

Atlantic Skills Institute
June 7 – 8, 2006
Sydney, Nova Scotia

Opening Remarks – *Chanel Grenaway, Manager Economic Development Collaborative Fund*

Welcome to the Atlantic Skills Institute. We are thrilled to host this conference and so pleased that you have made the effort and taken the time to travel to get here (by plane, by ferry, by car etc.). We are excited about being in Sydney and look forward to our two days together.

The Canadian Women's Foundation is dedicated to long-term systemic change that will bring about the equality of women and girls in Canada. We grant funds for innovative and diverse programs and projects designed to help women and girls achieve greater self-reliance and economic independence. We are proud to host this gathering of experienced, dedicated and passionate women involved in economic and social development in Atlantic Canada.

The Skills Institutes are an initiative of the CWF Economic Development Collaborative Fund. The Collaborative Fund is an innovative 5 year partnership of corporations and foundations making grants to address the issue of women and poverty in Canada. The fund began in 2003 and will be granting over \$2.4 million to women's organization across the country. In addition to the financial grants the Foundation provides training and networking opportunities to women serving community organizations through these annual National/Regional Skills Institutes.

The funding partners of the Collaborative Fund are CIBC, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Metcalf Charitable Foundation and an anonymous donor. Funding for the Institutes is also provided by the Bank of Montreal which has been a major sponsor for the past 3 years, Ricky's, Winner and Homesence, Home Depot, the Blair Family Foundation and L'Oreal have sponsored the conference for the past 2 years.

The Atlantic Skills Institute represents the first of 5 Regional conferences that the Foundation will host between 2006 and 2007. The Skills Institutes are grounded in the Foundation's work and learning about low-income women and economic strategies for supporting them to build sustainable livelihoods. The objectives of the conference are:

- *To increase the capacity and effectiveness of organizations in their economic development work with low-income women, and*
- *To provide an opportunity for networking, sharing and learning*
- *To provide an opportunity to address regional issues affecting the sector*

The conference program was planned with the assistance of a local committee that consisted of Doreen Parsons from Women's Economic Equality Society (Hubbards, NS) and Raylene Theriault from Every Woman's Centre (Sydney, NS). Advice was also sought from Valerie Carruthers of WISE (Newfoundland) and Nancy Hartling from Support to Single Parents and consultant Sue Calhoun (New Brunswick).

The Foundation decided to organize 5 regional meetings in response to the significant regional issues that are impacting the sector, including funding and government policies.

Workshops are catered to the needs and issues within the region and thus will offer the opportunity for focussed conversations about regional issues, lessons learned and challenges. Foundation staff will also gain a greater understanding of regional issues which will enhance our knowledge about how we can shape our processes, granting and support to address organizations across Canada.

Our next stop in Vancouver, British Columbia in November 2006.