



*"We would not have got near as far in reaching an agreement without the program" NWFF Participant*

**FAST FACTS**

**Participant risk factors:**

- Two thirds of clients said their relationship was abusive
- In 40% of cases police had been called to the house and 24% had restraining orders
- On average, clients returned to court at least 3 times prior to NWFF
- 64% of clients said parenting discussions led to arguments with their ex partner
- 93% of parents felt the children were negatively affected by parenting disputes

**NWFF Results**

- 47 cases completed; 14 cases in progress
- 13 resolved custody/access issues within the program
- 2 resolved through Collaborative Law
- Following NWFF, 7 resolved through JDR process and 2 resolved through mediation

**SROI Ratio:**

Year 1: 4.25 : 1  
Year 2: 9.29 : 1

**Contact Information**

Medicine Hat Family Services  
477-3 St. S.E. Medicine Hat, AB.  
Phone: (403) 504-8026

**Program Background**

New Ways for Families (NWFF) is a three year pilot project funded through Alberta Justice and Attorney General offices and implemented by Medicine Hat Family Services. NWFF provides short term counselling for high conflict separating or divorcing parents who have ongoing parenting disputes. The goal is to reduce potential escalation, assault or re-victimization in high conflict parenting cases and to increase parent’s cooperative parenting skills in order to ensure the children’s best interests are addressed and harmful effects on children are prevented. In NWFF both parents are encouraged to avoid the cycles of ongoing parenting assessment and additional court applications, and instead focus on making positive changes during individual counselling sessions. NWFF focuses on three fundamental problem solving skills for parents: flexible thinking; managed emotions and moderate behaviours. The program encourages system coordination among justice, legal and social service practitioners, and reduces use of justice and court systems for resolving parenting issues.

Over the first two years of the program, NWFF completed 47 cases with an overall success rate of 51%. Of the cases completed, 13 resolved within the program and did not require further legal decision-making processes. A further 2 cases were resolved through Collaborative Law; following completion of the NWFF program,

and additional 7 cases resolved through JDR processes and 2 cases resolved after attending mediation.

Program outcomes show that 42% of clients improved their parenting cooperation in

areas such as willingness to accommodate changes in visiting arrangements, to act as a resource to the former spouse in raising the children, and improved day to day decision making about the children. 52% of parents noted improved cooperation on major decisions about the children. In 22% of cases, parents increased their involvement with the children. Outcomes for children included less acting out behaviours (57%); less symptoms of stress such as headaches, stomachaches; difficulty sleeping (54%); improved school performance (45%); and more interest in seeing the non-custodial parent (33%).

**Theory of Change**

If separating or divorcing couples battling over parenting disputes, receive counselling that results in respectful communication, they are more likely to negotiate the best outcome for their children and to effectively co-parent into the future.

**Participant Outcomes**

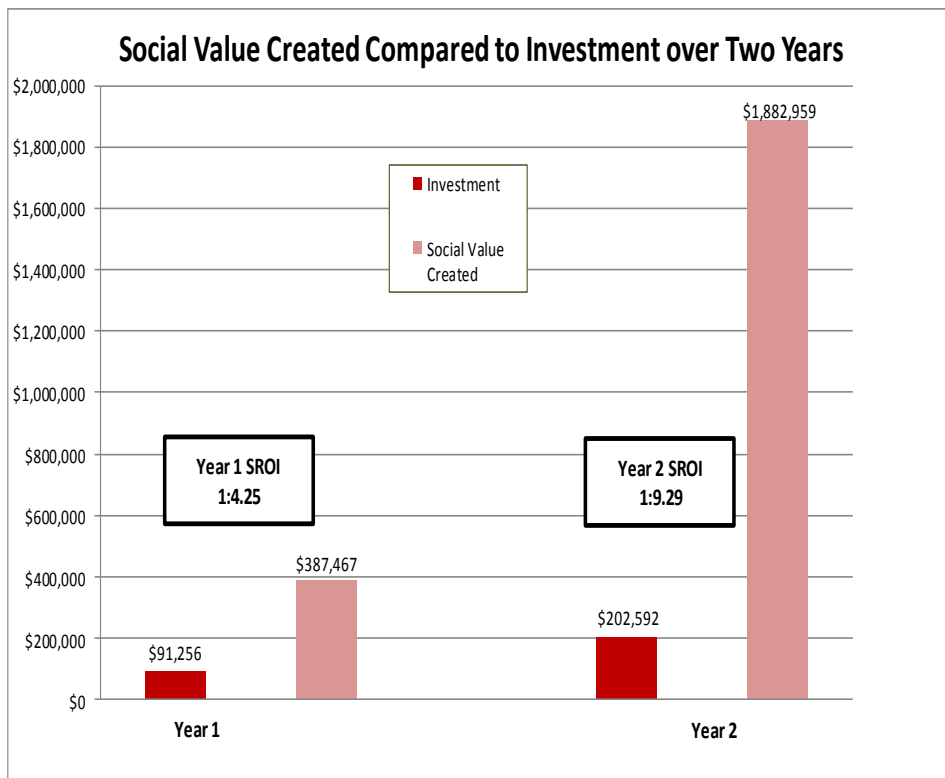
### Social Value Created & Valuing Change—SROI

Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis was used to capture the social value of the outcomes produced by investment in the NWFF program. Through SROI analysis, the outcomes of the program were carefully mapped enabling a clear understanding of the links between program activities and the social *change* resulting from these activities. The analysis looks at the outcomes for 47 completed cases and 94 participants (not including children). In order to determine the total present social value created, outcomes were assigned financial proxy values to represent the social value associated with changes experienced by participants as a result of the program. These proxies included justice costs like court, police time, legal costs to both the system and the participant, mental health services, as well as costs related directly to the children such as Child Welfare interventions and personal impacts of stress and abuse.

*“The information I got out of it (NWFF) was priceless”*  
NWFF Participant

### The Value of Annual Investment

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of the NWFF program found that for every dollar invested the program created \$4.51 in social value in the first year of operation, and \$9.86 of value in the second year for an average of **\$7.18** of social value created for every dollar of investment. Throughout the analysis, conservative estimations of social value were taken, and each proxy was considered in terms of the amount of the change actually attributable to the program (and discounted for that change determined not to be a direct result of the NWFF). Since not all social value can be adequately captured in financial terms, the values presented above represent the *minimum* value created through the program, and the actual value is likely higher.



### Looking Forward

These results indicate that there is significant value in using the skills based NWFF intervention to help parents improve communication and cooperation in addressing parenting disputes in order to keep these cases out of the court system where possible. By supporting these parents through the difficult process of establishing appropriate and fair parenting agreements, NWFF helps to decrease conflict, stress and abuse while improving outcomes for children, leading to safer, healthier families and communities. The NWFF program should be continued and expanded to other communities.