

PATH WAYS TO PROGRESS

I'm on my way to _____.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pathways to Progress
for the Women & Girls of Western New York

A CALL TO ACTION, January 2010

INTRODUCTION

Pathways to Progress for the Women & Girls of Western New York is a guide for impactful investment and action, and a momentous step forward in addressing the inequities and injustices still faced by women and girls today, even as we enter the second decade of the 21st century.

Sponsored by the WNY Women's Fund with broad community participation, *Pathways to Progress* is the first region-wide assessment of the status of women and girls – a baseline for where we stand in 2010. *Pathways to Progress* is also a roadmap for the future in its identification of targeted investments – leverage points – for removing barriers to economic security, education, leadership, safety and health for women and girls. A set of data-driven indicators serve as mileposts for tracking progress in the status of women and girls and monitoring investment impacts.

Pathways to Progress is not a final report. Rather it is a foundation for moving forward, the start of an ongoing region-wide dialogue on supporting women and girls, and a call to action to us all. This is the first step of an important journey toward a more vital, sustainable and competitive region.

Pathways to Progress
focuses on
the women
and girls
of Western
New York, defined
geographically in this
report as Erie and
Niagara Counties.



For the full report, visit www.wnywomensfund.com

Pathways to Progress is an initiative of the WNY Women's Fund. Additional support has been provided by the Community Health Foundation of Western & Central New York, the Joy Family Foundation, the Robert J. and Martha B. Fierle Foundation, the James H. Cummings Foundation, Inc., The John R. Oishei Foundation, the Patrick P. Lee Foundation, Delaware North Companies and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The University at Buffalo Regional Institute was commissioned by the Fund to administer the project.



WHY WOMEN AND GIRLS? WHY WESTERN NEW YORK? WHY NOW?

Women have experienced dramatic changes in recent decades due to shifting policy, cultural norms, attitudes, economic realities and social forces. In many respects, women have made stunning progress. They are more educated than ever and equal participants in the workforce. They are increasingly found in leadership positions. They are earning more and driving growth and prosperity for families, communities and the economy.

Yet significant gaps remain. Women are the dominant face of poverty. Teen pregnancy continues to derail thousands of young girls every year in WNY. Women are increasingly raising children on their own, and doing so at poverty levels. Over the course of their lifetime, women have a one in four chance of being the victim of intimate partner violence. Women are on the front lines of society's balancing act of work and family, and are far from parity in leadership roles. And women, on average, outlive men, making the issues of aging predominantly women's issues.

How successfully women and girls are able to pursue and achieve their goals matters not only to women and girls themselves, but also to their children, families, employers, policymakers and the region at large.

As Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn argue in their 2009 book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, there is a profound connection between the fortunes of women and a society's reckoning of its persistent economic, political and social challenges.

Women and girls are the critical link to families, community, different perspectives, and untapped economic, social and cultural contributions. Investing in women and girls is investing in a more vital WNY.

When **women** falter, the **region** falters.
When **women** thrive, the **region** thrives.

582,102
WOMEN AND GIRLS

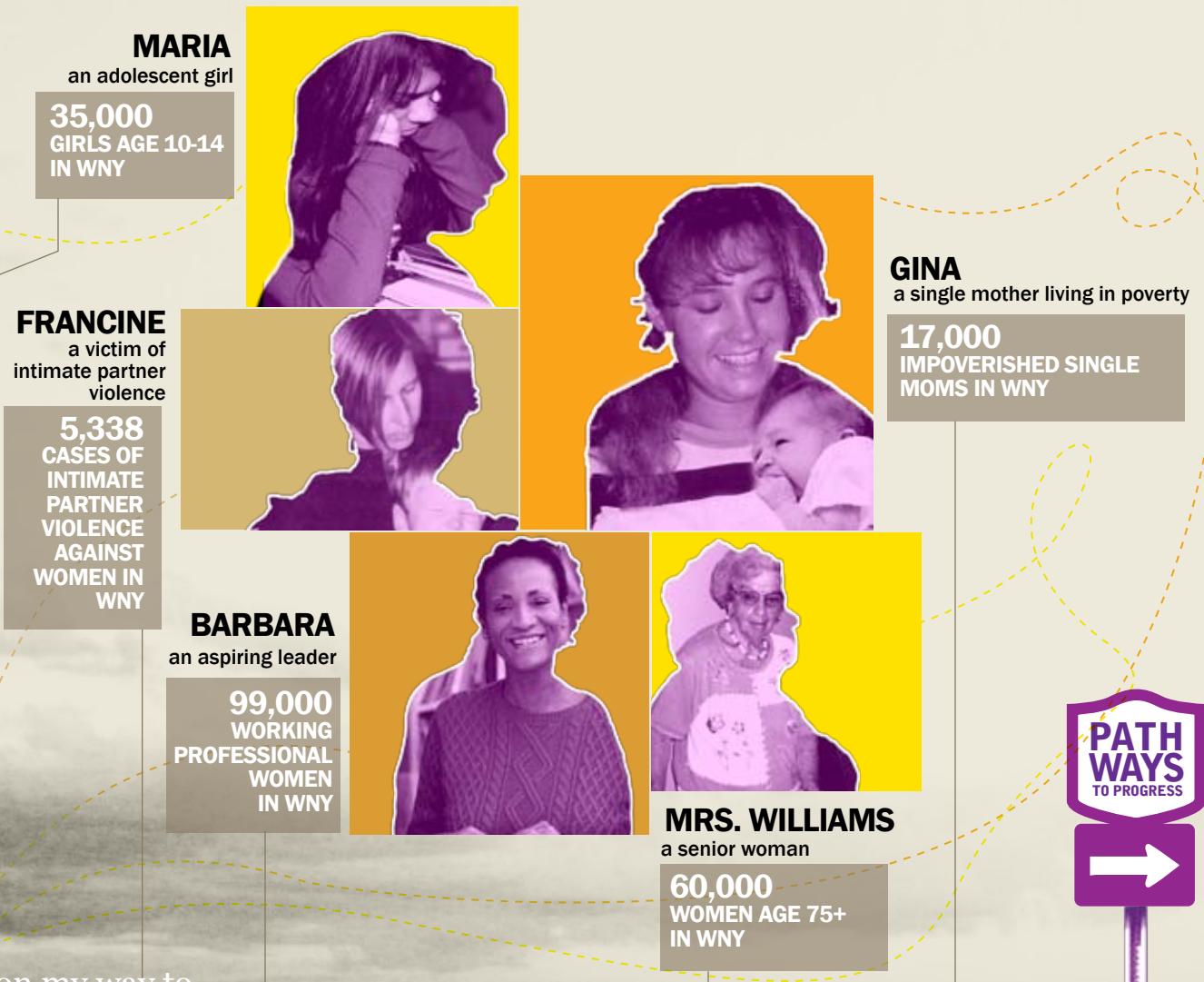


THE PATHWAYS

Pathways to Progress has been guided by rigorous research and analysis of issues ranging from the wage gap to the work-family balance. Grounding this research with diverse, front-line perspectives were more than 300 women and girls, service providers, experts, advocates and philanthropists engaged through a series of conversations across the region. From urban teens to rural seniors, women and girls shared their hopes and dreams. From nonprofit executives to community volunteers, experts and advocates offered insight on targeted investment needs and advocacy opportunities. These perspectives and wisdom color every page of this report.

Pathways to Progress presents the status of the region's 582,102 women and girls using the metaphor of the "pathway" to portray sometimes steady and sure, but often bumpy and obstacle-ridden, journeys. Along the way are prime opportunities to intervene and smooth pathways toward stronger outcomes. **The report focuses on the pathways of five hypothetical women and girls, who represent populations of women in the region at critical crossroads.** For these women, strategic investment can remove roadblocks, advance their pathways to progress, and help the region leverage their full potential. These pathways are defined broadly to encompass the full diversity of WNY women and girls.

The *five pathways* of this report open a window into the lives of:





MARIA IS AN ADOLESCENT GIRL.

Maria is among the region's 35,000 girls age 10-14 entering the difficult, transitional stage from childhood to adulthood, a period of self-discovery, growth and potential, and the launching pad for lifelong success. She is the future of WNY.

**35,000
IN WNY**

Maria is
on her way to

Strong academic foundations
Smart choices about relationships
good health, confidence and
freedom from violence and sex



Maria faces *roadblocks*

- > 2,000 girls were falling behind in major subjects by 8th grade in 2008.
- > Another 1,200 dropped out of school, including 700 from Buffalo Public Schools alone.
- > 2,200 girls age 15-19 got pregnant, with rates highest in the region's most concentrated pockets of poverty and where female-headed households predominate.
- > Incidences of sexually transmitted infections among teen girls doubled during the first half of this decade and rates are now three times the state average.
- > One in five elementary-age students in Upstate NY is overweight or obese; levels are higher among Hispanic and black youth.
- > Teen girls are nearly half as likely as teen boys to exercise vigorously on a regular basis.

WNY can remove her roadblocks through these *leverage points*



LEVERAGE
POINTS

- #1 Provide quality afterschool and summer programs and mentoring opportunities
- #2 Expose girls to career and technical education and academic enrichment, particularly in gender nontraditional fields
- #3 Broaden access to comprehensive sex education, targeting at-risk districts
- #4 Support increased physical activity levels among girls



GINA IS A SINGLE MOTHER IN POVERTY.

Gina is among the 17,000 WNY women raising children on their own and living in poverty. While she represents the face of impoverished families in WNY, she also offers a critical opportunity to build economic security for families and disrupt a perpetuating cycle of poverty.

17,000
IN WNY

Gina is
on her way to

*escaping poverty
education and training
toward career pathways
sustainable, interesting work*

Gina faces *roadblocks*

- Two out of three families in poverty in WNY are headed by single women, with poverty levels among this population rising over the past decade.
- Women in WNY with less than a high school education are five times more likely to live in poverty than are women with a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Top jobs for women, including personal care and health care support, are more often low-wage as compared to top jobs for men.
- Even in top occupations held by both men and women, women earn significantly less than their male counterparts, with the wage gap ranging from \$9,000 for office jobs to over \$20,000 for management positions.

WNY can remove her roadblocks through these *leverage points*



LEVERAGE
POINTS

#1 Increase access to human services

#2 Provide educational and vocational training toward career pathways

#3 Support child care affordability, quality and accessibility

#4 Push to reform welfare policy and practices



FRANCINE IS A VICTIM OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.

Her suffering counts among the nearly 5,400 cases of intimate partner violence against women in WNY in 2008. Thousands more are never reported. She represents the pervasive problem of violence against women and an opportunity to thrust what is often treated as a private matter into the regional spotlight to reshape attitudes, heighten attention from leaders and commit to prevention.

5,338
IN WNY

Francine is on her way to freedom from intimate partner violence & abuse and economic security

Francine faces *roadblocks*

- The approximately 5,400 cases of intimate partner abuse against women in 2008 reflect a 15% increase in domestic violence reports from 2006. National statistics show approximately 50% of domestic violence is never reported.
- Thirteen women were murdered by their intimate partners in less than a year in 2008 and 2009, representing a shocking escalation of violence against women.
- While intimate partner abuse does not discriminate, women who are separated, low-income, young or Native American experience some of the highest rates.
- The impacts of intimate partner violence are vast and include physical and mental health challenges, economic dependence and long-term cognitive, emotional and behavioral problems among children who are witness to or victims of such abuse.

WNY can remove her roadblocks through these *leverage points*



LEVERAGE
POINTS

- #1 Confront the social and cultural norms at the root of violence against women
- #2 Break barriers to victim intervention
- #3 Connect victims to supports for economic security
- #4 Provide victims with transitional and long-term housing opportunities

BARBARA IS AN ASPIRING LEADER

Among the **99,000 professional women in WNY**, Barbara has the potential to contribute to a more balanced voice in the policies and practices shaping life in WNY, whether through public office, top-level management or civic engagement.

**99,000
IN WNY**

Barbara is on her way to developing leadership pathways
leading public, private and civic institutions in WNY
balancing career with family



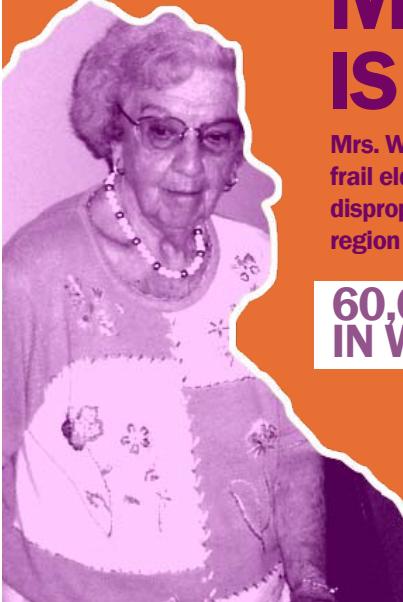
Barbara faces *roadblocks*

- While women more often hold advanced degrees as compared to men, they are still underrepresented in fields such as computer science, engineering, the physical sciences and mathematics.
- Although equal participants in the workforce, women are not maintaining leadership pathways, as they are outnumbered nearly 2:1 among managers, and more than 3:1 among top executives.
- Among those at the pinnacle of WNY's top companies and organizations, women are outnumbered in nearly every sector.
- In public office, women are underrepresented at all levels, local, state and federal.
- Women are more than twice as likely as men in WNY to work part-time, and cut their hours more often than women do statewide or nationwide.

WNY can remove her roadblocks through these *leverage points*

LEVERAGE POINTS

- #1 Eliminate policies, practices and values that contribute to the exclusion of women from leadership
- #2 Expand the pipeline of women leaders
- #3 Strengthen and expand work-family policies
- #4 Connect emerging leaders with leadership development resources



MRS. WILLIAMS IS A SENIOR WOMAN

Mrs. Williams is one of **60,000 women age 75+ in WNY**, part of the region's growing population of frail elders. With women outliving men, the challenges of frailty, from isolation to poor health, are disproportionately experienced by women, making Mrs. Williams the litmus test for an elder-friendly region that can support and leverage the contributions of its growing senior population.

**60,000
IN WNY**

Mrs. Williams
is on her way to

Staying healthy & connected
living independently & aging in place

Mrs. Williams faces *roadblocks*

- Declining health is a significant barrier for aging senior women in WNY. One in two women age 75+ has a disability that complicates daily activities, from walking and remembering to dressing and toileting.
- The risk of a serious fall increases rapidly as women age and become frailer. An estimated 59% of women age 85+ will be hospitalized due to a serious fall sometime over the next 10 years, with injuries ranging from hip fractures to traumatic brain injury.
- Depression often accompanies disability, isolation and a loss of independence among seniors. At least 42,000 senior women in WNY are at risk for this condition because they live alone, have serious disabilities or lack access to a vehicle.
- A shortage of independent, community-based living options increases the chances that our frail seniors will not be able to age in place.

WNY can remove her roadblocks through these *leverage points*



- #1 Shift culture to embrace aging and tap the potential of growing numbers of seniors
- #2 Build health system capacity for an aging population, including geriatric training and preventive care
- #3 Develop community-based, person-centered independent living options for frail seniors
- #4 Strengthen social connections for seniors through mobility supports

A REGIONAL ROADMAP

FOR SUPPORTING
WOMEN AND GIRLS

PATH WAYS TO PROGRESS



20 leverage points guide strategic investment and action for women and girls.

LEVERAGE POINTS

These reveal a core set of **Mandates for Action** for WNY and the basis of a regional roadmap for advancing women and girls:

Change the way we think to eliminate social and cultural barriers

Advocate for policy and legislative change

Invest in lifelong education and training

Ensure access to programs and services

Support physical, mental and emotional health for women and girls

Involve women and girls meaningfully in civic life and leadership

Inspire and guide women and girls through mentorship and role models

Commit to continual research and regional dialogue on issues affecting women and girls

WNY achieves progress for women and girls, as reflected by **16 Mileposts** that monitor the status of women and girls.

MILEPOSTS FOR WNY WOMEN & GIRLS

The region must now commit to tracking these mileposts to monitor progress, inform action, celebrate achievement and refocus action when necessary. Mileposts may change, or new ones develop, as better data become available and as issues evolve.

What if WNY succeeded in reaching

1. **Academic achievement** rises in the middle grades
2. **Dropout rates** fall
3. **Teen pregnancy rates** decline
4. Fewer girls are **obese or overweight**; **physical activity** levels rise; incidences of **sexually transmitted infections** fall
5. Fewer single women and **single mothers live in poverty**
6. **Educational attainment levels** for women rise, decreasing the odds of women living in poverty
7. Women hold a greater **share of high-wage occupations**
8. **Intimate partner abuse** declines
9. **No women are murdered** by their intimate partners
10. More women **graduate with advanced degrees** in fields where they are underrepresented
11. Fewer women fall off their **career path**
12. More women serve as **leaders in the private sector and hold elected office**
13. More WNY companies offer **comprehensive work-family benefits**
14. Fewer senior women experience **serious falls**
15. **Risk factors for depression** are monitored and addressed
16. Supply of **independent living options** increases

WNY becomes a stronger, more vital region as progress is achieved for women and girls.



Moving forward requires **the will to act together as a region**. We must all take responsibility and be held accountable for advancing women and girls.

mileposts for women and girls? What would it mean for our region?

MARIA



What if WNY cut teen pregnancy in half? 550 fewer girls become teen moms. They stay in school and obtain degrees or training for good-paying jobs. Collectively, they earn **\$7.7 million** more than if they had dropped out of high school.

Investing in girls is investing in the future of WNY.

GINA



What if WNY cut poverty in half? 8,500 women and 16,000 children no longer live in poverty. With a college degree, their annual household earnings increase **\$53 million**. Families and futures are secure.

A cycle of poverty is disrupted.

FRANCINE



What if WNY eliminated intimate partner violence for just one year? 13 women are alive today; thousands more are safe. At least **\$135 million** in violence-related costs, from property damage to lost productivity, are saved.

WNY confronts violence against women and is a more just region.

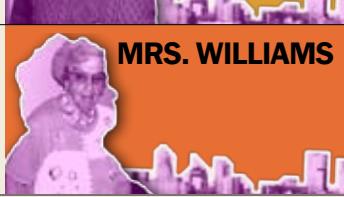
BARBARA



What if WNY achieved gender parity in leadership? 2,000 more women lead private institutions in WNY. **Business profits rise.** 39 more women hold elected office.

Decisions are balanced and the region is vitalized by diversity.

MRS. WILLIAMS



What if WNY reduced serious falls by half? 2,000 fewer senior women are hospitalized. WNY saves more than **\$150 million** in health care costs.

WNY is a more elder-friendly and sustainable region.

Women and girls

**Foundations,
philanthropists and
corporate funders**

Business leaders

**Health and human
services providers**

**Policymakers and
regional leaders**

Community members

Educators

Media





When **women** falter, **WNY** falters.
When **women** thrive, **WNY** thrives.



WNY Women's Fund
Transforming our community by
investing in women and girls

www.wnywomensfund.com

UB Regional Institute
University at Buffalo The State University of New York
www.regional-institute.buffalo.edu