

Recreation and Leisure

How do City services touch women's lives?

Women who live in Toronto are affected daily by the decisions made by the City. This includes sorting and taking out the garbage, walking with their children in the park, riding the bus to work, accessing essential services like transit, community centres, housing, and much more.

In 2010 the TWCA released a research report on women's experiences of City services.

Recreation is vital to the health and well-being of women, especially those who experience isolation due to poverty, immigration, cultural or language barriers. Recreational activities bring women together and provide a space to connect, engage and create dynamic and inclusive communities. For some women, especially those on limited incomes and older women, the cost of attending cultural activities is prohibitive. Others cannot access recreational or cultural activities due to lack of transport or lack of child care. In some cases, recreational programs may rely on assumptions about program participants which limit their interest and participation.

Affordability

"How can we afford to go to the museums and galleries and things like that. ... You know when you're worried about your next meal." - Young, racialized single mother

In the 2011 Operating Budget, Toronto City Council voted on the elimination of free adult programming at Toronto's Priority Centres. Priority Centres are recreational centres that the City has designated as important for the multiple benefits they provide to the communities they serve. These Priority Centres are often located in low-income communities.

The City's decision to eliminate free adult programming will affect over 9,000 residents. City staff estimates that 20% of program registrants will drop out due to the introduction of user fees.

Women told TWCA that recreational programs are critical to their well-being. TWCA is opposed to the charging of fees for women in low-income communities. Loss of recreational programmes will have a devastating effect on women's stress levels and overall health. It will increase their isolation and thus have an effect on the well-being of the family as well.

Appropriate

"I would like parks and rec to have a little more sensitivity to the fact that not every senior wants to play bingo and sign songs from WW1. The program is so patronizing." – Senior woman

Women's experiences and backgrounds differ widely and as such, recreational programming must be responsive to the interests and priorities of

different groups of women. Many newcomer women we spoke with also reported that recreational programming was not culturally appropriate and they did not feel comfortable attending. Many of the open court basketball and hockey programs are dominated by young men and the young women we spoke with reported that they needed more sports and fitness programming available to them.

Women want:

- The reinstatement of free programmes in Toronto's Priority Centres.
- Programming that is culturally-sensitive and appropriate for the needs of diverse girls and women of Toronto.
- Programming with flexible and extended services and hours.
- Programming for senior women and men that is developed in consultation with them.
- Washroom facilities and shelter in the parks maintained throughout the year so people can spend time outdoors.

TORONTO WOMEN'S CITY ALLIANCE

Making Equality Matter...

TWCA calls for the establishment of a Toronto Women's Equalities Office that could spearhead the development of an action plan for equality for women in all their diversity. This office could monitor city services, create recommendations to end the systemic discrimination against women, prepare a Report Card and connect with and provide support to organizations working with women across the City.

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For the complete research report, go to:
http://www.twca.ca/TWCA-publications/uploads/TWCA_June_2010a.pdf