



West Central
Women's
Resource
Centre

HOMES Program

Housing Options, Mentorship and Economic Security

History in a Nutshell

WCWRC began as a three year project called the Women's Empowerment Project. A collection of service agencies and community women came together, through a series of community planning processes, to determine what women in the West Central community needed. In 2001 the Project opened with an actual site - one room in the basement of Winnipeg's John Howard Society building. We have now grown into our own building with multiple programs and services.

Our Mission and Vision

The West Central Women's Resource Centre supports women, families and the community to safer, healthier lives.

Our shared vision is for a healthy, sustainable, equitable, just and peaceful community where women's knowledge and experience is valued and respected. Our vision includes women having hope and strength while living out equal social, economic and political rights.

Our Way of Working

We work toward achieving our vision using a *Women Centered Approach*, informed by the lived experience of the diverse women in our community. We also use the following to guide our work, words and actions:

Empowerment Framework - A capacity building framework with 4 stages of empowerment: breaking social isolation, networking, awareness, action.

Harm Reduction - Taking steps to reduce harm in people's lives by valuing where they are and helping them move to a place of less harm.

Multi-level Approach - Working simultaneously in many spheres - the individual, family, community and systemic.

Community Economic Development - Supporting local goods, services, investment, employment, decision making and skill building while promoting neighbourhood sustainability, human dignity and the environment.

“

Every time I come to the
Centre something good
happens!

”

-HOMES Participant experiencing homelessness, after solving financial issues
and finding employment with the help of the HOMES program

WCWRC Programs

Drop-in: Community space, phone and computer access, food, laundry, shower facilities and resource referral.

Volunteer Program: Women gain skills and contribute to the overall functioning of the Centre.

Housing Programs

- **HOMES (Housing Options, Mentorship and Economic Security) program:** Women are trained as mentors and offer one-to-one support for women with housing and income security concerns.
- **IN DEVELOPMENT: More Than Four Walls,** a Housing First program offering intensive case management supports for women experiencing chronic or episodic 'visible' homelessness. Starting May 2015.

WCWRC Programs

Indigenous Programs:

- **Red Road to Healing** - Creates space and knowledge to assist women healing from family violence, based in traditional Aboriginal teachings. Women have access to a sharing/teaching circle, opportunities to participate in traditional ceremonies and interact with Elders.
- **Traditional Teachings:** In an effort to promote traditional Aboriginal teachings, knowledge and culture with women and the larger community, this program offers a drum group and access to ceremonies, including Full Moon Ceremonies and Sweat Lodge Ceremonies.

WCWRC Programs

Employment and Training: facilitating access to training, education and the job market through individual support.

Childminding: Women are trained as child minders and then matched with community agency requests for paid short-term child care services. We hire a team of these child minders to provide onsite childcare during our programming.

WE-WIL Program: a program to empower and give voice to women who often have been excluded and silenced by the system. By understanding systems of power and privilege, women acknowledge the importance of being involved in their community through social action, mobilization, advocacy, and politics. That contributes to systemic change that embraces inclusion and equity as its core pillar.

WCWRC Programs

NISW: The Neighbourhood Immigrant Settlement Workers support newcomer individuals and families who live in the West Central neighbourhood. The NISWs offer a wide range of settlement services and programs in areas such as employment, housing, health, education, youth activities and childcare.

Sewing Program: With a focus on welcoming Newcomers, this weekly group breaks down social isolation as well as providing a hands-on resource.

Mentor Learning Internship: A comprehensive training and internship program preparing women to hold mentorship positions in one of WCWRC's program areas. These mentor positions provide skill building opportunities for participants as well as enhance WCWRC's program capacity and increase collaborative program development.

WCWRC Programs

Our programs work closely together with our Drop-In as the central hub and intake point, creating a multi-disciplinary circle of care for women accessing our programs and services.

How HOMES Works

HOMES Coordinator: Overall program coordination, workshop facilitation, HOMES Mentor training, networking and information sharing, intake coordination, staff and mentor supervision and support.

Assistant HOMES Coordinator: Day to day office coordination, individual support for participants around housing and income security, shares intake coordination, supervision and support of HOMES Mentors.

Volunteer HOMES Mentors: Up to 4 Mentors who are trained to provide individual support for participants around housing and income security. They work regular part-time hours on a term basis and receive a monthly honorarium.

Drop-In Supervisor: Coordinates basic needs services in the Drop-In for women who are homeless or underhoused - showers, laundry, snacks, lunches, phone and computer access, referrals.

Mentor Learning Internship (MLI) and HOMES Training

All our Mentor training is delivered through our centre-wide MLI training program. This 7 day training is open to anyone who is interested in becoming a mentor in any of WCWRC's program areas.

Women who complete the training are then eligible to apply for a Mentor position in their favorite WCWRC program. They are hired similar to an internship, with a 6 month contract (renewable up to 18 months) and a monthly honorarium.

Successful applicants are directly supported by their program coordinator. We also facilitate a peer support circle with all Mentors, as well as offer individual goal setting and training plan development through our Mentorship Coordinator.

HOMES Mentor Training

- Confidentiality
- Stress and Trauma Awareness
- Self Care
- Cooperation Skills (listening and speaking)
- Stages of Change
- Goal-Setting
- The Intake Interview
- Strategies for supporting someone when:
 - You don't have enough info
 - You don't agree with their actions
- Residential Tenancy Branch presentation
- Employment & Income Assistance presentation
- Navigating boundaries as a mentor
- Understanding Inclusion
- Additional on-the-job training in:
 - Navigating community resources
 - Working with resistant behaviours
 - Professional correspondence
 - All core staff trainings open to Mentors.

Meet Our Mentors

Background

- ▶ Majority have experienced homelessness or other housing insecurity
- ▶ Almost all are EIA recipients during their Mentorship contract
- ▶ Some are students studying social service disciplines
- ▶ No minimum education level required; applicants must show the ability to understand and apply new information during the MLI training

Qualifications

- ▶ Good communication and conflict resolution skills
- ▶ Successfully made positive changes to manage under difficult circumstances
- ▶ Comfortable discussing difficult issues
- ▶ Ability to draw on lived experience to empathize with and understand others
- ▶ Non-judgmental towards diverse women from various backgrounds
- ▶ Intermediate English literacy and document skills

“*The mentor opportunity helped me get beyond myself. I have purpose.*”

- 2015 Mentor

HOMES Roles and Responsibilities

Our goal is to build partnerships between participants and service providers in order to help participants find and maintain stable housing and income. We provide information and encouragement to coach participants in advocating for themselves where possible.

We are constantly faced with new situations, new policies and new administrative barriers. We use a document called HOMES Roles and Responsibilities with our mentors, participants and other contacts that explains the supports we can offer, our program limits, and how participants can best engage with us. This helps Mentors successfully navigate a challenging role, and helps participants know what to expect when they work with us.

“

The whole [housing] process is moving so quickly now thanks to all your help!”

”

-HOMES Participant

Who Do We Support?

- ▶ 187 new participants in 2014-15
- ▶ Primary issues are 20% EIA, 80% housing (they generally impact each other)
- ▶ 15% living on the street or in shelter
- ▶ 29% hidden homeless
- ▶ 2% in transitional or supportive housing
- ▶ 2% exiting the health, justice or child protection systems
- ▶ 20% at risk of immediate housing loss.
- ▶ 32% housed but facing a housing or EIA conflict

Success!

- ▶ 40 transitioned to more stable housing
- ▶ 51 EIA benefits released
- ▶ 58 assisted to obtain ID
- ▶ 29 emergency eviction preventions
- ▶ 43 participants supported to resolve a landlord conflict.
- ▶ 345 referrals made (88 confirmed successful)
- ▶ 6 obtained employment
- ▶ 18 moved from no income to EIA or other benefits.
- ▶ 828 Mentor hours contributed

Challenges

- ▶ Lack of affordable housing stock in Winnipeg
- ▶ Cuts in program funding in 2014 affected outreach and training/workshop capacity
- ▶ Need more outreach capacity - we could make better connections with participants who are referred to us through health facilities, correctional facilities, or youth aging out of child protection care
- ▶ Navigating the intersection of multiple systems - EIA, housing, mental health, child protection, justice, etc.
- ▶ Women experience homelessness differently; services and supports are geared more towards visible homelessness, not hidden.
- ▶ As women age, their housing and income becomes more precarious.
- ▶ Lack of administrative supports

2014 Program Highlights

- ▶ Improved our Intervention Policy in order to engage participants with challenging behaviours in a trauma-informed, inclusive way.
- ▶ Expanded our Mentor training to include more information on trauma awareness, boundaries and inclusion
- ▶ Expanded our Mentor supports to enhance peer support and help Mentors move toward their long term goals
- ▶ We do a pretty great job of making referrals. We make sure to support participants through the referral process and help them prepare for and debrief after connecting with other service providers and partners.
- ▶ Improved our ability to track statistics... in other words, improved our ability to recognize and celebrate success with participants, partners and funders!

“

Thanks for coming with me to
my EIA appointments.

”

-HOMES Participant

Looking ahead

In May 2015 WCWRC's housing supports are expanding. We are currently hiring for a new Housing First program through the Canadian Homelessness Partnering Strategy called More Than Four Walls to offer intensive supports for women who are chronically or episodically living on the street or in homeless shelters.

Thanks for listening!

