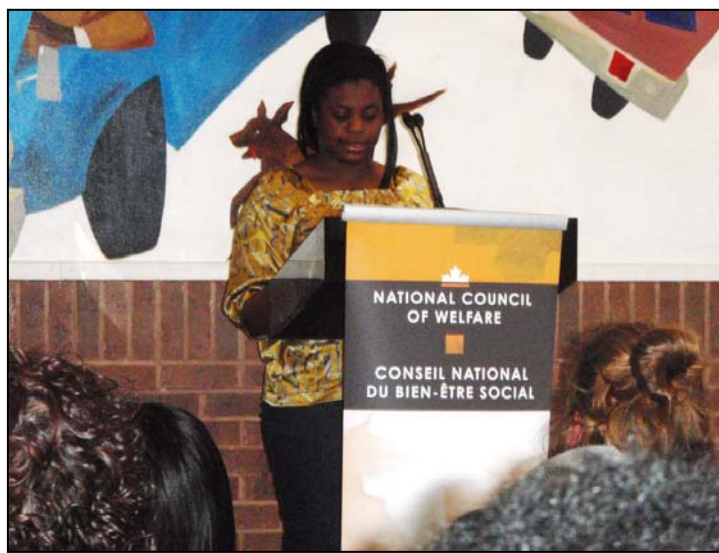




Women Moving Forward

Statements on the release of *Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007*

Toronto
December 10, 2008



About Women Moving Forward

Women Moving Forward (WMF) began as a five year pilot program led by the Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre in 2005. As Toronto's first and only program designed for young single mothers (age 20-29) living in the Jane/Finch Community who are recipients of social assistance/Ontario Works/welfare, WMF's goal is to use post-secondary education and training to break the cycle of poverty for female-led, single-parent families.

Women Moving Forward is a comprehensive, poverty reduction resiliency model. For a number of young, single mothers, the road to self-sufficiency seems like a long road and an up-hill battle. Often they are unaware of the necessary steps to take and the resources needed to improve their lives and the lives of their children. That's where *Women Moving Forward* comes in.

WMF has designed a curriculum that addresses the needs of young, single mothers who have a desire to become economically self-sufficient. For one year, participants are involved in a number of classes that are grouped into phases. Phase one focuses on self discovery, skill development and career exploration, while phase two focuses on goal setting, building resiliency and professional development. WMF helps women identify realistic career options, academic requirements and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Following this WMF pays for and/or subsidizes the cost of college/university applications, upgrading costs, bridging programs and/or career volunteer placement. Once women have made it to college or university, WMF then provides ongoing support in the areas of advocacy, referrals for support, and personal growth/professional development events.

To date, WMF has worked with 70 women, with another 23 currently in the program. There are now a total of 52 women who are currently enrolled in post-secondary education. WMF is proud to be contributing to the lives of so many young low-income families. This work would not be possible without the financial support of the Geoffrey H. Wood Foundation and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The National Council of Welfare is deeply grateful to the women from the program who spoke at the release of *Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007* at the Driftwood Centre in Toronto. Their stories give a human face to the struggle to get ahead.

Kamela

Hi, my name is Kamela and I'm a single mother on welfare. Here is my story. I live by the quote "Hard work overcomes all difficulties".

I believe in people and with the right help and resources we can help each other. I want to be a nurse. Currently, I'm on welfare and yes, they do provide a little help, but I need support.

Support for me is providing me with the resources that are effective towards my career choices, not what they want me to become. That's why I joined the Women Moving Forward program. It's the only program that prepares me for college and university and helps to get into the mindset of setting realistic goals for my future. Welfare doesn't do this.

WMF also provides me with an environment that is essential to stimulate positive growth for women who want to move forward and not be oppressed by the system. Thanks to the support of the WMF program I am a woman moving forward.

Neikeisha

Hello and good morning everyone. I am case ID # --- . My children have also inherited similar identities. For the last few years, I have traveled roads dark and unknown to me. However, I did so with courage and determination. I had to make decisions that weren't easy or ideal to a woman raised in hopes of beating the odds and conquering all. My decision to welcome motherhood at a time when I wasn't accomplished threw me off track. Nevertheless, I had to accept my blessings with an abundant heart.

I had to grow up quickly because a thing called "Life" happened to me. Sometimes all I had was me so I had to take all the help I could find. A woman filled with pride and promise felt weak and shattered the day I had to knock on OW's door.

I built a life or more like an existence trapped within the fragile glass house my income provided for my family. Through glass walls, I could see out into the world where I left my hopes and dreams. I fought many times to break free to fetch them. However, I seemed to only endure the glares and opinions of people filled with indifference. OW, did not provide me with realistic resources or opportunities that pertained to my vision for financial independence. Every option was a dead end. I tried volunteer work, joined job search programs and even worked a full time job for over 2 years. I still could not get ahead. Income was deducted from my cheques at every turn, and once my child care options conflicted with my mandatory work schedule, I was back where I started. I was drowning in an endless cycle, feeling like I'd never tread water again until the day I came across WMF. I had no idea that one phone call would change my life. Tools that I searched for to get ahead stumbled into my lap. Now, I believe I can become the woman I was destined to be. I have a lot of positive support, endless opportunities and I can finally begin to get my life back on track.

WMF had unlocked so many doors for me. I wish someone had sent me in their direction sooner. I will be returning to college to work towards a wonderful career. I will provide my family with a healthy and happy life rather than an existence. Most importantly, I will once again stand tall as my birth name, finally escaping my sentence as case ID # --- .

Shazia

Good Morning ladies and gentlemen.

I stand before you today with a very simple message. Breaking the cycle of poverty requires more than the handout of a monthly paycheck and training for meagre low-end job opportunities. I stand before you this morning to a face to poverty. I represent sole-support parents' dependant on the social services system who desperately are seeking a way out.

After over a decade of bouncing from one dead end job to another, on and off Ontario Works, I came to the realization that Ontario Works lacked the resources and tools to assist in breaking my cycle of poverty. The transition from Ontario Works to OSAP is one, which is bombarded with obstacles, resentment and closed doors.

Not until I stumbled across a program located at the Jane and Finch Community Center, did I see a way to break free. A program, appropriately named Woman Moving Forward promised to deliver. Deliver they did. They provided me with the resources and tools to finally create a path towards success.

I stand before you today this morning not as a victim not as statistic, but as an example of the result of comprehensive resources. Today, I am a first year university student financing my post-secondary education through academic scholarships and bursaries. Being a sole-support parent of three children, I require continuous comprehensive support.

Ten years ago when I first walked into my local social services office, I was told it couldn't be done, I would not be able to do it, ... I didn't deserve it. Well, I did it. It can be done. And I deserve it.

Thank you.