



Root Resilience, Root Change, Root Justice

November 3rd, 2025 – UNIFOR's Port Elgin
Retreat

UNIFOR Women's Advocates Program and DAWN Canada **A Bold Vision**

CHARLOTTETOWN, April 10, 2014 /CNW/ - UNIFOR Atlantic Director Lana Payne was chosen as one of 23 Women of Bold Vision from a long list of distinguished and accomplished nominees. The recognition is meant to highlight Canadian women who have demonstrated great passion and commitment to Canadian society, specifically with regards to women's issues.

"This is truly a great honour because it is a recognition of the incredible work by all trade union women, including proud UNIFOR women, who make a difference every day with their activism, with their passion and with their vision of a better, more equal Canada," said Payne. "This recognition is about them and how women activists are part of leading the way to transform and renew our movement".



Rex Woods painting, commissioned by Confederation Life insurance company in 1964 as a tribute to Harris, and to replace the original Harris painting, which had been destroyed by a fire in 1916.



Women's Leadership Conference
A moment in time • 150 years in the making.

Seated around the Confederation Table at Province House in PEI in a recreation of the famous Robert Harris painting of the Fathers of Confederation are 2014 Bold Visionaries. Clockwise from top right: Kluane Adamek, Crystal Fraser, Nazanin Afshin-Jam MacKay, Lana Payne, Kim Campbell, Shelagh Day, Becka Viau, Bonnie Brayton, Carolyn Bennett, Jessie Housty (standing), El Jones (standing), Maria Mourani, Eva Aariak, R Irene d'Entremont, Hazel McCallion, Pamela Palmater, Catherine Potvin, Natalie Panek, Eman Bare, Mina Mawani (standing), and Margaret-Ann Armour (standing). Missing from photo, Libby Burnham. Photo by Brian Simpson.

About DAWN Canada



Established in 1985, DAWN Canada is an intersectional feminist human rights organization that works to address systems of oppression.

Our mission is to end the poverty, isolation, discrimination and violence experienced by women and gender-diverse people with disabilities, including those who are Deaf, in Canada.

DAWN Canada began its 40th year in service on June 22nd, 2025.

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DAWN Canada's offices are located on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory (Montréal) and unceded Algonquin Anishinabe territory (Ottawa).



Root Resilience, Root Change, Root Justice.

- **DAWN Canada is advancing Intersectional Feminist practice**
- In 2020 DAWN Canada launched our ten-year vision for change. Founded in 1985, after 35 years in this work it was clear that we needed **A BOLD VISION** for women, girls and gender-diverse people.
- From 2020 to 2030, two of our biggest commitments to women in Canada, the **National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence** and the United **Nations Special Development Goals (SDG'S)** were launched, both recognizing that a 10-year commitment to change was required for real change. **It's 2025 – are we halfway there?!!**



Good leadership requires bold vision!

- The launch of our new logo, our beautiful Hummingbird was to reflect our commitment to Truth & Reconciliation.
- The creation of two new and important leadership positions at DAWN Canada followed.
- Our **Director of Indigenous Initiatives, Evelyn Huntjens** and
- Our **Director of Black Community Initiatives, Tamara Medford-Williams**





Are we golden?

Addressing Policy Gaps & Data through an intersectional lens

- **Canada's data REALLY matters** and should be widely shared to inform and impact economic and social policies.
- 30% of women in Canada live with a disability - in a population context that is **(1 in 6) people!**
- Persistent **policy gaps have resulted in low investments** in addressing the needs of women and gender-diverse people living with disabilities in Federal/Provincial/Territorial contexts (The National Action Plan to end GBV, Canada's Early Learning & Child Care Initiative, National Housing Strategy)
- Intersectional data would confirm **even higher rates of disability for Black, Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.**



Impact Pathway ... from resilience to justice!

- **Root Resilience** → Empowerment, care, peer networks → safety, strengthened leadership & wellbeing
- **Root Change** → Research, policy, education & advocacy beginning with community mapping & building intersectional communities of care
- **Root Justice** → Structural reform, power redistribution → Intersectional and sustainable justice & representation



UNIFOR Women's Advocate Program – Peer support saves lives!



Women's Advocate Program

What does a Women's Advocate do?

Learns to support and advocate

A *Women's Advocate* is a specially-trained workplace representative who assists women with concerns such as:

- workplace harassment,
- intimate partner violence and abuse,
- mental health concerns, and more.

The *Women's Advocate* is not a counsellor but rather provides support for women seeking workplace and community resources.



“

After what happened, I wanted to curl into a little ball and disappear.

The Advocate at my workplace was supportive and linked me to someone trained to help.

She was a life saver.

On resilience and intersectional practice ...lifting each other up!

- **Resilience is connected to intersectionality** because an individual's intersecting identities, including race, gender, (dis)ability and socioeconomic status, shape their capacity to be resilient by influencing their access to resources, social support, and the impact of systemic oppression.
- The **Woman's Advocate Program has taken root** thanks to all of you and the leadership of UNIFOR and Sister Lana Payne!
- **Combating systems of oppression through peer support** has been a foundation of the labour movement and has guided DAWN Canada since our inception.



Root Resilience

- **Rooting Resilience - Peer Support Models to End Gender-Based Violence Against Women with Disabilities** (funded by WAGE Canada 2018-2024)
- **Overview**
- DAWN Canada's Rooting Resilience initiative explores how peer support models can strengthen gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response for women and gender-diverse people with disabilities. The research and field work outcomes with key partners from the Independent Living Resource Centre in Kingston, Women@theCentre and the women who 'came and remain', affirms that Rooting Resilience responds to a critical gap.
- While nearly 1 in 4 women in Canada live with a disability, few accessible, trauma-informed services exist. Peer support is positioned as both a community-based intervention and a systemic strategy—validating lived experience, reducing isolation, fostering empowerment, and promoting inclusion.



Key Insights

- Women with disabilities are twice as likely to experience violent crime and sexual assault. 39% experience intimate partner violence, with higher rates among Indigenous, racialized, LGBTQ2S+, and rural women.
- Existing GBV and disability services are often inaccessible or disconnected, leaving survivors without adequate support.
- Peer support—anchored in lived experience, empathy, and non-hierarchical relationships—reduces isolation and builds empowerment.



Some important Frameworks for Change

- Intersectionality: addresses overlapping systems of oppression and power dynamics.
- Human Rights in Canada are guided by the Canadian Charter on Human Rights and numerous treaties including the Convention on the Rights of People with disabilities (CRPD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to uphold accessibility, equity, and safety.
- Trauma-Informed Care: prioritizes safety, trust, collaboration, and cultural responsiveness.
- The Accessible Canada Act



Some Learnings and Policy Linkages

- Root Resilience emphasizes reflection on power dynamics ('Who is a peer?'), identity, and shared accountability through communities of practice.
- DAWN Canada's National Action Plan recommendations call for inclusive, accessible, peer-led GBV services; intersectional data collection;



Key takeaway from Root Resilience

- Rooting Resilience confirms that peer support is both healing and transformative—linking personal empowerment with systemic change.
- True resilience is rooted in community, driven by lived experience, and sustained through intersectional collaboration.
- Peer support saves lives!



Root Change

- Transforming systems through intersectional (feminist and disability) collaborations in research, education and together in communities of practice;
- Coordination and collaboration in influencing policy and advocacy
- Building institutional capacity for inclusion
- Centering lived experience in systemic reform



Root Change

- DAWN Canada is currently in the final phase of completing a second WAGE funded project that links to the Root Resilience, Root Change, Root Justice initiative.
- Mapping community resources in partnership with local leaders in Kingston, Ontario and Whitehorse, Yukon
- Dialoguing with peer support program leaders and capturing their insights.



Community Mapping & building intersectional networks



- Community-led mapping consolidates resources and connects diverse leadership to work on shared objectives.

Intersectional peer-led networks build trust, increase community investment and increase resilience



Rooting Justice together!

- **Dismantling systems of oppression and advancing collective liberation is our shared objective.** The Women's Advocate Program led by UNIFOR has already begun to go global.
- **Addressing ableism, sexism, racism, and colonialism - of the list of 'isms' ESPECIALLY as they intersect can no longer be left to the leadership of the few.** Gender-based violence is a disabling event unto itself.
- Ensuring representation in leadership and decision-making. **DAWN Canada's own approach on this is clear.** It's a choice! Ask me how it's going! 😊😊😊😊
- Redistributing power and resources is required!



About The Hummingbird Feminist Disability Coalition (HFDC)

- In March of 2024 DAWN Canada hosted women and gender-diverse leaders with disabilities from coast to coast to coast and together **we launched the Hummingbird Feminist Disability Coalition.**
- At 30%, that quantitative figure, we know, is low! The rates of episodic & chronic illnesses for women in Canada is another 'indicator' of just how much more work we all must do to **break down the systems of oppression that are driving up all those statistics!**
- And yes, we need to start with healing from violence and isolation and building safety through community just as you are doing at UNIFOR through the Women's Advocate Program. **Peer support saves lives!**
- The HFDC is a platform for supporting the leadership of women, girls and gender-diverse people living with disabilities and their allies. Building communities of practice with a focus on key issues and developing a strong voice for reforms across research, education, policy and advocacy - **leaving no one behind is the next foundation in advancing feminist practice.**



Some of our Work ...

- The **Kokum Project** — Indigenous-led responses to elder abuse
- Accessibility Standards Canada – Developing an intersectional framework for **new Prison Standards in Canada**
- Root Change - **Mapping peer support** across the Continuum
- Foundations in **Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights**



Closing reflection ...

Audrey Lourde “If I participate, knowingly or otherwise, in my sister's oppression and she calls me on it, to answer her anger with my own, only blankets the substance of our exchange with reaction. It wastes energy”.

- Justice grows from the roots.
- By cultivating resilience, we nurture change.
- By nurturing change, we grow justice.
- Peer support saves lives — and it plants the seeds of liberation.



Let's hear from you now!?

- As Women's Advocates does what you have heard today from me surprise you?
- What would you like DAWN Canada to know and learn from and about your experience as a Women's Advocate?
- Are you ready to Root Change and how???



Let's stay in touch!



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