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Executive Summary

The *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Processes Project* Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Team brought together women from many walks of life and many different backgrounds to find out in what ways women participate in municipal processes, what barriers exist to their participation, and more importantly, to build partnerships to begin overcoming these barriers.

A brief overview of HRM was compiled, and focus groups were held with a diversity of women, that is, women from different cultural and economic backgrounds and spanning a wide age range.

The research confirmed that there is wide variety in women's participation in municipal processes, from no participation at all, to being a City Councillor. Most of the women interviewed believe that it is important for themselves and all women to be involved at all levels in city affairs. A variety of views were expressed, including that women understand family issues, women have a collaborative style of working, and that society needs female leadership role models.

The research also confirmed that women feel that they are not sufficiently informed about municipal affairs and processes, and they need more information. They also feel powerless and do not believe their voices are heard. Their lack of confidence in the face of the formality of City Hall was also an identified barrier to women's participation. Women also face logistical barriers to participation including lack of child care and inadequate public transportation. To overcome these barriers, women suggested that partnerships be formed to work on solutions which include finding ways to increase women's self-confidence, learn about HRM processes, and educating HRM staff and councillors about what women need.

To build partnerships and discuss what steps can be taken, a workshop with 60 participants was held at City Hall on Wednesday, March 10, 2004. The participants agreed that if the Municipality were to provide training, and/or financial support for the training, for women who are interested, more women would be involved in municipal politics. They also believe that a Status of Women office at the municipal level is warranted. The participants also want the opportunity to get together to discuss ways they can participate more fully. They would also like to see a strategy to educate women about municipal processes and encourage women to participate.

Introduction

In the fall of 2003, The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) began a one-year research project to strengthen women's involvement in municipal public participation processes. The *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Processes Project* was funded by Status of Women Canada and includes five main strategies:

- Building and strengthening partnerships
- Surveying the “state of the art” of gender-inclusive participatory practices at the municipal level
- Participatory action research in six Canadian communities
- Developing national action plans
- The creation of a “Tool Kit” of gender inclusive public participation tools for municipal governments and women's groups

The purpose of the project was to contribute to changing municipal consultation practices and policies so that the full diversity of Canadian women has a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect their daily lives. The specific objectives were to:

- Equip municipal governments with information, tools and strategies that will assist them to develop and implement public participation processes that involve the diversity of women in their communities
- Make recommendations, to FCM and to participating local municipalities, for action to strengthen women's involvement in public participation processes
- Develop national and local partnerships that will strengthen the capacity of municipal governments to involve women, and the capacity of women's organizations to participate in municipal consultation and decision-making processes

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities hired a national coordinator for the project, and distributed a call for submissions across Canada for organizations to undertake research on their behalf. Six organizations were selected to become part of the national *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Processes project*: City of Saskatoon, Cowichan Valley Safer Futures, Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre, Thunder Bay, Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council, Iqaluit, Women's Y of Montreal, YWCA of HRM.

The YWCA hired Barbara Cottrell of Meta Research and Communications as FCM/YWCA HRM Site Project Coordinator.

Methodology

Purpose of the Project

The overall goal of the project was to find out to in what ways women participate in municipal processes, what barriers exist to their participation, and more importantly, to provide an opportunity for women from a variety of communities to identify with other individuals with similar experiences, to build partnerships to begin overcoming the barriers participants experience, and to identify ways to increase women's participation.

Team Development

A project Advisory Committee was formed and consisted of 19 women, including the Project Manager and the Executive Director of the YWCA of Halifax. The members provided feedback throughout the process by means of regular face-to-face meetings, electronic mail and telephone calls. In addition, members provided their expertise in data collection methods, data analysis and report writing.

Instrument Development

The Committee discussed the possibility of conducting a survey and/or holding focus groups. It was concluded that the information gathered in a survey would not be representative and therefore not useful, whereas focus groups with a variety of women from different communities in Halifax would allow for a more indepth exploration and would be in keeping with our goal of forming partnerships. A guide for use in the focus group discussions was developed in consultation with members of the Advisory Committee.

Sampling

Sampling was designed by Advisory Committee members. Originally the Committee suggested that groups be held with women who live on low incomes, African Nova Scotian women, Mi'kmaq women, immigrant women, women who are community leaders, students, and youth. Unfortunately, in spite of many attempts, we were unable to identify a Mi'kmaq woman who was willing to serve on the Committee, and a focus group with Mi'kmaq women was not held.

Recruitment

It was agreed that recruitment would be more successful if it were conducted by members of the different communities, or people who are known to the women.

Process

A total of seven focus group discussions were conducted in Halifax with diverse groups of women. The groups were organized by people known to the participants and held in locations the women were familiar with. Jeannine McNeil, the Director of Stepping Stone brought together a group of women who are living on low incomes who regularly visit the centre; Joan Mendes, Coordinator of the North End Parent Resource Centre, and Linda Carvery, Advisory Committee Member, brought together a group of African Nova Scotian women who are active at the Parent Resource Centre; Layla Abdel-Wahed, a student at Dalhousie University; brought together

students who knew and trusted her; Maria Ramos, Cross-Cultural and Speakers' Bureau Program Coordinator brought together women who use the services of the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association; and Mary Beth Gillis, YWCA Youth Development Coordinator, held focus groups with youth who belong to YWCA youth groups.

Demographics

The women who participated in focus group discussions for the project represented a diverse group of 60 who live in Halifax Regional Municipality. They ranged in age from 14 to over 66. Participants also represented a variety of ethno-cultural groups, including African Canadians, Mi'kmaq and Cree, and new Canadians.

What Exists in Halifax Regional Municipality?

This section of the report begins with a brief overview of municipal government in Nova Scotia and outlines details about HRM, including tables detailing the composition of HRM which can be found at the end of this section. A description of the Regional Council, the roles and responsibilities of Council and senior staff; details about Community Councils, and an outline of the opportunities for public input, information about Boards and Committees, and a copy of the advertisement and application form for applying to serve, are also included.

Municipal Government

Municipal Government is the form of government closest to the people. The main function of local government is to establish policy according to the powers and responsibilities delegated by provincial legislation. HRM derives its powers and responsibilities from the *Municipal Government Act* (enacted in 1999). The powers entrusted to municipalities by statute may be changed through the legislative process (Provincial Government). Council makes the policies while the administration implements those policies through Council's direction. There are 55 municipal units in Nova Scotia.

As a result of Provincial Statute in 1995 (*Halifax Regional Municipality Act*), the former municipal units of the City of *Halifax Regional Municipality*, the City of Dartmouth, Town of Bedford and the Halifax County Municipality were amalgamated to form the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). On December 2nd, 1995, the HRM Council, consisting of 23 Councillors and a Mayor, was elected for five years. In 2000, following the enactment of the *Municipal Government Act*, a second HRM election was conducted. The current Council is in place until October 16th, 2004, the date of the next municipal election. Elections are conducted in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act*. Presently, the matter of HRM district boundary distribution is before the Utility and Review Board (UARB). Following public consultation by UARB, a decision will be made late 2003 or early 2004 to determine district distribution for the 2004 election.

Diversity in the Municipality

Halifax Regional Municipality is both urban and rural. The municipality does not have any written policies regarding public participation and no training is available on gender analysis for elected officials or HRM staff. A diversity advisory committee and employment equity program are in place. No statistics are kept on women's attendance at public consultations.

Halifax Regional Municipality Council

Regional Council meets in regular session every Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber in City Hall. Those meetings are all open to the public. All by-laws, including land use by-laws, municipal planning strategy and zoning changes, are subject, following advertising, to a public hearing. Members of the public are invited to present to Council, stating their views on by-laws so advertised, prior to final approval by Council. The public may present on matters under Council's jurisdiction by applying to the Municipal Clerk stating the essence of the presentation. Two presentations are permitted per meeting, with two presenters per presentation - five minutes per presenter.

Additionally, Council meets in Committee of the Whole as necessary (usually once or twice monthly on Tuesday afternoons) to informally discuss matters with staff on such issues as snow removal, signage, zoning, regional planning, etc.

Council may meet In Camera to discuss those matters it is authorized to discuss in private under the Municipal Government Act - matters such as personnel, contract negotiations, public safety, property matters, solicitor-client privileges. Any decisions made In Camera must be ratified by motion at the public Council session with the exception of directions to staff as to how it wishes staff to proceed with matters.

As of February 6, 2004, there are 23 Councillors and a Mayor on HRM Regional Council: six women and 18 men.

Roles and Responsibilities of Council:

- Articulates vision, sets goals and objectives
- Through leadership, establishes priorities and direction of the municipality
- Approves budgeted allocations and sets tax rate
- Adopts by-laws, resolutions and policies
- Evaluates Senior Management
- Ensures that residents are provided with an appropriate level of service

Roles and Responsibilities of Senior Staff:

- Understands and appreciates the democratic process
- Effectively manages the administration through best practices
- Provides resource and advice to Council
- Implements and administers approved policies of Council
- Informs Council of possible options, alternatives and implications
- Provides leadership to staff and ensures staff development
- Manages approved budgets

Community Councils

HRM is divided into six regions, each of which has their own Community Council:
Marine Drive Valley & Canal - Districts 1, 2 and 3

Harbour East Community Council - Districts 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Peninsula Community Council - Districts 11, 12, 13,14

Chebucto Community Council - Districts 15,16,17,18

North West Community Council - Districts 19,20,21

Western Region Community Council - Districts 18 22,23

The Municipal Government Act provides for Community Councils as a form of governance to addresses matters such as the monitoring of services to the community under their jurisdiction, establishing advisory committees, approving development agreements and variances, recommending appropriate by-laws, regulations and development standards to Regional Council. Community Councils provide citizens with opportunities to participate in the process. There are three main vehicles for this:

Public Hearings

Public hearings on issues such as rezoning and new developments, are advertised in the local media in advance of the hearing. Citizens who wish to address Community Council on the issue may do so at the Public Hearing. Each speaker may only speak once and is allotted a maximum of five minutes to state his/her views or make comment before Community Council. The time period is to accommodate as many citizens as possible to address the Councillors during the Public Hearing.

Presentations

Citizens may state their views or comments to Community Council during the "Presentations" segment of the meeting. Those wanting to make a presentation to Community Council are asked to notify the Municipal Clerk's Office by email: clerks@halifax.ca or in writing, in advance (P.O. Box 1749, Halifax Regional Municipality , N.S. B3J 3A5) and if appropriate, a date for the presentation will be set and the presenter(s) will be notified. Each presenter will be allotted a maximum of five minutes to make their presentation to Community Council.

Public Participation Period

Time is usually allotted at the end of each regular or special meeting of Community Council to afford citizens the opportunity to pose questions to Councillors, through the Chair. The questions are kept brief and whenever possible, directed to a specific Councillor(s). Should a member of the public wish to pursue a matter in greater detail than the Public Participation period will allow, they may discuss their issue or offer comment to the Chair or a Councillor(s) after adjournment.

Community Councils usually meet monthly as per approved schedules. The Community Council Meeting Schedule can be found online at: <http://www.region.halifax.ns.ca/Commcoun/Notices/cc2004Schedule.pdf>

Boards and Committees

All board and committee meetings are open to the public. As with Council, boards and committees may meet In Camera as authorized under the Municipal Government Act. Prior to proceeding with zoning changes and large developments, planning staff presents information to the community affected in the form of a public information meeting, where citizens are invited to give input.

Recruitment of Membership on Boards and Committees

There are 124 men on municipal advisory committees and 61 women. 20 of the women are from diverse groups and two women chair committees. A public process is in place to appoint committee members.

Each year, in September, HRM undertakes a recruitment process to fill vacancies on its boards and committees. An ad is placed in the newspaper identifying vacancies and outlining the process (see below). Applications are available through the Clerk's Office and on HRM's website.

Once applications are received, the Membership Selection Committee, consisting of the Mayor as Chair and a representative of each Community Council, reviews the applications for Regional Council's boards and committees, and makes recommendations to Regional Council.

At the end of this section is a sample of the advertisement that appears in the paper in September and other times of the year in the event there are a number of vacancies on boards and where there are no applications on file.

Citizen appointments on advisory boards to Community Council are made by the respective Community Council.

Membership Composition on Boards/Committees of Council and Community Councils

The following represents citizen appointments (through Council and Community Council) on boards and committees and the gender distribution on boards and committees of Council and Community Councils. It does not include boards and committees consisting of only Councillors, or boards and committees comprised of members of the public who sit on boards/committees as representatives of various organizations. It should be noted that the numbers change as vacancies are created and new appointments are made.

Citizen Membership on Boards/Committees/Commissions, as of Feb 6, 2004

Citizens on Boards/committees of Council (23 committees)	81 Men	44 Women
Citizens on Community Council Boards/committees (10 committees)	43 Men	17 Women
Total	124 Men	61 Women

The gender composition on boards and committees changes as appointments are made.

Advertisements are placed in the local newspaper and state that, whenever possible, appointments will reflect the diversity of the community, and that members of racially visible groups, women, persons with disabilities, aboriginal persons, and all other citizens are encouraged to apply. The application form invites applicants to identify by check mark if they are Aboriginal, Black, a woman, racially visible or a person with a disability. The form states that by voluntarily providing the information, the applicant will assist in the selection process.

There are no formal policies relating to women's participation on boards and committees other than the fact that the Membership Selection Committees attempts to ensure there is representation on boards and committees reflective of HRM's diverse community.

Safety Plans

HRM does not have a women's safety plan in place, nor does it partner with any organizations to deal with women's issues.

What women told us: Focus Groups Report

To find out in what ways women participate in HRM, and what barriers to their participation they perceive, focus groups with participants recruited through community-based organizations were held. The focus group was designed to allow for discussion and information sharing between participants. The facilitator provided a brief overview of the project and reviewed the purpose of the project, explained what information would be collected and that the information would be used for the FCM project.

The following questions were asked:

- What experiences have you had with municipal government? (Have you ever met a Councilor, voted, attended an HRM Council session or a consultation, lobbied, been a member of an Halifax Regional Municipality Board or Committee, run for office?)
- How would women benefit in their community if they could participate? How would municipalities benefit if women were more involved in municipal processes?
- What makes it difficult for women to participate in municipal processes? What would help increase women's participation?

All focus group participants, targeted community organizations, the Mayor and Councillors of the Halifax Regional Municipality, were invited to attend a meeting on March 10 at HRM City Hall to receive the research findings. The meeting was also designed to solicit feedback from the community on creating an action plan for increasing women's participation in municipal government.

THE FOCUS GROUPS

Seven focus groups were held with diverse groups of women, including African Nova Scotian women, women living on low incomes, immigrant women, women who are community leaders, university students, and youth. They took place at the North End Parent Resource Centre, Stepping Stone, the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA), Dalhousie University, and the YWCA (three groups.) The groups with African Nova Scotian women, women living on low incomes, and immigrant women were facilitated by the FCM/YWCA HRM Site Project Coordinator. The women who are community leaders group was facilitated by YWCA Executive Director of Programs and Development, Tanis Crosby. The Dalhousie University group was facilitated by Layla Abdel-Wahed; and the youth group was facilitated by Mary Beth Gillis, YWCA Youth Development Coordinator. All participants signed a consent form and filled out the demographic questionnaire.

Nine African Nova Scotian women participated, seven women living on low incomes, eighteen immigrant women, eleven women who are community leaders, six university students, and nineteen youth.

In all the focus groups, there was a lively exchange of information and discussion of all questions, and in some much laughter. In all of the focus groups the facilitator delivered the research questions, noting participant

responses on flipchart paper. The focus groups ended with a brief discussion of recommendations for municipal government action and comments about the focus group.

The participants said they enjoyed being part of the focus group and found the discussion 'interesting'. They appreciated the opportunity to get together with other women to talk about the issues. One Stepping Stone participant said she "liked being here and talking about our problems and why we don't participate." The women, who work on the streets of HRM or have worked in the past as sex-trade workers, thanked the facilitator for "showing an interest" in them and added, "Maybe if we keep talking like this, something will happen." Another participant ended by saying, "I'd like to run for City Council and I hope I do it!"

The MISA participants emigrated to Canada from Afghanistan, Argentina, China, Colombia, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iran, Mexico, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. One woman did not speak English and her words were simultaneously translated. These participants felt the topic was important and worth the time they took to discuss the issue. They also said they enjoyed the focus group.

FOCUS GROUPS SUMMARY

The participants' experiences with municipal government

Most of the women in the African Nova Scotian (ANS) focus group reported that they had voted in municipal elections. One of the participants had twice canvassed for candidates and another had attended a meeting because it focused on one of her areas of interest. A number of the women had attended a demonstration against closing a local school. None of the women had ever personally met a councillor but some had seen councillors at the rally. One woman stated that she had never been interested in local politics, but as she gets older her interest has increased. The women agreed that they get involved in issues that affect their lives, such as school closings and inadequate day care. They also agreed that the community needed to be more involved and most of the women stated that they would like to participate more fully.

The women who participated in the Stepping Stone and MISA focus groups made very little distinction between municipal and other forms of government. Five of the seven women at Stepping Stone had voted in municipal elections. One woman had met the Federal Minister of Health and one woman had worked for the NDP in the last provincial election. Four of the women had met their City Councillor.

The MISA participants had not participated in any HRM government processes, but most were very interested in becoming involved. One participant said she is very interested in political issues. Three had extensive experience working with government. One worked for three years with the President of the Green Party in Germany and another was involved in a government leadership program that promoted self-esteem and participation for women in Guatemala. One had been an activist in Colombia, encouraging women to participate politically.

Although she had not participated in the government, one participant said that she knew it was her duty to vote as soon as she is eligible. Another said she hadn't been involved here because she doesn't know anything about it, including how to vote. One woman remarked that although she is very active in her ethnic community in Halifax, she has had no contact at all with the municipal government.

Most of the expressed concerns of the participants were related to their experiences with political work both in their home countries and in Canada. They talked of the difficulties of getting involved in their countries of origin.

“In Iran I didn't believe in the system and wouldn't get involved in it. I very much want to be involved here.”

“In Afghanistan, under the Taliban, I did not have the freedom to participate, but here I have the freedom and I want to get involved.”

Most of the Dalhousie students had been in contact with the municipalities in their home towns. One had met her councillor during door-to-door canvassing and one had met the mayor. Other participants noted being involved in a school project about the municipality and working as city events planner with the municipality for two summers. Two of the students had participated in HRM. One had attended HRM council meetings. Another participant said that she had asked to be put on her councillor's mailing list so that she could be kept informed, she has called her councillor about a noise issue, and also used the city as a resource for information on tenancy agreements.

Some of the participants in the youth group had met HRM councillors, one as a friend of the family, another as a senior youth leader.

The women who are community leaders had the most experience with City affairs. All of the women had voted in municipal elections, and their contact included:

- Lobbying in person and by phone on behalf of local NGOs, environmental and heritage groups
- Lobbying in person and by phone about city development and traffic issues
- Watching council meetings on television
- Attending consultations
- Talking to politicians at social gatherings
- Paid work for the Municipality
- Meeting with councillors through volunteer, professional and political work
- Studying the municipal planning process

Why women's participation is valuable

Women walk in women's shoes. They know what women go through, and know what's needed to help them.

(MISA Focus Group Participant)

The ANS and Dalhousie participants both agreed that men look at issues differently from women, and that men are not as concerned as women about 'women's issues' such as schools and day care, recycling programs, green space, environmental issues and dumping sites, and women have a different perspective on issues such as the needs of families. One of the Dalhousie students felt some programs that are run by women might be saved, such as arts programs, programs for the homeless, and community activities. Another said that women have more awareness of what takes place in communities and women would give, "A more representative view of the community in general, more balanced issues, not just business interests." One student felt that women's participation leads to "improved relations between government and women leading to perhaps policies sensitive to women's unique needs."

The Stepping Stone focus group participants concluded that the more women involved, the better, because: "Women don't have a voice in city affairs. We need someone who will voice our concerns, especially about housing and daycare and transportation. We don't have cars and you can forget about trying to get a bus. A woman would be more likely to understand and to help us." The participants also agreed that they feel more comfortable talking to women than to men. One of the Dalhousie students stated that politics are male dominated and this deters women from participating. Another agreed that this alienates "a large group of the population."

The MISA group echoed these sentiments. They believe that social and economic issues affect women more than men, and women, especially women with education, understand women's issues better and can make better choices for other women and help change laws that are not suitable. The participants believe that women should be involved and should be elected to office, because women know what women need and can speak out for all women, especially about decisions that affect women, children, and families. As one woman said, "Women understand women's issues and they need to be informed about what they should do to fix things." They agreed that women have to be more active if they are to make changes.

The youth participants also felt their participation was important and that it was important that the voice of youth is heard. They stated that they should be involved because it is their community, and they are directly affected by the decisions made in City Council. They felt they should educate themselves about HRM because it affects not only their present, but also their future. One youth stated that she felt it is "hard to complain if you haven't participated." Others stated that most HRM positions are held by men who promote men's issues. They believe women's participation is essential because women councillors are more likely to promote issues faced by young women.

Some youth believe that it shouldn't matter if the councillors are men or women, that the most qualified people should have the job. Others felt that women's "voices are not expressed" because there is not representation of women in political roles, and so it is important that representation is ensured. One young woman said that she felt there should be "a forum" for women, especially young women, to voice their opinions. One youth stated that women need to be educated about their right to have a voice, and another said it is important that women "stand up for their rights." They feel that youth are "disconnected" from an "unapproachable" council because there is no opportunity for youth's voice to be heard. They want a "committee or youth-friendly council."

Women more collaborative

The women in leadership positions believe that women are more collaborative than men, and that women's understanding of social connectivity would benefit the planning process as women tend to look at things holistically and are more concerned about how projects will affect overall community. They also feel that women think long term, rather than focus on immediate outcomes, that women are concerned with how policies will affect the entire community rather than how much money the municipality can make, and that women tend to consider details.

Role models

"When we participate we're role models. They see us doing something other than raising kids. Raising kids is important work, but we are much more than just that."

(ANS Focus Group Participant)

The African Nova Scotian (ANS) participants believe that when they participate, they talk about their participation at home and as a result, their children hear about politics and are better informed: "The more we learn about politics, the more we pass on to our children." Only one woman said that politics was discussed within her family, and she was the one who had attended a political meeting. In addition, when women are involved, their children learn that women are more than mothers. One woman said, "Girls see that women can grow up to be involved and important. We expose our children to other things in the world." When ANS women are involved, their children have good ANS role models: "It's important for our Black children to see us participating."

MISA participants felt that men are still seen as the head of the family and as political leaders, and some people don't think women are as capable as men where politics is concerned. They agreed that this is false, that women are as important as men in society and are as able as men to think about social policy. In order to "stand up for themselves", women need to understand their rights, and men's thinking about this also needs to change. For some immigrant women their own communities present an especially difficult barrier. One woman said, "Ours are patriarchal societies, we have to do what our fathers and husbands say. The men don't like it when we get involved in politics, and our mothers-in-law scold us because of how it looks in the community."

The Dalhousie participants and women in leadership positions echoed these thoughts. They said that the increased participation of women generates new or more career opportunities for women, and more female role models for women to look up to and emulate. They also believe that it increases the appreciation of women at large for women's input in communities and hard work in general, and an increased representation of female leaders of the community leads to women's hard work being validated. The youth also believe that women in politics offer role models to youth, that if more women are elected having women in politics will begin to be seen as 'normal'. They also think more young women would vote if women were more visible in politics.

Involvement can make change

The ANS participants said that many things the city has responsibility for affect their lives and their families personally. They felt that they would benefit if they were more involved because they could change things. The city would know more about their community's problems and get more ideas and solutions to deal with them. One woman said, "Many 'yuppies' have moved into the area and because they know how to approach the city, they get to change things, and the changes don't improve things for us and our children. For instance, they took the area where our kids used to play baseball and they made it into a community garden. Where can our kids play now? No one's paying attention to the long-term needs of this community. But the politicians know the yuppies vote and the yuppies aren't intimidated by the politicians, so they get what they want at our kids' expense. We need to get out there and vote, and learn how not to be intimidated so that the politicians listen to us instead."

The women who are community leaders agreed that women's participation can effect greater change. It can empower more women to participate, help create a sense of community and improve the quality of life for all Haligonians. They also felt that councillors need women's input to make decisions.

The barriers to women's participation

Unheard voices

“We feel powerless. Why bother when they won't listen?”
(ANS Focus Group Participant)

One of the major barriers to women's participation that was identified is the sense that their voices are unheard. The ANS participants believe there is poor voter turn-out in their neighborhood because nothing ever results from their participation, that city leaders do not care about the community, and “never do anything for us”. As one woman put it, “The politicians pay attention to where the people vote. They know we don't vote, so they don't take any interest in us. We need to see results.” One participant said that she and a group of women gathered to fill out an application to be on a municipal committee, but “we didn't even get a response.” They believe that “they know who they want on their committees and boards, and it's not us. They're looking for people with money and connections. They probably always have the same people.”

The Stepping Stone participants echoed these views. They felt that politicians are only interested in bringing in tax dollars and in people who can bring in money. They're not interested in people “like us” who have no money. One woman said, “We feel they don't care about us. For instance, to us it looks like they've closed a plant because there was asbestos in it, now they want us to put our children in daycare there. If we thought they really cared, we might be more involved.” Another woman said she would never get involved because “they don't want me. They wouldn't let me in. They dismiss us as hookers and junkies. If we tried to come forward, they'd bring up what we do, or things from our past. We're disposable people to them, not citizens. Anything we say is just the railing of some junkie hooker.”

A number of the participants in the Stepping Stone focus group believe that, while women politicians are more likely to hear them, eventually, “They stop listening to us.” They feel that when women first take office, they listen and are available to them and try to help, but after a while they realize they have to try to fit in with the other politicians and they can't be seen as favouring women and only being interested in women's issues.

The women at Stepping Stone also felt that they would be more involved if the politicians were more available to them: “We try to get in touch with them, but all we get is message machines. They don't answer our calls because they know it's just us and we're not worth listening to. To talk to them we have to be able to find them.” They say it is difficult for them to have anything to do with City Hall because the politicians are not interested in the women's issues: “They don't support our community in ways we need them to. Like, thank God for Stepping Stone and the Food Bank. I'd don't know how we'd survive without them. But the city doesn't help out much at all. We never see them here.”

Immigrant women also felt that not seeing any changes as a result of what they say makes them feel there is no point in taking part. They want to be informed about what impact their input has. One of the MISA participants believes that the number of people who vote in Canada is so small because people think they can't make any difference.

"Immigrants feel so lucky to be in Canada, they don't want to be seen as complaining." One woman said, "I need to hear that my opinion is welcome, that the government wants to hear from me." However, some immigrants face a language barrier that makes it difficult to participate.

The women who are community leaders felt that some citizens are complacent, or feel that "it's a done deal" and they cannot make a difference.

Lack of confidence

"Women don't believe they can do it. We need to encourage women so they can see they can do it."

(MISA Focus Group Participant)

One of the Professional women thought that televising council meetings may deter women from participating.

MISA participants felt that women need to overcome their own cultural thinking. As one participant said, "We don't get involved because traditionally the women look after the family and children and politics have been part of the man's role in the family. We think the men will take care of it and leave it to them without thinking about it. But things are changing. More women are going out to work now and getting more involved in helping support their families. We need to get more involved in this too." Another agreed: "If we try, we can fly! We need to get up the courage to do this."

The formality of City Hall

"The meetings are so formal it makes me feel uncomfortable."

(ANS Focus Group Participant)

The formality of City Hall and municipal meetings was an issue for all groups. As one participant in the ANS group said, "The process is stiff and formal. The way it works, it is presented, makes it feel very distant from us, like it's out of our league." One woman had attended an FCM conference and said, "It wasn't grass roots or community-based at all. It had a distant feeling to it and I felt very out of place." One of the Professional participants said the many women feel unable to participate because the implicit and explicit hierarchy limits inclusion and the environment is intimidating. Another put it this way: "There is a foolish sense of self importance about the process."

Lack of information

“We don’t know how the system works. It’s mind boggling to me.”
(ANS Focus Group Participant)

The ANS participants and the Dalhousie students felt that they do not know enough about the municipality, about how it is governed, what the municipality is responsible for, or when meetings are taking place. One woman said that she heard that meetings are advertised on the CBC but did not think that was a good way to get the message out. The participants said that they did not know they could “just call your councillor” and did not know how to get in touch with councillors. They also expressed a desire to know where to go to be educated about city government.

The Stepping Stone participants agreed that they do not have sufficient education about municipal government. One participant had learned a lot about provincial politics working in the last provincial election. Another participant said that when they complain they are told that a meeting was held but no one came. She added, “How would we know about their meetings? We’d go if we knew about them.” One participant said that notices about meetings are posted in the library but until she can afford to pay her library fine, she can’t go into the library.

Lack of information was also an issue for the MISA group. A number said they wanted to get involved, but didn’t know where to find out information about the political process in HRM. They stated that women don’t realize they are affected by all social and economic policies and efforts are needed to make sure women know they can get involved and have some influence on things that affect their lives. They agreed that many immigrants, including themselves, come from countries where politics are corrupt. They come to Canada because they want to live in a “real democracy” and therefore they should be encouraged to be involved.

The Dalhousie students agreed they had insufficient information about what women can offer, and about events, elections and who officials are. One student said, “Women don’t know how to get started or how to approach increased participation. What can I do?”

Logistical problems

“I have five children. How can I get involved?”
(ANS Focus Group Participant)

Child care was also an issue for the ANS focus group participants. One woman said she needed a babysitter but couldn’t afford one. The single parents in the group agreed that it is difficult for them “to get out of the house” and one participant added, “When you’re a single-parent you’re concerned about survival and politics is the last thing on your mind.” The women who are community leaders agreed that child care is an issue for many women.

Both the Dalhousie students and the women who are community leaders felt that women do not participate because of transportation and traffic

problems, and other responsibilities such as family and/or children. They and ANS women all agreed that lack of time is a barrier to participation.

Lack of faith in politicians

Not believing the politicians' promises was one barrier to involvement for the Stepping Stone participants. One participant said, "It's like they say anything to get in to office then they ignore us. Someone should go over their promises and see which ones they kept and which ones they didn't, and then tell us about it."

Politicians are perceived by the Stepping Stone participants as "nasty and sarcastic and don't give a damn." They feel it is difficult to talk to politicians, and one participant gave an example of the fact that the women are cooperative if they are approached with respect: "The school knows we use their parking lot at night and they wanted us to clean up after ourselves so the kids didn't find condoms. They were really nice about it. They didn't try to stop us going there, they accept us. Of course we're willing to work with them. I wish the city people could be nicer so we could all get along."

They feel that politicians can't connect with them and have no idea what their lives are like. One participant said, "They're outsiders. They don't know about us and our community." Another said, "They live in big houses and have cars and never have to worry about not having enough to eat or feed their kids, or worry about bills, or worry about how they're going to get from one place to another."

One of the participants in the MISA group felt that people in power are seen as arrogant, and that women in power need to promote a different image, one that will encourage others to get involved.

One Dalhousie participant also said that the "intimidating feel of municipal and other government processes" is a barrier. The students expressed a lack of confidence that women's ideas or opinions are valid, or that change is possible with more participation.

Solutions

Summary

In summary, focus group participants want:

- to belong to women's groups that deal with the issues;
- increased self-confidence so they can be involved;
- to respect the municipal political process and to have faith in politicians;
- to be involved in the process. To do this, they need education about municipal affairs, about how they can participate, and they need information about meetings that are taking place;
- their voices heard and their opinion valued. They want to see evidence that their input is taken into account, that their participation does make a difference;
- access to politicians and the political process, and a process that is more comfortable for them;
- help overcoming child care and transportation barriers so that they can participate.

They had many suggestions for what they themselves could do, and what the municipality could do to achieve this.

Forming groups

“We need to come together.”

(ANS Focus Group Participant)

The ANS participants agreed that if they were to form a group, they may be listened to. As one woman said, “We have a big problem with pit bulls in this area. They terrorize the kids and attack the other dogs and cats. The dogs are gone by the time the police get here, so we don't bother to call them. The police are too scared to do anything anyway. The housing authority should ban pit bulls, but they won't. We're afraid to take any action because we're afraid the people we report will come after us. We're totally intimidated and feel helpless. But, if we got together as a group, we could take some action. No one would come after us if the snitch was a group of us.” The ANS women felt that a group would attract women and draw them into the discussion. “We need to discuss these issues and what we can do to get involved.” The MISA group also agreed that women need to get together to offer each other support. As one participant said, “We can't leave it to men to train us. We need to increase the solidarity between women.”

Confidence

One ANS woman suggested that the women need to attend the meetings, sit in the front seats, introduce themselves to strangers, and not be intimidated.

Outreach

In order for ANS women to participate, they believe that City Hall should show an interest in them, make them feel invited and welcome, and make sure they are informed about meetings, committees and boards. To do this, they suggest that the city advertise meetings where the women are, such as

the Parent Resource Centre, the library and the community YMCA. Local children could be paid to distribute fliers. This would please the children, and it would give the children an opportunity to learn about municipal affairs. Fliers could also be distributed through the schools and notices placed in church and school newsletters. Announcements could be made in churches. The City could also personally telephone people and send emails. The City could also do more to inform them about what the City does and how people can be involved. They should also make sure the meeting agendas address the issues the women are concerned about, and relate to the women's lives.

Stepping Stone participants agreed that more outreach is needed: "They should come to us. They should visit Stepping Stone and hold community meetings. They want to be better informed more about what the City is doing, they want meetings to be more open, and better advertised, "so we would know about them, and know how we can be involved. They could put information in with our welfare cheques."

A Dalhousie participant echoed this, saying the onus is on councillors "to reach out to women by distributing newsletters, letters, and invitations to raise awareness and target women so as to encourage more participation."

"City Councillors need to get out more and see what is happening in the community. If they got to know us, and found out how we struggle to live, they might be more helpful."

(Stepping Stone Focus Group Participant)

The MISA participants also suggested more education and outreach so that women could be informed and encouraged to vote. They would like to see a series of public talks and/or workshops on how government is run, and why and how women can participate. They believe this could, "Provide a positive welcome for immigrants so they do not feel they are complaining." They also suggested that women in positions of power could "get out there with the grass roots people" and encourage other women to get involved. A Dalhousie participant suggested that a time and/or venue be allocated where women are encouraged to voice opinions and pose questions.

The Stepping Stone participants felt that HRM needs to pay more attention to the "little people" and less attention to wealthy people. They need to have programs so poor people can afford to buy their houses. If there were programs to help them, the women would be more involved: "The programs they have are out of our reach, so right now, the houses around here are being bought up by people from outside the community. These people, including the City Councillor, move in and want to change our community. They know when they come here that we work the streets, and there's a needle exchange program, but as soon as they move in they want us to work somewhere else and want to close the needle exchange program. That's not right." They felt that City Councillors should have to live on welfare for one month, or even two, then they'd have some idea what it's like and why the women live the way we do. One woman added, "If they gave us vouchers to buy our kids presents at Christmas, we'd think they

cared.” They want councillors to be more sincere, more welcoming, and more respectful.

They also wanted more open reporting processes about where tax dollars are spent, and added, “it needs to be in a way we can understand. Then we’d take an interest.”

We need a lot more open meetings where we can learn about what they do. A MISA group participant also wanted more information. She said, “We need to learn whether we can make a difference, and how to do it.”

A Dalhousie student suggested that the City should, “Provide a more friendly approach to municipal government with a more open environment.” Another student suggested that the City formulate lists of names of women who are active in communities (volunteers, committee members) and invite these women to be candidates for municipal processes.

MISA participants suggested that women should be encouraged to support other women by voting for them.

The Dalhousie students felt that it is important that women’s unpaid volunteer work is recognized and valued, rather than being taken for granted. They also felt that there is a need to reach out to women, to show women how they could participate in municipal processes, and to encourage them to do so. This could be done by generating a list of women who are already active in volunteering and committees, and encouraging more participation. The women who are community leaders also felt there is a need to broaden the circle of women engaged.

Meeting time

One Dalhousie student suggested that the City make hours more flexible so that women with other responsibilities can have the opportunity to participate. Another student felt that the City should acknowledge that women do have familial responsibilities and allow for more flexible hours. The ANS, Stepping Stone and Dalhousie participants felt that the provision of daycare would facilitate their involvement.

Conclusion

“It's important to increase participation in urban politics in order to decrease alienation. It should 'feel like home.'”

(Dalhousie Students Focus Group)

Although women are involved in municipal processes in a variety of ways that range from voting to sitting on Council, women are not as involved in municipal politics as much as they could be. If more women were involved, the City would have better access to women's understand of issues that affect the quality of life for Haligonians, and the City would benefit from women's collaborative style of working. The citizens would also benefit by having more female leadership role models.

In order to be more involved, women need to be better informed about municipal affairs and processes, they need a more welcoming environment, and they need to see evidence that their opinions are valued. Strategies need to be in place to overcome the logistical barriers to participation that women face, such as lack of child care and inadequate public transportation.

To overcome the barriers to women's participation, women suggested that partnerships be formed to work on solutions which include finding ways to increase women's confidence in themselves and in the process, to develop a course of action that will include informing women about HRM and educating HRM staff and councillors about women's participation.

Follow-up

A workshop was held at City Hall on Wednesday, March 10, 2004 as a first action step. Sixty women participated in the process of partnership building and identifying concrete steps that can be taken.

The participants agreed that if the Municipality were to provide training, and/or financial support for the training, for women who are interested, more women would be involved in municipal politics. They also believe that a Status of Women office at the municipal level is warranted.

The participants want more opportunities to get together to discuss ways they can participate more fully. They would also like to see a strategy to educate women about municipal processes and potential for citizen involvement that could include political education in schools geared to females, and a community television show about women in politics. Women want to be involved in local council meetings and suggest that council provide an accessible interactive website with information about council activities.

If women are to be involved, the municipal government must provide childcare/eldercare and transportation support, and the criteria in respect to participation on boards and committees should be changed to make it more representative of the diversity of women.

APPENDIX ONE: SAMPLE ADVERTISEMENT

INVITATION TO SERVE THE Halifax Regional Municipality REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

All citizens interested in volunteering as members of the following boards and committees are invited to complete and submit an application form. Whenever possible, appointments will reflect the diversity of the community.

HRM Regional Council

- Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities
- Bedford Days Executive Committee
- Bikeways Task Force
- Board of Police Commissioners
- Community Monitoring Committee
- Community & Race Relations Advisory Committee
- Grant Committee
- HRM-Dartmouth Natal Day Steering Committee
- HRM International Airport Authority Board
- HRM Regional Library Board
- HRM Regional Water Commission
- Hotel Standards Committee

(applicant must be: i) Hotel Standards licensed taxi driver or ii) Hotel Standards licensed taxi owner or iii) Owner or Manager of a 24 hour dispatch taxi brokerage)

- Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority
- Point Pleasant Park Advisory Committee
- Heritage Advisory Committee
- Regional Taxi and Limousine Committee

(citizen-at-large, taxi brokers, taxi drivers, limousine drivers)

- Shubenacadie Canal Commission

Boards and Committees Under The Community Councils:

Harbour East Community Council:

- Harbour East Planning Advisory Committee (serving Districts 4 & 5)

North West Community Council:

- Tree Advisory Committee (serving District 21)
- Bedford Watershed Advisory Committee
- **HRM Watershed Advisory Board** which serves Chebucto Community Council, Marine Drive, Valley & Canal Community Council, North West Community Council, Western Region Community Council, Peninsula Community Council

Members of racially visible groups, women, persons with disabilities, aboriginal persons, and all other citizens are encouraged to apply.

Applicants must be residents of the HRM .Applications will remain on file and be considered for vacancies that may occur throughout the 2003/04 calendar year.

Application forms are available at the following locations, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday:

Halifax Regional Municipality Customer Service Centres

- Scotia Square, Lower Level, Duke Street Entrance, HRM
- 6960 Mumford Road, West End Mall, HRM
- 40 Alderney Drive, 2nd Floor, Alderney Gate, Dartmouth
- 51 Forest Hills Parkway, Cole Harbour Place, Cole Harbour
- 636 Sackville Drive, Acadia School, Sackville
- Musquodoboit Harbour Strip Mall, Corner of Highway # 7 and East Petpeswick Road

Applications are available by contacting the Municipal Clerk's Office, 1841 Argyle Street, 2nd Floor, HRM, and the HRM website www.region.halifax.ns.ca/boardscom/index.html (Please visit the web site (under Council) for detailed information about the Boards and Committees, including the Terms of Reference).

Applications will be accepted until October 3, 2003

Only successful applicants will be notified.

RETURN APPLICATION TO:

Office of the Municipal Clerk
1841 Argyle Street, 2nd Floor
PO Box 1749
Halifax Regional Municipality , Nova Scotia B3J 3A5

For additional information contact the Municipal Clerk's Office at 490-6524 or FAX 490-4208

By applying for any of the boards, committees or commissions, an applicant consents to the public release of information submitted in support of their application in the event they are appointed to a board, committee or commission.

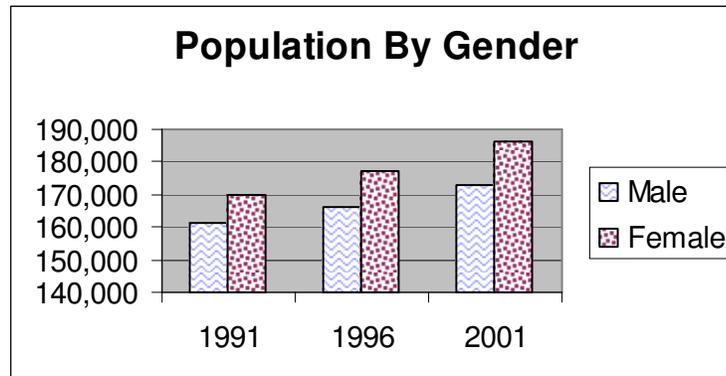
Dated: September 13, 2003

Vi Carmichael, Municipal Clerk

APPENDIX TWO: Tables Detailing the Population of HRM

Population

In 2001 there were 172,745 men and 186,440 women living in HRM.



	1991	1996	2001
Male	161,205	165,985	172,745
Female	169,645	176,980	186,440

Population of HRM	HRM	Nova Scotia
Population in 2001 (1)	359,111	908,007
Population in 1996 (2)	342,851 A	909,282
1996 to 2001 population change (%)	4.7	-0.1
Total private dwellings	153,328	403,819
Population density per square kilometre	65.4	17.2
Land area (square km)	5,490.90	52,917.43

Age Characteristics of the Population

	HRM			Nova Scotia		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
All persons	359,110	172,705	186,405	908,005	439,085	468,920
Age 0-4	19,935	10,180	9,755	47,455	24,325	23,135
Age 5-14	46,050	23,390	22,660	117,570	59,840	57,730
Age 15-19	22,905	11,585	11,315	61,750	31,560	30,190
Age 20-24	26,560	12,625	13,935	56,180	27,370	28,815
Age 25-44	118,530	57,175	61,360	267,640	129,380	138,255
Age 45-54	53,590	25,890	27,700	138,280	67,835	70,440
Age 55-64	32,010	15,570	16,440	92,565	45,545	47,020
Age 65-74	21,550	9,940	11,615	66,650	31,165	35,485
Age 75-84	13,590	5,160	8,430	44,410	17,495	26,915
Age 85 and over	4,385	1,195	3,190	15,505	4,575	10,930
Median age of the population	36.6	36.0	37.3	38.8	38.0	39.5
% of the population ages 15 and over	81.6	80.6	82.6	81.8	80.8	82.8

	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total population 5 years and over	335,675	161,130	174,540	849,765	410,430	439,330
Lived at the same address 5 years ago	181,860	87,000	94,860	543,440	264,285	279,155
Lived within the same province/territory 5 years ago, but changed address	115,670	55,640	60,030	244,020	115,905	128,120
Lived in different province/territory/country 5 years ago	38,140	18,495	19,645	62,305	30,240	32,060

Immigration Characteristics

	HRM			Nova Scotia		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total - All persons	355,875	171,505	184,370	897,570	435,115	462,455
Canadian-born population	329,540	158,410	171,120	853,655	413,745	439,910
Foreign-born population	24,385	12,000	12,390	41,320	19,905	21,415
Immigrated before 1991	16,880	8,435	8,450	31,030	14,965	16,060
Immigrated between 1991 and 2001	7,505	3,565	3,945	10,285	4,935	5,350
Non-permanent residents	1,950	1,095	855	2,595	1,465	1,135
Aboriginal Population						
Total - All persons	355,875	171,505	184,365	897,570	435,115	462,455
Aboriginal identity population	3,460	1,685	1,785	17,010	8,320	8,690
Non-Aboriginal population	352,410	169,825	182,580	880,555	426,795	453,765
Visible Minority Status						
Total population by visible minority groups	355,870	171,505	184,365	897,570	435,115	462,455
Visible minority population (31)	25,085	12,090	13,000	34,525	16,660	17,870
Chinese	2,440	1,250	1,190	3,285	1,615	1,670
South Asian	2,345	1,235	1,110	2,895	1,540	1,350
Black	13,080	6,015	7,070	19,670	9,155	10,515
Filipino	480	170	310	655	230	425
Latin American	415	175	240	520	225	300
Southeast Asian	715	420	295	795	470	320
Arab	3,030	1,565	1,465	3,610	1,925	1,685
West Asian	330	165	165	385	185	200
Korean	480	205	270	585	275	305
Japanese	335	135	200	420	165	250
Visible minority	980	505	480	1,165	595	570
Multiple visible minorities	460	255	210	535	270	270
All others	330,785	159,415	171,370	863,045	418,455	444,585

School Attendance

	HRM			Nova Scotia		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total population 15 years and over attending school full time	35,780	17,355	18,425	82,685	40,080	42,605
Age group 15-19 attending full time (50)	17,015	8,550	8,460	46,965	23,730	23,235
Age group 20-24 attending full time	11,505	5,140	6,360	22,375	10,135	12,240
Total population 15 years and over attending school part time	11,915	5,170	6,750	21,195	9,520	11,675
Age group 15-19 attending part time (50)	445	230	220	1,070	590	480
Age group 20-24 attending part time	1,800	895	900	3,165	1,640	1,525
Highest Level of Schooling						
Total population aged 20-34	80,320	38,240	42,085	170,615	82,220	88,395
% of the population aged 20-34 with less than a high school graduation certificate	11.0	13.0	9.3	16.1	19.1	13.4
% of the population aged 20-34 with a high school graduation certificate and/or some postsecondary (46)	28.6	30.8	26.6	28.3	28.9	27.7
% of the population aged 20-34 with a trades certificate or diploma	11.2	13.5	9.0	13.9	17.1	11.0
% of the population aged 20-34 with a college certificate or diploma (47)	18.3	16.1	20.3	18.9	16.0	21.6
% of the population aged 20-34 with a university certificate, diploma or degree	30.9	26.7	34.8	22.8	18.9	26.3
Total population aged 35-44	64,170	31,155	33,015	151,650	73,475	78,175
% of the population aged 35-44 with less than a high school graduation certificate	16.9	17.9	15.9	23.0	24.8	21.3
% of the population aged 35-44 with a high school graduation certificate and/or some postsecondary	18.9	18.1	19.8	19.1	18.1	20.0
% of the population aged 35-44 with a trades certificate or diploma	16.1	20.8	11.8	18.9	24.2	14.0
% of the population aged 35-44 with a college certificate or diploma	20.4	16.9	23.7	19.4	15.1	23.5
% of the population aged 35-44 with a university certificate, diploma or degree	27.7	26.4	28.9	19.6	17.8	21.2
Total population aged 45-64	85,135	41,150	43,985	229,300	112,390	116,905
% of the population aged 45-64 with less than a high school graduation certificate	24.5	23.9	25.1	33.7	33.6	33.8
% of the population aged 45-64 with a high school graduation certificate and/or some postsecondary (46)	17.0	16.3	17.7	16.0	14.8	17.1
% of the population aged 45-64 with a trades certificate or diploma	16.0	20.3	12.0	17.0	21.9	12.2
% of the population aged 45-64 with a college certificate or diploma (47)	17.5	13.5	21.3	15.2	11.2	19.1
% of the population aged 45-64 with a university certificate, diploma or degree	25.0	26.0	24.0	18.1	18.5	17.7

Place of Work Status

	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Employed labour force 15 years and over (32)	182,455	94,195	88,260	402,290	211,465	190,830
Worked at home	10,750	5,265	5,490	26,990	13,690	13,295
Worked outside Canada	1,510	1,200	310	2,265	1,755	510
No fixed workplace address	15,765	12,445	3,315	40,765	32,915	7,850
Worked at usual place	154,430	75,285	79,145	332,280	163,100	169,180

[Unpaid Work](#)

	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Persons reporting hours of unpaid work (34)	262,950	121,240	141,710	659,480	306,020	353,455
Persons reporting hours of unpaid housework (35)	259,875	119,310	140,560	650,310	300,065	350,245
Persons reporting hours looking after children, without pay (36)	104,535	44,590	59,940	268,755	114,540	154,215
Persons reporting hours of unpaid care or assistance to seniors (37)	45,090	17,860	27,230	135,240	54,200	81,040