

# WOMEN INSPIRE FORUM

(For women in business, trade and leadership)  
4TH EDITION

## Post-event Report

March 2023



"#EMBRACEEQUITY: ENABLING MANAGERS  
TO RISE TO BOARDS AND TOP LEADERSHIP

Presented By  
CASA FOUNDATION





# WOMEN INSPIRE

## 2023 FORUM *For*

### WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

ENABLING YOUNG WOMEN TO RISE  
TO BOARDS AND TOP LEADERSHIP

#### VENUE

World Trade Centre, Gala Ballroom-East  
Waterfront 100 Queens Quay East,  
Toronto, ON M5E 1Z2

#### TIME

8:30 AM – 1:30 PM (EST)

#embraceequity

## INTRODUCTION

Women Inspire is an annual event hosted by Casa foundation on International Women's Month (March) to celebrate the achievements of women and provide a space for connection, learning, and growth. This year's event was a truly inspiring celebration of women for women in business, trade and leadership in Canada. The following document includes a general summary of the 4th edition of Women Inspire 2023 .

# Executive Summary

## Women Inspire Forum 2023

In honor and celebration of International Women's Day 2023, the Casa Foundation for International Development hosted the 4th edition of Women in Business and Leadership Women Inspire Forum on the 10th of March 2023 at Toronto Region Board of Trade Ballroom, Toronto.

### Theme

The theme for this year is Embrace Equity: Enabling young women to rise to boards and top leadership. The theme focuses on acknowledging the efforts and impact made by women leaders in various sectors and industries in Canada as well as educating and building more opportunities for professional women and women entrepreneurs to take up the leadership mantle and make a difference for the society.

### Forum Objective

The Women Inspire Forum focused on celebrating International Women's Day in 2023 by recognizing women leaders' efforts in enabling and advocating for equity in various sectors and industries in Canada. The event hosted a dialogue to address gaps and the future of gender equality in leadership roles where women are underrepresented.

The Women Inspire Forum included a panel sessions, business roundtable, a case study of leading women pioneers in their respective trades, keynote opening statements from senior government officials, as well as speakers from various industry sectors that impacted lives or helped in fast-tracking innovation and growth in the trade, education, and entrepreneurship sectors.

The event enabled, empowered, and promoted women in business, enterprises, careers, and leadership, providing a unique platform that gave established start-ups, professionals, innovators, emerging businesses, inventors, and creators across various sectors the opportunity to discuss their ideas with expert panels and founders from business, corporate, and academic fields. The Women Inspire Forum welcomed about 150 women-owned businesses and startups, where participants met women who were changing the world as entrepreneurs, practitioners, women leaders, and influencers. Other expected participants included creative collaborators, partners, youths in established businesses, those looking to start a product or service, or pioneers with women's businesses.

**Dr. Olutoyin Oyelade**

President

Casa Foundation for International Development





## **ABOUT CASA FOUNDATION FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

CASA Foundation is a non-profit that focuses on developing communities through the empowerment of under-served communities through business, leadership and development programs. Through its various leadership and support programs, youth, women, and members of the Black community are trained to become better role models to mentor others, to start self-employed businesses and to become entrepreneurs.

Additionally, Casa Foundation serves the community by incubating its focus candidates for the development of ready-to-launch businesses. Casa Foundation's social impact programs and initiative are offered through the trifocals approach of partnership, sponsorship and mentorship.

### **MISSION**

To mentor leaders, youth and women, seeking self-development to attain their full potential in the health, infrastructure, and education sectors. To partner with relevant institutions and developmental agencies looking to advance women, relieve poverty, and promote economic, business and community development initiatives.

To collaborate with support groups across Canada, and around the globe, in the public and private sectors to realize these objectives.

### **VISION**

To advance and invest in start-up entrepreneurs and emerging leaders to achieve their business goals. To empower, mentor, and sponsor emerging leaders (women and youth), to build better communities.



## ABOUT WOMEN INSPIRE

Casa Foundation launched its Women Inspire program on 5th March 2020. Women Inspire Forum is one of the development initiatives of the casa foundation. It is a platform to celebrate women in business and leadership on International Women's Day.

Women Inspire hosts Women in Business, Entrepreneurship, Trade, and Leaders across a broad spectrum in Partnership with other Corporate, Non-Profit, and Public Organizations that promote, advance, and Empower Women.

Women Inspire focuses on women that advance trade, business, entrepreneurship, and the economic development landscape. It also celebrates Women who Inspire others and have distinguished themselves in business, leadership, and trade sectors. The Forum's sole purpose is to support women-owned businesses while empowering women to run businesses through connecting resources (social, capital, human) to ideas.

The Women Inspire Forum was organized in the form of a business roundtable, a case study of leading women pioneers in their respective trades, keynote opening statements from Senior Government officials, as well as speakers from various industry sectors that have impacted lives or who have helped in fast-tracking innovation and growth in the trade, education, and entrepreneurship sectors have also shared their insightful experiences.

## EVENT SUMMARY

To make the event effective and meet its intended purpose, various committees such as event organizing, and program coordinating, media & IT committees were established. Besides, various partners were also involved in carrying out the forum.

The event is handled by forming 3 panels and 18 Speakers are drawn from senior leadership of corporate Canada from both the public and private sectors. Through these panel sessions and Case-studies, Women executives from vertical sectors (Government, academia, business, banking, real estate, non-profits, and charities), have shared impressive thoughts supported by empirical pieces of evidence on how to succeed in a career, trade, or business in a challenging arena focusing mainly on the following discussion topics:

- 1. Empowering Women; Case Studies of Women in business, leadership. Sharing the journey.***
- 2. How do Women Create Sustainable Wealth?***
- 3. Enabling Women to rise to Boards and Top Leadership of Corporations***

During the panel session, participants raised numerous questions and thorough discussions were made to address the issues.





## EVENT OUTCOME

The Women Inspire Forum held on International Women's Day 2023 successfully brought together women leaders from various sectors and industries in Canada to address the gaps and future of gender equality in leadership roles. The event, which featured three panels, focused on empowering women in business, creating sustainable wealth, and enabling women to rise to boards and top leadership positions in corporations.

The panel discussions were a huge success, with about 150 delegates from all over Canada participating in the insightful conversations and gaining knowledge from the expert panels and founders from business, corporate, and academic fields. Out of the 246 registered participants, 156 (63.41%) attended the forum in person, and all the speakers shared their valuable insights and practices with the participants



## 1ST PANEL - A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

### TOPIC: EMPOWERING WOMEN; CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN IN BUSINESS, LEADERSHIP. SHARING THE JOURNEY

The first panel, "Case Studies of Entrepreneurs," featured Sarah Syed, Founder of You Are the Change, Tosin During, Co-Founder of Beauty, Braids and Beyond, and Eloisa Slimmon, Founder of Liberty Movement & Wellness. The panelists shared their experiences and lessons learned as successful women entrepreneurs and how they overcame challenges to grow their businesses sustainably.



**WOMEN INSPIRE**  
2023 FORUM FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP  
**PANEL ONE:**  
**CASE STUDIES OF ENTREPRENEURS**  
**TOPIC:** Empowering Women; Case Studies of Women in business, leadership, and trade.

MODERATOR		PANELISTS	
 <b>MELISSA JIMENO</b> Prof. of International Business Management Centennial College, Canada.	 <b>SARAH SYED</b> Founder, You Are the Change (YATC).	 <b>TOSIN DURING</b> Co-Founder, Beauty, Braids & Beyond.	 <b>ELOISA SLIMMON</b> Founder, Liberty Movement & Wellness.

**VENUE:** Toronto Region Board of Trade, 100 Queens Quay East, 3rd floor, Toronto, ON M5E 1Y3  
**TIME:** 8:30AM - 1:00PM (EST) **DATE:** MARCH 10, 2023

Canada InVcap TD TO BEADY COMMITMENT



## DISCUSSION PANEL 2: HOW DO WOMEN CREATE SUSTAINABLE WEALTH?

The second panel, "How Women Create Sustainable Wealth," featured Krystal VanWesterop, National Manager of the 'Women in Enterprise' initiative of TD, Jody Beaupre, Vice President TD Wealth Financial Planning, and Charmaine Emerson, Co-Founder of Black Opportunity Fund. The panelists discussed the importance of financial planning and wealth creation for women and shared insights on how to create sustainable wealth for the long term.



## DISCUSSION PANEL 3: ENABLING WOMEN TO RISE TO BOARDS AND TOP LEADERSHIP OF CORPORATIONS

The third panel, "Enabling Women to Rise to Boards and Top Leadership of Corporations," featured Christine Nakamura, Vice-President of the Central Canada Office of Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, Manjit Jheeta, Vice President of Industry Relations and Community Engagement at Centennial College, Jennifer Frees, Principal at Second Order Executive Advisory, and Adenike Yomi-Faseun, Associate Director of Tax Managed Services at KPMG, Nigeria. The panelists discussed the importance of diversity in leadership positions and how women can rise to top positions in corporations.







**KAYLA ISABELLE**  
CEO,  
Startup Canada



**DR. OLUTOYIN OYELEADE**  
Managing Partner,  
InvCap Corporation,  
Canada



**HON. FILOMENA TASSI**  
Minister, Federal  
Development Agency of  
Southern Ontario,  
Govt of Canada.



**MP RECHIE VALDEZ**  
Member of Parliament,  
Mississauga-Streetsville,  
Ontario



**KOLA OTEKALU**  
Global Director,  
HR Europe, Middle  
East, and Africa  
Oceaneering, UK.



**IFE OYELEADE**  
Senior Program  
Manager, TD Bank,  
Canada



**PROF. MELISSA JIMENO,**  
MBA,BA  
Prof. of International  
Business Management,  
Centennial College,  
Canada.



**SARAH SYED**  
Founder,  
You Are the  
Change (YATC)



**TOSIN DURING**  
Co-Founder,  
Beauty, Braids  
& Beyond



**ELOISA SLIMMON**  
Founder,  
Liberty Movement  
& Wellness



**CHARMAIN EMERSON**  
Co-Founder,  
Black Opportunity  
Fund, Canada



**KRYSTAL VAN WESTEROP**  
National Manager of the  
'Women in Enterprise'  
Initiative of TD



**PROFESSOR WENDY CUKIER**  
Founder & Academic Director,  
Diversity Institute; Professor,  
Entrepreneurship & Strategy,  
Toronto Metropolitan



**CHRISTINE NAKAMURA**  
Vice President,  
Central Canada Office,  
Asia Pacific Foundation



**MANJIT JHEETA**  
Vice President,  
Industry Relations and  
Community Engagement



**JENNIFER FREES**  
Principal,  
Second Order  
Executive Advisory



**ADENIKE YOMI-FASEUN**  
Associate Director,  
Tax Managed Services,  
KPMG, Nigeria



**JODY BEAUPRE**  
Vice President,  
TD Wealth,

# WOMEN INSPIRE 2023: SPEAKERS PROFILES

## GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS



### **Her Worship Bonnie Crombie, Mayor of Mississauga**

Since her election as Mayor in 2014, Mayor Crombie has worked diligently to hold the line on taxes, invested in improving traffic congestion and building transit, attracted major economic development to the city all while managing the growth of Canada's sixth-largest city. Prior to her election as Mayor, Bonnie served as the Ward 5 City Councilor, and before that, as Member of Parliament for Mississauga-Streetsville. Before entering public service, Mayor Crombie enjoyed a twenty-year career in business.



### **The Honourable Felicia Tassi, Minister of Federal Development Agency of Southern Ontario, Government of Canada**

The Honourable Filomena Tassi was first elected as Member of Parliament for the riding of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas in 2015. She has previously served as Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Minister of Labour, and Minister of Seniors. Minister Tassi has been the voice of change for families in the city through a lifetime of commitment to her community. Driven by her profound sense of civic duty, she has been highly involved in her community.



### **The Honourable Minister Mary Ng, Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development**

The Honourable Mary Ng was first elected as Member of Parliament for Markham-Thornhill in 2017. She has previously served as Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade. Minister Ng is a devoted community leader who has always believed in the power of public service. She has 20 years of experience in the areas of education, women's leadership, job creation, and entrepreneurship.



# WOMEN INSPIRE 2023: SPEAKERS PROFILES



## **The Hon Rechie Valdez, Member of Parliament for Mississauga–Streetsville**

Rechie is committed to listening to the constituents of Mississauga–Streetsville so that she can represent their voices in Parliament. Her multifaceted leadership roles have equipped her with first-hand experiences that allow her to empathize with and understand Canadians of different walks of life. As a small business owner and creative entrepreneur, Rechie understands the challenges of transforming dreams into realities. She is a sought-after mentor and speaker to girls, women, and female entrepreneurs.

## **SPEAKERS/PANELISTS**



## **Dr. Olutoyin Oyelade, President/CEO Casa Foundation for International Development**

Dr Olutoyin is the Founding Partner/CEO at InVcap Corporation, an investment advisory firm. She successfully managed Intercontinental Group's fund portfolio of over \$8bn, and now supervises InVcap's Investment strategy. She holds a Doctorate in Management degree from the University of Maryland, Global Campus, and is a graduate of Wharton School's Advanced Management program, IMD Lausanne's Business Marketing, and Lagos Business School's Senior Management Program.



## **Dr. Olutoyin Oyelade, President/CEO Casa Foundation for International Development**

Ms. Christine Nakamura is Vice-President, Central Canada Office (Toronto), at the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. Ms. Nakamura is a board member of the Japanese Canadian Culture Centre Foundation in Toronto, Vice-President of the Japan Earthquake Relief Fund, board director of the National Coalition of Canadians Against Anti-Asian Racism and Operation Smile Canada, and a member of the Advisory Council (Canada) for the Prince Takamado Japan Canada Memorial Fund.

# WOMEN INSPIRE 2023: SPEAKERS PROFILES



**Manjit Jheeta, Vice President of Industry Employment, and Community Relations, Centennial College**

Manjit Jheeta is the Vice President of Industry Employment, and Community Relations at Centennial College. She has been described as a strategic, and transformational leader able to build strong partnerships and professionally manage complex, multi-jurisdictional, multi-stakeholder initiatives that support community and city building. This also includes a strong advocacy approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI); both personally and professionally which she integrates and embeds into everything she does.



**Adenike Yomi-Faseun, Founder of the Jean Augustine Centre for the Empowerment of Girls**

Adenike has over twenty-four (24) years in-depth and hands-on experience in various administrative and business support services, having served our clients in various capacities, delivering value-adding results with industry leading practices. Adenike has deep experience in immigration compliance and advisory services, compliance review/audit, contract personnel recruitment and administration, cost of living survey, payroll management and country briefing.



**Charmain Emerson, Co-Founder, Black Opportunity Fund, Canada**

Charmain is the Founder and Managing Director of Cultured Communications, where she provides marketing and communications counsel to senior management teams to support a variety of organizational strategic plans. Charmain's foremost passion is working with organizations and clients that have a socially responsible or sustainable business platform. Her leadership work as a co-founder and the communications lead of Black Opportunity Fund is a testament to this. The organization was founded to combat anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination in Canada by creating a long-term and sustainable pool of capital that will increase social and economic empowerment for Black communities across Canada.



**Jennifer Frees, Principal, Second Order Executive Advisory**

Jennifer Frees has diverse revenue leadership, marketing, business development, and strategic partnership experience in private, public and nonprofit sectors. Jennifer has served on executive leadership teams at the Toronto Region Board of Trade and TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival), leading units including Membership, Marketing, Analytics, Events, and Partnerships. She is currently Principal at Second Order Executive Advisory. Jennifer is an internationally sought-after business development speaker and workshop facilitator, and provides executive business development consulting services for an array of organizations in the creative sector.

# WOMEN INSPIRE 2023: SPEAKERS PROFILES



## **Krystal Van Westerop, National Manager, Women in Enterprise Initiatives, TD Bank**

Krystal Van Westerop, National Manager Women in Enterprise, has been with TD Business Banking since 2007. Krystal leads TD Business Banking strategy around women-owned and women-led businesses, by collaborating internally and externally on partnerships to support Women in Enterprise (WE) and by educating stakeholders and colleagues on the WE segment and solutions—to facilitate the success and growth of Women in Enterprise at TD. Krystal is currently the Vice Chair of the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce Women's Committee— working to support local women entrepreneurs.



## **Eloisa Slimmon, Founder, Liberty Movement and Wellness**

Eloisa Slimmon has been teaching yoga, Pilates for over 18 years. She is the founder of Liberty Movement & Wellness, a studio and Movement School that she built from the ground up as a grass roots studio. Today, Liberty Movement & Wellness is still a grassroots yoga, Pilates, and movement studio located in Toronto's west end in Dovercourt Village. It is a female centric business, female founded, owned and operated. In addition to running regular movement classes and a wellness clinic, there is also a teacher training school for Movement practitioners in Yoga and Pilates at 200 – 500 hours of training with a specialized program of 100 hours of training for Women's Health and hormones.



## **Tosin During, Co-Founder, Beauty, Braids and Beyond**

Tosin is a dedicated professional with a passion for technology, entrepreneurship and public policy. As the Co-Founder and Chief Operational Officer of Beauty Braids and Beyond, an online Beauty Supply Retailer that leverages innovation and education to transform the Beauty Supply Industry. Tosin has established herself as a leader in the beauty industry, overseeing all aspects of the company operations and driving growth and success. In addition to her work in the private sector, Tosin is also a Policy Analyst at the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).



## **Jody Beaupre, Assistant Region Head, TD Private Wealth Management, Metro East Region**

Jody leads a team of Wealth Professionals in the Greater Toronto Area who provide trusted advice and planning to high net worth clients and their families to help manage, grow and protect their wealth. Jody is a seasoned Executive with over 25 years of wealth management experience, leading large distribution and sales support teams. She is passionate about helping women build their financial confidence and is the Executive Sponsor of the TD Wealth for Women Program in PWM Metro East. She is also a champion of inclusion and diversity and a member of TD Wealth's Inclusion and Diversity Leadership Council.



# WOMEN INSPIRE 2023: SPEAKERS PROFILES

## MODERATORS



### **Kayla Isabelle, Chief Executive Officer, Startup Canada**

Kayla Isabelle is the Chief Executive Officer at Startup Canada, the gateway to Canada's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Startup Canada's mission is to connect Canada's entrepreneurs with the tools, community, and support they need to start and build their businesses. Kayla has dedicated her career to supporting entrepreneurs, and is passionate about leveraging the power of storytelling in the business community, particularly for women entrepreneurs as the host of the Startup Women Podcast.



### **Melissa Jimeno, Professor and Program Coordinator, Global Business Management**

Melissa Jimeno is currently the Professor and Program Coordinator of Global Management at Centennial College. Having worked in multiple countries and industries, Melissa is passionate about preparing students for a global career. Melissa has taught International Business courses at the University of South Carolina, Seneca College, and Centennial College. Since joining Centennial College in 2009, Melissa has been involved in the development of courses for both the International Business Management (IBM) and Global Business Management (GBM) programs.



### **Dr. Wendy Cukier, Founder & Academic Director of the Diversity Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University; Academic Director of the Women Entrepreneurship Hub, and Research Lead of the Future Skills Centre**

Dr. Wendy Cukier is a multiple award-winning Founder of the Diversity Institute, the Academic Director of the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, and Research Lead of the Future Skills Centre. She is the co-author of the bestseller, *Innovation Nation: Canadian Leadership from Java to Jurassic Park*, and former VP of Research and Innovation. She holds a PhD, an MBA, an MA, and honorary doctorates from Laval and Concordia.

# WOMEN INSPIRE 2023: SPEAKERS PROFILES

## NETWORKING SESSION/TEA BREAK COORDINATOR



**Ife Oyelade, Senior Program Manager, TD Bank**

Ife is a Project & Program Manager with over 8 years experience whose career expands several industries including banking, legal etc. She is a respected leader in the banking industry, and has received recognition for her contributions to the field. Her passion for social development and commitment to improving the lives of marginalized communities have been the driving force behind her work. She is also an active member of several professional organizations, where she has contributed to the development of project management standards and best practices.

## MC



**Liz West, Host Afternoon Express Zoomer Radio**

Liz West has been engaging audiences for over two decades as a television reporter, anchor and host for several networks including CTV, Citytv, CHCH, and Amazon Prime. Her credits include CityPulse News, Star!, eNow, Square Off, and Rags to Red Carpet and she has done hundreds of interviews with musicians, actors, newsmakers, and politicians, covering everything from arts and culture to news and lifestyle content.

Liz can be heard daily as host of The Afternoon Express on Zoomer Radio. She is also a public speaking coach, is creator of the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies – Virtual Communicator course, is an author and active member of the Toronto music community.



## **NETWORKING SESSION**

The Networking session at Women Inspire 2023 was designed to provide a supportive environment for women to connect with and learn from one another. They involved small-group discussions or activities that encourage participants to share their experiences, challenges, and goals.

The goal of these session was to help women develop a strong network of peers and mentors who can provide support, advice, and guidance throughout their careers and businesses. By connecting with other women in their field, participants can gain valuable insights, access new opportunities, and build lasting relationships that can help them succeed.







## ***LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

This forum has brought a golden opportunity to pay tribute to the inspirational women who are playing a vital role in the economy and societies. The participants have gained much knowledge and experience from the thoughtful and inspiring presentations made by the speakers, as well as the participative discussions and networking held.

One of the key takeaways from the forum was the importance of financial investments for building a legacy. It was noted that women are often underrepresented in fields that require significant financial investments, which limits their ability to build a legacy and contribute to their communities. The forum highlighted the need for more financial resources and investment opportunities for women-led businesses and initiatives.

Additionally, the lessons learned from undertaking such a forum are that it is essential in upgrading the knowledge and skills of women, and that there is still a wide gap to be filled. Women, whether they are engaged in business or employed, are keen to get such opportunities for knowledge sharing and development. Moreover, there are many experienced professionals and scholars who are willing to do their utmost to enhance the capacity of women, thereby impacting the well-being of society at large.

To ensure the continued success of such forums, it is recommended that they be held regularly to sign up a significant number of participants. Follow-ups and long-term impact assessments should be made to evaluate their effectiveness. Partnerships with organizations and individuals who appreciate and support such forums are essential, as they have a significant impact on enhancing the capacity of women to sustainably lead businesses and contribute to society. Moreover, such forums should be intended to create a women's network that strengthens women's participation within the community and builds new skills and mindsets.

# ***WOMEN INSPIRE 2023: THE NUMBERS***

**146** *Attendees*

**3.5 K** *Views On  
Youtube*

**19** *Speakers and  
Panalists*

**8** *Sponsors*

## SPECIAL THANKS

CASA Foundation thanks the Government of Canada Representative, planners, partner, supporting organizations, panelists, moderators and participants of this year's summit for contributing to the success of the event.







# WOMEN INSPIRE

Starts: 8th March **2024**

Theme:

**The Power of Allyship**

Register **NOW** on Eventbrite

Open till 14th March, 2023

SAVE THE  
DATE



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