



# Annual Donor Report on The Girls' Fund

How you helped girls and gender-diverse  
young people gain power, safety, rights,  
and support since 2022



CANADIAN  
WOMEN'S  
FOUNDATION





## A Message of Gratitude for You

Thank you for understanding that girls and youth need support more than ever. Despite increasing national awareness about mental health, statistics about the wellness of girls in Canada paint a grim picture. When society teaches girls to focus on limiting, stereotypical gender roles and the way they look, it puts them at risk; it affects their inner confidence and self-worth, as well as their academic achievements and career aspirations.

Girls and gender-diverse young people face high rates of sexual assault and other forms of violence (Conroy, Statistics Canada, 2018; Trans PULSE Canada, 2021). For girls between age 9 and 13, studies show their confidence drops—in grade six, 36% of girls say they are self-confident, yet by grade 10 only 14% say the same.

In adolescence, safety and relationships become charged issues. Girls and young women experience sexual assault at a rate seven times higher than boys and young men. Mental health concerns and risks for self-harm spike—almost 30% of all self-harm hospitalizations are for girls and young women. Many youth withdraw and feel isolated, especially after the pandemic. It's a tough time, but as the grantee organizations we support know, it's a *vital* time to build senses of belonging, confidence, resilience, and healthy relationship skills.

I am proud to now be a part of the Canadian Women's Foundation and this crucial work. The Girls' Fund supports ways to broaden education and build up girls' confidence through programs in the following areas: STEM education; sports, outdoor activities, and art; cultural connections; media literacy to navigate negative self-image; groups for resiliency and confidence-building; and community mentorship opportunities. The positive effects of these programs can last a lifetime. Programs that build identity and cultural connection promote belonging, which is vital for everybody; school belonging has "powerful long- and short-term implications for students' positive psychological and academic outcomes" (Allen et al., 2022). For Indigenous young people, building a sense of cultural identity, community, and belonging is particularly important (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021).

I have witnessed it: you care about what girls and gender-diverse youth are going through. That is why you chose to step up when they need you the most and provide much-needed visibility. Your contributions have enabled the Canadian Women's Foundation to ensure that community-based programs in throughout the country can support those at risk.

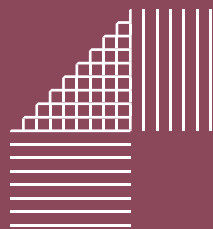
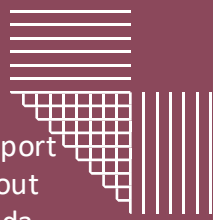
I am pleased to share this report with you. You'll learn how our grantee partner programs you support intervened at just the right time. You'll read about how your support helped girls and gender-diverse young people learn, play, explore, express themselves, and feel more empowered in their everyday lives.

Thank you for supporting girls' bright futures.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mitzie Hunter". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Mitzie Hunter**  
**President & CEO**  
**Canadian Women's Foundation**





## The Canadian Women's Foundation is pleased to announce Mitzie Hunter as new President and Chief Executive Officer

On June 27, 2024, the Canadian Women's Foundation enthusiastically announced Mitzie Hunter as its new President and Chief Executive Officer. Mitzie is a dynamic, community-grounded leader who will play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality in Canada.

Mitzie's 30 years of leadership span the non-profit sector, private sector, and government. She has a trailblazing track record and many successes championing infrastructure and community improvements. Mitzie was the first Black woman to serve as Ontario's Minister of Education. She also served as Ontario's Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development and as Associate Minister of Finance.

Mitzie is a respected advocate for diverse women, girls, and Two Spirit, trans, and non-binary people throughout Canada. She is known for her expertise in an array of issues, from women's leadership to inclusive economies to sustainable neighbourhood and city building. She is a founding visionary of the Prosperity Project.

She served as Chief Administrative Officer of Toronto Community Housing Corporation and as head of CivicAction. She is a Senior Fellow with the C.D. Howe Institute and a Canadian Urban Leader at the University of Toronto's School of Cities. Mitzie has also served in several board leadership positions in non-profit and public service bodies, including United Way Greater Toronto and TVO. In 2023, Mitzie ran for mayor in the City of Toronto by-election.

"Our goal must be nothing less than a gender-equal Canada," says Mitzie. "I am excited to play my part as President and CEO to help get us there, working alongside our brilliant grantee partners, and dedicated donors and supporters."

"The Canadian Women's Foundation is Canada's hub for action on gender equality," says Mitzie. "It is for every single one of us who believes in the change we've already seen and knows reaching the goal of a gender-equal Canada is both possible and necessary. I invite everybody to join me in this changemaking community so every woman, girl, and gender-diverse person gets the power, safety, support, and rights to thrive, today and tomorrow."



Senator Paulette Senior, centre, poses outside the Red Chamber with senators Marc Gold and Rosemary Moodie ahead of Senator Senior's swearing-in ceremony on February 6, 2024

## Leadership update: President and CEO Paulette Senior appointed to the Senate of Canada

A lifelong champion of social justice and equity, Paulette Senior has demonstrated outstanding leadership as President and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation since joining the organization in 2016.

For decades, she has been an outspoken advocate for an inclusive Canada, one that builds up women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals.

Now she will bring her passions to the national level. She has been appointed to the Senate of Canada, in no small part in recognition of her thought-leadership on and voice for gender equality.

We wish Senator Senior the best in her new role and deeply appreciate her change-making influence during her time leading the Canadian Women's Foundation

"I've seen a groundswell of public interest in gender equality that I've never seen before," she notes. "There's a greater recognition that we all need to be changemakers and do our part to further the goal of a gender equal Canada in our own spheres of influence."

We are so grateful to have worked with Senator Senior and know she will continue to inspire positive change.



**Girls and non-binary youth deserve to feel powerful and valued today and get every opportunity to become tomorrow's leaders.**

**Your support will help them get there.**

Thanks to you, the Canadian Women's Foundation Girls' Fund supports programs that give girls and non-binary youth aged 9 to 13 the support and tools to develop into confident, strong people, right when they need this most. Grantee programs help to build participants' skills, gain mentorship opportunities, learn, explore, and bolster their self-esteem in inclusive, safe spaces just for them.

To help girls and gender-diverse youth, programs that build identity, cultural connection, and belonging are vital. A sense "of belonging, specifically school belonging, has powerful long- and short-term implications for students' positive psychological and academic outcomes" (Allen et al., 2022). For Indigenous young people, building a sense of cultural identity, community, and belonging is particularly important (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021).

The funded programs are delivered by grassroots, community-based organizations that are deeply connected to the young people in they serve. Often in rural, remote, and Northern communities without access to age-specific or gender-focused services, these programs provide tailored workshops and broad supports that speak to girls' needs and risks, their cultures, life goals, and vulnerabilities at this challenging life stage.

Every grantee organization participates in the Canadian Women's Foundation's Girls' Fund Community of Practice. Here, grantees can learn from each other, and problem solve similar challenges. They also receive tailored professional development opportunities on issues impacting young people nation-wide and build skills and capacity to address those issues in the communities they serve. For example, with these resources, several organizations will reconfigure the names of their programs to be more gender inclusive and welcoming to gender-diverse youth. Organizations also work with local schools, strategize about parent engagement to bring learnings to the home, and reach specific communities (such as Syrian, Afghan, and Ukrainian refugees).

Grantees design their programs and respond to the evolving needs of youth in their communities—whether making services more accessible, bringing in Elders, mentors, and experts, or pivoting to accommodate more participants—and strive for the best possible outcomes and meaningful connections for lasting change.

# Girls and gender-diverse youth need empowerment and support. As girls approach adolescence, they face higher levels of sexual assault and other forms of violence, a sharp decline in mental health and confidence, and negative stereotyping and sexualization.

- The years between ages 9 and 13 are a critical time for girls' healthy development. At this stage, girls often face a sharp decline in mental health and confidence (Boyce, King, and Roche, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).
- In grade six, 36% of girls say they feel self-confident. By grade 10, this falls to only 14% (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).
- Almost 30% of all self-harm hospitalizations are for girls and young women. Those aged 10 to 24 are three times more likely to be hospitalized for self-harm than boys and young men the same age (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2020).
- A survey found that 4 in 10 trans and non-binary youth report having been sexually harassed. Gender-diverse youth are also likely to experience other forms of violence. (Trans PULSE Canada, 2021).
- Twenty-six per cent of Indigenous girls experience sexual assault before the age of 15, three times the rate of non-Indigenous girls. (Statistics Canada, 2022)

## You made an impact

Last year, young people served by our grantee partners reported:



99% felt safe



99% felt like the adults in the program cared about them



98% felt happy to have a space just for girls/non-binary youth



94% felt safe talking about youth issues



88% made friends





### łiłičałukwitasin, Huu-ay-aht First Nation

Port Alberni, BC

Served 20 Participants

łiłičałukwitasin (“we will be steering our canoe in the right direction”) helps girls and gender-diverse youth develop meaningful connections, gain a strong sense of cultural identity, and learn tools to navigate mental health and relationships. Through weekly group sessions, one-on-one mentoring, camps, and retreats, Huu-ay-aht youth bond with one another on their Traditional Lands and integrate cultural teachings with wellness practices. Several programs included four 8-week girls’ groups, two retreats, and several field trips such as surfing lessons. Spring break and summer culture camps were offered for all genders to enhance accessibility. Ongoing challenges include transportation (staff offered pick-ups for participants and gas vouchers for mentors) and attendance, both of which are points of struggle in this remote community.



*Participants with their Mentor at Foam Fest*

The girls’ groups for ages 9-13 took place with a clinical counsellor and a cultural wellness worker. Over eight sessions, the groups learn about listening to their feelings, healthy communication, building self-esteem, self-care practices, and activities that bring them joy.

Staff provided a safe space for spontaneous discussions about any issues important to participants; following the girls’ leads and interests resulted in more engagement.

Group activities included crafts like beading, making dream catchers, painting, cultural teaching, and singing; building Indigenous cultural connection promotes a strong sense of self. In the culture camps, girls worked with Elders and Knowledge Keepers in food preparation, plant identification, harvesting ceremonial feathers, and performances. A retreat at the Pacific National Exhibition allowed for practicing Sacred Principles as a group, and a 5K Foam Fest encouraged teamwork and physical challenges for the obstacle course.

#### **Impact:**

Girls have shared that they feel safe attending łiłičałukwitasin programs. Providing this inclusive atmosphere that focuses on identity and community within group discussions allowed participants to explore gender identity, and one girl disclosed their identity for the first time and felt empowered to share with a parent.

#### **Broader community impact:**

Community members of Huu-ay-aht First Nation appreciated seeing that youth learned how to prepare and can salmon, a declining skill. Participants impressed the community with their learning at a barbeque—the girls served lunch, and connected cheerfully with Elders, community members, and guests.

Within the Huu-ay-aht community, the phrase “culture is medicine” is often heard, which highlights the positive impact of connecting with culture. Community members loved watching the girls dance at Culture Camp; seeing youth practicing cultural traditions brings healing and hope to the community.



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **Circles of Care—Circles of Courage, Canadian Mental Health Association: Cowichan Valley & Malahat First Nation**

Duncan, BC

Served 8 Participants

The *Circles of Care—Circles of Courage* program offers girl-identifying youth aged 9 to 14 of the Malahat Nation on Vancouver Island a weekly facilitated group involving traditional values such as belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Through activities like crafting, art sessions, exercise, and group discussion, the program provides an environment for learning and skills building.

This year, a life skills component was added to provide some cultural guidance and practice for dealing with personal issues. Led by an Elder skilled in adolescent development, this component included presentations, activities, and exercises about what the youth were going through physically, socially, and emotionally. The Elder provided a safe space as well as cultural teachings to support communication and self-confidence for positive relationships.

Many of the Malahat girls who participated face mental health challenges and behavioural issues, which contributed to lower than anticipated participant numbers; the program aims to support participants in developing tools and resources for resiliency into the future.

#### **Impact:**

One of the program sessions focused on practicing positive self-talk, rather than focusing on worry, anxiety, and negative thinking. Participants created artistic posters that to express appreciation for themselves to build self-confidence; this exercise helped them realize that they loved themselves and their families in many ways. Many girls talked about how they wanted to help their families and learn more about their culture. Finding positive affirmations helped them cope with negative self-talk and value their own unique capabilities.



*Malahat Girls Club – November 10, 2022: Beading and Boundaries*





## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### Girls Can ... Brandon Mini University

Brandon, MB

Served 40 Participants

The Girls Can ... program provides Brandon-area girls with access to high-quality, interactive learning about STEM in an inclusive, fun, safe environment. Sixteen weeks of evening programs were delivered to two cohorts of girls and gender-diverse youth aged 9-13; the sessions included crafts, programming robots, 3D printing, cooking, media literacy, sports—all with a science twist.

With your support, the program builds confidence, healthy relationships, teamwork skills, and personal resiliency. Using Mini University's store of equipment, the themed Girls Can... sessions include: tie dye; coding principles; how to form a question and research the answer; plant propagation and painting pots; 3D Printing; Ice-cream in a bag; build and code K8 Robots; electricity and snap circuits; bloxels coding; DNA extraction with a banana; chemical reactions with slime and elephant toothpaste; bridge engineering; and math. These hands-on activities promoted problem solving through challenging tasks. Participants also took part in Equine Assisted Learning (EAL), using horses in experiential learning exercises with facilitators. Girls—many from racialized or underserved communities—were exposed to fun opportunities in science, school, and life.

#### Impact:

*"I have a better understanding and love for science and STEM."*—Raya, participant

Participants in Girls Can... became more comfortable with and interested in STEM and would often discuss where it fits into everyday life. Many coding participants were anxious but once they gave it a try and worked through problems, they felt capable and wanted to do it again.

*"I speak out more. I used to be really shy but now I'm more confident to share!"*—Jez, participant

A senior instructor observed that participants' confidence came through in their approach to the activities. Initially, girls would say: "How do I do this? Is this right?" and later said "Look what I did!" or "I'm doing this and here's why." Learning about scientific reasoning brought out their confidence.

**Broader community impact:** As the program progressed, it strengthened the participants' families' relationships with Brandon University. Many felt like they belonged there, despite initial reservations. Some parents brought their children to basketball and volleyball games, forging more connection with the educational community.



*Creating Snap Circuits*



*Equine Assisted Learning*



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **Girl Code, ElevateHER / Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia**

Dartmouth, NS

Served 50 Participants

*Girl Code* is an intensive program to address issues surrounding the difficult life stage of girls and non-binary youth (aged 9 – 13) by building confidence and communication skills through workshops with teen mentors (aged 16 – 19). The program met twice weekly in two locations: Dartmouth and Truro. They also ran mentor nights to provide training and learning opportunities, parent and family nights that discussed healthy relationships, skills building, internet safety, and workshops on topics like diversity and inclusion, body image, and more. This past year, program participants also took part in three field trips: a visit to the splash park, a women's fashion show to raise funds for those experiencing homelessness, and a volunteer activity day at a family resource centre.

The new Truro location, in a downtown area, provided a safe and easily accessible space for participants. More broadly, the community became more aware of *Girl Code* and supported these initiatives and helped raise awareness to reach diverse populations. Previous participants, mentors, and family members continue to contribute to the development of the program.



*Girl Code Outdoor Activity*

### **Girls Count, SuperNOVA, Dalhousie University**

Halifax, NS

Served 23 Participants

SuperNOVA's Girls Count program combines weekly educational programming with mentorship to enhance gender inclusion in mathematics by exploring STEM fields for underserved girls in grades 6-8. Girls Count facilitators include diverse women and gender-diverse people with distinct identities, professions, and industry experiences to bring deeper engagement to STEM fields. Participants experience a safe, inclusive space for positive experiences with STEM and apply those skills and confidence within their communities.

Your donations supported weekly programming featuring lesson plans developed by Dalhousie University student instructors designed to achieve their school curriculum outcomes. Team-based lessons build critical mathematics and problem-solving skills that promote confidence in topics such as physics, engineering, and finance. Monthly guest visits from a retired chemistry professor built trust and allowed participants to interact with an expert; the professor focused on tying math concepts to real-world applications and careers. This year, Girls Count focused on introducing technical tools such as graphing calculators to solve equations, and Microsoft Excel to learn its functions and apply formulas.

Based on participant feedback, going forward the program will offer one session of homework help per month for more one-on-one support, and organizers are considering a location change based on parents experiencing difficulties bringing children to downtown Halifax. Several participants were excited to join the program again.

#### **Impact:**

Some comments received during a feedback workshop included: "I want to become a teacher" "Now I want to be a mathematician," or desires to "become a scientist or engineer."



## **Girl Power & Girl Force, Women's Centre of Calgary**

Calgary, AB

Served 103 Participants

Thanks to your support, the girls' programs at the Women's Centre of Calgary offered safe spaces for girls and gender-diverse youth to explore important issues and build their leadership and activism skills through community participation. Girl Power (grades 5 and 6) and Girl Force (grade 7 to 9) were offered as three weekly after school programs, a spring break camp, and four summer camps at the Women's Centre facilities. The after-school programs are held both online and in-person to enhance accessibility. In terms of this year's challenges, many individuals seek out the Women's Centre while in crisis, and these demands place strain on staff and resources; additionally, an increased number of newcomers have sought out the program, highlighting the need to adapt some activities for participants learning English.

The Girl Power and Girl Force sessions discuss relationships, culture, body image, mental health, human rights, inclusion, and much more; some are youth-led, to centre youth needs and to promote confidence in leadership, and other sessions engage with the broader community by bringing in local experts and artists to share. Workshops on healthy relationships collaborated with Centre for Sexuality, and Indigenous Storytelling with Canada Bridges were some key activities. Through these sessions, participants from underserved communities learn positive communication skills that strengthen bonds, take part in extracurricular activities, access resources, and gain knowledge and confidence to navigate issues facing girls today.

**Impact:** Ti, who had recently come out as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, joined the summer Girl Power program. Ti had experienced the painful loss of some friends at school, leaving them eager to rebuild their sense of community in an inclusive space and connect with new friends who would embrace them for who they truly are.

Ti forged a deep connection with another participant who shared hopes of forming meaningful friendships. Their newfound friendship blossomed quickly, instilling a sense of empowerment and belonging for both of them. Their new friend, now firmly engaged in discussions about activism and leadership, took concrete actions to make a difference. During a field trip, she inquired about the location of gender-neutral bathrooms, ensuring Ti would not feel uncomfortable using a restroom that did not align with their gender identity. This simple yet profound act of support spoke volumes about her commitment to inclusivity and advocacy. By the end of the weeklong program, this young participant had experienced a remarkable transformation. She expressed feeling like a true leader, her confidence buoyed by the opportunities at the program and the new, meaningful friendship. This narrative showcases the extraordinary impact of acceptance, friendship, and youth empowerment within the Girl Power summer program.



*Participants during activity sessions and sharing their art*



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### Girls Without Barriers, DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) Montreal, QC

Girls Without Barriers encourages girl-serving organizations to examine and address (through focus groups and research) the underlying causes and consequences of ableism how they intersect with other systems of oppression. The key project activity was conducting focus groups and empirical story-based research with girls with disabilities, focus on the marginalized: Black, Indigenous, and racialized girls. With this research, thanks to your support, DAWN will develop facilitation guides, tips, peer-support skills, informational sheets on ableism, and tools for service providers who deliver programs to girls.

Although the previous DAWN researcher responsible for Girls Without Barriers has moved onto new ventures, and the process of hiring a new researcher and bringing her up to speed on the GWB project has resulted in significant delays, we are pleased to share that the new researcher has brought along a fresh perspective and energy to the project. With a clearer action plan and reworded methodology, and a streamlined questionnaire, the project now has a set timeline. Diverse participants will be involved as DAWN will gain insights while gathering qualitative data gathering with girls, young women, and gender-diverse youth from Indigenous, BIPOC, rural/remote, newcomer, and 2SLGBTQIA+ backgrounds.

### GRIT, Terrace Women's Resource Centre Society Terrace, BC Served 42 participants

The Terrace Women's Resource Centre Society's GRIT (Gain Resilience, Ingenuity, & Tenacity—formerly Girls' Resiliency Innovation Tenacity) program encourages participants to become future leaders by focusing on their strengths through enriching activities. The program supported activities for girls and gender-diverse youth aged 8 to 13 with regular after school and weekday programs, NID day, weekend and summer daytime activities, two weeks of summer camp, and engagement at community events and partner programs such as Family Literacy Day. Activities for youth focus on skills development STEM learning, empowerment approaches to topics like body positivity, healthy relationships, conflict resolution, inclusion and culture, and pre-employment skills. The organization further developed a peer mentoring network through GRIT, providing opportunities for youth to volunteer and develop professional skills. The outdoor forest camp and indoor circus camp received rave reviews from the community and many comments about how engaged the youth were.

Since the community served is northern, rural, and remote, transportation is limited; going forward, the program will focus on relocating outside of the downtown core to enhance accessibility. In the coming year, the program will move away from afterschool programs to focus on free evening recreational and physical activities to fill existing gaps in the community for those who cannot afford these activities, as well as continuing with weekend, NID day, and summer programming. Past participants have returned to volunteer as youth mentors for the programs and summer camps, and TWRCs plans to develop further staffing opportunities.

**Impact:** One thirteen-year-old participant has planned and facilitated programs with children and expressed her dream of one day becoming a teacher. She loved practicing her skills while having fun in the program.



It's urgent to remember that within feminist social movements and those fighting for the rights of people with disabilities, adults form the starting point for demands, and in this sense, take part in the erasure of girls with disabilities.

#GirlsWithoutBarriers

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*Nelly Bassily, the DAWN Director of the Youth Initiatives and International Relationships Blog*



### **HERd Zine League, LUSO Community Services**

London, ON

Served 27 Participants

*HERd Zine League* program promotes gender equity for girls aged 9-13 through artistic projects, literacy skills, and media awareness. The group discusses how gender is represented in the media and contributing to the history of zines as a feminist response to commercial media. In this 14-week program, two groups of participants in two different locations developed artistic skills through workshops and demonstrations alongside developing critical thinking skills to navigate the negative messages of influence in media. These discussions, built self-esteem, exposed participants to diversity, consent, and positive role models, as well as building connections among participants. The art projects—including self-portraits with positive descriptions of themselves—let participants enhance their strengths and skills. Participants received their own art kits and used their individual strengths (writing, drawing, collage, etc.) to produce zines for distribution as community action.

Partnering with the London Public Library this past year allowed for many resources, such as chrome books, 3D printer, circuit machine, and led the girls to explore the many library services available to them. Moving forward, the library will be unavailable to the program, so field trips will be worked into the curriculum. The program will continue to be offered at accessible community spaces.

### **Impact:**

During the first session of HERd Zine League, Netta shared her apprehensions about joining the program, as she didn't have many friends who were girls. She didn't want to join in on other groups' conversations, even with encouragement from the facilitators. However, as the program progressed, she started talking to the other girls in the program and building friendships through the interactive activities and art projects that required the girls to work together and intermingle. Halfway through HERd Zine League, she expressed how pleased she was to have joined this program and made friends. She brought in handmade origami gifts to give to the other girls. She showed more confidence when participating in the group discussions about photoshop in magazines, gender stereotypes in media, and consent—her confidence shone through. During the "I Am" self-portrait art activity, participants painted a self-portrait and then glued on an assortment of positive words they felt described them. At first, Netta felt reluctant to choose positive words, as she felt they didn't describe her. However, after our group discussion on self-confidence, she excitedly grabbed all the different positive words to add to her self-portrait.



*Program Photo after a Self Identifying Art Session*



**Intergenerational Girls Empowerment Program**  
**St. John's Native Friendship Centre**  
St. John's, NL  
Served 190 participants

Participants in the Intergenerational Girls Empowerment Program come together for various events and cultural activities focused on closing the intergenerational gap between youths and seniors and Indigenous Elders in the community. Both the participating girls and Elders benefit from mentorship and connections to culture.

The Intergenerational Girls Empowerment Program contributes to girls' and gender-diverse youth's development through mentorship opportunities, peer support, and empowerment through sharing and connections. Over the past year, the weekly program offered a series of land-based activities, water-based activities, and knowledge sharing activities. The land and water series activities progressively introduced cultural teachings and survival knowledge as well as improving participants' comfort and confidence levels, such as introducing water safety alongside traditional canoeing skills. As the organization expanded outreach offerings and engaged with a wider audience, the program's reach broadened; they were able to connect with more individuals and communities who support Indigenous rights and fostering allyship, broadening the support for these programs.

The Intergenerational Girls Empowerment Program ensured inclusive participation by creating safe spaces for open dialogue, offering safe transportation and providing programs in accessible spaces, and working with Indigenous knowledge keepers to facilitate cultural events and activities.



*Participant with their mentor strawberry picking*

**Impact:** A family that attends this program has benefitted greatly in terms of family health, individual skills, and personal empowerment. The children, from both First Nations and Inuit backgrounds, have developed strong self-esteem as well as skills with woodworking and hands on tool-use. They now help their father, and he expressed his appreciation for the girls' strength and dedication. The mother learned to be the head firekeeper of her family, and the grandmother has become more comfortable with how to create healthy relationships with all of her grandchildren and how to work with their differences in learning, abilities, and mental health. Bonding with other participants, they jokingly called the sessions "grandmother training" for grandmothers-to-be in the program.



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **Le Centre filles mobile, Association YWCA De Quebec**

Quebec City, QC

Served 442 Participants

The Mobile Girls' Centre (Le Centre filles mobile) program enables girls and gender-diverse youth to develop their leadership skills and make a difference. The project is designed by and for the participants, so each group will define its own objectives, themes, activities, and projects and be supported to enhance their confidence, critical thinking skills, and sense of belonging through an intersectional feminist approach.

Participants in this program are between the ages of 10 and 15, and most of them are racialized or newcomers and live in low-income housing in Quebec City. Many participants experience food insecurity, so snacks and meals were provided during their commitment to the program. Mobile Girls' Centre remained flexible to welcome participants' younger siblings, as many youth were responsible for caretaking while parents worked; this ensured they'd keep attending and contributing to the group activities and discussions. For more accessibility, YWCA offered bus tickets and transportation for special events.

Thanks to you, the YWCA's youth services team hosted, facilitated, and supported meetings for the weekly youth committees. The youth participants became part of committees to develop community action projects together; this approach develops a lot of autonomy and responsibility for problem solving. During the committee meetings, Mobile Girls' Centre set up a safe and non-judgmental space for young people to discuss important topics. The issues that arose the most were managing emotions, self-confidence, friendships, bullying, racism, puberty, consent, and affirmation.

Two committees created two public murals that represented their cultures (one in a dedicated art wall space and another in the community hall of a public housing project). Another committee contributed to a shared magazine/diary based on the social issues they experience; youth practiced graphic design and writing that discussed sexual harassment, gendered discrimination, and consent—demonstrating their learnings from the group discussions. The magazine was published and shared with their school, which made them proud and confident. Other committees' projects included: composing and recording a song; activism denouncing school dress codes for girls; a community clean-up around their school for Earth Day, and more.

Following participation in the girls' committees, participants were invited to the YWCA camps—many of which are free—and many attended Leadership Camp, continuing their community involvement and building positive habits and skills in an inclusive environment.

### **Impact:**

Over the year, youth participants in Mobile Girls Centre reported feeling more confident, listening better to others and their own needs, identifying healthy relationships, and respectful assertiveness techniques relating to social issues, such as racism and sexism.



*"Act for You" Program participants after doing art to reflect their own self worth*



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### Oskinikiskwew, Samson Community Wellness

Maskwacis, AB

Served 75 Participants

A Plains Cree word, Oskinikiskwew derives from a ceremony where a young girl becomes a woman, and this term connects to the program's goals for Indigenous girls to develop confidence and become community leaders. The Oskinikiskwew program supports Cree girls in a culturally sensitive space to explore the issues they're facing and helps them to develop positive gender and cultural identities.

The program continues to enhance the confidence and leadership development of girls and gender-diverse youth aged 9-13 in the Samson Cree community. This is accomplished through a combined weekly girls' program (Girl Power) and girls' group mentoring program (Youth Heal Your Life), and Daughters of Tradition for 16-weeks of in-person leadership workshops. Program sessions approach vital topics self-confidence, body image, and feature facilitated team-building activities. The weekly girls' program provides a safe space for girls to express themselves, and the girls' group mentoring program pairs participants with women mentors who give support, guidance, and role modeling. Leadership training workshops through the "Daughters of Tradition" curriculum focusing on communication and problem-solving skills and community service projects. Additionally, the program offered educational resources such as arts and crafts, sports, and STEM activities. To ensure participants stay engaged, the program provides attendees with coping skills and supports to navigate challenges faced by Indigenous girls in a culturally safe and empowering format.

Over the past year, the program adapted for virtual formats and other alternate options such as flexible attendance to address challenges in accessibility. The program adopted a trauma-informed approach by training staff to understand mental health needs

and components for a supportive environment. Oskinikiskwew also engaged Elders, Traditional Knowledge keepers, and community members for guidance and contributions to content and programming that deepened cultural connections in the community.

#### **Impact:**

Sarah, a ten-year-old participant, initially struggled with low self-esteem and feelings of isolation. Through her involvement in the Oskinikiskwew program, she had the opportunity to connect with supportive mentors, participate in cultural activities, and engage in discussions on topics such as self-confidence and healthy relationships. Over time, Sarah's self-esteem improved, and she developed a strong sense of belonging within the program. She gained the confidence to express herself, make new friends, and embrace her cultural identity. Sarah's story demonstrates the transformative power of the program in fostering personal growth and empowerment.

Twelve-year-old Maya faced challenges related to acceptance and understanding of her identity when she came out as 2SLGBTQIA+. Oskinikiskwew provided a safe and inclusive space where Maya could be herself without judgment. She found support from both her peers and program facilitators, who encouraged open dialogue and celebrated diversity. Maya's participation in the program allowed her to embrace her identity with pride, build resilience, and develop a strong support network.

*"Traditional Teachings share a historical connection that our lives are a journey and there are lessons that will bring us closer to becoming our 'best' self, the true essence of our being emanates from love — love of oneself, love of family, and love of others. This program builds a foundation of Cree values, support, and cultural understanding that will guide girls toward a brighter and more empowered future."* —Oskinikiskwew staff member





## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### Power Girls, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society

Surrey, BC

Served 40 participants

Power Girls: A Migrant Girls STEM Project is a collaborative, inclusive learning program aimed at racialized girls and non-binary kids aged 9–12. With hands-on activities and specific guidance, participants will be empowered to pursue STEM while breaking down social norms and stereotype barriers that may hinder their paths. Developing capacities in critical thinking, organizational and life skills, and teamwork, Power Girls supports racialized, migrant girls with experience science, technology, engineering, and math through participant-led programming.



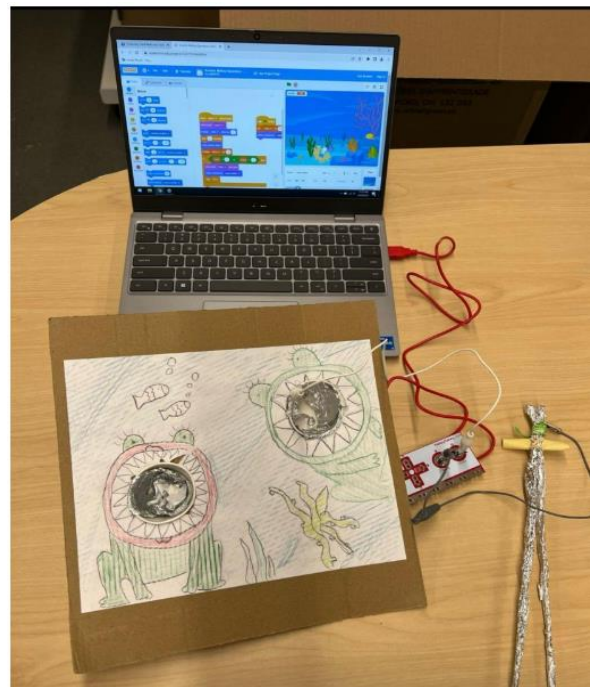
*Self Drawing of Participants being scientists*

During each session, participants tackled a specific “challenge,” all while delving into a STEM concept and directly applying it to real-world scenarios. The DCRS Power Girls program was structured as a 14-week Saturday program, followed by a two-week Seasonal Break Camp. In collaboration with two cohorts of STEM camps, the organization partnered with Simon Fraser University’s expertise in the field and leveraged DCRS’s ability to connect with newcomer families.

The program gathered feedback and adapted to participants’ needs, such as accommodations for neurodivergent youth, and ensured the offerings were adjusted for best possible outcomes going forward.

### Impact:

Prior to their involvement in *Power Girls*, a participant had been reluctant to participate in school settings—a source of concern for their parents and educators. However, the supportive and inclusive environment created by the Power Girls program inspired a noticeable transformation. Over the course of the program, they became remarkably engaged and enthusiastic about the activities. The child shared their newfound aspiration to pursue a career in civil engineering with their family and program leaders. This reflects their growing confidence and underscores the program's role in igniting a passion for STEM fields. The program empowered them to feel excited about learning and to dream ambitiously about their future.



*STEM Activity – Motion in Action*



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **RISE Empowerment, Community Resource Centre Killaloe**

Killaloe, ON

Served 47 participants

In 2023, the program Girls Rising was renamed Rise Empowerment to demonstrate its inclusive offerings. The RISE Empowerment program provides rural girls, trans, and non-binary youth with opportunities to build social safety nets, confidence, and skills to navigate their high school years. The program creates an inclusive and diversity-positive space, provides opportunities for learning and developing critical thinking skills, supports youth with a range of diverse role models of all genders, and builds peer community support for youth to find their voices. This includes team building, indoor/outdoor physical activities, cooking, media literacy, arts activism, and attending events with special guests.

Over the past year, with your support, RISE Empowerment worked with two elementary schools to support their Gender and Sexuality Alliance Groups and led a workshop at their joint GSA Day. The organization also worked with our Impact Mentor Program to organize a bus trip to support 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and youth allies to attend the Pembroke Pride March and community event.

In 2023, RISE Empowerment delivered programs including a weekly afterschool program for ages 9-13, a monthly leadership program for ages 12 and older, and the RISE Empowerment Summer Day Camp—an intensive week for girls and gender-diverse youth aged 9-13 with camp mentors ages 14-18.

The rise in anti-trans demonstrations in the region was challenging for students at local schools. Some youths were no longer allowed to attend the inclusive group.

To support participants, the program provided safe transportation after school, and expanded the library to better represent 2SLGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and disabled youth. Attendance is flexible to accommodate as many participants as possible.

Many of the program's teen are past participants, and their involvement encourages building relationships across age groups; participants were invited to create program plans for the spring session and to lead certain group activities (baking, button making, park visits, and more).



*The program's GirlsFest (youth organized event) in 2016 and at camp this year in 2023.*



*RISE participants at the Pride community march and celebration in Pembroke June 2023.*



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **SADI, Survivor's Hope Crisis Centre Inc.**

Pinawa, MB

Served 635 participants

SADI (Sexual Assault Discussion Initiative) "The Group" mentorship program takes place in two communities in rural Manitoba, Sagkeeng First Nation and its very close neighbour, Powerview-Pine Falls. Gender-based violence prevention is vital for teens in this region. The program is open to participants of marginalized genders in grades 6 through 12. Facilitators gather, support, and train high school mentors in both communities to lead empowering programming for younger students within their own community. The program supports youth with education, skills, and resources to help break cycles of violence with workshops on topics including healthy self-esteem, internet safety and exploitation, trauma and mental health, and positive relationships.



*Mental Health and Wellness Event at the Sagkeeng Anicinabe High School*

The program led several events over the past year, including partnering with the Manitoba Harm Reduction Network, which allowed community members and youth to access STBBI testing. This was a fun, compassionate, and collaborative way to provide basic needs and health information. The program also held a Mental Health and Wellness Event at the Sagkeeng Anicinabe High School, supplemented by funding from the Interlake Eastern Suicide Prevention Committee. At this event, organizers connected with 105 high school students and 51 faculty members and had representatives from the local social services and health centers join to share information and resources with the students. Holding larger events meant more students were reached, but this also meant less time for deep connections, but students responded well to the low-pressure environment and support from peers sharing about themselves, so many mentors were recruited. Throughout the year, SADI facilitators worked to adapt content to meet the specific needs of the community through collaboration with students, school faculty, and administrators

### **Impact:**

The program staff witnessed the excitement of the participants and the activities prepared for the students. Supporting and educating the students with the knowledge that they gained aids in empowering healthy individuals. These engaging conversations and feedback from the youth that our events were well-received illustrates the positive impact these events had on individuals that will progress to the wider community.



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **Speak Up, Community Arts and Heritage Education Project**

Thunder Bay, ON

Served 60 Participants

The Speak Up program, run by Community Arts and Heritage Education Project (CAHEP), uses art education to develop leadership skills for girls and gender-diverse students in grades 7 and 8 at four different schools. Through visual arts, storytelling, music, theatre, dance, and creative projects, participants will engage with topics like how to deal with uncertainty, celebrating diversity, and encouraging practices like self-reflection.

Speak Up delivers weekly programming in four different schools in Thunder Bay. Participants—many from low income, racialized, and/or Indigenous communities—developed connections with high school graduation coaches, Indigenous mentors, program services, and professional artists to forge secure networks at this important developmental juncture. The activities over the past year included art techniques and life skills building, creating safe spaces, leadership development, community engagement with broader school communities and exhibiting participants' artwork, and celebratory events (such as International Women's Day) and local activism. The program adapted to support participants in their self-identification journeys and initiated workshops on inclusion and understanding and will continue to tailor programming for the participants' needs next year.

#### **Impact:**

Sarah, a participant in the Speak Up program, initially struggled to find her voice. When she joined, she was reserved and often found it challenging to express herself; Sarah preferred using a doll as a means of responding during group sessions to share her thoughts without feeling overwhelmed. The supportive and inclusive environment of Speak UP played a pivotal role in her journey throughout the year.

Slowly, she started to gain confidence in her artistic abilities alongside her abilities to communicate and began to use her own voice during group discussions.

As the program continued, Sarah's growth became even more evident. She shared and embraced a leadership role within the group. Sarah became a source of inspiration for her peers, reminding them to be respectful, attentive, and engaged during sessions. She was a role model for active participation, empathy, and inclusivity, often helping others who faced similar challenges she once did. By the end of the program year, Sarah's transformation was truly remarkable. She had transitioned from a hesitant participant to a confident leader who fostered a respectful and inclusive atmosphere within the group. Her journey exemplifies the profound impact that Speak UP has on empowering youth to find their voices, take on leadership roles, and create a supportive community where all participants can experience personal growth and empowerment.



*Art projects from grades 7-8 – developing leadership skills*



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **Strong Girls Strong North Girls' Club, YWCA of Yellowknife NWT**

Yellowknife, NWT

Served 62 Participants

*Strong Girls Strong North Girls' Club* provides weekly, culturally relevant, youth-led programming for girls to build self-esteem, understand cycles of violence, and increase their potential through community involvement and leadership activities. In the rural North, having a safe place to learn is especially important, as the region's youth face limited resources, isolation, and high rates of family violence. Strong Girls Strong North is the only free, preventative, girls-specific program available and promotes accessibility for stronger futures.

Participants were racialized and Indigenous youth identifying as girls aged 8-17, all living in remote Northern communities. The program provided valuable resources to help them make healthy choices in their lives through volunteer opportunities, empowerment programming, mental and physical health resources, on the land and traditional activities, and engaging with positive role models. Some challenges over the past year included community evacuation during high wildfire activity, and the transient nature of Yellowknife for staff continuity.

*Strong Girls Strong North* aims to build trust, and so has adapted a diversity of programming and Indigenous topics for the participants; the program space is open and accessible so that youth can spend their free time relaxing and playing games. Several community organizations have partnered to include on the land Indigenous programs with local Elders, dog sledding at Aurora Village, City of Yellowknife recreation, and Jackpine Paddle—with youth-experienced instructors, these partnerships help youth gain the confidence to try new things.



Participants doing the Program's activities

#### **Impact:**

*"I laugh here and have lots of friends. I love learning new things."* —Jesse, participant

*"This is a safe place for me to be."*—Koya, participant

*"My daughter has become more confident and outgoing. Since she joined this program, she is more active with other peers outside her circle of friends and participates in activities that she normally wouldn't. I am so happy a program like this exists."*—Parent of participant



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### Tipihew, Aboriginal People's Alliance of Northern Ontario

Kapuskasing, ON

Served 15 Participants

Tipihew (“She has equal capabilities”) program run by the Aboriginal People’s Alliance of Northern Ontario (APANO) focuses on girls and gender-diverse youth aged 9-13 in Kapuskasing and surrounding communities that face limited resources. The Tipihew program runs weekly for six weeks per session; with workshops and activities in the APANO office, the program builds self-esteem, encourages empowerment in accessing community resources, bolsters inclusion and engagement in science, sports, and Traditional Indigenous activities with guidance and mentorships tailored to young girls.



*Participants doing the program activities*

According to parents and schoolteachers, girls often lack confidence both socially and in recreation or sports settings. Many First Nation and Métis children new to Kapuskasing face culture shock in a more urban setting. APANO partnered with the local high school for youth to earn a certification in Trauma-Informed Training: Indigenous Perspective and the program held a feast for participants’ accomplishments. Some challenges that limited youth participation were transportation, as pick-ups and drop offs can be difficult for local families. Youth demonstrated a strong interest in Indigenous culture, traditional crafts, and history, and how to be allies in their community.

Key activities over the past year included: helping youth with food security over the program duration; the Back-to-School program, which provided youth with backpacks, supplies, and snacks; APANO’s Truth and Reconciliation event where youth assisted Elders, learned about the Grandfather Drum; and a land-based field trip to learn Traditional medicines and survival skills canoeing New Post Falls.

#### Impact:

Before joining the Tipihew program, Eden was extremely down emotionally, mentally, and physically and felt they didn't belong anywhere. Eden’s parents shared that they’d been severely bullied in school and had no friendships. Once they started attending the program regularly, Eden built long-lasting friendships and their confidence has blossomed—they love to make everyone laugh and their joy is palpable.

During the grade 8 graduation for two participants, Tipihew provided a bursary and ribbon skirt as gifts. Both youths exclaimed that they would not have learned as much about Indigenous culture had it not been for the weekly program. Both participants are excited to learn more and have been all-in when it comes to doing community work.



## 2022/2023 Girls Fund Grantee Updates

### **We Can Do it Too (Nous aussi on peut le faire), L'Oasis Des Enfants De Rosemont**

Montreal, QC

Served Participants: 23

We Can Do it Too (Nous aussi on peut le faire) program provides activities and meetings for marginalized girls that work to deconstruct gender stereotypes, build belonging, critical thinking, and resilience, and promote self-esteem. Thanks to your support, We Can Do It led diverse activities such as: outing to Taz skate park; embroidery workshop; introduction to creative journaling; recording a podcast; beat-making music workshop with Sabrina Sabotage; intersectional environmentalist workshop; and more. The program also held a communal dinner every Friday where participants chose the menu and helped with cooking—these dinners made for easy discussion and connection outside the workshops.

Many participants were close in age (10-12 years old) and had a diversity of backgrounds; the group became quite close and comfortable with each other, forming new friendships..

The new project manager this year shared a background that resonated with many girls culturally, which built a safe space and connection. Additionally, a universal access ramp at the organization has facilitated greater access, and transportation was provided for children who could not be accompanied to the program

Participants were involved in selecting guests and activities, which helped with adapting the program for stronger engagement. Next year, the We Can Do It Too plans to accommodate for the high number of newcomer participants and is tailoring approaches with this in mind.

#### **Impact:**

*"I learned about Afro-feminism, to be courageous, to open up to others, to be direct, strong, and to express myself. Generosity, respect, not trusting appearances, too. I made new friends. It's mind blowing! The program makes me want to do everything."* —Kia, participant

We are so PROUD to present to you the music video for the song "Pourquoi pas rêver" by Fems.

The original song and music video were created as part of the Project for Girls 9-13 years old "We can too". Funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation, this project aims to deconstruct gender stereotypes and promote girls' development and self-expression.

Congratulations to the participants for your determination and your per ... [Show more](#)



YOUTUBE.COM

**LES/FEMS - Why not us (Official Music Video)**

Music video made by the girls' project of the Oasis des enfants de ...

Visit [<<youtube>>](#) to watch the inspiring video made by the participants of We Can Do it Too (Nous aussi on peut le faire)

# Building The Future For Young People

## Evaluation

All the multi-year grantee organizations that receive funding are provided with an external evaluation to help us learn about the effectiveness of these grants. Our evaluators are the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC). SRDC is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies.

In a summary of some key findings, the third year of funding for recipients of Girls' Fund grants reported strong growth and resilience; they reported fewer challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, while reflecting on the continued need to adapt programming in response to changing community needs, social justice issues, and accessibility.

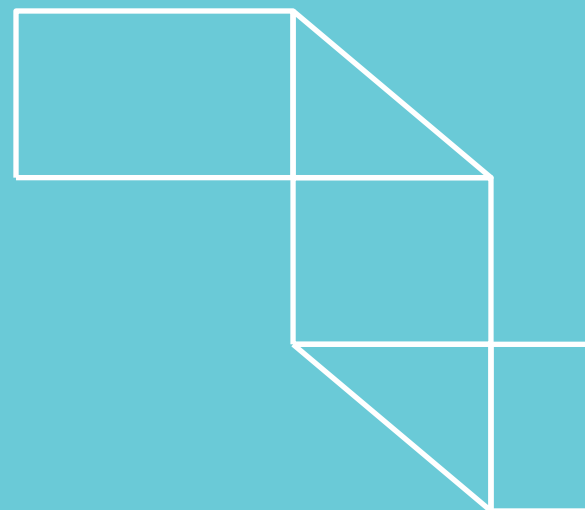
This year, Girls' Fund grantees collectively reached over 2,000 youth, which is more than double the number of participants from previous years. Through a wide array of activities, funded programs achieved objectives that were both grantee-specific and shared across the Girls' Fund cohort. SRDC has raised several questions, such as how to address staff burnout, how to advocate for systemic change, and what evidence may be emerging about approaches to youth programming? In collaboration with the Canadian Women's Foundation, SRDC looks forward to grappling with such questions in the year to come.

## Continuing and Bridging

As we wrap up the final year with of the Girls' Fund cohort of grantees, we are assessing feedback from Social Research and Demonstration Corporation to ensure your support is used in the best ways possible to achieve tangible outcomes that improve the lives of young people throughout Canada.

## A new phase for the Girls' Fund

After nearly 20 years since the launch of our youth-focused programs, we're embarking on a comprehensive review to refresh them. During this time, new calls for proposals will be paused and a bridging strategy will continue supporting organizations with active programming within the current grantee cohort. This is to keep providing vital support to girls and gender divers people as we prepare to begin a new chapter with our updated grant strategy targeting young people. We look forward to sharing our exciting shift within youth programming soon!





# How your gift was used

April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023

## How Revenue was Generated from the Girls Fund

Gifts from Individuals, groups, Foundations and Corporations to support Girls' Fund granting and programs	\$ 746,602
Support from the Department of Women and Gender Equity	\$ 162,993
<i>Additional funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation – Highest Priority Needs Fund</i>	\$ 156,905
<b>Final Support Total</b>	<b>\$1,066,500</b>

## How Your Money Was Spent

Grants to grassroots Organizations	\$ 753,377
Capacity Building, translations, advisory committee, professional development, admin, wages & benefits	\$ 156,218
Core operations and administrative costs	\$ 156,905
<b>Total Invested into Girls Fund Programs</b>	<b>\$1,066,500</b>

## Thank you to our generous supporters:

Giant Tiger

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The Shawana Foundation

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Women's Health

TC Energy

Tree of Life Foundation

Women and Gender Equity Canada



## Meet Catherine Plouffe Jetté



Catherine Plouffe Jetté joined the Canadian Women’s Foundation in August 2022 as Grant Manager for the Girls' Fund. Previously, she was involved in the Teen Healthy Relationships Committee and worked as a grant reviewer for the Shockproofing Communities grants. With a background in education and a Master’s focusing on Girlhood Studies, Catherine has been working as a girls' facilitator and a community organizer with YWCA Québec for eight years (within a program currently supported by the Girls' Fund).

“The Girls' Fund is super special to me, and I am proud to bring my expertise to the table. Working with the grantees during the past two years has taught me so much! It is amazing to see how each of them are deeply involved within their communities. The grantees deal with many challenges, but always manage to provide young people with support and opportunities. The Girls' Fund reflects the way I see youth work: approaching prevention by designing programs with and for youth and putting their ambitions and concerns at the center. It's all about creating safer spaces where girls and gender-diverse youth can be themselves, learn about solidarity, and explore new possibilities.”





## Thank you for investing in girls' empowerment

Thank you for all the ways you've taken action. You understand the importance of building resiliency and confidence for girls and gender-diverse young people, especially those most in need. Girls' need resources, teachings, mentors, and each other to face continuing inequities with knowledge and self-esteem.

Classrooms are not always the most comfortable spaces to open up and connect to community, confidence, and culture. That's why your support for the inclusive, far-reaching programs for girls and gender-diverse youth are so important.

**Thank you.**

**The Canadian Women's Foundation** is a national leader in the movement for gender equality in Canada. Through funding, research, advocacy, and knowledge sharing, we work to achieve systemic change. We support women, girls, and gender-diverse people to move out of violence, out of poverty, and into confidence and leadership. Since 1991, our partners and donors have contributed more than \$180 million to fund over 3,000 life-transforming programs throughout the country.

### National Office





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