

MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: April 15, 2025
To: Social Services Sub-committee
From: Alex Burgess, Manager of Ontario Works
Robin Brown, Social Services Supervisor – Ontario Works
Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Report Number: SOC25-005
Attachments: None

Title: Family Services Perth-Huron Counselling and Support Agreement Update

Objective: To provide Council with information regarding services provided by Family Services Perth-Huron to referred Ontario Works clients as per the Counselling and Support Agreement between Ontario Works and Family Services Perth-Huron.

Background: Participants in social service programs may have emotional and other barriers that need to be addressed to promote participant self-reliance and life stabilization prior to achieving the goal of employment and other forms of community engagement.

In March of 2023, an agreement was signed between the City of Stratford Ontario Works program and Family Services Perth-Huron. The Social Services Department agrees to pay Family Services Perth-Huron a maximum of \$95,000 annually for their services, with an ability to provide an extra \$20,000 for programming considered to enhance services.

Through this agreement, Family Services Perth-Huron agrees to support Ontario Works participants to improve overall life stability in the community. They do this through personal and group interventions, groups/clinics, as well as counselling services. These services are aimed at reducing barriers to employment, increasing sustainable wellness and change, impacting housing and overall life stability. Counsellors provide compassionate trauma informed support for mental health concerns/crises and address self-esteem and goal-setting challenges.

Local in-person and virtual supports help some of our most vulnerable community members through evidence-based prevention and interventions supports to offer support, seek solutions and mitigate overall risk and stability. Family Services focuses on

barriers to employment, housing instability, risk of homelessness, complex familial needs, mental health concerns, addressing self-esteem, and goal setting challenges. Focusing on these areas and providing personal counselling services allows participants to progress towards their eventual goal of successful life stabilization.

Key Performance indicators are tracked by Family Services for clear accountability framework through the Family Services Perth-Huron internal tracking system.

Analysis: The Utilization Rate Summary report was submitted by Family Services Perth-Huron on February 28, 2025. Through the course of 2024, the Ontario Works office referred 168 participants to Family Services Perth-Huron. Of those 168 participants, 151 were served, far exceeding the target set at 100. Many of the participant referrals included children, partners, and/or caregivers. The 151 participants served included a total of 226 individuals.

Family Services Perth-Huron utilized a total of 921 hours working with Ontario Works participants through various sessions including Psychotherapy, Individual, Couple and Family Group sessions, and Drop-in Counselling. Again, this far exceeded the target of 800 hours.

They conducted 64 group sessions or drop-in clinics with various Ontario Works participants with 48 people attending these group sessions or receiving drop-in services.

Family Services Perth-Huron faced a number of issues and complexities when working with Ontario Works participants. These issues were most often related and intersectional. Homelessness was a common factor where participants were facing a risk of homelessness, often due to precarious relationships.

There was regularly a sense of stress, instability and emotional issues with the participants concerning their overall life situations. These issues often impeded job search and retention abilities. There was also an inability to secure primary care or psychiatric supports as needed.

Other complexities often demonstrated by participants were traumatic brain injuries, developmental disabilities, addictions and other medical concerns.

As can be expected, many participants struggled with both current and past trauma, violence and/or abuse, affecting familial, and personal relationships.

Family Services Perth-Huron conducted surveys with the Ontario Works clients who accessed their services. Of those that completed the survey, 85% found their social and community connections improved while 63% of that number felt they had improved employability and a capacity for employment and/or volunteering. This number remains steady when compared to that in 2023.

An impressive 85% of those participants who completed the survey found their overall mental health and wellness had improved. In the survey, participants were quoted to have 'felt safe and understood' and 'glad it was there for me.'

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

This program was previously approved by Council in 2023 (SOC23-011). The cost of the agreement in the current year is \$95,000, with an additional \$20,000 available for emergency and enhanced services requiring clinical intervention, if approved by the Director of Social Services. The program is fully funded through the 100% Provincial Program Delivery Funding provided to the Ontario Works Division so there is no net financial impact to the tax levy for the City or the shared services partners.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

The program, as currently approved by Council, runs until December 31, 2027, and is renewed on a yearly basis, if agreed upon by both parties. The contract is subject to the City's budget approval and Provincial funding, on an annual basis.

As this program is 100% Provincially funded through the Ontario Works division, there is no anticipated impact on future year net tax levy budgets for the City or the shared services partners.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Build Housing Stability

This report aligns with this priority as this partnership provides gateways to housing stability to some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Culture and Community

Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities and promoting a culture of sustainable living.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Family Services Perth-Huron Annual Utilization Rate Summary Report" (SOC25-005), be received for information.

Prepared by:

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Recommended by:

Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer