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FAMILY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, May 18, 2005, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be sent by the Regional Clerk to the Government of Ontario, the community service partners identified in this report and to the Human Services Planning Coalition, for their information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with information regarding the Family Strengthening Programs administered by the Community Services and Housing Department. Programs included in this initiative are:

- All Our Kids (AOK)
- Ontario Works/Social Housing Summer Camp
- Family Child Care Provider Training
- Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY)
- Lead, Experience and Develop (LEAD)
- Social Housing After School Programs
- Adolescent Leadership Camp

3. BACKGROUND

Through the implementation of Family Strengthening Programs, the Community Services and Housing Department supports research showing that investing in these programs can be cost effective in reducing dependency on social assistance, health and other social services.

Family Strengthening Programs are not duplicated services and are designed to provide families with access to:

- Early child development and parenting supports and services.
- Community based recreation programs and services.
- Youth leadership programs.

Families who are eligible to participate in these programs are those with a low income, including recent immigrants to Canada and those wanting information about the care they give their children.

Because of multiple barriers, low-income families find access to recreation, camp and early child development programs difficult. Barriers, such as user fees for recreation and camp programs, transportation, lack of agency capacity to deliver no cost services, are addressed through the Family Strengthening Programs.

3.1 Benefits

The Community Services and Housing Department recognizes the importance of the family structure to the economic and social well being of the parent, and to the development of the child's full potential.

Family Strengthening Programs therefore promote:

- Increased employment supports and opportunities for parents.
- Improved social, emotional and educational outcomes for the children.
- Stable, healthy families with an improved ability to achieve independence.
- Opportunities for families to engage in their communities.

It is anticipated that Family Strengthening Programs, combined with a range of return to work supports, will reduce the length of time participants require Social Assistance. Further analysis will be done in the future to track exit rates where families are accessing family strengthening initiatives along with employment and other supports and the resulting potential savings to York Region.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Outcomes and Indicators

Attachment 1 provides an overview of the Family Strengthening Initiatives provided by the Family and Children's Services Division of the Community Services and Housing Department in 2004.

4.2 Collaboration

The Community Services and Housing Department works in collaboration with children's mental health agencies, municipal recreation departments, resource centres, child care agencies and community agencies, and York Region Early Years Centres in order to ensure that Family Strengthening Programs are accessible to vulnerable families and their children in York Region.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The Family Strengthening Programs support Vision 2026 by:

- Responding to the human services needs of a growing and changing population.
- Responding to children in need.
- Fostering effective working relationships with community partners.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Program Costs

The majority of Family Strengthening Programs are 100% funded through reinvestment of the National Child Benefit (NCB) and the Community Sport Opportunity Fund. The exception is the summer camp for children of Ontario Works participants which is cost-shared by the Province at 80:20 in 2005.

Table 1
Program Expenditures

Program	Gross Expenditure
All Our Kids (AOK)	\$160,000
Ontario Works and Social Housing Summer Camps	320,000
Family Child Care Training	90,000
Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY)	29,066
Lead, Experience and Develop (LEAD)	9,000
Social Housing After School Programs	36,200
Adolescent Leadership Camp	26,000
TOTAL	\$670,266

Funding concerns may arise in 2007 should the Province decide to stop the National Child Benefit (NCB) claw back, which is currently reinvested in community programs, and if this funding is not replaced. York Region staff are in the process of exploring alternate sources of revenue.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Family Strengthening Programs provide York Region families and their children with access to quality programs and supports within their local municipalities which promote healthy child development and parental attachment to the workforce.

7. CONCLUSION

York Region remains committed to working in partnership with the community to ensure that Family Strengthening Programs are high quality, delivered cost effectively and continue to meet measurable objectives. The Community Services and Housing Department recognizes the importance of family structure to the economic and social well being of the parent and to the development of the child's full potential. As part of York Region's Family Strengthening Initiatives, departmental divisions will continue to work together to provide innovative and responsive programs and services which are associated with positive outcomes for families in need.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report)