

2

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INNOVATIONS 2012 AND 2013 INITIATIVES

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated October 18, 2012, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk forward a copy of this report to the Human Services Planning Board and Community Partnership Council to inform their work on “Making Ends Meet” and Immigration Settlement initiatives.

2. PURPOSE

This report is a status update on the initiatives reported to Council on November 17, 2011 in Clause No.1 of Report No. 9 of the Community and Health Services Committee. It highlights the range of innovative workforce development approaches developed within the Social Services Branch to help Ontario Works participants become and stay employed. The report also outlines plans for 2013 and lays the groundwork for the future direction of employment programs.

3. BACKGROUND

Ontario Works is a provincially mandated program that provides basic financial assistance and employment supports to help people become and stay employed

The Community and Health Services Department provides mandated financial and employment assistance to eligible York Region residents under the provincial Ontario Works (OW) program.

Basic financial assistance helps with the cost of food and shelter, drugs and other exceptional needs. In addition, as a condition of eligibility for Ontario Works, most recipients are required to participate in employment assistance activities. These activities help participants obtain skills that allow them to get and stay employed. Employment assistance activities may include assisted job search, volunteering, job-specific skills training, self-employment activity, and employment placement.

For some individuals, the requirement to participate in employment assistance activities may be deferred due to ill health, caregiving responsibilities or other exceptional circumstances that make participation impractical.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario is continuing its focus on Employment Services as a key area for reform

In November 2010, the Province established the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. Employment services is a key area of reform. A number of themes have emerged through province-wide stakeholder consultations which are expected to inform the Commission's final recommendations to the government about the future of employment services in Ontario. These include the need for:

- A broader range of services designed to meet the individual needs of participants
- Increased focus on job retention supports to help people maintain work after leaving assistance
- Improved integration of employment services at the local level to ensure a more coordinated approach to serving the public
- Stronger connections with employers and a better understanding of employer needs

York Region supports the Commission's focus on employment, and the Region's employment services model is well positioned to meet these needs. The Commission is expected to report back to the Province with its final report and specific recommendations in the fall of 2012.

The Ontario Works caseload is dynamic and is comprised of people with complex and multiple barriers to employment

The OW caseload is in a constant state of change. Each month about 500 new cases come onto assistance and roughly an equal number exit the program. In 2011, OW provided assistance to a monthly average caseload of 6,000 cases.

The OW caseload is increasingly comprised of individuals with multiple, complex barriers to employment. The caseload includes persons with mental health and addictions challenges, those with language, literacy and numeracy barriers and skilled newcomers struggling to have their credentials recognized in Canada. This challenge of an increasingly complex participant base, coupled with ongoing caseload turnover, places pressure on OW workforce development to provide varied, flexible services that meet multiple and unique needs in order to move clients into jobs and long-term independence.

The Region's Ontario Works Workforce Development program offers a full range of services to meet the diverse needs of participants

York Region has created a workforce development program that addresses the full continuum of participant needs, from persons requiring only limited assistance in becoming job-ready to those needing intensive, ongoing supports.

To do this the Region's workforce development program uses a combination of:

- Case management
- Community referral
- In-house programs
- Purchased programming

Case management

Case management is offered to participants who need multi-layered support or who with focused intervention can quickly enter the workforce. It is used to build trusting relationships and an improved understanding of each participant's skills, interests and barriers. This allows the case manager to make good referrals, create effective employment plans and assist people in their transition to training and jobs. The resources to provide this service are limited and OW workforce development supports a monthly average of 400 participants with direct case management.

Community referral

While in-house social assistance case managers are best equipped to deal with the needs of complex, multi-barriered participants, Ontario Works also actively uses the supports of mainstream provincially funded service providers (known as Employment Ontario) to help with the needs of job-ready individuals. Employment Ontario enhances participant access to employment counselling, labour market information and job search strategies. Staff work actively with Employment Ontario providers to discuss participant progress, collaborate in action-plan development and ensure case plans remain complementary and beneficial to the participant. In 2011, staff referred over 400 participants to Employment Ontario for job-related supports.

In-house programs

Ontario Works operates four employment resource centres and provides access to computers, fax machines, photocopiers, library resources and job boards. Resource centres are partially staffed and offer one-on-one job coaching, computer tutorials and career exploration advice. Ontario Works also offers in-house workshops on resume development, job searching and interviewing techniques.

Purchased programming

Purchased programming helps to complement the range of services provided under York Region's workforce development program. The Region's Community Investment Fund (CIF) supports low income residents, including Ontario Works recipients, to gain the

skills needed for employment. CIF will support an estimated 520 individuals through employment-related initiatives in 2012. Among those participating in CIF funded programs in 2012, approximately 30%, or 148 individuals, will move directly to employment. For others, CIF programs will offer pre-employment training to build the skills needed for sustainable employment.

IN 2012 ONTARIO WORKS IS ENHANCING ITS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM THROUGH THE CREATION OF NEW PARTNERSHIPS

This year, Ontario Works launched a number of new partnerships to respond to the emerging needs of participants, employers and the economy. This work is an important, cost-efficient step in creating, supporting and moving toward a Regional system that leverages internal and external partnerships proactively to assist OW participants to get and keep employment.

New partnerships and targeted supports for foreign-trained professionals engage the talent and experience of skilled immigrants

In May 2012, the Community and Health Services (C&HS) Department entered into a purchase of service partnership with Rehabilitation Network Canada to provide pre-employment training, job placement, and retention supports for internationally educated professionals on Ontario Works. Over an eighteen-month period, this program will assist 24 foreign-trained individuals to obtain employment in their profession or a related profession and reduce unnecessary reliance on social assistance for skilled immigrants. Four individuals are currently participating in the program, one of whom has already been offered employment.

On October 23, the CH&S Department will host an Internationally Educated Professionals (IEP) conference (The Gateway) bringing together all levels of government, professional associations, employers and an estimated 500 newcomers. The event is being marketed to the over 300 internationally educated professionals on Ontario Works as an invaluable opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills and connect with associations and employers.

Ontario Works has recently been invited to become a member of the York University IEP Bridging Program Advisory Board. The newly formed Board provides an excellent opportunity to develop new partnerships with organizations serving IEPs and will play an instrumental role in helping IEPs on social assistance to achieve labour market success.

Ontario Works is providing improved access to the emerging green economy through specialized training in solar panel installation

The recent emergence of the green economy has provided an opportunity to develop new partnerships and creative programs to equip OW participants with additional skills

needed to become competitive. In May 2012, OW entered into a purchase of service relationship with Human Endeavour to provide solar panel installation training, job placement and retention support to OW participants. Eight participants recently completed sixteen weeks of theory and are now beginning the program's hands-on training component. An additional 16 individuals will benefit from this innovative program over the next twelve months.

A new self-employment partnership will respond to the entrepreneurial nature of many participants

In an economy increasingly demanding non-standard forms of work, self-employment can provide improved access to the labour market and a potential route to self-sufficiency for social assistance recipients.

Ontario Works recently launched a self-employment program targeting goal oriented, self-directed participants with a capacity for entrepreneurial work. The 24-month pilot, operating under purchase of service agreements with the Women's Centre of York Region, the York Region Small Business Enterprise Centre, Human Endeavour and Job Skills Employment Services provides business plan development support, business fundamentals training, ongoing consultation and referral. Toronto Social Services recently reviewed York Region's model and will be adjusting its model to emulate York Region's collaborative design and administrative simplicity.

Welcome Centre partnerships provide improved access to services for many recent immigrants

Ontario Works recently established a social assistance presence at two of the Region's five Welcome Centres (the Newmarket and Markham South locations) and is in the process of setting up a new partnership with the Vaughan location. Using a hoteling approach, OW provides employment planning, referral and information services directly to OW participants at the Welcome Centres. The initiative helps introduce participants to the range of services available at the new settlement service locations while at the same time reducing travel costs for participants and volume at OW Offices.

A new relationship with Roger's Daytime Television served to educate Ontario Works job seekers and provide a valuable community service

The OW workforce development program is staffed with employment specialists who are experts at helping people become and stay employed. In February 2012, Ontario Works leveraged this talent during a presentation on *Daytime*, a daily live-to-air talk show on Rogers Television. Using a role-play and demonstration format, employment specialists addressed commonly misunderstood job search practices including how to prepare and dress for an interview, the importance of a cover letter, and the power of networking. The content was aimed at OW participants and anyone in the general public (e.g. graduates,

workers entering new fields, etc.) needing advice on how to prepare for participation in the labour market.

Healthy Living partnership is aimed at supporting the improved overall health and employability of participants

It is a well-known fact that improved overall health has a positive impact on a person's employability. This year OW is working closely with the Region's Healthy Living Division (Public Health Branch) to develop a train-the-trainer program pilot. Under this pilot, OW employment services staff are trained by Public Health staff to deliver basic information on topics such as Nutrition, Tobacco Free Living, Early Cancer Detection, Substance Misuse Prevention, Workplace Stress, and Physical Activity. This information is shared at employment workshops, in flyers and through referrals to websites and Health Connections.

Continued partnership with the Geographic Information Services branch is supporting improved case management, planning and program efficiencies

Ontario Works is continuing its multi-year partnership with the Geographic Information Services (GIS) division to enhance program design and case management. Specialized maps depict detailed characteristics of the OW caseload such as age, gender, family type (single, sole support etc.) and length of time on assistance. This helps staff to design services that better target needs. Staff also continue to report efficiencies in their daily work due to a reduced need for manual data collection. Current mapping priorities are focused on the development and administration of programs for internationally educated professionals (IEPs) and persons participating in English as a Second Language (ESL) programming.

2013 PARTNERSHIPS WILL TARGET ONTARIO MANUFACTURERS AND SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZE BUSINESSES AS PART OF A FOCUSED EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

In 2013, C&HS will introduce a focussed employer engagement strategy to connect participants to jobs. The initiative includes stronger linkages with the manufacturing community, improved outreach to small and medium sized enterprises and the introduction of a job development pilot.

Ontario Works will use the new Interactive Manufacturing Innovation Network to move participants to jobs in the manufacturing sector

York Region's Economic Strategy and Tourism branch has recently partnered with the Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium to launch a province-wide on-line networking tool for manufacturers, known as the Interactive Manufacturing Innovation Network (iMiN). iMiN allows manufacturers to post tenders, forge partnerships and place job opportunities on-line. Ontario Works has been invited to be a member of the iMiN

steering committee to help inform the employer engagement strategy and the rollout of the tool in York Region. Over the coming year, OW will actively use iMiN to build relationships with manufacturers and link participants to emerging opportunities in the manufacturing sector.

A proposed Community Employment Roundtable aims at linking job seekers with small and medium size employers

Small and medium size employers provide over 90% of the region's jobs and offer a strong future source of employment for York Region residents. Better small and medium size employers' engagement and a more complete understanding of their needs are important steps in linking low-income residents to jobs.

This year the Social Services Branch has been collaborating with the Workforce Planning Board of York Region to build the framework for a proposed Community Employment Roundtable. The roundtable will confront obstacles faced by small and medium size employers in attracting and retaining qualified labour with the goal of linking jobseekers to this key employer sector. The roundtable would be comprised of a cross-section of community leaders and small and medium employers. The Workforce Planning Board is leading the development of a funding application for presentation to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in late 2012. If funding is approved, the initiative is expected to launch by mid-2013.

A new job development pilot will focus on creating employment opportunities for job-ready participants

It is a commonly held belief in the employment industry that between 75-80 per cent of jobs are in the hidden job market. These are jobs that will never be advertised and can only be found through referral and direct contact with employers. In early 2013, Ontario Works will pilot a targeted job development initiative to reach out to York Region employers to uncover these hidden opportunities. As opportunities are uncovered, clients will be actively matched to jobs based on their strengths, skills and experience. Under the pilot, staff will also provide on-the-job supports to ease the transition for both the participant and employer and to proactively address problems before they become a barrier to job retention.

Social assistance workforce development is helping people move to jobs, avoid OW altogether and is reducing the need for public assistance

In 2011, York's workforce development program assisted residents and their families, comprising over 1,300 cases, to become employed and exit social assistance. Through its innovative program design and focussed partnership development, the Region's employment program directly contributed to over 20 per cent of 2011 program exits. And, through the administration of CIF funded employment programs, Ontario Works assisted more than 105 low income residents to find employment and avoid social

assistance altogether. The Region's focussed investment in workforce development is making a difference and, though gradual, is successfully moving people to jobs.

Link to key Council-approved plans

The current as well as planned programs and initiatives that make up OW workforce development contribute to key economic and healthy community goals outlined in Visions 2026 and 2051, the Region's 2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan objective to *increase the economic vitality of the Region*, as well as the C&HS Multi-Year Plan. These initiatives and programs also contribute to fulfilling economic goals of the Human Services Planning Board and the Community Partnership Council.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Ontario Works Employment Assistance programs and innovations are managed within the current budget. In 2012, the budget is \$4.4 M gross. Funding for basic financial and employment assistance is cost shared with the Province. The 2012 cost-share ratio is 82.8% provincial, 17.2% Regional tax levy. This funding is gradually becoming the responsibility of the Province and will be fully uploaded by 2018.

Ontario Works workforce development and innovation assists people to move to jobs and reduce reliance on Regionally cost shared social assistance programs.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

An innovative Ontario Works workforce development program benefits all municipalities by providing vulnerable, low income residents with the skills needed to get work, keep work and actively participate in their communities.

7. CONCLUSION

While without significant provincial reform there are limits, Social Assistance in York Region is focussed on helping residents to get and maintain attachment to our economy and communities. There is increasing provincial interest in transitioning Ontario Works from a program of income maintenance to one rooted in workforce development and employment. York Region is advocating for a reformed social assistance program which includes a broader and more integrated range of supports and stronger connections with employers. Through a focus on innovation and partnerships, the Region is continuing to align its OW workforce development program to meet the future anticipated direction of social assistance in Ontario and to better equip OW clients to get and retain employment.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services at Extension 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.