



# International Women's Day

## Theme for 2021 #ChooseToChallenge

A challenged world is an alert world. Individually, we're all responsible for our own thoughts and actions - all day, every day. We can choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequity. We can choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements. Collectively, we can all help create an inclusive world. From challenge comes change, so let's all #ChooseToChallenge. More at [www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com)

## GENDER BIAS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

We chatted with local entrepreneurs Jennifer Denouden, CEO and President of Avana Enterprises, and Christine Marie, Founder of Awasis Boutique, to learn more about the obstacles they face as a woman entrepreneur and how they #ChooseToChallenge.



**JENNIFER  
DENOUDEN**  
President & CEO,  
Avana Enterprises

Avana is the first female-led, family-owned real estate enterprise from Saskatchewan to be ranked in the top 10 of Canadian Business and Maclean's 2020 Growth List of Canada's fastest-growing companies. Avana is purpose-led and focused on creating affordable, quality housing and providing attainable, safe housing that empowers women and children escaping domestic abuse.

### WHY ENTREPRENEURSHIP?

**Jenn:** My path to entrepreneurship started when I was on bed rest, pregnant with my second child. I already had a successful career in private banking. Still, I was interested in finding ways to maximize passive income and started investing in rental properties. Things took off in a big way, and we founded Avana in 2014.

In 2018, we pivoted to a purpose-led business model and today, Avana has \$200 million in assets under management and continues to grow exponentially.

**Christine:** I had been a stay at home Mom for five years, but I felt it was time to head back to work again. One day, in doing a quick Google search for "Metis bibs", I discovered there was a lack of representation of authentic Indigenous products for babies and kids in Canada.

From here, I invested \$2000 to launch Awasis Boutique. I was able to work from the comfort of my home and raise my two babies. I had never started a business before - but little-by-little, step-by-step, and with an incredible community around me, I was able to successfully launch and grow my business!

Women supporting women should be a motto for any woman in business. We should be supporting one another, and there is always something to learn from one another. Where women led businesses thrive, the community thrives.

*- Christine Marie*

### STEREOTYPES, BIASES, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**Jenn:** Leading a company in a male-dominated industry means I run into stereotypes and sexism all the time. People seem to think that because I'm a woman, I won't stand up for myself or that they can call me "sweetie." It's gross and inappropriate, and I won't tolerate it. It makes me determined to help drive change in our province so that women can have the same opportunities to lead and succeed.

**Christine:** I have experienced criticism from various people about my business because of the stereotypes and assumptions that exist about Indigenous women. This is a complicated issue that can not be changed overnight. However, by showing up and continually putting in the work, I am confident that we can create a more inclusive and safe space for all women, especially Indigenous women, who are interested in business or are looking for business opportunities to lead and experience success.

Women need to stand up for themselves and speak out. The more women stick up not just for themselves, but for each other, the more sexism shrinks. You can't be polite or passive. You have to use your voice and platform to support other women.

*- Jennifer Denouden*

**CHRISTINE  
MARIE**  
Founder,  
Awasis Boutique



Awasis Boutique is the first Indigenous inspired baby and kids fashion line in Western Canada. Launched as an online shop in 2018, it has grown from offering a small selection of hand sewn baby and kids items, to a selection of goods for the entire family.

Awasis means child in Cree. A brand that educates, empowers and celebrates the Indigenous culture, one product at a time.