

3

FAMILY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES 2007

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, March 13, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Council with information regarding the activities of the Family Support Team in 2007. The Family Support Team provides assistance to the Community Services clients in their pursuit of child and spousal support income.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Legislated Family Support Program ensures due diligence

The Family Support Team was established in 1998 to reduce the cost of social assistance allowances and benefits to York Region by assisting Ontario Works participants, and particularly sole support parents, to pursue child and spousal support income. Sole support parents currently comprise approximately 37% of Ontario Works participants. In 2004, the Team began to assist tenants receiving rent subsidies in Housing Services.

The Family Support Team has one Program Manager, nine Family Support Workers and three Clerks. The activities of this team are legislated requirements under the *Ontario Works Act* and the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*.

The Team actively participates in Settlement Conferences in the Family Court of the Superior Court of Justice. The Team supports participants' involvement in parenting programs such as Focus on Fathers and the parenting programs for separated and divorced parents, and involvement in childcare and employment initiatives.

Staff also participate on the local Court Liaison and Resource Committees as well as on the joint provincial-municipal Family Support Working Group to address training, systems and program requirements.

The specific objectives of the Family Support Team are to:

- Assist Ontario Works participants and Housing Services tenants to take action to pursue financial support from persons with a legal obligation to provide it.
- Assist in the enforcement of agreements, orders and judgements related to support.
- Participate in the established court administration process.

3.2 York Region collects support payments on behalf of the client

Due to its position as a level of government, York Region has a greater ability to collect spousal and child support payments from a reluctant payer (spouse or partner) than does our client. Through an 'assignment', an Ontario Works client gives York Region the right to collect support payments on their behalf. In exchange, the Ontario Works participant receives a full allowance. This avoids the need to deduct late or unpaid support amounts from their allowance payments.

An 'assignment' is a legal document and the principal tool used by the Province and by York Region to collect monies from a payer for the Ontario Works Program.

For each case where potential support income is identified, Family Support staff determine the appropriate action to be taken (refer to Table 1).

Table 1
Family Support Team Determination

Determination	Action Taken
• There is a current Court Order or Agreement in default	• An Assignment for Support is completed
• The whereabouts of the payer is unknown	• An investigation begins to locate the absent payer in order to pursue support
• There is potential support available	• An enforceable private agreement or court order is pursued

The Provincial Family Responsibility Office enforces assignments. Enforcement measures may involve garnishment of wages and income tax returns, seizure of assets, suspension of driver's licenses and reporting of arrears to credit agencies. Family Responsibility Office then forwards the monies collected to the municipalities. The Family Support Team has access to the Family Responsibility Office computer system (MECA – Maintenance Enforcement with Computerized Assistance). This allows the Team to obtain information to process, track and monitor municipal assignments and monies.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Review activities result from referrals and applications for assistance

In 2007, the Family Support Team completed 2,086 reviews consisting of 2,052 Ontario Works cases and 34 Housing cases (Rent Geared-to-Income and Rent Supplement tenants). Reviews result from staff referrals and from information contained in the initial applications for assistance.

The Team obtained 371 Court Orders and Private Agreements and 193 assignments, granted 461 waivers (pursuit of support is waived when the payer cannot be located, or when there is a likelihood of abuse) and 137 overpayments registered. An overpayment results from support income that is not reported and totalled \$116,910 in 2007. This amount is recovered through collection activities in the Employment and Financial Support Branch. A total of 59 cases were terminated for reasons such as refusal to pursue support, reconciled with spouse, or participant obtained a support order in excess of their benefit entitlement. Table 2 provides a summary of activities.

Table 2
Summary of Activities

Activity	2005	2006	2007
Cases Reviewed	1,538	2,101	2,086
Court Orders and Private Agreements	218	342	371
Total Assignments Processed	173	172	193
Waivers granted	285	420	461
Overpayments Registered	117	134	137
Terminated Cases	82	78	59

4.2 Recovery through assignments

In 2007, York Region recovered \$463,604 gross costs from support assignments. Assignments are submitted to the Family Responsibility Office to enforce.

A further \$76,200 in municipal funds was reimbursed to York Region by the Province. This annual municipal reimbursement results from Family Responsibility Office collecting on aged assignments that were made prior to the down-load of the sole support cases to the Region in 1998. In the past eight years this amount has gradually reduced as the assignments are paid out.

4.3 Savings through cost avoidance

There were 59 active files terminated as a result of Family Support intervention. York Region realized savings of \$542,590 gross costs in 2007 through cost avoidance based on a calculation of assistance costs which would have been paid had the 59 cases remained

opened for an additional 12 months. The Region saved an additional \$740,880 over 12 months through cost avoidance in cases where assistance was reduced.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Family Support Team identified gross recoveries and savings totalling \$1,823,274. This is a 16% decrease over 2006. In 2007 the new data system for the Provincial Family Responsibility Office was delayed, hence anticipated efficiencies and rapid reimbursement of Assignments to municipalities did not occur. In fact recoveries were substantially reduced over 2006. The majority of these recoveries and savings would not have been found without the services of the Family Support Team.

Table 3
Gross Recoveries and Cost Avoidance

Activity	2005	2006	2007
Assignments Reimbursed	\$ 514,500	\$ 633,805	\$ 463,604
Reimbursement from Province*	137,620	155,400	76,200
Total Recoveries	652,120	789,205	539,804
Cost Avoidance—Reduced Assistance	376,464	679,896	740,880
Cost Avoidance—Terminated Cases	694,068	700,740	542,590
Total Recovery & Cost Savings	\$1,722,652	\$2,169,841	\$1,823,274

* This reimbursement from the Family Responsibility Office represents payment to York Region of the municipal share of monies collected by the Province from aged (pre-download) assignments.

Eighty percent of Ontario Works monies recovered by York Region for Ontario Works recipients are returned to the Province while twenty percent is retained by the Region. It should be noted that we are required through legislation to perform these functions regardless of revenue recovery/cost avoidance ratios.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Lower regional costs are a positive benefit to local municipalities. The collection of support from payers redirects the cost of supporting a parent and children of Ontario Works participants and Housing tenants from the Region to the supporting parent(s).

7. CONCLUSION

The Family Support Team performs a valuable and cost effective mandated service to our clients and York Region. The Team assists participants of Ontario Works and Housing tenants to obtain support, which provides a long-term independent source of income.

In 2008, the Team will continue to provide its services to Ontario Works participants and Housing tenants. The Team will also continue to receive provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Enhanced Family Support Initiative.

For more information on this report, please contact Dennis Norton, Director, Business Operations and Support Services at Ext. 2088.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.