



Staff Report to Council - for Information

Title: Q3 Income and Support Services Update

From: Tina Metcalfe, Director Human Services

Date: December 7, 2023

Report Purpose:

This report is for information.

Report Summary:

The Income and Support Services update provides an overview of the service delivery components and outcomes throughout Q3.

Background:

The average number of households receiving social assistance from Bruce County to the end of Q3 was 559, which represents a 10% increase over 2022. Staff have completed individualized stability Action Plans with approximately 73% of the adults in these households.

In Q3, clients were referred and connected to a multitude of stability supports with various agencies across the area including the Adult Learning Centre, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Bright Shores Mental Health and Addiction Services, Grey Bruce United Way Financial Literacy program and the Salvation Army Pathways to Hope program.

Food security and housing challenges continued to present as major concerns for clients and staff continue to connect them to appropriate supports in their communities including referrals to food banks, Good Food Box and Community meal programs as well as to emergency housing services with YMCA Owen Sound Grey Bruce.

Employment Services Transformation and Integrated Case Management

In Q3, the primary focus of the Income and Support Services division continued to be spent on supporting the transition of employment services for social assistance clients to Employment Ontario (EO) and the implementation of Integrated Case Management between our caseworkers and the Employment Ontario service providers.

Key divisional staff attended various monthly meetings with our Service System Manager (SSM) and leadership from EO service providers in the catchment area as well as at the provincial EST Community of Practice, to share information, evaluate processes, identify challenges, and propose solutions/changes to issues that have arisen in the first 6 months of the transition; particularly around follow up, returned referrals and benefit coordination.

At the direct client service level, caseworkers have been actively engaged with EO service providers, making referrals and meeting on a regular basis to review client progress and support needs.

As at the end of Q3, approximately 18% of the Ontario Works caseload has been referred and accepted into employment services by the SSM. The returned referral rate is very low, demonstrating that staff are effectively using the Common Assessment and Action Plan tools to identify and refer those clients who are employment service ready.

Q3 also saw a significant effort to build relationships with new EO providers in the catchment area. College Boreal, now locally present with finalized staffing, offers a diverse range of services, including French language support and a broader system of assistance for clients with diverse cultural backgrounds.

The Huronia Area Aboriginal Management Board was added as a local EO service provider, with staff engaging to understand their unique services and programs for indigenous participants. Referrals and integrated case management is now active with both agencies. YMCA Owen Sound Grey Bruce shared their programming information at a staff engagement session as well, facilitating additional access to employment services closer to home, particularly for Bruce County residents in bordering communities to Grey County.

Caseworkers also continue direct collaboration with Settlement Services through YMCA Owen Sound Grey Bruce to support the needs of our newcomer clients.

Social Assistance Renewal

Work continued on various initiatives in Q3 to support the vision for Social Assistance Renewal announced by the province in February 2021.

Results from the Centralized Intake initiative remained a challenge in Q3 and administrative efficiencies are not being experienced by staff as intended. Centralized Intake and the use of the Risk Based Eligibility Determination tool were originally predicted to deliver significant administrative savings to our staff by determining eligibility and granting more than 70% of applications for social assistance received online.

Of the 90 applications received on-line throughout Q3, only 33% had eligibility determined by the Intake and Benefits Administration Unit. The remaining 66% of online applications required intervention by our local office to determine eligibility. Key divisional staff continue to participate at the Centralized Intake Collaborative & Strategic Tables with Intake and Benefits Administration Unit and MCCSS and provide input to inform future iterations of the Centralized Intake model and RBED tool with the goal of creating greater administrative efficiencies for local offices.

With Social Assistance renewal, there has been a continued shift toward the digital modernization of social services. Work in Q3 occurred to support greater access to digital tools for social assistance clients. Staff from Income and Support Services are working directly with Purchasing and our ITS department to acquire affordable technology in the form of refurbished cell phones and laptops that will enable our service users to access needed stability supports such as online mental health and physical health supports, financial literacy courses and to participate in pre-employment programming such as the Make Your Way workshop. Greater access to this technology will also allow clients to leverage digital tools such as MyBenefits for reporting information and communicating with their caseworkers in a secure environment and will also serve as a vital resource when participating in employment services.

In an effort to support staff in providing person-centric supports in a system that is becoming more centralized, automated, and digital, the entire division participated as a team in the OMSSA Virtual Forum in September. Staff attended sessions on the Digitization of Social Services and Casework in a Post-Pandemic Digital Era. Staff heard from experts from around the world on their experiences with the digitization of social services, the impacts of that digitization on staff as well as service users, and strategies for how staff can maintain a high quality, person-centric approach in casework while avoiding personal burnout and fatigue.

Also in Q3, the second cohort of the “Make Your Way” Program was delivered, co-facilitated by one of our Caseworkers. Six participants were successful in completing the virtual four-week comprehensive life skills program. This program was developed to support clients, who are not yet ready for employment services, to identify their strengths and establish meaningful goals that will empower them to connect to their community and the stability supports within those communities. Feedback from participants who completed this session was extremely positive and supports the efficacy of the program as demonstrated in these testimonials from clients answering the question “In what ways do you feel differently now that you have completed Make Your Way?”

“More positive that with determination and small goals I can do anything.”

“I feel more confident in myself for setting goals and being positive in how my life is.”

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

There are no financial, staffing, legal or IT considerations associated with this report.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

There were no interdepartmental consultations for this report.

Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:

Community and Partnerships - Build a strong and inclusive community

Community and Partnerships - Enhance and grow partnerships

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Departmental Approval:

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