



Positive Impacts of a Re-imagined Public Post on Rural Women

Brief to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) on the Challenges Faced by Women Living in Rural Communities

House of Commons
43rd Parliament, 2nd Session

Submitted by the **Canadian Union of Postal Workers**

March 18, 2021

CUPW

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) represents 56,000 postal workers. We argue for the maximization of existing post offices and the expansion of services to people everywhere in Canada, and give voice to these positions through our Delivering Community Power campaign, and Re-Imagining the Post Office.

Rural Women

Women in rural communities have different challenges than those living in urban settings. From what is known, they have fewer services, can suffer from isolation and face a tougher time getting employment. Anything that promotes connection, community, and communication stands to be a boon to rural women's realities.

Long the bedrock of most small communities, the Post Office has, for decades, served a vital function of communication and interaction. Before the era of the internet especially, people relied on the Post for letters and packages from loved ones, business associates, and service providers. Our current reality has changed a little for most postal users in the digital age, but not for all, and less so in rural areas. Moreover, with the advent of online shopping, the *raison d'être* of the Post is as it always was, whether one is in the city or the country.

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The Post Office as a Community Hub

The Post Office is still important for many people because of its primary function of delivering the mail. But it can be even more critical for rural women. Above historically being an important employer for them, the Post Office could also act as a community hub. In areas where broadband is patchy, rudimentary or expensive, such a hub could provide internet services. But it could also be the location for small pop-up shops where artisans and entrepreneurs could show their wares, thus enabling some to be known to others in the community and earn some money. In the same vein, the space available in post offices across Canada could also be used as a nerve centre during an emergency, a place where people can gather, get provisions, and be taken care of. For women especially, this might be of significant importance in a flood, fire or other catastrophe.

A Post Office with Postal Banking

In addition, were banking services provided at the Post Office, this would be of assistance to many women living in rural, remote or reservation locales. It is well known that for some small communities, their members have to drive long distances to even access a bank. Postal banking, utilizing the broad infrastructure of the Post Office, that is, literally thousands of brick-and-mortar buildings across Canada, could be there for citizens of small rural communities, and especially women.

Senior Check-ins

Another way that the Post can be of help to rural women is by having door-to-door mail carriers or rural and suburban mail carriers checking in on seniors and people with mobility issues, keeping more people in their own homes for longer. Giving rural women the ability to safely stay in their homes for longer will provide better quality of life for them and put their family members' minds at ease. Indeed, women largely carry the burden of child and elder care for family members. Knowing that a postal worker is checking in on, or reporting on any irregularities, may help to ease that burden.

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Rural Women's Jobs

When CPC wanted to close post offices in the late 1980s, a study of the impact of these closings on women revealed, among other things, the importance of the public Post Office. It said that privatization (of postal services) would convert unionized full-time jobs into low-wage part time positions. Given that many rural women do get postal jobs (as clerks or Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers), having a vibrant expanded Post would have benefits for these women. (See Hannant, J., 1989)

Conclusion

Canada Post is a valuable, reliable public service that has proved its worth for well over a century. For women who live in rural, remote or reservation areas in Canada, the Post already provides a high standard of service. However, CUPW holds the vision that with such a vast infrastructure and logistical network, Canada Post could be re-imagined as a vibrant publicly-owned institution that provides more services that are tailored to Canadians. In particular, women who live outside Canadian urban centres could benefit even more from expanded services and opportunities that could enhance women's experience of rural life.

All in all, existing postal services are a critical part of economic and social supports for rural women, and there is untapped potential for expanded services including post offices as community hubs, postal banking, senior check-ins and other initiatives, that could particularly benefit women in rural communities.

Works cited

Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). "Towards a Modern Public Postal Service". Brief to the Canada Post Mandate Review, February 15, 1996.

Hannant, J. (1989). *Privatizing Postal Services: The Implications for Women*. Ottawa: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the National Committee on the Status of Women.