



The City of Stratford Ontario Works 2023 Business Plan

**Respectfully Submitted on behalf of the Consolidated
Municipal Service Manager by:**

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Ontario Works Mandate

All Ontario Works delivery partners share the same mandate. This serves as a common starting point for the service planning process.

Mandate

To provide stability supports and financial assistance to people in financial need. The Ontario Works program:

- Recognizes individual responsibility and promotes self-reliance through participation in the right supports, benefits and services.
- Serves people needing assistance by providing financial assistance to those most in need while they meet obligations to become and stay employed.
- Is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario.

Ministry Priorities

Ontario Works delivery partners play a key role in delivering on many of the government's priorities and have the ability to leverage provincial investments in infrastructure, employment, education and social services to create new opportunities for clients. As part of the service plan, delivery partners will articulate the efforts they will undertake to address the following ministry priorities for the current business cycle:

1. Social Assistance (SA) Service Delivery

Accelerated Digital Delivery Solutions

Currently, 41% of our caseload is registered on MyBenefits. This has been a highly successful digital solution for the participants we support so we are continuing to increase registration for the program. As a predominantly rural setting, there can be challenges related to reliable internet, but we are continuing to work with participants, local municipalities, and internet service providers in our area to address these barriers. Caseworkers continue to utilize the messaging feature within MyBenefits and promote the safety and effectiveness of MyBenefits to the entirety of our caseload.

The local office has been directing clients to the enhanced and easy-to-use SA Digital Application (SADA) since it was made available in our region. We continue to promote and encourage the usage of this tool to allow for streamlined and automated service delivery when applying for Ontario Works locally, unless clients meet the requirements for a local office application.

Centralized and Automated Delivery

The local office continues to move forward as a member of Centralized and Automated Intake. We regularly provide feedback to IBAU regarding process changes and supports required to deliver services more effectively. Over the course of the past 5 months, we have processed 30% (114) of the applications received at the local office and processed a further 60 applications requiring immediate verifications. We are regularly refining and improving the local processes and ensuring they work smoothly and in tandem with IBAU.

The local office went live with Electronic Document Management (EDM) in November 2021. This has led to increased time savings for staff locating and producing documents as well as increased effectiveness of our file retention strategies and processes.

Risk-Based Eligibility Review

The local office continues to utilize all tools provided to us for risk-based eligibility determinations including third party sources, provincial, and federal tools. The addition of CRA information into SAMS has been especially helpful for our ERO and EVP staff members who can utilize this information during file reviews to ensure all income is being appropriately reported. The local office staff continue to utilize best practices provided by the Ministry with regard to risk-based eligibility determinations and risk-based eligibility reviews. We are participating in the ERO and EVP Community of Practice as well as staying in touch with other municipal offices through networks such as Business Processes and Technology working group (BPT) and the Southwest Employment and Life Stabilization Table (SWELT).

Access to Employment and Training

Presently, we receive regular reports from our EO partners in the community and participate in quarterly meetings with all employment, literacy, and basic skills/education partners across Perth County. The continued partnership and close collaboration to support participants remains a top priority for our local office, with a focus on getting participants back to work as soon as possible. We are co-located and work closely with the local economic development team at investStratford. Furthermore, we pride ourselves on strong relationships with our EO partners to ensure that OW participants receive the full range of support available to them. We are co-located with an EO provider in our North Perth satellite office which allows for more regional-specific services and an even closer working relationship which positively benefits participants. We also have presence in our local office by another of our EO partners on a weekly basis, offering informal and formal supports within our physical location.

As we move forward with Employment Services Transformation, we recognize our unique position as a member of the SSM Consortium as well as the OW Service Delivery Partner. We continue to have a strong role in developing a locally responsive and person-centered service system. This allows us to monitor and improve upon the successes and challenges facing our system locally, from both the EO and OW perspectives, ensuring a more robust response to any issues that may arise.

Collaborating with Municipal Partners

The City of Stratford continues to participate in municipal engagement sessions through OMSSA where members of leadership attend provincial tables and contribute feedback. The city is committed to co-designing, in conjunction with our municipal partners, a provincial social assistance program that meets the unique needs of each community across Ontario while staying accountable to taxpayers. As a unique community comprised of both large rural areas and an urban center, we are well positioned to offer feedback and input on the challenges faced in our community and similar geographic regions.

2. Improving Employment Outcomes

For the interim, while a SA performance management framework is being developed, EST delivery partners will use the performance metrics as the outcomes for service planning.

As outlined in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) memo, the Ministry is requesting an outcome target to be set for each performance metric, which will be due as part of the 2023 Budget Submission and contract negotiation. Further information will be forthcoming for the new EST municipalities in terms of setting targets for 2023.

The local office is committed to improving employment outcomes and setting fair and reasonable targets that the office can aspire toward. After another successful year of achieving employment outcomes, the shift to EST metrics will require the OW division to rethink strategy and service delivery as we transition through this transformative change. Through a strong relationship with the SSM and stronger relationships with our EO providers, we will offer integrated case management that supports participants to become more employment-ready and self-sufficient as they receive services.

We utilize best practices learned from tables we attend such as the Southwest Employment and Life Stabilization Table (SWELT) and the Business Processes and Technology working group (BPT), which sees representation from CMSM's across West 1 and West 2 region as well as Ministry staff. We regularly review

COGNOS reports to ensure accurate reporting of employment metrics and to follow-up with staff to confirm service delivery standards are being met. We inspire high level service delivery by OW staff at the local office by offering top quality training and coaching.

In all four employment metrics measured in 2022, we exceeded our targets as well as the provincial averages. In 2023 and beyond, we plan to continue that trend as we deliver a high level of quality services to residents of our catchment area.

3. Develop and Maintain Local Community Service Partnerships

Build on and strengthen local community partnerships and with Service System Manager (SSM) on the range of supports available to Ontario Works clients, including long-term recipients of SA and marginalized or disadvantaged groups across service sectors, including health, developmental services, housing and child-care.

The City of Stratford Social Services Department strives to be an active member of the community and has active partnerships with several organizations that support the health and welfare of individuals in receipt of Ontario Works.

The Director of Social Services co-chairs the local Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (CSWB), as well as the executive steering committee that focuses on the work being completed across our geographic region. The CSWB plan is a tool to address key social priorities for safety and well-being ranging from mental health to poverty, to safe movement around the city, to employment, to social isolation and much more. It is a way to work together through multi-sectoral partnerships towards sustainable communities where everyone feels safe, has a sense of belonging and opportunities to participate, and where individuals and families are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income and social and cultural expression. The CSWB plan guides all of the work that we do and is the overarching plan which informs the strategic direction our office is taking. The four key priorities – 1) systems planning and integration, 2) adequate, affordable and attainable housing, 3) affordable and accessible health, social and recreation services and 4) social inclusion – inform the direction that the Ontario Works Division is taking in 2023 and beyond and helps guide the creation of this document, serving as underlying priorities for all of the work that we do.

The OW Division currently has service contracts with the local chapter of the Canadian Mental Health Association who provides mental health and addictions support to individuals across our catchment area. We also have contracts with Family Services Perth-Huron, a counselling agency who provides care along a

spectrum ranging from group and one-on-one therapy to mediation, housing stability support, and adult protective services. The OW caseworkers have close working relationships with representatives from Community Connections to support clients living with FASD and work closely with our partners at DSO Southwest Region to support those with developmental disabilities. We are co-located with our homelessness and housing stability team and our housing division. We have an integrated intake system to ensure all available services are provided to clients in a timely manner.

Additional Benefit Worker

The local OW Division currently has a singular caseworker for all recipients of ODSP and Non-Social Assistance Recipients who are looking for additional financial support such as housing stability benefits or urgent needs. This position also looks after the provision of Discretionary Benefits for ODSP clients. The additional benefits caseworker provides one-stop for SA recipients and Non-SARS to receive additional benefits and ensure that they have access to all relevant programs without having to tell their story multiple times. This position works in the office as well as in the community, regularly attending a local drop-in center and other municipalities within the region to offer services in-person. This position can develop wrap-around supports by guaranteeing all relevant financial programs are accessed to address barriers to food security, urgent basic needs, housing instability, and utility disconnections.

Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Social Services outreach staff, though they are no longer funded through the Ontario Works program, continue to work very closely with OW and ODSP clients as well as low-income individuals experiencing homelessness. In partnership with local agencies, outreach staff focus on in-community work to provide wrap-around supports focused on stabilizing a client's housing situation, look after immediate health needs, and move someone along the continuum to employability, if appropriate. Ontario Works caseworkers work very closely with these staff members and provide support to clients who access housing stability services, ensuring they are ready for any housing opportunities that arise, have an appropriate housing action plan connected with their outcome plan, and are supported in-community with all issues related to their housing and general well-being. Ontario Works caseworkers work more intensively with clients experiencing homelessness, in partnership with outreach staff, to establish action/outcome plans that reflect their housing action plans and their primary goal of achieving sustainable and safe housing. Once housed, participants can begin working toward employability and self-sufficiency. OW caseworkers provide regular monthly updates to our local By-Name List to ensure their clients are

eligible for housing-focused services and work closely with Housing Division staff to support stable tenancies and eviction prevention activities.

Relationship with SSM

As a member of the four county Consortium that was awarded the SSM contract for the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula, we have regular meetings with the SSM and participate in both the design of the SSM as well as system design for the more locally responsive and improved employment system. Through our participation at all levels of the SSM, we are involved in the planning, implementation, and regional advisory bodies that inform the work being done. We provide input into shared case management models which helps to ensure they will work for the local Social Assistance clients whom we support. Our unique position as a member of the SSM allows us to ensure that SA clients are at the forefront of the work being done.

The Stratford CMSM also partners with other local services to provide specialized supports to OW recipients including:

- Contracting the services of a psychologist to complete cognitive and mental health assessments. Participants who identify as having cognitive disabilities or believe that mental health is a barrier to their employment are scheduled for an assessment. The assessment identifies next steps for the caseworker and the client regarding their action plans and how best to achieve self-sufficiency. Examples of this include employment that involves routine tasks, counselling, and literacy supports.
- Co-locating the Childcare Subsidy Intake Worker for Social Services with the Ontario Works caseworkers to allow for direct transfers between programs. This establishes a seamless approach when a client needs to apply for a childcare subsidy or requires a therapeutic referral.
- Co-Locating with Housing Division staff including: Public Housing Review Officers, intensive outreach staff, outreach staff, and subsidy workers. We have a shared goal of working toward ensuring tenancies are protected, supported, and eviction prevention activities are thoroughly undertaken to promote stability for housed OW clients while preventing occurrences of homelessness.
- Partnership with Family Services Perth-Huron (FSPH) to deliver front-of-line counselling and psychotherapy to individuals in receipt of OW and ODSP who are actively participating in Social Services programming. FSPH also employs an ASPW who works closely with Ontario Works caseworkers who may be supporting an individual with a developmental disability.

- Regular training provided by agencies in the community who deliver specialized services such as Developmental Services Ontario, Literacy and Basic Skills providers, Newcomer, and settlement services and community health organizations.

4. Strengthen Program Accountability

MCCSS continues to refine program controls to support greater delivery and financial accountability. Delivery partners will need to consider how these controls impact their business processes and delivery approaches when constructing their service plans.

Key elements include:

Compliance with expectations related to completing the Eligibility Verification Process

The Stratford CMSM works diligently each EVP cycle to ensure that targets are met and all cases are completed in a timely manner. We continue to monitor the effectiveness of EVP locally and adjust the process to ensure outcomes are being met and the work being done meets a high standard of quality and accuracy.

Participation in current, and prospective, Oversight Intelligence activities aimed at preventing and reducing financial losses

The Stratford CMSM will continue to participate in all Oversight Intelligence activities and factor any advancements or modifications to service delivery into local business processes to ensure minimal financial losses incurred due to overpayments.

Documentation requirements for Ontario Works benefits that are managed outside of Social Assistance Management System (SAMS)

The City of Stratford currently issues all benefits from within SAMS and has no plans to alter this model of service delivery.

Section One: Transition Plan

Service Delivery

A summary of outcomes achieved in relation to establishing targets for 2023, and a description of service system outcomes and delivery successes, client outcomes, challenges and lessons learned.

Within the previous two-year service planning cycle of 2021 and 2022, the City of Stratford's Ontario Works Division was being measured on three targets; the percentage of files which close each month due to employment reasons, the overall

percentage of the caseload which exits assistance to employment each month and the percentage of the caseload that is actively employed each month.

Due to the tenacity and determination of the individuals and families in receipt of Ontario Works and the high level of effective and efficient customer service provided by the local staff, the Stratford CMSM Ontario Works Division was not only able to achieve all three targets, but exceed provincial averages in all four measured outcomes and exceeded the customer service standards set by the Province with regard to days from application contact to the application being granted assistance. The Stratford CMSM averaged 3.5 days to decision which is below the 4-day benchmark set by the Province. The other targets that were achieved are as follows:

Employment Outcome	Stratford CMSM Target	Stratford CMSM Achievement	Provincial Average
% of files exiting to employment	24.09%	26.40%	22.75%
% of overall caseload exiting to employment	1.47%	1.66%	1.10%
% of caseload with employment earnings	10.34%	13.55%	9.27%
Average monthly employment earnings per case	N/A	\$913	\$887

The following table shows the performance data for the last 8 years of service delivery. We can see that there has been a continued recovery of most metrics tracked. For example, the percentage of terminations to employment increased by 1.86% from 2021 to 26.80% in 2022. Additionally, the percentage of caseload exiting to employment recovered to 1.66% in 2022 which is higher than during the height of the pandemic in 2020. Average monthly earnings have exceeded pre-pandemic levels, reaching \$913 in 2022 compared to \$857 in 2019. Finally, the percentage of caseload with earnings is also up substantially since the pandemic, achieving 13.57% in 2022 compared to 11.07% in 2020.

Year	% of terminations to Employment	% of caseload exiting to employment	Avg. Monthly Earnings	Caseload % w/Earnings
2015	14.77%	1.14%	\$757	13.48%
2016	21.45%	1.90%	\$736	18.03%
2017	22.01%	1.83%	\$764	18.81%
2018	31.35%	2.51%	\$905	17.87%
2019	30.08%	2.03%	\$857	16.00%
2020	31.11%	1.62%	\$770	11.07%
2021	24.94%	1.49%	\$852	10.27%
2022	26.80%	1.66%	\$913	13.57%

As is evident in the data, there is a lingering effect of COVID-19 on industries in the area and the percentage of the caseload employed and with earnings. COVID-19 saw the percentage of our caseload with earnings fall dramatically from 16% in 2019 to only 11% in 2020. We have slowly rebounded from this but still see a lingering impact whereby we have fewer individuals on the caseload who are employed then we have had in the past.

As a unique geographic blend of urban and rural regions, transportation is a recurring barrier for clients. PC Connect has been operational since early 2020 though it does not offer regular enough travel to accommodate clients who are working shifts or abnormal hours. We continue to work with our partners across the County to improve transportation services for clients to remove the barrier that this presents. This continues to be a challenge for those on our caseload residing within the County and in St. Marys specifically, as they do not have access to regular, reliable transportation to get to and from employment if it is located outside of the small community in which they reside.

Enter specific strategies used for the transition to EST – below are some guiding questions:

1. Strategies used to complete Module 1 of the Common Assessment Tool and Action Plan for new clients and existing clients, including determining which clients remain in stability support activities rather than referred to Employment Ontario and reconfirming readiness for employment, including those with earnings – both employed and self-employed?

Locally, we take an individualized approach to completing module 1 of the CAT and for completing all action plans with our clients. We will leverage readiness assessment tools being created by the SSM as a strategy to ensure quality referrals, while also walking alongside clients and ensuring a strong relationship exists before embarking on Module 1 of the CAT. Action plans are created at

intake with all clients and check-ins are set on an average of every 3 months to ensure regular follow-up is completed and action plans are accurately updated. Using motivational interviewing techniques and a trauma-informed lens, staff will complete the CAT with clients once a relationship is established and the client does not identify any barriers that result in a complete deferral from activity. If no deferral is noted, the CAT is used in conjunction with local readiness tools, caseworker experience, and the client's self-declared readiness to make referrals to employment activities. Utilizing the stability supports guide and the integrated case management protocol provided by the SSM, we will make referrals based on readiness for employment activities rather than employment itself. Being ready to undertake a transition to employment activities is a big step and coupled with stability supports provided by the caseworker, regular case conferencing between EO and SA will ensure clients are well-supported with integrated case management that moves them toward success.

2. Provide a brief description of how referrals to Employment Ontario (EO) are determined?

Referrals to EO are currently determined through a combination of employment readiness assessments – utilizing the MCCSS assessment alongside a local employment readiness tool – caseworkers converse with clients to determine employment activity readiness and make referrals according to the results of the assessments. They review barriers to employment and participation in employment activities, set realistic goals that are attainable and measurable, and make referrals for those who are stable enough to meaningfully participate. We currently see approximately 12-15% of our caseload referred to EO at any given time and have regular case conferencing with our partners at EO to confirm clients are regularly attending and meeting their outcome plan requirements. As we transition into EST, we will be utilizing the SSM's Integrated Case Management protocol which will guide how referrals are made. Through a combination of the Common Assessment results, conversation with the client, and an SSM created tool we will be able to determine employment activity readiness and make referrals accordingly. Readiness will be defined as per the stability support guide provided by MCCSS and through the SSM's new readiness assessment tool. There will be a warm handoff between programs if a client is deemed employment activity-ready. If a referral has to be sent back, another case conference will ensue to ensure the client is not left behind or feeling unaccomplished. By utilizing the tools available alongside caseworker training and experience, EO referrals are expected to rise to closer to 20% over the course of 2023.

3. Explain the alternative case/change management used to serve ODSP Non-Disabled Adults, if any?

The local Ontario Works office and ODSP office meet to conduct regional joint meetings multiple times per year with a focus on ensuring there is a high level of communication and coordination between offices. All ODSP NDA's are referred to a singular OW caseworker who provides support and works closely with ODSP caseworkers to determine appropriate action plans for NDAs. Utilizing the same tools that are employed for OW clients, they review the stages of change and readiness for employment activities and case manage based on the results of these tools and assessments. There is a close working relationship with our ODSP partners and we plan to continue improving that relationship as we transition into EST. We will identify best practices & leverage experience of employment agencies who have experience supporting persons with disabilities or persons whose family members are directly impacted by disabilities. Through networks created by the SSM, we will continue to leverage our relationships in the broader sector to improve outcomes for NDAs and establish more effective case management techniques that improve outcomes of both OW and ODSP clients receiving support from our office.

4. A brief description on the strategies used for referrals to broader supports and services (i.e., to other programs - housing, childcare needs, etc.)

The City of Stratford takes an holistic approach to case planning for participants who are "job ready" and who are not "job ready" when applying for assistance. Building trusting, quality relationships with participants is vital to ensuring that outcome planning is completed adequately and meets the needs of each individual participant. By completing accurate, detailed outcome planning, we can address barriers that participants are facing and help move them along the employment spectrum. These quality relationships with participants link directly to our community partners and stakeholders by ensuring that our referrals to their programs are appropriate and supported by evidence. It is of the utmost importance for the Stratford CMSM to maintain and strengthen quality relationships with our community partners to best serve participants and leverage funding that exists across the community. To enhance strong linkages between Stratford CMSM and community partners, staff members participate in various local committees related to the effect of poverty on individuals. These include food security, housing and homelessness, mental health and addictions, and employment and training. Having a voice at these tables helps build strong partnerships, identify service gaps, and implement new programming and services that can enhance participants' lives.

Strong communication with partnering agencies is key to ensuring participants are following through with referrals. Proactive measures like booking the appointment with the referral agency during the outcome planning process, or doing monthly follow-ups to confirm participant participation, are important strategies to confirm the delivery partner is helping achieve employment outcomes for participants. In many cases, partner agencies maintain open lines of communication and situations that arise can be addressed quickly and effectively.

This is also being done inter-departmentally as the City of Stratford Social Services Department moves towards a human service integration model. We are co-located in our physical office location with our Housing, Homelessness, and Childcare team. As a result, each client who accesses services is offered an inter-departmental consent to ensure information sharing is permitted and available to better support clients accessing multiple services. Referrals are often made as warm hand-offs and OW caseworkers remain involved in case planning for clients receiving services from another division. For example, a client residing in emergency shelter will complete their primary Housing Action Plan with the outreach worker supporting them, but the OW caseworker will reinforce this plan in their OW action plan and will regularly participate in case conferencing to ensure wrap-around supports are in place. Regular case conferencing has become a staple of the work we do which involves the client in discussions about their situation with all relevant stakeholders at the table ensuring that services are aligned, gaps are addressed, and the client is supported in achieving positive life outcomes.

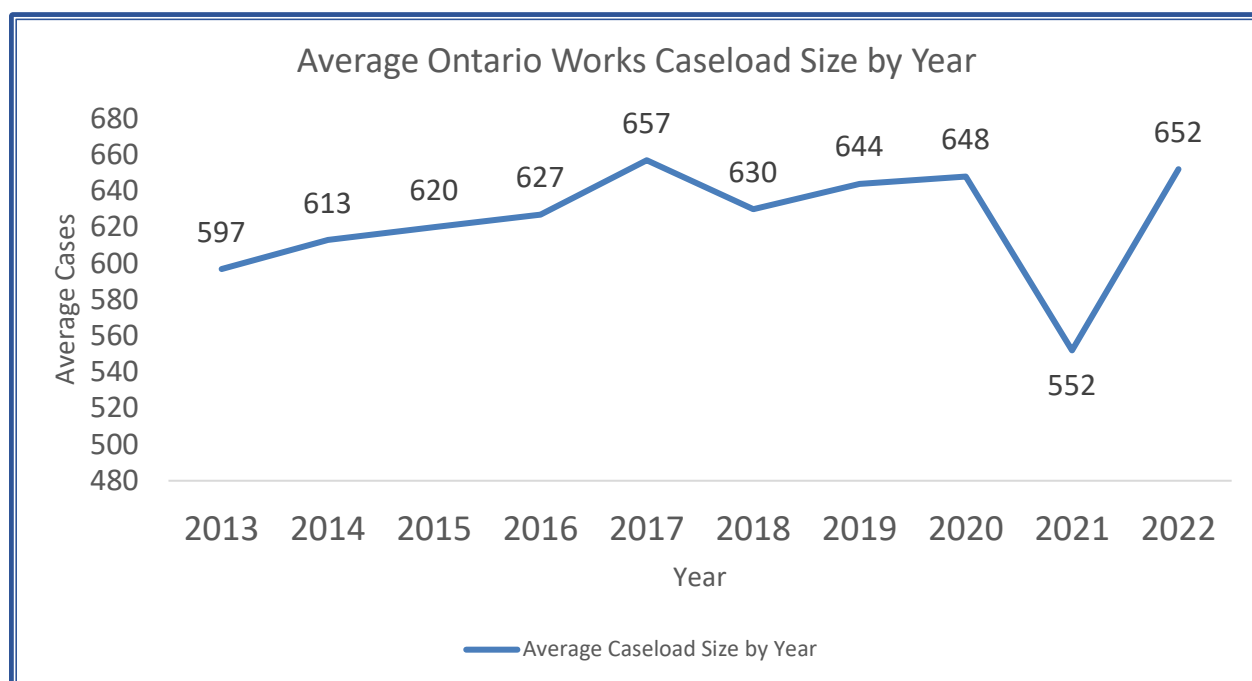
Furthermore, we regularly offer training and have agencies provide in-services to our staff regarding new programs in the community to ensure that caseworkers have the most up-to-date knowledge available to them.

Caseload

An overview of the current composition of the caseload and anticipated changes over the next two years (i.e., projected growth/decline, shifts in demographics, etc.).

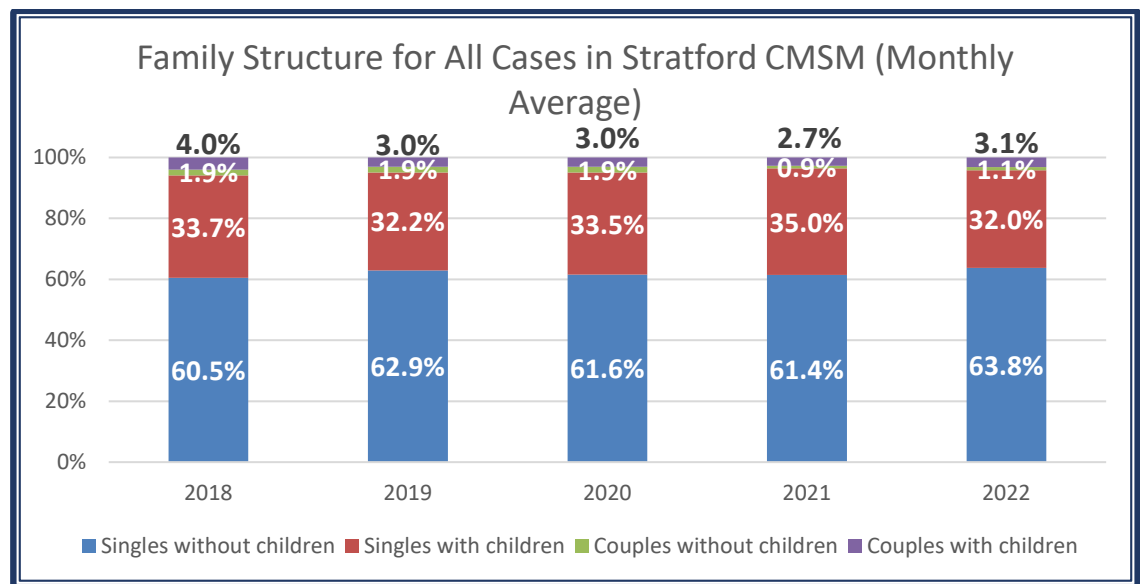
Note: Potential sources of caseload information include the Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance, Social Assistance Operations Performance Reports, Local Case Management System Reports, 2016 Statistics Canada/Census Data and other caseload information compiled locally by the delivery partner.

The chart below illustrates the Stratford CMSM's Ontario Works caseload. Overall, the caseload increased by an average of 18 benefit units from the year 2018 to 2020¹. In 2020, we began to see a decline in the latter half of the year from our year-high caseload of 702 in May due to the ongoing federal benefits. Clients who qualified, and some who did not, applied for the federal income benefits and lost contact with their OW caseworker resulting in file closures. New applications steadily declined as clients opted for the federal benefit programs. This led to a decrease in the average Ontario Works caseload to 552 in 2021. However, average caseloads have recovered, increasing to 652 in 2022, the highest average caseload since 2017. See average caseload data for the past 10 years in the chart below:



The chart below shows that the percentage of the caseload who are singles without children has grown over time to 63.8% in 2022. This poses significant challenges in finding affordable housing options for single-income participants. Conversely, the percentage of single parents with children has decreased to 32.0%, the percentage of couples without children has decreased to 1.1%, and the percentage of couples with children has also decreased to 3.1% in 2022.

¹ Social Assistance Operations Performance Reports, January 2023



The average months on assistance has reduced from 35 months in 2021 to 30 months as of 2022, though that does not reflect the complexity of the current caseload. There continues to be a majority of households lead by women, with 58% of the caseload having a female-gendered head of household. The predominant age range for the head of the family has remained in line with current years, with 32% of the overall caseload falling in the age range of 25-34 years old and a further 26% of the caseload representing the 35-44 years old range.

When reviewing the highest level of education completed, almost half, 45%, of the caseload has achieved a secondary school education. 17% percent have completed some form of post-secondary education, while just over a third, 39%, have not completed high school. Currently, over half of the caseload is participating in employment activity programming while the remainder are deferred from active participation for a variety of reasons, such as having non-school-aged children or having a medical reason that makes them unable to look for work or participate in employment activities.

Based on caseload forecast information provided by the Ministry in September 2022, the Stratford CMSM anticipates an increase from the current caseload, including temporary care assistance, of 732 to closer to 800 as of 2024. This increase, as we have seen in recent years, is largely attributed to singles who are of an employable age. Although our caseload represents many who are of an employable age, we are seeing added complexity in our clients, increased numbers of clients experiencing homelessness and more clients requiring intensive case management support. Based on our current homelessness By-Name List data (which is only able to capture source of income at program entry, so we anticipate this to be a slight underrepresentation), OW

² OW Caseload at a Glance, September 2022

recipients represent 43% of the households on the local by-name list. Of the households on the BNL, 63% are high acuity and 37% are mid-acuity, which helps demonstrate the complexity of clients that OW caseworkers are currently supporting.

Local Service Delivery Landscape and Community Partnerships

A description of how delivery partners have developed, maintained and plan to grow relationships with local community stakeholders that enhance access to services and support for clients and that may impact outcomes for participants. This includes (if details are unknown, the completion of this section can be held until the development of a service plan):

- **Current and future socioeconomic factors that may influence employment and employability**
- **Education and skills required to obtain available jobs**
- **Access to transportation, health, housing and other services**
- **Regional and local demographic trends (e.g., shifts in population size, age groups, and increases or decreases in immigration).**

Key Community Partnerships – to enhance stability supports services for clients include a list of stakeholders (e.g., SSM, community agencies, mental health providers, including other human social service providers).

The following data provides a high-level snapshot of the local demographic trends influencing employment across our geographic region. This report details the unemployment rate, labour force participation rates, business conditions in Perth County, and access to housing and local demographic trends. The City of Stratford maintains strong partnerships across the County with all the agencies listed on Page 20 and 21 and strives to improve upon services delivered using feedback and input from both our clients and service providers we work alongside.

It is of the utmost importance that the Stratford CMSM continues to collaborate and have strong partnerships at every level of the organization. Recognizing that, we are investing significant time networking locally, regionally, and provincially. Some of the steering groups and committees we participate in include:

- Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan Advisory Committee
- Partners in Resource for Employment in Perth
- Southwest Employment and Life Stabilization Table (SWELT)
- OMSSA Employment and Income Information Network
- OMSSA Housing and Homelessness Network

- OMSSA 47 Leads
- Southwest Region Business Processes and Technology Working Group
- Southwest Region Strategic Management Group
- Coordinated Access Leadership Group (Stratford, St Marys, and Perth County)
- North Perth Community Luncheon Committee
- Huron/Perth Situation Table

We continue to work closely, and are co-located, with Economic Development (investStratford) to look at our local labour market situation and affordable housing options. These partnerships allow us to stay abreast of current issues that impact our service delivery and enable us to implement best practices to improve participant services efficiently. By working with our community partners, we can improve employment outcomes for our participants. For example, case conferencing with Employment Ontario providers, referrals to counselling services, and the Community Legal Clinic have helped to mitigate complex situations.

The Homelessness Prevention Plan (HPP), Housing Stability Bank (HSB), and the Homemakers Program are administered by the Stratford CMSM. Risk of housing loss has become more prevalent which presents challenges for participants when finding and maintaining employment. Acting as administrators of the HSB program allows caseworkers to access financial resources to prevent eviction or re-house a client. Similarly, the Homemakers Program, which provides in-home, light cleaning services, helps participants maintain their residence so they can concentrate on improving their employment outcomes.

As we move forward with the human service integration model, we continue to look for partnerships that can help coordinate services to better serve our mutual participants.

Unemployment Rate

In 2022, the unemployment rate for Stratford-Bruce Peninsula was 3.7%³, an historic low and one of the lowest of all economic regions in Ontario. This is in stark contrast to 2020, when the unemployment rate was 7.3%. This is combined with job vacancy rates that are consistently higher than that of Ontario. Local economic development information suggests this points to a chronic shortage of workers in the Stratford-Bruce Economic Region.⁴

³ The Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Unemployment rate cannot be separated to reflect Stratford only.

⁴ Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Local Labour Market Plan, 2023

Business Conditions in Perth County

Economic Development recommends that a trend comparison of the number of businesses is not valuable at this time as the Postal Code Conversion File used has caused a change in the counts. As a result, some businesses have been assigned to an adjoining County because of the change, not because of a physical change in address. However, the majority of businesses continue to be owner operated (70.7%), followed by businesses with 1-4 employees (14.8%). Only 69 businesses in Perth County (public and private) have 100 or more employees.

The table below represents the top ten industries in Perth County from June 2022, and the total number of employers in each industry⁵:

Industry	Number of Employers
11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	432
23 Construction	427
44-45 Retail Trade	371
81 Other services (except public administration)	262
62 Health care and social assistance	229
31-33 Manufacturing	200
54 Professional, scientific and technical services	188
7 Accommodation and food services	157
41 Wholesale trade	126
48-49 Transportation and warehousing	115

Access to Housing

An overall lack of housing stock has severely decreased both the affordability and availability of housing for individuals living on a lower and/or fixed income. Vacancy rates for the area indicate 1.8% for 1-bedroom units, 1.6% for 2-bedroom units and 4.0% for 3+ bedroom units. Overall, the vacancy rate for Stratford sits at 1.9%.⁶

Further concerns are brought forth regarding the affordability of rental units, as our local AMR scan has shown the following Average Market Rents for 2021⁷:

⁵ Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Local Labour Market Plan, 2023

⁶ CMHC Rental Market Survey; Ontario-Rental Market Statistics Summary by Metropolitan Areas, Census Agglomerations and Cities

⁷ 2021-2022 Request for Alternate Average Market Rents for Housing Allowance and Rent Supplement Programs, Business Case for the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, and County of Perth

Unit Size	Approved Alternate AMRs based on 2021 Local Rental Scan
Bachelor	\$1,050
1 bedroom	\$1,253
2 bedroom	\$1,487
3 bedroom	\$1,894
4+ bedroom	\$1,894

This has a significant impact on access to housing for individuals living on a fixed income, such as those on Ontario Works. At this rate, a single recipient of Ontario Works is unable to afford an apartment without sharing that space or being in receipt of a portable housing benefit pushing more clients toward room rentals without security of tenancy.

Regional and Local Demographic Trends

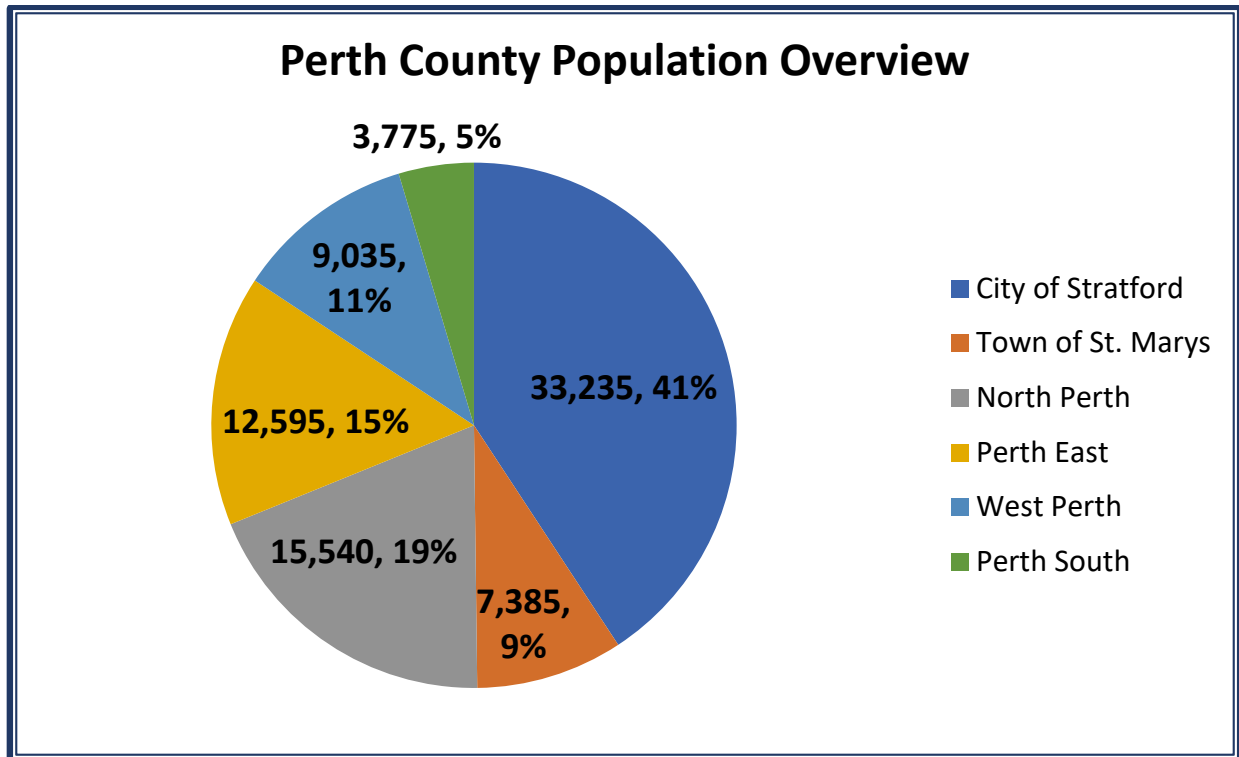
According to the Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Perth County attracted 17,169 new residents between 2015 and 2020. During the same period, Out-migrants totaled 13,447, resulting in a Net-migrant gain of 3,722 people. The 25-44 age cohort saw the greatest net increase of 1,201 people during that time, while the greatest net decrease came from the 18-24 age range, which saw a loss of 200 people over that time.⁸

Population Overview (Census 2021)

According to 2021 Statistics Canada Census data, Perth County's population was 81,565, which constitutes a 6% population increase since 2016. The largest population center in Perth County is the City of Stratford, which accounts for 41% of the total population.⁹

⁸ Four County Labour Market and Planning Board, Local Labour Market Plan 2023

⁹ Statistics Canada, Census 2021 for Perth County Census Division



Labour Force Participation Rates (Census 2021)

Census data also showed that Perth County had a higher participation rate and employment rate than the Province of Ontario as a whole.¹⁰ The average unemployment rate for Perth County was 7.8% compared to 12.2% for Ontario according to the 2021 Census.

Rate	Perth County	Ontario
Participation Rate	66.3%	62.8%
Employment Rate	61.1%	55.1%
Unemployment Rate	7.8%	12.2%

Labour Force aged 15 years and over by occupation, National Occupational Classification Perth County (Census 2021)

Occupation	# Employed	% of Workforce
0 Legislative and senior management occupations	395	0.9
1 Business, finance and administration occupations	6,105	14.2%
2 Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	2,045	4.7%
3 Health Occupations	2,890	6.7%

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, Census 2016 for Perth County Census Division

Occupation	# Employed	% of Workforce
4 Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services	3,785	8.8%
5 Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport	1,270	2.9%
6 Sales and service occupations	9,210	21.4%
7 Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	8,720	20.2%
8 Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations	3,780	8.8%
9 Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	4,880	11.3%
Total	43,075	100%

Key Community Partners and Services

Basic Education

- Conestoga College (GED, ACE, Literacy)
- Avon Maitland District School Board (Grade 12, ESL)
- St. Marys Literacy (Level 1 & 2 basic Literacy)
- QUILL Learning Network

Employment Supports

- Conestoga College (Employment Ontario)
- Partners In Employment (Employment Ontario)
- Practice Firm (Employment Training)
- Contact North

Service System Manager (Employment)

- Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Service System Manager Consortium

Lead: Bruce County

Members: Huron County, Grey County, City of Stratford, Bruce County

Mental Health and Addiction Services

- Family Services Perth-Huron
- Local Psychologists (contracted)
- CMHA H-P Addictions and Mental Health Services
- Special Services Unit (ACT)

Life Skills

- Shelterlink/LOFY
- Salvation Army
- Family Services Perth-Huron
- The Local Community Food Centre

Self-Employment

- Stratford Perth Centre for Business

Community Placement

- Volunteers in Perth
- The Local Community Food Centre
- House of Blessing

Legal Services

- Huron Perth Community Legal Clinic
- Huron Perth Family Law Information Clinic

Housing

- City of Stratford Housing Division
- Ontario Works Intensive Case Management Housing Worker
- Social Services Outreach Worker
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Addictions Supportive Housing
- The Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP – Home For Good funded Housing First Program)

Child Care

- City of Stratford Early Years and Childcare Division
- Perth Care for Kids
- Anne Hathaway Childcare
- YMCA of Three Rivers Stratford Perth

Economic Development

- Invest Stratford
- St. Marys Economic Development
- North Perth Economic Development
- Perth County Economic Development

Health and Long-Term Care

- Mobile Crisis and Rapid Response Team
- HPHA Nurse Practitioner
- Perth County Community Paramedicine
- Family Health Clinic
- Huron Perth Public Health
- Homemakers Program

Section Two: Strategies and Outcomes

Performance

- The interim performance metrics are to be used by EST municipalities starting in 2023.
- For determining targets and tracking achievement, the Ministry has released a new interactive report which tracks Ontario Works Service Contract metrics for EST sites. The report provides interactive visualizations of relevant metrics to help establish targets for the 2023 service contract and to identify emerging trends over time.

The report currently features data for:

- Ontario Works clients and ODSP non-disabled adults with a completed Common Assessment Module 1
- Ontario Works clients and ODSP non-disabled adults with an active Action Plan and length of time to create an action plan
- Ontario Works clients and ODSP non-disabled adult referrals to Employment Ontario (EO) that were accepted (i.e., ready for employment) by Service System Managers
- Amount of time from Ontario Works intake, or referral to Ontario Works for ODSP non-disabled adults, to referral to employment services.

Target	Service Strategy
Percentage of Ontario Works adult caseload with a completed Common Assessment Module 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This target is set at 50% of the total caseload as not all clients will be open or willing to complete a CAT.• Takes into account SSM approach of having a readiness tool that is to be completed before completing the CAT.• This builds in time for relationship building so caseworkers are able to better utilize their skills and motivate clients to participate in employment activities. Allows for a buffer of 2-3 months between when AP and CAT are completed.
Percentage of Ontario Works adult caseload with an Action Plan created	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This target is set at 80%. We plan to treat the AP like the current outcome plan and complete an AP with every adult member of Ontario Works files.• The 20% buffer allows for lags in timing (applies in December, AP created in

Target	Service Strategy
	<p>January) and deferred clients who will only have a "Started" outcome plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseworkers will complete AP's with all adult family members within 30 days of applying for assistance.
Proportion of Ontario Works clients (out of total Ontario Works caseload) that were accepted by the Service System Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is set at 8% to allow for a transition into the new model. As we will be working with more EO partners and may see a higher rate of returned referrals until the EST model is stable and eligibility requirements are clear to all participating agencies, this number is set to account for this. • This also allows for staggered referrals whereby we will be sending less clients initially due to our current transition plan.
Proportion of Non-Disabled Adults (out of total Non-Disabled Adults) that were accepted by Service System Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is set at 15% to represent the current number of NDA's working with EO. • We plan to build strong relationships and make appropriate referrals, but there may be returned referrals until the new EST model is stabilized.
Average days from intake into Ontario Works to referral to Employment Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is currently set at 120 days to allow time for new clients to explore self-directed job searching and caseworkers to build a relationship that makes completion of the CAT more seamless and supportive. • Using a strengths-based approach, caseworkers will make case-by-case determinations of who requires an immediate EO referral and who can complete self-directed job searching for the first 3-month action plan cycle.
Average days from referral to Ontario Works to referral to Employment Ontario for ODSP Non-Disabled Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This target is currently set at 120 days to allow time for new clients to explore self-directed job searching and caseworkers to build a relationship that makes completion of the CAT more seamless and supportive. • Using a strengths-based approach, caseworkers will make case-by-case determinations of who requires an immediate EO referral and who can

Target	Service Strategy
	complete self-directed job searching for the first 3 month action plan cycle.
Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) exiting to employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This target is currently set at 1.4% which represents a slight decrease from 2022 actuals due to the shift to the EST model and the uncertainties that it brings.
Percentage of ODSP Non-Disabled Adults referred to Employment Ontario with new or increased earnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This target is set at 10% as we have a low number of ODSP NDA's participating and need to set a realistic target of what we may be able to achieve in the 1st year under the new model.
Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) who exit the program for any reason and return within one year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This number is set at 80% due to the various reasons why a client may exit assistance, such as terminations for failure to provide information, terminations for failure to contact, terminations for not bringing in appropriate intake documentation, terminations for employment earnings, etc. These reasons often have individuals returning to assistance shortly after the file closes and will contribute to this number being higher than solely those who exit assistance for employment and return due to losing employment. The Stratford office will work diligently to ensure those who exit to employment, do so with all the necessary resources and supports in place to ensure long-term, sustainable employment, such as EHB/EEHB, referrals for additional benefits, housing supports in place, and regular follow-up from EO providers at key milestones.

Action Steps and Resources

- Outline the key strategies that will be used to achieve 2023 targets. Describe how the proposed strategies will be monitored to determine progress towards the achievement of outcome targets.**

Overall Strategies:

- Monthly individual meetings with caseworkers to review transition plans and KPIs set in the transition plan.

- Weekly review of CRS 355 and 356 by management, followed by regular meetings with CW to address shortcomings in transition plan identified in the reports.
- Completing AP with all clients and completing the CAT as we get to know clients better. Stagger CAT to ensure checkpoints are spaced out and timelines can be successfully achieved.
- Integrated Case Management model in place, as per SSM, to ensure a high level of collaboration with EO. Furthermore, the local office has an EO partner physically on-site once per week to enhance quality of referrals in an effort to ensure they are accepted and clients are well-supported.
- We will work with ODSP to ensure all NDA's are referred promptly and with a clear idea of what to expect when engaged with OW supports. There will be ongoing, open communication between the OW NDA worker and ODSP CW's to ensure a high level of collaboration.
- Staff will utilize motivational interviewing techniques and other case management strategies to move referrals to EO within the 120-day target.
- We will leverage client self-determination and a strengths-based approach to ensure services put the client first, are individualized and meet the client where they are at.

Strategies being used with respect to exits to employment include:

- Ensuring caseworkers capture appropriate exit reasons in SAMS within the appropriate time frame.
- Ongoing case conference and follow-up with Employment Ontario providers on mutual participants and general employment outcomes.
- Promoting employment-related benefits and services to assist and inform participants about moving toward self-sufficiency (Earnings Exemptions, Extended Employment Health Benefit, Child Care Subsidy referrals) in both written and verbal formats.
- Maintaining contact with participants to ensure they inform us when employment is attained and are aware of the supports available.

Percentage of ODSP Non-Disabled Adults referred to Employment Ontario with new or increased earnings

- We will work closely with EO and with ODSP caseworkers to ensure compliance and movement toward increased earnings. We will work within the realm of what the clients are capable, leveraging a strengths-based approach, and build from there. The goal will be movement into employment before gradually building up to a full return to the workforce for all NDA's in receipt of assistance.

Percentage of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) who exit the program for any reason and return within one year

- We will work to ensure sustainable exits from assistance by empowering clients, providing all necessary resources and ensuring they are aware of where they can access what benefits (i.e. our additional benefit worker, EHB/EEHB).
- Through successful referrals to EO, we can also ensure regular follow-up is completed by the EO office after someone is employed. As the SSM, we expect that EO meets requirements of following up with clients and supporting them to maintain employment.
- By building sustainable, client-determined action plans that look at longevity, we will focus on reducing recidivism instead of the speed at which an individual can potentially exit assistance.

Section Three: Program Management

Overview of Learning Supports

- An overview of other strategic learning plans to train staff in the delivery of stability supports, to achieve program objectives and improve program outcomes (i.e., Supportive Approaches through Innovative Learning (SAIL)).

The Stratford CMSM continues its commitment to providing staff with relevant training opportunities that can enhance service delivery and avoid burnout by empowering staff to better serve participant needs. We are evaluating the renewed SAIL Program and are working through the logistics of what delivery of this program would look like in the local office.

Some professional development training opportunities provided to staff include:

- Core legislative training and local office policies for new hires
- In-Services from Community Providers (e.g. QUILL Learning Network, Family Services Perth-Huron, CMHA Huron-Perth, DSO SWR)
- Motivational Interviewing
- OMSSA Training – i.e. Making Difficult Conversations Easier, Legislation training, etc.
- Trauma Informed Care
- safeTALK
- Crisis Intervention and De-escalation
- First-aid
- Mental Health First-Aid

We also encourage staff to submit requests for specific training that will enhance their abilities and encourage positive personal growth. Once they have completed a training

session, they are asked to present the information they learned to their peers to share knowledge and best practices.

We continue to work closely with the Service System Manager and partner municipalities in our economic region with plans to deliver training that is locally specific and responsive to the needs in our region. This will also ensure service delivery across the region meets the highest level of service standards and is consistent for OW clients moving across the economic region.

Strategy to Deliver French Language Services

- A strategy to ensure active delivery of French Language Services within designated communities.

We do not see a large French speaking population in Perth County, but we do have one caseworker fluent in French and print off applications in French when required. We are actively engaged with the YMCA Settlement Services to assist any newcomers to the area, including those who may move from French-speaking regions.

Business Practices

- A description of how any changes, if required, will be made to business practices to meet standards for performance to comply with program policy (e.g., developing local policies to support program delivery).

We are constantly reviewing business practices locally and have instituted several policies that align us with the Provincial standards including Exception Based Income Reporting, Discretionary Benefits, Records Retention, and Verification Standards. We implement processes as they are needed to address ongoing issues and ensure we look at best practices from across the province when implementing processes. Participation in the Business Process and Technology working group (BPT) as well as the Southwest Employment Life Stabilization Table (SWELT) allows us to share best practices amongst CMSMs in West Region 1 and 2, and implement effective, proven strategies that are working in other communities.

Centralized Intake was onboarded on June 21, 2021, and our office went live with Electronic Document Management on November 8, 2021. Centralized Intake continues to be an iterative process that will reduce administrative workload once it is fully operational. Electronic Document Management has allowed for us to modernize our file management processes and move away from paper files thus improving efficiencies in our office related to the submission and retention of documents. By allowing the electronic submission of information, we are better able to support our rural residents who would otherwise have to travel or mail documents into our Stratford office.

The Health and Safety Manual for Social Services was updated for staff. The updated manual focuses on protecting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of staff when interacting with participants. We are also in the process of completing a review of all local policies and processes, updating, and modernizing them to reflect the changing landscape of Ontario Works service delivery.

Summary

Management and staff of the City of Stratford Ontario Works Division are committed to providing quality, holistic services to all Ontario Works participants.

The Ontario Works Division will continue to work with community partners to identify gaps and find solutions through the enhancement of existing services or the development of new programming. This work will be guided, at all times, by our local Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan community priorities, ensuring that we are aligned with our community goals and the associated objectives.

The Stratford CMSM will also continue to support and work diligently with the Province on any forthcoming projects or mandates. The City of Stratford Ontario Works Business Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Ministry Guidelines, Ontario Works Policy Directives, and Memorandums. The 2023 Business Plan is respectfully submitted to the South West Regional Office of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for approval.