



FASTFACTS



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Federal Government Spending Cuts A Step Backward for High Risk Communities

On September 25, 2006, the Conservative government of Steven Harper announced \$1 billion in cuts to federal programs.

Among the long list of programs cut are many that have had a direct impact on important community-based work that has been very effective in assisting women and their families living in poverty. For example, the Status of Women Canada budget has been cut by \$5 million and they will no longer fund organizations to do research and advocacy.

The Harper government makes the claim that the government programs being cut have been targeted because they are “wasteful and ineffective”. How this has been determined is a bit of a mystery. In Manitoba, there is a long list of effective community-based initiatives that have been supported by the programs now under attack. The following provides just one example of how federal government programs now on the chopping block have had a meaningful impact on the lives of women in poverty.

North End Women’s Centre

The North End Women’s Centre (NEWC) was established in 1984 with funding from the government agency now known as Status of Women Canada. The Centre has played an important role in the lives of women, their families and the broader community.

In addition to the many services provided by NEWC, the Money and Women: Mobilization Through Addressing Systemic Barriers Project was launched in 2000 with financial support from Status of Women Canada. The goal of the project was to develop a community-based model that would provide women with the necessary tools to begin to move beyond poverty. A holistic model was developed to address the needs of multi-barriered women.

The program provides advocacy for women to assist them to develop skills, access programs and navigate through systems. For example, assisting women to acquire identification so that they can open a bank account can be an important first step toward independence. While this may seem a simple task, there are many women for whom lack of identification and difficulty getting identification, creates a significant barrier. The Money and Women project also provides education and awareness training for financial institutions, government agencies and others to increase understanding of the economic issues than many women continue to face and how service providers can better respond to their needs.

The Up Shoppe – Integrating Social and Economic Objectives

Early on, the Money and Women project looked at



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how they might intervene to increase opportunity for North End women at the local level. One important and innovative initiative that emerged was a small business called the Up Shoppe. The Up Shoppe was designed as a social enterprise that would provide a much-needed service for North End women while also providing them with training and employment opportunities. What started as a clothing exchange in the basement of the NEWC has evolved into a self-sustaining, gently-used clothing boutique that employs four community women.

But it is much more than a business. The Up Shoppe integrates social and economic objectives with a commitment to the local community. The Up Shoppe subsidizes housing units for chronically homeless single women, and provides training and casual employment for marginalized women. As a business, the Up Shoppe meets a market need as a retail outlet that sells affordable clothing to local community members. It also provides a much broader community service. It provides an opportunity for women to develop the self-esteem and experience that will help them become more 'employable'. It provides a fine options program so that women can work off their fines in a supportive learning environment. It established a community-access program to help women leaving abusive relationships find and furnish homes, and it has developed a volunteer program that draws many women in the community, particularly seniors, out of isolation. Many of the women who initially walked through the doors of the Up Shoppe with low self-esteem, and who were deemed by others to be 'unemployable', have moved on to further their education and find full-time employment. But more importantly, women participating in NEWC and other community-based initiatives are less isolated, more informed, and better able to advocate for themselves and their children.

This is just one example of how our tax dollars are being put to good use through the programs now under attack.

While NEWC's Up Shoppe is now proudly self-sustaining, it would not exist if not for the support of programs like those offered by Status of Women Canada. And the broader range of services pro-

vided by the NEWC will never be self-sustaining, nor should we expect them to be. They are providing a valuable public service that has long-term benefit to us all. But the Status of Women Canada budget has been cut by \$5 million. The NEWC Money and Women project ends October 27th and they have been told not to bother reapplying as 'priorities have changed'.

Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty boasts that their government has "*been able to reduce the debt, cut taxes and invest more resources in programs that are important to ordinary Canadians*". We believe that 'ordinary' Canadians are wise enough to know that the preventive, community-based programs on the chopping block are not only important, but are a critical component of a long-term vision to address the growing social and economic inequality that leads to despair, disengagement, neighbourhood decline and increased poverty.

By Shauna MacKinnon and Bernice Getty

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To read more on this issue go to: <http://communitiesagenda.wordpress.com/tag/stories>

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