

Social Return On Investment (SROI) Case Study: Safe Communities Innovation Fund Walking the Path Together

Fast Facts

- 300 participants served, including 67 six & seven-year-olds, 104 adult caregivers & 129 siblings
- Program recorded a total of 3,681 different service contacts, including case management, individual and family counseling, talking circles and many others

Impact

- 82 children were prevented from entering government care
- 24 of the caregivers returned to school or became employed
- Exposure to violence ended or was reduced for 50% of the primary participants (six and seven-year-olds)
- 70% of caregivers were ready to take action, seek help and stay safe

SROI Result

- Overall: \$5.42:1

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"I'm a better parent than I was before. Not only do I tell my children I love them, but I show them more love now than before. I have more patience with them; I give them praises when they do a good job when they're helping me. I take time to play with them. I am able to stand up for what I believe in and know that it's okay to make mistakes."
-WTPT Caregiver

Program Background

How can we help First Nations children live violence and crime-free lives?

Walking the Path Together (WTPT) uses an innovative, targeted crime-prevention approach for a high-risk population of violence-exposed, latency-age Aboriginal children, their primary caregivers and siblings. Its model is based on a long-term, intensive and flexible approach to service, and principles of strength-based intervention, matched to the context and needs of the children and their families.

Wisdom from First Nations culture is incorporated into all facets of this project and a shelter in each of the 5 on-reserve communities is the hub of the WTPT activities. At each shelter, an Eagle Feather Worker (EFW) is in regular contact with each participating family for a period of 2 years. Using a "whatever it takes" approach, individual healing plans evolve to meet the needs of the children.

WTPT began as a collaboration between Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS), five on-reserve shelters, the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System (CCFJS) and Dr. J. Campbell.

Participant Outcomes

WTPT treats the whole family. Caregivers from participating families deepen understanding of traditional Aboriginal parenting, address the inter-generational influence of residential schools and are supported through linkages to education, employment and addictions treatments.

Participation in WTPT ensures that the children live with at least one nurturing caregiver, and that no child is engaging in behavior that would be criminal if they were over 12.

Children develop positive self-identities as First Nations individuals and become interested in

learning about cultural traditions.

Raising the self-esteem of a child and giving them the stability they need reduces the likelihood that they will be involved in criminal activities when adults. WTPT fosters crime prevention in Aboriginal communities by addressing early risk factors in vulnerable families and children at risk.

The likelihood that the children will grow up to use or accept violence at home is decreased. The positive effects of WTPT will ripple through families and out into the communities for years and to come.

Theory of Change—Summary

If 7-year-old Aboriginal children and their siblings living on-reserve who have been impacted by family violence receive culturally-appropriate, intensive intervention over 2 years, their intimate and community relationships will improve and they will become positive role-models in their homes and communities later in life.

Jake's Story

Jake's abusive father extensively traumatized his family. To escape, Jake, his mother and his siblings moved from shelter to shelter. Jake refused to go to school. Eagle Feather Worker (EFW) talks with Jake suggested he feared his mother would be hurt, or be gone when he came home from school. As a result of WTPT, his mother is a more active parent who is maintaining structure. Overtime, the EFW convinced Jake to go to school—and he's been going, everyday. Later, when Jake saw his EFW, he said, "You know what? I really love school."

Social Value Created

Significant social value is created by addressing inter-generational root causes of violence, a cornerstone of WTPT's service delivery model.

By reducing abuse in the families, addressing inter-generational trauma, building self-esteem through reconnection with culture and focusing on parenting/life skills, WTPT:

- reduces costs for the schools (e.g. associated with behavioral incidents, school absenteeism and vandalism, etc.);
- reduces demand for justice system resources to respond to domestic violence incidents or other crime (e.g. police and court time, etc.);
- increases productivity and stability of family members (e.g. through reconnection with education, employment and housing, etc.);
- prevents family break-down and reduces Child Welfare costs, as fewer children become involved with Child Welfare or go into government care;
- reduces personal and financial costs associated with addictions and treatments;
- reconnects the family with necessary services and supports such as basic needs, child care and counseling, but also reduces reliance on other supports such as domestic violence and homeless shelters; and
- reduces health costs for the family through decreased hospital use and doctor visits.

Overall, value is created in the community by empowering and strengthening families so that they can be safe and productive in their communities.

Valuing Change—Social Return on Investment

Outcomes of the WTPT project were determined using on-going data monitoring, as well as interviews with the EFWs and participants. Using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology, financial proxies were assigned to the outcomes in order to represent the social value created through WTPT intervention (see Figure 1 for financial proxy summary).

These proxies relate both to service system savings through reduced demand for services or "cost reallocation" (e.g. justice system costs, health care costs, CFSA costs, etc.), and the reduced personal costs to participants (e.g. cost of pain and suffering from abuse, costs of homelessness, etc.).

Where possible, financial proxies were used to assign value to "material" outcomes experienced by the target stakeholders. However, some values such as improved quality of life, improved family functioning, enhanced self-esteem, reconnection with culture, improved life skills, good nutrition and decreased victimization could not be valued in monetary terms and were not included in the SROI ratio. Therefore, the SROI ratio should be considered a conservative illustration of the overall value of WTPT.

The social value created through the program represented by financial proxies was then discounted for deadweight, attribution, drop-off and displacement to avoid overstating the monetary value created through the intervention. Finally, a discount rate of 8% was applied to the entire analysis to account for any uncertainty in achievement of outcomes.

Tyler's Story

One night, Tyler witnessed his parents being brutally attacked inside their home. His mom escaped with Tyler and his siblings. His father eventually recovered physically. As a result, Tyler suffered from severe anxiety attacks and withdrew from everyone around him. He feared going anywhere in his community, including school. Tyler's EFW used play therapy to help him through the trauma, connected him with counselors, and organized hypnotherapist counseling for his family. Tyler is happier now and better able to express feelings. Shortly after family counseling, Tyler told his mom, "Mom, I feel loved."

Figure 1: Financial Proxies

Type of value	Proxies
School	Behavioral incidents, absenteeism
Stability	Employment, education, housing
Family	CFSA involvement
Health	Addictions, health care
Justice	Police, probation, legal aid, courts, incarceration
Community Services	Child care, counselling Reduction in shelter use

Figure 2: WTPT Investment and Social Value

Investor (Funds)	Pilot Total	Total Per Year
NPCPC	\$1,294,413	\$472,990
SCIF	\$ 873,460	\$315,327
<i>Total Investment</i>		\$788,317
Total social value created (year 2):		\$4,568,419

Value of Annual Investment

Phase I of WTPT lasted 3 years, with the first year devoted to project development activities. The SROI ratio, therefore, is based on the 2-year intervention period. With the funding extension (Phase II), the project will continue for at least another year and the SROI ratio will be extended upon its completion.

The SROI ratio indicates that in the course of 2 years, the overall social value of investment in WTPT is **\$5.42** for every dollar invested. This is the composite of 2 years of value creation, including **\$5.05** in social value created in year 1 and **\$5.80** created in year 2.

It should be noted that the ratio presented through this SROI analysis is a conservative estimate of the overall social value created by WTPT. Due to the inability to monetize many intangible outcomes (e.g. increased sense of safety, increased self-esteem, improved nutrition and overall health, etc.), and due to the application of different discounts (e.g. attribution to account for the amount of change potentially attributable to others), the social value presented here is only part of the total social value created through investment in WTPT. The SROI ratio is also limited as it does not account for value realized long-term to all project participants.

Looking Forward

WTPT is an important, valuable long-term investment in support of Alberta’s Aboriginal communities. This innovative, targeted crime-prevention approach has had powerful outcomes in a relatively short period of time.

The longer the project has to work with participants, the higher the potential for long term and far-reaching improvements. The SROI is simply going to increase over time as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Children deserve to be children. Holistic WTPT interventions “do whatever it takes” for children living on -reserve to be proud of their heritage, to grow in more stable environments, and to safely engage in childhoods free from family violence.

Figure 3: Value Over Time

