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FAMILY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES 2002

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 22, 2003, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The report of Family Support Activities for 2002 be received for information by Committee and Council.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with information regarding the activities of the Family Support Team in 2002.

3. BACKGROUND

The Family Support Team was established in 1998 to reduce the cost of social assistance allowances and benefits to the Region by assisting Ontario Works participants, particularly sole support parents, to pursue child and spousal support income. Sole support parents comprise the majority of Ontario Works participants who have opportunities to seek support from other sources.

In January 2003, the mandate of the Family Support Team expanded to include the portion of assistance to residents receiving Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) subsidy through our Housing and Residential Services Division.

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

The specific objectives of the Family Support Team are:

- To assist Ontario Works and Housing and Residential Services participants to take action to pursue financial support from persons with a legal obligation to provide it.
- To assist in the enforcement of agreements, orders and judgements related support.
- To participate in the established court administration process.
- To recover money owed to York Region as a result of reimbursements on assigned Ontario Works support arrears.

Due to its position as a government entity, York Region has a greater ability to collect support payments from a reluctant payer than does the participant. Through an 'assignment', an Ontario Works participant gives York Region the right to collect support payments on their behalf. In exchange, the Ontario Works 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 York Region to collect monies from a payer for the Ontario Works 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 • There are support arrears owed to the municipality or Province • The whereabouts of the payer is unknown • There is potential support available	• An Assignment for Support is completed • A Retroactive Assignment is completed • An investigation begins to locate the absent payer in order to pursue support • An Enforceable Private Agreement or Court Order is pursued.

The Provincial Family Responsibility Office (FRO) enforces assignments. The Family Support Team has access to the FRO assignment computer system (MECA – Maintenance Enforcement with Computerized Assistance). This allows the Team to obtain information to process, track and monitor municipal assignments and monies recovered.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In 2002, the Family Support Team completed reviews on 1,019 referred Ontario Works participants to determine the availability and to enforce, support income payments. This represents a review of 25.6% of the Ontario Works caseload, exceeding the 2002 target to review 15% of the caseload. The Team obtained 121 Court Orders and Private Agreements, 191 assignments, and registered 65 overpayments. Forty-two Ontario Works cases were terminated for refusal to pursue support. Table 2 provides a summary of activities.

Table 2
Summary of Activities

Activity	2000	2001	2002
Cases competed/closed	846	946	1,019
Number of Court Orders and Private Agreements	105	114	121
Total assignments processed	182	147	191
Number of overpayments registered	90	44	65
Number terminated cases	27	38	42

4.1 Recovery - Assignments

In 2002, York Region recovered \$322,931 gross costs from support assignments. Assignments are submitted to 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.

In addition, the Family Responsibility Office reimbursed York Region \$154,415, representing municipal monies collected and held by the Province for the period ending February 2002.

4.2 Recovery - Overpayments

In addition to recovering funds from assignments, 65 cases were found to have received support income that was not reported. Therefore \$83,742 gross costs in overpayments were identified and will be recovered through collection activities.

4.3 Savings – Cost Avoidance

There were 42 active files terminated as a result of Family Support intervention and due to participant refusal to pursue support. York Region realized savings of \$327,144 gross costs in 2002 through cost avoidance had the 42 cases remained active for an additional 12 months.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Family Support Team in the Community Services and Housing Department identified gross recoveries and savings totalling \$588,350. 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	2000	2001	2002
Assignments Reimbursed	\$250,253	\$257,821	\$322,931
Reimbursement from Province*	285,700	285,700	154,415
Overpayments Registered	15,729	49,344	83,742
Cost Avoidance – Terminated Cases		290,952	327,144
Total Recovery & Cost Savings	\$551,682	\$883,817	\$888,232

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

There is a favourable ratio between the costs to operate the Family Support Team and total savings generated as a result of this team's work. The revenue recouped by this team represents approximately 105% of its 2002 Budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There is no direct impact on the local community associated with this report. However, lower Regional costs also benefit local municipalities.

7. CONCLUSION

The Family Support Team performs a valuable and cost-effective mandated service to York Region. The Team assists participants of Ontario Works and RGI to obtain support, which provides long-term independent source of income.

In 2003, the Team will expand its services beyond the Ontario Works cases to include Social Housing files. The Team will also continue to receive Provincial funding for one Family Support Worker under the Enhanced Family Support Initiative. The Enhanced Family Support Initiative includes targets for increasing the number of new agreements or court orders and the average support income of Ontario Works participants thereby reducing Ontario Works costs.

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.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.