

2

QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT FAMILY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES 2003

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, February 25, 2004, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The report of Family Support Activities for 2003 be received for information by Committee and Council.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with information regarding the activities of the Family Support Team in 2003.

3. BACKGROUND

The Family Support Team was established in 1998 to reduce the cost of social assistance allowances and benefits to the Region by assisting Ontario Works participants, and particularly sole support parents, to pursue child and spousal support income. Sole support parents comprise the majority of Ontario Works participants who have opportunities to seek support from other sources.

In 2003, the Team expanded its mandate and services beyond the Ontario Works cases to include Social Housing files. The Team also received 100% provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Province's Enhanced Family Support Initiative.

The Family Support Team has one Program Manager, seven Family Support Workers (FSW), and two clerks. The activities of this team are legislated requirements under the *Ontario Works Act* and the *Social Housing Reform Act*.

The Team actively participates in settlement conferences in the Family Court of the Superior Court of Justice and supports participants' involvement in parenting programs, childcare and employment initiatives.

Staff also participate 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 and Housing and Residential Services participants 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 court administration process.
- Recover money owing to York Region as a result of reimbursements on assigned Ontario Works support arrears.

Due to its position as a government entity, York Region has a greater ability to collect support payments from a reluctant payer than does the participant. Through an 'assignment', an Ontario Works participant 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 York Region to collect monies for the Ontario Works Program from a payer.

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
• There is potential support available	• An enforceable private agreement or court order is pursued
• The whereabouts of the payer is unknown	• An investigation begins to locate the absent payer in order to pursue support
• There is a current Court Order or Agreement in default	• An Assignment for Support is completed
• There are support arrears owed to the municipality or province	• A retroactive Assignment is completed

The Provincial Family Responsibility Office (FRO) enforces assignments. The Family Support Team has access to the FRO 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

In 2003, the Family Support Team completed 1,194 reviews for Ontario Works Participants and 98 reviews on Social Housing Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) participants, for a total of 1,292 reviews. This represents a review of 28.8% of the Ontario Works caseload, exceeding the 2002 target to review 15% of the caseload. The

team obtained 133 Court Orders and Private Agreements, 178 assignments, and registered 89 overpayments. Seventy-two Ontario Works cases were terminated for refusal to pursue support. Table 2 provides a summary of activities.

Table 2
Summary of Activities

Activity	2001	2002	2003
Cases completed/closed	946	1,019	1,292
Number of Court Orders and Private Agreements	114	121	133
Total assignments processed	147	191	178
Number of overpayments registered	44	65	89
Number of terminated Ontario Works cases	38	42	72

4.1 Recovery – Assignments

In 2003, York Region recovered \$390,343 gross costs from support assignments. Assignments are submitted to the Family Responsibility Office (FRO) to enforce. Enforcement measures may involve garnishment of wages and income tax returns, seizure of assets, and suspension of driver's licenses.

In addition the Family Responsibility Office reimbursed York Region \$148,700 representing net municipal monies collected and held by the province for the period ending March 2003.

4.2 Recovery - Overpayments

In addition to recovering funds from assignments, 89 cases were found to have received support income that was not reported. Therefore \$122,289 gross costs in overpayments were identified and will be recovered through collection activities.

4.3 Savings – Cost Avoidance

There were 72 active files terminated from the Ontario Works caseload as a result of Family Support intervention and of participant refusal to pursue support. York Region realized savings of \$597,480 gross costs in 2003 through cost avoidance had the 72 cases remained opened for an additional 12 months.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Family Support Team in the Community Services and Housing Department identified gross recoveries and savings totalling \$1,258,812. The majority of these recoveries and savings would not have been found without the services of this team (refer to Table 3).

Table 3
Gross Recoveries and Savings

Activity	2001	2002	2003
Assignments Reimbursed	\$257,821	\$168,516	\$390,343
Reimbursement from Province*	285,700	154,415	148,700
Overpayments Registered	49,344	83,742	122,289
Cost Avoidance – Terminated Cases	290,952	327,144	597,480
Total Recovery & Cost Savings	\$883,817	\$733,817	\$1,258,812

* This reimbursement from the Family Responsibility Centre represents payment to York Region of municipal monies collected and held by the province.

There is a favourable ratio between the costs to operate the Family Support Team and the total savings generated as a result of the Team's work. Total 2003 savings represent a 71.5% increase over 2002. The revenue recouped by this Team represents approximately 119% of its 2003 Budget. However, 80% of recovered monies are returned to the Province. It should be noted that we are required to perform these functions regardless of revenue recovery/cost avoidance ratios.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Lower Regional costs have a positive benefit on local municipalities. The collection of support from payers redirects the cost of supporting children of Ontario Works' clients from the Region to the supporting parents.

7. CONCLUSION

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

In 2004, the Team will continue to provide its services to Ontario Works and housing subsidy participants. The Team will also continue to receive provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Province's Enhanced Family Support Initiative.

The Team actively participates in settlement conferences in the Family Court of the Superior Court of Justice and supports participants' involvement in parenting programs, childcare and employment initiatives.

Staff also participate on the Joint Provincial-Municipal Family Support Working Group to address training, systems and program requirements.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.