

## Dr. Maria Eriksen

### **Every Woman Can: The Maria Eriksen Memorial Bursary**

As an outspoken voice for the advancement and equality of women, Dr. Maria Eriksen (1939 - 2008) was a social advocate involved with various initiatives since the women's movement began in the 1970s.

Dr. Eriksen was educated as a nurse and earned her RN through the Galt School of Nursing in Lethbridge. Soon after, she earned a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in psychology from the University of Calgary, and a PhD in 1981.

Dr. Eriksen founded the City of Calgary's Employee Assistance Program in 1982 and was director for five years, before leaving to run a successful, private psychotherapy practice. She served as an adjunct professor for the University of Calgary's Faculty of General Studies and as a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, as well as an instructor at Mount Royal University (then College). Dr. Eriksen enjoyed being in the mountains and she spent time at her most favourite place, Lake O'Hara, for over thirty consecutive years.

In the early 1980s she earned a YWCA Women of Distinction Award and in the mid-1980s she was an Alberta Award of Distinction recipient. A founding member and chair of the Famous 5 Foundation (established in 1996), Dr. Eriksen received the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case in 1999 and a Global Calgary Woman of Vision Award in 2002. Dr. Eriksen was granted a University of Calgary honorary degree in 2004 and made a Member of the Order of Canada in 2008 for her lifetime dedication to making social change in her community.

A founding member of the Alberta Legal Education and Action Fund, Dr. Eriksen also served with National Watch on Images of Women in the Media, the Alberta and Calgary Status of Women Action Committees, and the Calgary YWCA Board of Directors. She was chair of the City of Calgary's Advisory Council on Equity for 10 years. Taking her vision for change beyond the local community, Dr. Eriksen also sat on the board of directors of the new Alberta Global Forum, and was instrumental in forming the Calgary Sexual Health Centre. She later supported the community through the Maria K. Eriksen and Harold Hanen Fund at Calgary Foundation.



Her most recent project was tackling a huge issue facing Alberta's immigrants — obtaining the Canadian accreditation or training required in order to become fully employed in their field. Dr. Eriksen was frustrated to see that many of the janitorial staff at the hospital where she worked were internationally trained professionals, unable to practice their professions in Canada. In 2005, she was the founding chair of the Immigrant Access Fund Society of Alberta (now [Windmill Microlending](#)), a nonprofit organization that offers micro loans to internationally trained and educated immigrants to help overcome the financial barriers they face in becoming able to work in their field in Canada.

Dr. Eriksen was a mentor and leader in the fields of legal issues, social and economic issues, and equality. She exemplified the values of sincerity and respect and her vigorous, courageous spirit and unambiguous sense of right and wrong touched all she encountered. Without her quiet leadership Windmill Microlending, The Famous 5 Foundation, and The Status of Women Action Committee would not have been created. Dr. Eriksen provided a profound voice for the advancement and equality of women. A psychologist, advocate, and long-time volunteer, through dignified commitment Dr. Maria Eriksen worked for change in society while helping individuals reach their own potential.

In 2010, the Every Woman Can: The Maria Eriksen Memorial Bursary was established at Calgary Foundation in memory of Dr. Eriksen, to support immigrant women living in Alberta who are pursuing post-secondary education in order to return to their pre-immigration field of work and to assist an individual's successful transition to life in Canada.