

Making Votes Count Where We Live



History of project:

- Voter turnout has been on the decline since the late 1970s.
- The impact of this trend is especially felt among low-income residents who are less likely to vote than higher income voters.
- Elected officials are more likely to make decisions in the interest of the people who elect them.
- This, in turn, people experiencing poverty may not see their concerns addressed, and become even less likely to vote.

Introduce the project

- **The Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres (CHRC)** and **City for All Women Initiative (CAWI)** have joined together in a three year project
- Funded by **Ontario Trillium Foundation** and the **Catherine Donnelly Foundation**
- Engage residents, community partners and governments in putting into place strategies to increase voter turnout and long-term civic engagement.
- Focus - the municipal election and the federal election.
- We provide training and tools on elections and civic engagements to women leaders in neighbourhoods like Khadijah. They then work in teams to have an impact in their neighbourhoods.
- Civic Engagement Table – brings together residents, community partners to work on issues and implementing strategies to increase voter turnout and long term civic engagement.

Why did I get involved?

- Many **people living on low-income** that I talk to, believe that no one will listen to them, so they often don't vote. They believe the politicians won't do anything for them or their neighborhoods and don't follow their promises. They think their voice will not be heard.
- When I approach **youth**, they tell me they are not interested or don't have the time, their families don't talk about politics at home, and as we know they are the future in our country.
- Also, a lot of **seniors** that I talk to don't understand about elections or have language barriers, mobility issues, and are confused about where to vote.
- Many **people with disabilities** think that the polling place may be too far, or not accessible to them.
- Or a **single mother**, who works all day, comes home exhausted then has to take care of her children. If the voting poll is far away, she not likely to vote.
- So that is why I got involved in this project.

My role in the project

- Work with a team of women in my neighbourhood
- Have received training on voting and why it matters.
- Together with my team we are taking our learning back to our community, giving them information and getting them involved.
- Participate at the Civic Engagement Table
- Examples
 - We facilitated focus groups to identify barriers on voting
 - We facilitated Cafes to make communities aware of why voting matters
 - We engage residents to vote
 - Set up info table on voting

Overview of project activities

- **Community Research** on barriers to voting in low income neighbourhoods
 - Key Barriers to Voting** (*alternate reading them*)
 - “I question which politicians can be trusted.”
 - “I don’t understand the political process.”
 - “I find it hard to get to polls.”
 - “I don’t know enough about the candidates.”
 - “I don’t see candidates who represent me.”
 - “My life is too complicated.”
 - “My vote doesn’t matter.”
 - “I am not eligible to vote.”
 - “I don’t know how to vote.”
 - “The candidates don’t go to where I am.”

Strategies – from this we identified 4 key strategies to address barriers

1. **Make it easy to vote**
2. **Make it fun to vote**
3. **Ignite the passion to make a difference**
4. **Build bridges between candidates and residents**

- **Addressing issues**

- From this same research and the consultation with community partners around the Civic Engagement Table, we identified four major issues:

Affordable Housing
Safe and Affordable Transit
Good Food for All
Good Jobs

- Working in coalition with residents and community partners through Civic Engagement Table, we have raised these issues to the candidates through a variety of forums, including chat and meet with candidates, all candidates debates, letters, surveys, and twitter questions.

How are we doing this?

- **Getting out information on how to vote**

Examples: in my housing unit, I post the information in the laundry room, in the hallway in the lobby. I put notices in the mailboxes. And talk to people to find out what support they need to vote. Maybe I can take care of their kids or go along with them to vote.

- **Holding *Making Votes Count Cafes***

I worked with the women who are on my team to hold a Making Votes Count Café. This is an event where we give people the chance to talk at tables, discuss issues that matter to them in the election, and give them information about voting. To get people to come, we each invited friends, we prepared refreshments and set up the room like a café. We covered costs for childcare and transportation in order to make it possible to come.

- **Making it fun to vote – contest!**

Creative activities to get people to vote: voting buttons, sing Making Votes Count song
 Winners were given prizes at city-wide forum.

- **“ I vote because...” campaign**

We also invite people to write on “*I vote because...*” sign in their own language and take photos. These get posted on Facebook. In some neighbourhood, they hung them on a clothesline in the park.

Sing along Making Votes Count Song

- Invite people to sing the song.
- It is to the tune of “When the Saints go Marching In” .

Making Votes Count Song **Chanson *Faire compter les votes***

Please take the time
(Please take the time)

To hear our views
(To hear our views)

‘Cause when we vote,
we’ll think of you
We are neighbours across this city
Making votes count where we live

Prenez le temps
(Prenez le temps)
pour notre point de vue
(pour notre point de vue)

Car quand on vote, on pense à vous
Nous sommes des voisins de partout
en ville
Nos votes compteront dans nos milieux

Verse 1

Now you make think
Where there’s poverty
The people are less likely to vote
So you may not listen to us
But it’s time for that to change

Verse 2

We’ll work with you
If you hear our views
Housing, jobs, transit and food
We want healthy, strong communities
Where all of us belong