Council Direction: Not Applicable

Information:
On November 25, 2009, Council approved Item 8 of the Emergency and Community Services Report 09-014 (Report CS09083), respecting Enhanced Employment Services funding, which read as follows:

That authority be delegated to the General Manager of Community Services to approve applications for employment services to be funded through the provincial Enhanced Employment Services program.

This Information Report is to inform Council as to how the funding was allocated and the outcome of the Call for Applications process.

As previously reported on November 25, 2009 (CS09083), the City of Hamilton will receive up to $1,128,635 for each of the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 provincial fiscal years to a total of $2,257,270 from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). This money must be used to assist social assistance recipients, with no or minimal attachments to the labour force who are most at risk during an economic downturn, find employment.

2009/2010 funding was used to cover one-time start-up costs associated with the administration to implement the EES funding. It also provided specialized training to the Employment Development Councillors in Employment and Income Support Division and provided focused, time-limited enhancements to three City of Hamilton employment programs:
Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.

Values: Honesty, Accountability, Innovation, Leadership, Respect, Excellence, Teamwork

- Team Lead Project;
- Skills for Life Program; and,
- The Transition to Home Project.

The utilization of the 2010/2011 funding was selected by a Call for Applications, which closed January 14, 2010. The Review Committee consisted of two Employment Program Managers, one Ontario Works Program Manager and two members from the Skills Development Flagship. There was no declared conflict of interest.

The applications were rated against set criteria, which were included in the application package (attached as Appendix A to Report CS09083(a)). This criteria was informed by “The Employment Service Needs of Hamilton’s Vulnerable Population: an Environmental Scan” (attached as Appendix B to Report CS09083(a)), which outlines the enhanced employment service needs of vulnerable persons facing barriers to employment in Hamilton.

There were 25 applications received from 18 community organizations. The General Manager of the Community Services Department approved the top five rated applications to be funded through the provincial Enhanced Employment Services program.

The five applications approved by the General Manager are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Howard Society: STEP (Specialized Training and Employment Program)</td>
<td>Program provides employment and education related essential skills through two distinct client focused streams of service: education/training or employment. The education/training stream will include referral and support in accessing academic, literacy or language upgrading and access to longer term training interventions. The employment stream will include job development, job coaching, and employment placement.</td>
<td>All vulnerable populations</td>
<td>$311,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATH Employment: STEP UP</td>
<td>Program is a 6 week pre-employment workshop delivered in modules such as social skills, decision making, WHMIS, LMI, goals setting, etc. These modules are followed by individual case management support and assessments as required.</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>$178,549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.
Values: Honesty, Accountability, Innovation, Leadership, Respect, Excellence, Teamwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marafon Consulting: ENcore Program</td>
<td>A holistic 26 week client centred program delivered in three phases: assessment and pre-employment, life skills and hospitality skills, co-operative placement on-the-job training.</td>
<td>All vulnerable populations</td>
<td>$331,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Joseph’s Immigrant Women’s Centre: Enterprising Women</td>
<td>12 week program that will give immigrant women the foundation tools for viable skills so they will aspire toward financial independence. In classroom component is 12 weeks with topics such as life skills, goal setting, and job market analysis. There is ongoing support from employment counsellors at the completion of the program.</td>
<td>Immigrant women</td>
<td>$131,212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YMCA: Youth Job Exploration Program</td>
<td>Program provides youth with an opportunity to develop employability skills and to gain work experience needed to secure future employment while upgrading their academics to pursue future training. The program includes 3 weeks of group based pre-employment workshops, 3 month part-time employment placements and part-time training with post-employment supports.</td>
<td>Youth Disabled Youth</td>
<td>$233,714</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of the 2010 budget process, an enhancement for two additional FTE’s, funded through EES, was approved. The FTEs have been charged with the responsibility to monitor mandatory legislated participation activities for participants and to complete the mandatory MCSS statistical and financial reports for the funding.
CITY OF HAMILTON
Community Services Department
Employment & Income Support Division

APPLICATION
FOR
ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FUNDING
TO MARCH 31, 2011

Read and complete the Application Form attached as Schedule 1 carefully. All Applicants should read the Background Information attached as Schedule 2 before completing the Application Form.

Deadline: Applications must be submitted before Thursday January 14, 2010 at 3:00 p.m.

Please submit Applications to:

Sandra Kelly
Program Manager
City of Hamilton
Career Development Centre
181 Main St West, 3rd floor
Hamilton, ON L8P 4S1

Questions related to the Application Form may be submitted by e-mailing Sandra Kelly at:
sandra.kelly@hamilton.ca

before Tuesday January 5, 2010 at 3 p.m. Any questions submitted and the answers to them will be posted at:

http://www.hamilton.ca/HealthandSocialServices/SocialServices/OntarioWorks/EnhancedEmploymentServicesFunding

on or before Monday January 11, 2010 at 4:30 p.m.
SCHEDULE 1

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

This Checklist forms part of the Application. In order for your Application to be considered the Checklist must be completed and signed.

☐ One originally signed and five photocopies of the completed Application Form in a sealed envelope or package.

☐ Other required information as stated:
  - Audited Financial Statement
  - Annual Report

I/We certify that all information contained in this completed Application Form is an accurate description of our organization and our plans for the specified program.

______________________   Date:  ______________
Signature

Name:  _________________________
Position: ______ ___________________

______________________   Date:  ______________
Signature

Name:  _________________________
Position: ______ ___________________
CONTENT OF COMPLETED APPLICATION

Your completed Application should address the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intent of Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrates an understanding of the intent of the funding in the program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• design, development and delivery of the program to achieve the stated deliverables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• addresses a vulnerable group as identified by Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• number and description of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not duplicate existing service in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides enhanced services for social assistance participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is participant focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• leverages integration and alignment opportunities of employment services and supports across a continuum of services through OW, Employment Ontario and Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is linked to key MCSS outcomes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– enhancing service capacity to support enrolment in employment services to maintain employment outcomes, particularly for persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– increasing retention to pre-employment and training programs; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– increasing training participation and completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• includes an exit strategy that addresses how participants who require further services/supports will be accommodated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrates the organization capacity, including size and experience to deliver the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• evaluates potential effect of adding additional work to the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• submits a work plan or timeline describing program from start to end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge and Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• has previous experience in delivering pre-employment and/or essential skills training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has experience in delivering services to participants on social assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Includes total cost of delivering the service and the number of participants served through this service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPLICATION

### Section A: General Information

### A1. Applicant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 1.1</th>
<th>Name of Organization: (Note legal name if different)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 1.2</th>
<th>Mailing Address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 1.3</th>
<th>A 1.4</th>
<th>A 1.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone:</td>
<td>Fax:</td>
<td>Website:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 1.6</th>
<th>A 1.7</th>
<th>A 1.8</th>
<th>A 1.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Executive Director/Senior Officer</td>
<td>Telephone:</td>
<td>Fax:</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name and Title of Contact Person for application</td>
<td>Telephone:</td>
<td>Fax:</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 1.14</th>
<th>A 1.15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization Type:</td>
<td>Language of Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Not-for-profit</td>
<td>☐ English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ For-Profit Enterprise</td>
<td>☐ French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Collaborative</td>
<td>☐ Health and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Other (specify)</td>
<td>☐ Educational Institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 1.16</th>
<th>A 1.17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the organization incorporated?</td>
<td>Please provide the organization’s business number:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Yes (If yes, since when? (   ))</td>
<td>☐ No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### A2. Organization Information

**A 2.1**
What is the main sector your organization serves? (please select one)

- [ ] Human/Social Services
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Other (please specify)

### A3. Communications

**A 3.1**
How did you hear about the EES Call for Application?

- [ ] City Staff
- [ ] City Website
- [ ] EARN
- [ ] Fax
- [ ] Word of mouth
- [ ] Other (please specify)

### A4. References (Do not provide letters of reference)

**A 4.1**
Please provide the names and phone numbers of two stakeholder references who will confirm that:

- [x] They have seen this application;
- [x] There has been consultation to determine the need for and relevance of the proposal;
- [x] Your organization has the capacity to conduct the work involved in this proposal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A 4.2**
Please provide contact information of another funder (other than the City of Hamilton) that we may contact.

- [ ] Please check if not applicable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Name of Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Appendix ‘A’ to Report CS09083(a)
Page 5 of 13
## A5. Mandate and Mission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 5.1</th>
<th>Please briefly describe your organization’s mandate and mission. <strong>Submit most recent annual report.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 5.2</td>
<td>What are your organization’s typical activities (e.g. programs/services, events)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 5.3</td>
<td>Please describe your clients. Who takes part in your organizations activities/programs or who do you serve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 5.4</td>
<td>Please provide the approximate numbers of clients you serve each year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 5.5</td>
<td>Does your organization reach out to members of the community who have not traditionally been involved in the programs/services you offer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes     No     If yes, how?       If no, what are your reasons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 5.6</td>
<td>Please describe previous program(s) that you have conducted for vulnerable populations and describe your success rate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Section B: Proposal Information

### B1. Proposal Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B 1.1</th>
<th>B 1.2</th>
<th>B 1.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Name:</td>
<td>Start Date:</td>
<td>End Date: (No later than March 31, 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B 1.4</th>
<th>B 1.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Budget: $ over months</td>
<td>Total amount of EES funding requested (in this application) $ over months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B1.6

When will this program be provided to clients?

Services to clients will start on:

Services to clients will end on:

### B2. Proposal Description

#### B 2.1

What is the proposed program’s objective? (What need does your program aim to address?)

#### B 2.2

EES is targeted towards social assistance clients who are vulnerable. Does your proposal serve any of the vulnerable social assistance populations listed below?

- [ ] Youth at risk
- [ ] Persons fleeing domestic violence
- [ ] Older workers
- [ ] People leaving the correctional system
- [ ] Aboriginal Community
- [ ] People with disabilities  (physical, mental or substance abuse, please specify)
- [ ] Newcomers to Canada
- [ ] Other
### B 2.2
Please provide a summary of your funding request.

The description must contain:
- Background information
- An explanation of why this program is needed
- A description of the services/supports
- Confirmation if this program enhances an existing service/support; expansion of service/supports or is a new service or support.
- A description of any elements of integrated service delivery your program may contain
- Confirmation that the program is aligned with EES requirements
- An exit strategy

### B 2.3
Please indicate how many people will be served by this program, estimated on a quarterly basis.

### B 2.4
If there are similar programs/services that already exist in the community please explain either how this program will differ in order to avoid duplication or fit within the already exiting programs/services.

### B3. Capacity

#### B 3.1
Please describe your organization’s capacity to manage and deliver the proposed program.

Please include:
- Management time and resources available for adequate supervision;
- Administrative capacity to ensure compliance with statistical and financial reporting requirements;
- Adequate space and equipment (if necessary)

#### B3.2
How many active volunteers and staff are involved in operating your organization?

Full-time Staff:  Part-time Staff:  Volunteers:
### Section C: Budget

#### C1. Budget Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C 1.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete and include a detailed line budget for all costs and services for the program. Submit most recent audited financial statements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### C2. Additional Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C 2.1</th>
<th>C 2.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the organization making any financial contribution to the program?</td>
<td>Please describe the organization’s financial contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C 2.3</th>
<th>D 2.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the organization making any in-kind contribution to the program?</td>
<td>Please describe the organization’s in-kind contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C 2.5</th>
<th>C 2.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is funding being received from other sources for this program?</td>
<td>Please identify the funder, describe the amount and nature of additional funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DECLARATION

I/We understand that:

1. The City of Hamilton reserves the right:
   (a) to change any deadline in this Call for Applications;
   (b) not to allocate any or all of the Enhanced Employment Services Funding for any reason;
   (c) to refuse any Application.

2. Applications will be reviewed by an Evaluation Team consisting of three Community Services Program Managers, a Business Development Consultant from the Planning & Economic Development Department and the Executive Director of the Hamilton Training Advisory Board. The Evaluation Team will make its recommendations to the General Manager of Community Services who may approve proposals for funding.

3. Any approval of a proposal for funding will not be binding on the City of Hamilton until a legally enforceable funding agreement has been negotiated and executed by both your organization and the City of Hamilton.

4. Any funding agreement will contain a provision stating that the City of Hamilton may terminate or suspend the agreement at any time, without cause, upon not less that thirty days’ written notice.

5. All information contained in this Form of Application, whether provided by the City of Hamilton or the Applicant, is subject to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.56 and, as such, is public information and may be disclosed to third parties upon request.

_________________________   Date:  ______________
Signature

Name:  _________________________

Position: ______ ___________________

_________________________   Date:  ______________
Signature

Name:  _________________________

Position: ______ ___________________
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 2009 Ontario Budget included a $700M investment over two years in transitional employment and training assistance, which is supported by enhancements to the Ontario Labour Market Agreement with the federal government.

Funding has been allocated to the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) in 2009-10 and 2010-11 to provide services for persons on social assistance with no or marginal attachment to the labour market, who are also experiencing multiple barriers to employment.

The City of Hamilton Employment & Income Support Division will receive a portion of this funding from MCSS through the existing service contract. This funding, entitled Enhanced Employment Services for Vulnerable Persons (EES), will assist people with no or minimal attachment to the labour force who are most at risk during an economic downturn. It is meant to re-connect, support and prepare vulnerable populations on social assistance to enable them to participate in appropriate education, training services and employment. The intent of the funding is not to duplicate existing employment services, but to enhance services to vulnerable persons. Specifically, persons with disabilities including mental health and/or substance abuse issues, at-risk youth (i.e., 16-30 years of age), older workers, aboriginal persons, newcomers to Canada, persons fleeing domestic violence and homeless persons.

The City of Hamilton, on behalf of the Employment & Income Support Division, is conducting a Call for Applications for community agencies to deliver programs under the EES funding.

A full range of employment supports are available to these participants through Ontario Works Employment Assistance. Incremental services/supports for individuals participating in EES should:

- enhance service capacity to support enrolment in employment services;
- increase retention in pre-employment and training programs; and
- increase training participation and completion.

Services and supports might include, but are not limited to:

- life skills training;
- peer support/mentoring;
- job trials;
- supported job placements;
- pre-apprenticeship readiness training;
- workplace attendant supports (e.g., people with disabilities);
- employment related expenses (e.g., transportation, out-of-pocket expenses, babysitting costs, etc.); and
- other services/supports as approved by MCSS.
In particular, pre-employment assessments can be an effective component of service delivery by building a picture of each participant that enables them to begin addressing the barriers impacting their ability to access the labour market, as well as building on pre-existing strengths. Areas for assessment could include:

- mental health issues;
- substance abuse;
- employment history/readiness;
- accommodation needs;
- strengths in activities of daily living;
- personal and family history; and
- social supports.

_The Employment Service Needs of Hamilton’s Vulnerable Population: An Environmental Scan_ prepared by Sarah V. Wayland, was commissioned to identify the enhanced service needs of vulnerable person who have barriers to employment. High level themes and key elements of program content are as follows:

- **Pre-employment or life skills training.** Above all other types of services, life skills training was identified as valuable to clients needing enhanced employment services.

- **Work experience opportunities,** including job trials, co-op placements, work-hardening and volunteer placements.

- **Job search and career assessment training.** Basic instruction in how to find job openings, write a resume and cover letter, and succeed in an interview situation is a fundamental component of any employment program.

- **Individualized counselling and assistance** that allow time for staff to get to know a client and to create a comfort zone with him or her.

- **Discretionary funds** to assist clients with basic expenses such as transportation and childcare.
Enhanced Employment Funding Proposal Requirements:

- Support vulnerable participants on social assistance in increasing their readiness through pre-employment activities to obtain and maintain appropriate training, access post-secondary opportunities, and/or find and maintain employment.

- Demonstrate how the program provides enhanced services to the vulnerable group, without duplicating exiting services or programs.

- Demonstrate how the program will increase participant preparation for labour market success.

- Recognize that specialized services are to be participant focused and can be tailored to group needs.

- Demonstrate and quantify that the program will enhance service capacity and increase training and/or employment readiness amongst a vulnerable population.

- State the number of participants that will be serviced through EES and supports required.

- Demonstrate that the program builds on existing funding sources and is a seamless and integrated service that maximizes opportunities and success for these participants. The program must leverage integration and alignment of opportunities of employment services across a continuum of services though Ontario Works, Employment Ontario and the Ministry of Citizenship and Integration.

- Include an exit strategy that addresses how participants who require further services/supports will be accommodated.

Successful Applicants must:

- Track and report baseline education indicators as to the level of education when commencing EES.

- Track, monitor and report on EES participant activity including number of EES participants exiting to employment and number of EES participants with employment income.

- Complete quarterly year-to-date service contract reports and submit to the Employment and Income Support Division.
The Employment Service Needs
of Hamilton’s Vulnerable Population:
an Environmental Scan

Presented to City of Hamilton Community Services

Final Report

September 18, 2009
Prepared by Sarah V. Wayland, PhD

Table of Contents
1. Introduction ....................................................................................................2
2. Literature Review .........................................................................................3
3. Focus Group #1: OW clients ........................................................................7
4. Focus Group #2: OW staff ..........................................................................11
5. Focus Group #3: Hamilton-area service providers ......................................16
6. Key Findings of Research ...........................................................................21
7. References ..................................................................................................27
Appendix A: List of Participants in Focus Group #2 ........................................28
Appendix B: List of Participants in Focus Group #3 ........................................29
1. Introduction

Context

“Enhanced employment services” (EES) are designed to re-connect, support and prepare vulnerable populations for participating in appropriate education, training services and employment in order to achieve labour market success. Under the terms of the Labour Market Agreement (LMA) between the federal government and the province of Ontario, new EES funding is being offered to provide transitional employment assistance (e.g., intensive case management and services and supports for vulnerable persons) and will support these vulnerable populations by increasing their readiness to obtain and maintain training, education and/or employment.

EES will be targeted towards social assistance clients who are vulnerable, specifically persons with disabilities including mental health and/or substance abuse issues, at risk youth (age 16-30), older workers, Aboriginal persons, newcomers to Canada, persons fleeing domestic violence and homeless persons.

This report contains research findings on the enhanced employment service needs of vulnerable persons facing barriers to employment in Hamilton. The objective of the research outlined in this report was to identify these needs based on a limited environmental scan of relevant, locally-produced reports and three focus groups.

Research Methods

Environmental scanning is the acquisition and use of information about events, trends, and relationships in an organization's external environment, the knowledge of which would assist management in planning the organization's future course of action.

This project consisted of a limited scan, involving a review of locally-produced reports within the past decade and three focus groups that were held in July 2009. Each of the three focus groups brought together a unique constituency that was knowledgeable about employment and support services available to vulnerable persons in Hamilton -- some as service providers, others as service users:

- **Focus group #1:** persons on Ontario Works (OW) social assistance who are accessing various employment supports offered through OW.
• Focus group #2: front-line City of Hamilton Community Services staff who provide various services to OW clients

• Focus group #3: executive level and front-line staff from other service providers in Hamilton that offer a range of employment support services.

In each of the focus groups, participants discussed the service needs of persons who are working towards employment but who may require particular types of added support services. They enumerated many barriers these persons face to accessing services, identified services that work well, and provided their views on shortcomings of existing employment support services. Lastly, they suggested elements that should be incorporated into any new services aimed at clients needing extra supports.

This report contains findings from all aspects of the environmental scan. Each of the following sections contains findings from one part of the scan. The final section synthesizes the findings into several key themes.

2. Literature Review

This short literature review is limited to employment-related publications and reports produced for City of Hamilton, Hamilton Training Advisory Board, Skills Development Flagship, and Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton since 2000. The particular focus is on the needs of vulnerable groups and findings or best practices in addressing those needs.

A scan of documents falling within the outlined parameters found several helpful documents, namely Fraser and Gazzola’s *Assessment of the Employment Services System in Hamilton* (Social Planning and Research Council, 2003) and Wayland’s *Immigrant Employment in Hamilton: Connecting the Dots, Final Report* (Hamilton Immigrant Workforce Integration Network, 2007). Several other documents mentioned in this review focused on youth in particular, including street-involved youth. The report that contained the most information on employment services and service needs was Wayland’s *Moving Forward: Employment Programs for Youth at Risk in the City of Hamilton, Project Report* (Hamilton Skills Development Flagship, 2006). Aside from these reports on immigrants and youth, no Hamilton-focused documents focusing on services for persons facing multiple barriers to employment were found.
Identifying “at risk” or vulnerable groups

Fraser and Gazzola (2003) note that -- compared to the general population -- unemployment rates are disproportionately high among new Canadians, youth and persons with disabilities. Many newcomers or immigrants in Hamilton require support in achieving licensing requirements and gaining recognition of their credentials. A key finding of Wayland’s 2007 report on immigrant employment in Hamilton was that, for newcomers, language skills and familiarity with Canadian workplace culture have increasingly become prerequisites for employment. As a result, occupational specific language training and opportunities for work experience, even unpaid placements, were greatly in demand.

Youth are a second population with particular employment needs. They experience the highest unemployed rates in the country, especially young males (Statistics Canada 2004, cited in Vengris 2005:14). According to Fraser and Gazzola, youth in Hamilton require more on-the-job training opportunities. High school students who are unable to complete high school need enhanced employment support services.

Third, persons with disabilities experience significant barriers to employment. The disabled in Hamilton are amongst those most affected by poverty and homelessness. According to the Hamilton Poverty Matrix, 29% of persons with activity limitation (disability) are low income. Many of these depend on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Though rent and other expenses increase from year to year, as of 2003 ODSP payments had not received a cost of living increase for the previous ten years (Wingard, McCormack and Neigh 2003). Persons with disabilities in Hamilton require continued support in the transition to employment, and flexible work environments (Fraser and Gazzola 2003).

In addition, persons with low levels of education are at risk for chronic unemployment. Statistics Canada research on chronic unemployment found that individuals without a high school diploma were over-represented in both the chronically unemployed population, and the always unemployed population (Brooks 2005). Conversely, they were under-represented among individuals who were seldom unemployed. High school leavers accounted for 20% of the labour force, but they represented 38% of the chronically unemployed and 51% of those who had not found a job during their time in the labour force. These proportions were higher than those for any other group in the study.

Aboriginal persons are another group facing particular barriers to employment. In both Hamilton and Ontario, the unemployment rate of those with Aboriginal identity is roughly twice that of the overall population. Among persons aged 35 to 44, the unemployment rate of persons with Aboriginal identity status was almost triple that of the non-Aboriginal population in 2006. Among those aged 15 to 24, the unemployment rate was 22.9% (Statistics Canada data, cited in Wayland, Bierling, and Abdullahi 2008: 62).
There are many other populations who are “at risk” in terms of employment, but they have not been the focus of recent, local research. These include older workers and persons fleeing domestic violence, among others. Although a recent needs assessment of the GLBTQ community (Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgendered Questioning) did not focus on employment issues, members of this community may face particular risks such as discrimination and harassment (Pike 2007).

**Recommended service offerings**

As part of their research, Fraser and Gazzola surveyed 101 users of employment services in Hamilton using a one-on-one interview format in five local employment service agencies. When asked “what type of employment service would be most valuable in helping someone find work in Hamilton?” respondents suggested the need for more one-on-one individualized service, more emphasis on job-search training, and by connecting or referring clients directly to employers.

Fraser and Gazzola also surveyed local service providers and found that 74% of service providers felt that a lack of work experience programs still represented a gap in employment service. Based on a four-point scale, ninety-three percent of respondents felt that work experience programs were either “Valuable” or “Very Valuable” in increasing the employability of their clients.

Lastly, Fraser and Gazzola organized a roundtable discussion of service providers, focusing on pre-employment supports and client case management. All of the roundtable participants agreed that pre-employment programs are often crucial to a client’s success in the labour market. Longer programs and more one-on-one opportunities were recommended to ensure that individual needs are identified and addressed. Lack of transportation was also raised as a barrier for many clients of employment services.

Focusing on youth in particular, Hamilton-based research identified several key elements of program content for youth at risk:

1. “life skills”-oriented pre-employment programs, including a focus on developing a work ethic, communication skills, anger management, the ability to work with others and take directions, and organizational habits. The most successful pre-employment programs offer group work with peers combined with one-on-one counselling.

2. opportunities for work placement, ideally with pay. Combined classroom and work placement is one of the best models.
3. programs that contain several discrete stages, with each one entailing some recognition and reward at the end. This provides young persons with a sense of achievement and progress.

4. Lastly, research indicates that most employment is found through social networks, yet employment programs often fail to discuss the importance of networks with clients (Wayland 2006).

This same research (Wayland 2006) identified key elements of good program delivery:

1. Long-term ties to a counsellor or mentor. The quality of relationship between youth and staff workers is very important, and having staff from similar backgrounds can be ideal. After the young person secures employment, maintaining a relationship with the counsellor can help him or her to work through problems at work and to manage conflicts when someone acts wrongly.

2. Strong relationships with employers. This is an essential component of any employment-related program for youth at risk. Building strong relationships with employers includes (1) marketing of the program to employers and (2) educating them about the benefits and challenges of hiring youth. Building good relationships with schools and school boards is also desirable.

3. Accessibility and location. Any program aimed at youth must be readily accessible by public transit. Another consideration is whether the program is delivered through an employment centre or a neighbourhood house/community centre. If the latter, then there is an opportunity to offer a more holistic approach to youth.

4. Continuous intake. When a young person makes the decision to seek assistance, the agency he or she approaches must be able to help them immediately, not tell them to come back when the next session starts weeks or months in the future.

5. Sustainability. Programs take years to become established and to develop networks with employers and the broader community. Program success is thus enhanced by stable funding.

6. Ongoing program measurement and evaluation. Organizations that perform well are constantly improving. They improve through innovation and learning, which includes monitoring, measuring, and evaluating their own work. Evaluations should be viewed as opportunities for learning on the part of both the program deliverer and the program funder, not as a threat for removing funding.
Other research in Hamilton identified some of the same concerns, notably the need for more opportunities for youth to have work experience, more opportunities for pre-employment and life skills training, and more collaboration between schools, local employers, employment service providers and government (Fraser and Gazzola 2003). A needs assessment of street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton found a lack of mentoring, counselling and emotional support available to these youth at risk. Recommendations called for the creation of multi-stakeholder initiatives and holistic supports around education and employment, including more pre-employment programming (Vengris 2005: 35).

A recent SPRC report on youth in the child welfare system concluded that life skills training needed to be improved to help youth live independently (McNaney 2009). Suggestions in this area included a comprehensive training program and one-to-one support to teach youth the living skills they need. The same report cites evidence for the view that linking youth linking youth to community services such as housing, education, social engagement, health and mental health resources improves their chances for success. According to McNaney (2009: Appendix C):

> Overall, the literature indicates that a more holistic approach to service provision through communication and integration will reduce the risk of street-involvement for youth.... Service integration is consistently promoted in the literature as a means of reducing the risk of street-involvement through a coordinated community effort.

The above findings were based on research into youth at risk, but it is expected that many of these same findings would hold true if applied to broader populations facing various barriers to employment.

### 3. Focus Group #1: OW clients

This focus group consisted of fourteen persons currently receiving Ontario Works. A variety of age groups were represented. Participants began the session by discussing the services they currently access through the OW Career Development Centre. They referred to a variety of employment programs, including:

- Job Search Workshop (half-day for one week)
- Resume Workshop (one week program)
- Network Connection (runs twice a week, voluntary)
- Tips & Techniques for Interviews (3 day, full-day workshop)
- Career Essentials (6 weeks, life skills, interviews)
Some participants had also accessed employment services outside of OW in the past. One described having an employment counsellor who wrote up the person’s resume without teaching him how to do it himself, much less update it. Participants praised the Career Essentials program for teaching people how to do a task rather than doing it for them. Another participant had taken a four-week course on computer skills.

**Barriers to entering the workforce**

Participants then talked about the difficulties they had trying to find employment. They identified many factors that made it difficult for them, and people like them, to enter or re-enter the workforce. These included:

- **Lack of affordable and reliable childcare.** Participants found it difficult to access subsidized childcare, and they said that it was cut off too quickly once their employment programs ended. They needed to get placements almost right away in order to keep their childcare spaces.

- **Inadequate public transportation.**

- **Gaps in employment history.** If people have been on OW for a long time, their resume reveals gaps in their job history.

- **Lack of experience.** Employers often want 2 or 3 years of experience. “How will you get that if no one will hire you to get the experience?”

- **Too much experience.** If a potential employee is overqualified, they are unlikely to get hired because the employer thinks they would have to pay him/her more and that he/she may not be content.

- **Age.** Several participants said that employers did not want to hire them because they were viewed as being too old.

- **Too much internal hiring.** One participant had interviewed for a position, but then the job was given to an internal candidate.

- **Temp agencies are taking jobs away from skilled workers, and they do not pay their workers very well.**

- **One participant felt that the world seemed to favour extraverts over introverts.** Introverts are at a disadvantage when it comes to the job search process and having to sell yourself to potential employers.
Identifying elements of helpful services

Participants were next asked to describe some of the services that have been helpful to them, including what they liked about them. They mainly referred to specific program offerings under OW as opposed to elements of the programs. They mentioned the following programs as being helpful:

- Career Essentials. Participants felt that this course provided a fun and friendly environment in which they learned things about themselves as individuals as well as job search skills. They also learned other skills that could assist them not just for work, but for everyday life, such as how to read body language and communication skills.

- Group sessions were described as motivating. One participant stated that they helped him to build up his confidence, and to figure out what he wanted to do with his life. He has been asking questions like “Where do I want to be in 10 years?” Participants mentioned the icebreakers that drew them into each session, and how these games turned into helpful lessons.

- Job application skills (resume, cover letter, and interview): Participants felt that they received good instruction on creating a short, effective resume. One participant described the in-class repetition about interviewing as boring, but then she went to an interview and she realized that she was really well-prepared. She knew what questions were coming and how to answer them. Another participant noted that she is very anxious, so it was good to practice so many times before she got to a real interview.

- Networking: This is an informal class in which people network and share leads on potential jobs with each other. Participants described a lively atmosphere that resembled something between a support group and a classroom seminar. Because participation is voluntary, it attracts a variety of people. It changes every week but usually attracts between 6 and 20 people per session.

- Some participants had high praise for their career counsellors, especially if the counsellor was able to assist with forms, funding, and the like. Conversely, some participants felt that their counsellors did not really care much about them.

- One participant mentioned receiving very useful reference sheets on different topics such as networking.

- Participants mentioned the Career Cruising website several times.
Identifying problematic aspects of services

Next, participants were asked to describe elements of services they did not like or did not find to be helpful. They identified a number of elements:

- The main point discussed by participants was that they wanted more information up front about the courses they were being steered into and what their options were. Some participants felt that they had been misled. Others stated that they learned more about their options from other OW clients than from their own employment counsellor. One expressed the view there seems to be “an underground society in OW,” in which select people have more access to funding and services. They wanted to see improved communication between counsellors and clients.

- One participant suggested that career counsellors should be obligated to do the courses themselves before putting clients through them.

- Having to make cold calls to potential employers. This felt like a waste of time and was nerve-wracking.

- Some participants felt that their counsellor did not care about them, and they admitted to feeling intimidated by their counsellor. Some felt that they were being pushed into jobs that were not really right for them, but that they employment counsellors had to do this to meet their own targets.

- Participants complained about the OW job board, noting the some jobs seemed to be permanently posted there and may no longer be available, and that the postings do not contain enough detailed information about the locations that are hiring.

- Participants complained that training funding seemed to be targeted at specific trades only, with no connection to labour market needs.

One participant took it upon himself to summarize the gist of the conversation on this question. He stated: “The programs are good, but some counsellors need to be more personable to the clients -- and more on top of things.”

Elements that should be incorporated into any new service offerings

Finally, participants were asked: “If you design a program that would help you to find a good job, what elements would it have?” They enthusiastically responded with a wide range of suggestions:

- Have computers available so you can do searches across Canada. Career Cruising website is very good, and available from the library
website. It contains job trends, and knowing these should be an important part of any employment program.

- Personal skills (life skills) that help us to deal with everyday situations, such as communication and self esteem. Also, how to read body language, how to react when people are angry with you, and problem solving skills. “If you don't think you can do things at home, how will you be able to do them on the job?”

- More essential skills training. Career programs are helpful, but more specific skills training is needed. “We need to know how to transfer skills from one job to the next.” Participants also identified a demand for computer skills (word processing, email, etc.).

- Job search skills, especially interviewing.

- Work placements and co-ops.

- Job board that is up to date. Develop better connections and communication with employers in the community so that they will let the OW office know when they have jobs available.

- Opportunities for individualized support. The group sessions are good, but shy people feel more comfortable one-on-one.

The session concluded by allowing each participant to give a final statement. Almost all of these statements focused on general prejudice and discrimination against people who are on OW, including by landlords and even their own family members. One participant stated that he had been “happily surprised” with OW and felt very supported after falling on hard times.

4. Focus Group #2: OW staff

Participants were recruited with the goal of securing representation from all the different service offerings within OW, e.g., Employment Counsellor, Case Manager, LEAP, Helping Hands, Hostels to Homes, and Alcohol, Drug, and Gambling Services. The thirteen participants began by describing their work and the services they provide within OW.
Barriers to entering the workforce
Focus group participants were next asked to describe the barriers their clients face in entering or re-entering the workforce. What makes it challenging for these clients in particular to find employment? According to participants, clients often:

- Lack a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Lack motivation to find work. This stems from other “lacks” in their lives, namely lack of education, lack of work experience, lack of self esteem, and lack of hope.
- Have unrealistic employment goals. They don't want a minimum wage job. It is not seen as being worth getting off of OW to take a low wage job.
- Have a whole range of mental health problems that are not diagnosed, including undiagnosed and untreated depression and history of abuse. When they have lost their jobs and have to resort to OW, mental health and addictions may surface or resurface.
- Face chronic difficulties finding childcare that is reliable, affordable and available when needed (e.g., for shift workers).
- Lack an employment history. This is particularly true for mothers who had children prior to acquiring any work experience.
- Lack proper identification documents, a requirement for becoming employed, receiving OW, and opening a bank account.
- Have a criminal record. Anyone on probation or parole faces restrictions on working even in a volunteer capacity.
- Have poor physical health, including health issues that remain undiagnosed because lack of access to quality primary care. Many doctors will not accept high risk people in their practices, and some refuse to complete necessary OW forms.
- Have a family history of living in poverty. They lack the “know how” to break out of the cycle of poverty, and they lack role models who can show them the way and help them improve their social skills.
- Have drug and alcohol addictions. Many clients got their first taste of addictive substances from their own parents.
Fear leaving the OW safety net. When they are on OW, clients have people to call if they make poor choices or need various types of assistance.

In addition to the above barriers that relate to clients themselves, two sets of broader barriers that impact clients were identified. First, and building on the final point above, although the stipend associated with OW means that recipients live below the poverty line, OW provides various tangible benefits that recipients are reluctant to give up, for example the bus passes provided by OW employment counsellors and reduced rate prescriptions. Most starting level jobs do not come with benefits. As a result, clients may not believe that they will actually make more money working than from OW.

Second, broader economic and structural changes impact the labour market and persons looking for work. Clients are looking for work within a dynamic labour market in which it is not uncommon for highly qualified individuals to have difficulty finding work. Even people working in minimum wage jobs may have a university education. There is a stronger emphasis on credentials in today’s labour market. It is especially difficult for clients with multiple barriers to compete in such a labour market. As a result, according to participants, the “typical” OW client has changed in the last several years. In addition to clients who grew up in poverty and whose parents were recipients of social assistance, there are now people of all education levels and different socio-economic backgrounds who are in receipt of OW.

Identifying elements of helpful services

Participants were next asked about services that they have found to be most helpful to clients. They identified the following:

- Having some discretionary funds to assist clients with basic expenses such as transportation and childcare

- Having time to get to know a client, to create a comfort zone, including exchanging email with clients. Programs with smaller case loads were identified as working well.

- Being able to set goals and define success on an individual basis, depending on the barriers faced. Success might be something concrete like securing housing or creating a good resume, or it might be something broader such as cultivating a sense of worth and accomplishment.

- Longer programs such as Helping Hands (six months of simulated work experience) are ideal. Helping Hands was identified as an effective program containing several key elements: participants are paid a small stipend every day, they have regular working hours, they acquire work
experience, and they have time to develop a relationship with their supervisor.

- Connecting clients with the broader community (such as through guest speakers) and even with each other (such as through the Networking Program)

There was some disagreement among participants about the value of in-house v. out of house programs. Clients are often more comfortable with in-house programs, and more likely to attend. Other participants felt that the availability of out of house programs was important for certain types of clients who may not be able to find peers within the OW system or who may worry about confidentiality within the OW system.

**Identifying problematic aspects of services**

When asked to identify problematic aspects of the services they were familiar with, participants gave wide-ranging responses. They identified the following:

- general inflexibility in the system

- Application forms for ODSP are extremely difficult, even for people who don’t have disabilities. Many people who are on OW should actually be on ODSP; there is a real need to move more people onto ODSP.

- There is not enough follow-up after the Employment Programs. For example, clients come to Career Essentials for six months, and then they are suddenly cut off.

- 30 day participation agreement seen as a waste of time (province says that the client must come back and see their OW counsellors each month), suggest changing to 60 days.

- Case managers now manage clients who have a wide range of needs. Some cases inevitably get lost in the load. It was felt by participants that grouping similar case loads together under the same manager would be helpful. Counselors/case managers with higher needs clients would have a lower case load so that they could better serve these clients.

- Relationship between case manager and employment counsellor. One participant stated that Employment Counsellors need to have a more cohesive relationship with Case Managers, including collaborating in their efforts with common clients. However, another participant disagreed, arguing for a complete separation of the two.
• Would like to see Employment Counsellors have some control of expenses. At present, only Case Managers can issue certain expenditures and they are not always around, which makes it difficult for Employment Counsellors to do their jobs well.

• All employment counsellors are located downtown. Having counsellors located around the city would increase access for clients who live in various parts of the city.

• Some concerns were expressed that OW clients do not receive the same treatment at VPI as do EI recipients. It was felt that there was a hierarchy and than OW clients were on the bottom.

• LEAP is a great program, but it is only for people who have children. There are many others who lack grade 12 and who would benefit from the same program elements offered in LEAP. Could LEAP either be broadened to include persons who are not parents, or could another program with same program elements be offered?

• Need more options for people with different levels of experience and ability. For example, the current resume writing program lasts a full day and is too long for many clients.

Elements that should be incorporated into any new service offerings

• A psychiatrist or psychologist attached to the program, to be used for various types of assessments and counselling. We know that many of our clients have mental health problems, but we have nowhere to send them for assistance. Suggest more in-house programs focusing on mental health.

• The ability to give people the comprehensive supports they need to move forward, even if those supports are not strictly employment-oriented. If someone has a learning disability, for example, we need to know what we can do to help them and then be able to actually do it.

• Outcome measurement needs to be redefined. We need to think of things holistically. So many different pieces (parenting, financial management, etc.) that need to be put together

• Clients often not really very knowledgeable about the careers they are choosing. Often, they are taking out large loans to pay for education in a field that may not be suitable for them. Would like to see more career assessment and some education process prior to career selection. Work placements such as co-op would really help in this regard.
• Programs that encourage clients to help themselves

• A designated support worker for newcomers

• Discretionary funding to support new clients, to be used for expenses such as transportation, health club memberships, and replacing lost identification.

• Retention Services: Some people are constantly on and off OW. We need to address this problem.

• Life Skills instruction, including workplace communication, anger management, and time management. Have guest speakers and specialists who can talk about handling various issues such as stress.

• More specialized programs and support groups for particular groups, e.g., professionals. Bring back the Youth Track and Sole Support programs.

• More volunteer options for those on probation or who have criminal records

5. Focus Group #3: Hamilton-area service providers

This focus group consisted of fourteen executive level staff and some front-line staff who work in organizations offering a variety of employment and employment-related support services to persons seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce. The organizations in attendance all serve clients who face multiple barriers to finding and retaining employment. These service providers responded to the same set of questions as in Focus Group #3.

Barriers to entering the workforce

Participants identified numerous barriers faced by their clients in attempting to find employment:

• Lack of work history and lack of legitimate references

• Unrealistic expectations

• Criminal records
• Health issues, including deteriorating mental health due to ongoing job search difficulties

• Presence of multiple, complex barriers such as domestic violence, addictions, homelessness, fallout from various forms of trauma, including political or ethnic violence.

• Living in poverty poses many problems and stressors, including the inability to meet basic needs, much less search for work. People are facing evictions, have court cases pending, and are resorting to food banks to feed themselves.

• Lack of affordable and appropriate childcare

• Lack of positive social and family networks

• Lack of essential skills and life skills (i.e. problem solving, priority setting, etc.)

• Lack of self-esteem

• Lack of trust from clients towards caseworker often stemming from negative experience in past, cultural differences, etc.

• Language and literacy issues

• Learning disabilities that often have not been identified, educational levels

• Lack of knowledge regarding services and programs appropriate to clients

• Lack of a case manager for some clients on ODSP. Nobody to support them.

• Hard to reach. Many clients do not have telephones. Clients may move several times a year, making it difficult to find them.

• Elder care: some clients are caring for aging parents and relatives.

• LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning) community often cannot find supports within Hamilton -- lack of inclusion

• Fear of facing employers who adhere to stereotypes regarding disabilities, youth and all others apart of ‘vulnerable populations’
• Lack of job availability in Hamilton, but there are few transportation options to get to work outside of Hamilton

• Employers often do not have proper equipment to assist employees/new hires with disabilities

• Hygiene and appearance

• Many foreign trained professionals unable to access workforce because credentials are not being recognized, and many employers want to keep foreign-trained people from accessing employment

Identifying elements of helpful services

Participants were asked to identify elements of services that have been helpful to their clients. To avoid a situation in which every participant was simply promoting the services of his or her own organization, they were asked to identify services offered by other organizations in particular. In response, they identified a wide range of service elements:

• Pre-employment training. Self-esteem, assertiveness, and stress management life skills training provide clients new ways to manage issues both at work and at home. These help boost self esteem and confidence. Includes assisting clients obtain equipment and business attire necessary for employment (mention of Friends for Success and Threshold School of Building), computer basics and email, prepare clients for “culture” of employment with various workshops pertaining to employment and job readiness.

• Peer support workshops: these allow clients to speak with others who may be facing similar employment issues (i.e. not getting paid for work from employers)

• One-on-one services that provide ongoing support counselling. Working with clients to develop a pathway – show them options, give them choices, and get buy-in. The ability for staff to follow up on one-on-one basis viewed as very important.

• Flexibility to meet needs of clients rather than impose organization’s regimen on client. Utilizes client centred approach needed to best assist marginalized population.

• Incorporating information sharing among agencies in Hamilton. Participants felt that the networking and referral processes work well in Hamilton, and that organizations took a client-centred rather than an
agency-centric approach for the most part. This includes engaging OW staff, keeping relationships positive.

- Use of in-house professionals whom clients are more ready to trust, e.g., in-house nurses, lawyers, occupational therapists offered by some service providers. In some cases, service providers can access external counselling services (for mental health, self-esteem, financial counselling, etc.) for clients.

- Use of wage subsidies for employers who hire clients with disabilities seen as a good model.

- Programs that include work experience, such as co-op placements and job trials.

**Identifying problematic aspects of services**

- Directing client to 'easy win' employment opportunities where client may be hired, but does not succeed; further reinforces self-doubts of employability and negative feelings about work.

- Clients run into problems and even stop participating in programs if there are too many steps they have to go through to receive services, including referrals. Need to make the process short and easy for them.

- Eligibility requirements sometimes too stringent.

- ‘One stop shop’ is difficult for people who need specialized supports.

- When OW clients have to obtain written documentation from employers to pass along to their case work, it is embarrassing and degrading for them.

- Lack of incentives to help OSDP clients. Service providers are not reimbursed for assisting ODSP clients until they have held a job for a certain number of weeks, and the amount is minimal.

- Lack of resources for those who have really complex barriers to employment. Many service providers “cherry pick” clients, choosing to help those who are most ready to be employed. Need to level playing field and provide service to all.

- Absence of a financial institution working in partnership with Ontario Works to help clients open accounts with no strings attached. At present, many people on assistance do not have bank accounts. Suggestion was made to find out more about YMCA’s relationship with Scotia Bank.
Elements that should be incorporated into new services

- Professional assessment of mental health with a clinical psychologist at point of first contact, to address underlying issues that are preventing clients from entering the workforce. Without this, clients continually run around in circles.

- Similarly, a holistic approach to serving clients is needed, either through the presence of a case manager who can work with the client to meet various needs or through a “wraparound” model involving various points of contact in the community.

- Many participants favoured a wraparound model and liked that it would encourage networking and information sharing amongst community organizations. However, it would have to be offered in multiple locations to keep it accessible. The ‘Hostels to Homes’ had a pilot project that put together wraparound services to get people into housing. For this to be effective, have to look at all barriers, with employment as the final stage of the process. Some participants noted potential drawbacks of the wraparound model, namely that confidentiality and privacy issues need to be addressed at ground level of development (to govern the release of client information to all agencies involved).

- Leveraging local expertise -- including lending out services, knowledge held by various community partners – to foster a client-centred approach. Using an assets-based approach that recognizes that organizations have different areas of expertise, and encouraging referrals accordingly. Emphasis on community cooperation.

- Clear articulation of program goal. Is it the shortest route to any employment, or is it a longer term focus? Participants felt that longer term approaches seem to ensure greater success.

- Teaching basic life skills, including coping strategies, budgeting, nutritional counselling, health awareness (including sleep and hygiene). Many OW clients deemed “employable” often lack basic life skills needed to acquire and retain a job.

- Important for clients to have small successes along the way, such as points of recognition and certification as they advance through a program. A graduation ceremony featuring a speech and certificates produced in house is neither complicated nor expensive, but it can be very effective. These steps provide assurance and documentation of progress to clients. Done correctly, they give much-needed dignity to clients.
• Related, important for clients to graduate from one level of service to next without gap in service delivery, to establish routine and reduce the risk of sliding backward

• Learning opportunities that are rewarded for participation, for example, a higher living allowance for those who voluntarily participate in programming, coaching sessions or counselling, would provide an immediate, positive and direct impact on their standard of living while simultaneously providing the necessary learning tools to utilize those additional funds effectively towards self-sufficiency.

• A higher level of financial support for those who are working towards improving their quality of life will allow them to purchase goods, raise families, and broaden their social networks. Engaging in paid learning experiences will enforce societal values of ‘earning your keep,’ while establishing new and higher standards of living that may in itself encourage long-term commitment to incentive-based learning for those who would not want to return to the basic level of social assistance. A process that rewards participation in life enhancing activities is contrary to many of the current interventions which require mandatory participation, without any additional financial reward.

• Government funding sources must share in the commitment to make long-term change, and recognize that for some, these changes may not ultimately lead to self-sufficiency, but at minimum, will provide better quality of life through knowledge and education and a positive impact on a community’s health, safety, and future generations.

6. Key Findings of Research

This environmental scan uncovered a wide range of themes and suggestions for service offerings to persons in need of enhanced services. The three focus groups that comprised the primary research for this report were obviously not representative of all service provider staff or all recipients of social assistance. Rather, they provide a snapshot of views taken at a particular point in time and give us insight into what is working and what is not working with regard to employment services in Hamilton.

The focus group discussions were characterized by a high level of richness and complexity, making it challenging to distill them down into key themes. This section highlights points that arose more than once in the research: ideas that
were mentioned the most frequently in a focus group or across more than one focus group, and themes that were recurrent in the literature review.

**Barriers**
This research found that persons in need of enhanced employment services often face multiple, wide-ranging and complex barriers in their lives. Focus group participants identified dozens of barriers, many of which may reinforce each other and are thus more difficult to surmount than if they existed independently and separately.

First, there are barriers that relate to clients themselves, such as age, ability, level of education, learning difficulties, physical and mental health issues, addictions, criminal records, even identity (woman, newcomer, Aboriginal, GLBTQ). In addition to these tangible barriers, there are intangibles that can be equally crippling: lack of motivation and self-esteem, lack of positive role models, absence of a supportive family, unrealistic employment goals, fear of leaving the social assistance safety net, and so on. From the vantage point of someone living below the poverty line, basic stressors related to living, working, and being in relationships can be overwhelming.

Next, there are barriers related to societal supports or lack thereof, namely around transportation and childcare. These two barriers were mentioned frequently by focus group participants.

More broadly, these barriers exist within the context of economic and structural changes that are impacting everyone in the labour market. In this dynamic and increasingly knowledge-based economy, even highly qualified individuals may have difficulty finding work commensurate with their skills. Credentialism combined with the recent economic downturn mean that many people are actually overqualified for the work they are doing. It is especially difficult for clients with multiple barriers to compete in such a labour market.

In this context, and in light of the complex barriers faced by many individuals, “success” is all relative as well as highly individualized. Whereas for one person “success” may entail finding a full time employment at a living wage, another may be “succeeding” just by maintaining his housing and keeping a drug addiction at bay. What it means to move forward varies from person to person.

**Problematic aspects of existing services**
Participants identified numerous aspects of services that they felt were not helpful to clients. The most commonly identified problems all pertained to lack of time with clients and barriers to providing comprehensive supports:
• Outcomes-oriented process encourages staff to direct client to “easy win” or first available employment opportunities as opposed to helping them find work that is better suited to their interests and abilities. Client may be hired but does not retain the job, thereby reinforcing self-doubts of employability and negative feelings about work. Often, the client then cycles back into social assistance.

• Lack of resources for those who have really complex barriers to employment. Many service providers “cherry pick” clients, choosing to help those who are most ready to be employed. The incentives to help persons on ODSP are particularly lacking. Participants spoke of the need to “level the playing field” and provide service to all persons in need.

• Similarly, the lack of time and opportunity to build relationships with clients was identified as a problem.

• OW clients in this research identified the need for better communication with their counsellors, including having access to more information about the courses being prescribed by their counsellor and what their options were.

**Key elements of helpful services**

In the focus groups, participants responded to two similar questions about positive elements of services. One focused on existing services, and one asked about what elements should be incorporated into new services. These are presented separately and in more detail in each of the previous sections. Here, they are combined into several key findings, some of which focus on program content and some on service delivery.

**Program content**

• **Pre-employment or life skills training.** Above all other types of services, life skills training was identified as valuable to clients needing enhanced employment services. This training boosts self esteem and confidence and can assist clients in managing issues both at work and at home. Services in this area should cover communication and body language, assertiveness, anger and stress management, time management, budgeting, nutritional counselling, and health awareness (including sleep and hygiene). Bringing in guest speakers and specialists on various topics not only enriches program content, but it gives clients a glimpse into different careers and enriches their social networks.
• **Work experience opportunities**, including job trials, co-op placements, work-hardening and volunteer placements. These help clients overcome their lack of work experience, provide them with more realistic work-related expectations, and expose them to various types of careers and work settings, giving them a better idea of what interests them. Wage subsidies encourage employers to give people a chance, particularly in the established programs for people with disabilities. Generating these opportunities entails developing strong relationships with a variety of employers.

• **Job search and career assessment training**. Basic instruction in how to find job openings, write a resume and cover letter, and succeed in an interview situation is a fundamental component of any employment program. OW clients stated that these were valuable tools to learn and gave them confidence entering a hiring situation. Career assessment tools can help identify career directions that are consistent with clients' interests, skills, and aptitudes. Use of these tools provides motivation to find suitable work. For clients in need of enhanced employment services, job search and career training should be offered in conjunction with other services such as life skills training.

• **Individualized counselling and assistance** that allow time for staff to get to know a client and to create a comfort zone with him or her. Counsellors should work with clients to set goals, identify the steps needed to get there, and to define success as it pertains to the client. The counsellors can show them options, give them choices, and get buy-in. If the counsellor-client match is not a good fit, there should be opportunities to move on to a new counsellor.

• **Discretionary funds** to assist clients with basic expenses such as transportation and childcare.

**Service delivery model**

• The most common theme around program delivery was the need for a holistic approach to serving clients. Clients in need of enhanced employment services require this approach to overcome the various barriers they face. This approach could be provided through of a case manager or through a “wraparound” model involving various points of contact in the community. (elaborated upon in rest of this section)

• An intake model promoted numerous times in this research was essentially a case management model. It involved an initial evaluation to determine a client’s needs, including the appropriateness of a range of services such as addiction, basic life skills, behavioural issues, advanced
life skills, employment skills, work hardening / coop, job search and employment. Some focus group participants felt that the intake process should be conducted by a mental health professional.

- Many participants favoured a wraparound model that would encourage networking and information sharing amongst community organizations. Confidentiality and privacy issues would need to be addressed at ground level of development to govern the release of client information to all agencies involved.

- Participants also promoted the idea of more specialized case loads to serve particular populations, e.g., newcomers, youth, older workers, homeless. Case load numbers would be adjusted according to the level of need.

Other suggestions related to service delivery

- Using community connections. This was a frequent theme in the focus group discussions. This could entail several different forms:
  - Information sharing, networking and referrals among organizations -- recognizing that organizations have different areas of expertise, and encouraging referrals accordingly.
  - Use of wraparound models
  - Use of guest speakers to enhance a sense of connection to the wider world among clients.
  - Use of in-house professionals whom clients are more ready to trust

- The importance of small successes along the way, such as points of recognition and certification as they advance through a program. Similarly, it is important for clients to graduate from one level of service to next without gap in service delivery, to establish routine and reduce the risk of sliding backward.

- Full time programs offer several advantages. They allow time for peer and staff-client relationships to form and grow; allow exposure to many different program elements; provide established routine of work; allow preview of workplace expectations and confidence to client in knowing they can successfully manage schedule, family demands, personal stamina, etc.

- Helping Hands was identified as an effective program containing several key elements identified in this research: participants are paid a small stipend every day, they have regular working hours, they acquire work
experience, and they have time to develop a relationship with their supervisor.

In conclusion, the key themes outlined by focus group participants echoed those outlined in the literature review, particularly the key findings of Wayland’s 2006 *Moving Forward* report on employment programs for youth at risk in Hamilton. *Moving Forward* identified the key elements of program content as: (1) “life skills”-oriented pre-employment programs, ideally combining group work with peers combined with one-on-one counselling; (2) opportunities for work placement, ideally with pay; (3) programs that contain several discrete stages, with each one entailing some recognition and reward at the end; and (4) promoting the importance of strong social networks.

This congruence should be viewed in a very positive light. Though limited in scope, this piece of research has provided further insight into what types of employment services work best for marginalized clients, and thus what kinds of services are needed in the immediate future.

**Next steps**

A next step in the process should be to consider the impact of enhanced services on various populations in Hamilton. This could include identifying the incidence of the different populations in need of enhanced services, identifying which populations would benefit the most from enhanced services, and identifying which populations have the greatest potential to contribute to Hamilton’s economy and community should they receive appropriate services. This would have to be weighed against the cost of providing various services. Is it preferential to offer really comprehensive supports to a smaller population (and which one?), or to offer fewer supports to a broader group of people? Full time programs with a case management option are known to be effective, but they obviously cost more to deliver than short workshops. Another consideration is whether existing programs might be expanded to reach new populations. In the research, for example, it was suggested that LEAP program would benefit youth who are not parents.

The provision of enhanced services will fill a great need in Hamilton. Addressing the above questions will ensure that these services are as effective and far-reaching as they can be within existing budget and time constraints.
7. References


Appendix A: List of Participants in Focus Group #2

Date of focus group: July 24, 2009
Scribe: Emily Hill

Nadia Badke, L.E.A.P. (Learning, Earning, and Parenting) Case Coordinator
Liz Cronk, Hostels to Homes Project
Theresa Dawe, Facilitator for the Career Essentials Program
Rhonda Day Bordonaro, Employment Development Counsellor
Melissa Eberhardt-Markle, Employment Development Counsellor
Lynn Foye, Finding Home project
Dee Lynch, Training Coordinator, Helping Hands Program
April Matchett: Case Manager, works with youth
Lisa McGorrian, Case Manager
Laurie Miladin, Case Manager, works with newcomers
Yasmeen Mirza, Case Manager
Joan Plyler, Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Services
Denise Zawislak, Employment Development Counsellor
Appendix B: List of Participants in Focus Group #3

Date of focus group: July 30, 2009
Scribe: Rachelle Moore

Sharon Arnold, YWCA
Dana Borcea, St. Joseph Immigrant Women's Centre
Justin DeWaard, Salvation Army - Lawson Ministries
Craig Foye, McQueston Legal and Community Services
John Grant, Threshold School of Building
Lily Lumsden, YMCA
Sharon Marafon, Employment Now (written submission)
Leah Morris, Adult Basic Education Association
Mary Nelson, Mission Services of Hamilton Opportunity Centres
Christina Scarciglia, SISO
Wally Stadnicki, Employment Hamilton
Jennifer Sturgess, VPI Inc.
Sue Taylor, Wesley Urban Ministries
Rene Tunney, Neighbour to Neighbour Centre
Liz Voogjarv, St. Joseph's Healthcare