

The Redwood: Report to The Bras Family Foundation April 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016

"I have learned how important it is to stay positive. My past life experience negatively affected my self-esteem. The WOTM program offered valuable knowledge on developing self-esteem, life skills lessons in various areas of life, and employability skills. We had fun doing community activities while gaining valuable knowledge to enhance our personal and professional skills.

I have instilled these scripts in my mind. 'I can succeed', 'I am worthy of having a fantastic life', 'I can accomplish great things'. I posted those notes on my bedroom wall. I believe with hard work and effort I can achieve anything!"

N., WOTM graduate, Class of 2015/16

What a difference a year can make in the lives of the ten (10) women graduating from our sixth Women on the Move (WOTM) Leadership program! April 9th marked a day of celebration and jubilation for staff and participants. Of the twelve (12) women who were selected to participate, two women were unable to complete the program due to unforeseen changes in their circumstances.

As the women reflected on their one-year journeys, they talked about the value of opportunities and being flexible. New prospects are not always easy or come when you are ready. Being open to change and calling upon their resilience and best problem-solving skills prepared each woman for growth and learning. They increased their leadership knowledge and gained experience that will allow them to support and mentor others.

Throughout the program, women strove to find balance in their lives – the path between past histories of violence and new beginnings is a challenging journey. We were continually inspired by their commitment and dedication to the learnings. They shared humour and laughed often, celebrating personal achievements and the accomplishments of one another. They created new goals and identified the



directions they wanted their lives to follow and the lives of their children. As staff, we celebrated each woman's inimitable journey of growth and self-love. And through the course of one-year, we observed the burgeoning of trust and the development of valuable relationships and friendships between the participants.

The women have realized the power of their voices and shared their stories through facilitating educational workshops. They are embracing their roles as individuals, mothers, and leaders and are committed to creating change and making a difference in our communities. Developing a positive sense of self and overcoming barriers to success or negative messaging is a crucial component to the WOTM program. Throughout the duration of the twelve months each participant grows in understanding and belief that they are *"worthy of having fantastic lives and accomplishing great things"*. They are looking to the future, confident in their realized career and education choices and embracing the encouragement and resources they have received to transform their lives.



The original WOTM program has been enhanced with a formal module(s) on career/employment pathways. A total of 12 classes (each 3 hours in duration) were added to support women to develop their entrepreneurial capacity, gain employment and pursue post-secondary studies.

Using assessment and evaluative tools helped the women set their career/vocational goals, create a working document and execute their plans in manageable steps. At The Redwood, we use *Personality Dimensions*® because it is easily interpreted and allows women *"to have a clear understanding of themselves and an appreciation of others"*. Together we examined the process of preparing to enter the workforce, pursuing career advancement, and also explored entrepreneurialism. Career planning addressed the current changing work demands, vocation options and labour market trends.

"Thank you for sending me to the Women Gaining Grounds Conference (United Way). I've never been in a meeting with so many great professional, highly positioned women who are ready and willing to be there for one another. I was able to connect with a few of the women and I'll be communicating with them for jobs and other networking events. Thank you for helping me be a part of this. I have learned so much over the year and it will help me in the future as I continue to meet with employers." - Betty

Vision Board Project – inspires abundance for participants

The Vision Board Project was a huge success when we introduced it to last year's WOTM group. The vision board can also be referred to as a dream board, a treasure map or vision map. Creating a collage of images, pictures and affirmations – things that make you feel good about yourself – can be a useful tool to help women conceptualize goals and serve as a source of daily motivation. Setting intentions and developing the tools to accomplish goals is one of the most important aspects of the Women on the Move program.

Participants were encouraged to set goals for key areas of their lives, such as self, family, career and education. For each goal identified, the women recorded a set of action steps and an associated timeline. This turns their dreams into something that's attainable. A vision board allows participants to visualize the actions they'll need to take to stay on track and attain their goals.

For example, if the goal is to improve health and wellness, women will determine how this goal will be attained. Time is devoted to researching images that represent their goals. Looking online, through magazines, personal photographs, sketches and paintings are just some of the ways to illustrate the action steps they need to take. The women then organized and assembled their vision boards to share with the group. Our final session allowed time for each woman to present her vision board to the group.



The women are encouraged to place their vision board **where they will see it every day**. Displaying their boards is affirmation and acts as motivation to accomplish their goals. Women commit to viewing – really viewing and not just glancing at their vision boards – at least once a day. It is a powerful tool that not only captures dreams but also reflects each woman's growth and achievements.

"In short, this program gave me a new life. Every part of my life has changed, from my eating and sleeping habits to the amount of productivity each day. My forms of entertainment, value of time, self-respect and knowledge of my role in the community has been irrevocably and positively impacted." - Name withheld for safety reasons

Sharing Women on the Move success internationally

Sharing our Women on the Move leadership program with front-line counsellors, program managers and executive directors at the third annual conference of Women's Shelters in the Netherlands in November was a significant highlight this past year.

We were honoured to be able to narrate the success of the program at an international level. Avon Harris, Outreach Manager, (pictured to the right in blue) displayed clips from the WOTM documentary and took participants through the program and discussion manuals. Questions abounded from the packed room of approximately 70 individuals from around the world. A great deal of enthusiasm and interest was expressed by many of the women who attended the session - many felt it was possible to adopt WOTM to specific programs they were currently working with.



Lerina Kwamba, from the Netherlands, booked a one-on-one session with Avon to ask more questions and to gain hands-on knowledge about implementing WOTM in her organization – 'Stad en Kerk' (Stek), based in The Hague. Stek's activities include church innovation, drop-in centres, special programmes for women, the elderly and children, empowerment of socially marginalized people, financial and social aid and other programmes to advance social harmony in neighbourhoods and city. Additionally, Lerina is a member of Kariboe Bibi – a community-based organization where sub-Saharan African women support, stimulate and inspire one another. The work of the centre is organized by the women themselves. "The centre empowers women and is empowered by them as well." Lerina believes there is a possibility to introduce the WOTM leadership program here as well. Avon is keeping in touch with Lerina and we look forward to the success of this leadership program in Europe.

Evaluation

While the common goal of the group was to pursue education and employment to achieve the larger vision for economic self-sufficiency, another goal that was consistently voiced amongst the women was, to rebuild their self-confidence and mental well-being. By the end of the twelve months, women indicated the program had surpassed their expectations – they reported feeling an increase in comfort levels with resume creation, preparation for job interviews, public speaking and leadership facilitation.

“Thank you – I believe that for each one of us our lives have changed because this program happened.” - Alma



100 %	of participants reported at the midpoint and again in the post-program evaluations that their lives and economic outlook had improved because of their participation in the program
100 %	of participants agreed that their leadership skills and abilities have been strengthened by stepping out of their comfort level to take risk and engage other women in conversations about domestic violence
75 %	of participants co- facilitated workshops and participated in public speaking activities to a variety of community-based organizations and school groups
100 %	of participants completed a career assessment and identified their employment and business development pathways
81 %	of participants have a new resume and participated in mock interviews
83 %	of participants were accepted and are currently enrolled in education or employment upgrading programs
42%	of participants gained employment and are continuing to upgrade their skills
**	Special Note – two (2) women identified their desire to be entrepreneurs and have completed their business plans

Month by month – journeys to self-determination April 2015 – March 2016

Learning outcomes for the participants of the WOTM Leadership and Career Exploration program included the following:

- Develop a positive sense of self and overcome barriers to success or negative messaging;
- Increase leadership knowledge;
- Develop personal leadership skills and attain personal goals that they have set;
- Support with Career Assessment and planning;
- Increase training and work options leading to employment;
- Increase comfort level with job interviews, public speaking, and participating in community events;
- Gain experience that will allow them to support and mentor others.

The Outreach team and members of the Women on the Move program facilitated many domestic violence education workshops throughout the year. We made visits to MicroSkills, Massey Centre, the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre (RIWC), and the Oasis Dufferin Community Centre. Topics included: setting boundaries, assertive communication, fostering healthy relationships and gender-based violence.

The team was thrilled to add the Yorkdale Adult Day School to their roster of outreach visits! This organization is one of the largest credit granting adult day schools in the GTA with over 2,000 students enrolled each term. We were invited to facilitate a discussion on gender-based violence with a co-ed class of approximately 90 students studying to be Personal Support Workers.

We are honoured to be called upon to share our knowledge with individuals in the community. The more education and awareness building we can promote will mean easier access to resources for women who are looking to begin their journeys towards a violence-free life and through education we have the capacity to end the cycle of violence.

