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FALL 2018 Edition 3



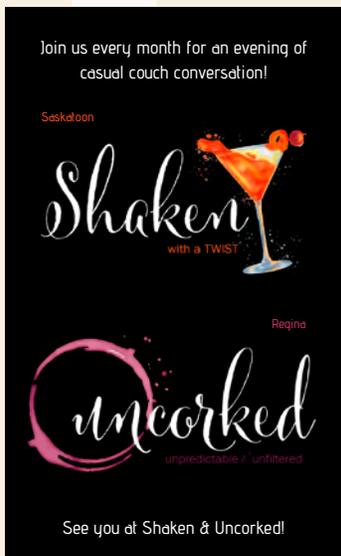
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS SASKATCHEWAN

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WESK reaches out to support Indigenous women entrepreneurs

Matchstick program will be presented in several locations around the province

Every entrepreneur is daring, driven and determined. Not every entrepreneur, however, has the social, cultural or financial support she deserves and needs to succeed.

It's one of the fundamental reasons why Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan, now known as WESK, was founded more than 20 years ago. Much has been accomplished since then, but more is left to be done.

WESK has therefore founded a new initiative called Matchstick: Spark for Indigenous Entrepreneurs. It recognizes that Indigenous women experience similar challenges to all women, and most entrepreneurs; but they also face additional challenges.

"Last year, WESK launched a new brand, an inclusive brand, addressing the needs of Indigenous, newcomer and young entrepreneurs, regardless of the stage of business growth," said Prabha Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer of WESK.



"It encompasses the entrepreneur of today and tomorrow — the millennial, the newcomer, the Indigenous woman."
— Prabha Mitchell

"For WESK, it was really important to walk the talk and invest in Indigenous women entrepreneurs. It was important to work with the communities toward economic growth and independence."

There was also a profound need to emphasize the demographics of Indigenous communities, she added. Young Indigenous women make up a significant proportion of the Saskatchewan population; more than 36 per cent are under the age of 15.

In addition, "there seems to be a real gravitation to entrepreneurship. You hear stories about people starting their own businesses to realize their dreams."

WESK put a proposal for Matchstick before Western Economic Diversification, a primary funder of the organization, and the project was approved with provincial and federal funding.

"WESK did not do this alone. We needed to work with our Indigenous partners, as well," Mitchell added.

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Matchstick: Awaken Your Independence

Indigenous women face many challenges in their pursuit of entrepreneurship. Some of these they share with all entrepreneurs: access to capital, role models, mentors and networks, for example.

Yet there are additional barriers to overcome. Prejudice, a greater burden of responsibility for children and lack of access to training and technology are just some of these.

WESK has long recognized the issues, and to address them, we launched a new program specifically for Indigenous women entrepreneurs: Matchstick. A dedicated strategy to support and assist Indigenous women will help fuel economic independence, drive growth and foster entrepreneurial activity in Indigenous communities.

WESK is approaching the strategy in three phases.

Phase One:

Phase one is complete. Its focus was on needs assessment, data collection and analysis and consultation. We determined that an advisory council, comprised of Indigenous leaders, was a crucial piece of the strategy. A second key task was to organize roundtable discussions with stakeholders, which would point us to barriers, concerns and gaps in support.



matchstick

spark for indigenous entrepreneurs

Phase Two:

The second phase of developing Matchstick began in May and will continue through March, 2019. It will address training and capacity building, including the delivery of business training workshops in up to seven communities throughout Saskatchewan. These workshops will develop an

entrepreneurial mindset and skills in Indigenous women that will support their participation and performance in a wide range of entrepreneurial activities. Other elements of phase two include:

- The development of a culturally-sensitive curriculum and materials
- The creation of training content including interviews with successful entrepreneurs
- The delivery of workshops to Indigenous women entrepreneurs to foster and develop a profound understanding of entrepreneurship.

“Our women are the life givers and caregivers in our Nations. They are the heart and soul of all of our families and communities. When they succeed we all succeed.”
— Chief Bobby Cameron

Phase Three:

The final and ongoing phase of the Matchstick program begins in spring, 2019. It will address service delivery for start-ups and supports for existing businesses that require assistance, ranging from advising to financing. Indigenous women from across the province will have access to the programming provided by WESK.



We have made considerable progress. The advisory council has been established, with members from key Indigenous organizations, agencies and educational institutions. The roundtables have been held, and WESK is fully engaged in preparing for Phase Two workshops and training sessions.

WESK is confident that Matchstick will address and satisfy the project objectives:

To better engage and involve Indigenous women in entrepreneurship

To strengthen Indigenous women's role in entrepreneurship

To address the lack of entrepreneurial awareness of business ownership as an opportunity

To respond to identified barriers such as limited or no access to capital or equity

To provide links to business resources

To encourage the building of relationships with business service providers

To increase the number of Indigenous entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan

To influence and help existing business owners in growing and developing their current enterprises

To cultivate support for business in Indigenous communities

(Continued from page 1)

Those partners include the First Nations University, the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN), the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation (SIEF), FHQ Developments from File Hills First Nation and Onion Lake First Nation.

The program's first phase, a series of roundtables in four communities to discuss challenges and opportunities, has been completed. WESK is embarking on Phase Two this fall, delivering training in seven communities: Saskatoon, North Battleford, Regina, Prince Albert, Fort Qu'Appelle, Yorkton and Onion Lake.

Phase Three will connect Indigenous entrepreneurs with existing WESK programs, such as business advising, financial planning and funding.

"Indigenous women face all the barriers of all female entrepreneurs," said Mitchell. "However, they also face racism, an even more profound lack of access to capital and selling challenges.

"One of the emerging themes was the importance of integrating personal development and cultural imperatives with business growth. They want to meld their way of life with their businesses. We are determined to help."

"The women we meet and talk to throughout the province aspire to become successful entrepreneurs for many reasons," added program leader Lori Jestin-Knaus, "whether it is to fulfill their passion, provide for their family or give back to their community. We are here to support these amazing



women so that can achieve their potential.



From left to right, the Matchstick Advisory Council and WESK staff: WESK Manager of Programs Lori Jestin-Knaus, Angela Pratt, Thomas Benjoe, WESK CEO Prabha Mitchell, Gloria Waskewitch and Kay Lerat. Richard Missens is also a member of the council.

Our Matchstick Advisory Council

Richard M. Missens

Richard is a member of the Pasqua First Nation and a senior faculty member at the School of Business and Public Administration at the First Nations University of Canada. He is currently the Department Head for the Business School. He is also director for FHQ Developments Inc., an economic development corporation owned by the 11 Indigenous Nations of the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council.

"I am very happy to be a part of the important work with WESK and the advisory committee. Empowering Indigenous women to be business owners empowers families and contributes to our societies far beyond just wealth creation." — Richard Missens

Cree Cheechoo

Cree is a member of the Moose Cree First Nation in Ontario. She started at the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation (SIEF) in March 2016, where she is a Business Development Officer for the SIEF Contribution Program (SCP). Her role is to assist First Nations Entrepreneurs throughout Saskatchewan to either start up or expand their businesses through the grant program.

"Matchstick is a great initiative because women have many barriers to overcome in order to succeed in the business world and this program will be a stepping stone in achieving their success." — Cree Cheechoo

Angela Pratt

Angela, a member of Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, sits on the board for the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network (SFNEDN). In addition to her many educational achievements, she has completed training through the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and Canadian Centre for Aboriginal Entrepreneurship (CCAEE) partnership to deliver the Aboriginal Business and Entrepreneurship Skills Training program (Aboriginal BEST). Currently, she works for FHQ Developments as the Economic Development and Business Advisor.

Kay Lerat

Kay is the Executive Director of the FSIN Women's Secretariat, and is based in Saskatoon. She has also served as Policy and Implementation Officer at the National Centre for First Nations Governance.

"The Treaty right to livelihood encompasses economic self-sufficiency. The FSIN saw this partnership with WESK as an opportunity to increase the economic self-sufficiency of First Nations women, through entrepreneurship, and thereby improve the well-being of families." — Heather Bear, Vice-Chief, FSIN.

Thomas Benjoe

Thomas is the president and Chief Executive Officer for FHQ Developments, and from the Muscowpetung First Nation. FHQ Developments is the economic development corporation for the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, managing partnerships and new business ventures on behalf of its limited partners, the 11 First Nations of FHQTC. He has a bachelor of administration from First Nations University of Canada/University of Regina.

Gloria Waskewitch

Gloria is the economic development officer at Onion Lake Business Development Corp. Her role includes business planning and proposals for the corporation's businesses, the Onion Lake Cree Nation and its members. She holds a Bachelor of Applied Financial Services degree from Lakeland College in Vermilion, Alberta and has extensive experience providing financial and administrative services for a variety of organizations.



Indigenous women take on the challenges of business



Kimberly Parent

Owner, Saskatoon Salsa Dance Company

Kimberly Parent and Devon Fiddler are two women entrepreneurs who have successfully launched thriving businesses based on their love of dance, fashion and art.

It wasn't easy, of course. Both Parent and Fiddler worked during the day and built their businesses after hours before taking the full-time entrepreneurial plunge. Along the way, they encountered other barriers, as well — and some of them might surprise you.

Find out more about their paths, and how they think WESK's new Matchstick program might help smooth the way for other Indigenous women entrepreneurs.

Kimberly Parent

Owner, Saskatoon Salsa Dance Company

Kimberly Parent started out teaching salsa in her sister's garage to friends and family 13 years ago. Today, her business has its own studio space and roughly 200 customers who come through the door each week.

Saskatoon Salsa Dance Company has both a performance school and provides recreational Latin dance classes for people from age three to 93.

"When I first started," said Parent, "I just wanted other people to dance with me. I didn't intend to start a business. I wanted other people to experience what I had experienced; I wanted other people to love it, too. The goal from the beginning was just to build a community.

"It turned into something bigger than I ever could have expected. It grew really fast. I had to keep changing studio spaces to accommodate our needs. In addition to running the studio, I was working another full time job. Once the studio grew to a certain point, I had to decide whether to go all in, or not. I either had to quit my job or quit teaching dance so I decided on the former and the rest is history."

Q What barriers did you face when you started your business?

One of the first barriers was that, **A** in the beginning, we had to rent space from other studios. The renting per hour was not the smartest way to go about things, I realized. I could never get prime time for my classes so had to teach really early or really late. It was at that point, five years ago, I went to Clarence Campeau Development Fund (CCDF) and they helped me get things going to own my own space.



Another barrier was that I had no background in business. I graduated with an arts degree; I have bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Native Studies. I didn't know anything about running a business so it was a huge learning curve for me. Thankfully I had a lot of motivation and a lot of help from CCDF. I believe it was eight years into running my business that I finally completed my first business plan. As I look back I realize I did things a bit backwards, but that tends to happen when you're an artist in business. We are driven by passion rather than money or projections.

Another barrier was that I had to teach dance as a side business while working another job for many years. My business was doing well but not well enough to support myself and my daughter. It was getting pretty crazy to try to manage my life, run the business and be a good mom to my daughter. I look back on those years with pride that I survived, and relief that I am now able to do what I love full time, and dedicate as much time as I want to my family.

Q Did you require financing at some point?

A When I decided to stop renting and lease my own space in 2013, I needed some help and some financing to make it happen. The first studio space was on Duchess Street and was quite small. In fact, we outgrew the space within a year as the business ended up growing extremely fast once we had our own studio. In 2015 I received funding and support again to move to and renovate a larger space. We remain in that same space today, which has two studios, an office, and a student lounge.

Q Were there any barriers that were insurmountable?

A There wasn't anything that was insurmountable. I think you have to shift direction, get creative, and change your perspective from time to time. But I never felt that the barriers were insurmountable.

A lot of the barriers, I didn't realize, were not really barriers. I just didn't know where to look. For example, I didn't think that any bank would lend me money to renovate a studio, and

it felt overwhelming to try and secure financing. But when I got in touch with some of the organizations in the city, I realized that so many things are possible.

Q Do women in business continue to face barriers?

A Certainly, there are barriers for women that still remain in our society. Trying to articulate them isn't easy. One of the biggest things, especially for aboriginal women, is women are still doing the majority of the child rearing — a lot of times all of the child rearing. This is a big barrier for women in business, because it's a top priority to take care of our kids first. And we want to do that. It's about finding ways to incorporate your children into your business life. I've been lucky in being able to do that.

Q What kind of help do Indigenous women entrepreneurs need?

A We need access to affordable programs, educational courses and those things must be made known to aboriginal communities. A lot of people think it's not for them, but it is. It's important to have a liaison into the community.

Other helpful programs would be business mentorship, guidance and encouragement, a list of community resources that's easy to find, and help with leveraging funding and financing. Thank you so much, Kim. Best of luck with Saskatoon Salsa Dance Company.

Devon Fiddler

Owner, SheNative Goods Inc.

Devon Fiddler started SheNative Goods Inc., a leather goods and apparel company, in 2014 after years of longing to start a fashion business years. Inspired by a company called Neechie Gear and its owner, Kendal Netmaker, whom she knew in university, she started working toward her dream. Her first job was as a business development co-ordinator, working with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. "Being inspired by other companies, I got that entrepreneur bug by working with other entrepreneurs," said Fiddler. "I originally wanted to start a clothing line. I hired a product development



Devon Fiddler

Owner, SheNative Goods Inc.

consultant, Sheena Repath, out of Toronto to help me start developing my company, and what is my fashion brand today. Her expertise is product based development.

"It took me almost two years just to start up SheNative. I started in 2014 and launched a crowdfunding campaign, took a bunch of pre-orders, and officially launched in 2015.

"It's been really great ever since."

Q What barriers did you face, and how did you deal with them?

A We have a temporary storefront and are exploring where to go next — whether we're going to stay in the Midtown Plaza. It's such a great place, I love it, but I would like to do some leasehold improvements. We're looking for a space where we can be all under one roof. We also have a second



Devon Fiddler and Vanessa Schellenberg

location with production. We're also looking at investing in a garment printer, making all the garments ourselves, and creating t-shirts too to create more jobs in the province.

Right now, we have one production worker, whom we call the lead creative – we just changed her position. We also have a fashion designer on a contract basis who helps develop some of the designs and also helps with production. They are my core employees who started with me. And we have three sales associates; one is full time and two are part time. One is actually my sister.

I feel like there were a lot of barriers, and I think that's why I took so long to get started. It took me a while from declaring okay, I'm going to start a business, until I actually did. It took me a few years to learn about starting a business.

One of the barriers was leaving my job and moving into the uncertainty of entrepreneurship. What helped me though was the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship. I entered the self-employment program to ease that transition. I got EI for nine months to go through the process, through which we wrote a very comprehensive business plan.

With that, and the consulting, I think I got really solid advice. That was one of the main things, was being scared to leave

my job. I had to take a leap of faith. I saw an opportunity in that program and it helped me with that transition.

I also didn't have a lot of credit. I was able to build that up by buying a car and a house. If I hadn't done that, I would have had a much harder time getting business loans.

I also didn't have a lot of my own equity. I had to save up from my job to pay for my consulting fees, and once the money ran out, I had nothing extra. I had no extra cushion lying around.

I just took every opportunity I could find out there. I did fundraising to start my business and some crowdfunding, too. After my first round of crowdfunding, I got a business loan approved. That helped build my market, too; I got my brand out there. That's how people found out about me.

Q What barriers, if any, are you facing today?

One of the barriers I'm facing right now is there's never enough money to go around. There are so many expenses; sometimes it's really hard to manage.

Another thing is I've had two babies – one in 2016 and one this past year. I had no maternity benefits. I had to keep going and try to run my business. Both of the

babies are in daycare, but it means my household expenses are high too. I have to pay for childcare expenses.

Those are my biggest challenges. I'm just lucky enough to have a partner to help with the life challenges as well. It's that work-life balance piece. I used to be able to work on my business all hours of the night and now I'm only able to do that when they're in daycare or sleeping.

Q How can the new Matchstick program at WESK assist entrepreneurs like you?

A lot of it has to do with the woman entrepreneur's mindset – working with women who have more challenges than men do. We are the givers of life and the main caregivers to our children, often.

Teaching women how to delegate more would be very helpful – management and delegation and hiring the right team: Business and human resources management, how to build a team, and the benefits of having a team that can basically run your business so you can focus on growing your business. Transitional programming would be helpful, too.

Thank you so much, Devon. All the best with SheNative Goods.



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