

# Chamber: Closing the gap for women in Windsor-Essex



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Heather Gregg, left, and Ronna Warsh are shown on Monday, Feb. 15, 2016, with a copy of Positioning Women for Success — Windsor-Essex, an assessment report they compiled. *DAN JANISSE / WINDSOR STAR*

**By Lee Anne Doyle, Jeffrey MacKinnon and Matt Marchand**

On Oct. 14, the front page article in the Windsor Star read: Is Windsor the “worst city” in Canada for women?

It was written in response to a recent study released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives entitled *The Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada in 2016: The Gender Gap in Canada’s 25 Biggest Cities*. The study provides an annual snapshot of the gaps in men’s and women’s access to economic security, personal security, education, health and positions of leadership in Canada’s largest 25 metropolitan areas.

Windsor placed last due to its large gap in women’s representation in leadership roles, its larger-than-average employment gap, and the fact that Windsor has the highest gap in the percentage of women living in poverty (24 per cent) compared to men.

The Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce board of directors, comprised of a balanced representation of males and females, acknowledges the concerns identified in the CCPA study. Regions like Windsor-Essex that depend on predominantly male industries (e.g. auto sector) tend to land at the bottom of the list.

Although Windsor is a city with a large manufacturing sector, more women are working in non-traditional careers such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and manufacturing). This is promoted by community partners such as St. Clair College, the University of Windsor, local school boards and not-for-profit organizations.

In other vocations where gender barriers have been broken down, Windsor-Essex takes a back seat to no one — particularly in public sector management.

The study states: “Windsor has only one woman on city council. The outlying regions fare slightly better, boosting women’s representation among elected officials to 23 per cent. Men outnumber women two to one among senior managers.”

The score for leadership is calculated based on two indicators: the ratio of women to men in senior management occupations, and the ratio of women to men in elected municipal government seats. The CCPA did not include federal, provincial and school board elected positions where ratios are

better. In reality, we do need more female politicians and more women running local companies.

Our community supports and recognizes the leadership ability of women. Many of the past WERCC Business Excellence Award nominees and recipients have been women. In 1996, Windsor became the first Canadian city to present the international ATHENA Award which honours men and women who are recognized for business and professional excellence, for community service and for encouraging women to achieve their leadership potential. The chamber has awarded 21 outstanding female leaders with the ATHENA Award.

And even though we think the result is skewed because it puts manufacturing centres in a less favourable light due to traditional gender-based vocational norms that are only now being challenged, Windsor-Essex is doing something about it.

Workforce WindsorEssex and Ronna Hope Warsh Leadership Coaching and Consulting have partnered in the Positioning Women for Success — Windsor-Essex project funded by Status of Women Canada.

Its purpose is to create workplace champions and develop leadership skills in a minimum of 100 professional women employed by six local employer partners: Enwin, Essex-Windsor EMS, Green Shield Canada, KPMG, VON Canada and Windsor Regional Hospital.

The research contained in the project's 2016 needs assessment report confirms barriers exist for women and makes recommendations for employers. These findings will provide valuable tools and best practices for all employers in Windsor-Essex.

The CCPA study is the beginning of the conversation, not the end. WERCC is committed to working with other community partners in closing the gaps to ensure women's access to security and opportunity in the Windsor-Essex community.

*Lee Anne Doyle is a director of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. Jeffrey MacKinnon is the chair and Matt Marchand is the president and CEO.*