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ONTARIO WORKS ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE PERSONS PROGRAM

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated March 25, 2011, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Chairman write to the Minister of Community and Social Services urging the Province to continue to support Enhanced Employment Services for Vulnerable Persons as part of its review of the social assistance system.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, for their information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an update on the provincially funded Enhanced Employment Services (EES) initiative, including a summary of early successes observed with this program in York Region.

3. BACKGROUND

The Community and Health Services Department provides mandated financial and employment assistance to eligible residents under the provincial Ontario Works (OW) program. Financial and employment assistance consists of the following elements:

Financial Assistance

- food and shelter
- drug, dental care and other supports
- community support referrals

Employment Assistance

- pre-employment and job search support
- career exploration
- return to work training and job placement
- assistance with employment-related expenses

Funding for OW client allowances and benefits is currently 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. Subsidy for OW Employment Assistance, operating under a capped envelope of funding, is also cost shared and being gradually uploaded by the Province.

In July 2009, the Province announced new time-limited 100% employment service funding for Ontario Works delivery agents

In October 2009, Clause No. 5 of Report No. 2 of the Community and Health Services Committee, Regional Council approved spending of new time-limited 100% provincial EES funding to support the training and employment needs of vulnerable OW participants. Under the EES initiative, the Region was allocated \$1,064,000 in one-time funding over a two year period ending in 2011.

Under a one-time federal transfer to the Province, this funding was introduced as a stimulus in response to a weakening economy and was the first investment of its kind in Ontario Works that directly targeted vulnerable participants.

The Enhanced Employment Services program targets persons in receipt of OW with no or marginal attachment to the labour market due to multiple barriers to employment

The purpose of EES is to prepare and support some of the most vulnerable OW recipients for participation in education, training and employment. Many of these individuals, suffering from multiple barriers to employment (e.g. learning, addictions and mental health challenges) have had limited workforce attachment and in some cases no history of employment.

Intensive supports are needed to move vulnerable, multi-barriered Ontario Works participants out of poverty

Poverty is a complex issue and results in significant economic costs to our communities. People with multiple barriers to employment require investment in upfront intensive supports that address issues such as mental health, addictions and family breakdown to create the stability needed to achieve labour market success. Assistance with the cost of transportation is also required to support this client group to achieve sustainable employment and long-term independence.

Enhanced Employment Services has become an important part of York's Ontario Works service delivery model by strengthening the continuum of supports available to participants, particularly for those with significant barriers to employment

The Region's OW employment service delivery model is built on a continuum approach, providing a mixture of direct case management, in-house programs, community referral and externally purchased programming to meet the diverse needs of participants.

Key components of the Region's employment model are highlighted below:

- General and tailored case management approaches including language-specific caseloads and specialized supports for internationally trained individuals.
- Employment resource centres providing access to internet, fax, telephones, computers, job boards and other job search supports.
- In-house programs such as locally delivered workshops providing assistance with interviews, cover letters, resumes and other important pre-employment needs.
- Referral to a range of employment and other community service providers supporting the employment and training needs of individuals with barriers such as addictions, mental health, and literacy issues.

York's model is enhanced by additional programming provided through the Region's Community Development Investment Fund (CDIF) and strong linkages with mainstream, provincially funded employment service providers (now known as Employment Ontario). The provincially funded EES program plays a key role in strengthening this continuum by introducing targeted supports for persons with significant barriers to employment.

In 2010, Ontario Works successfully moved over 1,300 participants to jobs.

Central to the success of Enhanced Employment Services is the ability to spend time needed to build rapport and trust, the first steps in uncovering numerous and often long-standing barriers to labour market success

The Region's EES Case Management staff carry intensive caseloads, about 25 cases per staff. In comparison, our Social Assistance Case Management staff manage caseloads of approximately 130 cases per staff. It is this smaller caseload size that allows staff to spend time needed to develop supportive relationships and provide the resources necessary to help our most vulnerable participants overcome long standing barriers to employment. Intensive EES Case Managers have the ability to meet with participants up to several times a week for in-depth sessions depending on the unique needs of each individual.

As highlighted in Table 1, the intensive coaching is combined with EES funded externally purchased programming.

Table 1
Enhanced Employment Services Funded Programming 2010-2011

Program Name	Program Description
Pre-Employment Supports for Persons with Criminal Records	Life skills, job search and retention strategies, case management supports, pardon application supports and job development services. Also included are work experience placement, employment placement and job retention supports.
Life Skills Training	Skill training to develop strategies for time management, organization, work and life stresses and anger management.
Skills Specific Training	Individual skills training to provide job specific training in a range of vocations (e.g. dental assistant, trades training, truck driving and office skills).
Employment Related Expenses	Financial support for expenses associated with participation in employment including transportation, training, clothing, grooming, safety equipment and supplies.

Complementing the purchased programming is a range of external supports such as vocational assessments, mental health counselling, and community referral.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Staff report growth in the number of multi-barriered Ontario Works participants and increased need for programs like Enhanced Employment Services in helping vulnerable individuals move to jobs

York Region staff report an increasing number of participants presenting with complex needs. Staff estimate that 10% of all participants have barriers that interfere with their ability to sustain employment. For many years, staff has commented on the need for intensive programs like EES to respond to the training and employment needs of this core group of barriered participants.

Though time-limited, EES has provided a critical investment in programs and staff resources needed to assist this growing demographic.

In 2010, Enhanced Employment Services produced strong outcomes, supporting many barriered participants to exit the Region's cost shared OW program and helping others link to important community supports

The EES model has proven to be a successful approach to engaging multi-barriered participants, serving a total of 157 individuals in 2010. For some, EES has supported participation in skill building, training, education and employment. For others, EES has resulted in referrals to services that address barriers and promote employability (e.g. addictions, mental health, and criminal records). Recent program outcomes related to skill training and education completion, employment and exiting OW are noted in Table 2.

Table 2
Enhanced Employment Services Outcomes (January to December 2010)

EES Outcomes	Number of EES Participants
Number completing skill training/education program	33
Number securing employment	72
Number leaving OW due to sustainable income	30

These results are significant given the depth of barriers encountered by these participants.

Enhanced Employment Services is having a direct impact on the lives of York Region residents, producing stories of success for many vulnerable individuals

Michael is a clear example of the positive impact of EES. Michael is a single male, aged 49 who had been in receipt of OW for approximately 10 years. Michael was referred to the EES program in 2010.

When Michael began working with an EES Case Manager he presented significant barriers to employment and quality of life. Michael's barriers included:

- Mental health – depression and paranoia
- Addictions – recovering alcoholic and cocaine addict
- Limited education – grade 8
- Criminal record for assault
- Low self esteem and a negative attitude
- Poor hygiene and a dishevelled appearance
- Dental decay

The Case Manager met often with Michael and linked him with other service providers to help overcome these barriers. Interventions included:

- Individual mental health and addictions counselling
- Purchased fork lift license skill training
- Purchased dental care to enhance appearance and self esteem
- Purchased clothing for job interviews
- Coaching to improve self esteem and attitude
- Navigating the complicated criminal pardon process

Over time, Michael improved mentally, physically and emotionally and was able to look for employment. At this time, staff supported his employment search by helping Michael prepare his resume, conducting mock interviews and assisting him in looking for work.

After 9 months of intensive support, Michael secured full-time employment as a fork lift driver. Michael was provided weekly retention supports to support his transition to employment and has been able to maintain his employment. Michael is earning a living, which has resulted in him no longer requiring OW. Michael's story, and the stories of others served through this program, is proof the Province's time-limited investment in EES is making a difference.

Funding loss will compromise the Region's ability to provide the supports and programming needed to move multi-barriered participants to training and jobs, placing continued pressure on net Regional costs as participants remain on the cost shared social assistance program.

Without appropriate supports, multi-barriered clients are at risk of remaining on the cost shared social assistance program for extended periods of time. In the absence of continued funding for EES, it will be difficult to provide the level of intensive supports needed to move multi-barriered participants to independence.

Programs like Enhanced Employment Services have a strong place in the Region's Multi-Year Plan and continue to play a vital role in strengthening our communities

In the absence of continued provincial funding, an option would be to seek continued support for this program under the framework of the Multi-Year Plan (MYP). Investment in EES would address the issues and challenges outlined in the MYP's Goal 1 "Contribute to Regional economic vitality by helping low income residents with access to basic needs and with finding and keeping jobs".

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The conclusion of Enhanced Employment Services will result in a substantial reduction in annual provincial employment related funding to the Region

EES provides time-limited 100% provincial funding to Ontario Works delivery agents to assist multi-barriered participants on their path to employment. The conclusion of this program at the end of 2011 means a \$530,000 loss in annual funding to the Region.

Recently announced changes in provincial subsidy will help to address a long standing gap in funding for OW cost of administration, but cannot offset the loss of Enhanced Employment Services funding

In February 2011, the Ministry announced province-wide changes to the Ontario Works funding model. Under the new funding approach, York was allocated an additional \$4.2 million in administrative funding, bringing the total support for administrative costs to \$8.4 million. While this additional funding is greatly welcomed, the enhancement will be used to help address a long standing gap in provincial subsidy for OW cost of administration. As a result it cannot also compensate for the loss of EES funding.

Table 3 below summarizes the various funding envelopes provided for the Ontario Works program.

Table 3
Financial Summary of Ontario Works & Employment Programs for 2011

	OW Allowances & Benefits	General Employment Programs	* Cost of Administration	Enhanced Employment Services
Gross Expenditures	\$55,779,964	\$5,107,311	\$18,692,210	\$531,801
Provincial Subsidy	44,780,294	3,159,390	8,448,210	531,801
Net Tax Levy	\$10,999,670	\$1,947,921	\$10,244,000	-

* Includes \$4.2 million additional allocation based on new funding formula

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Continued investment in services such as Enhanced Employment Services is important to all municipalities. EES improves the ability of vulnerable, low-income social assistance recipients to overcome barriers, participate in local labour markets, and to contribute to our economy and communities.

7. CONCLUSION

Enhanced Employment Services has proven successful in addressing the needs of highly barriered low-income individuals. Provincial funding for EES is not expected to be extended. The federal government's transfer to the Province is expected to conclude as it shifts from a period of massive stimulus spending to one of fiscal constraint in response to slower than expected economic growth. Service managers have been informed that funding for EES will conclude at the end of 2011.

The recent recession has created an even more competitive labour market. York Region has diverse needs and intensive support is required to assist our most vulnerable residents to successfully integrate into our communities. The EES program provides key resources to help improve the level and type of employment assistance available to the Region's most vulnerable residents. Continued EES funding is vitally important.

For more information on this report, please contact Ted Burley, Manager, Employment Services at Ext. 2910.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.