

Research paper on community engagement practice: mother to mother initiative

[Countries](#), [Canada](#)



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Introduction

Mother to Mother Initiative is a community based women empowerment organization that will target poor single mothers and other vulnerable women. The organizational activities will be run and coordinated by professional women willing to volunteer their time to help their vulnerable counterparts.

The concept of Mother to Mother is based on the reality that only a woman who is a mother can understand the length to which another mother can go to, to provide for her children. It is therefore easier for a woman empathize with poor, abused, disabled, unemployed or depressed women who are still struggling to fend for their families.

This is not to say that men will not be involved in the activities of the organization. Contrary to that, they will be part of the program but will provide support through other means such as administration and financial support. Women and specifically mothers will be directly involved with the implementation of the organization's programs and particularly during group and individual interaction with the mothers receiving support from the Mother to Mother organization.

Quantifying the Problem

The idea behind the Mother to Mother concept arose from the fact that income inequality especially among women is a reality in modern day Canada. This problem is particularly pronounced in Alberta where the levels of income inequality have been on the increase for the past 20 years (Weil & Reisch, 2005). The province's inequality index has moved from low inequality

to medium inequality. This translates to increased cases of deteriorating health for both physical and mental health in the general population, increasing crime rates, drug abuse and collapsed familial institutions (Murphy, 2012).

Statistics Canada and other academic research indicate that the social cost and poverty are on the rise in Alberta because of the growing income disparity. The income to debt ratio in Alberta is 16% higher than the national average (Murphy, 2012). The Edmonton Social Planning Council reported that there are 73, 000 children and 148, 000 non elderly families affected by the income disparity in Alberta (Saarkisan, Hurtford & Wenman, 2010).

Statistic Canada reported that over 300, 000 Albertans can be classified under the Low Income Cut- Off (LICO) when their income is examined after taxes. The prevalence of low income increased from 6. 6% in 2011 to 9. 9% 2012 (Murphy, 2012)

In the 2007 recessions, child poverty increased by 40% because the economic difficulties were especially harsh on families with medium and low income (Murphy, 2012). Women account for over two thirds of low-income earners in Alberta. This is because women generally work in low-paying non standard jobs where they do not require any specialized skills; however, they also do not get health insurance, fair compensation or a decent pension. In 2009, women working full time earned only 68% of what their male counterparts earned (Saarkisan, Hurtford & Wenman, 2010). Other studies also show that Albertans worked longer hours and took less time for holidays compared to other workers in the developed countries.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, 9% of the population in

Canada is poor, however women are more likely to be poor than men (Canadian Women Foundation, UD). The CWF statistics indicate that 36% of Aboriginal women, 35% of minority women, 26% of women with disability, 21% of single mothers and 14% of senior women are likely to live in poverty (Canadian Women Foundation, UD). Since women are the primary care givers to children, these statistics mean that children are also poor. 80% of more than 1 million families are headed my women (Canadian Women Foundation, UD). Single mothers have an average annual income of \$17, 000 while single fathers make about \$80, 000 annually (Canadian Women Foundation, UD). All round empowerment of mothers is therefore the best way of tackling poverty in society.

Alberta's increasingly unequal society is dangerous for the development of children and women because they are the most vulnerable in society. Since there are less community based social support programs in Alberta compared to other provinces, it would be prudent for social workers to device women centered programs that will attend to the needs of vulnerable mothers and their children (Raphael & Raphael 2011).

Women usually bear the brunt of dysfunctional social and economic systems. This is because they are usually left to take care of their children despite the harsh socio-economic conditions. Many men often take the option of absconding from their duties to their families in order to fend for their own needs. Women rarely have this option and end shouldering the burdening of nurturing a family single handedly (Raphael & Raphael 2012).

The government has put in place several social support systems. However studies have shown that these programs do not help women because of the

strict qualification requirements and social stigma associated with being part of such government sponsored assistance programs (Canadian Women Foundation, UD). Secondly, the programs are not designed to create independence but instead breed dependence. This is evident from the fact that the number of families applying for social support seems to be increasing every year while there is no significant reduction in the number of families leaving the system (Raphael & Raphael 2011).

Women to Women will be anchored on principles of women empowerment. The organization will convert victims into victors and dependent women into independent providers. Every aspect of the program will be infused with a growth and development aspect that will require the women to graduate from one stage to the next. The participating women will have fellow mothers to cheer them on and to encourage them to become better mothers and to take charge of their lives, families and children.

Community Engagement Method

As the name suggests, Mother to Mother will be a women based support system that will provide a safe haven for struggling single mothers, rape victims, abused women and other vulnerable women. The organization will provide practical solutions to the problems facing these mothers such as addiction counseling, day care services, job searches and referees, training in practical skills, family therapy among other solutions.

The core of Mother to Mother is children. The organization is driven by the desire to ensure that no child sleeps hungry or misses an opportunity to have a healthy childhood and a decent education because of the problems

they face at home. Since mothers are the primary care givers to children, it is only practical to empower them so that they can improve the lives of their children in return.

Mother to Mother will be run by mothers with various competencies in areas such as counseling, social work, education, reproductive health, addiction management, psychotherapy, education and early childhood development. These women will use their technical competencies and practical experience to give the participating women practical solutions to their problems. Additionally, Establishing a profound relationships and team dynamics will help women a lot towards achieving their objectives.

Goals of Mother to Mother Initiative

The goals of the Mother to Mother initiative will be to provide;

- A safe home for abused mother and their children where they can get food, shelter, emergency healthcare and legal assistance
- A free day care service for working mothers
- A network of women willing to look out for each other and help each other during difficult times
- Weekly and monthly food , clothes and medical supplies donations
- Practical skills workshops and training to equip mothers with employable and self- employment skills
- Drug rehabilitation services and financial support for institutional rehabilitation
- HIV/AIDS counseling and health support centre
- Family therapy services to reconcile families and repair unhealthy

relationships

- Seek employment opportunities for women and negotiate better salaries and terms of employment on their behalf.
- Offer willing women and their children opportunities to further their studies through partner institutions and willing sponsors.
- Provide motivation for self-improvement through weekly motivation speeches from women who have survived difficult situations and managed to raise their families and improve the quality of their lives.

Community Engagement Strategies

The Mother to Mother initiative will be implemented in five key stages. These are

- Analysis of the extent of the need within Edmonton and Calgary in Alberta.
- Identify strategic outreach centers that will be centrally located to ease access for the vulnerable families already identified in stage one.
- Recruit women participants from within the community and also professional women companies and institutions around the community to create the Mother to Mother network.
- Build a healthy and functional relationship between the mothers benefiting from the program and the women providing the support services.
- Lastly the program will be evaluated against its goals to ensure that it is creating value and changing.
- Analysis of the extent of the need within Edmonton and Calgary in Alberta

This process will require a combination of existing statistical data and an extensive study of the social services needs of the communities living in

Calgary and Edmonton. The areas to be studied will be selected based on three key indices; poverty indicators, income disparity and population of lone families on social support (Raphael & Raphael 2011). Once the information is compiled, it will be used to identify the neediest areas which will have the first Mother to Mother centers.

- Identify strategic outreach centers that will be centrally located to ease access for the vulnerable families already identified in stage one

The second stage of the process is a continuation of the first. However, this stage is important because the location of the centers will determine how effective they will be in helping the vulnerable women. The selected locations have to be accessible, secure and appropriate for children. Security is paramount because these centers will double up as safe havens for children and abused mothers. The centers should also be close to the homes of most of the participating mothers so that they can actively participate in training and self-help programs without commuting long distances.

- Recruit women participants from within the community and also professional women companies and institutions around the community to create the Mother to Mother network.

The core of the Mother to Mother initiative will be its participants. Unlike other existing programs, Mother to Mother will be founded by mothers, run by mothers to help mothers in need. Motherhood serves the purpose of creating a bond and a source of unity and trust between the volunteers in the organization and the mothers under the organization's care. Motherhood and the welfare of children will be the first and foremost focus of the groups that will be created in the course of the activities of the organization.

Engaging the neighborhood patch, is a definite approach towards achieving this.

- Build a healthy and functional relationship between the mothers benefiting from the program and the women providing the support services

Vulnerable women are often untrusting of strangers because of the fear that these strangers will take advantage of them (Weil & Reisch 2005). The Mother to Mother Initiative will begin its operations by building a healthy and trust worthy relationship between the volunteers and participants. The earliest group sessions will involve introductions to foster a sense of belonging within the groups. The next stage of building trust will entail the volunteers giving their life stories in order to encourage the vulnerable mothers to open up about their experiences as well (Raphael & Raphael 2011). The last stage of trust building will involve all participants signing confidentiality documents and agreeing to keep the details of the lives of all participants a secret.

- Evaluation of the program

The last and perhaps the most important stage of the implementation of the Mother to Mother program will be to evaluate the efficacy of the interventions undertaken in the course of the program. Mother to Mother can only be as useful as the number of women it has helped to get better paying job, an education, healthy familial relationships or healthy children. The programs efficiency will be measured according to the responses of participating women and the overall observation of the changes in the lives of participating women (Raphael & Raphael 2011). The evaluation will also

open doors for new sponsors to join the program and expand the initiative to other cities in Alberta.

Expected Results

The Mother to Mother Initiative will have an impact on individual mothers and their children, the community and the society.

Individual

The Mother to Mother will provide a resource centre for single mothers and vulnerable women to access socio-psychological support, financial advice, career guidance, job placement and entrepreneurship training. These skills will enable the women to become better mothers and to find gainful employment to provide for their families. The women will also have a safe haven for their children and themselves whenever they have no shelter.

Community

The Mother to Mother Initiative will be a community bases program that will draw from the strengths of mothers within the community and use these strengths to support those who need it the most. The women in the program will be learning from each other and supporting each other through difficult experiences in their daily lives. Vulnerable mothers will be taught how to avoid abuse, protect their children and ensure that they have access to healthcare, education and security. The initiative will therefore contribute to healthier communities and stronger families.

Societal

The society will benefit from the empowerment of mothers because they will be able to protect their children, provide food and shelter and ensure that the children access the best education. Society's collective responsibility to provide for impoverished families will be reduced because the Mother to Mother initiative will equip the vulnerable with practical skills they can use to create their own jobs or to get fair remuneration at work.

Concluding Remarks

Possible Challenges and Solutions

The biggest challenge that will face be funding. The Mother to Mother initiative will be fully funded by well-wishers and philanthropic organizations. This type of funding cannot be fully relied upon because sponsors are not under any obligation to renew their financial commitments every year (Raphael & Raphael 2011; Weil & Reisch 2005). Furthermore philanthropic organizations often donate to different needy charities every financial year. To tackle this problem, the organization will have to find a permanent benevolent donor or set up a benevolent fund to finance the activities of the organization. Additionally, the participants could produce easily marketable merchandise such as handicrafts or specialized services like catering and day care to finance the centre and its activities.

The second challenge will be finding committed volunteers to run the activities of the Mother to Mother centre. Finding qualified women who will be willing to volunteer their time consistently to help other women will not be easy. The organization will also have to seek women with various

qualifications such as counselors, health care workers, police officers, teachers, motivational speakers among others. This problem will be overcome by advertising widely and by screening and recruitment a large number of volunteers to fill in the available positions.

The last significant problem will be finding centrally located centers that will be secure, affordable and accessible to the targeted populations. The target populations live in areas ridden with crime, drug abuse and prostitution (Hardina, 2012). There may not be a secure location to set up a refuge centre for vulnerable mothers, their children and abused women. This problem will be solved by requesting community leaders to suggest or provide appropriate locations within the identified areas and ensure that the centers are protected from any external aggression.

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