

Helping women find meaningful work

Minerva Foundation program aims to get unemployed or underemployed professional women back to work.



The course allows women to explore the kind of work they want to do, and provides advice on how to find a job.

Photograph by: Nick Procajlo, PNG, Vancouver Sun

Looking for a job is rarely a fun way to spend your energy.

But for those who, for whatever reason, have found themselves out of the professional workforce for any length of time, the task is even tougher.

There are those nagging gaps in your resume, your interview skills are more than likely a little rusty, and your confidence in your ability to compete low.

You may not even know what you want to do any more, or really what kind of work you are best suited for.

The Minerva Foundation for BC Women has devoted plenty of thought to this dilemma in recent years, and, in response, has developed two unique programs designed to get women back into the workplace.

Beginning this Tuesday, the foundation will host its 18th session of Minerva Helping Women Work – a five-month intensive course for women over the age of 30 years.

Participants must have post-secondary education, previous professional work experience and either underemployed or unemployed.

Karen LeClair, program manager, said many of the women who enroll in the course are mothers looking to get back into a meaningful job now that their children are older.

But many others are new to town, or even to Canada, and don't know how to get their careers back on track.

"In this city it's all about your network. You don't find work by just sending out your application. They (potential employers) don't even call for interviews quite often," she said.

The course allows women to explore what kind of work they want to do, and provides solid advice on resume writing, mentoring and the chance to practice their pitch in mock job interviews.

It's not easy, said LeClair. Participants are required to do some serious soul searching before the course is finished.

"It is intense," she said.

The pay-off comes with a great new job. LeClair said the average participant lands work within six to 12 months of course completion.

In one case, a woman with a PhD in water sciences was hired as a researcher at the University of B.C., while another participant successfully made the shift from a past career as a judge in another country to heading up a provincial tribunal.

“These women are highly qualified. They have a lot to contribute. It’s just finding the right niche for them,” LeClair said.

Minerva also offers a four-week Kick Start program for recent graduates or those who’ve found themselves recently unemployed.

Participants in this course often know what they want to do already but need help through mentoring, mock interviews and resume writing to land that dream job.

According to LeClair, 78 per cent of participants find “meaningful and sustainable” work within a year.

There are costs involved with both programs, though they are heavily subsidized through private donations and government grants. Fees associated with the five-month course, for instance, are \$750.

But there are also bursaries available for those in need of financial aid.

“Never let the registration fee be the reason you don’t submit your registration,” LeClair said.

To learn more about the courses, or about the Minerva Foundation, go to www.theminervafoundation.com.