

Young women work: Community economic development to reduce women's poverty and improve income ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Report in pdf ^[2]

Excerpts from the report:

This is a participatory feminist research project which sought to describe the barriers and opportunities for young women in the "new" economy, and outline Community Economic Development approaches to preventing poverty among young women ages 15-24. We worked with young women in two inner-city Winnipeg neighbourhoods, and asked them which community supports they used, in order to understand how we could build CED approaches into the current network of community-based organizations they already access.

We talked to 50 young women, the majority of whom are Aboriginal. We asked them about their neighbourhoods, unpaid and paid work, school, computers, motherhood, teenage pregnancy, role models, and what they hoped for in their futures.

This research project also included a scan of programs offered in inner-city Winnipeg. It found that community supports available to young women are limited, and generally concerned with young women's health. Community supports generally served practical needs for food, shelter, health services and education, and there is a lack of programming that incorporates economic skills and economic development for young women.

Young women in this study demonstrated incredible possibilities for improving their quality of life and income. They wanted to give back to their communities and work with other youth, and develop and share their cultural identities. They wanted to help other youth, by inspiring and motivating them, and supporting them to stay in school.

As young mothers, they want access to education and training so they can be better parents for their children in the long term. This requires child care that is close to their home or school. To be good parents, they also need supports and breaks from their children to reduce stress and isolation.

This study finds that programming and supports need to encompass both young women's practical daily needs and their strategic long term needs, for both are equally important. This study has a variety of implications for Community Economic Development approaches to preventing poverty and improving the incomes of young women. It finds that a strong social safety net is a key support to economic development efforts with young women. Young women also require safe, welcoming spaces in order to participate in programming. The study finds that CED approaches should be centred on young women's needs - child care was most frequently mentioned as a key component of any support to young mothers, for example.

The study concludes with suggestions and ideas for CED emerging from the findings of this research study. The following key features are identified as essential and should be incorporated to support young women's success in the programs:

- Aboriginal cultural teachings led by the Aboriginal community
- Basic needs such as child care, transportation, and nutritious food
- Living wages where applicable
- No cost to participants
- Economic literacy and career guidance
- Mentorship / role modeling

The study finds that young women are ready and willing to participate in holistic programs that respect their cultural backgrounds and build strong futures for themselves, their families and their communities.

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