



Source Episode #3

Women Leaders in Education Presents OSSTF President Karen Littlewood

Episode Highlights

This episode launches the Women Leaders in Education podcast series. Join Andrew King as he connects with Karen Littlewood, President of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO). In this episode, Karen recounts how she became the leader she is today, becoming president during a pandemic and the challenges facing women in leadership.

Come learn about the women leading their teacher organizations throughout the CTF/FCE membership! For resources to support women in leadership, check out femleadfem.ca.

How did your experience in the classroom help get you to this point?

KAREN LITTLEWOOD (KL): Everything in my past has been leading up to where I am, even though I didn't know that at the time. I build on those experiences to help guide where I am.

KL: In 1991, I started teaching Grades 4-6 core French in Keswick, and that is not a path to the President of OSSTF.

KL: When I took a job in 2007 at a secondary school, I thought "well the possibility is there, so why not try?". Then I was able to stay involved in the union and get involved in OSSTF, and the pathway led me here, which is not some sort of plan that I had, not something I'd ever imagined.

Why did you get involved in the union in the first place?

KL: For me, union involvement is all about relationships. We were part of a very small staff at a new school and one of my colleagues had put her name forward to be the Secretary of the Local Executive. And the next year she said, "I'm going to go on to another position. Why don't you do this?", and I thought, I don't know how to do any of that. She said, "You'll be fine". So, that's how I started, as a Secretary to a Local Executive. And since that time, I've been incredibly involved; you stay involved because of those relationships too.

What advice do you have for women members who want to pursue leadership in their teacher organizations?

KL: As a woman, I find, for many of us, we need people to recognize the work we're doing and to say, "I think you should be on the Provincial Executive".

KL: When you have enough people saying that they have confidence in you, that your voice matters, that you will have an impact...I've come to the recognition that a door opens and you go through it. And if you don't like it, you come back out.

KL: Listen to that little voice inside and try and build some confidence in yourself. And when somebody says that they think you can do it, believe them. They're not making it up. It's true.