

1

FAMILY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES 2004

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, April 21, 2005, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The report of Family Support Activities for 2004 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 2004 supporting clients in their pursuit of child and spousal support income.

3. BACKGROUND

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 comprise 38% of Ontario Works participants.

The year 2004 was the first year of full operation to assist participants in both the Ontario Works and Social Housing programs. The Team received 100% provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Enhanced Family Support Initiative.

The Family Support Team has one Program Manager, eight Family Support Workers (FSWs), 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 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 and Housing 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 established 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 level of government, 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 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	
• There is a current Court Order or Agreement in default	• There are support arrears owed to the municipality or province	• An Assignment for Support is completed	• A retroactive Assignment is completed
• The whereabouts of the payer is unknown	• There is potential support available	• An investigation begins to locate the absent payer in order to pursue support	• An enforceable private agreement or court order is pursued

The Provincial Family Responsibility Office (FRO) enforces assignments. FRO then forwards the municipal portion of monies collected to the municipalities. 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 2004, the Family Support Team completed 1,337 reviews for Ontario Works participants and 104 reviews on Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) participants, for a total of 1,442 reviews. This represents a review of 31% of the Ontario Works caseload. The team obtained 192 Court Orders and Private Agreements, 192 assignments, and registered 119 overpayments. Eighty-five Ontario Works 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	2002	2003	2004
Cases reviewed	1,019	1,292	1,442
Number of Court Orders and Private Agreements	121	133	192
Total assignments processed	191	178	192
Number of overpayments registered	65	89	119
Number of terminated cases	42	72	85

4.1 Recovery - Assignments

In 2004, York Region recovered \$436,363 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.

4.2 Recovery - Overpayments

In addition to recovering funds from assignments, 119 cases were found to have received support income that was not reported. Therefore \$125,278 gross costs in overpayments were identified and will be recovered through collection activities.

4.3 Savings – Cost Avoidance

There were 85 active files terminated as a result of Family Support intervention. York Region realized savings of \$690,996 gross costs in 2004 through cost avoidance had the 85 cases remained opened for an additional 12 months. The Region saved an additional \$317,112 over 12 months through cost avoidance in cases where assistance was reduced.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Family Support Team in the Community Services and Housing Department identified gross recoveries and savings totalling \$1,582,272. 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	2002	2003	2004
Assignments Reimbursed	\$168,515	\$390,343	\$436,363
Reimbursement from Province*	154,415	148,700	137,801
Total Recoveries	322,931	539,043	574,164
Reduced Assistance	208,656	167,136	317,112
Cost Avoidance – Terminated Cases	327,144	597,480	690,996
Total Recovery & Cost Savings	\$858,731	\$1,303,659	\$1,582,272

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

As per requirement, 80% of Ontario Works monies recovered by York Region 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 and RGI participants 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 RGI participants. The Team will also continue to receive provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the 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.