

## **Background**

Ontario Works (OW) employment activities and supports are provided with the intent of helping individuals prepare for, connect with, and remain in the labour market. It also includes employment activities such as:

- community participation (i.e., activities that allow people to contribute to the community and improve their employability);
- employment placement and job retention services;
- job search support services;
- supports for self-employment development;
- referral to basic education;
- referral for life stabilization supports;
- Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) Program;
- Literacy; and
- job-specific skills training.

The appropriate mix of employment assistance activities depends on the experience, skills, circumstances, and needs of individual applicants or participants and the realities of the local labour market. The amount of time a participant needs to engage in activities designed to help him or her increase employability and obtain sustainable employment will vary.

As the Ontario Works Employment Assistance program has evolved some aspects of the services are outdated and in need of a review. The anticipated outcome will be that this review will determine current needs and establish a process to secure a purchased service provider going forward.

## **Employment Assistance Purchased Services – Community Participation and Employment Placement**

The YMCA Sudbury and the local Ontario March of Dimes (OMOD) began providing brokered services in 1999 on the inception of Ontario Works and have been the brokers of record since. Both agencies have transitioned from providing stand alone services (youth focus and services for people with disabilities) to becoming part of the Employment Ontario Model; the YMCA working with all types of clients and the OMOD focusing on services for individuals of all ages receiving funding from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Disability, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), and private insurers.

Two of the contracts were originally developed under a different service model for employment activities. These transitioned to the newer employment outcome model (in or around 2003) where the focus was on earnings and exits to earnings. The brokers continued to offer community placements and a greater focus was placed on finding earnings, increasing earnings, and utilizing the full time employment placement

program to target living wage jobs. This offered a greater chance for the participants to exit from OW for a much longer period (beyond 24 months) - a new target in the service contract. The contract amounts and deliverables are as outlined in the table below.

Broker	Overview of Contract Deliverables	Cost
Ontario March of Dimes	Provide support for Employment Placements and Community Placements	\$133,000
YMCA Employment Services	Provide support for Employment Placements and Community Placements	\$240,000
YMCA Employment Services	Community Helper Program - provides low income seniors and various festivals and not for profits who require a temporary crew	\$85,000

The current employment activities remain focused on earnings and exits to earnings, but the delivery of service at the brokers has evolved under the Employment Ontario suite of programs. The focus on job development/coaching is now delivered as more of a self-directed model. There are fewer paid employment placements happening and while youth are finding employment; the income is no longer impacting the earnings outcome as it can be exempt under certain criteria.

The recent announcement by the Provincial Government to refresh and move toward improving attachment to the workforce data for Ontario Works participants offers a chance to revisit and modernize the services the Social Services Division purchases.

**Note:** The Community Helper contract and associated deliverables was developed as a way to offer individuals who had criminal records to have a supervised activity to re-engage with society and move forward towards employment. This targeted individuals who would otherwise be precluded from community placements in mainstream not for profits. The program offers supports to low income seniors as a way to support outdoor work such as raking of leaves or shoveling of snow. The program also provides a crew of individuals for set up and/or tear down for festivals. It too should be modernized but remains a value added program.

## **Individualized Employment Assistance Supports (Life Stabilization and Increased Employability)**

The Social Services Division also purchases individualized supports through the same Employment Assistance budget to offer clients a path towards life stabilization and opportunities to engage in activities focusing on increased employability. These life stabilization supports are often seen as addressing barriers (brief therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, learning disability testing, psycho-vocation testing, self-

awareness testing through MBTI/ Strong) that limit an individual's ability to move forward. While the Social Services Division has vendors of record for these types of services, the costs vary from year to year based on the type of clients that are on the OW caseload. Increased employability programs are often identified through labour market lead training, which include recent programming in the areas of culinary, carpentry and Personal Support Worker (PSW). They offer clients an experiential learning opportunity with a wrap around approach to client supports. Supports can include financial support to offset costs with employment activities to purchasing of a seat to connectivity with a dedicated staff resource to assist in planning and resolving issues that from time to time arise.

## **Next Steps**

Upon approval by City Council, the Social Services Division will engage in a review of the services that are provided for under the Employment Assistance budget including external contracts with providers. This review will include an environmental scan of best practices in the Province and value for money with recommendations for the process for future procurement to the Community Services Committee in the fourth quarter of 2019.