

WINNIPEG, MANITOBAWWW.WCWRC.CA/CHILDMINDING

West Central Women's Resource Centre (Child Minding Program)

The West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC), which opened in a basement office in inner city Winnipeg in 2001, recognized that several needs in their low-income community could be addressed by a single initiative – the Childminding Program.

More than just meeting local needs, it would create social, economic, and educational opportunities for local women. The Childminding Program currently creates casual employment opportunities for an average of 40 childminders each month and provides occasional childcare to more than 40 community agencies.

As an integrated CED initiative, the benefits of the Childminding Program are multi-dimensional and far-reaching. The Program not only provides a much-needed service to local parents and local organizations, but it also offers skill development opportunities, income and jobs for local women, and a positive environment for local children.

Many of the parents who use the services work for

non-profit, government and community organizations, while other local parents use this safe and accessible childcare option while participating in community meetings, events, and workshops at over 40 locations throughout Winnipeg. These activities often act as opportunities for these parents to build capacity, access resources for themselves and their families, and explore employment options.

The Childminding Program also creates jobs and training opportunities for local childminders who receive certification from the Centre upon completion of the program. For many of these childcare →



→ employees, their only other income option is social assistance. Therefore, these work experiences and skill development opportunities are very important to the childminders and their families.

The Childminding Program has been beneficial to the community in many different ways. Since January 2007, over 150 local residents have been trained as childminders, and they have collectively completed over 3000 hours of work annually following their training. In 2010, the collective income earned by childminders was over \$32,000 — a significant amount when considering these individuals' previous employment opportunities. Currently, 40% of the childminders continue to be actively involved in the program, while an additional 45% have moved on to further employment or education since they completed the training. As these statistics attest, the Childminding Program has positive short, medium and long-term effects in the community.

As part of their holistic approach to community and personal development, the WCWRC ensures that employees in the Childminding Program, as well as parents whose children spend time at the Program, are also able to access other important services at the Centre. Dedicated staff and volunteers at WCWRC offer a craft program, a clothing exchange, health information sessions, and a drop-in area where individuals can access a phone and library.

In addition, WCWRC is also home to the RESPECT Program, which offers support for people struggling with issues of safety, gang involvement, or drugs and crime in their lives, families or neighborhood.

Also available through RESPECT is the Peace Begins at Home Parenting Program which offers a support circle and monthly information sessions that help local parents raise strong, happy children. The HOMES Project supports women struggling with housing or income security issues, and trains those who have experienced housing and income challenges to act as the program's Volunteer Mentors. The Volunteer Mentors help women find and keep quality housing; write letters and complete forms using an onsite computer and fax machine; prepare for meetings, hearings, and appeals; educate them about their income and benefits eligibility; and assist them in obtaining rental housing improvements.

WCWRC is committed to local community leadership, and puts in place a governance structure to ensure that the needs and priorities of local women are at the forefront of organizational and community planning. Their board of directors is elected each year by members; a member is any woman who lives or works in the West Central area, and any man who is an active volunteer at the Centre. This builds the capacity of local women, ensures that the people using and benefiting from the Centre are central in the planning and visioning for their work, and ensures that any activities and programs that they create are clearly relevant to local priorities.

Their commitment to a community-led, holistic development approach that includes prioritizing the creation of economic opportunities while strengthening social conditions is a great example of taking a CED approach to women-centered local community development.