



# the Rose

## MAGAZINE



## BECOMING

# Gwynndolin

A personal story of transitioning

**CUPW IS PROUD TO SHARE ITS LATEST DOCUMENTARY  
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF MEMORY AND MUSCLE**



# Justice & Dignity for All

## Stories From the Struggle for Pay Equity

DEBORAH  
BOURQUE

SUE  
EYBEL

KAREN  
LEE

ALICE  
BOUDREAU

NANCY  
BEAUCHAMP

CYNTHIA  
PATTERSON

AND WITH: SYLVIE PEDNEAULT, SOPHIE GRENIER, VERONICA LINTON, JANET RUSSELL, RAMONA SORBUN,  
KARLA GUERRA, PEARL GILLIS PALMER, LYNN KEEFE, KIM VANSICKLE, GLORIA PEW

SCAN THE QR  
CODE WITH YOUR  
PHONE TO WATCH  
THE FILM



ENGLISH



ASL



FRENCH



LSQ



# Welcome to the new Rose

Since the 1996 to 1999 term, the *Rose* publication has been one the main vehicle in which the National Women's Committee has connected with Sisters across the country. Mailed twice a year to Sisters and members who identify as women, the *Rose* has published stories on the fight for equality and the history of women in the labour movement. It's also not shied away from discussing difficult yet timely topics such as violence against women, date rape and murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls.

Over the years, the publication has evolved. During the last mandate, a recommendation was made to publish one of the issues in CUPW's *Perspective* magazine. The rationale was that it would open up the issues to a wider audience as all CUPW members receive *Perspective*. The first issue of *Perspective* magazine to include the *Rose* was published in 2020, and profiled five Sisters who ran for elected office during the last federal election.

Readers may also have noticed an updated logo and design.

This year, the *Rose* has undergone another transformation. The National Women's Committee is proud to launch the new *Rose* magazine! The magazine format gives the publication more creative freedom with design and photos, as well as more pages to fill with articles, information and stories by women and for women.

During the last National Women's Committee meeting, the members brainstormed ideas and volunteered to write articles. This first issue of the magazine is a collection of personal stories, opinion pieces, and articles about the pandemic, women's rights, violence against women and resources to get help, legalizing and decriminalizing sex work, and racism. As well, one Sister opens up about her experience and journey as a transgendered woman.

We are proud of the new *Rose* and are happy to share this magazine with all CUPW Sisters.

In solidarity,

Jan Simpson

Julee Sanderson

Bev Collins

*On behalf of the National Women's Committee*



## In this issue:

Ms. Information	3	The Shadow Pandemic	8
Worker, Teacher, Mom	4	Domestic Violence Leave in Canada	10
Racism and the Atikamekw of Manawan	5	Opinion: The decriminalization of sex work vs legalization of prostitution	12
Becoming Gwyndolin	6	On the Frontline of a Global Pandemic	13

# WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The Rose is a newsletter from the CUPW National Women's Committee, sent to all Sisters and those who identify as women of CUPW.

## Communication is a two-way street!

We want to hear your stories and concerns – what do you have to say to your CUPW Sisters? You can submit your letters to the editor, opinion pieces, feature ideas and other thoughts to [feedback@cupw-sttp.org](mailto:feedback@cupw-sttp.org) or to CUPW *The Rose*, 377 Bank Street, Ottawa ON, K2P 1Y3.

## CUPW THE ROSE

Published in English and French by  
the Canadian Union of Postal Workers,  
377 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1Y3  
Tel: (613) 236-7238 Fax: (613) 563-7861  
[www.cupw-sttp.org](http://www.cupw-sttp.org)

Letters to the editor are welcome.

Please e-mail your feedback to: [feedback@cupw-sttp.org](mailto:feedback@cupw-sttp.org)

Graphic Design: C. Benoit

Translation: A. Boulet, J.-R. Gaudreau, G. Laflamme & M. Prévost

Contributors: Gwendolyn, B. Collins, T. Jones, T. Langille, A. Lesage,  
S. Robinson, J. Sanderson, J. Simpson, E. Tobin & M. Wood

Affiliations:

- Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM)
- Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
- UNI Global Union
- International Transport Workers Federation (ITF)
- Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

## LETTERS POLICY

The *Rose* welcomes letters to the editor. We will print letters from a CUPW member provided it:

- is 400 words or less. Union members may submit longer items for consideration as commentary pieces.
- does not violate CUPW policy opposing discrimination and harassment against women, people of colour, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender individuals, people with different abilities, and/or CUPW policies and principles.

- is typed or written neatly.
- includes the author's name, address, local and a phone number where they can be reached if there are problems.

The *Rose* will withhold the author's name if necessary. Otherwise, the author's name and local will appear.

The *Rose* will contact authors if there are problems with their letters.

We accept letters by mail, fax and electronic mail.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCTION



The *Rose* is printed on Rolland Enviro Satin (70 lb). This paper contains 100% post-consumer fibre, is manufactured using renewable energy - Biogas and processed chlorine free. It is FSC® Ancient Forest Friendly™ certified.



## CUPW eDigest

Stay connected. Stay informed.  
Sign up @ [cupw.ca/cupw-eDigest](http://cupw.ca/cupw-eDigest)



**cupw•sttp**

CUPE-SCFP 1979



[cupw225.org](http://cupw225.org)



# Ms. Information

Imagine a Canada where more than half the citizens are unable to vote in federal elections. These individuals are disenfranchised based solely on gender. It's hard to believe, isn't it? But it's part of our history. Even more difficult to digest is the fact that the Canadian federal Election Act of 1906 read, "No woman, idiot, lunatic or criminal shall vote." As disturbing as these facts are, it's perhaps easy to dismiss them as archaic and irrelevant in today's democratic and socially-progressive Canada. After all, most of us learned that Canadian women were given the right to vote in the 1920s. So, shouldn't we be celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canadian women's suffrage? We were taught incorrectly. It wasn't that long ago.

Like many political struggles, it's complicated. As World War I drew to a close in 1917, Parliament passed the Wartime Elections Act. This gave the right to vote to the wives, sisters and mothers of serving soldiers and also to women serving in the military. It was dismissed as tokenism by many feminists. The following year the vote was extended to include other women—we were taught 'all women'—but this isn't true either. Yes, the next federal election held in 1921 was the first women were allowed to vote in, but that didn't mean all women.

Asian women couldn't vote federally until 1948. The Inuit were officially granted the right to vote in 1950, but this was a politically deceptive move as the Inuit were so isolated there was little chance they could travel to a ballot box. It wasn't until 1960 that Indigenous women were granted the right to vote, finally meaning that all women in Canada had the right to vote in a federal election.

So, as of Canada Day, 2020, it's actually only 60 years since all Canadian women have been eligible to vote.

2020 was a difficult year. We relied on our elected leaders to provide information and advice to guide us through a national crisis and an international disaster. Throughout 2020, we witnessed closely-contested provincial elections as well as controversial international elections where every vote was scrutinized and often recounted. Since women comprise a slight majority of Canada's population, women's votes mean we can elect leaders who listen to women's perspectives and honour women's values. Every vote counts. Today, more than ever, every Canadian woman's vote counts.

*Terraka (Terry) Jones is a writer and journalist, living on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island. She is a CUPW member, working at the Victoria mail processing plant.*



**EVERY  
VOTE COUNTS  
TODAY,  
MORE THAN  
EVER,  
EVERY  
CANADIAN  
WOMAN'S  
VOTE COUNTS**

# Worker, Teacher, Mom:

## A personal story of navigating the pandemic with children



Overnight, my world turned upside down. No matter how we look at it, COVID-19 changed everything in our lives, all over the world. And we may never return to life as we know it. Masks, social distancing, lockdowns... and to top it all, school closures. My situation is not unique. The burden on women's shoulders is heavier than ever because of the pandemic. This is how I experienced it.

When the axe fell, when the government announced the first two weeks of school closure and the possibility that it could last for the rest of the school year, I received an unexpected visit from an old acquaintance I'd rather avoid: anxiety. I thought it was just visiting, but we've been living together quite some time now.

As a woman and a single mother, my world was in pieces and my mind was constantly racing, thanks to anxiety. Since postal workers were essential during the pandemic, and because the government's guidelines prevented anyone from entering my family bubble to help me care for my school-aged children, how could I be a mother to my children every other week without them paying the price? I was down in the dumps.

With society expecting us to work as if we had no family and to educate our children as if we had no work, I was completely lost. Our contract forbids us to work remotely in normal times. What am I going to do? Where will my children go while I'm at work? Who will take care of them? Why is nobody helping us? Why are we expected to make every effort and ask anyone and everyone to look after our children, even going against government directives and asking strangers to look after our children, putting our families in danger in the name of work? Questions, worries and frustrations were piling up. Emotions, too. Too many emotions and not enough answers.

Luckily, my calls were answered. But I am well aware that not all women found help and accommodation from their employers. I was allowed to work remotely. What a relief! At least that's what I thought at first. In reality, it's not really better to work from home when the kids can't leave the house. I ended up working more. I stretched my work day because I felt guilty about having lunch with my children or doing laundry. Even dealing with small everyday conflicts made my work day longer. It wasn't uncommon for me to start at 6:00 in the morning and turn off the computer at 5:00 p.m. because of the 5-minute breaks I took here and there.

Then came mandatory home schooling, a completely different challenge. I had to manage the education of my children, their video meetings with their teacher at the same time as my meetings, and their refusal to do any school work, because they thought they were on a long vacation. The mental burden was crushing.

At the time of writing, life has become easier. I am convinced that women play a key role in our society. I appreciate that my concerns and frustrations were heard, and I was allowed to slow down to keep my children safe while performing my duties. Life as we know it may never return. I was luckier than some and it has allowed me to get back to basics. However, I believe that women need to help and support each other in these difficult and uncertain times. Employers will also have to adapt. Without women in the workplace, work would not be the same.

*Stéphanie Robinson is a Union representative for the Metro-Montreal region, and a member of the Montreal Local. Her position with Canada Post is Retail Sales Clerk.*





# Racism and the Atikamekw of Manawan

The death of Joyce Echaquan at the Lanaudière hospital in Joliette has caused an outcry. This mother from the Atikamekw community of Manawan filmed herself live while she was calling for help. During these last moments, two hospital employees were heard making racist and disgraceful remarks about her. She was reportedly given intravenous medication. Her heart stopped beating shortly afterwards.

Why did she reach for her phone and film herself, alone and isolated in her room? The hospital was aware of her health problems, as this was not her first visit to the facility. One thing is certain, it brought to light the way she, and probably many others, were treated. She became the voice of many. The day after her death, marches and rallies were held in Joliette and throughout the province.

Manawan is a territory located about 200 km north of Joliette, in the Lanaudière region where I grew up. I was born in the same hospital where Joyce passed away. When we had to go to Joliette, we avoided going on the first of the month because that was when the Manawan “Indians” would come to town to do their shopping. When I was born, in the late seventies, my mother asked the nurse if she had gotten the wrong baby. She was afraid I may have been accidentally switched with a little Manawan Indian girl. Yet I grew up in a family where the doors were always open to everyone. Our family had friends

from South America, one of my uncles was a missionary, and there were no racist comments about them. I think my mother called the Indigenous people that way because it was ingrained in the popular language to call them that, the Manawan “Indians”.

My daughter who plays broomball has told me about racist comments that other girls on her team have made about players from Indigenous territories. She was very uncomfortable and didn’t know how to react. Eventually she told them that it was not appropriate to talk that way and that she wasn’t going to put up with it anymore. We can see that in the same region, many stereotypes and racist ideas are passed on from generation to generation. Luckily, the openness to others and some teachers who foster this kind of discussion ensures that young people my daughter’s age can make a difference by recognizing and defending the rights of each and everyone.

We have heard too many stories like Joyce’s to remain insensitive. It’s too easy to close our eyes and say it doesn’t concern us. We need to be allies with Indigenous women. These women who are marginalized by history have so much to teach us. We must continue to raise our voice with theirs. Let us continue to learn and try to understand their reality instead of pointing fingers and judging them as some institutions do.

Despite three investigations in Canada to shed light on the treatment of Indigenous people by police forces and the situation of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, despite reports in Quebec denouncing the way Indigenous women are treated by the police, the Premier of Quebec refuses to acknowledge the systemic racism of which Indigenous people are victims.

The racism and violence experienced by First Nations women were filmed by this Atikamekw mother of seven children. Her story stirred up the people of Quebec as well as the Indigenous communities who came together to denounce this injustice and united their voices, loud and strong, to call for a more just, respectful and inclusive society.



*Anny Lesage is  
the Grievance officer for  
the Metro-Montreal Region  
and a member of the  
Montreal Local*

***A feminist lucky to have  
had more opportunities  
than others...***

# BECOMING *Gwyndolin*

## A personal story of transitioning



**Gwyndolin is a rare gem in Saskatchewan. Like all precious gemstones, she is beautiful, luxurious, and unique, but it is her strength, her durability, even her imperfect edges that make her stand out, that truly make her shine. Five years ago, she began her transition from male to female. Stepping into her true self, she found a confidence that was long missing, and a voice in her community.**

### **A Mind-Blowing Discovery**

Gwyndolin didn't grow up thinking about gender. In fact, she didn't even know transgender people existed until high school. "When I was younger, I was unaware that there were resources and information about transgender and LGBTQIA+ people," she says. "Without access to that information, I thought there must be something wrong with me. I didn't know any better."

She suffered in silence, her thoughts dark, even thinking of suicide. She was lonely and isolated herself from others. When she saw transgender and non-binary people for the first time, "it blew my mind, and I started to think that maybe I was a transgender woman. I started unraveling into my journey of being my authentic self."

She began researching, first about what it meant to be transgender, and then about how she could transition. Knowing why she felt the way she felt was a great relief, but transitioning isn't an easy process, and for Gwyndolin, it was emotionally, physically and financially draining, although ultimately, worth it.

Although many parts of Saskatchewan have stronger and more vibrant LGBTQIA+ communities today, there's weren't as many openly transgender people when Gwyndolin was growing up, and she didn't know about the community resources.

Most of her family is supportive, and for that Gwyndolin knows she's lucky, but it doesn't mean she didn't lose a lot. Her identity has caused friction with a few family members and a lot of her closest friends abandoned her when she transitioned.

Still, without the guidance of an older transgender person, Gwyndolin was left to "wing" every aspect of her transition, which inevitably led to mistakes, including going \$60,000 in debt. Her experience has led her to become a mama bear type for other struggling transgender folks, offering the guidance she didn't have when she was transitioning. "I've helped some people realize their own identities and encouraged others



be braver,” she says. “When I look back, I see that I’ve changed people’s lives. I didn’t realize at the time that sl inspired other people to come out.”

## A History of Discrimination

The word “transgender” – or trans – is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned at birth. Although the word “transgender” and our modern definition of it only came into use in the late 20th century, people who would fit under this definition have existed in every culture throughout recorded history.

Throughout history, society hasn’t been kind to transgender people. Transgender people are portrayed in films and in media as cross-dressing serial killers or as a joke. Society has been taught to fear and or laugh at transgender people. *The documentary Disclosure which is currently streaming on Netflix explains this phenomenon and should be watched by all.*

“It sucks that transgender people not only have to fight to be themselves, but we also have to fight hatred and discrimination at the same time,” admits Gwyndolin. “One of the hardest truths about being transgender is that I have to be on my best behaviour all the time because I might be someone’s only interaction with a trans-person and I can’t give a bad impression. If I do, people will use that to trash trans-people.”

## My Name is Gwyndolin

For transgender people to feel safe in society, they need to feel safe at work. To feel safe is to feel respected. Gwyndolin has worked for Canada Post in Saskatoon for over 10 years, and faced some pushback from certain supervisors when she asked to inform her co-workers about her proper pronouns and name. Pronouns and names are the easiest ways to acknowledge someone’s identity, yet some supervisors felt pressured to wait for permission from the higher ups to grant a simple request.

Gwyndolin didn’t accept that bullshit, went straight to her union, and together, the situation was remedied, but it should never have been an issue in the first place. “I’ve seen people make fun of effeminate men and call them girls, which is wrong in itself, but when there’s a transgender woman, they won’t use their proper pronouns and name?” Misgendering is hurtful, ignores the core identity of trans people, and is homophobic.



**I was drawn to the character of Gwyndolin in a video game. She’s a mysterious and authentic beauty. A deity/Goddess. Her name and her character are unique, just like me, and she holds the same values I do. She is a protector and has no tolerance for injustice while seeking acceptance from her father.**

She also asked her workplace to install a gender-neutral bathroom, and was surprised when a family bathroom was created soon after, although she does wish they called it gender-neutral. “The title is important. Yes, I got what I needed, but the message was just as important, and it wasn’t sent.”

There have been roadblocks and setbacks, but throughout it all Gwyndolin hasn’t felt too much pushback from her co-workers. “When I first started transitioning with clothes, I was terrified of being seen as a joke,” she says. “Some people did laugh, some made comments and called me names behind my back, but most people seemed chill about it. Over the years, I feel that people have grown more supportive of my transition at work.”

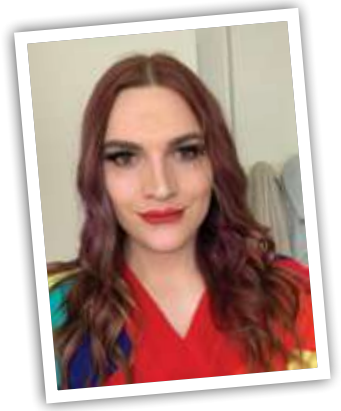
## Change comes in Small Waves

The pandemic has been hard for most of us including Gwyndolin. “I fought so hard for my body, for my transition, and grew into a social butterfly,” she says. “I went into all this debt and it was worth because I was finally living the life I wanted, and then the pandemic happened and I felt alone and isolated again.”

Although the year has been tough, Gwyndolin has hope for the future. Trans-people have always been on the front lines fighting for equality and justice, and they are stepping up in new ways, moving into the political arena. Over the last five years, the first openly transgender mayor was elected in Quebec, and the state of Delaware elected its first transgender senator.

New allies have emerged over the last few years, and Gwyndolin encourages them to educate themselves about LBGTQIA+ issues, and reminds everyone that it will never be wrong to fight for equality – whether it’s standing up to a closed-minded family member or co-worker, marching in parades, voting for political parties that support minority issues and push for diversity – everyone is capable of showing up as an ally.

“I’m not trying to be what society says is a perfect woman per say. We need to be our own beautiful.”



She sees the union as an important piece of this change. “We’ve come together to fight the corporation’s greed, now we need to come together to battle for equality.”

Gwyndolin has a message for anyone who is struggling with their identity: “Don’t be focused on the label. Focus on being authentic, what feels right and eventually the pieces will fall together.”

# The Shadow Pandemic

## Violence against women and girls in pandemic times

A year into this pandemic, many countries, including our own, are still implementing various forms of lockdown and stay-at-home orders in the hopes of curbing COVID-19 transmission and keeping people safe and healthy.

These protective measures have unfortunately amplified another dangerous and deadly element: violence against women and girls. It’s been called the “shadow pandemic”

by the United Nations – the unprecedented increase of violence against women and girls, in particular domestic violence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## A Perfect Storm

Even before the pandemic began, 1 in 3 women worldwide experienced physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. In Canada, the statistics are just as grim: *approximately every 6 days, a woman in Canada is killed by an intimate partner.*

It's not hard to see how this happened. The measures to keep us safe from COVID-19, are the same measures that keep victims isolated with their abusers. In addition, many services that abuse victims rely on are either closed, reduced, moved to online, or at capacity.

A Statistics Canada survey released in early April 2020 reported one in 10 women saying they are "very or extremely" concerned about the possibility of violence in their homes due to the stress of confinement alone.

That concern was warranted. A national report published by Women's Shelters Canada in November 2020 found an increase in the frequency and severity of violence against women since March 2020, when public health lockdown measures were imposed in different provinces.

Without the reprieve of leaving the home for work, school, or social activities, abused women are now left with their abusers all hours of the day, with little reprieve or opportunity to reach out for help.

## Long Lasting Effects

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls cannot be underestimated. The Canadian Human Rights Commissions has said that "these disproportionate impacts could have long-term and far reaching consequences" and that "there is a serious risk that the pandemic could erase the gains that have been made towards gender equality in Canada."

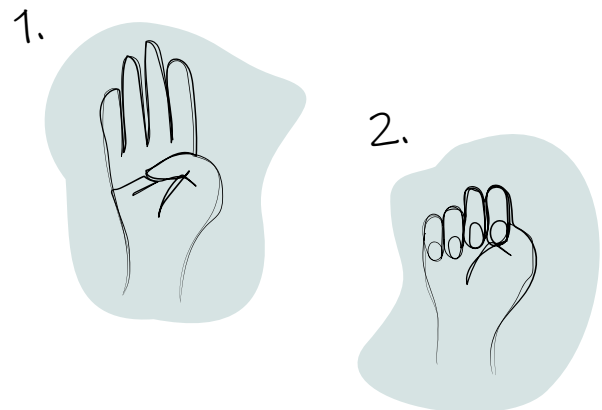
Women and children are among the hardest hit by the pandemic. Social and economic barriers have been amplified for racialized, Indigenous, and migrant women, low-income and single mothers, LGBTQ2I+ women, and women with disabilities or mental health issues. The current situation has put women at greater risk of job loss, poverty, food insecurity, loss of housing and domestic violence.

A survey by RBC released in November 2020 reported that more than 20,000 women left the workforce between February and October, 2020 – a statistic some are calling a SHE-cession. One of the barriers to women leaving an abusive partner is the ability to provide for themselves and their children. If women continue to be pushed out of the workforce, it will become harder to leave abusive homes.

## Resources for Women Experiencing Violence

Being in isolation with a violent partner greatly limits the opportunity for victims to reach out for help. Given that most of our activities have moved online, the Canadian Women's Foundation developed a tool for women to ask for help using hand signals. The *Signal for Help* is a simple one-handed sign someone can use on a video call. It can help a person silently show they need help and want someone to check in with them in a safe way.

### The Signal for Help



Links to more resources for women across the country experiencing domestic violence:

<https://canadianwomen.org/signal-for-help/>

<https://canadianwomen.org/support-services/>

The Canadian Women's Foundation also produces a podcast called *Alright, now What?* which touches on how the pandemic has affected marginalized people.

*Tracey Langille is the Secretary Treasurer of the Hamilton Local. She works as a mobile letter carrier out of the Burlington Delivery Centre in Burlington, Ontario.*





# Domestic Violence Leave in Canada

## What you need to know about the updated Canadian Labour Code

The Canadian Labour Code provides full-time and part-time employees who are victims of family/domestic violence up to 10 days leave for each calendar year. The first five days will be paid for employees with three months of continuous employment. Workers are also eligible for 15 weeks of unpaid domestic or sexual violence leave per calendar year.

### Some provinces provide additional domestic violence leave

Manitoba: 17 weeks of unpaid domestic violence leave

Quebec: Up to 26 weeks of unpaid domestic violence leave over a period of 12 months

New Brunswick: Unpaid Violence Leave of up to 16 continuous weeks

Nova Scotia: Up to 16 continuous weeks of unpaid leave

### For Canada Post Employees

#### Who is eligible

- All employees are entitled to the leave.
- For employees with at least three consecutive months of continuous employment, the first five days will be paid.
- Employees must also be scheduled to work at the time for which they requested the leave.

*NOTE: An employee need not be the direct victim of violence to qualify for this leave. Employees who have a child who has been victimized are also entitled.*

#### What you need to know

Leave may be taken when an employee or their child:

- was a victim of family violence;
- needs medical attention;
- requires psychological counselling or other services;
- needs to relocate;
- has to seek legal or law enforcement assistance;
- or needs to prepare for, or participate in, legal proceedings.

All employees will be paid based on scheduled hours.

#### What you need to do

##### Employee

- Inform your supervisor if you want to take this form of leave.

##### Team leader

- Speak with the employee and let them know that support is available through EAP.
- Offer EAP phone number, 1-866-565-4903.
- It is essential to protect confidentiality.
- There is no requirement for the affected employee to provide documentation of any kind.
- When such cases arise, consult with your team leader or HR representative (HR Business Partner) if you require any guidance.

## Please use these leave codes:

### CUPW-Urban

- **9200 – Special Leave** when entering paid leave in SAP.
- **9310 – Personal Needs** when entering unpaid leave in SAP.

### RSMCs and PREs

- **800 – Other Paid Leave** when entering paid leave in SAP.
- **410 – Leave Without Pay (LWOP) Employee Requested** when entering unpaid leave in SAP.

### OCREs

- **112 – Training** – Other when entering paid leave in SAP.
- No action required for unpaid leave.

All employees (except CUPW-Urban, RSMCs, PREs, and OCREs)

- **200 – Special Leave** when entering paid leave in SAP.
- **9410 – Other LWOP Employee Requested** when entering unpaid leave in SAP.

## 2018 Stats\* Intimate Partner Violence (police Report)

Province	Total Number	Rate per 100,000
Newfoundland & Labrador	1,472	328
Prince Edward Island	392	307
Nova Scotia	2,682	330
New Brunswick	2,182	368
Quebec	22,515	324
Ontario	28,626	243
Manitoba	6,250	592
Saskatchewan	5,919	655
Alberta	13,896	400
British Columbia	11,723	277
Yukon	357	1,063
North West Territories	1,143	3,233
Nunavut	1,100	4,205

\*latest from Stats Canada

Melanie Wood is an RSMC from Regina, who is currently is working as a Union Representative for Prairie Region, and a member of the National Women's Committee



# The decriminalization of sex work vs legalization of prostitution

---

The Union's National Women's Committee has never shied away from tough, hard-hitting subjects that foster debate and higher learning. When we were preparing for the last meeting, held in October of 2020, I knew I wanted to continue this legacy, and invited some guest speakers to talk about the often-misunderstood topic of sex work.

This Committee has several new sisters, myself included, and my hope was that our speakers – a former and a current sex worker – could foster a discussion around the topic and CUPW's National Policy C-16 – Legalizing Prostitution.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the meeting, I received several inquiries from Sisters about this discussion. I sensed a lot of nervous excitement from the participants, and I was hopeful and cautiously optimistic.

One of the first realizations we had as the discussion began was that C-16 of our National Constitution, while progressive when it was first recorded, was actually a bit outdated and not in line with what progressives and some feminist groups are calling for currently.

While legalization would mean the regulation of prostitution with laws regarding where, when, and how prostitution could take place, decriminalization eliminates all laws and prohibits the state and law-enforcement from intervening in any prostitution-related activities or transactions, unless laws apply.<sup>2</sup> Making a distinction between legalization and decriminalization is not a petty argument, but for some the subject has been a bit taboo. Legalization of sex work means that only under certain state-specified conditions would sex work be legal, but decriminalization involves the removal of all prostitution specific laws, although sex workers would still have to operate within the laws of the land, as any other business.<sup>3</sup>

Other countries have introduced decriminalization models. New Zealand for example, now focuses on protecting sex workers' health, while eliminating bureaucratic red tape. When our neighbours to the South decriminalized sex work in Nevada and Rhode Island, both States reported significant reductions in sexually transmitted diseases. The Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and the UK are also debating changes to existing laws.

So why do we call it sex work? Quite simply put, sex work, is work. Although the word prostitution will always be attributed to the exchange of sex for money, reframing the message that sex work, is work and these workers deserve protections may just be the next important step in starting a conversation and breaking down some of the stigma.

In 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that criminalizing sex work promotes violence and violates sex workers' human rights. Yet no action has been taken to repeal the laws and regulations that place sex workers at risk every day.<sup>4</sup>

In June 2014, the Harper-led Conservative Government introduced Bill C-36, a criminal law reform on prostitution.<sup>5</sup> Supporters of decriminalization maintain that this law forces sex workers into a horde of further unsafe conditions. A myriad of unions and civil society organizations are calling for the repeal of Bill C-36, while at the same time human rights groups are demanding protections for these workers. Some sex workers have unionized as an act of solidarity while calling for worker protections and rights, breaking down barriers and increasing access to justice and health services, benefits and protections.<sup>6</sup>

You can join the call to action by signing the petition initiated by NDP MP Randall Garrison and Move Up, a BC-led local of the Canadian Office and Professional



Employees Union. CUPW is proud to have signed this petition along with other Unions and more than 130 civil society organizations. All are calling on the decriminalization and repeal of Bill C-36.

This E-Petition will be on-line until March 30, 2021. You can find the petition at the following Website: <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-3132>

The path to justice and protections for women's rights, securities and freedoms is ongoing and won't be won by politely asking.



*Julie Sanderson  
CUPW First-National Vice-President*

1. *CUPW - 2020-01-10 - National Constitution*
2. *Sex worker explains the difference between legalizing and decriminalizing prostitution - Business Insider*
3. *The difference between decriminalisation and legalisation of sex work (newstatesman.com)*
4. *Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights (actioncanadashr.org)*
5. *Fact Sheet: Prostitution Criminal Law Reform: Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act - Open Government Portal (canada.ca)*
6. *The difference between decriminalisation and legalisation of sex work (newstatesman.com)*

## On the Frontline of a Global Pandemic

It took no time for COVID-19 to take hold of our lives and destabilize our habits and everything we take for granted. It came without warning, threatened the entire planet, and targeted the most vulnerable among us.

This invisible threat highlighted the jobs that are essential to ensure that our basic needs were met. One of the most important sectors has undoubtedly been healthcare. There is no working from home for those who work in hospitals, retirement homes or home care services. These workers – women, in majority, as it is often the case in health care professions – have put aside their fears in order to serve the population in this time of crisis.

The global pandemic has also highlighted a reality that our leaders have long tried to minimize: the insufficient compensation for this type of work.

It is well known that predominantly female jobs are less well paid than predominantly male ones. This has become even more obvious now that

we are seeing which jobs are truly essential in our society. The importance of the work performed by caregivers, practical nurses, kitchen workers and cleaners who toil in the shadows could finally shine through. However, this also highlighted the poor recognition they receive from their employers.

If there is one thing we must remember from this crisis, it is this contrasting reality. We must force our leaders to review the working conditions of those we affectionately dubbed our “guardian angels”, to show them the respect they deserve for carrying the health and well-being of society's most vulnerable on their shoulders. Sooner or later, we will need these angels to take care of us, whether for a short or a long period of time, or at the end of our lives. Kindness and selflessness are qualities that must be quantified and rewarded for their true worth. Saying “thank you” is not enough. Appreciation must translate into good working conditions and adequate remuneration.

*Nancy Beauchamp has worked for Canada Post for almost 26 years and is a member of the Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers bargaining unit. She has been active in the Union since 2002, and was elected National Director for the Metro-Montreal region in 2019.*



CATHY KENNEDY • MARJOLAINE LABRECQUE • GINETTE LALIBERTE • CINDY MCCALLUM MILLER • ELAINE MCMURRAY MEGAN WHITFIELD  
BOYCO • JEANIE CAMPBELL • CATHY KENNEDY • MARJOLAINE LABRECQUE • GINETTE LALIBERTE • CINDY MCCALLUM MILLER • ELAINE MCMURRAY  
MEGAN WHITFIELD • KAREN BOYCO • JEANIE CAMPBELL • CATHY KENNEDY • MARJOLAINE LABRECQUE • GINETTE LALIBERTE • CINDY MCCALLUM MILLER  
MAYRA MELO • MAVIS WIEBE • KAREN BOYCO • JEANIE CAMPBELL • CATHY KENNEDY • MARJOLAINE LABRECQUE • GINETTE LALIBERTE

# Trailblazing

## WOMEN OF CUPW

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## MARCH 8, 2021

**FOLLOW OUR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN BEING FEATURED THIS YEAR**

[illegible]

<b>CANADA</b>		<b>POSTES</b>
<b>POST</b>		<b>CANADA</b>
Postage paid		Port payé
<b>Publications Mail</b>		<b>Poste-publications</b>
<b>40064660</b>		