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FAMILY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES 2005

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, May 4, 2006, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding the activities of the Family Support Team in 2005. The Family Support Team provides assistance to the Community Services and Housing Department clients in their pursuit of child and spousal support income.

3. BACKGROUND

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

The Family Support Team has one Program Manager, eight Family Support Workers (FSW), and 2.5 Clerks. The activities of this team are legislated requirements under the *Ontario Works Act* and the *Social Housing Reform Act*.

The Team received 100% provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Enhanced Family Support Initiative.

In 2005, the Team developed an in-house Family Support database to assist the FSWs to manage client records which often involve multiple payers with cyclical pay histories.

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 OW 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 OW 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 OW participant gives York Region the right to collect support payments on their behalf. In exchange, the OW 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 OW 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	• An Assignment for Support is completed
• There are support arrears owed to the municipality or province	• A retroactive Assignment 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 (FRO) enforces assignments. FRO then forwards the 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.

In 2006 and 2007, the Provincial Family Responsibility Office will replace MECA with a new data system. We anticipate that this may reduce recoveries during the period of implementation.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In 2005, the Family Support Team completed 1,469 reviews for OW participants (approximately 32.5% of the OW total caseload) and 69 reviews on Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) participants, for a total of 1,538 reviews. The Team obtained 218 Court Orders and Private Agreements, 173 assignments, and registered 117 overpayments. A total of 82 OW 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.

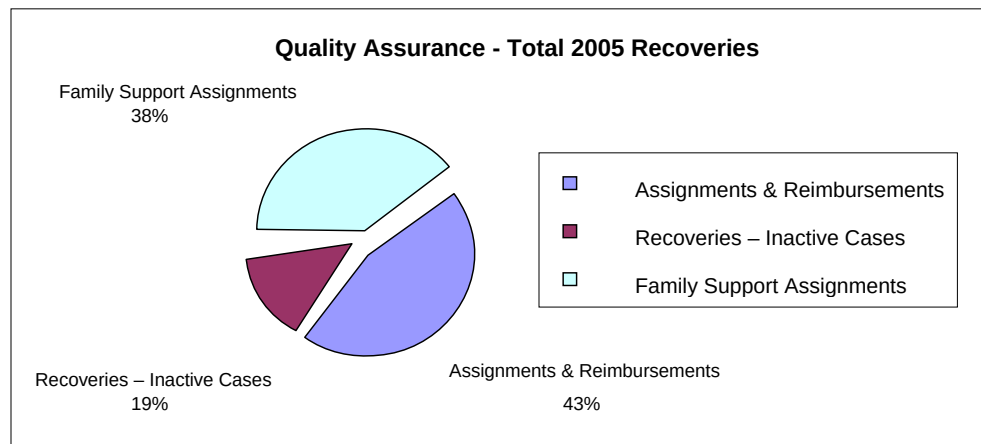
Table 2
Summary of Activities

Activity	2003	2004	2005
Cases Reviewed	1,292	1,442	1,538
Number of Court Orders and Private Agreements	133	192	218
Total Assignments Processed	178	192	173
Number of Overpayments Registered	89	119	117
Number of Terminated Cases	72	85	82

4.1 Recovery - Assignments

In 2005, York Region recovered \$514,500 gross costs from support assignments and a further \$137,620 in municipal funds was reimbursed by the Province. 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.

The monies received from Family Support Assignment accounts for approximately 38% of the total recoveries by the Quality Assurance unit. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of recoveries by the Quality Assurance unit in 2005.



* Revenue from recoveries, assignments and reimbursements are reported by the Eligibility Review Team.

4.2 Recovery - Overpayments

In addition to recovering funds from assignments, 117 cases were found to have received support income that was not reported. Therefore \$119,526 gross costs in overpayments were identified and are being recovered through collection activities.

4.3 Savings – Cost Avoidance

There were 82 active files terminated as a result of Family Support intervention. York Region realized savings of \$694,068 gross costs in 2005 through cost avoidance based on a calculation of assistance costs which would have been paid had the 82 cases remained opened for an additional 12 months. The Region saved an additional \$376,464 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 \$1,722,652. 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	2003	2004	2005
Assignments Reimbursed	\$ 390,343	\$ 436,363	\$ 514,500
Reimbursement from Province*	148,700	137,801	137,620
Total Recoveries	\$ 539,043	\$ 574,164	\$ 652,120
Reduced Assistance	167,136	317,112	376,464
Cost Avoidance – Terminated Cases	597,480	690,996	694,068
Total Recovery & Cost Savings	\$1,303,659	\$1,582,272	\$1,722,652

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

Eighty percent of OW monies recovered by York Region for OW recipients are returned to the Province while 20% is retained by the Region. It should be noted that we are required to perform these functions regardless of revenue recovery/cost avoidance ratios.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There is no direct local municipal impact; however, 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 OW and RGI participants 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 OW and RGI to obtain support, which provides a long-term independent source of income.

In 2006, the Team will continue to provide its services to OW and RGI participants. In addition, Phase 2 enhancements to the new Family Support database are planned which will improve automation of data collection and provide further reports. The Team will also continue to receive provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Enhanced Family Support Initiative.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.