EIC.

There are so many programs and so many changes and so many people, nobody's going to be right about everything. Take everything with a grain of salt and keep going. If you seem to hit a wall where someone is telling you that you can't do it, try asking them, "How can I do it?"

**Computers**

Computers are everywhere. You need to be able to use them to get information. Most library card catalogues are on computers now and Canada Employment Centres are in the process of putting their job listings on computer. Mostly computers are easy to use once you get used to the idea. Being surprised by them can be a problem.
Claudia was taken aback when she went back to school and found the library computerized. She had never used a computer plus she didn't know how to type so she felt quite handicapped by the lack of these skills. She would have preferred to take a typing course and a computer course before signing up for her regular course.

Librarians will show you how to use their computers, but it does take awhile to get the feel of finding information on them.

The other big use of computers in schools is to do assignments. You do not have to use a computer to do written assignments. You can type or, in some cases, write your papers, but most students find it much easier to do this work on computer once they learn how. Most schools have a computer centre where you can learn how to use a computer. This service is usually only for registered students, which means that you are learning to use the computer while taking regular courses. If you have never used a computer before, this is definitely something to ask the school counselor about before you sign up for your course.

Sources of information

There are two kinds of information about training and education — outside information and inside information. I often found outside information easier to understand and more helpful, but Alice found inside information more useful because it is the actual thing that is happening. Sooner or later you will need to get inside information.

Sources of outside information include:

- Your friends and the people in your community

A woman in Kamloops got into the Re-entry Into Successful Employment (RISE) program because her friend got in and told her about it. Another woman got her husband's friend to tell her about his job and who to talk to about training for a job like it.

- Community groups and bulletin boards

Women's centres, Native friendship centres, immigrant services societies, and disabled people's organizations are all likely to know something about training and education programs. Many of them actually run training programs funded by EIC. These and other training programs are often advertised by flyers which are put up on community bulletin boards at bookstores, temples and churches, the YM and YWCA, community centres, and stores.

- Local newspapers
Mary saw an ad for the RISE program in the want ads section of the Kamloops paper and called the number listed. Then all she had to say was "I'm calling about your ad in the paper." These ads appear in the 'Help Wanted' or the 'Educational' sections of the want ads. If the ad mentions Unemployment Insurance (UI) there's a good chance that the course is funded by EIC and you won't have to pay to go to it.

- **The library**

Libraries are good because not only do they have information, they have librarians. In rural areas where the library is small you can tell the librarian what you are looking for and she may be able to get information for you from other libraries. In urban areas where the libraries may have large collections on training and education, careers and the job market, the librarian may know just where you should look so you don't have to go through the whole collection.

Sources of inside information include:

- **School Boards**

This is a good place to look for high school courses for adults (ABE) and for English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Many school boards have other courses as well. You can find the telephone number listed in the white pages of the telephone book under schools or school district, or call 411 and ask for the number.

- **Colleges, universities, institutes**

Post-secondary information service
431-3300 or toll free 1-800-663-9711
This service run by the Open Learning Agency can answer questions about courses and requirements at all post-secondary institutions in BC. (See page 47 for telephone numbers and addresses of BC post-secondary institutions.)

- **Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) Canada Employment Centres**

If you have an EIC in your area, it will be listed in the phone book in the blue pages under: Government of Canada/Employment & Immigration. If you can't find it, phone 411 and ask directory assistance for the number. The Metro Vancouver Information number is 682-5400. See Government funded training (page 25) for more information.

- **Private training schools**

Private training schools in your area are listed in the yellow pages of the phone book under Schools. Under this heading, the yellow pages have further sub-headings like Business and Secretarial, Sales Training, Technical and Trade. See Private Training Programs (page 63) for more information.
• Distance education

Distance education is when you register to take a course from a school but you study in your own home. See Distance Education (page 65) for more information.
I need to do something, but I don't know what

Finding out what you want to do is one of the hardest parts of this whole process. And, let's face it, most of the time it's not just finding out what you want to do, it's finding out what you want to do which also pays you a decent wage. What you are trying to do is match up your skills and desires with the demands of the labour market. So, you need to know about yourself and about the labour market.

"There's that one first step when you're practically unconscious."  
Susan

This is a task that could easily overwhelm the most avid shopper. Fortunately, many places offer courses and/or counselling to help you figure this out. The generic name for this type of information is career exploration.

Almost every place that offers courses offers some type of career exploration course — school boards, colleges, private schools, the Open Learning Agency, YM & YWCAs. Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) project-based training often includes some career exploration. Women's resource centres, immigrant services societies, Native friendship centres and disabled people's organizations sometimes run career exploration courses, or they will know where in your community you will find such a course. Private counsellors and non-profit groups that specialize in career counselling are listed in the yellow pages under Career and Vocational Counselling.

Often these programs are a combination of individual and group counselling. If you call up student services at a college for career counselling, you may be told to come to an information group. At the group you'll be told how to make an appointment to see a counsellor privately. Or, you may have to have a private interview with a counselor before signing up for a course. Every program runs a little bit differently.

The kinds of things that are usually covered in these courses are: self-esteem and confidence building, interest and aptitude testing, information about training and education and about the job market, strategies for finding what you want and presenting yourself.

One thing to look for is a course or counsellor who will help you realize the many skills and marketable talents that you may have already acquired by doing the unpaid labour of being a homemaker, a mother, and/or a community organizer.

The courses can run in length anywhere from a one-day workshop to a 15-week full-time course. There is usually a fee for these courses. The shorter courses range from about $25 to $125. If you are interested in taking one of the longer courses you may qualify for EIC sponsorship.
Some sample exploratory courses:

Pre-employment training for women:

Hiring Opportunities for Women  
#218-285 Prideaux St. Nanaimo, V9R 2N2 753-9633

Course Content: Self-esteem, self awareness, values and goals, problem solving and goal setting, communications, assertiveness skills, stress management, conflict resolution, time management, career exploration, skill assessment, aptitude and interest testing, occupation information interviewing, plan of action, creative job search strategies, resumé writing, job search, interview skills video work.

Time: 9 am to noon, 5 days a week for 4 weeks.  
Cost: Funded by EIC. Priority is given to women on UI and Social Assistance.

Creative career choices for women:  
Women's Career Strategies  
#102-2511 East Hastings St. Vancouver, V5K 1Z2 251-7476

Course Content: Self-assessment, health and fitness, occupational/personality career assessment tools (self-directed), assertiveness, creative visualization, labor market information, setting goals and making decisions, trades and apprenticeship opportunities for women, putting it all together.

Time: 25 hours (10 two-and-a-half-hour sessions over a five week period).  
Cost: $125.00

This course is recognized by the Ministry of Social Services and women on social assistance may be able to get the ministry to pay for the course.

Planning your future:  
Open Learning Agency  
4355 Mathissi Place, Burnaby, V5G 4S8  
1-800-663-9711 toll free in BC  
431-3300 local

Course Content: Introduction to career planning, getting started, interests, skills, values, gathering information, career research, making decisions.

Optional Units:  
A. Career change & mid-life transitions  
B. Women returning to work  
C. Introduction to assertive communication
Cost: $170.35

**Employment and educational access for women:**
Kwantlen College, Newton Campus
13479 77th Avenue, Newton, BC V3W 6Y1
599-2943

Course Content: Self-esteem and esteem-building, communicating effectively, effective problem-solving, assessment and career options, options for self-employment, making career decisions and action plans, work placement and individual projects (part-time and full-time).

Time: Full or part-time for 15 weeks.

Cost: Part-time $29 or $58 per course depending on the length of the course.
   Full-time $416.00 plus $24 Student Association fee. EIC sponsorship may be available to those who qualify.
Susan's story

Desperation is the mother of creativity

I was married three times. When I left my last husband I was 43. I had to find a way to make my own living, which I had never done. I'd just gone from one man to another.

"Okay, enough of these dead-end things. It's time to go back to school and do something that's going to make some money." I got a job in the West Edmonton Mall and found out I could practically starve to death, being in retail. Then I moved to social services, that kind of volunteer work in which unless you've got a master's degree, you're pretty much up the creek. I got my salary up to $15,000 and that's where I topped.

I said, "Okay, enough of these dead-end things. It's time to go back to school and do something that's going to make some money;" I was 46 when I got to Vancouver, and fantastically depressed. I stayed at the YWCA. I walked the streets; I didn't know a soul - I was sort of half here and psychologically blotto.

So I'm in Vancouver and on UI. That's the symbolic point, the crux. I have to make a decision before the UI runs out. I made stabs at finding jobs. I applied where they sold parts for fuel injection. They ask me, what do you know about fuel injection, and I say "not a thing, but I'm a real fast study." They say "you're kind of funny, but we're not going to hire you."

I went through one of those all-day women's re-entry workshops with Canada Manpower (EIC). There's that one first step when you're practically unconscious, you don't know what you want to do. There were lots of women like me there, it was good and I got tested. It turned out that I should be either a funeral parlor director, a systems analyst or the manager of a fish-packing plant.

So I decided I'd be a systems analyst even though I didn't know what it was. I went and talked to one woman who was a systems analyst and said, "What do you do?" I didn't know anything about computers; they scared me. I asked her, "Is that a good job?" Because it could have been something that I could never dream of doing, but it turned out okay. I mean I still didn't understand what she told me exactly.

Next, I investigated programs around town for computer programming. There's one big school that does computer training, but you don't even deal with a person, you just sit down in front of a monitor, and they charge big bucks. I got in there and they said, "Oh we can get you money; we can do anything." When they promised that everyone of their graduates got jobs, I said, "I got tested. It turned out that I should be either a funeral parlor director, a systems analyst or the manager of a fish packing plant."
knew from being over 40 years old, that this was not so.

I investigated every kind of program that would help with funding for someone like me, the re-entry kind of woman. I fell through every crack there was. I was too old, too young, too something.

I went to Canada Employment and asked what kind of programs they had. I couldn't get a student loan because I still had some money in RRSPs. I said "I'm 46 years old, I've got $4,000 in an RRSP, it's all I've got to my name." When I told them I had that they said, "You spend every dime of that, then we'll talk about student loans." So much for being honest, eh? Friends of mine said you didn't have to tell them that. God, how can I be so old and so naive all at once?

I went to BCIT and said, "I'm 46 years old and I've got two years of university. I haven't had a math course since Dwight Eisenhower was president of the United States." They said, "Listen honey, you're wonderful, we're going to give you six months of math upgrading and then you can go to BCIT for two years solid and you will get a technical diploma." I said okay.

Then I went to Langara and they said, "We give you an entrance exam and if you pass that exam you ought to be able to handle our math course." So I got a friend's algebra book. Over the summer I had my nose in an algebra book and you know; this was the new math and I didn't even know what the words were. I mean, my son took new math but I didn't pay much attention. Anyway, I passed their test and they said, "Hey, you're in." So I decided I'm going to go to Langara and get a technical diploma.

When that math course came around, you were supposed to have calculus as a prerequisite. Only the computer students didn't have to have calculus to get into that math course!

I went to the head of the department and said, "This is outrageous. You promised me when I started your program that if I passed your test I would be able to handle this math course and there is no way in the world that I can do it." He said "How about tutoring," and I said "Not even the best tutor in the world could get me through this course. I am not going to take that course over, I am not going to settle for a tutor; as far as I am concerned I should have been able to handle it, but I can't handle it and my other course load."

I knew from looking at BCIT bulletins about evening courses in FORTRAN (a mathematical language). Both the schools used FORTRAN, but the one at the school where I was going was incredibly difficult and the one at BCIT was an introductory course which didn't require you to know a whole lot when you started and didn't require you to learn a lot of mathematics. It just taught you that language that is used for all the fancy damn math.
He didn't want to do it, but I would not go away. He knew that I had formally complained about an instructor in the English department, and that I would not shut up. I said, "Let me take the course at BCIT as a replacement for this. It's not going to be any skin off your nose, and I'll be able to graduate when I expected." So I made a good case for him to substitute and he did.

By then, this was my fifth term, I had been around long enough to know that there's many things you can't get around at that college, but certain things you can. I was glad I was middle-aged or I could never have survived the Computer Information Systems Program.

If somebody tells you on the basis of a test that you should be able to get through a course, and you can't... if somebody has been teaching there for twenty years and when people don't understand he raises his voice and screams at them... I knew I didn't have to put up with it without making a stink. I had high standards and I wanted to get my money's worth.

An accounting instructor was driving me crazy, telling jokes, you know, fun guy, but he wouldn't explain anything. He'd say "The book explains it," but it wasn't explaining it. When I asked him, he'd just be charming. I got sick of that and it made me depressed because I knew I wouldn't get any instruction.

"I'm 46 years old... I haven't had a math course since Dwight Eisenhower was president of the United States."

"I was glad I was middle-aged or I could never have survived... I knew I didn't have to put up with it without making a stink."

I said, "Can I see you in your office?" He shared his office with three other accounting instructors and in front of the three others I said, "I want to talk to you about what's going on in your class and why I can't come back. You're not doing the teaching that I need and expect." And wow! You never saw anybody move so fast. He said, "Susan, let's go down to the cafeteria for coffee." Darn it, I was so damn mad. Desperation is the mother of creativity. I mean, I liked this guy but I was going to have to shake him up. I had to make it so I didn't have to go back there every day and get tortured by what he was doing.

He wasn't just doing it to me. Practically all the other women and the younger men would never dream of speaking because you just don't challenge that kind of authority. You know; "You're the student and I am The Teacher. "You sit there and listen until somebody like me says I don't understand, explain it to me again. People would come up to me and say, "Thank you Susan." I was by far the oldest student and older than the instructors mostly. It gave me an edge, it gave me the confidence to challenge.

So I did make a name for myself there. Anger made me do it... and outrage. I was there for more than two years and would have finished on time, but I had to have a hysterectomy. I had to go another three months, but then I had a two-year technical diploma in computer information systems. That qualified me to program computers.
Of course, never doing what people expect me to do, I decided that sitting and programming computers for seven hours a day would make me crazy so I've got to use this to find another kind of job that I can tolerate. If I were programming computers I'd be making ten thousand dollars a year more than I can make now but I just couldn't make myself sit there, and I was afraid maybe some of that technical stuff wouldn't stay in my head. So I got into this part-programming / part-administration stuff.

I went out and tried to find a job and I didn't get a whole lot of interviews. When we started talking about programming I'd be very enthusiastic and then just before the end I'd shoot myself in the foot. Something within me would say, "Oh God don't even dream of getting this job" and I would say something really inappropriate and dopey.

I knew I couldn't program, but I had to make myself go out and do these interviews because that was what I was trained for: So there I am with my diploma looking for a job - for three months. I borrowed a thousand dollars from my brother to see me through and I was getting more and more desperate, thinking, "How long can I go on doing interviews for jobs that I don't want?" And then came a little thing through the college from a systems company wanting an assistant to work at the Ministry of Social Services with IBM stuff and the main frame and this and that. The college has a little service for alumni, job postings that they send out to you because employers call the college and want somebody cheap.

"By the end of three years I had a job I liked and I had doubled my salary." So, I went for the interview and got the job. Then I had to make it so I didn't end up programming all the time. I would look around the office for things that needed to get done that weren't being done and I would do them.

Pretty soon I had made myself indispensable and I had a job with some variety in it. I could get up and move around and I could stand to do it. Then I asked for a raise. By the end of three years I had a job I liked and I had doubled my salary. But now I think I have to figure out a way to do more programming!
Where the jobs are

The key is flexibility

Most women who go back to school do so to get a better job. While improving your job prospects is certainly a valid reason for returning to school, it's a mistake to think that you can simply find out what fields have labor shortages and train for one of those jobs.

One career advisor pointed out that although you may read in the paper that the airline industry is cutting back, there may be a shortage of helicopter mechanics within that field. Or, there may not be anything in mining at the moment, but by the time you're ready to graduate, there may be openings. Therefore, it's important to choose a field that you are interested in and have some aptitude for. It is easier to find your way around in a field that interests you.

How education helped two women find jobs

Leslie wanted to be a carpenter. She enrolled in a program at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) that prepared women for trade occupations by teaching assertiveness, body building, carpentry, electrical and plumbing, industrial first aid, computers, and small business skills.

For the work experience part of the course, she worked with a contractor building a house. At the end of it, he offered her an apprenticeship as a carpenter. But Leslie had discovered that she found carpentry boring and repetitive.

What she really liked was the first aid course. She decided she wanted to be an ambulance attendant and found out what courses she needed and how to go about getting hired as an ambulance driver. She now has a part-time job as an ambulance attendant.

Karen had been fascinated with sign language from the first time she saw it. She decided at the age of 39 to take a course in it, even though there aren't many job openings in the field. Besides doing her course work, she read everything she could on sign language and got involved by joining organizations and going to conferences and meetings related to communicating with hearing impaired people.

At one conference she heard about a job which she wanted near her home. Before Karen finished her course, she wrote to the school board to tell them when she would complete her training and be ready for work. She kept in touch with them and eventually the job
came open. Since she was known in the field and by the school board and was available, she got the job.

**How women who study the job market see it**

In her 1989 Labor Market Paper on Women, Diane Alfred from EIC presents two models to show what is happening in the labour market now.

In the donut model, the hole in the middle stands for the core jobs. These are full-time, full-year jobs, usually in large companies or governments. Employment is stable, wages are sufficient and there are opportunities for promotion. Core jobs make up less than half of the total employment in BC.

The donut, or the fastest growing part of the model, is the peripheral jobs that are growing up around the core jobs. These jobs are in consulting, self-employment, contract work, part-time, and part-year work. They are the result of employers wanting to buy services for a specific time or a specific task.

In the wedding cake model, Alfred presents three layers of the labour market. She points out that the cake is actually pyramid-shaped with the largest layer being at the bottom and the smallest layer being at the top.

The bottom layer consists of entry level jobs usually at close to minimum wage with no career path (dead-end jobs). This is where the mismatch between employers and job seekers is most evident. There are more vacancies than can be filled and there are also many unemployed people who are not trained to do any other work. People don't take these jobs or keep them very long because they don't make enough money to live. Employers in this area are going to have to offer higher wages, training opportunities and fringe benefits to attract workers. Workers without specific marketable skills in high demand areas such as nursing or electronic engineering will have to consider these service jobs in the bottom layer as permanent careers.

In the second layer of the cake are workers who have education and/or experience, but they do not have a specific marketable skill. An example of these would be the white collar, middle managers (such as social workers) who were laid off due to cutbacks in the private and public sectors in the 1980s. Rosalyn Kunin, an economist, speaking at BCIT, has pointed out a shift in the wedding cake model. The top layer at 30 percent of new jobs is now bigger than the middle layer at 20 percent.

These middle layer workers need to acquire a specific skill that employers are looking for such as technical or sales skills. Their other option is the self-employed, contract route.

The top layer of the cake consists of technical specialists such as highly qualified engineers, health care professionals, those with international trade experience, and people
who can sell almost anything. These are professions where there is an excess demand. Workers at this level can offer their skills on a world-wide labour market and often work outside the country. When employers cannot fill a job at this level they do not hire from the second layer.

The mismatch between the employers' needs and the workers' skills is expected to grow because the majority of new jobs created will exceed the current education and training level of most workers.

This is why people are now being encouraged to increase their education and training.
The miracle minute

Arranging your life so you have the time, the energy, the support and the money to go to school can be a full-time job in itself. For women with kids at home this is especially true.

The only thing more formidable than the problems women face are the solutions they've managed to create, usually out of a minute, a nickel and a little bit of space. This chapter is mostly direct quotes from the women I talked to because nobody could give a clearer picture of what it takes than they can.

Getting there

Roxy didn't go back to school until they opened up a college branch in her town.

Norma found a job as close as possible to her home. She found a day care close to her work. She picked the school she wanted to go to because it was the closest. Then she picked the courses that ran for five hours one night a week, instead of courses that met twice a week or more.

Jennie took the kids' bus into town in the mornings and walked over to her college from the school. But afternoons were a real problem.

"I would ask my son to pick me up and he would always be late and sometimes he didn't show up and that was the pits. I have two grandchildren and I get a babysitter after school for about half an hour a day and sometimes they're left there and when I get to them they're hungry. So then I was trying to get sponsored by Manpower (Employment and Immigration Canada) so I could get back pay because this course was already started and I was halfway through. I got the back pay and I got a car. That's a big improvement. Now all the money goes into the car." - Jennie

Nancy never left home.

"I worked for 14 years at one place and my kids were getting into grade 11 and 12 and I was doing a lot of tutoring. I realized that gee I can do this. Even if I don't have a big background in calculus and algebra, I can see what they have to do, and so I tutored them because they were ski racers and went all over the world. They only went to school three months out of the year. I was their tutor."
"I did really well and then I was thinking to myself gee I'm getting my kids their high school. I don't even have it myself. I used to help them with their writing and what saved me was Open Learning (See Distance education, page 65) because I had a nine-to-five job. I had my household to look after.

"I did all my ABE through Open Learning and I flew through it. Like the grade 10, the first math ABE I went through that in about two months. I loved it. I loved working alone. I could work at home very well." – Nancy

Making time work for you

☐'If I slowed down I was so tired I would be very ready to go to sleep. I didn't have any energy. So when I got home I would have to do something so I wouldn't feel so tired. I needed time with the children and myself so I won't be tired by Friday. I go home and I sit with the children and my granddaughter reads to me, after they change and everything.
And it's my time with them and at the same time I'm relaxing. So that break in the afternoon makes it so I'm not so tired by the end of the week.

"If I have a lot of work to do I'll do a little bit when I get home. Then I'll have my time with my granddaughter then I'll cook dinner and then I'll give them a bath and when they're in the tub I can do a little bit of work. I set up my work area and then they go to bed at 8:30. I got my own room now which is really nice. I need to be organized. I'm much more organized than I was before. All I did was work and work and work. I had to do it differently because I didn't want to be tired by Friday."
- Jennie

☐'I was working full time and I had my family. When I decided to go to school I had no social life. All I did for those years was go to school and go to work and have my family. I didn't know any other people. I didn't socialize with any other people. Never went to the cinema or anything." - Norma

☐'Homework is hard. I live in an apartment with my two kids and my husband. There's not much room. I find I do my homework early in the morning. That works the best for me . . .

"Sometimes if I don't have anything to do right away I just lie on the couch. I need to do that — otherwise I overstress myself trying to be a role model for everybody which is kind of silly of me." - Rose

☐'It is one thing to stay on top of things and go through the classes in undergraduate school. At least this was my experience. It was something else to be clear in your thought patterns to go into your seminars in graduate school. I then needed time.

"In undergraduate to do my work, I'd get up at 4:00 in the morning and do my reading.
Well I couldn't do it in graduate school because your brain doesn't fully function at 4:00 in the morning. . . This is going to infringe on family because I had to have right-after-dinner time. I had to have time while my brain was still awake and this started to be a problem." - Norma

**Support**

- "What I did learn over the years was that you can't do it alone unless you want to die." - Norma

- "My boyfriend is paying for the babysitter so I can come to school." - Roxy

- "My dad feels it was a waste of time at my age going back to school. It gave me more drive to do it. I can't wait to get my grade 12 diploma and wave it in from of him." - Bev

- "When I came back to school at first my family felt kind of rejected 'cause I'm always there for them.

My children, but mostly I noticed my husband. He had to learn to cope with me being not there or whatever.

"I more or less had to push myself to come to school. It is hard when you don't have someone to say, Oh come on, go to school it's not so bad." – Rose

- "My husband on the other hand would say, well that's your job or you don't have to work. Which was always his biggest thing. Because you see his mother never worked. I only worked because he didn't quite make enough money, but it got to the point where he in fact made enough money. I did not have to work and I still worked because I wanted to work. There was this transition where I worked because I had to work in order to go to school. I had to be able to pay for it. This was a big bone of contention because my salary paid for child care and my education and that's it. So it was obvious I didn't have to work. I had to work for me.

"Staying one step ahead of the problem allowed me to make better choices for myself." - Alice

"My husband was not real supportive. He had his degree. He saw absolutely no reason for me to do what I was doing but he wasn't obstructive. He wasn't supportive but he wasn't obstructive. He was a much better typist than I was because I always refused to type. He would type my papers for me. He was supportive in that way but there was that constant complaint about this not being done or that not being done. Plus he would only babysit one night a week.

"Of course my husband and I would have screaming matches and went through all of these kinds of things but I was bound and
determined that I was going to finish. He saw no reason for me to put myself and the whole family through this kind of stress." - Norma

☐"My ex-husband's mother babysits for me when I need her to babysit. My youngest brother lives here so he baby-its, my best friend, she helps me with my homework if I need it. I have a lot of friends and family even on my ex-husband's side that help me. We're all very close. I'm very fortunate." - Sandra

Kids

☐"At first they didn't believe that Mommy wasn't going to make supper every night. I had to put a list on the fridge — everybody got a night to make supper and a room to clean. My husband was harder to train than the kids." - Sandra

☐"You have to realize that it doesn't matter if they never clean their rooms. In the overall scheme of things it doesn't matter. Close the door. If they want to live in it, leave their clothes lying on the floor, don't buy them any more new clothes." - Norma

☐"One talks on the phone and the other plays Nintendo. When they go to their friends it's nice and quiet and I can do my homework. . . Well I tell them to help around but they never do so I end up doing it myself. They don't do a good job." - Audrey

☐"Of course I was raised properly and it was my responsibility to look after the kids. I was married and I had a husband but that wasn't his job. That wasn't his responsibility. It never occurred to me until a bit later that he had some responsibilities here too. . .

"The kids were old enough then to fix meals for themselves. I had taught them how to cook. They could do spaghetti. They could do basic kinds of things and when it was their day to cook, we would eat whatever they cooked. At first what I did was one person would cook and someone else would clean.

Well we had to stop that real fast because the person who would cook would make the biggest mess in the world. So I had to change that to the person who cooked also cleaned but they only had to do it once a week. . .
"The older kids resisted some. What I decided I would do is I would pick up my youngest from daycare and go home and if there wasn't supper I would take the youngest one, put him in the car and we'd go out to eat. The first time I did that it was hilarious. They were really stunned. They smartened up for a while and then they fell off the wagon again and I did the same thing.

"What I did that really turned my kids around was I would take them with me up to the library at Simon Fraser University (SFU). That was a real turning point. In the early years I didn't do that. I didn't take the kids up there. I would either find the time when the kids were looked after or whatever but when I decided that I would take the kids with me it changed them tremendously. They really enjoyed going up. My son would call it FSU. The library has a huge education department. They had a whole bunch of children's books so I would go and sit them in that section and they could sit on the floor and pull out all these books and look at them. My son used to like to go xerox his hand on the xerox machine. It only cost a nickel. He would xerox his hands. Whatever would keep him busy.

"I would take them up there to the film nights. The film was only a dollar. When I brought them in to that environment then they started enjoying it a lot more and then they were a lot happier about Mom going up to SFU. It was a place they knew. I wasn't just disappearing. I was going someplace they knew and someplace that they occasionally went as well. That made a big difference. It's something that if I were ever advising anyone, an adult person with kids who is going back to school I would say take the kids, to school. Show them where you're going. What you're doing. Familiarize them with that place so that they know that that's part of their lives. Because if you're going to school, that's a part of your life.

"Your kids are part of your life and I think it's important that you have all of the parts of your life somehow connected." - Norma

Child care

Finding child care is a big challenge for many women who want to go back to school. One of the best places to call to find child care is your local health department, which is listed in the blue pages of the phone book under BC Government/Health. Because health departments are in charge of licensing child cares they will have a list, but they won't be able to tell you which places have space available. You'll have to call the centers yourself.

Other sources of information:
Information Day Care ................................. 739-4143
Vancouver
These people often know who to phone in other parts of the province.

Ministry of Women's Equality
Child Care Support Program .......................... 356-7960
Victoria
How am I going to pay for this?

Money is a major consideration for women who want to go to school. However, it is not the first consideration. First you figure out your goal, then you find out what institutions might provide the training you need. Then you're in a position to find out how to pay for it.

Some women have financed their return to school with money from their divorce settlement or the sale of the house. If you get a job with a college or university you can get a break on fees.

If you have to raise money to go to school, the two main sources of information about this are Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) and the institution you are planning to attend (college or university, school board, private college).

Native women can also get information about money for training and education from their band or tribal council.

Disabled women can contact the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Branch of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. Look in the blue pages of the phone book for Government of BC/Advanced Education Training and Technology/Vocational Rehabilitation for the office nearest you.

The EIC also funds some training. For more information about this see Government funded training (page 37).

The first step in getting information from the school you wish to attend is to read the school calendar. School calendars have information about financial services which can help you focus your questions about how to get money.

Public colleges, universities and institutes have financial aid counsellors in their student services offices. You can contact them and tell them you are thinking of going back to school but you need help to finance it. They will tell you what the next step is. Some offices have information sessions, others will make an appointment for you to see a counsellor. Some will send you information in the mail.

"There's money around. You just have to ask." Kate
Some private post-secondary institutions have financial aid services and others don't. If you are thinking of taking a course from a private college, tell them you will need financial aid and ask if there's any available. Private colleges will know about funding that is available to students taking their courses.

Because it takes time to gather information, start your financial planning well ahead of when you want to go to school. When you send in your financial aid application, the school will need time to process it. For example, the BC Institute of Technology (BCIT) has a July 30 deadline for many scholarship and bursary applications for programs starting in September.

What if I'm on social assistance?

The Ministry of Social Service (MSS) doesn't have to subsidize education. But they will financially support some clients while they go to some training and education courses. In order to get MSS support while you attend a training or education program, it is important to talk to your financial aid worker or a rehabilitation worker BEFORE you sign up for any course.

The thing that is most likely to persuade the ministry to support you is showing your worker how this course you want to take is part of an overall plan. For example, say your goal is to have a regular full-time job that pays enough so you can support yourself and your kids. In order to do that you may need to:

- build up your self-confidence
- get your high school diploma
- find out what jobs there are that interest you
- go for further training

You can take a course that will help you do these things. Many EIC project-based training programs will also help you do this.

If your worker approves your course they will work out a contract, telling you what MSS is willing to pay for while you are in school. They may continue your child care and medical coverage, give you money for books and transportation, continue your living allowance or a combination of all of these.

Once you have the ministry approval form, you can sign up for your course without losing your benefits. You do not have to pay for project-based training. If you are going to a college or institute in a program that requires tuition, the ministry approval will allow you to apply for all the grants, bursaries, scholarships and loans without having what you receive deducted from your ministry payments.
As with all other ministry decisions, there are general guidelines. Then individual workers make decisions within those guidelines. This means that what is possible varies from region to region, office to office, and worker to worker. Remember that you can appeal any decision. You have 30 days after a decision is made to ask for an Appeal Kit, which contains a copy of the GAIN Act and Regulations and the forms you need. You can get someone to help you - a friend who has appealed a MSS decision, a welfare advocacy group, or the Legal Aid office in your community. If there is no welfare advocacy group or Legal Aid office in your community, or you don't know how to find them, you can get help by calling the Law Information Line (660-4673). Unfortunately this service is in Vancouver and does not have a toll free number, so you may have to pay a long distance charge.

Types of financial aid

There are several types of financial aid available. Schools may offer all, some, or none of them. Often a school will mail you a list of financial awards and how to apply. High grades are not the only criteria for these awards. Companies, unions, service organizations, professional associations, individuals, and the schools themselves often establish funds to help students finance their education. One example of a corporate award from the BCIT Student Financial Aid and Awards booklet is:

BC Gas Inc.

A bursary of $400 is awarded to a student in the Petroleum Technology who resides in an area serviced by BC Gas.

There are many different pockets of money available for education. You should apply for all those for which you are eligible.

Entrance awards

These are for students who are just starting their training. They do not have to be paid back and are based on various criteria. For instance, BCIT has entrance awards for women who are entering the trades and technologies. For example:

BCIT Montreal Memorial Awards for Women in Engineering

The winner of this award has her tuition paid for the first year. The following are eligible:

- Women entering Electronics Technology or any two-year program in the School of Engineering Technology.
- Women who have a high academic standing in high school or post-secondary studies.
- Women who are active participants in school or community activities.
Women who demonstrate a strong desire to enter their chosen field

_Bursaries and grants_

Bursaries and grants do not have to be paid back. They are available to students who have financial need and a satisfactory academic record.

_Scholarships_

Scholarships are awarded on a merit basis, usually for high academic achievement. They do not have to be paid back. These examples come from the 1992-93 Simon Fraser University Calendar:

**Ken and Su Jang Scholarship for Women in Science**
An annual scholarship, valued at a portion of the accrued interest, is available in the Fall Semester to an undergraduate female student in the Faculty of Applied Sciences or the Faculty of Science. The award will be based on academic merit.

**Evelyn Lett Scholarship**
A $600 scholarship is available annually to a full-time woman student enrolled in the Women's Studies Program.

_Student loans_

Students can borrow money from both the federal and provincial governments for part-time or full-time study. Parts of them sometimes do not have to be repaid. The money can be used to cover course fees, books, supplies, transportation, child care and living expenses.

Details and application forms about the Canada Student Loan Program and the BC Student Assistance Program can be gotten from the financial aid offices of schools. It takes about six to eight weeks to process these applications, so give yourself as much time as possible. Don't wait until the last minute.

**BC Part-time Student Assistance Program (BCPTSAP)**

_Who is eligible:_

- Canadian citizens or landed immigrants.
- Residents of BC for 12 months.
- Those in good standing with the Canada Student Loan Program and the BC Student Assistance Program
- People able to show financial need.
- Priority is given to mature students with dependents.

Money is available for tuition fees, required text-books, and administrative
charges.

**Work study programs**

Some schools offer part-time jobs to students who need financial help getting through school. There is usually a student employment office where you can get more information about this.

**Emergency loans**

Some schools provide emergency loans for when something unexpected happens. These loans are usually for small amounts for short periods of time, and students must show how they can repay them.
This is the part of the mall that's under renovation. Programs change, names change, funding changes. It can all be very confusing and frustrating. However, persistence can pay off.

Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) is the federal department that administers training funds. The first confusion to deal with is the many names and acronyms people use when they are referring to this institution. Someone might tell you to check with CEC to see if they'd sponsor you and someone else might tell you to check with EIC. In fact they're both telling you the same thing.

Of course, the first rule when someone tells you something that's confusing is ask them to explain. It is never stupid to ask questions until you understand. In fact it's vitally important. However, a little background on the many names of EIC will spare you some confusion.

People commonly refer to Employment and Immigration Canada as EIC, CEC, CEIC, UI, UIC or Manpower. Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) is the federal department. The Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) and the Unemployment Insurance Commission (UIC) are regulatory agencies that don't deliver direct service to the public. The Canada Employment Centre (CEC) is the local office of EIC. Manpower was the name of Canada Employment Centres before 1977 and is still commonly used. In the CEC there are two separate departments--Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Employment Programs and Services, which mysteriously has not developed an acronym.

The important thing to remember about this information is that it explains why there is so much confusion around the name. It does not explain how people are using the terms when they talk to you. Even EIC workers who know the differences often use the names interchangeably. The first rule is always if you're not sure what they're talking about — ask.
The part of this bureaucracy that funds training is Employment Services. You reach them by looking up their telephone number in the blue pages under: Government of Canada/Employment and Immigration/Employment Services, and phoning, or by going down to your CEC office and saying you want training.

There is a limited training budget and not everyone is eligible. EIC funds a wide variety of training programs for people who are in danger of being unemployed for a long term. Their goal is to get people off welfare and unemployment insurance and into the labour market. Generally speaking, their priorities at the moment are:

- people on Unemployment Insurance
- people who experience long-term, recurring unemployment
- Social Assistance Recipients
- displaced workers
- members of the four equity groups named in the Employment Equity Act: women, aboriginal peoples, disabled persons and visible minorities.

When you phone up or go into your local CEC, the first thing to do is say you want training. Training is the magic word that will get you into the process. At some point someone is going to want to know how you fit into their priorities and how training will help you find and keep a job.

One thing that you can find out is what jobs are likely to be available in your area. EIC does research on the job market and it's part of their job to make it available to you. You can call your local office and say something like, "I'm thinking of going into training and I want to stay in this area. I want to know what the long-term and short-term job prospects are for our area."

Even though there are general guidelines followed by CECs allover the country, local offices are in charge of their own budgets and can decide what their priorities are and what kind of training they will put their money into. Training programs available vary from office to office. Also who is eligible for training may vary. You just have to start asking questions and keep asking them until someone leads you through the maze. (See Sarah’s story on page 42.)

Some of the employment services offered at CEC

Labor market and career information

Some CECs have well-organized libraries with binders full of information on the labour market (what jobs are likely to be in demand), careers (what a person does in a job, what education you need for it and how much it pays), and information about their programs (lists of project-based training, of approved private schools, etc.). Some CECs have this
stuff but it’s not very well organized and in some offices it’s not there at all.

If you like to read things before you talk to people, check out the resource library in your CEC. If it’s not there or it's too disorganized to understand, phone in and ask a question. If you live in a city with more than one office, you might check around. In Vancouver, for example, there is a big difference from office to office in the amount of resource material available and in how well it is organized.

**Project-based training**
These training programs are very useful to women who have a lot going against them when it comes to finding a job. EIC pays for the course and continues your UI or pays you a training allowance while you take the course. There are also allowances for child care and transportation in some cases.

Generally speaking, these courses provide counselling, confidence building, education and skill upgrading and on-the-job experience. In some CEC offices there is a book of project-based training you can look through. In other offices you have to ask about it.

The following are some examples of this type of training:

**R.I.S.E. (Re-entry Into Successful Employment)**
This course is sponsored by the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre (telephone 376-9009).

Phase one is 6 weeks of half-day workshops in self esteem, self-confidence, self-defence, assertiveness training, aptitude testing, career development, and labour market trends. Phase two is 18 weeks of full days covering on-the-job work experience, job specific training, computer orientation, academic upgrading, first aid, CPR, communications, financial and stress management, and job search techniques. Phase three consists of maintenance of skills and on-going support.

**Employment skills for women**
Sponsored by Pacific Legal Education Association Vancouver (telephone 683-3439). This is a 12 week course, 5 hours a day for women 19 or over who:

- are in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction
- have been in trouble with the law
- are in a relationship with an offender or ex-offender
- are in recovery from an eating disorder
- are in recovery from a psychiatric illness
- are survivors of sexual or physical abuse

Topics covered include: career awareness, self discovery, job finding techniques, career exploration, workplace issues, assertiveness, communication skills and building a support system.
**EIC-sponsored training**

EIC will pay for some training in marketable skills. Most offices have Training Information Sessions where they explain to groups of people how to go about getting funded to go to school. There are basically two kinds of funding:

**Full sponsorship**
EIC pays for the course and continues your UI or gives you a training allowance while you are in the course. You have to pay for books, student fees and most equipment fees.

**Partial sponsorship or Fee payer**
You pay for the cost of the course, books, student fees and equipment. EIC continues your UI while you take the course.

What EIC will fund under this program depends on what you present them with. You have to make a case for the reasons you need training to find a job: how this training will lead to a job and how you know this is something you would like to do and could be successful at.

The key here is training in a marketable skill that will lead to a job. Some of the things they don't normally fund are university courses, night time or weekend courses, or anything less than 25 hours a week.

There are examples of partial sponsorship in Sarah's story (page 42) and the experiences of Nicky and Susan who got partial sponsorship to take the sheet metal course at BCIT (See page 19).

**Workplace-based training**
If you are in danger of losing your job because of changes in the economy or in technology, your employer can apply to this program for financial assistance to train you in skills that have current and future demand. This program also covers self-employed people who need to upgrade their skills in order to remain in business.

**Job opportunities**
If you've been having difficulty finding work, this program will assist an employer with the costs of providing you with training and work experience. The employer is expected to continue employing you after the Job Opportunities contract ends.

**Job development**
Assists people who are at risk of long-term unemployment. Projects provide training and work experience to participants by providing training-related costs, wage subsidies and other specified costs to employers. Training can be in an institution, on-the-job or a combination of both.
**Job creation**
Provides opportunities for unemployed workers to maintain their work skills during periods when they are without work.

**Self-employment assistance**
For people on UI or Social Assistance who have the interest and the skill to become self-employed and who have a business idea. This program is not operating in the lower mainland or the Greater Victoria area. Course covers business planning, financial management, marketing and inventory control.

**Mobility assistance**
Financial help for people who have to look for work or move to accept work outside of the area where they currently live.

This is only a partial list to give you some idea of the scope of EIC employment services. They have many useful services, they're just a little hard to find. Also cutbacks are affecting them all the time. It seems to be a common experience that if you ask a lot of questions and keep trying to figure it out, suddenly someone will give you the exact right piece of information and you can whiz through the rest of the process. Along with this chapter, you should read

*The shopping list in your head* (page 10), *How to ask questions* (page 12) and *Sarah's story* (page 42).
Sarah's story

Persistence pays off

I wanted to get aptitude testing because I noticed that I might be having a tendency to do jobs that I wasn't that good at. So I looked for the women's employment project, but they don't exist any more. Then I phoned my Employment and Immigration (EIC) office and I said, "Do you give help with aptitude testing and career counselling?" They said, "Sort of, don't come this afternoon though." That wasn't such a great response; I had heard bad things about my office, so I decided to go to a bigger office in another town. I phoned them and they said to come in and talk with an employment counsellor. I went in and an employment counsellor said, "What do you want?" I said, "I think I want some training, but I don't know exactly what I want." She said, "In that case, come to the training workshop that we do next Thursday."

"Buy a notebook and write every conversation and every little piece of information down or it'll all get lost." So I went to the training workshop. They tell you the rules about what kind of training they will pay for a little bit too fast, and they wouldn't give us copies of what programs they sponsor because it changes so often there's no point. Makes it kind of hard to figure out. When I asked the woman after the training session whether they did any career counselling and aptitude testing, she said that they didn't, but you could join this half-day value clarification workshop or maybe go to this place in Aldergrove. I phoned Aldergrove and they said I could come but not until January. This was in December. Somebody gave me a Fraser Valley College calendar, and I thought Agriculture Technology sounded interesting. I wasn't sure if it was a great career choice, but I decided to talk to the people at the college to find out what the career opportunities might be.

I had been told on the phone that there was no way that I could get into anything in January, because it was too late, but that it was still worthwhile for me to talk to the director of the program. I had an interview with the director in January, and she said I could start right away. By this time the course was three weeks away. Everything was a big rush; I couldn't get my career counselling before the course was going to start. I went back to Clearbrook Canada Employment Centre (CEC) and the first thing the employment counsellor asked me for was my phone number. She said, "You live in Mission, you have to go to the Mission office."
I had asked the Clearbrook office if it was okay, and they said it was, but it turns out it wasn't. Maybe it was okay for certain things, but it wasn't okay for the training, because that's done office by office. The Clearbrook woman said it's up to the Mission office to decide because the money is allocated region by region. And she said, "Agriculture isn't such a great career. Why do you want to do this? What do you want to do?" Well, that's what I want to know what the possibilities are. She told me to phone the Agriculture Employment place which isn't listed in the phone book under EIC even though it's part of EIC She gave me the number. So I called, and the receptionist said, "I'm not sure if a counsellor could help you." I talked to a counsellor and she also wanted me to know more about what I wanted to do before she answered my questions. But she did say greenhouses are a growing occupation.

I told her I wanted to take the course, and I wanted to know what my employment prospects were. She told me EIC requires me to phone employers and other people who are already employed in the field, to see if what they do is actually what I'd like to do, which seemed reasonable. Except that it's very hard to figure out where to phone, if you don't already have connections in the field.

"One grower told me people could have gone to school & still be lousy workers... but if I went to school that would show I had a real interest... so he'd give me a try." After I didn't get anywhere with Agriculture Employment, I went home and began looking through the Yellow Pages. What do you look up? Greenhouses? Places that employ lots of people aren't listed because they aren't looking for retail sales.

I tried doing cold phone calls from the phone book which is a hard thing for me to do. It was very anxiety producing, and only minorly useful. EIC required me to ask employers what kind of jobs are available and whether they had heard of the course I wanted to take and would they consider it a qualification. One greenhouse grower told me that people could have gone to school and still be lousy workers or they could be good workers and people who don't go to school could be good workers or lousy. But if I went to school that would show I had a real interest in horticulture, so he would hire me to give me a try. It's a get-in-the-door.

I phoned the college counsellor who said, you should talk directly to the department. The department gave me the name of one ex-student, who told me about the job they were doing and how long it took to find it. They said they had to do a lot of entry level stuff and keep sending out resumés for a while. I shouldn't expect to get a really good job right away.

I wanted to do as much as possible before I went and talked to the Mission office. I talked to five places and a couple of people who had worked in the field. I even went to the apprenticeship branch. They told me that there is an apprenticeship in horticulture, but
you get a job first and then talk to them. And they didn't have any written stuff around the apprenticeship in horticulture. I tried to phone places in the Fraser Valley where apprentices work but they were mostly in landscaping. It was a little unclear to me. It cost a mint in phone calls because where I live almost anywhere is long distance.

I went back to the Mission office and they gave me a lot more useful places to go. They told me the name of a person to phone at Agriculture Employment, and exactly how to phrase the questions, which was helpful. They said to ask, "What are the growth parts of the industry," not "What jobs do you have." So I did phone and got more information, and there was more running around.

I went to Mission CEC once and talked to one person. She told me to do more research and come back and talk to somebody else. The second time they finally gave me some of the names I needed to do the research.

When I went to see the man who gives permission for training, I sat in the office saying to myself "I will be treated with respect." I had to keep reminding him that I was asking him for something specific and was he going to say yes or no? I got some really good information out of him.

When I went to CEC and I told them that I could get into the course in January, they said what is the matter with this course that there are seats left in it? I told them what the school had said - most people can't afford the two-year course. EIC doesn't sponsor two-year courses, and that's why the one-year course was completely packed, but the two-year course would let me in. He told me that educational institutions are in the field of selling seats so you shouldn't necessarily believe what they tell you about their course. So, it makes sense that you should double check the information you get from the institution.

One thing they also said in the training session was that, for whatever reasons, certain training programs aren't held in regard by the employers. You should check and make sure yours is, which is easier said than done. At that point, I didn't even bother asking them if they would sponsor me because after my first contacts with counsellors it seemed pretty obvious that they probably wouldn't sponsor me in Agriculture. I would have a much better chance as a fee-payer, which means I would pay tuition, books, and transportation, and they would keep me on UI.

Would they allow me to keep my Unemployment Insurance (UI) going while I went to school? They said, "How long is the break between terms?" If it was only an eight-week break they would keep my claim going, but because it was over eight weeks, they wouldn't. They said, "If you work over the summer, you can requalify, you could reapply." But there weren't enough weeks to requalify, so I said, "Will you do the first term?" He wanted me to phone one more person, and finally I just said, "Are you approving this or
"I really shouldn't because we're not supposed to fund only part of a course."

But, they agreed to do it for that one term. Later when I went back to get the paperwork I thought I'd better make sure that getting this funding I wouldn't disqualify me from future training sponsorship. They said that they didn't have a rule like that at the moment, but one could come in. They didn't want to put people through school for the rest of their lives, but if I had a good reason I might get another shot.

After I was in school for a week, the secretary told me I had to sign in every day because I was on UI. Nobody from UI had told me about attendance. Fortunately, the secretary had seen me the first week.

I see from the sign-in sheets that a number of people in my two-year course are in fact sponsored by UI, so they probably came from a different office. One person told me that every year CEC chooses two or three geographic areas which, because they have exceptionally low employment, they put more money into and loosen up on the rules.

I would have liked if they did have more employment information, but people keep telling me they can't predict the future. I didn't start on the training thing until I was some months into my UI, and I realize now; it's much smarter to start right away. A lot of courses fill up six months before they start. The investigation takes longer than you think it will because you do a lot of running around and you will get contradictory information. If you've been unemployed for a longer time, it shows you really don't have employment prospects, but then it's harder to get it all done before your claim runs out, especially if there are waiting lists.

"The investigation takes longer than you think it will because you will get contradictory information."

There's all these little rules at UI that can screw you. The first thing you should do is apply to the course but not register at the institution - put your name on the waiting list but make sure you don't register. Even if you're looking at three different courses and it costs a $10 application fee each time, it might be worthwhile to apply because the educational institutions have such big waiting lists. They say that you have to have a barrier to employment and they will help you overcome that barrier. But if you have just junky employment and want better, then they're not too interested in helping you. If you're a fee-payer and not asking for sponsorship, they're a bit looser.

Some workers are more cooperative than others. Some know more about the employment situation in the field you are looking in. They can give you the name of who to phone, instead of a secretary who may not understand your questions, or people who may never return your call.
I think, in retrospect, when they told me to go somewhere else, I could have said, "Is there anyone else in this office who has more information about this field than you do?"
I wish I had my high school

Years ago I used to work as a chambermaid, but I quit because there was a lot of backstabbing. Some of the girls made fun of me 'cause I didn't know how to read. If someone left clothes behind you'd have to write it down and put it in a plastic bag and take it to the front desk. So I'd ask the girls how to spell this and that. They called me stupid. So I said fine, I quit. So I didn't bother going back to work. . . My friends are glad I'm back in school and starting to know how to read and write long letters. Last year I wrote a book about my life.

Audrey

If you had to leave school before you got your high school diploma, there are many programs to help you upgrade your education. You do not have to go back to high school. Learning at this level is often called Adult Basic Education (ABE). It is sometimes called literacy, but usually literacy means the basic skills of reading and writing.

You may not know your grade level, but the people who run the programs can figure that out for you. Sometimes, to do this, they give you an assessment test. Jennie said the test was good because it put her at a level that was easy for her and she got A's. Now she's moved to the next level and it's harder.

Some places offer two kinds of courses for ABE students. One is the same as school; it starts on one date and ends on another. The other kind of course is called continuous intake, where you can start any time you want and go as often as you like - every day or every Monday, or whenever you can. You finish the course when you finish the work.

Adult Literacy Contact Centre
#622-510 W. Hastings St. Vancouver, BC V6B 1L8
Toll free from anywhere in BC 1-800-663-1293
In the Lower Mainland call 684-0624

In BC, we have the Adult Literacy Contact Centre. You can call this centre toll free from anywhere in the province and get information about ABE programs in your area.
The people who answer the phone will ask you where you live and what you want to do. This helps them find the programs that are right for you. They keep an up-to-date list of all ABE programs offered by school boards, community colleges, Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) programs, and distance education. They will find information and make phone calls for you if you'd like them to. You do not have to tell them your name unless you want them to call you back. The more information you give them, the easier it is for them to decide which programs might suit you.

If you have completed your Grade 10 you may qualify for pre-apprenticeship training in trades. See page 41 for more information about these courses.

Money
Some courses do not cost anything and there is money available to pay the costs of other courses.

Free Courses:

- Any basic literacy course in the province
- Courses to get your high school diploma if you have never graduated from high school and you are taking your upgrading courses through a school board
- EIC courses for women on Unemployment Insurance (UI) or Social Assistance

Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program (ABESAP)
This is a grant that you can get to pay for the costs of tuition, books, supplies and in some cases transportation and child care. You can apply for this through the school you are attending. When you go for your assessment and they tell you what level you are in and what the costs are, ask about applying for ABESAP money.
I want to work in Canada

Immigrating to Canada is a process filled with both positive and negative feelings. Many immigrant women have been told that Canada is the land of milk and honey but find that the process is not so smooth. It takes courage, strength and support from families and communities to thrive.

Immigrating often means leaving behind everything you ever loved, and all that was familiar, and arriving in a strange and often cold place. Upon arrival most immigrants go through a period of shock, feeling isolated, lonely, helpless, scared and wondering "Why did I decide to come to this foreign country?" For many, flying this far is a first-time experience. Even before you land, learning about a new culture begins as you start observing and adapting to your new environment.

After an initial adjustment period, many immigrant women begin to look for paid work. An important place to start is by making contacts within your own ethnic or religious community. Contact your nearest church, temple, gurdwara, synagogue or mosque and find out more about activities in your community. Find the nearest community organization, immigrant services agency, school, library, and recreational centre and start to gather information and support.

Getting started
If you are a landed immigrant and you arrived at the Vancouver International Airport, you were probably welcomed by the Community Airport Newcomers Network (CANN). The staff of CANN speak many different languages and have lots of information to help with the settlement process. If you received information from them, go back and look at the brochures they gave you - there are lists of government offices, community organizations and emergency phone numbers.

The telephone book is another good source of information. The yellow pages list all the businesses and services in your area. If you're nervous about using the phone, prepare your questions before you call and ask them slowly. Tell people you are new and are seeking information. You could also ask a family member or friend to call for you the first time.

Working in Canada
You need a Social Insurance Number (SIN) before you can work in Canada. If you are a permanent resident or a landed immigrant, you can fill out an application form for your SIN at your local Canada Employment Centre (CEC). The address is in the blue pages of the phone book under Government of Canada/Employment and Immigration/Employment Centres. It takes approximately four to six weeks to get it.

If you are a refugee and are accepted for legal status, you can apply for a temporary work permit from your local Immigration Centre. The address is in the blue pages of the phone.
If you are a foreign worker and have a prior employment authorization, you can get information from your employer for the next step.

Because the economy is changing, finding full-time, permanent jobs is becoming more difficult. The trend is toward part-time work, contract work (where you work on a short-term basis, for a specified period of time, on a specific task or project), temporary work or seasonal work. See Where the jobs are (page 23) for more information about the changing job market. A good place to get information about the labour market is through your local CEC.

"It was so different coming here compared to our culture. At first I was very disturbed."  
Sushila

There are a few terms that are often used to describe work in the Canadian labour market. It is useful to become familiar with them and to know what they mean. For example, "white collar" refers to jobs where the work does not involve physical labour and where degrees or diplomas from post-secondary institutions are usually required. "Blue collar" jobs are those where the work involves physical labour - janitors and truck drivers for example. "Pink collar" jobs are those usually done by women such as secretaries and receptionists. You might hear the term "traditional" or "non-traditional" jobs too. These terms are usually used when referring to women's work.

"Traditional" jobs are those where almost all the workers are women, such as nursing, teaching, and clerical jobs. "Non-traditional" jobs are those where most of the workers are men.

Another term you might come across, particularly if you are getting information about government funded programs, is "visible minority." This is a term the government uses to describe people who are visibly different from the white population because of their skin colour. Sometimes these people are immigrants, but sometimes they were born in Canada. Some government programs have a certain number of spaces in them set aside for "visible minorities."

**Language training**

Almost every job and training program requires you to understand and speak English. If you need to learn or upgrade your English, there are government funded programs that can help you. These programs are called LINC which stands for Language Instruction for New Comers. LINC classes are sponsored by the Immigration Department and are available to any immigrant, male or female, who is not yet a citizen. These classes are free and available at flexible times. Some classes even provide child care services. They are delivered by various schools, private institutions, immigrant service agencies and community and non-profit organizations.

There are three levels of LINC training. After level three you graduate with an
intermediate level of English. Before you can take these programs, you need to have your English skills assessed. In Vancouver call 876-5756 to make an appointment for an assessment. If you live in the Fraser Valley area, call 589-7739. At other locations in the province call your local Immigration office for information about LINC programs. Local community or cultural organizations should also have information about language training. You can also find other English language classes, which you pay for, at private institutions, continuing education departments of colleges and school boards.

Since most government funded training programs are only for people receiving Unemployment Insurance (UI), many immigrant women cannot get into these programs. There are, however, a few other programs for people who are not on UI. Labour Market Language Training programs (LMLT) are funded by Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC) and are available to "visible minority" women who are not receiving UI. These programs provide occupational language upgrading, skills training, job search techniques and work experience.

**Wanted: Canadian experience**

When you start looking for work you may find that most jobs open to you pay minimum wages (five to six dollars per hour) and have minimum educational requirements. Many immigrant women take these jobs because they have families to support and even the lower wages are better than what they were working for before.

When you first start looking for work in Canada, it's easy to become discouraged because most employers ask for Canadian education or Canadian experience. It is important to remember to take things one step at a time. You have already survived a lot, leaving behind your home country. Find people who will support and encourage you. Ask questions and let people know you are new to Canada. Be persistent and keep going.

Because many employers want you to have Canadian experience, many immigrant women start their Canadian work experience as volunteers. This is a good way to familiarize yourself with the Canadian system and Canadian customs. It is also a very good way to make contacts and find out about paid jobs. Contact your local Volunteer Centre or community organization to find out about volunteer jobs.

**Upgrading your education**

As you explore your work possibilities you may find that going back to school for retraining is the next step. As a new immigrant you are not alone in this process of continuous learning and adapting. In Canada, the notion of "lifelong education" is becoming increasingly common. This means that even though Canadian workers have finished high school and even obtained a degree or diploma from a university or college, many of them return for further education and training many times throughout their working lives.

**Finding training programs**

In the chapter on government funded training (page 25) you will find out about training
programs which you may be able to take for free. Often the best way to find out about
these training programs is through local community groups and immigrant services
agencies. Sometimes these organizations run government funded programs.

These programs are a good place to start because all the other students are also
immigrants and the staff are culturally sensitive to your difficulties as a newcomer. Some
examples of such programs in the lower mainland area are:

**Employment Challenge Program**
Sponsored by MOSAIC in Vancouver, telephone 254-0244. This is a 17-week program
for men and women. Nine weeks in the classroom are followed by 8 weeks of on-the-job
experience. Participants must:

- want to look for permanent, full-time work
- be unemployed
- speak, read and write English at the upper beginners to lower intermediate level
- have little or no post-secondary education in their country of origin
- have little or no Canadian work experience
- be 18 years or older
- be legally permitted to work in Canada (landed immigrants, refugees with work
authorization permits, or Canadian citizens)
Topics include: job search techniques; on-the-job skills; life skills: banking,
budgeting, using community resources and pronunciation instruction

**New Immigrants in Science**
Sponsored by Willensky and Associates in Vancouver, telephone 682-1909. A five-month
full-time course with places reserved for women. Participants must:

- be unemployed and looking for work (preference is given to those on UI)
- have a degree in biological sciences or chemistry earned outside Canada
- have an intermediate or advanced level of English
- have work experience in their field outside Canada
- be landed immigrants
Topics covered include: English in context: media analysis, technical writing,
research skills; communications training: presentation and conversation skills,
conflict management, negotiation skills; computer training; bicultural adjustment
and counselling; on-the-job experience in science settings; career planning:
 networking, joining associations, writing exams; information interviewing and job
search skills: resumes and cover letters, interview practice with video.

These are only two examples of a wide variety of programs. Another government-funded
program often run by community agencies is the Job Finding Club. Many immigrant
women find this club useful. These programs run for three to eight weeks and help you to
learn job search techniques and find a job placement in a supportive environment. They
are often sensitive to women with language and cultural barriers. Women who are
unemployed and eligible to receive Unemployment Insurance can participate for free in
these programs.

Other places to look for information about jobs or training include local papers, community centers, unions, and bulletin boards in places like child care centers and laundromats. Often the most effective sources of information are friends, relatives and your own community contacts.

School boards, colleges, universities and private training schools may also offer courses for immigrants. You can find out more about these institutions by reading the chapters: *I wish I had my high school* (page 47), *Private training programs* (page 63), and *Colleges, universities & institutes* (page 46).

*How will my education be measured in Canada?*

There is not one standard for assessing foreign educations in Canada. Say, for example, that you have a high school diploma from your country of origin and you want to take a course at the University of Victoria (UVIC). You would have to talk to the counsellors at UVIC to find out who at their school could decide whether you are qualified to take the course. Each school is different.

If you are a licensed professional such as a doctor, nurse or accountant, you should apply to the professional associations that set the standards for licensing in Canada. You can find out how to contact them from immigrant services societies.

If you are applying for jobs in Canada with a degree from a foreign university and you find prospective employers asking what the Canadian equivalent is, it may be useful to get your degree assessed. The Open Learning Agency (OLA) has a program called *Assessment of Foreign Credentials*. This service is for employment only. It is not for universities. There is a fee and it takes a couple of months to complete the process. You can get more information about this program by calling the Open Learning Agency at 431-3000 in the lower mainland or toll-free at 1-800-663-1678.

Generally, foreign degrees are valued less than Canadian degrees so it may not be a good idea to get your degree assessed unless employers want it.

*Family adjustments*

Going back to school means a lot of adjustments. It is important to have the support of your family and to make sure you are not doing all the homemaking as well. Think about both your short-term and long-term goals. While going through this challenging process you will probably experience many personal and family changes. The dynamics in your family will probably change, especially the roles and expectations of husband and wife. Talking to a counsellor might help, especially one who understands your culture and speaks your language. Counsellors always keep these conversations confidential. See *The miracle minute* (page 26) for ideas about how other women made these adjustments.

Remember, you're not alone. Building support for yourself and talking to someone helps. In the following chapter you will read about Sushila, an immigrant woman from Fiji
whose strength and persistence helped her find her place in this new country.

Contacts in the lower mainland:

Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of BC
Vidya Sharma, Box 38601, 121 First St. East,
North Vancouver V7L 4T7 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .941-6427

Immigrant Services Society of BC
#501-333 Terminal Ave.
Vancouver V6A 2L7 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .684-2561

MOSAIC
1720 Grant St. Vancouver V5L 2Y6 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .254-9626
OASIS (Orientation Adjustment Services for Immigrants Society)
Vancouver . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .324-8186
Surrey . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .590-4622

SUCCESS (United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society)
Vancouver . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .684-1628/324-1900
Richmond . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .273-9878
Burnaby/Coquitlam . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .936-5900

Surrey-Delta Immigrant Services
13719-72nd Ave. Surrey V3W 2P2 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .597-0205

For reference books helpful to immigrant women see Other resources (page 73).
Sushila's story

"We come from a very rich culture"

I came to Canada in 1987. At that time, my husband had passed away and I had a very hard time. I was teaching back home in Fiji. I had two boys and one is still back home - he's a high school teacher and the other is working at UBC. I came for a holiday, to spend some time with my son. I took a leave without pay and came over here. My son went to the immigration and got the papers for my permanent residency. I was very lonely, very depressed because I was no longer working full time in Fiji with kids. I love children.

"My son says, 'You're sitting here crying - why don't you go and do some volunteer job?" There were two schools nearby where I was living and some daycare centers. I went to one of the schools and the principal was really nice, so she gave me a volunteer job. I started at the library, helping the children, doing book-keeping and then after a month they let me get totally involved with the children, telling them my background and doing programs and stuff.

So I started full time for three months and I applied to university but I couldn't afford the money. Then I tried volunteering in the daycare in the afternoons so I was balancing it. Mornings I was in the elementary school and the afternoon I was at the day care. The daycare supervisor was very, very good and she said to go and take the training in ECE (Early Childhood Education). So I applied but it was late so Gyda (at the college) told me to go and do out-of-school care. So I did one year of an out-of-school care course and I was upgrading my English, too. Then, the next year I got into the program for ECE.

I was lucky because I was then hired by the place where I was doing the volunteer job. So I was working full time and going to school at night. It was really, really hard for me - all the stress - but I was so lucky that I was involved in what I wanted to do. Then the supervisor became sick at the day care, so I took over from there as the supervisor. We had 40 children and I worked with five staff, I was doing everything - administration too, down to working with the parents, everything. In the ECE program, Gyda gave me the support I needed.

"I was lucky because I was then hired by the place where I was doing the volunteer job."

I learned a lot, because in our culture, the children were very respectful to the parents, everybody. But over here, it's totally different. I was so fortunate to do the volunteer work at the elementary school to get that side of the story and then to go to the day care. It seems to be really different, the children are so independent, whatever they want to say, they say. Whatever they want to do, they do it. Where I am from, we have a mixed culture, Fijian and Hindu. These cultures always have a lot of respect for parents and older people. We come from a very, very rich culture.
It was different coming here compared to our culture. At first I was very disturbed. My son, who is now 26, he would never talk back to me and now sometimes he does. I have to take it, I have to accept it. I was so disturbed that he was very different - all of sudden he changed. He lost his values of our culture and I, I guess, lost mine too, working with kids in this society. With my son, we have to communicate, and problem solve. We are very good friends now and it works. At the day care, I teach some songs and counting in Hindi and tell them about my country and clothing. After that they want to go to Fiji and drink coconut juice. Now when they go to the superstore they say; "There are the coconuts!"

In my background, my family was very cultured. In our neighborhood, we always show respect, call people 'aunt' even though they are not our flesh and blood. So I found it very different here. By working, doing the volunteer job in the school, it helps. I just mixed with the children - whatever comes I take it. And I watch, that's my main point. If I'm doing wrong, I always go and ask. I will accept the challenge, try to correct myself. Whatever help I need, I'm never shy. I always go and ask and then get the help. And the children, I think are far more educated in some kinds of stuff than us. They give us lots of ideas and we just put it together and work it out.

"In our culture, the children were very respectful to the parents. But over here, it's totally different."

After I came to Canada, I was also involved in my own culture. I was working at our temple, very involved in that too. I was teaching heritage language in my temple. I was the education director for two years there - a volunteer job. Every Sunday from 9:30 till 2:00, I was teaching Hindi, teaching our culture, dance and everything. I was totally involved for two years. Back home, we don't have kindergarten or day cares. The rich parents can send their children to kindergarten, but it wasn't provided by the government. It was private. But here, the children come right from home, they come without English and so we have to go and start from the roots, doing actions with the children to teach them English, but they grasped it so quickly. While I was teaching Hindi at the temple, it was so hard because at home they are speaking only English. If they speak Hindi, their own language at home, it wouldn't be that difficult.

I started working in the day care where I am now two years ago. I saw this place when I walked by one day and came in and talked to the people running it. The day care moved to another location for a while so I went to talk to them about opening the day care again. Nothing was here, no furniture or anything so we went to the licensing board, we started from the root. I took it over, it's a private day care, there is no parent board but I have a program for the parents and we have parents' meetings. They can come anytime and do anything with the kids, they are most welcome. I have a very good set of parents. They come in the morning and spend time with the children. One of the parents volunteered to play the piano and they sometimes read books with the kids. They sit down and do puzzles and stuff.

"Whatever help I need, I'm never shy. I always go and ask and then get the help."
Like that. All the children know everybody, all the parents. And all the parents regard the children as their own children. I have a mixed group here, I have Chinese, I have Hindu and English and some French-speaking children. A very rich group.

I am thinking of, maybe next year, going and taking more courses so I can work with special needs kids. I also do fund-raising, put flyers together, the parents are really helpful with that. My wages are not too good but we're working at it. But if you think about the children and the recession and those out of jobs, I think it's good. I'm going to get more qualifications in other fields like counselling for the parents, if they have kids with problems. I'd love to take that. I'm taking an administration course now. I have also taken workshops, like art or multiculturalism. I also use the resource centre and take out their books.

"I am thinking of taking more courses so I can work with special needs kids."

I keep going, even though sometimes it's difficult. I get help from God, I thank God and he gives me encouragement to do whatever I want to do. Otherwise I would have been nowhere. I felt so isolated when I came here five years ago. . . . And my son, he's my best friend, he always encourages me. So through him I get strong and I believe in God a lot. I am so fortunate that what I wanted to do, I'm doing right here. I was a teacher back in my country, I didn't change my job.
Please read this chapter

Considering sciences, trades & technologies

This chapter is about training for jobs in trades, science and technology. These would include, for example, carpenter, welder, computer programmer/analyst, forestry technologist, engineer, and biologist. Most women have to go out of their way to imagine themselves going into these fields, but it's well worth the effort. Besides the fact that these jobs generally pay better than most jobs in predominantly female occupations, much of the predicted job market growth in the coming years is going to be in these fields.

Most of us work because we need the money. Ideally, we would have a job that is fun, interesting, meaningful and also pays well. Many jobs in the traditionally male fields of trades, sciences and technology offer these qualities.

Some women eliminate trades work as an option for themselves because they think the physical requirements of the job will be too demanding. It is true that trades work is often very physical and you have to be in good physical shape to do it. If you are, there is no reason you can't do the work. You learn to lift properly, and when something is too heavy you ask for help. Very heavy things are moved by crane or hoist.

Another concern some women have about physical work as a career is that they're not sure they'll want to do it when they are 40 or 50. One of the great things about being skilled in a trade is that you can take these skills into related careers. Many trades people have gone on to contracting, teaching industrial education in high schools, colleges, or institutes, doing health and safety work, working in quality control or doing advocacy work for tradeswomen. The opportunities are many and varied.

More concrete information about these jobs can be had from books and publications found in the career information section of your local library or Canada Employment Centre (CEC) (see page 26.).
Say you are looking for job descriptions in the trades, sciences and technologies. Some good books to look for are *Job stories: I Like the Work, I Like the Money* and *Building the Future: Profiles of Canadian Women in Trades*. (See Other resources, page 73, for more information.)

Another good way to get an idea about what these jobs are like is to browse through the course calendars from universities, colleges, the BC Institute of Technology (BCIT) and the Pacific Marine Training Institute. This latter institute trains people who work on ships or do the many jobs around ports such as marine terminal operation, freight forwarders, customs brokers, traffic management, etc. Look at the names of programs, read the courses required and what they cover.

One thing to keep in mind is that these jobs are not all the same in terms of future job growth and good salary. When you find something you think you might be interested in, check with your local CEC to see if they anticipate a demand for that job in your area.

Once you have some idea of a field that might interest you, you can phone one of the contact groups listed below and ask to be connected with a woman working in that field. By talking to her, you'll get a much better idea of what the job involves and how it is for women.

Women are physically, mentally and emotionally capable of doing trade, science and technology jobs. It's just that these jobs have been a male preserve so they've been organized by men for men. The more women that enter these fields, the better off the women in them are going to be.

Women who go to work in male-dominated fields often really love the work. Nicky and Susan took the Trades Exploration Program for Women at BCIT and discovered that they really liked working with metal. Nikki was a chef and she said cutting metal was just like cake decorating. She and Susan applied and were accepted into the full-time Sheet Metal Working course.
Trade courses offered through BCIT, the Pacific Marine Training Institute or community colleges are a good idea, especially for women who may not have much experience with the tools or the vocabulary of trade jobs. Some of these courses only require a grade 10 education, however, it is strongly recommended that you get your high school diploma.

These courses are not the only way to get trades training. One hundred and ninety trades in BC have apprenticeship programs. They are mostly construction, automotive and metal fabricating trades. If you can find a trained tradesperson to take you on as an apprentice, you can learn on the job and be eligible to have additional training paid for.

If you are interested in a trade and want to find out how to become an apprentice, you can get more information by phoning the Skill Development Centre of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. The phone number will be in the blue pages of your telephone book under BC Government/Advanced Education, Training and Technology/ Apprenticeship.

Sometimes, men are not that welcoming to women entering these fields, but let's face it, a woman working in a traditional female job can be just as harassed. Sticking to "women's jobs" has not really made us any safer, just poorer. Women have had to figure out how to deal with harassment in restaurants, stores and offices. We can also figure it out on the shop floors, construction sites, in laboratories and board rooms.

Heather, a boilermaker, loves steel. She says it's one of the most liquid things she can think of to work with. She also says it's true she's been harassed by men on the job, but almost never when she's holding her welding torch.

The other thing that women can sometimes find unwelcoming, especially in science and technology, is the way of thinking.

Marilyn had an arts degree. She decided after several years in the work force that she wanted someone to pay her to watch birds. So she figured she would have to go back to school in biology. She called the biology departments at the local universities and talked to whomever they put her on to. She was shocked to find herself in "Science." She said, "There were no courses on sparrows or birds. There were courses like Ethology and Behavioral Ecology. It was all very daunting."

But Marilyn was determined and she went ahead and applied anyway. At one university, she thought her advisor was overestimating her background and wanted her to start out at too advanced a level. At the other university, she thought the advisor treated her like an eighteen-year-old student coming from high school. She ended up picking the university that was the more progressive, where she knew more people and where there were more ornithologists (someone who studies birds) on the faculty.
"If I wasn't so determined I couldn't have done it. I found almost no help in the beginning. It all came from myself and friends outside the university."

When she started her course of study two things shocked her: The birds were not important, in and of themselves. They were treated as examples of theories. Secondly, science quantifies everything. Everything is turned into numbers and equations. I thought I'd go to school and learn about birds. I learned to manipulate numbers and make graphs and do statistics. There was no way around it."

Her determination kept her going until her third year. "It turned around for me when I decided to do conservation biology. If you want to know the effect of logging on a bird you have to do it by numbers. I don't have the same kind of reaction to quantitative thinking that I did. It can be really useful. Also I found a way to work in science so I don't have to do terrible things to animals."

Marilyn got a grant to conduct her own research project. During the summer, she got up at 5:30 in the morning and went and sat in one of three different forests. Her job was to recognize by sight, or sound, the birds that showed up in the vine maple gap she was watching and to make a scientific record of her findings. Her study, Vine Maple Gaps and Bird Diversity in Lower Mainland BC, is part of a whole series of research designed to figure out how to plant trees so that they can continue to support the diversity of species that live in forests. She achieved her goal of having someone pay her to watch birds.

These are not easy fields for women to break into, but women have done it. You don't have to be a pioneer. The following is a list of contacts for more information.

**Contacts:**

**Trades Exploratory Program for Women**
Kate Pelletier, Coordinator, Women in Trades/Special Initiatives, School of Trades Training BC Institute of Technology (BCIT) 432-8233 Toll free 1-800-667-0676

**Women in Trades and Technology, Operations and Blue Collar Work (WITT)**
National Network, RR#1, Winlaw V0G 2J0 226-7624

This organization can put you in touch with *Women in Trades and Technology* in your area. They publish a newsletter and you can get on the mailing list.

**South Island Women in Trades and Technology**
5741 Titan Place, Sooke V0S 1N0 474-1128

This is an answering machine responded to by volunteers. They will try to answer any question or point you in the right direction, but it might take them a while to get back to you.
Lower Mainland Women in Trades and Technology, 
Operations and Blue Collar Work (WITT) 
Kate Pelletier, contact person at BCIT 432-8233 Toll free 1-800-667-0676

Society of Canadian Women in 
Science and Technology (SCWIST) 
Resource Centre #2423-515 W. Hastings St. Vancouver, V6B 5K3 291-5163

This centre has videos, newspaper clipping files, books and magazines. They can put you in touch with women and women's organizations in science and technology.
Private training programs

One of the ways to find out about private training programs is to look in the yellow pages under Schools. Some of the sub-headings are: Business and Secretarial, Language, and Trades and Technical. People usually go to these schools so they can learn a skill that will get them a job. While the school is in the business of offering courses, finding the job is up to you. It is generally a good idea to start by figuring out what kind of job you want to get. This is especially important if you are thinking of getting your training from a private school. While a diploma from a public school is generally recognized, a diploma from a private school may or may not be recognized by potential employers. You want to make sure before you sign up for a course that your training is going to help you get into an existing job market.

The Private Post-Secondary Education Commission run by the BC government is working on a set of standards for private training programs. This commission is part of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. At the moment what they do is register private schools. You can find out if a school you are interested in going to is registered by phoning 660-4400. This registration only means that you are protected under the Consumer Protection Act if you want a refund. It does not tell you that this training is recognized by employers.

Say, for example, you think you want to take a course to be a long-term care aide. Call up Employment and Immigration Canada (EIc) employment services and ask if there is going to be a continuing need for long-term care aides in your area. Ask if they will fund the training. Find out who trains long-term care aides. Then call hospitals and nursing homes and ask which programs they hire graduates from. If that question is too general for them, pick a program you are interested in and ask if they hire graduates from that program.

Once you have an idea of what the potential job market is and what programs are recognized by employers, you can start talking to private trainers about what their program is like, whether or not you could do it and how you will pay for it.

Computer courses are very popular right now and there are many private schools that offer computer training, but there is a difference to be aware of in the kinds of computer training.

Diane called a secretarial business listed in the yellow pages and asked if they would hire someone who had learned WordPerfect™ at a private school. The woman who answered the phone asked her why she wanted to know. Diane said she was thinking of taking a
course from them and wanted to know if she could get hired after. The woman said, "Listen, you want the scoop, I'll give you the scoop. I've been through the whole thing, computer courses, government-sponsored training, the whole thing and I'm right back where I started from ten years ago, in reception. If you want to get anywhere you have to learn about computers, not just software programs. That's my advice. And shop around." Many women have learned to use particular programs like Word-Perfect™ or Microsoft Word™ without really understanding how computers work and have come to realize that this does not open up the world of computer technology to them.

When it comes to finding a private training program that fits your needs, shop for it the way you would any major expense item like a car. You can ask to see the course materials and talk to the instructor, then you can go home and think about it. You can phone around and comparison shop. It's also a great idea to talk to someone who's taken the course. If you're careful you can get a good deal.

**Checklist for private training programs:**

- Is the school registered by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology?
- Where have graduates of this course gone to work?
- How much of the course is instruction time and how much is independent study or lab work?
- Can I see the curriculum and the course materials?
- Can I talk to someone who's taken the course?
- How much does it cost?
- Is the training recognized by other educational institutions?
Distance education

Distance Education used to be called correspondence courses because it consisted of going to school by receiving written material and sending back written exercises through the mail. Now there are many more components to distance education. You still stay home, but besides receiving and sending written material through the mail, your course material may include audio tapes, video tapes, and computer software and may come by TV, by computer or by satellite. You can talk to your tutor by phone and you may participate with other people taking the same course by teleconference calls, or by arranged classroom seminars in your area.

In BC, the Open learning Agency (OLA) has the widest range of distance education courses. Through OLA you can study English as a Second language (ESL), complete your high school diploma (Adult Basic Education) (see page 32) take career, technical or college courses, or work toward a university degree. OLA is in partnership with UBC Access Guided Independent Study at the University of BC; University Extension at the University of Victoria; and the Centre for Distance Education at Simon Fraser University. This means that you can register through OLA for distance education from all these institutions. Other schools offering distance education are listed at the end of this chapter.

The advantages of this type of education are that you don't have to spend any time or money on transportation, you can arrange your study schedule to fit around the demands of your job, your family, and your life and you can go at your own speed. Women who like distance education find they enjoy working on their own and the sense of accomplishment they get from doing it.

However, distance education is not for everybody. And even if it is for you, this may not be true all the time. It depends on what is going on in your life. There may be times when you could take a distance education course and really do well and other times when you just can't bring yourself to concentrate on it.

Many people who register for distance education courses don't finish. It is important to remember that if you take a credit course through OLA and you don't withdraw in time, this incomplete goes on your college transcript and can affect your ability to get into a course or school later on.

Before you register for a distance education course, spend some time thinking about how you learn and when you would work on the course. Could you arrange a regular study time - twice a week once the kids are in bed? Could you work on it Saturday afternoon if...
everybody was out shopping? The advisors at OLA say that 12 to 15 hours a week per course is the standard amount of time to put aside. They also say that if you've never taken a distance education course before and you're not sure how you'll do, it's better to start with a subject that you like.

If you can find someone who's taken a distance education course, you might get an idea of what it was like from talking to them. Also you can call OLA's toll free number and ask to speak to an educational advisor.

**Places offering distance education:**

**Open Learning Agency**  
(OLA, UBC, UVIC, SFU)  
Mailing Address: Box 82080, Burnaby, V5C 6J8  
Location: 4355 Mathissi Place, Burnaby, V5G 4S8  
431-3000 1-800-663-1678 (Toll Free)

**BC Institute of Technology (BCIT)**  
3700 Willingdon Ave. Burnaby, V5G 3H2  
434-3304 1-800-667-0676 (Toll Free)

Some courses, especially in health sciences, are offered through distance education.

**Okanagan College**  
1000 KLO Road, Kelowna, BC V1Y 4X8  
762-5445

**Emily Carr College of Art & Design**  
1399 Johnston Street, Granville Island  
Vancouver, BC V6H 3R9  
844-3830

**Regional Correspondence Schools**  
Ministry of Education  
This is a way to get your high school diploma for free by studying at home. The Adult Literacy Contact Centre can give you more information.  
684-0624 (Vancouver)  
1-800-663-1293 (Toll Free)
Colleges, universities & institutes

"I tried three universities, they wouldn't take me. They said, 'you don't have French! I said, my second language is English, my first language is Cree. Why do I need French? So, I was one of the first to be admitted on the basis of having a native language."

Nancy

Colleges, universities and institutes all put out calendars that give a lot of general information about admission policies, courses, student services, financial aid, just about everything. Most schools will mail the calendar to you for five to ten dollars. The Open Learning Agency will send theirs for free. These calendars are often available through libraries. If you spend some time browsing through the table of contents of a couple of different calendars you will pick up a lot of information about how the school is organized and where you might start asking questions.

If you don't see information in the table of contents relating to women, disabled people and native people, check the index at the back of the calendar.

Prior Learning Assessment

As an increasing number of experienced working people are going back to school for further training, there is a growing movement to get universities and colleges to recognize training and skills that students have already acquired either on the job or in their communities.

Some schools will waive academic requirements to allow work-experienced people to take courses. This exemption is usually granted by the head of a department to an individual. The actual process of assigning academic value to both formal and non-formal learning is called Prior Learning Assessment.

At the moment, the only place in BC that does this is the Open Learning Agency (OLA) through their BC Educational Credit Bank. For a fee, the Educational Access staff will assess your background and help you choose the best route to earn credit.

OLA also offers a non-credit course called Portfolio Development Course (PORT 001). This course helps people document their learning in a form that can be submitted for assessment.

Once you know the diploma you want to work toward, if you have related experience in your background, call OLA at 431-3300 or toll free at 1-800-663-9711 and ask to speak to someone about the BC Educational Credit Bank.

The trial run

When they decide to go back to school, many women do a trial run to make sure they can

"I don't altogether agree with the college system. They practice what I call 'bulimic learning.' Take it all in and throw it all back up."

June
do it, and that they want to do it. Some women sign up for one course and see how that goes. Some women start by taking non-credit courses. These are courses which will not go on your academic record, so they do not affect your chances of getting into school. Some women audit credit courses, which means they take the courses, but do not write the exams. So they don't get credit and it doesn't go on their record.

**An important difference between college and school board courses:**
If you need upgrading in math, science, English, or social studies, but you're not sure if you'll be able to get through the course, it's often a good idea to take the course through your local school board.

Transcripts from the Ministry of Education only list courses you have completed, not courses you have failed or from which you have withdrawn. College courses, including courses from the Open Learning Agency, go on your transcript if you take them for credit. Not finishing these courses can hurt your chances of getting into other colleges or universities.

**A word about transferring credits:**
A good general rule is to always check with the program you want to get into to make sure they will recognize the courses you are taking somewhere else. For example, if you are aiming for the Renewable Resources Diploma at BCIT, check to see if they will accept a Math 11 course from the Vancouver School Board.
Universities:

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6
291-3111

Simon Fraser Harbourside
515 West Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC V6B 5K3
291-5000

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
2075 Wesbrook Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1
822-2211

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BC
P.O. Bag 1950 Station A
Prince George, BC V2L 5P2
565-5555 or
1-800-667-8622 (Toll Free)

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
Bookstore
P.O. Box 1700
Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2
721-7211

Colleges:

CAMOSUN COLLEGE
Lansdowne Campus
3100 Foul Bay Road
Victoria, BC V8P 5J2
370-3000

Carey Road Campus
3814 Carey Road
Victoria, BC V8Z 4C4
370-3000

Interurban Campus
4461 Interurban Road, RR3
Victoria, BC V8X 3X1
370-3000

Junction Campus
1627 Fort Street
Victoria, BC V8R 1H8
370-3000

CAPILANO COLLEGE
2055 Purcell Way
North Vancouver, BC V7J 3H5
986-1911

Sechelt Campus
Box 1609, 5627 Inlet Avenue
Sechelt, BC V0N 3A0
987-1535

Squamish Learning Centre
Box 1538, 37827 2nd Ave.
Squamish, BC V0N 3G0
986-3515

CARIBOO COLLEGE
Box 3010
Kamloops, BC V2C 5N3
828-5000

Williams Lake Campus
351 Hodgson Road
Williams Lake, BC V2G 3P7
392-6202

Box 1759
Merritt, BC V0K 2B0
378-2967

Box 2109
100 Mile House, BC V0K 2E0
395-3115

Box 459
Lillooet, BC V0K 1V0
256-4296
Hazelton Centre
Box 338, Hazelton, BC V0J 1Y0
842-5291

Houston Centre
Box 1277, 3411 10th Street
Houston, BC V0J 1Z0
845-7266

Kitimat Centre
606 Mountainview Square
Kitimat, BC V8C 2N2
632-4766

Nishga’a Centre
General Delivery c/o
The Nishga’a Tribal Council
New Aiyansh, BC V0J 1A0
633-2601

Prince Rupert Centre
130 1st Avenue West
Prince Rupert, BC V8J 1A8
624-6054

Queen Charlotte
Island Centre
Box 67, Queen Charlotte
City, BC V0T 1S0
559-8222

Smithers Centre
Box 3606, 3966 2nd Avenue
Smithers, BC V0J 2N0
847-4461

Stewart Centre
Box 919
Stewart, BC V0T 1W0
636-9184

OKANAGAN COLLEGE
1000 KLO Road
Kelowna, BC V1Y 4X8
762-5445

Kalamalka Centre
7000 College Way
Vernon, BC V1B 2N5
545-7291

Penticton Centre
583 Hastings Avenue
Penticton, BC V2A 8E1
492-4305

Salmon Arm Centre
Box 189, 2552 Trans Canada Hwy. N.E.
Salmon Arm, BC V1E 4N3
832-2126

SELKIRK COLLEGE
Box 1200
Castlegar, BC V1N 3J1
365-7292

Nelson Campus
2001 Silver King Road
Nelson, BC V1L 1C8
352-6601

Trail Campus
900 Helena Street
Trail, BC V1R 4S6
368-5236

VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Box 24700, Station F,
1155 East Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5N 5V1
871-7171

King Edward Campus
Box 24620, Station F,
1155 East Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5N 5T9
871-7000

Langara Campus
100 West 49th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 2Z6
324-5511

City Centre Campus
250 West Pender Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 1S9
443-8300

Continuing Education
Box 24785, Station F,
1155 East Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5N 5V2
871-7070

Other:

BC INSTITUTE
3700 Willingdon Avenue
Burnaby, BC V5G 3H2
434-3304
Toll free 1-800-667-0676

EMILY CARR COLLEGE
OF ART & DESIGN
1399 Johnston Street,
Granville Island
Vancouver, BC V6H 3R9
844-3800

OPEN LEARNING AGENCY
4355 Mathissi Place
Burnaby, BC V5G 4S8
431-3000
Toll free 1-800-663-1663

PACIFIC MARINE
TRAINING INSTITUTE
265 West Esplanade
North Vancouver, BC
V7M 1A5
985-0622
Other resources

This is only a list of some of the resources mentioned in this guide. There are many more resources available at libraries and Canada Employment Centers.

Labour market information

Video Tape of Women in Trades and Technology Information Session at BCIT, Oct. 19, 1992. Available from BCIT Student Services or from Kate Pelletier (see page 42). This tape has Rosalyn Kunin talking about the job market as well as women in the trades and technologies talking about their jobs.

Women in trades and technologies
Building the Future: Profiles of Canadian Women in Trades by Kate Braid is published by Labour Canada. Available in some libraries and CECs. Also available free from Publication Distribution Centre, Labour Canada, Ottawa, Ont K1A 0J2, 819-994-0543.

Jobstories: I Like the Money, I Like the Work by Donna Stewart and Bev Bradshaw was published by the Learning Resources Society in 1990. This book tells the stories of women in British Columbia who make good money in growth occupations. If your library doesn't have it, you or they can order for $19.95 plus $5.00 handling charge per order from Learning Resources, #102-2511 E. Hastings St., Vancouver, V5K 1Z2, 251-7476.

Immigrant women

New Comers' Guide to Resources and Services in BC, 1991. Available from Multicultural Programs, Suite 902-865 Hornby St., Vancouver, V6Z 2G3. It is best to send a written request but you can also phone. Local calls 660-2395. For toll free calls ask the operator for Zenith 2863.