



A TURNING POINT  
FOR WOMEN



## Deputation to the City of Toronto Budget Committee

YWCA Toronto – January 14, 2016

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Good evening,

My name is Maureen Adams and I am here today on behalf of YWCA Toronto. Our Association serves over 11,000 women and girls every year in 30 programs in 12 communities all across the city.

YWCA Toronto has a long and proud history of partnership with the City of Toronto, particularly in providing housing for women. Our housing portfolio includes 104 emergency shelter and violence against women beds, 12 units of transitional housing, and 550 units of permanent affordable housing. Working collaboratively with the city and other levels of government, we provide community and a place to call home for over 1,500 marginalized and disadvantaged women. But there is still much to be done because we continue to be challenged with over 90,000 households on the waiting list for affordable housing.

It was about this time one year ago that YWCA Toronto held consultations with our tenants about how to eradicate poverty in Toronto. They compiled a list of recommendations that were forwarded to the city as part of its outreach to people who had lived experience of poverty for the poverty reduction strategy.

And it is important to say that they participated in good faith – with the hope that their voices would be heard and that positive change was soon on the way because many of them had been living in poverty for some time.

Women told us about the difficulty of finding full-time employment. Many are working two part-time jobs or are on short-term contracts. Most have no

guaranteed hours of work, no benefits and no sick time. They also told us that finding affordable child care when they need it is next to impossible. Women need more childcare subsidies, more local spaces, and flexible hours of operation to deal with work schedules women are working today – particularly if they are precariously employed in multiple jobs.

We heard that a safe and secure home at YWCA Toronto has transformed their lives and the lives of their children. And, that they want this opportunity for all women. They want to ensure that women are never forced to stay in violent relationships because they cannot afford to leave or made to make a terrible choice about whether to feed their children or pay their rent. These are too frequently the real lived experiences of many women in Toronto.

When the poverty reduction strategy was released we saw that our tenant's voices were represented and that the recommendations they put forward were key components of the strategy. We congratulate City Council for listening to voices of those who have lived with poverty and for passing the strategy with unanimous support.

However, as we all know, if the strategy is not adequately funded it cannot be implemented. This would be a tragedy and an enormous setback to addressing inequality in our city. Put quite simply, we cannot afford to wait for action.

We urge this Committee and members of Council to ensure that the 2016 budget includes the funding necessary to reduce poverty. This is why YWCA Toronto joined with over 50 civic leaders in calling on City Council to invest \$75 million to make real progress on core priorities. Priorities such as child care, shelter and supportive housing and affordable rent for 7,000 households at risk of homelessness.

We know what this means for Council. We know it means the introduction of new revenue generating tools. We have followed the deputations that have been made

in this area, and we know that various proposals have been put forward as to how this revenue can be generated. There is a strong moral, social and economic case for investing in poverty reduction. For example, YWCA Toronto leveraged city funding with private sector donors and volunteers and developed 300 units of affordable housing on Elm St in downtown Toronto. All levels of government provided \$38 million of the \$80 million that cost. Our organization raised \$15 million and carried a mortgage of \$27 million. So we actually put the majority of money into that housing. It would not have been possible if we had not had early support, especially from the City of Toronto.

The City of Toronto Act gives you the power to introduce new revenue tools to make poverty reduction a reality. The women we work with, if they were here, would say they want to contribute to make their families, their neighbourhoods and our city stronger. They urge you to put the funding forward to make the Poverty Reduction Strategy work.

Thank you.

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