



## Coaching tomorrow's role models

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04/02/06 00:00:00

While success doesn't come easy, the reward is the payoff.

That was one of the messages delivered to hundreds of young Halton women who attended the Women as Career Coaches event in Burlington on Wednesday night.

Sponsored by the Halton Education Council in partnership with the Ontario Women's Directorate, the evening gave young women a chance to gain access to the wisdom of adult role models, who encouraged their young counterparts to strive to achieve their goals and dreams.

One of the career coaches offering words of inspiration was Cheryl Pounder, a hugely successful member of Canada's Olympic women's hockey team.

"The harder it is to get there, the more rewarding it will be," Pounder told the audience of students, who acknowledged her accomplishments with a standing ovation.

Another of the evening's spotlight speakers told the young women to make sure they speak up as they pursue their dreams.

"Write a letter to the editor or start a blog," said Michelle Dagnino, of the effort that has to be made in order to reap the eventual reward.

Dagnino, a law student, was named one of MacLean's Top 25 leaders under 30 in Canada. In high school she formed a group called ASPIRE, which gave young girls a chance to interact with community leaders while helping to promote healthy self-esteem.

She spent a year abroad as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) child labour campaign co-ordinator. The position was based out of Brussels, Belgium and gave Dagnino the opportunity to travel around the world with businesses and grassroots organizations in an effort to prevent child labour in their communities. She moved to Toronto in 2002 after feeling a need to promote more activism in Canada.

Dagnino suggested that Canadian women are slipping in political involvement with men still making up 80 per cent of our government.

"Take the energy and inspiration from this night and do something about it," she challenged her young audience.

Another guest speaker who invited the crowd to aim high was Jill Rydall, who more than 20 years ago became the first female member of the Sault Ste. Marie carpenters' union. Before she was 25, Rydall was an instructor of carpentry for a North Bay college.

She offered a positive perspective on the tremendous opportunities available to women in the skilled trades industry.

Sandra Pupatello, Minister of Community and Social Services and the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues offered words of inspiration to the more than 400 students and career coaches at the Burlington Convention Centre.

She said having an "I can do that," outlook has got her to where she is today. Pupatello also stressed the importance of women taking leadership roles in all sectors, but most importantly in politics.

"There is nothing wrong with being wrong or failing. You just need to move on," Pupatello said.

Through her speech she encouraged women to believe in themselves and be confident. She concluded by thanking the career coaches for their participation.

"You are helping to build strong young girls and the nation needs that."

Five key principles were covered during the Women as Career Coaches seminar -- each one was followed by a clip from The Wizard of Oz. The principles included accessing your allies, focusing on your journey, learning is ongoing, change is constant and follow your heart.

'Your journey is your own' was the theme of the event. To remember the evening each participant was presented with a spirit stone as a gift of inspiration.