



# women unlimited news



## Lana Fudge *"I was where I was meant to be ... at the right time!"*

Lana Fudge's life was about to change. After 25 years and four children, her marriage was dissolving. Her current job as a teaching assistant was only 27½ hours a week, so she wasn't making enough to sustain herself. She lived in New Ross, three-quarters of an hour away from the nearest centre, Bridgewater. She knew she couldn't move far from her family and friends ... her support system would be more important than ever.

The year was 2011, and a change was also coming to Women Unlimited in Bridgewater. It was the first time the program linked its recruitment strategies and curriculum directly with an employer ... Michelin North America (Canada) Inc. Bridgewater Facility. Women Unlimited and Michelin came together to create a 14-week program designed purposely to prepare women for careers at the facility. The women were to learn what it would be like to work in an industrial setting. They would learn about the changes that shift work can bring to your life and they would actually spend a 12-hour night shift in the facility. They were to study subjects that made them competitive in Michelin's application and testing processes. And, they would be given opportunities to

meet and speak with women already working at Michelin.

Once, Lana had applied for a job at Michelin but had not been successful. So, when a friend gave her a Women Unlimited flyer with the front fold asking the question, "Are you interested in a career at Michelin?" her immediate response was, "Yes, I am!" It was the right program and the right time and in the right place. She applied, was accepted, and began her daily commute from New Ross to Bridgewater to attend the program.

Looking back, Lana says Women Unlimited built more than just her skill sets. The personal attention, the support from staff and the other participants, the positive feedback coalesced to build her self-esteem and boost her confidence level at a time when she needed it most. When she completed Women Unlimited, she was ready to take on Michelin Bridgewater. And she did, as the first woman from her class to be hired there.

Up to that moment, Lana had always worked with people ... as a teacher's assistant, at the Credit Union, at Bonnie Lea Farm. Suddenly, she was into a 12-hour shift of heavy lifting. She remembers driving home after that first shift crying and asking herself, "What have

## Did you know?

Since 2006, **435** women have participated in Women Unlimited ... a program designed to support diverse, unemployed and underemployed women explore, prepare for, obtain and maintain employment in the trades and technology fields?

Did you know that **94%** of those women completed Women Unlimited programs in Bridgewater, Halifax, Dartmouth and Sydney? Those women have gone on to increase both the diversity level of the trades and technology programs at the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) and of local work-sites across the province.

Finally, did you know that by increasing diversity; productivity, creativity and problem solving increase and workplace accidents decrease? **That has to be good for all Nova Scotians.**

I gotten myself into?" By the end of the week, she found herself thinking, "I can do this! I like working without having the mental work of dealing with people." It was the right job at the right time in the right place.

After a winter's commute to work, Lana decided to move to Bridgewater. A man on her crew introduced her to his wife, who was a Real Estate agent. Together, they found the perfect house for her and she made the move. She loves it! And as a bonus, she's lost 50 pounds and has never felt so fit or so healthy in her life.

Lana says, "Everything fell into place. I was where I was meant to be ... at the right time." We'd like to edit that to "I was where I was meant to be ... at the right time, with the right skills and the right attitude." That's how everything falls into place. ♀

## Counting us in!

Words are powerful. They impact how we act and react. The term of *non-traditional* is regularly used in the trades and technology sector to describe the role women play there. It implies, "Women don't belong." However, the term of *under-represented* implies, "Hey, we need more of you!" At Women Unlimited, we choose to say that women are *under-represented* in trades and technology ... and hey, we do need more diverse women working there!

We believe that workplaces are progressively changing to become more inclusive and respectful of diversity, and Women Unlimited is part of that change. In time and with the commitment of Nova Scotia employers, we can challenge ourselves to lead the country in workforce diversity.

The Ivany Commission Report, *Now or Never: An Urgent Call to Action for Nova Scotians*, made it clear we need to shift our attitudes and become a more inclusive and welcoming province. We must address youth unemployment, immigrant underemployment and raise the employment rates of Aboriginal and African Nova Scotians. And we need to increase the population of adults who complete post-secondary education and/or apprenticeship. We need the courage, imagination and determination to do better.

The new Apprenticeship Special Operating Agency recognizes the need to engage youth, women and underrepresented groups at a strategic systems level. The Irving Shipbuilding Centre of Excellence at the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) is developing a strategy to engage underrepresented groups in the future of shipbuilding. And, employer engagement in apprenticeship is one of the priorities of the Workforce of the Future Table. Progress is in the air.

Since 2006, Women Unlimited has worked in this direction. As a small not-for-profit organization with a big vision, we have worked with the NSCC to increase the number of diverse unemployed and underemployed women who enroll in their trades and technology programs. So far, 435 women have participated in Women Unlimited at four sites across the province, and the enrolment of diverse women in trades and technology classrooms at NSCC has almost doubled to 15%.

Nova Scotians, who want to create a better future for our province, know it's time for diverse women to be equally represented in the trades and technology workforce. Through this inaugural newsletter, we celebrate women who are training and working in these fields and progressive employers who are leading the way by hiring them. Thanks to all of those who are counting us in!

*Doreen Parsons, Women Unlimited Manager*



## Merly Prentt

Since 2008, Merly Prentt has been the Site Coordinator for Women Unlimited at the IT Campus in Halifax. There are themes that run throughout her life that ground her in this position. Growing up in Colombia at a time when women there were voiceless, she said, "I could see how unfair things were ... and I had to speak up about it." When she immigrated to Canada, she worked as an employment counsellor for Spanish speaking people. There, she found joy in empowering the women with whom she worked. Her move from Ontario to Nova Scotia was precipitated by her need to give her daughter a safe, secure environment in which to grow and thrive. The themes of speaking up for women, empowering women and providing a space for women to find themselves had already taken root.

Once they settled into Nova Scotia, Merly began applying for jobs. An ad in the newspaper led her to apply for the position of Diversity Facilitator with the Hypatia Association, an organization that promotes the full participation of women in science, trades and technology training programs and workplaces. In that job, Merly was to reach out to women who were further marginalized because of their race, ethnicity, sexual identity or disability. Once again, she worked to support diverse women to find their voices and define their strengths.

When the position of Site Coordinator for Women Unlimited became available, Merly stepped up to the plate. "I was so afraid. I didn't know if I could do it." But she set about her new work, advocating for the women in the program, helping them build their self-esteem, teaching them that they already have power, but they need to own that power and use it. When asked what has made Women Unlimited so successful over the years, Merly said, "We don't have a mold that women must fit into. We mold the program to fit each woman."

And what nurtures her, as she works so hard for the women in her program? "I have grown so much in this work. I am much more confident. There is so much support at Women Unlimited, from everyone ... from the training that we're sent on, from all of the other staff members, from the management ... any question that I have, anything that I need ... someone finds a way to support me. I have a sense of wholeness here. This is where I fit. This is where I'm meant to be." And so, the themes that echo throughout Merly's life ... speaking up for women, empowering diverse women and providing a safe space for women to find themselves ... are the things she sought for herself as well. ♀



## Sarah Robinson – Red Seal Automotive Service Technician

Women Unlimited would like to congratulate Sarah Robinson for achieving her Red Seal as an Automotive Service Technician. Sarah completed the Women Unlimited program in 2008 and went on to graduate from the Automotive Service & Repair Program at the NSCC Akerley Campus. Sarah is currently employed as a mechanic with Bridgewater Mazda.

## Stephanie MacNeil *"It's not just a job for me ... its what I do. I'm a mechanic ... that's who I am."*



At 19, Stephanie found her way to Women Unlimited, having eked out a living through a series of dead-end jobs. She knew she wanted more but didn't know what "more" was going to look like. She told her employment counsellor she liked working with her hands, and she enjoyed good, honest physical labour. It was that counsellor who connected the dots and put Stephanie on track for the Women Unlimited program.

That year, Stephanie was one of 80 women who applied for the 20 seats at the Women Unlimited program at the NSCC Marconi Campus in Sydney. Her positive attitude and her

obvious commitment to creating a better future for herself won out, and Stephanie was on the first leg of her journey.

Women Unlimited begins with the Career Decision-Making Program (CDMP). This free program provides participants with an opportunity to explore careers in trades and technology and to take part in career decision-making activities. Through a combination of hands-on workshops, field trips, industry-based activities, work/life balance sessions, math upgrading and job shadowing with local employers, the women work together to enhance their skills and to prepare for entrance into trades or technology training or to move directly into employment.

Stephanie was enthusiastic as she went to all the shop visits, site visits and employer discussions in the CDMP. She loved it all! How on earth was she going to decide which trade to study? It was when she entered the Industrial Mechanical (Millwright) shop she knew. This was where she was meant to be. Millwrights so called because long ago they built the watermills and windmills that made early industry run. They worked mainly with wood. Modern Millwrights work with steel and other materials and must combine the skills of other mechanical trades in order to successfully install industrial machinery or assemble machines from pre-fabricated parts.

They must also be able to read blueprints and other schematics. This was not a program for the faint of heart!

The next leg of her journey was enrolling in the Industrial Mechanical (Millwright) program at the Marconi Campus. She tackled her program with the same commitment and spirit that defined her time in the CDMP. Once, she dropped into the Women Unlimited office beaming with pride. She wanted to tell the Women Unlimited staff she could now convert measurements from metric to imperial ... in her head! She'd found her stride, made excellent marks and completed her projects on time and with great precision. She finished that leg of her journey by graduating as one of the top students in her class.

Stephanie was interested in working in the West and pursued her job search daily. She finally found a company in Edmonton that provided her with her first step on the final leg of her journey ... working as a Millwright Apprentice. In discussion with Stephanie, she says: *"I've made a lot of friends from the companies I've worked with and I will get my journey papers ... I love millwright ... it's not just a job for me ... its what I do ... I'm a mechanic ... that's who I am."* ♀



## SoNya Smith

What's in a name? In this case, a capital letter smack dab in the middle! SoNya put her own unique spin on her name to draw attention to the way it sounds (son-eye-ya). But her name isn't the only unique thing about SoNya. Her entire wardrobe is purple ... except for her coveralls. If she could get her hands on a purple pair, her coveralls would be too. SoNya's name and colour choices are only a small part of her story and the exceptional turns she's taken.

At 38, and a single mother of three, SoNya began making changes in her life. She applied and was accepted into GroundWorks ... a pilot project that gave her the opportunity to upgrade her skills and to learn about possibilities open to her in the trades and technology sectors. There, she started studying for her GED and within six months, she wrote and passed all 5 GED subjects. Next, she attended Women Unlimited, a program designed to support women to enter trades and technology programs and to find their places in industries where women have been historically under-represented.

Once she entered Women Unlimited, SoNya hit her stride ... she loved all of the hands-on workshops the program offered, exploring a variety of programs like Metal Fabrication, Gas Technician and Power Engineering Technology. At first, Welding held her in its thrall, but then she met Heavy Duty Truck & Transport and fell ... hook, line and combustion engine. Growing up, she'd helped her brothers when they worked on their cars ... she was Hand-me-that-wrench-SoNya. This was different ... this was SoNya-in-Charge!

With her GED in hand, and Women Unlimited staff behind her 100%, SoNya applied and was accepted into the NSCC Heavy Duty Truck & Transport program. She's the only woman in the class, where she gets to break down a whole engine and build it back up again. She loves all of it.

When asked how far she wants to take this, SoNya said, "I want to get my Red Seal and make this my life's work." With SoNya's positive attitude and determination, we know she'll make this happen. ♀

**Christina Sachs** *"I'd never held any of those tools in my hands. I'd never welded before. But, I got in that class and I've never looked back. It's the right choice for me."*

Christina Sachs bounces when she walks. She has an infectious laugh, the gift of gab and an onerous burden. A graduate of Women Unlimited in 2013, she is now in her first year of NSCC's two-year Automotive Collision Repair program, near the top of her class and set to enter this year's Skills Competition. How did she end up here?

She and her younger brother, Michael, grew up in Fall River. Their father was a mechanic who spent time puttering in the garage. There, he encouraged three-year old Michael to paint his car ... with a roller. Christina knew that was the place to be: the place where the fun stuff happened. She wanted in. She also wanted to placate her 'girlie' side with dance lessons and art classes.

Leaving school at sixteen, Christina began working low-waged retail jobs, which sustained her until she and her partner became pregnant. That was the impetus she needed to go back to school. First she graduated from high school, then she entered NSCC's Academic and Career Connections program, which she completed ... first juggling her pregnancy and then the birth of her son, Layton Michael.

She began to look into other programs that would build a more secure future for her

son. She wanted him to be proud of her. She explored the idea of becoming an Ultrasound Technician or a Licensed Practical Nurse but neither suited her. Michael had entered NSCC in the Automotive Collision Repair program and encouraged her to follow suit. No way was she going to follow in the footsteps of her little brother! What if he was better at it than she was? No way!

Nothing prepared her for what came next. Michael was taken from her family in a car accident. Christina struggled to make sense of something so huge. Tears spring to her eyes when she speaks about him. "I think about him every day. I carry him with me."

Six months later, an employment counsellor told her about the Women Unlimited program, and Christina applied and was accepted. There, she found the support she needed to move on with her life. "They're always there for you in every way. If I needed a shoulder to cry on, I could count on Shelley to be that shoulder every time." Automotive Collision Repair was not one of the programs slated for a 'hands-on experience' that year, so Christina went to all of the other shops in search of her future. In the end, Automotive Collision Repair was the one that called out to her ... so she enrolled.

"I'd never held any of those tools in my



hands. I'd never welded before. But, I got in that class and I've never looked back. It's the right choice for me." She's doing her work term at Overall Collision, Custom & Restoration Ltd, a family run business with "the best painter in the province." They let her do it all. On her first day, she was told to prime a car. "Whose car is it? Is it a shop car? A family car?" "It's a customer's car." "Really!?" But she did it and did it well.

So, in the end, how did she get here? Is she here because she wants her son to be proud of the work she does? Is she here because she wants to keep her brother's dream alive? Or, is she here because she loves the work? All of those answers are true. Christina's where she's supposed to be, with someone watching her and someone watching over her. ♀

## Women Unlimited's Employers

We would like to send out our appreciation to the following employers/unions, who hired Women Unlimited graduates in their chosen fields:

ABCO Industries Ltd.	City Mazda	JW Lindsay Enterprises Limited	Saunders Mazda
Able Electric Ltd.	Composites Atlantic	Lunenburg Industrial Foundry & Engineering	Simplex Grinnel
ACE Machining Ltd.	Dalhousie University	Mackay's Truck & Trailer Center	South Shore District Health Authority
ADI Limited	Department of National Defense	Maritime Helicopter Project	South Shore Regional School Board
Aecon Buildings – Atlantic	Do All Industries Ltd.	Metro Suzuki	Stantec
Alva Construction Ltd.	D.P.M. Solutions Inc.	Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.	Sunsel Systems Manufacturing Corp.
Atlantica Mechanical Contractors Inc.	Easco Electric Ltd.	MilAero Electronics Atlantic Inc.	Sysco Atlantic
Balls Creek Alignment	Eco Electric Ltd.	Nova Enterprises Limited	THI Construction Limited
Belfor	Eddy Group Limited	Nova Wood Products	Trican Tire Distributors
Bridgewater Mazda	Encanex	Nova Scotia Department of Transportation	Twin City Electric
Canadian Welding Bureau	ESSO	Nova Scotia Power	UA Local 56
Cape Breton Regional Municipality	FMF Cape Scott	O'Reagan's Toyota	Wajax Industries
Capital Health	Fossil Power Systems Inc.	Retire Well Renovations	Westin Nova Scotian Hotel
Carpenters Local 84	Foxwood Contracting Inc.	RKO Steel Ltd.	
Carroll South Shore	Halifax Regional Municipality	Rod's Machine Shop Ltd.	
Chester Building Supplies	IBEW: Energize 625		
	Irving Shipbuilding Inc.		
	IWK Health Centre		