

# Poverty study points to lack of coordination of services <sup>[1]</sup>

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EXCERPTS

Affordable childcare and housing. Family of origin. Education.

These are but a few of the common issues faced by women in the Cochrane area, according to results from the "Let's Touch the Skies" report <sup>[2]</sup>, a study that examines the status of women's economic security in Cochrane and surrounding areas, based on engagement with nearly 200 individuals.

The study was made possible by federal grant funding from the Status of Women Canada and was conducted in partnership with the Cochrane Society for Housing Options (CSHO) and Cochrane Family Community Support Services (FCSS) and the Western Rocky View Family and Community Resource Centre. Research on the topic began in November of 2012.

As presented to Town council on Oct. 15, a stakeholder's group is now being put together, as a result of this research. The group will then come up with one or two community initiatives to implement in the municipality by March 2015.

Ravi Natt, project lead, stressed that the most important finding from this data is that women's economic security cannot be measured by any singular factor.

"Even though the language is about women - these women are not living in isolation. Really, our recommendations are about families," explained Natt, adding that the motivation behind this study is to increase community awareness and work toward a coordination of services.

The study identified 10 major factors that contribute to poverty, including: choices, childcare, education, employment, family of origin, financial literacy, health, housing, relationships and transportation.

Of these, Natt said the most prevalent factors included childcare (access and affordability), choices (issues of hopelessness, which prevents people from moving forward), education (low levels equate to lower income-earning potential), family of origin (early childhood development impacts life decisions), health (sick children, poor mental health) and housing (lack of affordable options in Cochrane).

Of the 198 individuals surveyed, more than 40 respondents have a household income of more than \$90,000; the median Cochrane income is \$83,003, which is nearly \$20,000 more than the Alberta average, making it one of the highest median incomes in the province, according to the Town of Cochrane's Economic Development Strategy of Winter 2013.

"Some of these key issues become compounded exponentially due to the presence of others. For example, child care continues to be a universal theme across demographics due to lack of availability, accessibility and affordability," said FCSS Family Support Worker Melissa Engdahl.

"However, for vulnerable populations in Cochrane, who do not have transportation, this becomes an even greater issue with further reaching effects for the parents and the children."

Engdahl further explained how those who are eligible for subsidies are further limited due to the nature of often part-time work, usually without benefits.

Working women who do not qualify for subsidies must seriously outweigh the risks versus financial rewards of returning to the workforce without a proper coordination of affordable services.

"Current research shows a strong relationship between a women's return to the workforce or pursuing further education directly with their access to quality childcare," said Engdahl.

The next step for the project is to "have the community presentations completed by the end of the month, with a goal of having the key areas designate their representation for the satellite working groups and the steering committee by Nov. 20," said Engdahl.

- reprinted from the Rocky View Weekly

**Related link:** Let's Touch the Skies! report <sup>[3]</sup>

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** economics <sup>[5]</sup>

poverty <sup>[6]</sup>

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