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FAMILY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES 2006

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, April 19, 2007, 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 2006. The Family Support Team provides assistance to 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 36% of OW participants. In 2004, the Family Support Team began to assist tenants receiving rent subsidies in Housing Services.

The Family Support Team has one Program Manager, eight Family Support Workers (FSWs), and 2.5 Clerks. The activities of this team are legislated requirements under the *Ontario Works Act* and the *Social Housing Reform Act, 2000*.

In 2006, the Family Support Team received 100% provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Enhanced Family Support Initiative.

The Family Support Team actively participates in settlement conferences in the Family Court of the Superior Court of Justice and supports participants' involvement in parenting programs such as Focus on Fathers and the Parenting program for separating and divorced parents offered by Blue Hills. In addition, the Family Support Team supports participant involvement in a range of 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 participants and Housing Services tenants 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. 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. In exchange for the 'assignment', the Ontario Works participant receives a full allowance. This avoids the need to deduct late or unpaid support amounts from their allowance payments.

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 the FRO began implementation of a new Service Delivery Model which includes replacing the current MECA system with a new data system. We anticipate that recoveries may be reduced during the transition to the new system.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In 2006, the Family Support Team completed 2,105 reviews consisting of 2,033 Ontario Works cases and 72 Housing cases (Rent Geared to Income and Rent Supplement tenants). Reviews may be completed on both active and inactive clients (no longer in receipt of program benefits).

The Team obtained 342 Court Orders and Private Agreements, 172 assignments, and registered 134 overpayments. A total of 78 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.

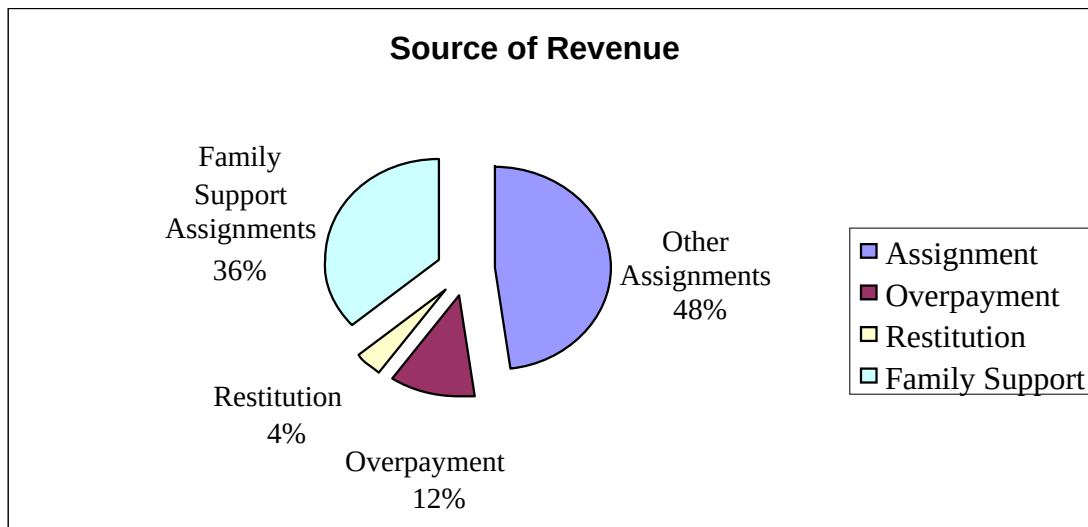
Table 2
Summary of Activities

Activity	2004	2005	2006
Cases Reviewed	1,442	1,538	2,105
Number of Court Orders and Private Agreements	192	218	342
Total Assignments Processed	192	173	172
Number of Overpayments Registered	119	117	134
Number of Terminated Cases	85	82	78

4.1 Recovery—Assignments

In 2006, York Region recovered \$633,805 in gross costs from support assignments and a further \$155,400 in municipal funds was reimbursed by the Province. Assignments are submitted to the FRO to enforce. Enforcement measures may involve garnishment of wages and income tax returns, seizure of assets, suspension of driver's licenses and reporting of arrears to credit agencies.

The monies received from Family Support Assignments accounts for approximately 36% of the total recoveries by the Quality Assurance Unit. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of recoveries by the Quality Assurance Team in 2006.



4.2 Recovery—Overpayments

In addition to recovering funds from assignments, 134 cases were found to have received support income that was not reported. As a result, \$134,689 gross costs in overpayments were identified and are being recovered through collection activities within the Eligibility Review function.

4.3 Savings—Cost Avoidance

There were 78 active files terminated as a result of Family Support intervention. As a result, York Region realized savings of \$700,740 in 2006 based on a cost avoidance calculation that took into account what assistance costs would have been paid had the 78 cases remained opened for an additional 12 months. The Region saved an additional \$679,896 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 \$2,169,841 in 2006. As part of its work, the Team conducted a major review of OW cases as a result of a data integrity project which contributed to the 26% increase in cost savings and recoveries over the previous year. The majority of these recoveries and savings would not have been found without the services of this team (see Table 3).

Table 3
Gross Recoveries and Savings

Activity	2004	2005	2006
Assignments Reimbursed	\$436,363	\$514,500	\$633,805
Reimbursement from Province*	137,801	137,620	155,400
Total Recoveries	\$574,164	\$652,120	\$789,205
Reduced Assistance	317,112	376,464	679,896
Cost Avoidance—Terminated Cases	690,996	694,068	700,740
Total Recovery & Cost Savings	\$1,582,272	\$1,722,652	\$2,169,841

*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 twenty percent 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

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 participants and Housing tenants 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 Housing tenants to obtain support, which provides a long-term independent source of income.

For more information on this report contact Joanne Bovair, Acting Director, Business Operations and Support Services in the Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.