



What is Momentum?

The **Momentum: Reducing Barriers to Women's Economic Security** project was a response by the Portage la Prairie Community Revitalization Corporation (PCRC) to a Call for Proposals issued by the Status of Women Canada for "Women Living in Rural and Remote Communities and Small Urban Centers."

Phase 1 focused on research and creating a community plan together with women facing economic security and community organizations to ensure ongoing action. The next phase of the project will focus on taking action on three priority areas which were identified during a community meeting held in June 2013. For more information see the full report on the PCRC website at www.PortageCRC.com.

August 2013 Update

What does economic security look and feel like for women?

Women in Portage are not satisfied or comfortable living paycheck to paycheck. Being economically secure would mean no longer being faced with the task of juggling financial priorities to provide the necessities on a daily basis. Collectively women painted a picture of what their lives would look like if they achieved financial security:

- Living in safe and affordable housing, ideally owning their home
- Reliable transportation, including their own driver's license
- Reliable, qualified and affordable childcare
- A stable, good paying job
- Having a good education to open up opportunities
- Having time for themselves to do things they enjoy like exercise, read and rest
- The ability to make the choice between staying home with their children or working

What is working?

- Completing their Grade 12 education and taking post-secondary courses is allowing women to find better paying employment and increase their job options.
- Programs that improve employability skills such as communication, computer literacy and job search skills are helping women enter and move forward in the workforce.
- Life skills training such as cooking and money management classes are helping women make ends meet and live on a limited income.
- Women are aware of and accessing many social services available in Portage la Prairie and area to help make ends meet and move forward with their lives.
- Family-based programming is assisting in developing skills, healthy relationships, self-esteem, and a sense of community while providing children with a healthy, nurturing, educational environment.
- Women are finding ways to manage tight budgets by seeking out financial tips, budgeting, and couponing.

Barriers to Economic Security

Women in Portage la Prairie are struggling with similar barriers women face across Canada; low incomes, child care, transportation, access to education, affordable housing, quality healthcare, and employment that pays well. These barriers are interconnected as women's challenges are directly linked to one another.

Low Incomes

- Many struggle to cover necessities, let alone save for an education, home, or their children's future.
- Some women felt isolated, helpless, and dependent on systems such as Employment and Income Assistance and subsidized housing that were supposed to be helping them, but rather made them feel trapped.

Childcare

- A lack of affordable, quality childcare is holding women back from finding employment and upgrading their education.
- Waiting lists for licensed daycares can take years, and often even limited costs are too high for low-income women.
- Most daycare hours do not match the hours of entry-level positions, which are often shift work, or require evenings and weekend hours.

Transportation

- Lack of transportation is a barrier to accessing education, employment, childcare, and services such as health care and recreation.
- Portage does not have a public transportation system and women report shuttle companies and cab services as expensive and unreliable.
- Many women do not have a driver's license or a vehicle so walking is their primary form of transportation.
- Although young women and service providers see transportation as a significant barrier to employment, many employers do not feel that transportation is a barrier to potential employees.

Accessing Education

- Although women felt education was key to getting a good paying job and providing a better life, the cost of education was most commonly mentioned as a barrier.
- Not having desired courses offered locally, or the inability to balance the time commitments required for education with family and employment needs are stopping women from upgrading
- Lack of childcare and transportation hold women back from pursuing educational opportunities.

Racism and Stigma

- Many Aboriginal women felt judged when accessing services.
- Women felt the stigma of being on assistance, or being viewed as "poor." They often don't feel welcome which stops them from participating in programs or seeking services such as childcare. Other women felt specific services such as Manitoba Housing and Child and Family Services were "out to get them", and a deep distrust of service providers stops them from accessing help.
- Others felt that they were constantly being judged for past mistakes, which was difficult to escape in a small town.

Mental Health, Lack of Social Supports and Isolation

- Some women, particularly mothers, admitted feelings of depression, anxiety or low self-confidence; feeling stressed and isolated.
- Many women feel a lack of positive emotional supports from friends and family.
- Inability to access quality health care, including mental health services was a concern by women in Portage.

Feeling Safe

- Feeling safe was a key to women having the security to make changes in their life.
- Reports of feeling unsafe included not feeling secure in their homes, being scared to walk the streets at night, fear of abusive partners and facing aggressors or bullies towards themselves or their children.
- Housing and safety were closely linked. Slum landlords, maintenance issues, and lack of security were common complaints causing many women to feel unstable.

Employment Opportunities

- Minimum wage jobs, part-time jobs, casual positions and positions requiring evening and weekend work were not sufficient to reach economic security.
- Some women felt the job market did not match their skills or that employers were not flexible enough for them to be able to meet their family needs.
- Other women felt they were out of the loop after raising children for years; they lacked necessary skills, or didn't have the confidence needed for an interview.

Awareness and Collaboration between Service Providers

- Both women and service providers admitted they are not aware of all of the programs and services available that may be able to help women.
- Women and service providers want more easily accessible information on available programs and services.
- Stakeholders desire more open discussions and forums between service providers and community leaders that focus on taking action on community issues.



Snapshot from our Momentum “Call to Action” community forum held June 13, 2013 at the Family Resource Center. Photo courtesy of Golden West Radio.

For more information call 204-240-0036 or e-mail our coordinator at j.campbell@Portagecrc.com

Next Steps

A community forum was held June 13th 2013 at the Family Resource Centre. The Day of Action had two main purposes; one was to share the knowledge and research we found in phase one and the second was to collaboratively decide what our priorities would be moving into the next phase of the project. Collectively childcare and transportation were identified as the priority issues. These issues, as well as collaboration and public education will be the focus for the remainder of the project. While the work plan will evolve as we gather information, the following chart outlines the activities that Momentum will focus on over the remainder of the project.

