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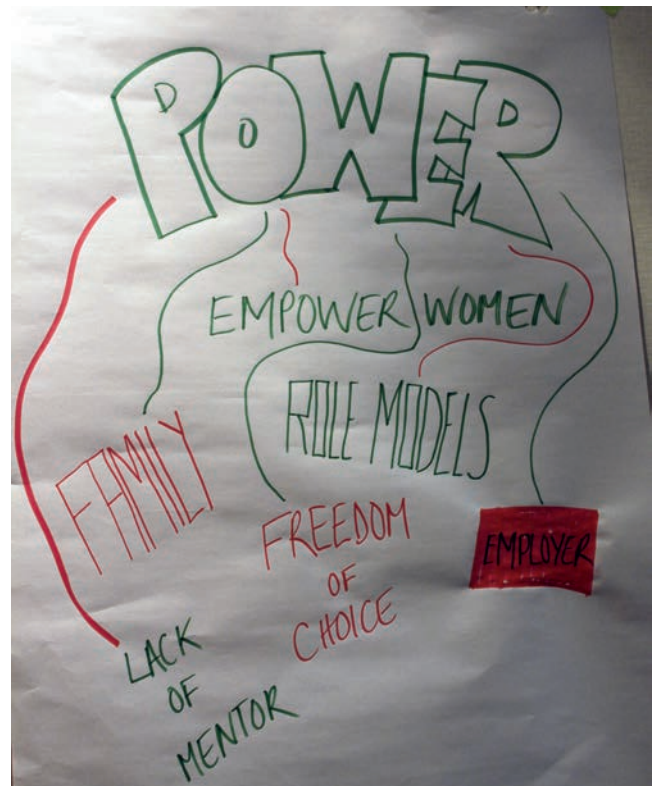
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women

PSAC BC Regional Women's Conference

September 13-15, 2019

Vancouver, BC





From September 13-15, 2019, 49 delegates from across the province joined the PSAC-B.C. Regional Women's Conference, under the theme "Empowered Women Empower Women" in Richmond.

Conference Chair and Regional Council Women's Coordinator, Kelly Sidhu, began the conference Friday afternoon by introducing Debra Sparrow, Indigenous Representative from the Musqueam Nation. Sister Sparrow shared that while the lands in the Metro Vancouver area overlap between several Nations, the Richmond area, in particular, was home for her Musqueam People although it is difficult to find traces of her Nation's history there.

She also spoke to the different ways women (and men) contributed in a shared balance to help produce the things they needed as a community but that she had to teach herself about this history and began to create art from that learning. She ended on speaking about textiles and how all societies are connected by weaving, and that is it a way to "change fear into faith so we are aware of what we have to fight for and blanket ourselves to help make the tough decisions".

The conference then heard from Jamey Mills, Regional Executive Vice-President for B.C. Brother Mills briefly spoke to the Federal Election with a clear message of encouraging members to say no to Andrew Scheer's Conservatives. He asked delegates to remember the annihilation of Status of Women Canada and cuts to Federal Funding of important women's programs and national women's organizations under the last Conservative government. On a provincial note, Brother Mills spoke to the B.C. government's consultation process on considering paid leave for people who experience domestic or sexual violence. He shared that the Region will make a formal submission and encouraged all to participate in the consultation process if they are able.

Sister Sidhu thanked both Sister Sparrow and Brother Mills as they took their leave. Sister Sparrow would return on Sunday for the conference closing.

At this point, Sister Sidhu shared her own opening comments by thanking all for taking the time from their family lives to work together to build a stronger union and to empower each other as that is essential for the union movement. She commended how each delegate has committed to work over the next few



days and to share that work when they go back to their Locals/Branches. Sister Sidhu shared her appreciation of that commitment and recognized it as how we keep the movement going and growing stronger.

The conference had the following objectives:

Challenge ideas and barriers to women's participation in the Union.

Encourage strategic actions to build a better Union, better workplaces, and a better society by encouraging and supporting PSAC women in our struggle for fairness, equality, and social justice.

Increase the active participation of women in the PSAC and the Union movement as we have the power to make change if we are willing to be part of the solution.

Empower PSAC-B.C. women to support women working together for our Union and our community in creating positive change.

Contribute to the work of PSAC's Gender Equity Task Force by identifying opportunities to develop women's leadership and achieve gender equity within our union.

Sister Sidhu then made it a point to not only introduce the Conference Organizing Committee, Resolutions Committee, and the staff, but also had them physically come up to the front to visually acknowledge the number of women involved in making this conference that all the delegates were about to embark on.

The Organizing Committee, led by Sister Sidhu, included Tracey Arrowsmith, Kelly Megyesi, Nancy Sermons, Amrit Sihota, Linda Woods. Unfortunately, Sister Megyesi could not attend the conference and was acknowledged for her work alongside the Organizing Committee.

The Conference Resolutions Committee, led by Kelly Megyesi, included Karolyn Jones, Zita Lambert, Joyce Lawson, and Karen Sutton. Sister Sutton agreed to Chair the Committee in Sister Megyesi's absence for the duration of the Conference.

The Committees were acknowledged for their hard work.

Amrit Sihota and Linda Woods read out the PSAC's Harassment and Scent-Free policies to help ensure all delegates would be able to fully participate throughout the weekend in a safe and kind environment.

Sister Sidhu brought to the attention of the delegates that the Organizing Committee had made specific decisions regarding their refreshments, requesting that the coffee served was Fair Trade coffee and the tea and hot

chocolate were ethically sourced. She also announced that extra toiletries from the hotel were being gathered to be donated to the Northern Regional Women's Committee's annual "care kits" that they provide to women and their families in their community. The Organizing Committee had chosen the B.C. Society of Transition Houses as the recipient of their fundraising activities (more on this later in the report).

Next, women spoke freely and frankly while participating in a plenary workshop on the Gender Equity Taskforce that PSAC is undertaking across the country. They discussed barriers women face in the Union under various scenarios such as participating in Union meetings or getting elected to Union office or experiences from Union leadership. Conversations also included what motivates themselves and others when participating in Union Activities. The workshop ended on identifying the many ways to address the barriers identified. Delegates were provided time to fill out anonymous, individual surveys that included more questions on gender equity and actions still needed within and by PSAC. These surveys were gathered by PSAC and are being compiled nationally for further analysis and action.

After a short break the evening program was kicked off with Tracy Arrowsmith as emcee. Delegates enjoyed an intimate and fun dinner, distributing door prizes as tables were chosen to get food. Later into the evening, Sister Arrowsmith brought up Nancy Sermons to introduce Magali Picard, National Executive Vice-President for PSAC.

Sister Picard spoke from the heart with some important messages. She encouraged delegates to work together and strategize together as women. She mentioned that education and mentorship were important but also the need to try something different in order to change the results. Sister Picard emphasized the importance to make things positive and fun to encourage more women to come, otherwise, why would they bother? She acknowledged that women have responsibilities at work and in their home lives so keeping things fun is important and is possible while still working to achieve change.



The NEVP challenged delegates to help bring our own women in our work along with us. She recognized that there is a rise of the right in Canada, especially when looking at recent elections at the Provincial level. Sister Picard spoke to

the need to talk to our colleagues about this danger and that we have to fight, not only to keep what we have already achieved in the workplace but for any further improvements. She ended with a request to have women stop judging one another for making different choices, but instead find ways to support one another.

The evening ended with some lighthearted fun through Union Bingo. This enabled women to get to know each other more as they sought out Sisters who matched the bingo square descriptions and provided more chances to give out prizes to participants.

Saturday morning brought women into three simultaneous workshops on “Building Women’s Power for Change.” This workshop built on the previous day’s Gender Equity Taskforce discussions. It gave women an opportunity in smaller groups to share more deeply on the issues that women face and possible avenues for change within the Union and the Workplace. It gathered more of the common barriers faced by women when it comes to Union participation. The workshop also included how to empower and mobilize members, which some were able to practice, and ended on women choosing particular actions they want to take on and made a plan to bring those actions to fruition. One immediate action that was taken was to immediately create a Facebook group under the conference theme to help continue the networking started at the conference.

Saturday afternoon brought all delegates together for an interactive plenary workshop, “Lead Indeed, The Heart of Leadership” facilitated by Carol Ann Fried. This workshop included a variety of ice breakers, thoughts on the power of words and compassionate communication, discussions on “good” and “bad” leadership, and the need for daily acts of kindness.

The Organizing Committee hosted hospitality suites both Friday and Saturday evenings to provide additional opportunities for informal networking.



A special moment for many delegates was when they took part in a member-initiated and spontaneous action first thing Sunday morning when Andrew Scheer’s Conservative Party of Canada campaign van was spotted in the hotel parking





lot. Armed with “I support my bargaining team” signs the women effectively surrounded the van while chanting, “So-so-so-Solidarity” until the van backed out of the lot. Women were already wearing red in honour of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), which also included empty red dresses on hangers to symbolize the women and girls.

The rest of the morning included a resolutions orientation and then resolutions debate. Fourteen resolutions were submitted to the Regional Women’s Conference for the Resolutions Committee’s consideration. While eight resolutions passed in total, only the top five priority resolutions can be submitted to the PSAC National Women’s Conference.

The top five priority resolutions were:

Resolution #1 Priority Equity Resolutions

Resolution #2 Diversity Mentorship

Resolution #3 Ending Sexual and Gender Harassment

Resolution #4 Participation in Regional Committees

Resolution #5 Supporting Harassment Cases: Trauma Informed Practice and Paid Time Off

At the close of the debate, delegates were requested to get involved in their geographic Regional Women’s Committee.

Sister Sidhu called upon Nancy Sermons to update that the conference had raised over \$1100 through donations and raffle sales to be donated to the B.C. Society of Transition Houses! Sister Sermons, Sister Woods, and Sister Arrowsmith was the sub-committee responsible for the raffle and ardent ticket sellers.

To conclude, Sister Sidhu called up all of the Organizing and Resolutions Committee members to present them with a gift of thanks for their tireless work. Debra Sparrow officially closed the conference on behalf of the Musqueam people and wished all safe journeys home.

Special conference thank you’s

AGR 20043 | AGR 20044 | CEIU 20937 | DCL 20500 | Kelly Megyesi | Lea Serron
Mohr Good Ideas | North East Regional Women’s Committee | Okanagan
Regional Women’s Committee | PSAC West Fraser Valley Area Council | UCTE
20209 | UNE 20140 | UTE 20007 | UTE 20029 | Vancouver Regional Women’s
Committee | Victoria Regional Women’s Committee