

# THE FACTS

## The Importance of Education and Training to Women:

### **Women are nearly half the labor force**

- Women comprise 46 percent of the labor force. <sup>1</sup>

### **Many women are their own or their families' major income support...**

- Fully 47 percent of women are on their own (27 percent are single, 20 percent are widowed, divorced, or separated).<sup>2</sup>
- 18 percent of all families are headed by a woman.<sup>3</sup>

### **...but women are disproportionately poor**

- Three-fourths (76 percent) of the poor are women and children.<sup>4</sup>
- More than one woman in four (28 percent) heads a household that is at or below the poverty level.<sup>5</sup>
- Women are concentrated in the lowest-paying occupations. For example, women make up 79 percent of clerical workers and 64 percent of retail workers.<sup>6</sup>

### **People with low literacy levels are at a particular disadvantage in moving up the income ladder**

- Those with low literacy levels are much more likely to be unemployed than employed full- or part-time — 59 percent of the unemployed have low literacy compared to 37 percent of the employed.<sup>7</sup>
- Half (51 percent) of those on welfare in Illinois lack a high school credential<sup>8</sup> and three-quarters of welfare recipients are in the two lowest literacy levels of the five defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey.<sup>9</sup>

### **Meanwhile, skill requirements are rising and employers can't find skilled workers**

- 42 percent of surveyed firms in four major metropolitan areas report that skill requirements have risen for all of their new job categories, with almost three-quarters of all jobs requiring customer contact and more than half (56 percent) requiring computer use.<sup>10</sup>
- 60 percent of manufacturers report that current workers lack basic math skills and almost as many (55 percent) find serious deficiencies in workers' basic writing and comprehension skills.<sup>11</sup>

### **Education and training are proven strategies for raising incomes**

- Graduating from high school increases working mothers' earnings by over \$1.60 per hour (over \$3,300 per year). In contrast, each year of work experience is worth only 10 cents per hour. <sup>12</sup>
- Even three months of training significantly increases the number of jobs for which low-skilled workers can qualify.<sup>13</sup>
- A woman with a two-year associate's degree earns 34 percent more than a woman with a high school education (\$30,919 vs. \$23,061).<sup>14</sup>
- A woman with a bachelor's degree earns 65 percent more than a woman with a high school education (\$37,993 vs. \$23,061).<sup>15</sup>

## Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of Labor, *Employment & Earnings* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2000).
2. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Money Income in the United States: 1999* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000).
3. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Money Income in the United States: 1999* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000).
4. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Poverty in the United States: 1999* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000), Series P60-210.
5. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Poverty in the United States: 1999* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000), Series P60-210.
6. U.S. Department of Labor, *Employment & Earnings* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2000).
7. Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center (*based on unpublished data from the National Adult Literacy Survey for November 1998 Literacy Conference*), Table 3.1, 'Labor Status.'
8. Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Research and Analysis (*based on data from University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children, September 2000*), p.c. with Women Employed.
9. National Adult Literacy Survey, *Illinois Adults Receiving Public Assistance by Prose Literacy Level* (Unpublished data, 1992), Table 3.6P.
10. Harry Holzer, "Employer Skill Needs and Hiring Procedures," presentation for workshop held at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, May 15, 1996, in *Assessing the Midwest Economy: Looking Back for the Future* (Chicago: Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, April 1997), 39.
11. The Manufacturing Institute, *The Skills Gap: A Survey of American Manufacturers* (Washington, DC: The Manufacturing Institute, 1998), 15.
12. Roberta Spalter-Roth and Heidi Hartmann, "Increasing Working Mothers' Earnings," in *Education and Job Training Under Welfare Reform*, ed. Institute for Women's Policy Research (Washington, DC: 1997), 4.
13. Virginia L. Carlson and Nikolas C. Theodore, *Are There Enough Jobs? Welfare Reform and Labor Market Reality* (Chicago: Illinois Job Gap Project, 1995), 21.
14. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Money Income in the United States: 1999* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000).
15. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Money Income in the United States: 1999* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000).

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