

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON  
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT  
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.  
 Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 24 September 1999

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator  
 Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Social Services Commissioner

SUBJECT/OBJET **SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONSE TO MONITORING ONTARIO  
 WORKS ACTION PLAN: RESPONSE TO MOTION CS 30 (99)**

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### **DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Community Services Committee receive this report for information.**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Community Services Committee on Social Services response to the recommendations appearing in the Ontario Works Monitoring Project Team's final report Plain Speaking: Hope and Reality.

### **BACKGROUND**

In March 1997, Community Services Committee received the Ottawa-Carleton Business Plan for Ontario Works. Community Services Committee and Regional Council approved the plan, including a motion to create an independent volunteer panel to evaluate the success of the program. Subsequently, a community Project Team was formed, including representatives from the Social Planning Council, labour, academia and clients, to monitor Ontario Works, with a particular focus on the impact of Ontario Works on clients. The Project Team was arm's length from Social Services and reported directly to Community Services Committee. The Project Team presented its interim report to Committee in October 1998, and its final report in May 1999.

The Project Team's final report, Plain Speaking: Hope and Reality provided qualitative data to reflect participants' experiences of Ontario Works. Community Services Committee received the report and approved the following Motion:

That the Areas of Further Research outlined in Section 4 of the Report, as well Recommendations 1 through 17 of the Monitoring Ontario Works Action Plan be referred to the Social Services Department for a report back to the Community Services Committee, defining strategies to deal with each of the recommendations.

## DISCUSSION

### Recommendations 1- 17

It is very clear that a significant number of recommendations outlined below require an overall advocacy strategy. The most efficient approach to this issue would require expertise in intergovernmental affairs complemented by sound information and analysis. This comprehensive approach might best be placed at the corporate level e.g. the CAO's office. It is estimated that a .5 FTE would be required for the development and implementation of an overall advocacy strategy plan.

Other actions identified in the following table will be incorporated into the operational plans for the respective Directorates of Social Services.

The table provides additional information and clarifications where relevant. Lastly, it cross-references recommendations and strategies to their counterparts in the Preliminary Costing Report on the Task Force on Poverty Recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION	COMMENTS
1. Allowances for basic needs and shelter be increased to reflect the actual costs of a nutritious diet and adequate housing.	A similar recommendation appears in the Task Force on Poverty report. There is a need for the development and implementation of an overall advocacy strategy, perhaps with a corporate "home" (See <u>Preliminary Costing Report</u> ).
2. Clients retain the full amount of the National Child Benefit to allow them to meet the additional needs of their children.	This item would need to be integrated into an overall advocacy strategy workplan (See <u>Preliminary Costing Report</u> ).
3. Clients be allowed to retain a greater amount of their earnings from part-time or full-time work.	Provincial changes to STEP (pending), which will introduce variable rate exemptions, move in the opposite policy direction. The variable rate exemption will decrease the amount of earnings to zero over 5 years which any given person will be able to retain before claw-back of social assistance benefits. Benefit levels will be tied to length of time on assistance, not level of earnings. Thus benefits will be clawed back at a higher rate whether or not a person's income is increasing over the 5 year period.  A similar recommendation appears in the Task Force on

RECOMMENDATION	COMMENTS
	<p>Poverty Report. An overall advocacy strategy will need to be developed and implemented, perhaps with a corporate “home” (See <a href="#">Preliminary Costing Report</a>).</p> <p>Informal methods of building assets, such as co-operative pooling of savings for purchase of appliances within a given neighbourhood or community, is already happening and will continue to be encouraged e.g. through community developers in Community Resource Centres.</p>
<p>4. Clients continue to receive supplementary benefits (e.g., drug card) for a period of time after leaving social assistance, so they can sustain employment during the initial transition.</p>	<p>EHSS (100% municipal) is available for discretionary benefits, including assistance with deductibles required under the Trillium drug program for working low-income families. (See <a href="#">Preliminary Costing Report</a> for additional information on EHSS).</p>
<p>6. Current options available in the Ontario Works Program be expanded and more streams be created. The definition of “work” must be widened to recognize such activities as co-operative ventures and community economic development.</p>	<p>Alternative work such as Community Economic Development (CED’s) and community ventures are already acceptable options under Ontario Works in Ottawa-Carleton.</p> <p>An overall advocacy strategy would need to include advocating to the Province for a wider definition of “work” e.g. caring for young dependent children, disabled family members, and self-initiated volunteer work, including more flexibility with respect to time limitations.</p>
<p>7. The time allotted for the initial assessment for Ontario Works be increased to allow for appropriate selection of options and clarity of roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Social Services is actively piloting new approaches to service that moves the initial discussion about an applicant/client’s employment needs and plans closer in time to their application for Ontario Works.</p>
<p>8. Comprehensive information about education, training, placements and supports be provided to all participants at the initial assessment regardless of which option clients have chosen. Clients should also be informed on an on-going basis of policy and other changes that may affect them.</p>	<p>See Comments for Rec’d #7 above.</p>
<p>9. All documents be written in plain language and clients be provided with copies of any documents they are asked to sign.</p>	<p>Area Operations Directors will follow-up to ensure clients are getting copies of Participation Agreements (P.A.’s). Social Services will continuously improve how it communicates information to the community.</p>
<p>10. Benefits (e.g., bus passes) be improved and clients be provided</p>	<p>An estimated \$ 28m would be required to provide bus passes to all OW clients. This amount would increase if</p>

RECOMMENDATION	COMMENTS
<p>with information about eligibility for benefits.</p>	<p>those receiving bus passes included people on OSDP and people who are working low-income.</p> <p>If a client is involved in an approved OW activity and needs transportation for this activity, the client receives a bus pass.</p> <p>New OC Transpo policies have contributed to improved access to transportation: 20% discount for Social Services to purchase bus passes from OC Transpo for clients within its transportation budget; introduction of Sunday family passes and individual day passes..</p> <p>Transportation, access to discretionary benefits for working poor (EHSS) and access to information on eligibility for benefits are addressed in the Task Force on Poverty report (See <u>Preliminary Costing Report</u>).</p>
<p>11. Licensed and/or informal childcare, as chosen by the parent, be provided as needed to all participants.</p>	<p>Social Services supports parent choice. Parents identify child care themselves and are able to choose caregivers with whom they feel comfortable.</p> <p><i>Formal care:</i> Financial resources for formal licensed care are limited. Social Services accommodates as many families as current resources permit. Because of a waiting list for licensed spaces, Social Services is in the process of advocating for more funding. An overall advocacy strategy would include advocating for more subsidized licensed care (See <u>Preliminary Costing Report</u>).</p> <p><i>Informal:</i> If the demand for child care exceeds the OW Child Care funding envelope (which provides funds for informal care), a given client's obligation to participate is deferred.</p> <p>Social Services is building new relationships with other programs to increase efficiency in the allocation of OW Child Care dollars. For example, the federal LINC programs (ESL/FSL) provide on-site child care. Social Services will ensure that child care provided through these programs is utilized by OW participants in LINC before OW Child Care dollars are accessed.</p>

RECOMMENDATION	COMMENTS
<p>13. The Region of Ottawa-Carleton engage in a proactive campaign to directly challenge stereotypes of people on social assistance and to make employers aware of the skills and abilities of people on social assistance. Such a campaign must demonstrate that most recipients genuinely want to work.</p>	<p>Following changes to Provincial policy, Social Services is introducing an <u>enhanced</u> employment placement in the private, non-profit and public sectors which provides a subsidy to employers for employing and training an employee for a time-limited period (similar to jobsOntario).</p> <p>The enhanced employment placement component of OW represents an opportunity to breakdown stereotypical views of Social Services clients. The success of enhanced employment placements will depend on assessment and matching being well done.</p> <p>The Task Force on Employment work group will implement a similar recommendation in the report <u>Partners for Jobs</u> calling for a public education and marketing strategy to challenge stereotypes of people on social assistance and entice employers.</p> <p>At the same time, it is important to note that the demand for training and child care far exceeds Social Service's ability to provide them. A recent provincial study confirms that lack of child care is a major barrier. Lastly, clients have a range of skills, abilities and degrees of job readiness. Increasingly disadvantaged people are receiving OW.</p>
<p>14. Existing practices be modified and/or eliminated which require individuals to identify themselves as social assistance recipients when they present themselves for employment.</p>	<p>Area Operations Directors will clarify expectations of works/clients with respect to letters confirming employment to ensure disclosure is not happening unnecessarily.</p>

RECOM MENDATION	COMMENTS
<p>15. The Social Services Department work with employers in the Region to identify specific training that is geared to current labour market needs; and to develop partnerships for training in the workplace.</p>	<p>This work is already underway. Staff resources have been assigned in response to the Task Force on Employment. Some of the work being undertaken includes implementing and assessing 9 pilot initiatives identified in <u>Partners for Jobs</u>, identifying labour market needs, and identifying and developing customized training to meet local needs in collaboration with community partners (HRDC, MET, business, community). (See also final report of the Task Force on Employment <u>Partners for Jobs</u>).</p> <p>The Region is positioning itself to maximize its role in employment services once the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) is signed between the Province and the Federal government, by: continuing to create new partnerships and building on existing ones; and, monitoring and contributing to developments by participating and sharing information in a range of public forums on workplace development.</p>
<p>16. A mechanism or forum be created outside the Social Services Department, with appropriate funding, where clients can talk to a safe third party about their individual concerns, and get information and assistance without fear of jeopardizing their benefits.</p> <p>(Recommendation 16 continued)</p>	<p>Social Services will re-institute distribution of OW regulations, policies and guidelines to community agencies.</p> <p>Client advocacy organizations have been defunded . This has created a gap in the areas of policy advocacy and individual advocacy. Formerly different funding streams from the city, Region and province provided funds to such organizations as OCLISS, Citizens Advisory Committee and Social Assistance Recipients Council - all these funding streams have been discontinued.</p> <p>Funding for an advocacy organization needs more internal discussion. An advocacy organization would likely need funding - therefore, this would need to be costed out. Social Services will review the need for a client advocacy group to be established and funded .</p> <p>There is a need for more clear information about</p>

	<p>eligibility/programs/services. Social Services is actively piloting new approaches to service that moves the initial discussion about an applicant/client's employment needs and plans closer in time to their application for Ontario Works. The Task Force on Poverty report contained recommendations related to providing information on programs and services in resource centres and/or a 211 line (See <u>Preliminary Costing Report</u>).</p> <p>Legal clinics and the Social Services review and appeals process, including the Social Benefit Tribunal, do offer appeal avenues to clients.</p>
<p>17. That on-going mechanisms be put in place so that clients can give feedback, in a group setting, on their experiences in the Ontario Works Program, and be given the means to influence the system without prejudice.</p>	<p>See #16 above</p>

### Areas for Further Research

The report identified areas where further research is required, including:

1. Examining OW rules, regulations and practices that discourage people from acting in ways consistent with the goals of OW (specifically, those related to assets or help from family and friends or short-term work);
2. The extent to which OW targets and counts only those who would have found work through their own initiative;
3. Examine and document participants' experiences in the Employment Placement and Self Employment component of OW;
4. Impacts of OW on specific groups and individuals; and
5. Who leaves welfare? Why? What happens to them?

Social Services' Strategic and Operational Support (SOS) Directorate is presently conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the Community Placement component of Ontario Works to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the program, and a study on Reasons for Leaving Ontario Works to determine what services were of benefit to clients in finding and maintaining employment. SOS will also be conducting a Client Survey in October to obtain feedback on ways to improve services to clients. The Areas for Further Research have been referred to the SOS Directorate for incorporation in the development of these and future studies and evaluations.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Social Services staff met with representatives from the community Project Team to clarify and discuss the recommendations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time.

*Approved by  
Dick Stewart*

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