



Regional Clerk's Office
Corporate Services Department

November 18, 2011

Regional Councillor John Taylor, Co-Chair
Susan LaRosa, Co-Chair
Human Services Planning Board
c/o Janet Rurak, Program Manager, Human Services Collaboration
The Regional Municipality of York
Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch
Community and Health Services Department
17250 Yonge Street, 2nd Floor
Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1

Dear Co-Chairs:

**Re: Supporting Ontario Works Participant Success
Through Workforce Development and Innovation**

Regional Council, at its meeting held on Thursday, November 17, 2011, adopted the following recommendation of the Community and Health Services Committee regarding the report entitled 'Supporting Ontario Works Participant Success Through Workforce Development and Innovation':

1. The Regional Clerk forward a copy of this report to the Human Services Planning Board and Community Partnership Council to inform their work on '*Making Ends Meet*' and Immigration Settlement initiatives.

A copy of Clause No. 1, Report No. 9 of the Community and Health Services Committee is enclosed for your information.

For more information on this report, or if you have any questions with respect to this matter, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Acting General Manager, Social Services at 905-830-4444, Extension 2150.

Sincerely,

Denis Kelly
Regional Clerk

/C. Clark
Attachment

Clause No. 1 in Report No. 9 of the Community and Health Services Committee was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting on November 17, 2011.

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SUPPORTING ONTARIO WORKS PARTICIPANT SUCCESS THROUGH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends:

- 1. Receipt of the presentation by Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Acting General Manager, Social Services and Ted Burley, Manager, Employment Services; and**
- 2. Adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated October 27, 2011, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Regional Clerk forward a copy of this report to the Human Services Planning Board and Community Partnership Council to inform their work on "Making Ends Meet" and Immigration Settlement initiatives.

2. PURPOSE

This report highlights the range of innovative workforce development approaches for Ontario Works participants to become and stay employed. The report also lays the groundwork for the future direction and necessary and renewed direction of employment programs.

3. BACKGROUND

The Community and Health Services Department provides mandated financial and employment assistance to eligible York Region residents under the provincial Ontario Works (OW) program.

Basic financial assistance helps with the cost of food and shelter, drugs and other exceptional needs. In addition, as a condition of eligibility for Ontario Works, most recipients are required to participate in employment assistance activities. These activities assist participants in obtaining skills that support progress toward sustainable employment. Employment assistance activities may include assisted job search, volunteering, job-specific skills training, self-employment activity, and employment placement.

The level and type of employment assistance provided to a participant is determined based on the local labour market and the experience, skills, interests and circumstances of each participant. For some individuals, the requirement to participate in employment assistance activities may be deferred due to reasons such as ill health, caregiving responsibilities or other exceptional circumstances that may make participation impractical.

Funding for basic financial and employment assistance is cost shared with the Province at a ratio of 81.2% provincial and 18.8% municipal. This funding is gradually becoming the responsibility of the Province and will be fully uploaded by 2018.

In 2010, the Region's OW program provided assistance to a monthly average caseload of 5,852 cases and assisted over 1,300 residents to become employed and exit the social assistance program.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Provincial Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario recently identified Employment Assistance as a key area for review, consultation and reform

In November 2010, the Province established the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. The Commission is expected to submit recommendations and an action plan for reforming Ontario's social assistance system to the government by June 30, 2012. In June 2011, the Commission released *A Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas* which concluded that a transformed income security system in Ontario should:

- Contribute to labour market opportunities to ensure jobs provide real pathways out of poverty.
- Provide workforce development and related services to help all Ontarians do better, including support for out-of-work and underemployed Ontarians to transition into sustainable employment.

The Commission's report was recently supported by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association. Both associations have long advocated for a social assistance system rooted in employment and workforce development. In August 2011, the Community and Health Services Department responded to the Commission's report also advocating for a newly reformed system founded in employment. The details were reported to Council on October 20, 2011 in Report No. 7 of the Community and Health Services Committee.

York Region supports the focus on employment and is preparing to take full advantage of a transformed income security system.

The Region's Ontario Works Workforce Development Model offers a continuum of services to meet the diverse needs of participants

The face of the Region's OW caseload is diverse, ranging from those with literacy, language and learning issues, to persons struggling with mental health and addictions challenges, to participants with considerable workforce history, credentials and professional backgrounds. York Region has created a workforce development model that addresses the full continuum of participant needs, from those requiring only limited assistance in becoming job-ready to persons needing intensive, ongoing supports.

To do this, the Region's workforce development model uses a combination of:

- Case management
- In-house programs
- Community referral
- Externally purchased programming

In 2011-12, Ontario Works will enhance its workforce development program by introducing a number of new innovations that meet the growing and evolving needs of participants and our economy.

Case Management

Case management is offered to participants who need multi-layered support or who with focused intervention can quickly enter the workforce. It is used to build trusting relationships and an improved understanding of each participant's skills, interests and barriers. This allows the case manager to make good referrals, create an effective employment plan and help participants in their transition to training and jobs.

Employment case managers meet regularly with participants to provide pre-employment and life skills supports, and assistance with resume development, job searching, and interviewing techniques.

Specialized staff also provide case management tailored to the distinct needs of internationally trained individuals and persons whose first language is not English. A dedicated case manager works with participants to help navigate the complex accreditation, re-certification and re-training process. Participants are referred to workplace language training, pre-employment programs and opportunities within the Canadian workplace.

Under the two-year (2010-11) 100% provincially funded Enhanced Employment Services (EES) initiative, Ontario Works also dedicates one specialized employment position in each of its four locations to provide intensive case management support for the most multi-barriered participants. These individuals commonly suffer from a combination of mental health issues, addictions, low literacy levels, poor self-esteem, cognitive barriers, limited life skills and sporadic work history.

The resources to provide this service are limited and OW workforce development supports a monthly average of 400 participants with direct case management.

Community Referral

While in-house social assistance case managers are best equipped to deal with the needs of complex, multi-barriered participants, Ontario Works also actively uses the supports of mainstream provincially funded service providers (known as Employment Ontario). Employment Ontario enhances participant access to employment counselling, action plan development and job search strategies. Staff work actively with Employment Ontario providers to discuss participant progress, collaborate in action-plan development and ensure case plans remain complementary and beneficial to the participant.

Staff also make referrals to a range of community resources such as mental health, addictions, life skills, ESL and literacy programs to help participants overcome obstacles to active workforce participation and long-term self sufficiency.

In-House Programs

In-house workshops provide assistance with resume development, job searching, interviewing techniques and career exploration. Over the past several years, staff have provided specialized language-specific sessions for immigrants and ESL participants requiring employment resources as well as workshops for sole support parents looking to enter the labour market.

The Region operates four Ontario Works employment resource centres and provides access to computers, fax machines, photocopiers, library resources and job boards. Resource centres are partially staffed and also provide one-on-one job coaching, computer tutorials and career exploration advice.

Externally Purchased Programming

Externally purchased programming is an important part of the OW workforce development model. The Region's Community Development Investment Fund (CDIF) supports low income residents, including OW recipients, to acquire the skills needed for employment. It is projected that CDIF will support an estimated 461 individuals with employment-related supports in 2011. Table 1 provides a summary of externally purchased programming funded through CDIF in 2011.

Table 1
 CDIF Programming 2011

Program	Projected Individuals Served	Projected Employment Targets
Pre-employment Services for Youth One-on-one employment counselling and job development services for youth with a history of conflict with the law	160	32
Food and Beverage Employment supports, sector-specific skills training including workshops, job placement and job retention supports in the food and beverage industry	64	45
Pre-employment Supports for Persons with Addictions Helping people who have dealt with their addiction to drugs/alcohol to overcome personal/ emotional barriers, maintain recovery and prepare for employment	60	16
Retail/Grocery Training Training and retention supports for marginalized client groups in the grocery/retail service industry	110	45
Vocational Assessments Assessments and employment action planning for persons at risk of homelessness	22	2*
Electro Mechanical Maintenance Hands on skills- training, exam preparation and employment preparation for internationally trained trades people in electro-mechanical maintenance	15	10
S.E.T. for Success Skills, education and training supports assisting low-income individuals to find and retain employment	30	12

* This is a pre-employment program that focuses on the identification of participant interests, aptitudes and significant vocational barriers, and for this reason is not expected to produce significant employment outcomes over the short-term

It is projected that among those participating in CDIF funded programs in 2011, approximately 35%, or 160 individuals, will move directly to employment. For others, CDIF programs will offer the pre-employment and job-specific training to provide the foundation for sustainable employment and long-term independence.

In 2011-12 Ontario Works will enhance workforce development by launching new initiatives that respond to the emerging needs of participants and employers

In 2011-12, Ontario Works will launch a number of innovative community partnerships that will position the Region to seize opportunities that may come with or without social assistance reform. It is the first step in creating, supporting and moving toward a Regional system that leverages community partnerships proactively to assist OW participants to get employment and keep employment.

Partnerships with self employment delivery agents will respond to the entrepreneurial nature of many participants

In June 2011, staff met with members of the self employment community to develop the framework for a collaborative self employment program for Ontario Works participants. The new pilot program, operating under a purchase of service agreement, will provide hands-on assistance in business plan development, training on business fundamentals, ongoing consultation and referral supports. The pilot is scheduled for implementation in early 2012.

Self employment is ideal for innovative, goal oriented, self-directed participants. It is also well suited to supporting the employment needs of immigrants, many of whom have a strong entrepreneurial nature and direct experience in self employment. In an economy increasingly demanding non-standard forms of work, self employment provides improved access to the labour market and a potential route to self-sufficiency for vulnerable social assistance recipients.

Ontario Works will provide targeted supports for foreign trained professionals to engage the talent and experience of skilled immigrants

By 2031, immigrants will account for 55 per cent of York Region's total population. In 2006, 60 per cent of York Region's newcomers with a university degree worked in jobs requiring less than a university degree. According to the Conference Board of Canada, under-utilization of immigrants accounts for a loss of \$4 to \$6 billion to the Canadian economy.

In 2012, the Community and Health Services (C&HS) Department will embark on a purchase of service partnership to provide pre-employment training, placement, and retention supports for internationally trained individuals. The Region's Ontario Works program serves over 50 internationally trained individuals with backgrounds in areas such as family medicine, engineering, nursing, accounting and information technology.

Many individuals have extensive experience in their profession but lack the credentials needed to practice in Canada. The accreditation process can take several years and is often extremely expensive, making it impractical for many to continue to pursue work in their chosen field. Using the skill of an external provider, the C&HS Department will assist foreign trained individuals to achieve meaningful employment in their profession or a related profession, leveraging their education and experience and reducing unnecessary reliance on social assistance for skilled immigrants.

In 2012, the Department will also explore the possibility of hosting an Internationally Educated Professionals conference. If funding is provided by the Federal government and approved, this conference will bring together all levels of government, professional associations, employers and newcomers. It will be an invaluable opportunity for foreign trained professionals receiving social assistance to learn and connect with associations as well as employers.

Ontario Works will work with employers and community partners to provide improved access to the emerging green economy

Ontario Works routinely monitors changes in the labour market to ensure skills training programs remain relevant and can effectively support participants to move to sustainable jobs. In early 2011, OW will enter a purchase of service relationship with the community to provide participants with job-specific skills training and employment placement in the green sector. The recent emergence of the green economy requires the development of new partnerships and creative programs to ensure OW participants are equipped with the skills needed to remain competitive.

Welcome Centre partnerships will provide improved access to services for many recent immigrants

Over the past several months, Ontario Works has been working closely with the community to establish a social assistance presence at the five federally funded Welcome Centres. The initiative was identified as an action area in the C&HS Multi-Year Plan and is aimed at supporting improved access to services for diverse communities and recent immigrants. Using a hotelling approach, OW will provide employment planning, referral and information services directly to OW participants at the Welcome Centres. This will reduce travel costs for participants and cut down on volume at OW Offices. At the same time it will help to introduce participants to the range of services available at these new settlement service locations. The initiative will be introduced through a phased pilot in 2012, beginning with the Newmarket Welcome Centre and one southern location.

A new relationship with Roger's Daytime Television will educate job seekers with new or limited attachment to the labour market, and provide a valuable community service

The OW workforce development program is staffed with employment specialists who are experts at helping people with complex needs become employed and stay employed. By the nature of its role, OW contributes to the Human Service Planning Board's "Making Ends Meet" goal of economic self sufficiency. However, ideally, residents will never need OW crisis support. One way to do this is to provide supports to a broader population of residents who struggle to enter the workforce.

In 2012, Ontario Works will present on *Daytime*, a daily live-to-air talk show on Rogers Television. Using a role-play and demonstration format, employment specialists will provide pre-employment "tips" on areas such as personal appearance, dressing for an interview and the fundamentals of cover letters, resumes and interviewing. The content is aimed at OW participants and anyone in the general public (e.g. graduates, workers entering new fields, etc.) who would benefit from advice on how to prepare for participation in the labour market. This segment can also be used in seminars and other venues as part of the Region's local social media outreach to residents.

Link to key Council-approved plans

The current as well as future programs and initiatives that make up OW workforce development contribute to key economic and healthy community goals outlined in Visions 2026 and 2051, the Region's 2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan objective to *increase the economic vitality of the Region*, as well as C&HS Multi-Year Plan. These initiatives and programs also contribute to fulfilling economic goals of the Human Services Planning Board and the Community Partnership Council.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Subsidy for OW Employment Assistance operates under a capped envelope of provincial funding. In 2011, the Province has allocated \$3.6 million in funding to offset projected costs of \$4.4 million.

This report has no financial implications. All programs and innovations can be managed within the current budget. OW workforce development and innovation assists people to move to jobs and reduce reliance on Regionally cost shared social assistance programs.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

An innovative Ontario Works workforce development program benefits all municipalities by providing vulnerable, low income residents with the skills needed to actively participate in the local labour market and their communities.

7. CONCLUSION

Social Services is focussed on helping residents to get and maintain attachment to our economy and communities. There is increasing public interest in transitioning Ontario Works from a program focussed on income security to one rooted in workforce development and employment. York Region is advocating for a reformed income security program which includes a range of supports to help social assistance participants compete in the labour market and achieve long-term self-sufficiency. In addition, through a focus on innovation and partnerships, York Region is aligning its OW workforce development program to meet the diverse and changing needs of residents and the future direction of social assistance in Ontario.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Acting General Manager, Social Services at Extension 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.