

## Program and Policy Change

The women who were part of this project point out that many changes are needed to help women with low income get out of poverty and improve their own well-being and their children's, such as:

- Government should include the ideas of low-income women with children when changing policies, programs and services.
- Health and social services should work with their staff to make sure that they have resources to help low-income women and most importantly, treat women with respect.
- Better housing, childcare, education and social assistance programs are needed.
- Services need to work together to be really effective. For example better childcare services can help women find better jobs.
- When policies are created or changed, attention should be given to the different needs of women, women of different ethnic backgrounds and women who live in rural and urban areas.
- Family Resource Centres help low-income women with children and need more government funding to help communities better.

*The full report is available on the web at: [www.pwhce.ca](http://www.pwhce.ca)  
or by calling (204) 982-6630.*

### Funded by

The Winnipeg Foundation



### Published by

**PRAIRIE WOMEN'S HEALTH**  
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE  
RESEARCH • POLICY • COMMUNITY

*L. Scruby & R. Rapaport Beck. Including Low Income Women with Children: Program and Policy Directions – Research Report 2007.*



## Including Low-Income Women with Children

### Community Booklet

#### A Booklet for...

- Women and their Families
- Community Workers and Volunteers

Based on the project  
*"Including Low-Income Women with Children:  
Program and Policy Directions"*

*"If you think you're too small to be effective, you  
have never been in bed with a mosquito"*  
- Bette Reese

#### Participating Family Resource Centres

Andrews Street Family Centre  
Anna's House

Mrs. Lucci's  
Wolsey Family Place

## About the Project

This booklet is a summary of a research report called: *“Including Low-Income Women with Children: Program and Policy Directions”*.

- 56 women took part in this project, they met in 9 focus groups
- 4 groups included women who worked or volunteered at Family Resource Centres
- 5 groups included women who used services at Family Resource Centres
- The women live in Winnipeg, Steinbach and Lac du Bonnet, Manitoba

Women who take care of their families while living on a low income have a lot to say about how to improve programs and policies, and better processes for change. People in government and in health and social services need to know the impact of programs and policies in women’s lives and the best way to make improvements.

The women in this report say that government programs and policies can make it harder to take care of their families rather than easier.

Programs and policies have to change to help low-income women and their children get out of poverty and have a better sense of well-being. Including ideas from low-income women with children is a **good way** to make better programs and policies.

## A Safe and Nurturing Place To Go

Family Resource Centres provide a place where mothers can go to meet other women, children can play safely and where everyone is treated with respect:

- FRCs deliver helpful community programs and offer a place to develop strong social networks.
- Women know their children are nurtured at FRCs, and that they can find helpful information about child development.
- Staff and volunteers who give support and information in a respectful way are some of the best things about FRCs.
- More hours of services and new programs for youth, women and men are needed to do more for the community. Family Resource Centres often don’t have enough money or space to add more services for communities.
- FRCs involve the people who use the services in making plans and decisions, so that they can have a say in how FRCs are run and the kinds of programs they offer.

## Food (continued)

- Many women said they are willing to volunteer to work at the food banks in exchange for food.
- If monthly costs like rent and utilities are too expensive, then money for food must be used to pay for these other things.
- Governments need to have programs and policies that make sure that everyone has enough nutritious food to eat.

## Education

Many women in this study have not had the chance to complete high school, however they said that a good education was important for getting out of poverty. Here are some of the ideas the women shared about education:

- Lack of childcare and the cost of getting to classes make it very difficult for women to go back to school.
- The women also said that the costs of some education programs are not covered by social assistance and are too high. It would help if more kinds of courses were covered.
- Using the Family Resource Centres for training programs would make them easier to attend.
- The women value being able to learn about everyday skills at Family Resource Centres, such as parenting and budgeting.

## Women Taking Care of Their Families: The Challenge of Living on a Low Income

The report presents the women's experiences and ideas for change in 6 main areas:

- Access to Social Programs and Services
- Housing
- Childcare
- Food
- Education
- A Safe and Nurturing Place To Go

## Access to Social Programs and Services

The women in this study said that they need to use health and social services such as going to see doctors, nurses, social workers, family service workers, legal aid, housing and income support workers. These are the issues that women talked about:

- Health and social services do not work together and should come up with ways to be more organized.
- It is hard to get to services. Women who live in the city who take the bus say that it costs too much money and it can take a really long time to get to the places they need to go.
- Women who live in small towns sometimes have to take a day off work for appointments and often have to go to other towns or to Winnipeg for services. This can cost a lot of money.

## Access to Health and Social Services (continued)

- Workers can be rude and sometimes don't want to listen. It is hard to go to a clinic or service if the people who work there are not kind and don't treat women and their families with respect.
- It is difficult to find information about people's rights in the system and what resources are available. Service providers should share the same information with everybody and offer women information about their rights and the services that they can use.

## Housing

Having a safe affordable place to live is one of the most important issues that the women talked about:

- Comfortable and affordable places to live in safe neighbourhoods are hard to find. This means that women and their families may have to move a lot to try to find safer or less expensive places to live and they often don't have money to pay for heat and hydro, food, clothing or bus passes.
- Low rent housing is usually not clean or safe. Also, it can be dangerous for anyone to walk around and for children to play outside.
- Not having to move a lot helps women and their children develop friendships and know about places in the community where they can go for help.
- Public housing is hard to get into. Some public housing buildings are good, while others are not well taken care of.
- There should be more public housing and the quality of public housing should be good and the same in all buildings.

## Childcare

Women in this study said that having good childcare that they can afford and count on is one of their biggest challenges. Good, affordable childcare is an important issue for women who are trying to get out of poverty.

Here is what the women said about childcare:

- Many women said that they did not have a person or place that they could trust to take good care of their children.
- It is hard to get childcare subsidies and finding a space for their children in a licensed day care was really difficult.
- There is a concern that Child and Family Services might get involved if they have problems with childcare.
- It is really hard to get paid work, go to school, or go to appointments without good childcare.

## Food

Good nutritious food is important for good health and food banks aren't able to provide enough. Women in this study said that living on a low income means that it is often hard to get enough food to feed their families.

These are some of the issues the women shared:

- Food banks are charities and don't provide enough food for families to eat. The food is often not fresh and nutritious.
- Some women said they felt that they were treated badly because they used the food bank.