

WAR INDUSTRY TRAINING FOR WPA WORKERS IN THE
MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In July, 1940, the Minnesota Work Projects Administration established a vocational training project for those persons currently employed on WPA rolls desirous of training for defense industries. The WPA vocational training project depended for its operation upon the utilization of vocational facilities in the public schools. The war industries training program was built around a cooperative relationship between the United States Office of Education, the United States Employment Service, the State Board of Education, and the WPA Division of Training and Reemployment. Since the summer of 1940, approximately 8,000 persons in the state of Minnesota have received the opportunity and benefit of vocational training instruction. Of this statewide total, approximately 5,000 have been drawn from the Twin City area. Fortunately the Minneapolis public schools offered excellent facilities for war industry instruction and have been used to capacity during the past eighteen months. The WPA Division of Training and Reemployment has supplied approximately 50% of the total enrollment in the pre-employment training courses.

The selection of persons from the WPA rolls for training in the occupations needed in war industry production has not been a haphazard process. Every candidate has received an interview in order to determine his desire for training, his previous work experience, and in order to ascertain such important factors as health, age, and educational background. It was decided early in the program that not only should the prospective trainee be thoroughly interviewed but because of the requirements demanded by industry and the vocational school authorities, aptitude tests were to be given by a competent psychologist. The purpose of these tests was to determine mechanical dexterity in selected occupational fields as well as the general learning ability.

Following the interview and aptitude tests, project workers were carefully selected for assignment to vocational schools with consideration given to the current requirements of industry as pertains to age, physical condition, and previous work history. Because of the rather thorough pre-selection program and the adequacy of the vocational training instruction, we are able to report a record of placement that is almost 100% perfect. At the present time, out of a total of over 8,000 persons trained, less than 40 are now back on WPA rolls. The main accomplishments of placement, of course, have been in the Twin City area in such industrial plants as Minneapolis Moline, Honeywell, Northwest Airlines, Northwest Aeronautical, and other industries having war production contracts.

The courses of instruction have not been decided by any one particular agency but are the result of surveying the employment market and determining those occupations in which there was and is a critical need for skilled workers. Behind the cooperative relationship

of the above mentioned agencies stands an advisory committee made up of representatives of all parties directly attached to the war industry training activities. The purpose of this advisory committee is to currently survey the employment market and make determinations as to the expansion and retraction of vocational instruction as necessitated by war production contracts. At the present time courses are being offered in such occupational fields as aircraft sheet metal, machine shop, electrical assembly, radio assembly, welding, aircraft woodworking, power machine shop, drafting, and aircraft engine mechanics. This list, as previously pointed out, may be expanded or curtailed as the needs of industry dictate.

Upon completion of the course of instruction, all trainees are immediately referred to the local USES office where they are interviewed, classified, and referred to local industries. The WPA training program has a competent staff of reemployment officers working closely with the officials of the USES offices. The objective of the reemployment representatives is to secure equal and immediate consideration of WPA trainees for private industry employment.

WAR INDUSTRY TRAINING FOR WOMEN

When it became obvious early in 1942 that the available man power in Minneapolis would not be sufficient to keep factories running at full production, the training of women for industry began to receive serious consideration.

The first class of women trainees was organized in March, 1942, at Miller Vocational to train workers for radio assembly work. Twenty women were enrolled, 50% of whom were on WPA and were paid a living wage while in school. Instructors were at first reluctant to accept the newcomers; employers were skeptical; men trainees in similar classes were openly disdainful. The women themselves were at first bewildered, awkward, and afraid. But not for long! Soon the instructors were willing to admit that the women were not only doing as good work as the men, but in some types of work they were even proving superior to the men.

From that time on the number of women trainees increased rapidly. Every six weeks a new group of women was assigned as the others completed their courses. Nokomis Junior High opened a class in electric assembly and coil winding in April. The fall of 1942 saw the greatest activity in training for women. Aircraft sheet metal was opened to women in Minneapolis in August; the first class in woodworking instruction began in September. At about the same time the first class of women mechanics for repair and maintenance of airplane engines was begun at East High Annex. Today all but two of the women of that first

class are servicing airplane engines at Northwest Airlines. Women trainees for machine operation were assigned to Marshall High School in November; to Dunwoody Institute in December. Soon women donned goggles and helmets and started training in welding at East High School.

At the present time, 210 WPA women are in training in classes in Minneapolis. Since last March 270 women of the Hennepin County WPA rolls have completed vocational training courses of one kind or another under the Federal training program.

Everywhere the results have been gratifying. Not only have the women demonstrated that they can absorb the training; they have also proved beyond a doubt that they can make good on the job.

On those who replied to the follow-up questionnaires, 160 women indicated that they had received employment in war industries. Of those who did not reply, it is safe to assume that nearly all received private employment of some kind since a very small percentage have returned to the WPA rolls.

To be sure there were failures along the way. Wherever physical disabilities, family problems, or poor learning attitudes entered into the picture, the adjustment to a new occupation was difficult and sometimes impossible. More recently the handicaps of overage and overweight have become limiting factors, not so much from the standpoint of successful training but more from the resistance of employers to any modification of arbitrary age and weight specifications. However, as the labor surplus shrinks more and more, the outlook for employment for this latter group becomes more promising.

All in all, the training of women of all ages, of all levels of education, and of all types of previous work experience has been, and will continue to be, a healthy and heartening experiment. It will most certainly change fundamentally all previous concepts of the contribution of women to the social and economic life of the country.

Developments in Minneapolis are doubtless typical of hundreds of communities throughout the United States. Predictions as to the number of women who will be employed in industry during 1943 reach the staggering figure of 15,000,000. To the training of this total, WPA has contributed its full share. Minneapolis may well be proud of those gallant women who have sought to give service in return for help throughout the lean years, and who now, in time of our country's need, stand ready to pioneer in new fields in order to make contribution to the battle of production.

The Work Projects Administration wishes to express its appreciation to the vocational education coordinators and instructors and to

all those persons who have so willingly given up their time and energy in the development of this program. From the State Board of Education on down through the instructors in every class, there has been a genuine willingness to work with and understand the problems inherent in the WPA training program. WPA workers have appreciated the courtesy extended to them by the school authorities and in the majority of instances, have shown their appreciation by an immediate lift in morale which has resulted in better citizens doing better work in war plants. Classes have been operating in Miller Vocational School, Edison High, North, East, South, Roosevelt, Central, and West High Schools, as well as Nokomis Junior High School. To all of the officials responsible for the direction of these activities, we extend our appreciation and praise.



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