To: Chair and Members  
Social Services Committee  
Community Services Department  
SSC06020

From: Joe-Anne Priel  
General Manager  
Community Services Department

Date: May 29, 2006

Re: Ontario Works Family Support Initiative (SSC06020) (City Wide)

Council Direction:
Not Applicable

Information:

The City of Hamilton established a Family Support Worker Program in December 1998 to assist Ontario Works participants in their efforts to obtain financial resources to which they are entitled for themselves or their children. This initiative is consistent with the Ministry of Community and Social Service’s (MCSS) direction to encourage self-reliance and support transition to work for social assistance recipients. A team of one full-time manager and eight staff, cost shared 50/50 with Ministry of Community and Social Service’s (MCSS) and funded through the Ontario Works Cost of Administration program, was established to administer this program.

The Family Support Worker Program helps Ontario Works participants obtain the support they are legally entitled to receive, and it also serves to protect the Ministry of Community and Social Service’s (MCSS) and City of Hamilton’s interest in outstanding support arrears. This program ensures that participants obtain the supports they need, which reduces their dependency on Ontario Works, and results in participants exiting the Ontario Works program.

In 1999, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) announced that additional provincial 100% funding would be made available to enhance the Family Support function. The Enhanced Family Support Initiative (EFSI) was established to complement the existing Family Support program and assist in the further reduction of basic financial assistance expenditures for the City of Hamilton over time.
The overall goal of Enhanced Family Support Initiative (EFSI) in 1999 was to:

1) Increase the average amount of support in pay by 4% a year up to 10% above the baseline; and,
2) Increase the percentage of Sole Support Parents cases that have support provisions in place by 4% a year up to 10% above the baseline.

With this additional 100% Enhanced Family Support Initiative (EFSI) provincial funding, three additional staff were hired and the Family Support Function was enhanced to:

- Expand capacity to focus on locating absent parents;
- Enhance training for Ontario Works Family Support Staff;
- Retain professional legal staff when required;
- Increase (where needed) and maintain the percentage of Sole Support Parent cases in Ontario Works with support arrangements in place;
- Increase (where needed) and maintain the average amount of support in pay consistent with the Child Support Guidelines; and,
- Defend arrears owing to the Ontario Works delivery agent and where appropriate, arrears of other delivery agents and the Ministry of Community, Family and Child Services (MCFCS).

The allocation for the Enhanced Family Support Initiative (EFSI) was based on the above targets and was established at $100,000 in 2000/2001; $170,000 for the next two years; $213,000 for 2004/2005; and, it is anticipated that this same amount ($213,000) will be available for the 2005/2006 year.

The Enhanced Family Support Initiative (EFSI) has further enhanced the family support function by:

- Fostering stronger working relationships with the local courts, lawyers, Legal Aid Ontario and the Family Responsibility office;
- Marketing Family Support as a key way of moving people off social assistance;
- Expanding strong communication linkages between the case worker function and the family support function, supported by ongoing training;
- Integrating Family Support function with Housing and Child Care programs;
- Developing sole support parent workshops for participants; and,
- Enhancing support within team structure of verification and Consolidation Verification Process (CVP) teams.

In the year 2005, data provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) has acknowledged that the City of Hamilton has exceeded the targeted goals. In addition, recoveries from the Family Responsibility Office on assigned court orders to the City of Hamilton for 2005 was $320,000 net ($1.6 million gross).
Staff are optimistic that the established targets and allocations for 2006 will also be achieved. An update on the 2006 Family Support activities will be provided in 2007.

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Joe-Anne Priel
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