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Women of Worth Honored for Social Contributions by Marianna Tu

What do poetry in prisons, breast cancer, yoga and old cell phones all have in common? They are all part of the initiatives started by L'Oréal Paris' 2009 "[Women of Worth](#)," a group of 10 women who were honored for their social contributions at the CNN Inspire Summit on Tuesday night. These ten women began social programs in their communities ranging from cell phone donations to soldiers serving abroad, to yoga classes for cancer survivors. The evening, which featured a panel discussion and awards ceremony, began with a conversation between news anchor Erica Hill and nine-time Grammy winner, Mary J. Blige, speaking on what would become a theme of the evening, using personal tribulation as motivation to mobilize women.

For Blige, sharing her story of growing up in a violent community was empowering as "Women told me I was helping them, when I thought I was just crying out for help." Blige now runs educational programs for young women. Panelist and Actress Holly Robinson Peete became an activist around Parkinson's Disease and autism when the conditions touched her life; her father has Parkinson's and one of her sons is autistic. Honoree Maimah Karmo similarly used her personal experience of having breast cancer to start the [Tigerlily Foundation](#), working to provide education and support around the disease. Other panelists included Beth Brooke of Ernst and Young, speaking on the need to economically empower women, and celebrity chef Lorena Garcia who is combating obesity.

This theme of transforming pain into power culminated in the surprise of the night, the announcement of a the National Honoree, whose project would receive a \$25,000 to her cause in addition to the \$5,000 already donated to each Woman of Worth by L'Oréal Paris along with matching donations to ovarian cancer research. The National Honoree was Sharon Lambert, who was selected by popular online vote. Sharon, a survivor of rape at 15, shared her story with women all around the country through [Pandora's Project](#), a website offering resources and support to survivors of sexual assault. Lambert was warmly applauded by her fellow honorees, but this was not just one woman's night.

"There was power in meeting one another and synergies across the causes," L'Oréal Paris President Karen Fondu commented. Honoree Brenda Murray, who started an education program for women in prison, expressed this camaraderie in her interview, saying, "Well, you should go talk to Carol. She's doing really terrific stuff!" Carol Reza's [Bridge of Faith](#) provides support and mentorship for those aging out of the foster care system. Halle Tecco of [Yoga Bear](#), a yoga program for cancer patients, warned that "You can put your head down in your own cause," and advised other young women to first "make sure no one else is doing what you want to, otherwise you're better off helping them."

L'Oréal Paris spokeswoman and UNICEF Ambassador Dale Haddon commented on the unique role a make-up company can play in engaging women from every stage of life, speaking from her own efforts to make change from within the industry.

"Women are vehicles for transformation and L'Oreal is very women-centric. You used to see creams for 40 year olds advertised on the faces on 20 year olds, but now things have changed... every age has a secret to tell you." On a night when women from age 18 to 91 were honored, these secrets were shared with all.

Greg D'Alba of CNN, described his feelings on being a man at an event filled with powerful women in two words. "It's special."

But perhaps the evening was best summed by President Fondu. "There's a reason the acronym for Women of Worth spells WoW."