

Pathways to Prosperity

Community Planning For Women's Economic Security in Elgin-St. Thomas

Executive Summary

Community Planning for Women's Economic Security in Elgin-St. Thomas aims to advance women's economic security and opportunities for local prosperity through the following efforts:

- Enhance understanding and awareness of barriers and local supports to women's economic security
- Collaborate to identify gaps, priorities and opportunities and implement supports and strategies
- Develop a community plan & take specific actions to address the economic situation of women living in St. Thomas and Elgin County

Economic security refers to an assured and stable standard of living that provides individuals and families with the necessary level of resources to participate economically, politically, socially, culturally, and with dignity in their communities. Security goes beyond mere physical survival to encompass a level of resources that promotes social inclusion.

The economic stability and prosperity of women affects the whole family and the community at large. There is a significant local need to develop solutions that limit the unique barriers rural women face. Engaging women, community partners and other stakeholders began the dialogue for community planning to this end. An Advisory Council comprised of a diverse range of community partners have supported research efforts, survey development and community consultation processes. Close to 700 surveys were completed locally and 11 community consultations with women were hosted to identify challenges, supports and areas to develop in enhancing economic security for women.

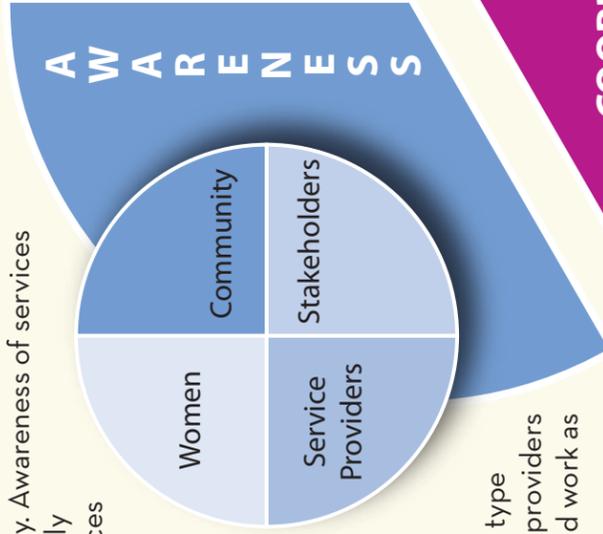
Pathways to Prosperity: Community Planning for Women's Economic Security in Elgin St. Thomas, is the resulting report that highlights these findings and provides a gender-based analysis of women's current economic status in St. Thomas-Elgin. Understanding current realities for women in our communities will inform ongoing efforts, new developments and policies that impact women's economic well-being. With a Collective impact approach to economic security for women—many players working together towards the same goal- we can foster opportunities that lead to Pathways to Prosperity.



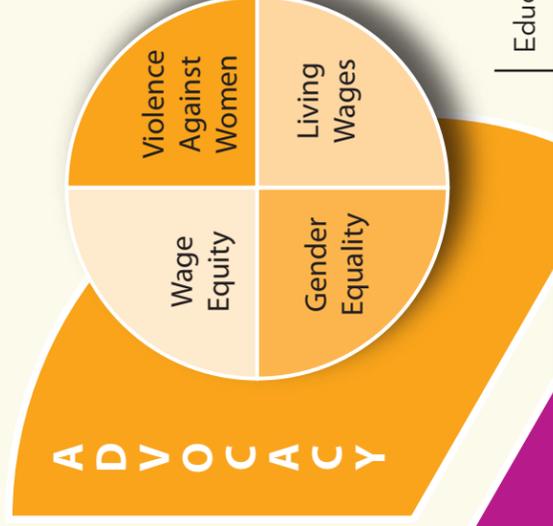
BUILDING A FOUNDATION EMERGING AREAS OF NEED FOR ELGIN

This document represents areas of need to improve women's economic security in Elgin County and St. Thomas. Moving forward into implementation, community engagement and local collaboration will be integral to success. We will only be successful through awareness, advocacy and coordination.

There is a need to address the role of local service providers in achieving success through a collaborative system. Collaborations do not just happen, they need to be built; an active approach needs to be taken between service providers. Awareness of services and coordination between services are two areas that have the potential to ensure individuals are able to obtain the supports they require while progressing to economic security. Awareness of services requires service providers to fully understand other support services available to foster appropriate referrals. Furthermore, there needs to be a vehicle to empower individuals with an understanding of the available services, so that progressing through the supports of service providers is not mandated, but a clear choice they have made to move towards economic security. This type of approach requires all service providers to be included in the process and work as a community.



There are systemic factors that have a crippling effect on achieving economic security for women specifically violence against women, wage disparity, gender bias within professions, and living wage. Ultimately, these areas need support from policy; however, there are local changes that can begin which will help enact systemic change.



Education
Education was a barrier for 1 in 3 of the respondents, specifically: level of education is a barrier for 1 in 5; location is a barrier for 1 in 6.

Transportation

1 in 3 women do not have access to a reliable mode of transportation compared to 1 in 6 men.

Skill Development

Literacy was a barrier of 1 in 20 of the respondents, life planning and budgeting for 1 in 3. Furthermore, 5 in 11 respondents indicated that they could not save money and 6 of 11 indicated that debt load was an issue.

Newcomers to Canada

Newcomers to Canada experience barriers to economic well-being a larger degree. Additionally, there is a misconception that immigration status prevents access to available social supports.

Health

3 in 10 people are experiencing personal health and wellness as a barrier to their economic integration.

Poverty

43% of the survey participants indicated that they cannot meet their basic needs, or are experiencing poverty.

COORDINATION

Awareness of Services

Workforce Development

Education

Social Supports
In Elgin County in February of this year 475 claims of which 92 are made by single females and translates to 868 people access, Ontario works, in St. Thomas it was 1239 claims, 271 single females and 2177 people.

Employment & Income

Food Security

Unemployment was considered a barrier by 1 in 3 of the respondents. Furthermore, reliable income is a barrier for 4 in 10. Another main concern for minimum wage earners is the lack of benefits within the types of jobs that are currently available.

Dependent Care (child/elderly)

Access and adequacy of food is of concern. Of the service providers 7 in 10 indicated that up to 50% of their clients have limited ability to access healthy food.

Food Security

The number of single parent households is higher than provincial average in 5 out of 8 municipalities and in St. Thomas - 77% of these are headed by females. In a lifetime there are two stages of dependency, from birth through childhood, and in old age. Furthermore the St. Thomas & Elgin County dependency ratio is higher than Ontario; more people are caring for children and elderly simultaneously.

Housing

70% of people who indicated in the survey that they have an income below \$30,000 have never used subsidised housing or rent geared-to-income. With current waitlist and considering these people who potentially have this need, there is a concern of the current housing situation.

Recommendations

The surveys and consultations used in the research of women's economic security were analysed to help identify the emerging areas of need in Elgin. While the research was conducted focusing on traditional service areas, the need for an integrated approach became clear with the inter-connection of the barriers that are affecting the economic security of women. While there are many ways to categorize and prioritize the emerging areas of need, it is recommended to consider the areas of:

- Coordination
- Awareness
- Advocacy

Focusing on these three areas will allow for the formation of action groups that can look at local needs for the individual (coordination), needs of the service providers (awareness), and the larger systemic needs (advocacy).

The intricacies of the needs required to help support women in achieving economic security can be obtained through wide spread community support. Often women will face challenges in achieving economic support, not because of deficiencies in one area, but because of several weaknesses in the areas of need identified previously. There is a need for support from many services simultaneously, not just individually. There is a need for services to find a way to support clients between different service providers, and not just focused on their area of support. While this ideal may not be achievable, collaboration between agencies can be created to aide in this type of horizontal support.

SNAPSHOT OF DEMOGRAPHICS OF ELGIN COUNTY AND ST. THOMAS IN 2006/2011

DERIVED FROM 2006/2011 CENSUS AND WORKFORCE DATA

Population

- In 2011 there were 87,461 people living in Elgin County of which 37,905 lived in St. Thomas
- The population has grown 2.5% in the County including St. Thomas, 0.6% in Elgin County alone, and 5.0% in St. Thomas from 2006 to 2011
- There are slightly more females in St. Thomas at 51.9% which is the reverse of the proportion of women in the County alone at 49.9% of the population in 2011.
- The age distribution has also changed since 2006. The largest growth was seen in those aged 60 to 73. Declines were seen in the age 6 to 22 years and 30 to 45 populations.
- The median age of the population in the county is 40.9 years; the median age of women is slightly older at 41.8 years.
- The population density of Elgin County and St. Thomas is 46.5 people/km², is 1067.3 people /km² for St. Thomas and is 26.8 people/km² for Elgin without St. Thomas.

Cultural Diversity

- Elgin County is home to 12,000-15,000 Low German Speaking families.
- In 2006, Elgin County including St. Thomas was 13.1% immigrants, with St. Thomas being 9.7% and Elgin County 15.7%.
- Within the 2001-2006 Census period St. Thomas attracted 9.8% of the immigrant population and Elgin attracted 10.7% of the immigrant families.
- In 2006 St. Thomas had 3.7% visible minorities and Elgin had only 1.5% visible minorities, the majority of the immigrants into Elgin County are of European decent.

Labour Force

- 56.7% of all workers in Elgin are employed by Small and Medium sized enterprises.
- Participation rates in St. Thomas and Elgin were 67% in 2010.
- Employment rates in St. Thomas and Elgin dropped to 59.6% in 2010.
- Unemployment rates in St. Thomas and Elgin were 11.1%, an improvement on the 13% in 2009.

Industry

- Manufacturing represents 30% of the workforce in Elgin County and St. Thomas; Females represent 24% of the manufacturing workforce and males 76%.
- The largest percent of females are employed in the Healthcare and Education Industry, accounting for 13% of the workforce, 3% for males.

Occupation

- Sales and Services represent 21% of the workforce in Elgin County and St. Thomas in 2006, with females occupying 62% of these jobs.
- Trades represent 20% of the workforce in Elgin County and St. Thomas in 2006, with females representing 10% of these jobs.

Household and Family Characteristics

- There are 25,300 families in Elgin County of which 10,975 families live in St. Thomas in 2011.
- In Elgin 13.8% of families are single parent families. Of the single parent families, female run are 77.7% and male run are 22.2% in 2011.
- There are 1.1 children living at home on average for all families in 2011, 42% of families reported having no children living at home.

Income

- On average people earned \$27,982 in St. Thomas (\$38,583 for males and \$19,990 for females) and \$27,182 (\$31,270 for males and \$19,484 for females) in Elgin County in 2006.
- Ontario Works Social Assistance is accessed by 3045 families in St. Thomas and Elgin County combined. This represents 3.48% of the population; in St. Thomas 5.74% and in Elgin 1.75%.

Education

- The population over the age of 15 that does not have any formal education is 29.8% in Elgin County including St. Thomas, (27.9% for females and 31.8% for males) 32% in Elgin County alone (30.5% for females and 34.9% for males), and 26% in St. Thomas alone (24.5% for females and 27.3% for males).

Health

- 12.8% of males and 17.4% of females report perceived life stress
- 92 of 100,000 males and 105 of 100,000 females report hospitalization for Mental Health
- 77.9% of males and 79.7% of females report a sense of community belonging