

# w-power\_podcast\_episode4\_v1

## Saavutettavuusteksti

\*Intro jingle\*

Matthew:

Hello, and welcome to the W-power podcast series. I'm Matthew Comber, and I'll be your host. The W-power project works with women entrepreneurs in sparsely populated areas across Northern Europe and Arctic communities, encouraging them to set up and develop and grow their own business. The project is funded through the Northern periphery and Arctic program of the European development fund. Although primarily a European project, W-power has an associate partner in New Brunswick, Canada, where the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs are much the same as those in Northern Europe. In this episode, we'll hear how business women in New Brunswick have been helped by the W-power peer to peer mentoring program, a scheme, which brought together female business owners from different countries. So they could share knowledge and experiences. We'll hear about the pros and cons of working on a transnational project. And finally, what future projects are planned for the New Brunswick region. My guest today is Katherine Lanteigne, director of women in business, New Brunswick.

\*Jingle\*

Matthew:

Welcome Katherine. Thank you for joining us.

Katherine:

Thank you for having me.

Matthew:

Like start by asking you to tell us something about female entrepreneurship in the New Brunswick region in particular, what sort of business possibilities are there and what sort of challenges are faced.

Katherine:

For those who are listening. They might not know where New Brunswick Canada is. So just to give you a glimpse of where we are in the world and, and, and we're part of this project because it's, we are also sparsely populated. So Canada is very wide. We have lots of trees, lots of forest that separates all kinds of our cities and our villages. So the population of New Brunswick is 780,000 people. So that's, uh, it's, it's a province and the area is 73,000 square kilometer. So it's quite big. So we're very sparsely populated. And that's one of the reasons I know we're going to talk

later on, on the podcast about why we're in this project, but so we're very rural and we don't necessarily have big cities. So, um, to answer your question it's um, so what kind of business possibilities is it? I like to see it as a blank canvas. Uh, we don't, we're, we're not big like Toronto or Vancouver, so we're really small and we're, we're really sparsely populated in, in the woods that would say, um, but I, lots of opportunities, I would say, um, who tends to fall under our services at women in business, New Brunswick mostly fall under three major sectors. And, and I mean, we help women entrepreneurs from all kinds of sectors, but we see a trend where the ones that we tend to help are in the restaurant industry, they are in the service industry and they are also in retail. So that's just how I think it's organic that the programs that we offer, we tend to attract those kinds of, uh, women in these different sectors. But really there's a lot of opportunities.

Matthew:

Okay, thank you. Now I'd like to ask you, um, how did women in business, New Brunswick become involved in the W-project? What did the European partners expect to learn from you joining the project?

Katherine:

It's interesting how we got to get involved because we're not part of the EU, what are we doing there? So, uh, the, it happened that our president, so, uh, we're a non-profit organization and we are managed by a committee and the president of our committee is very involved in a lot of projects, uh, through her, her job she's she gets to do a lot of contacts and she's involved in a lot of international projects and it's just happened that she came across this fantastic project that was called W-power. And, I remember at a meeting and it came out of the blue because we've never really been involved internationally. We have always been in our small province and focusing on our economy and our businesses. And I remember in a meeting that it was December, 2019. And she said, hey, no, not 2018. And she said, I came across this interesting project. You have to read it. You absolutely, Katherine, have to read it. It's describing our challenges, what we're seeing in New Brunswick. So I, I'm like, okay, so I, I get the proposal and the whole project, and it's quite thick. I know that, and that worked a lot and very hard on this project. And, um, it was basically everything I was reading. It was describing what we were facing and what women entrepreneurs here in New Brunswick are facing. So I said, we got to get in on this project. I don't know how, I don't know if it's possible. So, um, just put me in contact with Helena and we started talking and I said, we need, even if it's just to share best practices, even if it's just a, to be at the table and just see what you guys are doing and we could share on her end as well. So, um, to answer your second question is what partners can expect to learn from you. I think it was sharing best practices we were doing. So we are fortunate that we have in Brunswick, an organization that helps women entrepreneurs and that's all we do. So we were, uh, for us, it's, it's a blessing to be able to be partnered with other countries and just learn about what they're doing for entrepreneurship in their own country.

Matthew:

Okay. Thank you. Well, that brings me on to asking you about the peer to peer program, which is a big part of the W-power project. Could you briefly describe to us what the peer to peer program is all about and how it works?

Katherine:

The peer to peer program is, um, a twinning program. So basically, what we do is we match women entrepreneurs from our country. So here in Canada with an, and that's with all the other European countries as well, but, um, it's matching women entrepreneurs in a similar sector. So, um, it's required a lot of, um, we send out a call for interest and then women entrepreneurs apply. And then what we do is we play matchmaking. So we look at their sector, we try to put them together and we try to, and we know our clients. So also personality is a big factor in it as well. So we try to match them as best as we can because it's a matching program. It can be successful or not, it depends if they connect, but they do have a lot of points, the common points that they're able to exchange on it.

Matthew:

Okay, yep. Matchmaker. It sounds like a really good way of describing the program. I understand that you initially matched up five different pairs of female business owners. Can you tell us how this went overall and what were the outcomes for the participants?

Katherine:

That's correct. So us Canada, we, we did match five, um, entrepreneurs, but throughout the program, I don't have the final number. Maybe you came across it during your podcast, but I think it's close to 40 or 50. So a lot of women were matched, uh, amongst our country. Um, so we were fortunate to be able to match five or more Canadian women business owners. And it went really well. Um, the feedback that they're receiving, they were really excited because for us, like, like I mentioned, we never really did anything internationally. So when we got on board and we're approaching women entrepreneurs, and we said like, maybe you would be matched potentially with somebody from Finland, somebody from Sweden, Iceland. So they were really excited. And the feedback that I still remember from a women entrepreneur, she said that she felt really comfortable because she is in a sector she's in the fashion industry. And she said, if we're so small here in New Brunswick that she said, I don't see who I would be able to exchange my challenges with or the, if it's in Canada, they would be potentially my competitor. So she said the fact that I'm being paired with somebody in Finland, I feel more comfortable about cheering my success and, um, my success stories and also my challenges.

Matthew:

Okay. And these people who took part in this program must have learned so much from each other and really learned how to, how to go about in their similar sectors, how to make the best, some practical tips and making new contacts. I mean, it must have been really beneficial for them.

Katherine:

Very beneficial. And also it happened that this program was launched really close to COVID. So by the time that the, so we did all of the, the process and by the time they'd be really got to meet one another was really closed when COVID hit. And I think they were able to connect on another level. And I think during, like the beginning of the pandemic and everybody was working from home and everybody was struggling with all of them, a lot of unknowns. And I think they were able to connect on a personal level as well and just see that they're not alone. So I feel that the project was really held on a good time. It was good timing for the peer to peer project.

Matthew:

So yes, I suppose, uh, the pandemic has made a lot of people feel more isolated, of course. Um, but with technology, I suppose that the participants were able to have video calls and share knowledge and experiences in that way too. So being not able to travel hasn't stopped them from getting together and, and, uh, swapping their stories and helping each other I assume.

Katherine:

Yes. And like you're mentioning with the technology, they were able to do virtual tours of one another's business as well. So, and really learn here's your workshop here is how I do it here. Tips and tricks. So it was, uh, it was really interesting and very motivating for us to learn how they were doing it.

Matthew:

Yeah, to actually see that without having to travel there, but to see on the computer screen in someone's workshop here, this is how I do this job. Must have been really, really helpful to see with that in mind. Uh, I gather that you, you develop the peer to peer concept further and you reached out to even more international partners. Is that right?

Katherine:

That's correct. So, uh, with the peer to peer program with W-power, I mean, we worked together and we developed some, some forms. We developed some nondisclosure agreement, all the documents that's related to a program like this. And, um, basically we kind of ran with it. So the whole goal of the w power project it's to share best practices. So, uh, we thought to ourselves, well, let's not stop there since we have most of the document and we kind of tweaked it to our country. And then we launched another peer to peer program with Germany. So we had, um, and

that was for a year and decided to test it for a one-year period. And, uh, it was from May, 2020, June, 2021. And we had 12 women from New Brunswick and 10 women from Germany. And then we were like, oh, this is fun. So we decided to do another one with France. Um, so we had, um, because your Brunswick also has, uh, two official languages, English and French. So we decided to do a French peer to peer mentoring program with France. And we had 12 women from New Brunswick and 14 from France.

Matthew:

Wow. Very international.

Katherine:

Yes, very.

Matthew:

So, I mean, what have been your experiences on working such a transnational project? I mean, what, what have been the difficulties you've had to overcome and what would you say would be the biggest positives?

Katherine:

I would say for, um, difficulties, it's a strong word, maybe a challenge. Um, oh my God. The time differences. I think that was the most challenging thing. Um, right now, as we speak, uh, there is a, um, a seminar that's happening, but I was not able to attend because it started at five o'clock in the morning Canadian time. So that would happen a lot. So, and the W-power team was fantastic to work with because they kept that in mind, like when we had, do have monthly meetings. So it will start at eight o'clock Canadian time, but 2:00 PM, because we do have a six hour difference with Finland and that's our, the most Eastern, uh, partner. So they were always fantastic. And keeping that in mind when they were planning meetings, because we were the one that was still asleep though, the one that was still sleeping, um, because of the time difference. And then, I think that was the biggest challenge. And of course not being able to see each other, um, through the project, the were, uh, we were supposed to meet in-person meet, we met twice. Um, so we had, we were fortunate enough to meet twice, but I think that was also something that we would have, it would have been fun to see each other and, you know, have in-person meetings because we do have the virtual ones, but some of the best exchange sometimes happen in person after the meeting. But to answer your other question, which is, um, the positive, definitely sharing best practices. So we got the chance to exchange and learn about, um, different programs that each of the different organizations do in their own respective countries. And especially during COVID, I think we're still in COVID, but I think we had those moments when we were just chatting and saying, what are you doing for your entrepreneurs? And, and this was beside the W-power project and, oh, well, we, we tried this new platform, which is

called Slack and we have coffee breaks and we do this and we do that. So there was a lot of exchange of best practices, and I think that was really, really great for us and for the other organization. And of course, all the fantastic contacts that we made throughout the project.

Matthew:

Yeah. They will hopefully last for a very long time. Those contacts, it all sounds very positive.

Katherine:

Yeah, absolutely.

Matthew:

Could you describe the impact that the W-power project has had on your region and to women in business, New Brunswick as an organization.

Katherine:

Many positive impacts. Um, I always talk about the W-power project with pride. Um, we were so happy to be part of it, and I think it's going to leave a really big trace throughout the years, uh, long after the projects are done. Um, we were all, we all re uh, we also did a startup competition, uh, through this project. And that's something that we're doing again this year. Um, and then we're going to try to do it depending on the success of it. We were really successful last year, we had more than 30 women entrepreneurs that applied for this startup competition. And we were not expecting that number at all because it was during the pandemic. Who's going to start a business? Like we, we just decided to run with it and put it out there. And, um, it was so successful that we decided to do it again this year. So I think there's a lot of positive things that came out from this project. And that's going to live for a long time with our organization.

Matthew:

Very much. I wish you all the best with your plans. It all sounds very exciting and I'm sure these projects will continue to be a huge benefit to female entrepreneurs in your region.

\*Outro jingle\*

Matthew:

I like to say many thanks to Katherine for joining us today. And thank you for tuning into the W-power podcast. If you'd like to discover more about this project and access a wide range of material, please visit the W-power website. You can find a link below.