

An Overview of “Starting in the Right Place: A New Approach to Employment and Social Services in Toronto”

Date:	October 27, 2008
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Social Services Division
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

An Overview of: Starting in the Right Place: A New Approach to Employment and Social Services in Toronto responds to a Council direction to report back on the progress being made on implementing *Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in Toronto*. *Systems of Survival, Systems of Support* provided a comprehensive overview of the role of social assistance in Toronto’s safety net and its contribution to the well-being of individuals and families.

This report provides a brief summary of the directions contained in *Starting in the Right Place* (Attachment 1). Initially, new approaches to delivering employment and social services in Toronto are discussed, culminating in a new client-centred, integrated service delivery model. Subsequently, steps required to promote service integration and access to services are highlighted, as well as efforts being made to transform employment services in Toronto. Finally, the report focuses on poverty reduction, including the progress that is being made to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy in Ontario.

Ultimately, *Starting in the Right Place* sets out the basis for reshaping the planning, management and delivery of employment and social services in Toronto, consistent with both the principles articulated in the Action Plan and with Council priorities.

Recommendations

Toronto Social Services recommends that:

1. the General Manager of Social Services, where appropriate, in consultation with other City officials, proceed to implement the directions contained in, “*Starting in the Right Place: A New Approach to Employment and Social Services in Toronto.*”

Financial Impact

There will be no financial impact in 2008. Any future financial implications related to the directions discussed in this report will be included in future year’s budget submissions.

DECISION HISTORY

This report responds to Council’s approval of *Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in Toronto* in June 2006. At that time, Council requested Toronto Social Services (TSS) to report back on the implementation of the Action Plan. The report also responds to *Principles for a Poverty Reduction Strategy*, approved by Council in May 2008, which had the following recommendation: “The General Manager of Toronto Social Services, as part of her report on the implementation of the Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto to Community Development and Recreation Committee, identify ways in which the City of Toronto can advance the poverty reduction initiatives outlined in the 25-in-5 Declaration.”

As part of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review, launched in August 2006, a group of provincial and municipal staff, including representation from the City of Toronto, was struck to identify effective service delivery arrangements in a range of human services, including Ontario Works (OW). The directions set out in this report are consistent with the discussions at this table.

The approaches outlined in this report also support key directions related to economic inclusion contained in *An Agenda for Prosperity*, released by the Mayor’s Economic Competitiveness Advisory Committee in January 2008. The Agenda is based on four pillars. The fourth pillar – One Toronto: Economic Opportunity and Inclusion – recognizes the need to revamp employment and labour force development policies and programs to ensure that everyone can benefit from Toronto’s economic prosperity.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Promoting Social and Economic Well Being in Toronto

Toronto, like other global cities, faces complex and deeply-rooted problems such as poverty and exclusion. Sometimes called “wicked problems,” they transcend

jurisdictional boundaries and cannot be addressed in isolation by any one service provider or by any one order of government.

In addition to robust social policies at the provincial and federal level, effectively tackling the root causes of wicked problems requires local strategies, planning and initiatives. As the order of government closest to the lives of residents, the City is leading efforts to address social challenges facing the city. It is doing so by championing comprehensive strategies, including the *Community Safety Plan*, the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*, the *Action Plan*, the *Clean City*, *Beautiful City* initiative and most recently the *Agenda for Prosperity*. Recognizing the dual goals of increasing the City's competitiveness and reducing social exclusion, the Agenda's fourth and final pillar (One Toronto: Economic Opportunity and Inclusion) focuses on ensuring that all residents have equitable access to the benefits of Toronto's economic competitiveness and growth.

The City's leadership role was underlined with the passage of the City of Toronto Act in 2006 which, acknowledging the need for "made-in-Toronto" solutions, ensures "a seat at the table" when provincial and federal governments are creating policies that affect key urban issues. At the same time, the City is building strong partnerships with key provincial ministries, notably Training Colleges and Universities, Community and Social Services, and Citizenship and Immigration, who are also increasingly working in local communities across the city to address the challenges of poverty and exclusion.

The implementation of the Action Plan recognizes that local leadership and action on economic development, employment planning and social inclusion are essential to create opportunity and well-being for all.

It also recognizes that the delivery of social assistance in Toronto by TSS has continually evolved over the past several decades. Social assistance has become an ever more critical support for people in Toronto who lose their job, who are underemployed or who are seeking assistance to enter or return to the labour market. Currently, about 1 in 12 city residents, or 220,000 people, rely on the City's social assistance delivery system at some point in a given year.

Today, Toronto's social assistance delivery system is first and foremost a city program delivered to city residents supporting city priorities. It is an integral part of Toronto's safety net and a significant contributor to the city's social inclusion, poverty and prosperity strategies. So although the City of Toronto is mandated to provide OW by the Province, Toronto's social assistance delivery system has been thoroughly shaped by its response to the needs of Toronto residents.

Comments

Starting in the Right Place focuses on ways that the City, in partnership with other orders of government, communities, service users and service providers, can reshape the planning, management and delivery of employment and social services in Toronto. It

does so in a way that is consistent with both the principles articulated in the Action Plan and with Council priorities.

As part of its endorsement of the Action Plan, Council requested that a comprehensive (“end to end”) review of employment services be undertaken. The findings from the review identified a worrying disconnect between existing provision and service user needs, pointing to an on-the-ground reality of silos, fragmentation, gaps and barriers. Concretely and practically, many unemployed and underemployed people in Toronto are left to their own devices to navigate this often complex and bureaucratic maze of programs and services. Similarly, employers are often unaware of the services that exist or are confused by the lack of co-ordination in the current service delivery system.

New approaches to employment and social services are now required that make services work better for service users, that make access easier, and that ensure services are planned and managed in ways that make sense in Toronto.

The following is a brief high level summary of the three sections of *Starting in the Right Place*:

1. Employment and Social Services in Toronto: A New Approach

Section 1 of *Starting in the Right Place* describes a new simplified, integrated, and client-centred model for delivering employment and social services in Toronto. The section details:

- the building blocks for a new delivery model, which recognize that services provided must fit the needs of the person using them, but also that service users and employers must be engaged in the planning of services
- the elements of a new service model that integrate employment services, financial benefits and social supports
- an illustration and description of the new delivery model

Ultimately, the starting point for this model is the perspective of the service user. It is the unique needs of individuals in their communities that drive access, integration and program and delivery strategies.

2. Integration and Employment Services

Section 2 of *Starting in the Right Place* discusses the steps being taken to achieve greater service integration, to make employment and social services more accessible and to strengthen the planning, management and delivery of employment services at the city and neighbourhood level. Highlights include:

- descriptions of key initiatives that demonstrate how service integration is proceeding in priority communities, and with vulnerable populations, across the

- city, as well as the how the learning's from these integration efforts are supporting new ways of working and thinking about service management and delivery
- an overview of the exciting Web Access to Your Services (WAYS) project, which is Canada's first fully integrated online application for social assistance, and which will provide the foundation for future e-service initiatives
- a discussion of the steps that are being taken to fundamentally strengthen critical aspects of employment services in Toronto, including:
 - how services are planned and managed, at both the neighbourhood level and within the City overall
 - better ways to engage employers to support local initiatives, but also to contribute to better employment strategies for all residents
 - more effective ways for the City to directly and indirectly deliver employment services as well as support key service priorities, such as settlement and employment services for newcomers
 - the development of innovative programs that directly place social assistance recipients in jobs while simultaneously building community capacity

3. Adequacy and Poverty Reduction

Recently several important steps have been taken with respect to both adequacy and poverty reduction, albeit leaving much more to do. Section 3 of *Starting in the Right Place* highlights two actions that are of particular importance.

- the creation of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) outside of the social assistance system is a first for Ontario and represents a new direction for social policy in the Province. Strongly reaffirmed in the Action Plan, the idea was to both remove children from social assistance and provide a financial benefit for all children living in poverty. The OCB represents a solid foundation for future poverty reduction efforts in Ontario
- one of the most exciting developments over the past year has been the consensus around the need for a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy in Ontario. In its 2007 budget, the Province committed to developing a poverty reduction strategy complete with measures, indicators and targets by the end of 2008. The 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction has emerged as a province-wide coalition, organized around the call for a reduction in poverty of 25% in five years, and 50% in ten years. Consistent with the Action Plan and Council priorities, the City has played an important role in enabling and supporting community efforts to make poverty reduction a priority in Toronto.

At the same time, it should be noted that there have not been significant increases to social assistance benefits over the past several years, as recommended in the Action Plan. Nor will the OCB substantially increase the incomes of families on social assistance, although it will provide a much needed increase in the funds available to these families. However, The Province is expected to table its report on poverty reduction before the end of 2008, which will serve as a basis for poverty reduction efforts in Ontario moving forward.

Conclusion

As a City government, on behalf of diverse communities and neighbourhoods, Toronto is actively concerned with, and actively involved in, constructing a safety net that supports all its residents, and in developing an economy and labour market that provides opportunities and prosperity to everyone in the city. Increasingly, these two objectives are mutually reinforcing and interconnected.

Starting in the Right Place: A New Approach to Employment and Social Services in Toronto epitomizes how co-ordinated local actions which engage people who need and use services, and which create real partnerships among governments and service providers, can make a difference. Starting locally, but understanding the vital importance of making service systems as a whole work for Toronto residents, the challenge now is to build on the progress that has been made to date. This will entail continuing to experiment with innovative initiatives in local communities, using the best ideas available. But it will also mean transforming the way employment and social services are planned, managed and delivered in Toronto.

Starting in the Right Place reflects the City's commitment and its determination to ensure that employment and social services in Toronto continue to create opportunities for individuals and families and to strengthen communities. Through this work, Toronto will not only become more socially inclusive, but also more economically competitive.

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ATTACHMENTS

“Starting in the Right Place: A New Approach to Employment and Social Services in Toronto.”