



Power of Women: A hand up, not a hand out

Last year the BCGEU became aware of an amazing group of women with a mandate to help other women move out of poverty and into self-sustaining, family supporting careers. The union jumped on board to help.

Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF) is Canada's only national public foundation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls. They don't ask for government funding and are totally funded through donations from individuals, foundations, companies and now unions.

CWF started as a conversation between two women in a backyard in the late 1980's, trying to figure out how to stamp out workplace sexism. One of these women was Rosemary Brown, who was elected to the B.C. legislature in 1972, becoming the first black woman elected to a Canadian parliamentary body. The conversation led to Brown becoming a founder of the CWF.

Since 1991, CWF has become one of the top ten women's foundations in the world, funding over 1,000 initiatives in every province and territory.

CWF raises money to fund initiatives in three areas:

1. Ending violence against women
2. Empowering girls ages 9–13 with confidence, courage, and

critical thinking skills

3. Moving low-income women out of poverty

CWF firmly believes, as the BCGEU does, that when you help a woman you help her family, her community and help create a better society for us all. We call this the ripple effect. For example:

A few years ago a woman named Rina came through a CWF-funded program. Rina worked in the sex industry and was trapped in the world of prostitution and drugs. Then she got pregnant. But leaving the sex trade wasn't easy – she didn't have any skills or contacts.

Rina learned about a CWF-funded program that gives women skills and resources to open their own businesses. Rina completed the program and launched her plus-sized clothing business, Maximum Woman — now an online store, with 2 retail locations.

She's very proud to have achieved \$1 million in sales by her third year and is creating her own clothing line. You may have seen Rina on CBC's *Dragon's Den*, turning down the deal they offered her, because it wasn't good enough.

Since then, Rina has hired a few friends who were working in the sex trade, and is now a CWF spokesperson. She sponsored another woman, who is now self-supporting, running an arts program for at-risk youth.

How does CWF do it?

Their groundbreaking *Women Moving Women* campaign raises funds to help women living in poverty in Canada. The campaign's goal is to move 2500 women on their journeys out of poverty in the next 5 years.

CWF funds organizations that adopt holistic approaches to engage women in their economic futures. Every \$2500 raised allows another woman to enrol in a program to gain the skills, resources and confidence to achieve economic independence – providing a hand up, not a handout.

Companies are also coming together to sponsor women. The BCGEU wants the trade union movement to do the same.

CWF provides women with skills to work through life's challenges, and support in other crucial areas like building confidence, networking and child care.

The BCGEU is adding to the ripple effect by helping the Canadian Women's Foundation continue the legacy of sister Rosemary Brown. We ask you to join *Women Moving Women* with a pledge of your own. Go to www.cdnwomen.org for information or to make a pledge.



"Until all of us have made it, none of us have made it." **Rosemary Brown**

Photo: Order of BC archive



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