

WESK ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

# Celebrating 25 Years of Empowerment

*Championing women entrepreneurs  
through seasons of global change*



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WESK TEAM

28,271  
entrepreneurs  
have attended  
WESK workshops  
since 1995

# A message from the Chair Board



**DANIELLE GRAFF**  
BOARD CHAIR

**“I have every confidence that WESK will continue to be a change-maker and will lead the path forward to close the gap.”**

Like organizations and businesses around the world, WESK was forced to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in this past fiscal year. And, like those organizations and businesses - but especially like the amazing female entrepreneurs we have right here in Saskatchewan - WESK pivoted swiftly to meet those challenges, to support its community, and to seek opportunities to move forward and further its mandate to close the gender entrepreneurship gap.

Women are amazing (which we already knew), but the examples that we've seen in this last year, of women-owned businesses pivoting and finding a path forward, despite everything, is nothing short of amazing. We've created such a strong community in our province and the momentum to support women-owned business as they start, grow, and scale continues to build.

WESK continues to play a lead role in supporting women entrepreneurs and transforming the Saskatchewan business ecosystem. A few highlights from the 2020-2021 fiscal year include:

- The implementation of a new strategic plan which will guide WESK's efforts over the next few years. Among numerous other efforts both internally and with respect to WESK's programs and services to support both recovery and

growth, the implementation of the strategic plan has included the update to WESK's membership model.

- The celebration of WESK's 25th anniversary, including the virtual conference in September 2020. While it wasn't the in-person celebration that the WESK team had planned, WESK marked it by doing what it does best - providing opportunities and support for women entrepreneurs to learn, connect, and move forward.

It has been an absolute honour to serve as Board Chair again this year, working with an incredible group of Directors who are as passionate about the work of WESK as the WESK team. I want to especially thank Marcia Mirasty and Aimee Schulhauser who concluded their Board terms this year for their contributions, and to welcome new Directors Rhonda Spencer and Claire Belanger-Parker who have jumped right in.

On behalf of the Board, I also really want to thank the WESK team again for their commitment to WESK over this past year - I am constantly impressed by everything that this team has accomplished and am excited by all of the go-forward initiatives they have planned. Stay tuned folks, because this WESK team has so much more in store and I have every confidence that WESK will continue to be a change-maker and will lead the path forward to close the gap.

# A message from the CEO



**PRABHA MITCHELL**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

**“We have demonstrated our ability to adapt and adopt a ‘new normal’.”**

## 25 YEARS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY

This year, we lived through unprecedented times, and I am incredibly proud of the grit and resilience displayed by the WESK team. Driven by our goal to enrich the lives of women entrepreneurs throughout our province, we have demonstrated our ability to adapt and adopt a ‘new normal’ in response to the global pandemic.

We are honoured to have celebrated WESK’s 25th anniversary. Over the course of 25 years, WESK has provided over \$40 million in financing to women-owned businesses and over 7,000 women have accessed our business advising services. The correlation between supporting women in scaling their businesses and economic growth is irrefutable, as women entrepreneurs contributed \$23.1 billion to the GDP in 2019 and created approximately 192,000 jobs.

Despite the challenges and constraints imposed by the pandemic, the WESK team resolutely advanced four recommendations outlined in

the Saskatchewan Advisory Committee’s final report. This includes a brand identity to uniquely identify women entrepreneurs, a campaign to increase awareness of the contribution of women entrepreneurs, the Saskatchewan Women Entrepreneurship Charter, and the Digital Entrepreneurship Hub. Read on for more details, as this report covers many of the other initiatives embarked on during the course of the year.

We want to remind you that WESK is here to support you and your business as we navigate through this difficult time. Our new membership packages provide support to all women entrepreneurs, no matter where you may be in your entrepreneurial journey.

This year has been marked with much reflection and transformation. With the strength and resilience learned over this past year, we encourage you to strive for excellence as we continue to move forward in the re-opening of our province.

# Supporting women entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan for 25 years

## WHY

Saskatchewan depends on entrepreneurs, but a gender entrepreneur gap holds women back. Without specifically-designed support structures, social inequalities limit our economic potential as a province. WESK exists to close the gender entrepreneurship gap in Saskatchewan.

## ROLE

As a non-profit, membership-based organization of over 1,200 members, WESK provides programs and services for entrepreneurs who are starting, growing, scaling, or purchasing a business. We help build confidence about a future in business.

## GOALS

WESK offers our members endless possibilities to unite with empowered entrepreneurs of every age, stage, and culture. We strive to connect women in business with a community that is rooting for them.

## WAYS

By charting a path to equal opportunity, WESK helps remove the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. WESK is here to provide the tools women need to succeed, because when women succeed, we all succeed.

## MISSION

Empowering women entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan to start, grow, and scale businesses to drive economic growth.

## VISION

To close the gender entrepreneurship gap in Saskatchewan.

## VALUES

WESK is driven by the values of collaboration, diversity, and boldness.

## WHAT IS THE GENDER ENTREPRENEUR GAP?

There is a significant gender entrepreneurship gap in Canada. By understanding and addressing the unique barriers that women entrepreneurs face, we can enhance opportunities to scale businesses and boost economic growth in our province.

How much more robust our province and country could be if we created an environment that empowered women entrepreneurs? It's more than a social and moral imperative – it's an economic issue.



**\$148 billion**

has been contributed to Canada's GDP by women entrepreneurs



**\$23.1 billion**

was contributed by women entrepreneurs to the SK economy



**\$150–\$420 billion**

in additional economic activity would result from closing the gender entrepreneur gap



**180 years**

would need to pass to close the gender gap at current levels of women entrepreneurship



**\$6.3–\$17.64 billion**

could be injected into the SK GDP through gender entrepreneurship parity

# Snapshot of key metrics

2020–2021



**1212**

members reached  
this year



**1,816**

business advising  
appointments this year



**17**

new loans this year,  
totalling \$1.5 million



**\$90,607**

average loan  
amount



**9**

startup loans



**5**

expansion loans



**3**

businesses  
purchased



**144+**

jobs created/  
maintained

**RRRF**

**557**

jobs saved through  
the federally-funded  
Regional Relief and  
Recovery Fund

## Since 1995



**9,307**

women have accessed our  
business advising program



**\$40.4 million**

has been given to businesses  
through our financing program



**1,829**

jobs have been created through  
our financing program



Western Economic Diversification  
Canada provided WESK with a  
total of \$5M, which has **grown** to

**\$7.9 million**

allowing us to support even more  
entrepreneurs



**55,297**

women have contacted the WESK  
offices for information since 1995



# Championing women's social and economic justice in a pandemic

After 25 years of standing with women entrepreneurs through good times and bad, it is hard to capture what this past year has meant to us all. We have been managing the impacts of COVID for many months now. At this time last year, we were already working hard to create high-quality virtual programs and pivoting approaches to deliver great services despite the challenges of social distancing. Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones and those who cared for family members in need this year. We're all looking

forward to seeing women-owned businesses reopen as the province achieves herd immunity.

The WESK offices shifted to working remotely last year, and through our virtual presence, we continued to provide support and resources to our members and all Saskatchewan during this period of uncertainty. We've been far apart, but we have also explored new ways to connect. This year provided an opportunity to link up across the distance, bringing rural and urban entrepreneurs together.

## PANDEMIC RESPONSES

In March 2020, the gravity and impact of COVID-19 compelled organizations to rapidly adjust how they conducted business. WESK shifted practices to make it easier for women to receive key supports:



Waived our annual membership fee for April and May of 2020



New payment solutions for our loan clients



Free weekly webinars, virtual workshops, and virtual networking events



COVID-19 webpage with information, resources, and tips for small business owners



Provided additional financial support up to \$60,000 for women entrepreneurs unable to access government support for COVID-19



# Looking back at the history of WESK



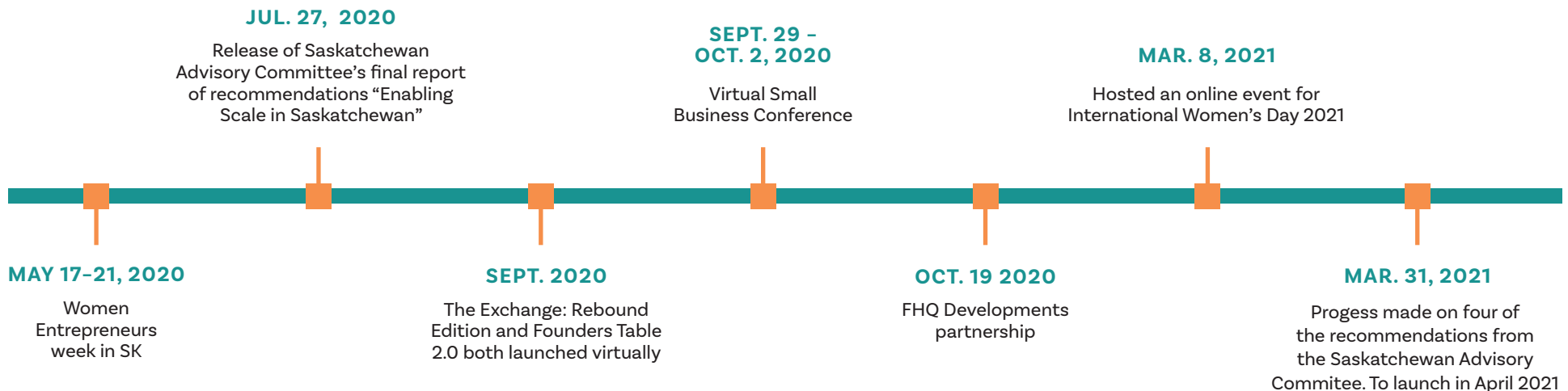
## Highlighting the achievements of 2020-2021

We have many accomplishments to celebrate from the past year at WESK, including our 25th year Anniversary! WESK was founded in 1995 when Western Economic Diversification Canada commissioned a number of focus groups across the province. Participants represented women from different cultural backgrounds, stages of business development, and geography. They were tasked with identifying barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan, as well as services and programs to assist them in achieving their goals. Much has changed in the 25 years since WESK began, including a significant rebrand. But one thing

hasn't changed. We are still committed to empowering women in business and supporting them to overcome gender-based barriers.

This year, we focused on delivering programs and services in a virtual world. Despite the challenges of social distancing, we hosted two of our signature entrepreneurship programs online (The Exchange and Founders Table) as well as our annual Small Business Conference. We also celebrated the release of a final report from the WESK-led Saskatchewan Advisory Committee, and we've already advanced several key recommendations.

[View our 25th anniversary video](#)





# Empowering women at every stage of the entrepreneurial journey

WESK has over 1,200 members, and we strive to support every woman that comes to us for assistance. Our core programs support women to take the next step in their entrepreneurial journey, whether they are starting, growing, scaling or purchasing a business. As our non-profit organization expands, we continue to find innovative ways to bring women together, building up their confidence and capacity, and guiding them along the best path forward.

In 2020-2021, our programs had great attendance despite being limited to online engagement tools. It's easy to feel isolated when you're an entrepreneur, and we believe that women deserve to know that there are people rooting for them who understand their business goals. Over the past year, our programming provided valuable resources and networking opportunities, in addition to free one-on-one appointments with business advisors. We also provided financing and pandemic recovery support, helping women weather the storm of changes brought on by the pandemic this year.



## MATCHSTICK: SPARK FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Women across Saskatchewan face barriers to making their business dreams a reality, and for Indigenous women, there are additional barriers. WESK is passionate about closing the gender-entrepreneur gap for all women, and Matchstick is a program specifically for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women who are either starting a business or seriously considering bringing their ideas to life.

The Matchstick program provides resources for those starting a business in Saskatchewan, and includes workshops, business

advising for entrepreneurs, and mentoring. Matchstick connects women with like-minded entrepreneurs to share a wealth of knowledge, resources, and opportunities. This year, WESK provided access to small business loans and resources for Indigenous entrepreneurs. We also developed and released a final report for Matchstick, and we created three videos to describe the importance of the project and showcase the program and participants. This program has created a positive impact in a short time-span. Matchstick will relaunch next fiscal year.

**“This program made me think and get a clearer idea of my business goals.”**

*- Year 1 Participant*

## FOUNDERS TABLE 2.0: CONNECTING WOMEN IN TECH

According to a 2018 WESK report on women entrepreneurs, women are highly under-represented in Canada's tech sector, with only six percent of founders identifying as women. We know how important it is to connect women within under-represented industries, and this program aims to address that gap by providing support, mentorship, and networking opportunities for women tech founders.

Founders Table is a six-month technology-focused mastermind group to help women take their technology business and management skills up a notch. Participants get a chance to meet and discuss topics like team-building, design-thinking and product development, digital marketing, and funding pitches. The program is structured around monthly meetings, where participants pitch some of the biggest

equity, angel, and venture capitalist funders in Saskatchewan, all the while developing deep and meaningful relationships with like-minded women. It also includes a tech symposium, open to all members of the tech community. This year, we brought close to fifty people together for a very powerful online session! Big thanks to our program facilitator, Saskatchewan tech entrepreneur, Katrina German.



supported by:



The top session this year was a virtual speed networking event in January 2021, where women in tech had the opportunity to pitch to eight investors.



Our virtual retreat included cohorts from this year as well as from 2019-2020, as the pandemic disrupted plans for last year's retreat.



We opened up a tech symposium to the broader tech community and brought close to 50 people together for a very powerful online session.

## FOUNDERS TABLE 1.0

Founders Table 1.0 continued to meet this year even after the conclusion of the educational components to stay connected and deepen relationships with one another.



## REBOUND AND CONQUER - THE EXCHANGE

Another cornerstone WESK program is The Exchange. This program serves as a catalyst for women entrepreneurs who are ready to harness their true potential and take their businesses to the next level of growth and profitability. The Exchange provides women with dynamic peer learning, coaching calls, retreats, presentations from well-seasoned experts, and networking opportunities. Each part of this program is crafted to hone business acumen and entrepreneurial strengths.

Those who participate engage in a three-year term, beginning with creating a tailor-made Board to nourish a sense of courage and capacity. Boards consist of 8-12 women entrepreneurs, who are carefully selected to exchange knowledge and lessons learned along their business journey. This year, 68 women participated in The Exchange program, including eight Indigenous participants. We held

56 monthly training sessions, and over 200 coaching calls were made between women and their Board Chairs. Seven Board Chairs stepped forward to participate from a variety of sectors, each representing a wealth of experience as a successful businesswoman combined with a passion for entrepreneurship. We held three virtual retreats for Exchange participants in September 2020, January 2021, and May 2021. These retreats focused on five pillars of business: Operations, Finance, Human Resources, Leadership, and Sales and Marketing.

Our year-end survey for The Exchange highlights the impact of this program, and participating women spoke to the value of this mentorship opportunity. The results are clear: meaningful, supportive relationships advance women entrepreneurs and help close the gender entrepreneur gap.

“The support and ideas through the women in The Exchange program has been invaluable.”

“Thank you for the opportunities and coaching offered by WESK - I would not be where I am today in business if not for WESK and for The Exchange.”

“I have loved being part of The Exchange program, I have met some amazing women.”

# Advocating for women in business at the provincial level

## TAKING ACTION WITH THE SASKATCHEWAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE GENDER ENTREPRENEURSHIP GAP

In 2019, the Government of Saskatchewan created the WESK-led Saskatchewan Advisory Committee with a mandate to advise the Government on strategies, policies and activities to close the gender entrepreneurship gap. The twelve members were specifically tasked with examining gender disparity in business growth.

In July of 2020, the Committee concluded its work with the launch of a final report of recommendations entitled “Enabling Scale in Saskatchewan”.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REPORT

1

### ENHANCING ACCESS TO CAPITAL

- Create incentives for angel investors to provide access to capital and financial support to women-owned and women-led businesses

2

### DEVELOPING SCALE-ENABLING POLICIES

- Develop and monitor measures through a women entrepreneurship economic scorecard
- Incentivize job-growth as a mechanism to encourage scale in companies with high potential for success
- Implement a growth innovation fund and connect recipients to mentors to increase potential for success
- Develop and implement mechanisms to enable childcare for women entrepreneurs in scaling phase

3

### STREAMLINING ACCESS TO DATA, PROGRAMS AND NETWORKS

- Build an entrepreneurship hub for women entrepreneurs
- Create partnerships with educational institutions to provide relevant educational opportunities for existing and aspiring women entrepreneurs

4

### ENHANCING AWARENESS AND SUPPORT BY BUILDING MOMENTUM

- Increase awareness of the contribution of women entrepreneurs to the Saskatchewan economy and profile the successes of individual women entrepreneurs
- Launch a brand that uniquely identifies Saskatchewan women entrepreneurs
- Launch a charter to build a pool of champions in support of women entrepreneurs

## What this means for WESK

WESK has been at the frontlines of provincial advocacy for women entrepreneurs, and the formation of the Saskatchewan Advisory Committee was a direct result of calls to action by our organization. June 2020 marked the conclusion of the Committee's work, and a report of recommendations was published in July 2020. WESK worked on executing four of those recommendations, and we are proud of the advancements made over a short, challenging time period.

**1** One key action was the launch of the Saskatchewan Women Entrepreneurship Charter in April 2021, with four principles to provide guidance for supporting local women-owned businesses. WESK invited influential organizations to sign on as Champions to express

their commitment to advancing gender parity and equality through economic activity. We encouraged Champions to establish targets to increase engagement with, and support of, women-owned Saskatchewan businesses that are in alignment with organizational objectives.

**2** We also developed a new brand identity for women-owned businesses in Saskatchewan. Women were invited to self declare and gain access to the Women-Owned Businesses brand identity. They will also receive invitations to exclusive events and appear in our Women-Owned Saskatchewan Business Database.

**3** We worked hard this year to create a Digital Entrepreneurship Hub on our WESK site to allow entrepreneurs to easily access

relevant programs, services, and resources based on their stage of business. We launched a new website to be better geared towards women entrepreneurs in all phases of business. We developed a one-stop shop resource library with webinars, blogs, custom business plan templates, and external resources, as well as phase-specific landing pages with custom-curated content for each stage of entrepreneurship.

**4** WESK is currently working on a campaign to raise awareness about the accomplishments and economic contributions of Saskatchewan women entrepreneurs. You may have noticed our recent #WomenEntrepreneurshipWednesday posts on social media. Stay connected as we work to expand this campaign throughout the year.

[View more information about the Committee recommendations](#)





## Virtual events from the last year

This year required a new approach to events, but the pandemic didn't slow us down or keep us from gathering virtually for learning and networking. In 2020-2021, WESK hosted 25 events with a total of 1754 attendees.

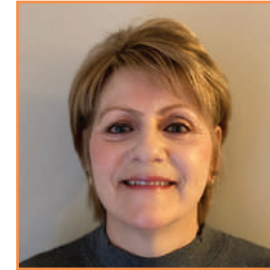


### SHAKEN

Each month, WESK brings forward a respected entrepreneur or business professional to be interviewed by moderator Shawna Nelson. Shaken is Saskatoon-based and the season this year included nine virtual events, each with an average attendance of approximately 60 people. This event series provides an opportunity to hear candid advice, reflections, and tips for entrepreneurs based on the wisdom of experienced entrepreneurs. We're so grateful to all our sponsors this year, and all of the speakers who shared their stories. WESK welcomes members and non-members alike to these events, and it's a great way to get involved with WESK and see what our organization has to offer.



**MONIQUE SIMAIR**  
MAVEN WATER AND  
ENVIRONMENT



**DEBBIE ROSS**  
SASKATOON AGRI-  
AUTO PARTS



**CHRISTIE PETERS**  
PRIMAL; THE HOLLOWES



**JANNA DUTTON**  
DUTTON GROUP TIM  
HORTONS



**KARRI HOWLETT**  
KARRI HOWLETT  
CONSULTING



**MACKENZIE KILSHAW**  
(FIRBY)  
TWO FIFTY TWO BOUTIQUE



**MELANIE MORRISON**  
BETTERCART



**TINA BEAUDRY-MELLOR**  
FORMER MINISTER  
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE  
STATUS OF WOMEN



**VERONIQUE LOEWEN**  
VEROLINGO  
COMMUNICATIONS

## EVENTS



**JANETT LEE**  
THE STORY CO.

APRIL 2020



**DARCI-LANG**  
MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER  
AND TRAINER

MAY 2020



**TINA BEAUDRY-MELLOR**  
FORMER MINISTER  
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE  
STATUS OF WOMEN

JUNE 2020



**JEANNE MARTINSON**  
WOOD DRAGON BOOKS

SEPTEMBER 2020



**SANDRA MASTERS**  
RICHARDSON PIONEER LTD.

OCTOBER 2020



**AIMEE SCHULHAUSER**  
SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR

NOVEMBER 2020



**LEANNE BELLEGARDE**  
AKAWE TECHNOLOGIES

JANUARY 2021



**THOMAS BENJOE**  
FHQ DEVELOPMENTS

JANUARY 2021



**JENNIFER DENOUDEN**  
AVANA

FEBRUARY 2021



**DANIELA MINTENKO**  
DANDY'S ARTISAN ICE CREAM  
& LUXE ARTISAN CHOCOLATES

MARCH 2021



### UNCORKED

Uncorked is a Regina-based networking event where local entrepreneurs are invited to relax, listen, and learn from local business experts. Uncorked aims to inspire through storytelling and casual couch conversation as we ask some of the boldest businesswomen and leaders of the community the most unpredictable and unfiltered questions about business, life, and community. This year, we hosted nine virtual Uncorked events. Sessions are live, and each event saw great engagement from the local community and our network of members. We couldn't have done it without the generous contributions of our sponsors and speakers. Here's to another year of events filled with laughter and inspiration. We are hopeful that in the year ahead, we'll be able to bring people together in person for these conversations!

## SMALL BUSINESS CONFERENCE

Our Small Business Conference is a long-standing tradition at WESK, where typically we bring members, entrepreneurs, business professionals, and community leaders together in person for a full-day event. This year, due to the pandemic, we pivoted to a virtual conference and hosted a week of workshops and panels.

WESK hosted three panel discussions and three workshops, each of which engaged a wide range of participants. We are grateful to all our speakers for sharing their expertise with 476 attendees. We are especially grateful to Conexus Credit Union, our Presenting Sponsor.

In February 2021, WESK announced the rebrand of the gala and conference to the WESK Summit and Gala. Our next annual report will include a recap of our first ever WESK Summit! Stay tuned.

### Jewels of Saskatchewan Panel

**Devon Fiddler**, SheNative Goods

**Jess Tetu**, Serial Entrepreneur

**Krista Moe**, Shellbrook Pharmacy

**Rachel Mielke**, Hillberg & Berk

**Moderated by:** Prabha Mitchell, CEO of WESK

### Champions for Change Panel

**Eric Dillon**, Conexus Credit Union

**Murad Al-Katib**, AGT Foods

**Thomas Benjoe**, FHQ Developments

**Moderated by:** Pam Klein, Phoenix Group

### Venture Capital Panel

**Eric Clark**, PFM Capital

**Jason Drummond**, Broad Street Bulls

**Laurie Dmytryshyn**, PIC Investment Group

**Moderated by:** Christine Hrudka,  
Pharmacy First

### Website UX Workshop

**Katie Osborne**, Bravo Tango

### Brand Storytelling Workshop

**Nykea Behiel**, Rock & Bloom

### A Taste of Bene Brown Workshop

**Kellie Garrett**, Kellie Garrett Enterprises

Presented by 

## CELEBRATION OF ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Extraordinary women deserve to be celebrated. In May 2020, we recognized Katherine Regnier, CEO of Coconut Software, as the winner of the 3rd annual Celebration of Achievement award! This award pays tribute to an exceptional woman entrepreneur who has built a business in Saskatchewan with a significant impact on the economy and the community. Coconut Software aims to modernize how banks and credit unions engage, and Katherine is a passionate advocate for women in tech. Thank you, Katherine, for all of the ways you are helping women overcome barriers to business.



# Building our network

## MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

WESK was founded 25 years ago with six members. Since then, our organization has grown to more than 1200 members, each of whom are making an impact on the Saskatchewan economy. Our membership is diverse, with members located all over our province in a variety of industries and stages of business. Diversity is one of our core values as an organization, and we aim to be as inclusive as possible. The pandemic presented unprecedented financial strains on women in business, and we offered free memberships for April and May 2020. WESK has also worked hard to revamp our membership options, and we launched a new model in April 2021.



**1212**

members across  
the province

## MEMBERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



**KATRINA WHYTE**

Owner, Taste Patisserie by Katrina  
Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan

### **Q: What motivates you to be an entrepreneur?**

**A:** I want to build and create something wonderful for my community, and I want it to operate well so that it will be here for years to come. I was also raised in a generation where I was told a girl could only go so far, that I could only reach so high. I refuse to believe that. In fact, I think women are what is missing from the business world.

### **Q: What supports have meant the most along the way?**

**A:** It's so important to surround yourself with people who believe in you and want to help you achieve your dreams. The support of my husband and children have been absolutely invaluable to me. I was also blessed early on to be introduced to the best bunch of women entrepreneurs ever! Nobody can do this alone.

### **Q: How has WESK made an impact on your journey?**

**A:** They believed in me! And when I needed more capital to handle some unforeseen expenses during start-up, they encouraged me and provided what was needed to help me succeed. They keep up to date with me offering assistance and support. It helps me to not feel alone.

### **Q: What do you have to say to other women entrepreneurs?**

**A:** Be brave and dare to dream. Small businesses are the backbone of any community. My business is not just a bakery. It's a place where people come to celebrate and to mourn - it's become an important part of the community. So dream. Plant your seed and watch it grow and stretch and change. In the end, it will grow into something beautiful!

## MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

### THE PIONEER

(\$25+ GST)

#### *She is the first.*

The Pioneer package is ideal if you have an idea, or are thinking about entrepreneurship. If you want to be in WESK's sphere of influence, but don't know where to start, The Pioneer package is perfect for you.

### THE TRAILBLAZER

(\$125+ GST)

#### *She is providing it's possible.*

The Trailblazer package is ideal if you are starting a business and want continual support from WESK throughout your journey. We will connect you to resources for Saskatchewan entrepreneurs, and the people you need to get established.

### THE CHANGEMAKER

(\$375+ GST)

#### *She is making the difference.*

The Changemaker package is ideal if you are already established and are looking to take your business to the next level. WESK will help you scale your company and make meaningful connections to other entrepreneurs and corporate execs.



# Supporting women through entrepreneurial advising

## SERVICE IMPACT

Confidence matters in business, and WESK is here to help women step into bold leadership as entrepreneurs. No matter what stage of the journey an entrepreneur finds herself in, our business advisors are here to lend an ear, provide guidance, and point to the right resources. Members are quick to tell us about the impact of having someone take the time to understand their business goals and challenges, support them in creating a business plan, or help them take the next step toward their vision. These supports are invaluable, especially in light of the gender-based barriers that exist for women.

9,307

women have accessed our Business Advising Program since 1995

55,297

women have contacted the WESK offices for information since 1995

1,816

business advising appointments this year

1,629

information requests were received this year

245

new clients this year

“Don’t be afraid to reach out and ask for help. There are lots of WESK resources available!”

– Dr. Monique Simair  
Founder of Saskatoon-based  
Maven Water & Environment

## ALL ACCESS EXPERT ADVICE

The All Access Expert Advice Program is an exclusive opportunity to connect with professionals in Saskatchewan. The WESK roster of experts includes those in marketing, legal, accounting, and human resources industries! This high-impact, low-barrier service provides tailored support for women, whether they are starting, growing, or scaling a business. The All Access Expert Advice Program has been running for three years now, and we owe it all to our partners and specialized experts. Your generous support to this program helps to fill in the gaps for women running small businesses across the province.

75 appointments

3

human resources

10

marketing

26

accounting

36

legal



# Kick-starting women-owned businesses

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

A key finding of the Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on the Gender Entrepreneurship Gap was that women are less likely to secure capital than men. WESK understands how hard business capital can be to access - particularly for women - and our WESK Financing Fund aims to address this gap with loans of up to \$150,000 (or more through our partnerships).

We are thrilled to continue the legacy of financial support for women entrepreneurs, and this year we funded a number of new loans through the WESK Financing Fund and helped protect many Saskatchewan jobs through the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF). If your business is majority woman-owned and controlled (51%), come talk to our friendly business advisors to see how a loan could help you grow your business. Interest paid from your loan goes back into our financing fund, which helps us provide even more loans to women entrepreneurs.

**We've been supporting women entrepreneurs for 25 years!**  
**Since 1995:**

**766** loans have been disbursed for women

Businesses have received a total of **\$40.4 million** through our financing program

Over **\$3.4 million** has been leveraged as a result of our financing

Western Economic Diversification Canada provided WESK with a total of \$5 million, which WESK has grown to **\$7.9 million**

**1,829** jobs have been created through our financing program

**In 2020-2021:**

**17** new loans, totalling **\$1.5 million** and **98** current loans, totalling **\$6 million**

Our loan fund created/maintained **144** FTE jobs in our province this year

Our average loan this year was **\$90,607**

**9** new business start-ups, **5** expansions, **3** existing businesses purchased

## JOHN AND BERNICE WILLIAMS AND NORTH PRAIRIE DEVELOPMENTS EQUITY INVESTMENT FUND

Managed by WESK, this fund has disbursed a total of 13 Equity Investment Loans - totalling \$87,641 - since its inception in 2012.

## REGIONAL RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUND

The Regional Relief and Recovery Fund was announced by the Government of Canada to provide financial support directly to small and medium-sized women-owned businesses. Loans of up to \$60,000 are available through WESK to address COVID-19 impacts on short-term stability.

This access to financing will support small enterprises that are unable to access larger federal relief funding programs, or unable to obtain a loan/credit from traditional financial institutions, and that are struggling with working capital needs.

**Between April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021 WESK approved:**

**98** RRRF loans

**\$3,153,175** in RRRF loans

**\$32,175** RRRF loan average

**557** jobs saved

# Enhancing entrepreneurial capacity and skills

## TRAINING PROGRAMS

Learning never stops for an entrepreneur. WESK's signature workshop, Business Plan Basics, provides an in-depth step-by-step for developing a business plan. This 1.5-hour virtual workshop teaches first-time entrepreneurs the strategies for moving their business idea out of their heads and into a plan.

This year, WESK connected over 2,500 entrepreneurs to training through more than 100 workshops. Each week, we offered different webinars on a variety of business topics. In addition, we took our three annual full-day workshops and converted them each into the following webinar series:



**Learning Month with Deloitte** series on accounting for entrepreneurs



**Marketing Madness** series to support focused, consistent, efficient and cost-effective online marketing efforts



**Legal Tips for Entrepreneurs** series on small business legal considerations

We are proud of the diversity of topics and focus areas we covered this year, and we look forward to continuing these webinar series into the coming year.

**2,652**  
entrepreneurs  
participated in...

**111**  
workshops  
this year

**28,271**  
entrepreneurs have  
attended WESK  
workshops since 1995

# Depending on our community

Thank you to all of our generous funders! We couldn't do it without you.

## SHAKEN WITH A TWIST



## UNCORKED



## SMALL BUSINESS CONFERENCE



## Celebrating the WESK team

### SHOUT OUT TO OUR AMAZING BOARD AND STAFF MEMBERS

The 2020-2021 fiscal year was not without challenges, but it brought out our strengths and helped us refocus on what matters most. We appreciate all the energy our team poured into adapting WESK's work this year, and we want to thank our members and partners for building strong relationships with us. The trust placed in us to help meet business goals is not taken lightly, and we will continue to strive for excellence by every measure.

Thank you to the board members for their wisdom and guidance, and to all our staff, members, and partners for making our 25th year one to celebrate.

## OUR BOARD



**DANIELLE GRAFF**  
CHAIR



**JILL POULTON**  
PAST CHAIR



**CLAIRE  
BÉLANGER-PARKER**  
DIRECTOR



**COLLEEN DIXON**  
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**RHONDA SPENCER**  
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**LEANNE JOHNSON**  
DIRECTOR

## SASKATOON



**PRABHA MITCHELL**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



**LORI JESTIN-KNAUS**  
REGIONAL MANAGER  
NORTH



**DANIELLE GRIMES**  
BUSINESS ADVISOR



**CARA COTE**  
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**NICK KOCHAR**  
PROGRAM ADVISOR



**KAURIE MAY**  
MANAGER OF FINANCE  
AND ADMINISTRATION



**JODI MACMILLAN**  
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**OLU FATOYINBO**  
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**JEANINE ARMILLOTTA**  
LENDING AND  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
COORDINATOR



**JOSIE FRIES**  
MARKETING ADVISOR

## REGINA



**HEATHER BLOUIN**  
REGIONAL MANAGER  
SOUTH



**AMANDA PARKINSON**  
BUSINESS ADVISOR



**BRITTANY SCOTT**  
PROJECT COORDINATOR



**LOLA ADEBOGUN**  
MARKETING AND  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
ASSISTANT



**BRONWEN MALLOY**  
COMMUNICATIONS  
INTERNS



From start up to scale up, your success is our only goal. Since 1995, WESK has helped thousands of women start, purchase and expand their businesses through access to business support, financing, training, and networks.

WESK is proud to be affiliated with the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC). Committed to the growth of women's entrepreneurship, WEOC works with women's enterprise support organizations, like WESK, to champion innovation, broaden expertise, and enhance collaboration.



Women's Enterprise  
Organizations of Canada

Organisations d'entreprises  
de femmes du Canada

WESK is proudly supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada.



Diversification de l'économie  
de l'Ouest Canada

Western Economic  
Diversification Canada

## SASKATOON OFFICE

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Saskatoon, SK S7T 0G3

**Phone:** 306-477-7173  
**Toll-Free:** 1-844-900-WESK (9375)

## REGINA OFFICE

**200 - 1965 Broad Street**  
Regina, SK S4P 1Y1  
(located in Path Co-work)

**Phone:** 306-359-9732  
**Toll-Free:** 1-844-901-WESK (9375)

## FOLLOW US ONLINE



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Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan

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