The Importance of Education and Training to Women:

Women are nearly half the labor force
➢ Women comprise 46 percent of the labor force.¹

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).²
➢ 18 percent of all families are headed by a woman.³

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

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.⁷
➢ Half (51 percent) of those on welfare in Illinois lack a high school credential⁸ and three-quarters of welfare recipients are in the two lowest literacy levels of the five defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey.⁹

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.¹⁰
➢ 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.¹¹

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.¹²
➢ Even three months of training significantly increases the number of jobs for which low-skilled workers can qualify.¹³
➢ 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).¹⁴
➢ A woman with a bachelor’s degree earns 65 percent more than a woman with a high school education ($37,993 vs. $23,061).¹⁵
Endnotes

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.’
9. National Adult Literacy Survey, Illinois Adults Receiving Public Assistance by Prose Literacy Level (Unpublished data, 1992), Table 3.6P.

Women Employed

111 N. Wabash, Suite 1300
Chicago, Illinois 60602
Phone 312/782-3902
Fax 312/782-5249
www.womenemployed.org

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