



**FAST FACTS**

Participant risk factors:

- 59% of clients said their relationship was abusive
- In 33% of cases police had been called to the house and 20% had restraining orders
- 37% of clients returned to court at least 3 times or more prior to NWFF
- 87% of clients said parenting discussions led to arguments with their ex partner
- 87% of parents felt the children were negatively affected by parenting disputes

NWFF Results

- **Total 142 cases referred**
- **99 cases completed NWFF**
- **51 cases resolved outside of court**

SROI Ratio:

Year 1: 4.25 : 1

Year 2: 9.37 : 1

Year 3: 6.01 : 1

Year 4: 10.57:1

**Average** return over three years  
**8.01 : 1**

Contact Information

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

**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 custody and access disputes. The goal is to reduce potential escalation, assault or re-victimization in high conflict custody and access 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 custody issues.

**Participant Outcomes**

Over the first 4 years of the program, NWFF completed **99** cases with an overall success rate of 51%. Of the cases completed, 35 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, 12 cases resolved through JDR processes, 1 case resolved after mediation and in 1 case the parties reconciled.

**Theory of Change**

If separating or divorcing couples battling over child-custody and access, 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.

Program outcomes show that 54% 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. In 75% of cases parents maintained or improved their joint decision making around major decision for the children and their overall involvement with the children. Outcomes for children included less acting out behaviours (40%); less symptoms of stress such as headaches, stomachaches; difficulty sleeping (33%); improved school performance (33%); and more interest in seeing the non-custodial parent (33%).

### 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 99 completed cases and 198 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 an **average of \$8.01 in social value**. 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 custody/access 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 custody/access 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.

