

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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The Up Shoppe (North End Women's Centre Inc.)

Doesn't everyone want to look good? Winnipeg's North End Women's Centre (NEWC) recognized this basic element of human dignity and created a social enterprise — a second-hand clothing boutique called the Up Shoppe.

Following their modest basement beginnings in 2001, the shop moved to a new location when NEWC purchased and transformed a vacant, deteriorating building into a vibrant community meeting place. The business was constructed to support the retail revitalization of the North End, provide local women with access to affordable quality clothing, generate revenue for the Centre's services, and create job and training opportunities for women with barriers to employment.

The Up Shoppe is part of an integrated, community-based model at NEWC that aims to provide women with the tools they need to overcome poverty. However, when supporting women in searching for a job, a challenge they identified was that many women did not even have the right clothing to

wear to an interview. So, in addition to the donated collection of gently-used clothing for local women and their families, NEWC also began to focus on the collection of appropriate formal and business attire for low-income women as a way to improve their employability — one of NEWC's key priorities.

Being focused on more than charity, this social enterprise is also creating employment and training opportunities for local women who may be struggling to enter the mainstream job market. The Community Wages program provides ongoing skills training for women who face multiple barriers; ➔



→ working at the Up Shoppe helps women gain skills in retail sales, build their resume, acquire valuable references, and builds their self esteem. The Fine Option program allows women to work off fines they have accrued in the criminal justice system, also building important skills and gaining employment experience.

At any given time, the Up Shoppe provides jobs for two full-time employees and relies upon 8-9 program participants or regular volunteers. Their volunteer program draws women in the community out of isolation and helps them get employability skills.

The Up Shoppe passes along all donations that can't be sold at the store to the Winnipeg's Boys and Girls Club. The Community Access program, offers low-income women and their families free clothing, housewares, and linens each year. This program is carried out through a partnership with Oyati Tipi, which provides free furniture. The Up Shoppe offers a flexible schedule and access to other NEWC support services, such as basic needs assistance, counseling, and groups.

NEWC also coordinates two transitional housing units for chronically homeless single women located on the Up Shoppe's second floor. Residents can live in the apartments for up to one year and are encouraged to work in the Shoppe, as are residents of the

Centre's Betty Berg House — an additional housing program that accommodates women in recovery from addictions. NEWC aims to help struggling women form positive supportive relationships and develop self-respect; the Up Shoppe is one of the many ways they accomplish this goal.

The work of NEWC is also to revitalize the real estate infrastructure along Selkirk Avenue, provide a retail business aimed at meeting local needs, and create economic and social opportunities for local women.

The Up Shoppe also supports other local economic initiatives by selling goods produced by community members such as hand-made jewelry from local artisans.

The Up Shoppe meets people where they are at without judgment, creates a flexible space for them to gain experience and job skills, and supports them through this learning process.

Many of the women who initially walked through the doors of the Up Shoppe have little self-esteem and have been deemed "unemployable" by others, yet through this social enterprise model that is integrated with the many supportive services of NEWC, many have moved on to further their education and find full-time employment.

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