



Women are changing the face of philanthropy

TORONTO STAR

Laura Eggertson

October 3, 2010

When Roslyn Bern took over in 2001 as head of the Leacross Foundation, which her father had started a decade earlier, she was determined to change the philanthropy it practised.

As a former teacher who had worked with high-risk teens, and president of the family firm, Montreal-based Bow Plumbing Group Inc., Bern's priority was no longer chequebook charity. She brought her passion for improving the lives of women and children to the table alongside her business acumen.

Instead of donating small amounts to causes that ranged from curing Alzheimer's to combating xenophobia, Bern leveraged and invested. She focused dollars on helping women achieve higher education, through leadership training programs and university bursaries. Then she joined a network of like-minded Canadian women using their money to change the world.

"We're building momentum, and it's the next wave of (philanthropic) funding," says Bern, 54, a board member of the Canadian Women's Foundation.

Women like Bern are changing the face of philanthropy, as part of a global movement propelled by the increasing wealth, influence and independence women wield, says Beverley Wybrow, president and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation. One example: From 1967 to 2002, Canadian women's incomes rose by 81 percent, compared with 32 per cent for men, according to Statistics Canada figures cited by RBC Dominion Securities and Mezzanine Consulting.

In the United States, women head half of all small businesses and control almost 60 percent of the country's wealth, according to a survey by Oppenheimer Funds Distributor Inc.

"More and more women are realizing that they can use their money and their time strategically, and that they have influence even on family giving decisions," says Wybrow.

The Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain, the first female Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, helps channel her family's money toward combating violence against women and girls; women's health issues; and the National Ballet School, among many other causes. Her husband, Wallace McCain, is consistently ranked as one of Canada's richest businessmen, and the couple is a powerhouse in Canadian philanthropy.



“I am hugely influential and getting more so,” she says bluntly of the decisions the couple makes on where to donate. “Not that I’m aggressive about it . . . but he leans very heavily on my guidance.”

Many women today use their influence to give more strategically, and in different ways, than men or women did in the past, say fundraisers, executives and key donors in the Canadian voluntary sector. They have adopted new models, such as giving circles, to bring like-minded donors together to pool their resources in support of a common cause.

“Women give to organizations that they have some connection with,” says Maria Antonakos of Opus Philanthropic Strategies Inc., based in Dundas. Antonakos, who works with clients to plan their giving, says women want systemic change rather than Band-Aid solutions. They often give to grassroots organizations where they have volunteered, and they want evaluations and hard numbers to know that what they support is making a difference.

“Women like to see the results of their money and they like to know that they’ve changed women’s lives,” says Margot Franssen, who founded The Body Shop Canada and is now a board member of The Canadian Women’s Foundation. “Having their names on buildings is often the least important consideration for women.”

In Wybrow’s experience, women also want to form relationships with other donors and forge connections to the organizations they support. That means organizations must welcome “engaged philanthropy,” cautions Mary Coyle, the senior advisor at The Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, N.S. She says a new breed of women philanthropists put themselves directly into the equation, often by working for the organizations they support.

That’s because these women are seeking a community of others who share their values and interests, agrees Wybrow. As a broad generalization, women are less interested in getting their name on a plaque or having a building named after them — unless having that visibility serves as a role model to encourage other women to give, she adds.

Although statistics on gender-based giving are difficult to find in Canada, U.S.-based research bears out these differences, says Andrea Pactor, associate director of the Women’s Philanthropy Institute at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University.

The Institute’s research indicates men tend to be more strategic in their giving — motivated by tax concerns, for instance — and women have traditionally spread their giving more broadly among many charities. Although women have historically been reluctant to characterize themselves as philanthropists, some high-profile campaigns are working hard to change that.

Women Moving Millions, which officially launched in November 2007, set the ambitious goal of persuading 150 women to donate \$1 million or more to women’s foundations around the globe that benefit women and girls. The brainchild of sisters Helen LaKelly Hunt and Swanee Hunt — members of the Hunt oil family — the initiative began with their \$10 million gift. In just two years, Women



Moving Millions raised more than \$180 million, surpassing its goal even in the midst of the world economic downturn.

“It has helped increase the visibility of women’s foundations and of women as philanthropists,” says Gretchen McComb, chief philanthropic engagement officer of the U.S.-based Women’s Funding Network. “I think it’s really helped women claim their space and their power as philanthropists.”

Although the vast majority of women in Canada and the United States cannot, of course, give million-dollar donations, the initiative wants to encourage all women to think of themselves as philanthropists. “The woman that is committing hours or writing a \$100 cheque is just as important as these million-dollar donors,” says McComb. Not all women philanthropists are dedicated solely to investing in projects focused on women and girls, but that is an important sub-sector of this movement, says Pactor, of the Women’s Philanthropy Institute.

“It’s got a tremendous amount of traction,” Pactor says. “It’s important to a segment of women, but it’s not important to all women. What we have to do is help people understand that women are engaged in philanthropy in a lot of different ways, and that is one way, one model.”

It’s a model that longstanding women philanthropists in Canada, such as Senator Nancy Ruth, are convinced is the only way to achieve real change.

One of the co-founders of the Canadian Women’s Foundation, Nancy Ruth calls herself “Canada’s first feminist philanthropist.” She is one of the million-dollar donors to Women Moving Millions, but she has been supporting projects that benefit women and girls since long before the Hunt sisters dreamed up the campaign.

As a trustee of her family’s Jackman Foundation, Nancy Ruth was often frustrated by being outvoted by her brothers on what to fund. “Sometimes I’d get my mother to back me and we’d give money to the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, but it was a struggle,” she says.

So she started her own foundations to direct money toward systemic change. Since its founding in 1991, the Canadian Women’s Foundation has given away about \$25 million to more than 100 initiatives across Canada, largely focused on stopping domestic violence, alleviation of poverty and economic empowerment of women and girls.

Nancy Ruth and the Canadian Women’s Foundation point to World Bank and United Nations research that demonstrates the ripple effect of investing around the world in women, who then support their families, and their communities.

It’s a fundamental principle that another of Canada’s prominent women philanthropists, former MP Belinda Stronach, espouses. Though Stronach’s charitable support is not restricted to women and girls alone, she committed The Belinda Stronach Foundation in September to contributing \$5 million over five years to the Clinton Global Initiative. The foundation will host a G(irls) 20 Summit in advance of



THE
BELINDA STRONACH
FOUNDATION

each of the G-20 summits for the next five years, to help empower girls and women globally.

And in Ottawa on Wednesday, The Belinda Stronach Foundation, joined by corporate partners Vale and BMO Financial Group and the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs launched the One Laptop Per Child program, a Canadian version of the international initiative to bring lightweight, low-cost laptops to students in the developing world. Under Stronach's project, 2,200 children aged 6-12 at 12 schools in aboriginal communities across Canada will receive laptops loaded with content designed specifically for them, with the number expected to grow to 5,000 students as the project rolls out.

One of the forces driving women's philanthropy now is a greater focus on international development and the interconnectedness of the world, says Stronach. At the same time, she also works on projects at home, such as a shelter for homeless women in York Region.

"As women gain greater economic freedom or independence, they can look back at their own circumstances and want to enable or assist other women, or younger women, as they move through their lives," Stronach says.

"When you give girls a chance to get an education, they can earn more money. There's less pregnancies, their families are healthier — they reinvest 90 percent of their income back into their families and their communities, versus 30 to 40 percent for their male counterparts. That's a big difference.