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To be listed on the Community Services  
Committee Agenda, 11 February 1999

DATE 25 January 1999

TO/DEST. The Chair and Members of Council

FROM/EXP. Social Services Commissioner

SUBJECT/OBJET **REVIEW OF INFORMATION PROVISION TO  
ONTARIO WORKS PARTICIPANTS**

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A copy of the Executive Summary of the above report is attached for your information.

If you wish to receive a copy of the full report, please call Ardith Juby at 724-4199 extension 4378.

Dick Stewart

Attach. ( One )

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# Review of Information Provision to Ontario Works Participants

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December 1998

# Executive Summary

## Background / Purpose

A Monitoring Ontario Works (MOW) Project Team, comprised of representatives from various sectors of the community, was formed in early 1998 to evaluate how successful the Region's Ontario Works Program has been. The MOW Action Research Report found, in one of its findings, that "little or no information was provided to participants – at least in a manner they were able to absorb, understand and use".

A recent joint Regional-Provincial audit of Ontario Works in Office A found that although sufficient information was provided to applicants about the Employment Support component of Ontario Works, limited information was provided about the Employment Placement and the Community Placement components at the application stage.

In response to the above findings, the Policy, Planning and Performance Management Services Branch conducted a review of information provided to participants to determine the extent to which Social Services has met clients' need for information about Ontario Works.

## Method

1. Staff at various levels in Social Services were interviewed (19 staff in total) to determine:
  - ◇ What information has been provided to participants about Ontario Works (OW)?
  - ◇ How has it been provided?
  - ◇ In the opinion of staff, are participants adequately informed?
  - ◇ What challenges have staff faced in obtaining and providing OW information?
2. A compilation was made of printed Ontario Works information that had been distributed to participants, staff, and the community.

## Results

Staff interviews and a review of information provided to participants indicate the following:

- In the early stages of implementation of Ontario Works, lack of clarity in Provincial announcements and reports in the media resulted in a lack of understanding of the program: some participants thought they had to do "workfare" for their cheque; others thought they would be referred to a job.
- Until recently, information that was available was not sufficiently clear and detailed. Frontline staff needed clearer information from Management. Management needed clearer information from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS).

- Frustration was expressed by staff about the expectation that the recent volume of revised Ontario Works Regulations and Directives be implemented on short notice.
- Many initiatives were undertaken by Social Services to inform participants and the community about Ontario Works in the past two years. These initiatives include the following:
  - ◊ direct mail-outs to clients,
  - ◊ fact sheets to be provided to participants by staff,
  - ◊ Ontario Works information pamphlets for participants,
  - ◊ pamphlets, fact sheets, and other information provided to agencies,
  - ◊ information sessions held with agencies, and
  - ◊ overview of Ontario Works at Employment Resource Centre orientation sessions.
- Although many information initiatives were developed, not all the information reached the targeted audiences. For example, the yellow information pamphlet about Ontario Works was not always given out. Some workers were unaware of it. At times supplies ran out.
- Most participants were provided with a brief overview of Ontario Works. The extent of the overview depended on time and workload constraints, the workers' knowledge of Ontario Works, and the relevance of the information to the client's individual circumstances. Workers indicate that as regulations and policies become clearer, the information they provide to participants becomes clearer as well.
- In recent months the amount and clarity of Ontario Works information has improved as the program has evolved.
- Numerous initiatives have been undertaken in recent months to implement the new legislation and to inform staff and participants about Ontario Works. These include the following:
  - ◊ a three page newsletter mailed to all clients including Ontario Works information,
  - ◊ new policy and program fact sheets,
  - ◊ large posters with pamphlet pockets for all waiting and interview rooms advertising the services available at Employment Resource Centres,
  - ◊ Ontario Works implementation guidelines for staff, and
  - ◊ increased training activities for staff.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- current information initiatives continue in order to inform staff, participants and the community about Ontario Works, and
- steps be taken to ensure that information that has been developed is being distributed by staff to the intended audience, and that supplies of it are always available.