



BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 2009-2014
EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS





“I wanted so badly to get away from the dead end, part-time, minimum-waged jobs I had, but I had no idea what to do or what my options were.”

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Note: Although the quotes included in this report come from program participants, they are paired with stock images to preserve participants’ privacy.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

The Canadian Women's Foundation is Canada's public foundation for women and girls. The Foundation empowers women and girls to move out of violence, out of poverty, and into confidence and leadership.

Since 1991, the Foundation has raised more than \$70 million and invested in over 1,400 community-based programs across Canada, and is now one of the 10 largest women's foundations in the world.

The Foundation takes a holistic and long-term approach to address root causes of the most critical issues facing women and girls. Our staff members study and share the best ways to create lasting change. We also bring community organizations together for knowledge-sharing and networking.

The Foundation carefully selects and funds the programs with the strongest outcomes and regularly evaluates its work. It has a special focus on building a community that invests in the strength of women and the dreams of girls.

For more information, visit www.canadianwomen.org

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“I finally
feel like
I am
moving
forward.”



BACKGROUND ON THE FOUNDATION'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

“Until all of us has made it, none of us has made it.”

The words of Rosemary Brown, one of our founding mothers, help guide the Canadian Women's Foundation's economic development work.

Through the Canadian Centre for Women's Economic Development, the Foundation supports women to move out of poverty. The Foundation does this by:

- Funding economic development programs tailored to women's needs
- Building the capacity of the economic development field to better serve women
- Enhancing the profile of women-centred economic development work across Canada
- Increasing philanthropy for women-centred economic development activities

Poverty is a complex, multi-faceted issue, so the Foundation takes a holistic, long-term approach. While most other funders offer grants over one or two years, the Foundation offers five-year grants. This helps grantee organizations focus more on the women they serve, and less on securing new funding. Long-term funding also helps grantees hire and retain their staff members, and that contributes to organizational stability and the cumulative improvement of programs over time.

The Foundation also offers knowledge-sharing and networking opportunities for organizations in the field of women-centred economic development. Representatives of grantee organizations attend meetings and professional development events where they hear from specialists in the field, participate in educational workshops, explore partnerships and strategies they can use to enhance their programs.

An important element of the Foundation's work is ongoing learning and evaluation. We collect data through surveys and stories, which help to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement in the field of women-centred economic development. This knowledge translates into more effective programming to support more women in their journeys out of poverty.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FROM 2009 TO 2014

Between 2009 and 2014, the Foundation invested about \$6 million in an economic development strategy that aimed to help women build sustainable livelihoods. The majority of this investment went into women's economic development program grants and the remainder went into capacity-building activities to help improve overall program strategy and delivery.

GRANTS

During this five-year period, the Foundation set out to reach more than 2,500 women, but actually surpassed that goal and supported programs that reached 3,197 women.

Of the total amount invested, over \$3.3 million went into 10 grantee organizations to deliver women-centred economic development programs. The evaluation of these programs is discussed in Sections 1 – 4 of this report.

The Foundation also granted \$600,000 through two Aboriginal Partnership Grants, and \$330,000 through five Annual Development Grants.¹ The evaluation of the Aboriginal Partnership Grants is discussed in Section 5 of this report.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

The Foundation also invested \$1.6 million in building the capacity and skills of the community organizations that deliver economic development programs. These capacity-building activities helped to strengthen networks, develop leadership skills, and increase knowledge of best practices for addressing women's poverty.

OVERSIGHT

A 20-person National Advisory Committee was established to oversee the implementation of the Economic Development strategy and to make recommendations to the Foundation's Board of Directors. The Committee included Foundation Board Members, donor partners, field practitioners, and community specialists.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTERS 2009-2014

This economic development work was made possible by the generous support of our funding partners:

- CIBC
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Hydro One
- Roslyn Bern, The Leacross Foundation
- Lise Watier Foundation
- Ricki's (Comark Inc.)
- MasterCard Worldwide
- The Sanderling Foundation
- Cenovus Energy Inc.
- The Carrera Foundation
- Talisman Energy Inc.
- an anonymous donor

This work was also supported by:

- BMO Financial Group (National Skills Institutes)
- Winners and HomeSense
- Rogers Media
- Many individual donors across Canada, including Leadership Donors, Canadian Women's Foundation 100 Donors, and Women Moving Women Donors

1. Annual Development Grants were not included in the learning and evaluation strategy.

PROGRAM DELIVERY

The Foundation provides grants and capacity-building supports to three types of women-centred economic development programs:

1. Skilled trades programs

The skilled trades are lucrative labour markets where a skills shortage is looming and where women are under-represented. The trades programs supported by the Foundation typically follow similar stages. They aim to recruit a diverse group of women and help them explore their options in the trades. Participants then receive hands-on training in the trade they choose, as well as support with any academic upgrading they might need. The programs also help women transition into employment through placements or apprenticeships, and typically offer career development services. Grantee organizations also work toward systemic change in the skilled trades, aiming to raise awareness of the need for inclusive and respectful work environments.

2. Self-employment training programs

The Foundation supports two types of self-employment training programs.

- **Start-up programs** give women the skills they need to create and implement a business plan for the first time.
- **Accelerator programs** teach women who have already launched a small business to build on their entrepreneurial skills and increase their income.

Both types of program are designed to help women identify their business goals and boost knowledge of financial literacy, as well as the legal and managerial issues related to running a business. Self-employment programs typically connect participants with mentors and provide participants opportunities to network.

3. Social enterprise programs

Social enterprises are businesses formed by nonprofit organizations. These enterprises help carry out the organization's social mission by providing participants with on-the-job training, employment, and work skills. The women-centred social purpose enterprises that were funded by the Foundation also supported women's transitions into the workforce by offering a flexible work environment, social supports, employment counselling, and other connections to employment.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FUNDED BY THE FOUNDATION (2009-2014):

TRADES

Job Placement and Job Retention Support for Women, Women Building Futures, Edmonton, AB

Women Unlimited, Women's CED Network Society, Bridgewater, Halifax, Dartmouth and Sydney, NS

Enhanced General Carpentry Pre-Apprenticeship Program, The Centre for Skills Development & Training, Burlington, ON

Women in Skilled Trades and Technology, Building Resilience and Self-Reliance Program, Moose Cree Education Authority & Timmins Native Friendship Centre in partnership with Northern College, Moose Factory and Timmins, ON

SELF-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Women's Venture Accelerator Program, Momentum, Calgary, AB

Enterprising Women, Saint John Community Loan Fund, Saint John, NB

Self-Employment/Entrepreneurship Training Program, Fonds d'Emprunt des Laurentides, Lachute, QC

Business Coaching To Strengthen Entrepreneurial Capacity, Option Femmes Emploi, Gatineau, QC

SELF-EMPLOYMENT & TRADES

Women's Opportunities in Business, Trades and Technology, MicroSkills Community Development Centre, Etobicoke, ON

SOCIAL PURPOSE ENTERPRISE

Skills Development Centre, YWCA Toronto, Scarborough, ON

A SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS

This report provides a window into the impact of three types of economic development programs²—skilled trades, self-employment, and social purpose enterprise—on women's journeys out of poverty. These are some of the highlights of participants' progress:

- **High completion rates:**
80% of the women finished their programs.
- **Increased financial independence:**
46% of the women moved closer to developing a sustainable livelihood.
- **Strong progress out of poverty:**
20% of the women moved above the poverty line.
- **Higher employment and self-employment:**
The percentage of women who found employment or self-employment jumped 20 percentage points, from 52% to 72%.
- **Less dependence on social assistance:**
The percentage of women receiving social assistance or EI dropped 13 percentage points, from 41% to 28%.
- **Stronger networks and connections:**
The percentage of women who said they knew which organizations to turn to for help jumped from 38% to 55%.
- **Increased confidence:**
The percentage of women who said they felt a strong sense of self-esteem rose from 54% to 67%.
- **Increased financial literacy:**
The percentage of women who improved their understanding of managing money went from 56% to 68%.

2. This snapshot does not include the evaluation from the Aboriginal Partnership Grants. Those results are discussed in Section 5 of this report.

“...The program (helped me) develop my self-esteem. I realized that I am more skillful and resourceful than I gave myself credit for.”



OUR APPROACH TO WOMEN AND POVERTY

PUTTING PROGRAMS IN CONTEXT

Meet Sarah. She's struggling to make ends meet as a part-time worker with two young children. She earns a steady paycheque, but receives no benefits and sees little hope for advancement.

She wants a higher-paying job, but can't afford to take time off work for the training she needs. She also can't afford the extra childcare that would enable her to either study or work full-time.

For Sarah and many women like her, there are multiple obstacles to overcome on her journey out of poverty. But the Canadian Women's Foundation knows that with the right supports, women can overcome these obstacles to build a stronger future.

Women's strengths are not defined by their economic status. The programs funded by the Foundation help women recognize their unique assets and abilities, so they can build on them and move toward employment, higher income, and a sustainable livelihood. By helping women build stronger futures, the Foundation is also helping Canada build a stronger future. Research shows that improving women's equality benefits everyone.³ With more women in the workforce, the economy grows.⁴

Although we live in a relatively privileged country, more than 1.5 million Canadian women live on a low income.⁵ The average income for women in Canada is \$32,000, while the average income for men is \$48,100.⁶

While many women face obstacles like a lack of affordable housing and childcare, discrimination

also plays a role. Rates of poverty increase for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, racialized women, and women with disabilities.

Women living on a low income may also be survivors of abuse who are coping with psychological trauma on top of trying to make ends meet. They may lack the social network, financial literacy, and confidence they need to move forward. Even when they do take those first steps out of poverty, any number of setbacks—a health emergency, sudden job loss, or a legal or immigration issue—may get in the way. The journey out of poverty isn't linear—it's often two steps forward, one step back.

While women living on a low income in Canada may receive social assistance or Employment Insurance, these benefits aren't enough to help them rise out of poverty. In fact, the eligibility requirements for these benefits may discourage women from advancing. Some of the participants in grantee economic development programs expressed concern that they would lose their benefits if they enrolled or progressed.

Two other key factors contribute to women's poverty:

1. Women do more unpaid work than their male counterparts.⁷

Many women interrupt their careers or sacrifice opportunities to advance so that they can take care of their children and do other household work. While this work is important, it is undervalued by society. Time spent on unpaid childcare and housework decreases women's financial independence.

3. "No development tool more effective than education of girls, empowerment of women," Speech by Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2004. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2004/sgsm9118.doc.htm>

4. Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment, Benefits of Economic Empowerment, UN Women. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

5. Persons living in low income after tax, 2012. Statistics Canada. <http://statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/famil19e-eng.htm>. To learn more about women and poverty, visit canadianwomen.org/facts-about-poverty

6. Average earnings by sex and work pattern. Statistics Canada: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/labor01a-eng.htm>

7. Veerle, Miranda: Cooking, Cleaning and Caring: Unpaid Work Around the World, OECD: <http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DELSA/ELSA/WD/SEM%282011%291&doclanguage=en>

2. Women face a gender wage gap. Even when women work full-time, they continue to earn about 72 cents for every dollar earned by men.⁸ Women's lower earning capacity means that they're at a disadvantage when it comes to saving money and investing in their own futures, or those of their children.

One of the reasons it's so important to focus on women and poverty is that if a woman like Sarah can't change her financial situation, her children will grow up in poverty. This means they will be more likely to struggle in school and less able to participate in extra-curricular activities. Children living in poverty are also less likely to finish high school or get a university education.⁹

The Canadian Women's Foundation supports programs and initiatives that aim to break this cycle. We support women from some of Canada's most marginalized groups to move out of poverty, by helping them address the multiple barriers they face. Our approach to women-centred economic development is guided by the vision of a future without gender-based poverty.

WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS

Women enrolled in grantee programs often face daily challenges and unexpected obstacles when it comes to attending and completing their courses. They may encounter problems finding childcare or juggling multiple priorities. They may not have enough money to buy the course materials they need, or be living in insecure housing.

It's important to note that about one-third of program participants experienced a major change or setback over the course of this evaluation, and most found that it hindered their career pursuits.

They were knocked off course by crises like a spouse losing their job, a decision to divorce, a death in the family, or a disaster in their community. When Calgary experienced catastrophic flooding in 2013, for example, one program participant had to deal with the loss of her home, while others experienced business slow-downs as the city dealt with the crisis.

With these kinds of setbacks in mind, many grantee programs offer wrap-around supports to help maximize women's chances for success. Some examples of these services are:

- On-site childcare, or help getting childcare subsidies
- Emergency cash allowances to cover basic necessities or course materials
- Referrals to housing agencies, legal, and counselling services
- Financial literacy workshops






8. Average female and male earnings, Statistics Canada, 2011. <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=2020102>

9. Supporting Education: Building Canada - Child Poverty and Schools, 2009, Page 1. Canadian Teacher's Federation. http://www.ctf-fce.ca/Research-Library/FINAL_Hilldayleavebehind_eng.pdf

MEASURING PROGRESS

The Canadian Women's Foundation uses the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework to map change in women's lives as they move through economic development programs.

The framework recognizes that participants come to programs already possessing different kinds of assets. Programs help them to identify those assets in five key areas:

-  **1. FINANCIAL ASSETS**
Income, savings, and sources of financial security
-  **2. SOCIAL ASSETS**
Relationships and networks that help to cope with daily life
-  **3. PERSONAL ASSETS**
Personal and cultural identity, values and beliefs, self-confidence, and motivation
-  **4. PHYSICAL ASSETS**
Basic material goods and services that everyone needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, and transportation
-  **5. HUMAN ASSETS**
Skills, knowledge, abilities, and capacities that aid in the development of other asset areas



Grantees' economic development programs help women assess and strengthen their assets in many of these areas.

CONSIDERATION OF EACH PARTICIPANT'S CIRCUMSTANCES

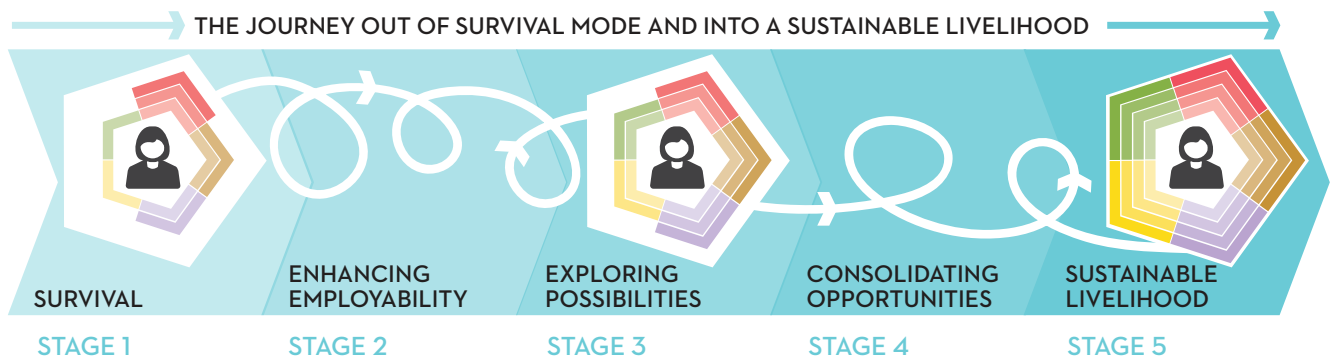
Each woman's ability to build on her assets will vary, depending on her unique social situation, challenges and opportunities. Evaluating her progress on the journey out of poverty takes into consideration social trends, systems or unexpected events that might impede her progress. The Foundation's evaluations also take into account the structures, institutions, and legislation that influence a woman's life.

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND GOALS

As women build on their assets, they become more independent and less susceptible to crises and setbacks. As they work to progress toward personal and economic stability, they often shift back and forth between two or more stages of livelihood development (see graphic below).

- **STAGE 1: Survival**
Women are unemployed or underemployed, which means their assets are declining.
- **STAGE 2: Enhancing employability**
Women increase their ability to meet basic needs, which allows for greater focus on employment readiness and decision-making. Their assets are stabilizing.
- **STAGE 3: Exploring possibilities**
Women enter the workforce and use income-patching strategies like multiple part-time jobs. This helps build on assets in various areas.
- **STAGE 4: Consolidating opportunities**
Women strengthen and professionalize their employment patterns. Their ability to develop new assets accelerates.
- **STAGE 5: Sustainable livelihood**
Women achieve long-term financial security.

The goal of the Foundation and our grantee programs is to support participants in building their assets and moving along the continuum to a higher stage of livelihood development.



HOW WE EVALUATED OUR WORK

THIS EVALUATION AIMS TO:

1. Demonstrate the impact of grantee programs in women's lives
2. Identify success factors for supporting women on their journeys out of poverty
3. Present lessons learned over the last five years of economic development granting

EVALUATION TOOLS INCLUDED:

- A Livelihood Tracking Questionnaire, which was completed by 386 participants at the start of the programs, and then again about 18 months later. All results are self-reported and based on participant's point-in-time self-assessments.
- Stakeholder interviews conducted by program staff
- Storytelling by participants
- Photovoice by participants¹⁰
- Site visits for direct observation of program impacts by Canadian Women's Foundation staff and Advisory Committee members.

“Now I am feeling more in control,
more confident and happier with myself.
I feel like a pretty flower
that is opening.”

10. An exercise where participants take photographs that illustrate their everyday lives, then tell stories about them. It's a way for participants to recognize challenges and opportunities.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Personal goals: The women in the grantee programs came with unique personal stories and goals. Some were working in low-paying or part-time jobs and wanted to improve their earning potential. Some were running their own businesses and wanted to boost their earnings. Others saw skilled trades as a path to a better financial future.

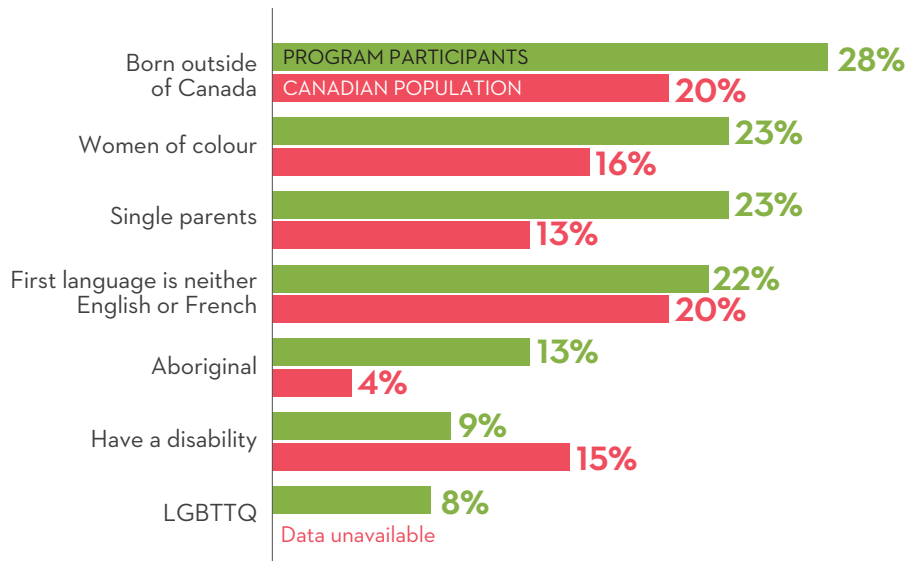
The two most-identified key goals for participants were having a better life, and earning enough money to support their families.

Number of program participants: 2,466 women participated in grantee programs¹¹ from 2009 to 2014. Of these, 1,936 women, or 80%, finished their programs.

Economic status: Based on the responses to the Livelihood Tracking Questionnaires given at the start of the programs¹², half of the women in these programs were below the official low-income cut-off line, and 83% earned less than \$30,000 per year at the start of their programs. Participants generally made their living through a combination of government assistance, employment income, and family support. Forty-four per cent of participants received social assistance or employment benefits. Forty-six per cent were employed or received income through a business.

Social status: Grantee programs succeeded in reaching women who faced multiple barriers, including women born outside Canada, racialized women, single parents, Aboriginal women and women whose first language was neither English nor French. The following chart shows that the proportion of participants from these groups was higher than that of the Canadian population.

The Foundation reached some of Canada’s most marginalized women



Age: 84% were between 25 and 59 years old

Location: 84% lived in urban areas

Household status: 62% were single

Parental status: 52% had children under 18

11. This participant profile does not include participants in the Aboriginal Partnership Grant programs.
 12. This information in the Participant Profile section is based only on the Livelihood Tracking Questionnaire that was given at program intake. It was completed by 51% of program participants.

“I finally have a career,
not just a job.
I’m on my way.”



HOW WOMEN'S LIVES CHANGED

When looking at how women transitioned out of poverty, no two journeys were alike. Each woman entered grantee programs with her own set of assets and barriers, and moved toward sustainability at her own pace.

Most of the analysis in this section is based on the responses of the 386 women who completed a Livelihood Tracking Questionnaire at the beginning of their program, and then again about 18 months later.

The Foundation's evaluation process between 2009 and 2014 captured data from a relatively short time frame (12 to 18 months of a woman's life). In most cases, it captured only a few steps in each woman's journey out of poverty.

Given this window, the Foundation used the following indicators at the start and at the end of the program to assess how each woman's life had changed:

- Her stage of livelihood development
- Her income level
- Her employment status
- Her asset development in each of the five asset areas

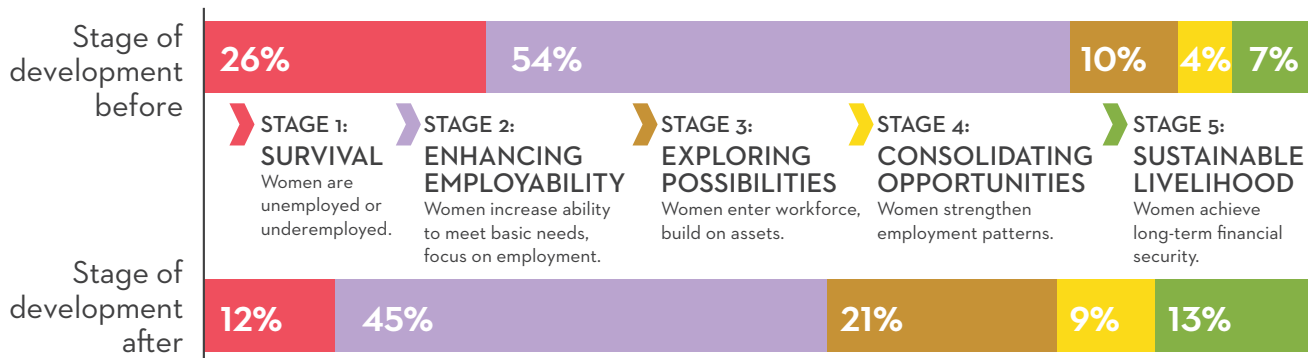
“I thought I had no skills whatsoever, but they showed me otherwise.”

KEY INDICATORS OF PROGRESS

The majority of women in grantee programs made progress in their journeys out of poverty. Many also saw increased levels of employment and economic independence. Here are some indications of how their lives changed:

1. Increased financial independence

46% or 1,936 of women in these grantee programs moved closer to a more sustainable livelihood. Women in trades and technology were more likely to move to higher livelihood stages than those in social purpose enterprise or self-employment programs.



2. Strong progress out of poverty

20% of participants moved above the poverty line, and almost half (48%) of the women saw their personal incomes go up. There was also a slight increase in the number of participants who managed to save some money.

Considering that many of the women entered programs struggling to cover basic needs like housing, food, and clothing, these were significant signs of progress within the 18-month evaluation period.

3. Higher employment and self-employment

The percentage of women who were employed or self-employed increased 20 percentage points, from 52% to 72%. The percentage of women who were receiving social assistance or EI decreased 13 percentage points, from 41% to 28%.

Women in skilled trades and social purpose enterprise programs were the most likely to become employed or self-employed. In fact, half of the women in trades and technology programs found jobs in the field they trained for.

Putting self-employment programs in perspective: Women in self-employment programs tended to experience slower progress in terms of livelihood development, movement out of poverty, and employment, but these indicators don't necessarily capture the full impact of these programs. A slower rate of progress is to be expected, because establishing a new business typically requires a longer runway than finding employment. While starting a new business takes time to pay off, its long-term value has the potential to grow far beyond a steady paycheck. Self-employment also has non-tangible benefits: it offers women more flexible schedules, the ability to work from home, and can be more personally rewarding than working for an employer. In the short-term, research shows that the process of developing a business idea and plan helps women gain both valuable employment skills and contacts.¹³ The women in self-employment programs go through a powerful process of self-discovery, independent learning, planning, and strategic decision-making. These skills will benefit them whether or not they decide to launch their own business, and can lead to better employment opportunities in the future.

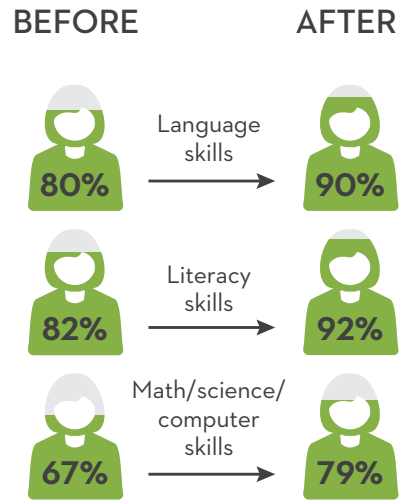
13. Beyond Survival, Canadian Women's Foundation, 2010. Page 77-78. <http://www.canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/PDF%20-%20Beyond%20Survival%20-%20Report%20FINAL%20EN.pdf>

4. A stronger set of assets

Many participants in these programs built on the key assets that they needed to continue moving out of poverty. Women reported significant improvements in the following areas:

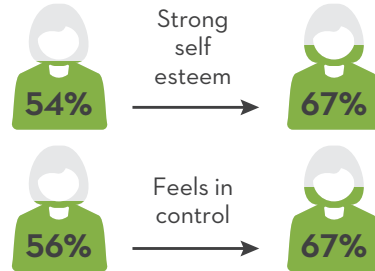
• Better equipped for the job market:

The percentage of women who said they had the math, science or computer skills they need for work or training increased from 67% to 79%. Women also reported improvements in their language and literacy skills.



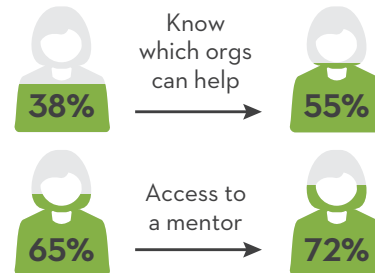
• Increased confidence:

The percentage of women who reported that they developed strong self-esteem increased from 54% to 67%. Some also reported an increased sense of independence: the percentage that said they felt in control of their lives increased from 56% to 67%.



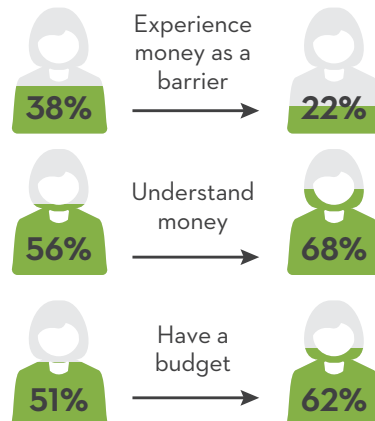
• Stronger networks and connections:

The percentage of women who reported knowing which organizations to go to for help increased 17 percentage points, from 38% to 55%.



• Increased financial literacy:

When they entered the program, 38% of women responded that not having enough money to meet their basic needs was a barrier. After 18 months, only 22% of women felt that it was a barrier. The percentages of women who improved their money-management skills and had a budget went up about 10 percentage points each.



- 5. More positive outlooks on life:** When it comes to evaluating how Foundation-funded programs changed women's lives, numbers don't tell the whole story. Some evaluation participants captured the transformation they experienced in their photovoice submissions. These photographs and quotes help illustrate the programs' impact on women's self-esteem, sense of autonomy, and hope for the future.



"It looks like a long walk up, but there is something positive at the end."

—Ayisha, The Centre for Skills Development & Training



"The program helped me find a career I love, and take the steps needed to get there. I hope to show my children that they can do whatever they want in life and follow their dreams."

—Torrance, Women Building Futures



"We all need someone else to show us our strengths sometimes, and to convince us to believe them."

—Lily of the Valley, St. John Community Loan Fund



"I now have more control over my life. I can take myself anywhere I want to go."

—Angelina, Microskills

“Being in the program gave me
the confidence
to take more
responsibility
for my finances.”



SUCCESS FACTORS

What program variables influence women's chances of success? The evaluation of the Foundation's economic development work between 2009 and 2014 helped to identify four key factors:

1. Program choice:

Some of the women-centred economic development programs funded by the Foundation may offer a faster track to progress than others, so expectations for outcomes should be adjusted accordingly. Women enrolled in skilled trades and social purpose enterprise, for example, have a clearer route to employability and higher income than women in entrepreneurial programs. Most entrepreneurial ventures take time to become profitable, but these training programs still help women build their assets.

Self-employment program staff members pointed out that many women use self-employment training as a catalyst for other types of income opportunities, and do not necessarily embrace the end goal of starting their own business when they join the program. Program staff also noted that most of the women they serve pursued self-employment training because they faced barriers to finding formal employment.

2. Gauging participant readiness:

While all grantee programs target women living on low incomes, some programs used additional intake and assessment processes to confirm that participants were well-suited to the program. Women in these programs typically experienced better outcomes in terms of income and livelihood development.

3. Women-centred services:

All grantee programs provide women-specific services, in line with the Foundation's explicit mandate to support women-centred program models. The financial and material wrap-around supports offered to women during their program participation were a key factor for success. In fact, some participants commented that they wouldn't have been able to complete their programs without the financial/material support services offered.

Another service that enhanced success was financial literacy training. Women who accessed this kind of training reported improved money management skills and saw bigger improvements in employment and income than those who didn't. Hands-on skills development was also an important service; women's ability to learn and practise new skills was often linked to a wide range of improvements.

4. Learning focus within programs and the Foundation:

Program staff members strive to adapt and improve programming based on participants' individual needs, feedback, successes and failures. These efforts mean that grantee programs are always evolving to better support women on their journeys out of poverty, and by extension, that the Canadian Women's Foundation is continually improving its investments.

ABORIGINAL PARTNERSHIP GRANTS

INTRODUCTION

As part of the Canadian Women's Foundation's economic development strategy from 2009 to 2014, the Foundation dedicated part of its funding to programs that specifically engaged Aboriginal¹⁴ women. The Foundation piloted this approach to learn about effective practices for programming and funding in Aboriginal communities.

Through these grants, the Foundation aimed to:

1. Help Aboriginal women build sustainable livelihoods
2. Help the funded organizations expand their services for Aboriginal women

The two funded programs, which each received \$300,000 over three years, were:

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada's Inuit Women in Business workshops (IWB):

A series of workshops delivered by Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, which aimed to support Inuit women who wanted to become entrepreneurs.

Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies' Women in Trades Program (WIT):

A 12-week program designed to help women learn the skills they needed to get a job in construction.

In supporting these programs, the Foundation reached women in regions that were not already receiving women-centred economic development funding.

14. Aboriginal comprises First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

THE FOUNDATION'S APPROACH

Like other economic development programs, the Aboriginal Partnership grant programs measured women's progress through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihood framework (see explanation on page 10). Both programs aimed to help participants build on their assets and move closer to a sustainable livelihood.

In Pauktuutit, the framework was adapted to reflect Inuit culture. For example, a woman's assets were reframed as her ability to contribute to her family and greater community. Also, it's important to note that the IWB program's workshop format was not designed to directly improve participants' physical assets (housing, food, safety, transportation, childcare/eldercare).

SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN THEIR JOURNEYS OUT OF POVERTY

While poverty is an issue for women across Canada, First Nations, Inuit and Métis women face higher rates than non-Aboriginal women. In fact, 37% of First Nations women¹⁵ live on a low income and 23% of Métis and Inuit women¹⁶ live on a low income.¹⁷

Both the IWB and the WIT program aimed to increase women's skills and networking opportunities so that participants could either create or find employment in the future. In a women-centred environment, both programs focused on increasing women's confidence and giving them practical tools to improve their lives.

Although both of these programs served Aboriginal women, they took place in two very different cultural contexts and geographic regions of Canada. The following two charts describe each program's delivery, context, and evaluation methods.

**“I knew I really wanted to do it,
but having other women
support my efforts (even strangers)
was very uplifting.”**

15. Not including First Nations women living on reserves.

16. Includes Inuit women living in Canadian provinces, but not territories.

17. First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women, Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report. Based on 2005 data and low-income cut-offs before tax. Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11442-eng.htm#a28>

PAUKTUUTIT INUIT WOMEN IN BUSINESS (IWB) WORKSHOPS

PROGRAM DELIVERY	PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS
<p>IWB workshops were three-day sessions that introduced Inuit women to the possibilities of entrepreneurship.</p> <p>The workshops focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill-building • Sharing information • Confidence-building • Networking 	<p>The IWB workshops funded by the Foundation reached a total of 26 participants, all Inuit women.</p>
PROGRAM CONTEXT	
<p>This program engaged women living in Inuit Nunangat, which is the Inuktitut term for the Inuit homeland. This region stretches from Northern Labrador to the Northwest Territories.</p> <p>Women in the area face unique economic challenges. Traditional subsistence living remains a part of the local economy. There are substantial barriers to employment for Inuit women: 53% of adult Inuit women have less than a high-school education, and only 5% of Inuit women hold a university degree.¹⁸</p> <p>This limits income potential, so many Inuit women rely on informal, temporary seasonal work or traditional harvesting to boost their earnings.</p> <p>From a historical perspective, a significant proportion of Inuit women were also part of the residential school system: 40% of Inuit women between 45 and 54 years old reported attending a residential school.¹⁹ There is also a relatively high proportion of single parents: 18% of Inuit women in 2006 were single parents, compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal women.²⁰</p> <p>When it comes to entrepreneurship in Inuit Nunangat, there are also specific challenges. There is a lack of community infrastructure, and businesses face higher costs when it comes to utilities, transportation and communication. Some of the challenges women may face include: policies that prohibit the operation of businesses in public housing, lack of access to a computer or the Internet, and the competing demands of caring for children, spouses, and elders on top of running a business.</p> <p>The Women in Business workshops aimed to help Inuit women explore the possibilities of entrepreneurship and connect them with the resources they needed to get started.</p>	
HOW WE EVALUATED OUR WORK	HOW WOMEN'S LIVES CHANGED
<p>Data collection included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset mapping • Collective and individual storytelling • Photovoice²¹ • Pre- and post-program questionnaires (self-reporting) • Follow-up by Pauktuutit staff one year after the workshop 	<p>The evaluations indicated that the program supported participants in making various positive changes in their lives. The funded organizations also improved their capacity to serve Inuit women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women increased their business knowledge and gained specific business skills • Women developed a new awareness of business support organizations and how to approach them • Women gained a stronger sense of belonging to an Inuit women's business community • Women developed more confidence and motivation to succeed <p>Over the course of the grant, Pauktuutit increased the number of people who were trained to offer the IWB workshop and expanded its ability to deliver financial literacy training. Pauktuutit also developed an Inuit-specific asset-mapping tool, and an information technology component, where participants learned software skills.</p>

18. Women in Canada: A Statistical Report, Ottawa: Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11442-eng.htm#a30>

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. An exercise where participants take photographs that illustrate their everyday lives, then tell stories about them. It's a way for participants to recognize challenges and opportunities.

SASKATCHEWAN INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGIES' WOMEN IN TRADES (WIT) PROGRAM

PROGRAM DELIVERY	PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS
<p>Over 12 weeks, the WIT program offered both theoretical and hands-on technical training for the construction industry. Participants' time was divided between learning in the classroom and the workshop.</p> <p>WIT participants also received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life-skills training • A practicum placement • Opportunities for networking 	<p>Forty Aboriginal women attended the grantee sessions and 31 of them graduated.</p>
PROGRAM CONTEXT	
<p>Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan face higher rates of unemployment and have lower incomes than non-Aboriginal women. One in three Aboriginal women (living off reserves) in the province live on a low income, compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal women.²² The average income for Aboriginal women in Saskatchewan is \$16,950, which is about two-thirds of the average income for non-Aboriginal women (\$25,160).</p> <p>Saskatchewan has a need for skilled trades and technology workers, but there are specific barriers for Aboriginal women, including gender and cultural discrimination. It is also difficult for women to find childcare that accommodates irregular work schedules in the construction industry.</p> <p>The WIT program aimed to help address these challenges by providing participants with applied skills training, as well as services such as job coaching and career planning.</p>	
HOW WE EVALUATED OUR WORK	HOW WOMEN'S LIVES CHANGED
<p>Data collection included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A livelihood tracking questionnaire completed by participants before the program and six months afterwards (self-reporting) • Storytelling (interviews and photovoice completed before the program and six months afterwards) 	<p>The evaluation indicated that participants were more able to meet their basic needs, and their average personal income increased slightly over a six-month period. Other program outcomes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of women on social assistance decreased • Some women were able to buy a vehicle with increased earnings • Some women reported an increased sense of pride in their skills and accomplishments • More women knew how to access resources for support, and had access to a mentor. <p>During the grant period, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies hired and trained new female instructors who were able to serve as role models for program participants. The institute also adjusted its program to include a life-skills component and practicum.</p>

22. Socio-Demographic Profiles of Saskatchewan Women: Aboriginal Women. Status of Women Office (2008). <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/aboriginal-women.pdf>.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The delivery of these programs highlighted some insights that could help guide future programs for Aboriginal women:

- Program content must take into account the realities of women's lives, whether this means incorporating a discussion about domestic violence or acknowledging cultural values and traditions.
- In Northern communities, a lack of community infrastructure may challenge both program delivery and entrepreneurship development.
- Investing in multi-year funding helps to strengthen program delivery, and maximize participants' chances of success.
- Program staff should consider their assumptions about cultural norms: concepts like a cash payment system may be new in some Aboriginal communities.
- Programming may need to adapt to seasonal cycles in some communities.



“I’ve never been so
happy about my career
path as I am now—
I’ve found
my niche.”



“I learned that
I can really
make my dream
come true.”

CONCLUSION

A cornerstone of the Canadian Women's Foundation's mission is to support women on their journeys out of poverty.

This report illustrates how the Foundation helps women take meaningful steps toward transforming their lives through a women-centred economic development program in their community.

The findings indicate that many women in grantee programs make significant progress toward building a sustainable livelihood. These participants reported a variety of successes, including:

- **Increased financial independence**
- **Strong progress out of poverty**
- **Higher employment and self-employment**
- **Less dependence on social assistance**
- **Stronger networks and connections**
- **Increased confidence**
- **Increased financial literacy**

In considering the evaluation of women's progress, it's important to remember that journeys out of poverty are challenging, and many women encounter various setbacks along the way. It is a long and complex process, particularly for women who face multiple barriers.

Some program participants are raising children on their own, and dealing with unforeseen crises as they try to complete their programs. Some participants are newcomers to Canada, or survivors of abuse, while others have inherited the tragic legacy of the residential school system.

The Foundation's evaluations between 2009 and 2014 capture a short period of time, illustrating only part of the progress participants will make over the course of years and lifetimes of hard work, both within and outside of economic development programs.

There is no single solution that will help all women find their way out of poverty. But there's no question about the need for women-centred economic development programs that are culturally sensitive and tailored specifically to women's needs.

The grantee programs succeeded in reaching women who faced multiple barriers: program participants included a large proportion of women who were born outside Canada, women of colour, single parents, and women whose first language is neither English nor French. Through the Aboriginal Partnership Grants, the grantee organizations provided programming customized for women in two very different Aboriginal communities.

Through its funding, the Foundation also helped to strengthen the field of women-centred economic development as a whole, by providing:

- **Multi-year funding**
- **Capacity-building and organizational support**
- **Ongoing learning, evaluation and program enhancement**

The Foundation will continue to support women-centred economic development programs across Canada in the years to come, envisioning a future free of gender-based poverty. With the generous support of our donors, the Foundation hopes to build a stronger future for women and children across Canada.



For more information about the Canadian Women's Foundation Economic Development Program please visit canadianwomen.org