



March 2013

Off Balance: Reflecting on the Economic Impacts of Pregnancy in Aboriginal Youth

Wanda Wuttunee

University of Manitoba, wwuttun@cc.umanitoba.ca

Recommended Citation

Wuttunee, W. (2013). Off Balance: Reflecting on the Economic Impacts of Pregnancy in Aboriginal Youth. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 4(1).

DOI: 10.18584/iipj.2013.4.1.10

Off Balance: Reflecting on the Economic Impacts of Pregnancy in Aboriginal Youth

Abstract

Many Aboriginal leaders are focused on holistic approaches to bring physical, mental, and spiritual health to their citizens, allowing them to participate fully in a community's future. However, teen pregnancy brings specific challenges that need to be addressed if, indeed, children are the future of Aboriginal communities. This commentary looks at how the tools of community economic development (CED) can be applied to move young parents into positions from which they can participate in local economies. CED can be used to address contributing factors to teen pregnancies that are supportive of youth and appropriate to the community in question. Young parents need support to develop the necessary independence and resilience. This brings challenges to community leadership to take steps to encourage the development of healthy sexuality and lifestyles, and to provide the needed education, training, and other community supports. If youth are the future of Aboriginal communities, the cost of ignoring young parents and their children is much too high to ignore.

French Abstract

DÉSÉQUILIBRE : ANALYSE DES RÉPERCUSSIONS ÉCONOMIQUES DE LA GROSSESSE CHEZ LES JEUNES AUTOCHTONES

Wanda Wuttunee
Université du Manitoba

Résumé

De nombreux dirigeants autochtones mettent l'accent sur des approches holistiques afin de favoriser la santé physique, mentale et spirituelle de leurs citoyens, leur permettant ainsi de participer pleinement à l'avenir de leur collectivité. Toutefois, la grossesse à l'adolescence engendre des difficultés particulières auxquelles il faut donner suite si, à n'en pas douter, les enfants représentent l'avenir des collectivités autochtones. Le présent article examine l'application des outils de développement économique communautaire pour permettre aux jeunes parents de faire la transition qui s'impose pour participer aux économies locales. Les outils de développement économique communautaire peuvent être utilisés pour éliminer les facteurs contribuant à la grossesse chez les adolescentes d'une manière qui soutient les jeunes et qui est adaptée à la collectivité en question. Les jeunes parents ont besoin de soutien pour devenir autonomes et résilients. Les dirigeants communautaires doivent donc prendre les mesures qui s'imposent pour favoriser le développement d'une sexualité et d'un mode de vie sains, ainsi que pour fournir le soutien nécessaire en matière d'éducation et de formation, de même que d'autres mécanismes de soutien communautaires. Si les jeunes représentent l'avenir des collectivités autochtones, il ne faut pas fermer les yeux sur la situation des jeunes parents et de leurs enfants.

Spanish Abstract

DESEQUILIBRIO: REFLEXIONES SOBRE LAS REPERCUSIONES ECONÓMICAS DEL EMBARAZO EN LA JUVENTUD INDÍGENA

Dra. Wanda Wuttunee
Universidad de Manitoba

Resumen

Muchos líderes indígenas se basan en enfoques globales para aportar salud física, mental y espiritual a sus ciudadanos, permitiéndoles que participen plenamente en el futuro de la comunidad. Sin embargo, los embarazos de adolescentes plantean retos concretos que han de tratarse ya que los niños son el futuro de las comunidades indígenas. En el artículo se examina la forma en que se pueden aplicar las herramientas de desarrollo económico comunitario para que los padres jóvenes puedan participar en las economías locales. El desarrollo económico comunitario puede usarse para tratar de los factores que contribuyen a los embarazos de adolescentes, de forma que apoyen a los jóvenes y sean apropiados para la comunidad en cuestión. Los padres jóvenes necesitan apoyo para lograr la independencia y la resiliencia necesarias. Esto plantea ciertas dificultades a los líderes de las comunidades a la hora de tomar medidas para fomentar el desarrollo de una sexualidad y de estilos de vida sanos y de proporcionar la educación, la capacitación y otros apoyos comunitarios necesarios. Si los jóvenes son el futuro de las comunidades indígenas, hay que considerar el costo de no tener en cuenta a los padres jóvenes y a sus hijos.

Keywords

teenacy pregnancy, early parenting, community economic development

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Off Balance: Reflecting on the Economic Impacts of Pregnancy in Aboriginal Youth

Aboriginal leaders are focused on the physical, mental, and spiritual health of their urban and rural community citizens with the ultimate goal of self-governance and independence. Achieving these goals requires opportunities for the inclusive participation of its citizens through economic activity. A holistic approach makes sense given the complex fabric of Aboriginal communities (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009). Indications of what types of communities leaders are working to build are found in themes such as: communities that are safe, clean places to raise families; and economic development creating a level of prosperity where each citizen is healthy and participating fully in current activities that lead to a hopeful and bright future. Issues arising from teen pregnancy and young families will be examined within this context.

While community-building goals can be advanced without full citizen participation, there is a cost in so doing. This article acts as a commentary on the impact of teen pregnancy from a community economic development (CED) perspective. Lost opportunity is perhaps the greatest incurred cost when young teenaged women become pregnant. Opportunities for success are impacted and the chances of leading a productive life, personally nurturing a strong family, and participating in and building a robust community economy are often altered.

CED principles empower communities to accomplish their goals through the efforts of their citizens. A very important CED component is missing when young women and men are caught up with the huge demands of their families, leaving them unable to support a community process they can help enrich. They easily become unintentional role models for their children, young female relatives, and for other young women in their communities. In some cases, these young mothers are able to follow their dreams, but the paths taking them there can be difficult and daunting.

Community economic development challenges will also be discussed in this commentary, including reflections on how young parents move to a position where they participate in the local economy. The level of consistent support that fathers provide to young mothers for their children is critical, as is the support mothers receive from their parents, the school system, and the community. It is very likely that most teenage mothers will be on welfare, with few means of breaking that cycle, since their formal education often ends at some point during their pregnancy unless educational alternatives are accessible.

Other themes that will be examined include the likelihood that young women realize the extent to which the success of their communities lies with them. Motherhood at a young age may have intergenerational impacts. From a traditional perspective, the child is at the centre of the community and, so, young motherhood is often encouraged because it is seen as following an acceptable path that has long historical roots. In contemporary reality, however, many Aboriginal leaders carry a heavy burden that is poverty-driven. Their ability to achieve community goals is handicapped by having to deal first with under or unemployed citizens including young mothers and fathers.

It is important to recall the overwhelming statistics surrounding the issue of teenage pregnancy as described herein (see for example Garner, Guimond, & Senécal, 2013; Guèvremont & Kohen, 2013, in this issue). Briefly, teen pregnancy is linked to disadvantaged groups according to social and economic

indicators. Moreover, there are significantly higher rates of pregnancy among Aboriginal populations (e.g., 4 times higher for First Nations teens, 12 times higher for Inuit, and 18 times higher on reserve) than among the general population in Canada. Risk factors increase when the pregnant teen is part of the child welfare system. Children of teen mothers are at greater risk of abuse, neglect, and becoming part of the child welfare system (Ordolis, 2007). Finally, this chapter draws on my 25 years of experience in examining Aboriginal economic development and my personal perspective as a First Nations woman.

Locating the Author

I am a proud Cree woman who is a member of Red Pheasant First Nation, Saskatchewan. I was raised in Calgary so I embrace the term “cement” Indian. That is my reality. My father, William Wuttunee, grew up on our reserve and raised us to understand that no one owes us a thing. My father and my mother, Bernice Dufour, both emphasized education and independence as critical values for my four brothers and sisters. We were raised to embrace Cree ceremony and tradition. We also accepted values that helped us succeed in the world. We were open to new ideas and my father always had the newest and the best in gadgets. Traditional values of respect and humility were incorporated into our childhood. Our sense of community was nurtured with regular visits to family who lived on our reserve. My siblings and I all proudly identify with our Cree heritage and also celebrate our Scottish, Ukrainian, and French ancestry.

Taking a chance on getting pregnant was not an option when I was growing up. However, a number of family members and friends ended up getting abortions while in their teens. I started university right after high school. I earned three degrees: in business and law, followed by my PhD. During that time, I married and had two children. Neither my son nor my daughter faced the complex challenges of involvement with teen pregnancy. They are currently in relationships of more than a year, while completing their university and senior high school programs. They continue to deal with many difficult issues around drugs, alcohol, smoking, human sexuality, and relationships.

While I don't have personal experience of teen pregnancy, it was a topic of interest and concern when I was a teenager and remains so as a parent. In speaking to other mothers with pregnant teenage daughters over the years, I know that it is a very difficult time for everyone. It is a time that requires fortitude to handle problems with few easy answers and many hard choices. In my professional life, I was drawn to economic development issues, including how communities achieve their economic goals using community economic development strategies. It is the rural setting that interests me the most with regard to examining the economic impacts of teen pregnancy on youth, families, and communities.

Community Economic Development

Community economic development is more than economic development, which is focussed mainly on wealth creation. It incorporates community values into the process of building an economic base that can involve community members and, where appropriate, corporate and government partners. It provides opportunity and encourages individual participation in the development process. This results in an empowered community, focussed on success on their terms. This approach to CED gained popularity among many Aboriginal communities, as well as the federal government, in the 1990s and

continues to be one of the main CED approaches today (Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, n.d.).

If a community identifies issues of poverty related to lack of employment and dependence on assistance as the critical goal that needs addressing, then community efforts could incorporate strategies in a CED plan that deals with these issues in substantive and meaningful ways. A community's CED plan is only as strong as its weakest members. Thus, it makes sense for communities to have a long-term strategy that seeks the full participation of its members in the community's economic plans (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2004). The focal point for CED activities would see members in training for real jobs in the community. Obstacles, such as day care, transportation, addictions, and poverty, must be addressed. If the community has a high rate of teenaged pregnancy, examining the contributing factors is crucial as is tackling these issues in ways that are appropriate to the community. CED looks at cultivating community leadership and developing community wealth through the support of local business, creating co-operation, independence, and relevant development (Economic Development, Community Development, 2009).

Scrutinizing teenaged pregnancy in the context of a CED plan might include, for example, considering the following possible scenario, which is offered for illustrative purposes only (see also Olsen, 2005):

Both young parents drop out of school.

Education and training are critical to participating in the community's CED plan. Pregnancy at a young age often disrupts education and makes future laborforce participation difficult, if not impossible. More often than not, a single parent family is created in this situation (Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre and the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada, 2008).

The young man may try to obtain employment to support his family.

Due to lack of experience and young age, his opportunities will be few. It is likely that only unskilled jobs will be available with their attendant lack of stability and good wages. When times are slow, this junior person would have little job security. Many Aboriginal communities, unfortunately, have few jobs available for any community member.

The poverty and assistance cycle.

It is easy for a teenaged single mother to slide into a cycle of poverty and assistance (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2003). This risk may be mitigated if the teenaged father is trying to support his family. However, given the quality of available opportunities, there is no guarantee that his family can be supported. The teenaged parents may try to survive as a family, but without their respective families' and community's support their child will likely end up in state care (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2005). The poverty cycle that many teenaged families find themselves in is often intergenerational.

Family and community support.

The teenaged parent's families may support the addition of a child into the community, which aligns with traditional beliefs that the child is the centre of the community. Problems arise if the teenaged parent's families have no resources to help meet additional expenses. This launches the poverty and assistance cycle for the young family. The community may support the young family, but there are likely to be few resources available to help beyond such things as babysitting assistance and the nursing station. Alcohol and drug abuse are linked to teenaged pregnancy (Anderson, 2002). If the baby is born with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), fetal alcohol effects (FAE), or other serious health issues, then the child will not have the same opportunities to be a fully contributing community member when he or she grows up that it might have had if the parents were more mature and the family more stable before taking on the responsibility of a child.

This is only one possible scenario, but the challenges that arise for communities that want to achieve specific economic goals are clear. Young people are the future of the community. If they are unable to develop skills and contribute for whatever reasons, then the future of the community is limited. Independence and self-government are likely out of reach and there remains little to pass on to the next generation. Consequently, the community's quality of life is diminished. Moreover, the value that ascribes the future of Aboriginal communities to our children is an empty one. A robust and resilient community, able to meet the challenges of its environment, demands the commitment of all community members in this generation and among the generations yet to come (see McCracken, 2005).

Young Aboriginal women are likely to be single mothers, living in poverty, without a high school diploma, and caught in the social assistance trap. All of this is borne out by the statistics (Guimond & Robatille, 2008). Aboriginal women have many challenges to deal with as a result of colonization. Their resilience, however, is documented in the literature in areas of culture, health, politics, and of course with their families (Valaskakis, Stout, & Guimond, 2009; Voyager, 2008). If our young women are not in a position to become educated, raise healthy families at a time in their lives when they have matured and are strong in mind, body, and spirit, and be able to join the economy if they desire, then the prognosis is dismal. It is not a question of young Aboriginal women becoming mothers. Rather, it is a question of whether personal resilience, as well as family and community support and resources, are available to them when they become teenage mothers (Guimond & Robatille, 2008). The paragraphs that follow focus on the role of the parents, their families, and the community in the context of community economic development.

Outlining the Impacts

Ordolis (2007) informs us that the close, communal practices associated with raising a child include the extended family and community. This is why a child is often welcomed into the family in many communities, no matter what the age of the parents might be. From an Aboriginal perspective, women are crucial for nurturing relationships between the generations, since they are keepers of the culture who ensure that the People would always know who they are.

As one woman explains, “we were taught that the time we are in is only borrowed from future generations – generations yet unborn. Our thoughts, words and actions impact seven generations from now. It is these children held sacred by our Mother Earth for whom we must leave a true fire.” (Ordolis, 2007, p. 31)

There is immense pressure on mothers to birth and keep the baby. Teenage mothers are expected to keep the baby in the community, whether or not adequate financial and social resources exist to ensure a good life for the child (Olsen, 2005). Community complacency in the face of this reality and the easy acceptance of teenage pregnancy by many parents ignores how out of control the situation has become (Olsen, 2005).

An Elder warned that what was considered right in the past should not be imposed on young people today:

I had my first child at 14... My grandchildren live in another world entirely. What was right and proper and expected of a young woman in my day should not be considered right and proper today... I cannot even imagine my grandchildren having children without tasting life. Thirteen or 14 year-olds today are still babies. Then, women cleaned skins, made boots, ran our own homes. I can't see kids today doing that. (Archibald, 2004, p. 8)

Today's youth culture has great influence, too. Consequently, taking alcohol and smoking during pregnancy is not considered taboo. Such behaviour compromises the child's health and often results in illnesses and damage, such as FAS. Such choices have far reaching short-term and long-term impacts on families who try to grapple with these issues. There are also impacts for their communities, whose members may need short-term health care or care for the rest of their lives as a result of substance abuse during pregnancy.

Leadership

Political leaders are always aided by those persons around them who care about their communities. Formal and informal leaders operate throughout communities by offering guidance and wisdom (e.g., elders), their time, direction, and role modeling for other community citizens of all ages. The CED process gives voice to their concerns and provides opportunities for their involvement. In the following section, I look at some of the general challenges facing leaders today and how can they begin to address teen pregnancy.

Education, employment, and income statistics demonstrate positive growth in many First Nation communities (Assembly of First Nations Make Poverty History Expert Advisory Committee, 2009). Times have changed and some communities are well on their way to economic independence, reforming health and education policies (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2005), reviving culture, and improving the process of community governance. One challenge is that such change varies from community to community. Moreover, this change can be frustratingly slow for many community members. In many of those communities working hard to move ahead, human resources are stretched thin and burnout among community members is all too common. Economic development is often based on community stability, clear vision, and strong leadership.

According to the report entitled, “The State of the First Nation Economy and the Struggle to End Poverty” (Assembly of First Nations Make Poverty History Expert Advisory Committee, 2009), improvement has been encouraging, although the First Nation economy is especially vulnerable to recessions, which can reverse, at least for a time, positive changes gained over the last forty years. As the Expert Advisory Committee’s report states:

Many First Nation businesses are less well established, overrepresented in the primary resources sector and more likely to be engaged (and exposed) in the export of goods and services. The First Nation labour force is younger, growing faster, has less union protection and seniority, and less education - all of which make it more vulnerable in the current climate. (Assembly of First Nations Make Poverty History Expert Advisory Committee, 2009, p. 5)

The statistics referred to in the quote above are only some of the challenges facing Aboriginal leaders and communities seeking economic autonomy. First Nation young people in the labour market or about to enter it face especially challenging, even desperate, times in the labour market. This conclusion is drawn despite the favourable economic environment characterizing the last decade. As of 2006, Aboriginal youth were disadvantaged in terms of educational achievement and the unemployment rate for those living on reserve was 38 percent, with some 27 percent unemployment for the overall Aboriginal population. Thirty-four percent of Aboriginal persons living in a family context reported low incomes and as many as 77 percent of “unattached individuals” reported the same (Assembly of First Nations Make Poverty History Expert Advisory Committee, 2009).

Strategies for Healthy Sexuality in a CED Context

Although limited in its scope, the economic profile set out in the previous section underlines the fragility of Aboriginal economies. Young people are exposed to continuing unemployment and many face additional complications arising from teen pregnancy. It can be helpful to consider what other communities are doing in the face of similar trials. One example that Robert Anderson (1999) discussed is a CED plan formulated by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council in Saskatchewan. Community members outlined each person’s responsibility and role in meeting development barriers. This approach is unique because it is often much too easy to point a finger at a lack of funding, or federal government (ir)responsibility, or an inalienable right as the root cause of the situation. This simplistic response often results in significant delays, while a community holds its collective breath for some response from the government that is out of their control.

Instead, the empowered approach taken in the Meadow Lake Tribal Council example resulted in a community written document with personal accountability built into it. This approach requires that individuals have positive attitudes, appropriate training, and a will to support local, small businesses. Families must maintain healthy lifestyles, offer holistic support, and nurture language, culture, and tradition. The First Nation itself is required to offer effective and responsible leadership; thereby ensuring a strong future supported by economic development and a good standard of living for their members. The First Nation’s role also includes providing support for education, training, and wellness initiatives. This includes sufficient supports for small business. In the Meadow Lake Tribal Council

example, the roles and expectations of the tribal council and two levels of government were also laid out (Anderson, 1999).

What types of actions might be asked of community members to address teen pregnancy in such a way that young people and their children are not just statistics or, worse, on-going and unsolved problems (Disant, 2008)? Getting at the root causes of poverty and offering community perspectives are at the heart of the following example of a CED draft plan that addresses the challenges posed by teen pregnancy.

Teens: Take individual responsibility for healthy lifestyles. Communities and adults need to understand why they are assets and, especially with regard to young women, their role in raising robust families and supporting their communities. According to Godfrey's (2006) work with youth:

- When young people feel they are being heard, they feel the communities care, value and respect them. If they are a part of the decision-making, they begin to build self-respect, self-esteem and self worth. They begin to look at productive and healthy alternatives in their lives;
- It helps them to be less afraid, and they begin to build leadership skills;
- They know that the future lies in their hands, and they want to be positive leaders in their communities. Having a voice and knowing it is valued, gives young people a path to make positive changes and meet the challenges they face. They would then be able to work with the adults in their communities, to overcome challenges and make positive changes. (p. 15).

Families: Talk about human sexuality and support young families so that grandchildren are not taken into state care (Anderson, 2002) and focus on strengthening these young families. After reflection, it may become apparent that if the families of teenaged parents are not able to protect their future grandchildren from state care, then supporting good choices regarding sex, contraception, and reproductive health before pregnancy takes place should become a priority and also a community social value (Irvine, 2009).

Community: Place priority on keeping young people engaged in positive activities by offering activities that are attractive to everyone or offer a series of activities that can engage all youth in the community in one way or another. Hockey is great, for example, but not everyone likes hockey; however, hockey can be complemented by other team sports.

Communities, parents, and teens need to ensure that healthy sexuality, healthy lifestyles, and topics on the family are raised with young people in appropriate settings, including school and small community gatherings. What can be learned from the values found in traditional teachings and reflected in the actions of role models, elders, and community leaders regarding teen pregnancy? Informed, healthy decisions are the ultimate goal (Young/Single Parent Support Network of Ottawa-Carleton, Timmins Native Friendship Centre, and the Canadian Institute of Child Health, 2000). All players, teens, their parents, and their community leadership need to work together to break the poverty cycle by working

with young families and offering them opportunities to complete their education, ways to look after their children, and help them to be strong, good parents.

The result of this very community-specific process could begin to address some of the issues around teen pregnancy and encourage full community contribution to the CED plan. It is an approach that empowers children, youth, and families in developing healthier communities (Blackstock, Bruyere, & Moreau, 2006). It is also useful for accomplishing other community economic development goals that would otherwise be stalled because of a lack of resources.

Finally, Godfrey's (2006) research results support this community approach:

- By listening to youth, adults will know what types of activities and resources benefit youth in their communities. This will help communities build on strengths;
- The people in the community are the main supports for youth. If they do not feel important in their communities, then they begin to feel lost and alone;
- The youth expressed that they want a voice and they want to be heard, they know that they are the future and that the future lies in their hands. If we don't step up and hear them now, they're afraid they will never be heard. Positive leaders are needed in the communities to help guide the youth in the process of change. The youth feel that not only their futures lie in their hands, but adults as well. Positive leaders and role models in the communities will help guide them (p. 15).

Personal Reflections: Working Together

Aboriginal teenagers are really no different than other Canadian teenagers in issues of the heart. Each has to figure out the answers to the big questions in their lives. These questions are complicated, especially when teenagers have to deal with poverty. They are often overwhelming when pregnancy enters their reality. This situation is also hard on small Aboriginal communities, meaning that help from members of the larger community or Nation may be useful. Such help may come from communities that are setting examples in this area, or it may come from individuals that can give time and ideas.

Being sensitive to the damage stereotypes and low expectations have on young people can also make a difference. Olsen (2005) describes how the impacts of such attitudes and stereotypes paint off-reserve First Nations women as incompetent and substandard mothers who are more fertile, consume more drugs and alcohol, are sexually abusive or were sexually abused, and come from broken homes. The experience on reserve may be different but it is not necessarily easier. Pregnant teenagers are nothing new – it has become a stereotype of its own in general society, as discussed in this issue by Fonda, Eni and Guimond (2013). This is even more so in the case for Aboriginal youth. The level of community acceptance of teenage pregnancy allows them to walk freely about the reserve, but they don't feel any better about themselves. When everyone in their community and, indeed, in Canada seems to have low expectations of them, youth end up having low expectations of themselves.

If we flip these negative connotations on their head and consider that the situation for young teenaged women of different ethnicities is no different, it becomes obvious that:

They are lively, intelligent and beautiful. They are daughters, granddaughters, cousins, sisters, and friends. They are enthusiastic sometimes and depressed sometimes. They have goals and dreams and hope they can accomplish them. They make good choices and bad choices. They like to shop, play soccer, eat burgers, party and attend music concerts. They love to dance. (Olsen, 2005, p. 33)

Parents have similar issues with their sons. The goal is to keep young people on a straight path so they can enjoy bountiful lives, where everyone benefits. Such a CED plan can only come together if the community is ready to work together.

Aboriginal children are the future. They are also at risk and highly marginalized (The Working Group of the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy, 1999). They are being taken into state care in higher numbers than ever before and continue to be underprivileged. Many of today's First Nations' children will have children before they are ready, because they had teenage parents who lacked parenting skills and did not know how to take care of a family as well as they might have hoped. This cycle continues today and, because what affects the part affects the whole, it has social and economic ramifications for all of us, Aboriginal or not. Teenage mothers are a key to the success of CED goals of building strong Aboriginal communities. They are the women who determine the strength of the families and the health of their young people, and who pass on critical cultural information to the next generation. Teen mothers are a vital First Nation resource. The cost of ignoring them is much too high (Olsen, 2005).

When I take stock of the changes in my world since I started working with Aboriginal economies, I remember marveling at the growing sophistication in our leadership, the increasing levels of education, and the strength women in management positions. It is important to consider that some of the women leaders I knew were teenage mothers and, yet, they made it; they have met with undeniable success. Today, I see more Aboriginal students entering in my classes and a growing contingent of the same in the commerce degree program at my university. I see hope for major change. About 10 years ago, I travelled to communities up north where the overwhelming majority of children had FAS. Once I understood the permanent damage our children suffer from the poor choices of their mothers, I felt we had lost a generation. It is very challenging to make progress in communities when they are faced with the kind of fallout that FAS children bring to themselves and those around them. As mentioned previously, FAS is often linked to teenage pregnancy because many young women do not value, and lack information regarding, healthy pregnancies. The economic consequences tend to grow like a snowball rolling down a hill, moving from the family to the community to the general population. Such consequences are far-reaching and very sad. Moving through the CED plan I suggested in the previous section, we find are some very positive ideas that involve the whole community. That is where hope lies.

Summary

While there have been strides made in the First Nation economy over the past 40 years, there are still many challenges to confront. Young Aboriginal people, especially, face daunting employment

challenges. Their level of education is low and this curtails many opportunities that otherwise might be available. Teenage pregnancy adds another layer of complication in communities that may have few economic opportunities themselves. While grandchildren are often embraced by the grandparents and sometimes by both sets of parents, often resources are not available over the long-term and the grandchild is taken into state care. Many dreams are shattered as a result.

Economic self-sufficiency takes effort from every community member including teenaged parents and their offspring. It means resources must focus on healthy sexuality, which includes prevention and support for teenage mothers so the poverty cycle can be broken. This is an investment in the future, in *their* future. CED is one path that brings to the table a unity of effort that deals directly with issues and finds solutions that put community citizen participation at the heart of the process with minimal reliance on outside programs. Outside programs and resources can be used judiciously but progress does not rest on them. All community citizens need to be able to participate in the economy according to their personal capacities and desires. The alternative is loss of community resiliency. This impacts all of Canadian society. Teenage pregnancy is not an easy situation to handle but the effort is worth it. Honest conversations, better programs, thoughtful policy change, and meaningful community attitude shifts will create the opportunities necessary for real change and for economic resiliency.

References

- Anderson, K. (2002). *Tenuous connections: Urban Aboriginal youth sexual health and pregnancy*. Toronto: Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.
- Anderson, R. (1999). *Economic development among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada*. York University: Captus Press.
- Archibald, L. (2004). *Teenage pregnancy in Inuit communities: Issues and perspectives*. Ottawa: Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association.
- Assembly of First Nations Make Poverty History Expert Advisory Committee. (2009). *The state of the First Nation economy and the struggle to make poverty history*. Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations.
- Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre and the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada. (2008). *Update report on teen pregnancy prevention*. Toronto: Government of Ontario.
- Blackstock, C. B., Bruyere, D., & Moreau, E. (2006). *Many hands one dream: Principles for a new perspective on the health of First Nations, Metis and Inuit youth*. Retrieved from www.manyhandedream.ca
- Canadian Centre for Community Renewal. (n.d.). *Community economic development*. Retrieved from <http://www.cedworks.com/CEDdefinition.html>
- Disant, M. H. (2008). *PopHealth notes: Aboriginal youth and social inequalities in health*. Montreal: Quebec Population Health Research Network.
- Economic Development, Community Development. (2009, March 5). *Economic development 101: Development defined*. Retrieved from <http://ecdevcomdev.blogspot.com/2009/03/economic-development-101-economic.html>
- Fonda, M., Eni, R., & Guimond, E. (2013). Socially constructed teen motherhood: A review. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 4(1). Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol4/iss1/>
- Godfrey, K. (2006). *In their own words: Aboriginal youth speak out on what concerns them*. BC: The Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia, The First Nations Summit, The Forum's Community Planning Group.
- Garner, R., Guimond, E., & Senécal S. (2013). The socio-economic characteristics of First Nation teen mothers. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 4(1). Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol4/iss1/>

- Guèvremont, A., & Kohen, D. (2013). The physical and mental health of off-reserve First Nations children of teen mothers. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 4(1). Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol4/iss1/>
- Guimond, E., & Robataille, N. (2008). When teenage girls have children: Trends and consequences. *Horizons: Policy Research Initiative*, 10(1), 49 - 51.
- Irvine, K. (2009). *Supporting Aboriginal parents: Teaching for the future*. Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health.
- McCracken, M. (2005). *Young women work: Community economic development to reduce women's poverty and improve income*. Winnipeg: Prairie Health Centre of Excellence.
- National Aboriginal Health Organization. (2005). *Aboriginal women and girls' health roundtable*. Ottawa: National Aboriginal Health Organization.
- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. (2005). *Understanding neglect in First Nation families*. Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health.
- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. (2009). *Economic development as a social determinant of First Nations, Inuit and Metis health*. Retrieved from <http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/myfiles/nccah-factsheet-SDOH-economicdevelopment.pdf>
- Native Women's Association of Canada. (2004). *Background document on Aboriginal women's health for the health sectorial section following up to the Canada-Aboriginal peoples roundtable*. Ottawa: Native Women's Association of Canada.
- Olsen, S. (2005). *Just ask us: A conversation with First Nations teenage moms*. Winlaw, BC: Sono Nis Press.
- Ordolis, E. (2007). A story of their own: Adolescent pregnancy and child welfare in Aboriginal communities. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 3(4), 30 - 41.
- Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. (2003). *Urban aboriginal youth: An action plan for change*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.
- The Working Group of the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy. (1999). *National Aboriginal youth strategy*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.
- Valaskakis, G. G., Stout, M. D., & Guimond, E. (Eds.). (2009). *Restoring the balance: First Nations women, community and culture*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Voyager, C. (2008). *Firekeepers of the twenty-first century: First Nations women chiefs*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Young/Single Parent Support Network of Ottawa-Carleton, Timmins Native Friendship Centre, and the Canadian Institute of Child Health. (2000). *Pro-action, Postponment, and prepartion/support: A framework for action to reduce teen pregancy in Canada*. Ottawa: Health Canada.