

Advocating Changes to Maternity & Parental Benefits Legislation

Project 2.4

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Introduction

Phase I: Conducted an extensive review and Atlantic-wide consultation regarding federal parental benefits legislation

Phase II: Explored policy options and recommendations for parental benefits legislation based on findings of research from phase I. Guiding principles established at outset had a goal of creating equality for more women, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized in our society.

Phase III: Communicated the research findings and policy recommendations to decision makers and those who influence policy direction and development. This work happened at provincial, regional, national, and international levels.

Student Research: Evaluating the effectiveness of our community based partnership in moving forward policy change

Background and Rationale

- Project has done work to mobilize community around an issue of common concern (supporting new parents) through a grassroots, inclusive process for making recommendations for policy and legislative changes.
- The project seeks to communicate the voice of the community to politicians and policy makers.
- The project is evaluating its effectiveness in affecting policy change.

Community/University Collaboration (partnership)

- Member of sub-node II, “Community mobilization through inclusion and empowerment”
- Although the project is primarily supported by Women’s Network PEI and funded by Status of Women Canada, funding was provided from the sub-node for conference travel, proposal development, and evaluation.
- Without the help of the sub-node, phase III (communications and advocacy) may have never got off the ground. It is the hope that this project adds to the resources created by SERN on methodologies for community engagement and empowerment.
- Key findings are disseminated throughout SERN partnerships and into the community

Project Methodology

Women's Network PEI, with assistance from an Advisory Committee made up of women from PEI, NB, NS, and NL, undertook research on access to maternity and parental benefits. Research included focus groups, best practice review, and statistical analysis.

Research was disseminated through community by partners / advisory committee. After community engagement / validation of research findings, partners met to form policy recommendations using a set of agreed upon guiding principles.

Consultations were held with MPs from all parties, FPT Ministers Responsible for Status of Women, Senators, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Status of Women, federal NGOs and policy think tanks for further community engagement and validation.

Project process and outcomes were externally evaluated and the lessons learned are shared amongst partners.

Main Findings To Date

Policy recommendations have had uptake at national NGO level. These groups will continue to advocate for change at the national level.

Senate inquiry into maternity and parental benefits called in 2008.

Potential for uptake at Federal, Provincial, Territorial Ministers responsible for Status of Women level.

Policy for improving access to maternity and parental benefits now policy for Liberal and NDP parties.

Deliverables (completed* & planned)

- Publications: Womens Network, 2008. **Looking Beyond the Surface: An In-depth Review of Parental Benefits.** (3 documents: Final report, Summary of recommendations & community information sheet).
- web site
- brochures
- workshops
- an impact assessment on the project.
- Broad awareness of need for improved parental benefits (long term)

*Please contact Women's Network PEI for a full list of project activities <http://www.wnpei.org/>

How Students Benefited from the Project

- Student researcher contracted to evaluate effectiveness of project in meeting the goal to change policy; skills: conducting interviews and write-up the evaluation.
- Student able to experience the challenges community organizations face in moving their agenda forward with very limited resources.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Women's Network will act as a resource on the issue whenever needed, however, as project funding for this type of work is extremely limited, the work will continue on a less continuous basis.

Coalition of Advisory Councils on the Status of Women are making improving access to maternity and parental leave a priority, as are the Canadian Bar Association, and the Canadian Institute of Child Health. This uptake by nationally focused orgs will help keep the issue moving forward.

Senate inquiry will be completed in near future and results communicated.

Quote taken from a press release, January 23, 2007

- “It is important to bring awareness to the Canadian public and policy makers that steps must be made to increase accessibility for maternity and parental benefits,” says Michelle Harris Genge, Co-Executive Director of Women’s Network PEI. “It is often assumed that once a woman has a child, she can go on maternity leave. Unfortunately, women who do contract, seasonal, or part-time work are less likely to be eligible for benefits. Self-employed women – with the exception of self-employed fishers – are simply not eligible at all. This accounts for 41% of all Canadian women who work.”
— (Harris Genge, <http://www.wnpei.org/pr2.html>)