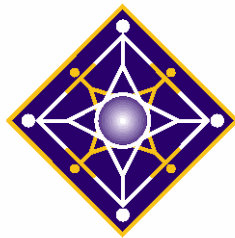


**District of Thunder Bay
Social Services Administration Board**

**Ontario Works
2008-2009
Service Plan**



THUNDER BAY DISTRICT
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

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Section 1: Ontario Works Vision and Mandate

TBDSSAB Ontario Works Vision

A simplified, stream-lined, and cost-effective social assistance system that treats our most vulnerable with fairness and dignity, and provides effective, integrated employment supports to help them prepare for, find and keep jobs.

Mandate

To provide employment assistance and temporary financial assistance to people in financial need. The Ontario Works program:

- recognizes individual responsibility and promotes self-reliance through employment;
- provides temporary financial assistance to those in need while they meet obligations to become and stay employed;
- effectively serves people needing assistance; and
- is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario.

Section 2: Environmental Scan

Analysis of Previous Planning Cycle

Since the inception of Ontario Works an increasing number of provincial initiatives have been implemented placing increasing demands upon Service Manager's human resources. The TBDSSAB is not appropriately funded to staff the human resources required to administer initiatives and this in turn places increasing challenges and negative effects upon the delivery of the program. During the 2006-2007 planning cycle the TBDSSAB made comprehensive service delivery changes to, as much as possible, streamline delivery to replace the band-aid effect of these initiatives and maximize the capacity of its resources. Service Managers such as TBDSSAB who cannot exceed the regulated provincial-municipal cost sharing arrangement are experiencing challenges and directly see the negative impacts upon the vulnerable population we serve as a result of this milieu.

Outcome targets during the service planning years 2006-2007 were achieved. Changes in the funding model were taken into account during comprehensive restructuring of the City's Ontario Works service delivery model. In December 2006 the City Ontario Works office converted to a hybrid service delivery model with the majority of participants having two caseworkers, one which provides financial assistance and the other employment assistance. Centralized booking of appointments has proven successful in many regards. Preliminary statistics in the 2008 evaluations demonstrate notable improvements in service delivery and client outcomes between December 2006 and December 2007. In-house employment programming and partnerships with community educational institutions and agencies are supporting the needs of clients towards their employment activities and goals. Client's employment performance targets were achieved. Service Delivery Models with the three District Delivery Agents vary and are designed to meet the respective community's unique servicing needs. Given the TBDSSAB's large geographic

area of service, considerable resources are expended to bring basic Ontario Works services to those in need of our services. The District Delivery Agents in particular continue to face the challenge of geographic distances coupled with fewer or an absence of services in the community to which to refer clients for training. Continuing job losses of higher paying positions within the District of Thunder Bay and unstable entry level positions (e.g., call centres) continues to be a significant challenge for clients striving for self sufficiency through employment.

Significant challenges are being experienced in meeting the 4-day turn around between application and verification interview due to staffing shortages and increased peak demands. During the calendar year the TBDSSAB experiences frequent influxes in applications and the City Delivery Agent does not have sufficient intake human resources to meet the demand for application and verification interviews and perform case management activities with our increasing number of harder-to-serve clients that are struggling with low education levels, low overall functioning, mental and physical health issues. Provincial Cost of Administration funding has been frozen since 2003 despite increases in costs of delivery and a loss of provincial funding was further experienced when the intake screening units were closed. Provincial funding for intake human resources is required to achieve regulated requirements or alternatively, the legislative requirements and corresponding eligibility determination needs to become significantly more simplified to achieve time efficiency that can be refocused on engaging clients in wrap-around community servicing to remove barriers to employment. The functionality of the City Service Delivery Model would be improved through sufficient provincial funding for a dedicated application team.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

POLITICAL

Provincial

Provincial changes to social policy and particularly the timing of implementation of changes in absence of sufficient discussion with Administrators continue to be problematic in local implementation and service delivery. Provincial initiatives are often first learned through media releases and announced implementation dates are not achievable. **Recommendation:** Better communication and collaborative planning by provincial ministries with all Ontario Works Service Managers is needed to facilitate achievable implementation dates and positive outcomes for clients and front line staff when implementing change.

Local

In accordance with the *District Social Services Administration Boards Act*, the TBDSSAB is represents 15 member municipalities and the unincorporated areas. At any given time the Board is comprised of six elected officials from the City of Thunder Bay, 5 elected officials from District municipalities, and one elected member representing the unincorporated areas. In general, Board members are subject to change every four years with respect to changes arising through municipal elections. Representation on the Board by the Townships of Schreiber and Terrace Bay alternates every two years and, representation amongst other municipalities in the district alternates every four years. Consequently the structure of DSSABs and alternating municipal representation brings unique dynamics in decision-making that would not otherwise be experienced by Consolidated Municipal Service Managers who deal with municipal councils that may be more static in composition and meet more frequently. Presently the TBDSSAB has

service contracts with four member municipalities to deliver the Ontario Works program within the District of Thunder Bay (excluding First Nation reserves). Historically these four member municipalities have been contributing approximately \$254,000 of in-kind services to the delivery of programs and have placed the TBDSSAB on notice that they will no longer be able to do so. The Board is deliberating upon becoming the employer and if this occurs changes to current administrative processes for service delivery will likely result. However, should the TBDSSAB become the employer it will still need to purchase many of the present in-kind municipal services to delivery programs throughout the District of Thunder Bay.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Communication from the Ministry flows from many sources relative to changes, transition directives, Q & A's, etc. and, SDMT directives and help information is not current. The overall communication system and flow is perceived as disjointed and frustrated by information being housed on different locations versus comprehensively in one location that would facilitate timely referral to current information needed to deliver services. Directive updates are long overdue and when changes are made there is not advance time for staff review, training of frontline staff where applicable, or time to seek necessary clarification prior to implementation of change. Provincial staff requests to meet are often on short notice, requiring travel, and do not take into consideration other meetings or conferences that may have already been scheduled by other provincial staff or, local work, activities and meetings that have already been scheduled well in advance. **Recommendations:** (1) The Ministry establish a single stream of communication to Service Managers as well as one web-based location for all information to be readily accessible. Particularly, information should be accessible in a manner that readily supports one-stop reference filed by service topic with all "current" relative information relating to that topic located within the particular file i.e., identification of relevant sections of Act, of Regulations, Directives, Transition Directives, Communications, Q & A's, etc.. Once Directives are updated the interim corollary information that led to the change should be relocated to an information archive also filed by service topic to be accessible for reference where clarification is required concerning the changes in the Directives. In this manner, Service Managers and front-line staff will have easy access to current information without having to filter through old communications to determine which are current and those that are now outdated or have been replaced through subsequent communications that clarify any issues raised. (2) Better communication and collaborative planning by the Ministry with all Ontario Works Service Managers is needed to facilitate achievable implementation dates and positive outcomes for clients and front line staff when implementing changes in social assistance benefits and services, directives, initiatives, etc. Service delivery would benefit from the Ministry communicating changes well in advance to allow for adequate time to review and clarify the change and communicate to and/or train front staff on the pending change. (3) When engaging Service Managers, that Ministry staff operate from one shared calendar to prevent double scheduling and work collaboratively with Service Managers in arranging mutually convenient times for meetings.

SOCIAL

Demographic Shifts in Population

The TBDSSAB's service area covers a geographic area of 103,368 km² (excluding First Nation reserves) which holds a population of approximately 147,674 persons.¹ Over the last 15 years, the population of Thunder Bay has decreased while the rest of Ontario's population has increased². According to 2006 Census data, Thunder Bay's population declined by 4.1% between 1996 and 2001, while the population of Ontario at the time grew by 6%. Dr. Moazzami predicts that without economic intervention, the population of the city could decline to about 94,000 people by 2015 because of out-migration. Overall he estimates that Northwestern Ontario's population will decline by approximately 0.97% per year during 2001-2015.³

Comparison of the 2001 and 2006 Census Data indicates the population of the City grew slightly by 0.1%, while the overall District saw its population rate decline by 1.2%. Census information reaffirms an aging population for the North. The percentage of the population aged 65 in Ontario increased to 13.6% an increase of 0.7% in 2006, while in Northern Ontario this population increased to 15.8%, an increase of 2.2% higher than Ontario. In Thunder Bay District the portion of the population aged 65 and above increased from 13.9% in 2001 to 15.2% in 2006, while for the City this percentage increased from 15.7% to 16.5%.⁴ The slight increase in the City's population of .1% likely resulted from the relocation of people who lived in surrounding communities affected by forest industry related plant closures.⁵ The significance of the changes in population is that there will be an impact on the Region's dependency ratio.⁶ The decline in population within the District of Thunder Bay together with an increasing number and proportion of older citizens will have profound effect on demand for services related to health care and social services. The demographic shift will have an effect on labour force growth rates, participation patterns, and sources of revenue.

Although the population in Northwestern Ontario is decreasing, the Aboriginal population is increasing, is younger than the overall population in the district, and represents a considerable percentage of Northwestern Ontario's population. About 58% of Northwestern Ontario's Aboriginal population is under the age of 30⁷. Dr. Moazzami estimates that the Aboriginal population of Northwestern Ontario will increase by 26.85% by the year 2015, at an average growth rate of 1.92% annually.² An increase in the number of Aboriginal applicants is

¹ Canada Census 2006

² Service Canada, Population Characteristics for Northwestern Ontario, Economic Region 595, Census 2001, November 24, 2004.

³ Dr. B. Moazzami, Department of Economics, Lakehead University: Thunder Bay Economic Development: A Roadmap to Success, 2005.

⁴ Aging Population Trends in Northern Ontario: 2001 to 2006, Dr. Southcott C., Lakehead University, 2007).

⁵ Government of Canada, Labour Market Bulletin: September 2007.

⁶ Service Canada, Population Characteristics for Northwestern Ontario, Economic Region 595, Census 2001, November 24, 2004. The dependency ratio is a measure of the potential human resources available (the working age population) to assist those most likely in need of social supports.

⁷ Trends, Opportunities and Priorities, North Superior Training Board, A Community Action Plan: January 2006.

anticipated due to the continuing high migration of persons from First Nation reserves into the City, ongoing local labour market challenges, and other social issues.

In the district of Thunder Bay out-migration of youth and professionals is of continuing concern. By 2003, Thunder Bay had a high youth out-migration rate of 12.4%⁸. In Northern Ontario the 15 to 29 year old age group has had the largest decrease in population size. There was a 10.5% decline in the number of people in Northern Ontario were between the ages of 15 and 29 in 2001 and who now are between 20 and 34 years of age. Further, in comparison with Ontario and Canada, this age group (20 -34) increased in size; Ontario by 5.2% and Canada by 3%.⁹ Northern Ontario has a lower percentage of professional service industries. As a result, youth and professionals are leaving Thunder Bay to pursue their careers in larger cities offering more professional service employment opportunities.

Education

On average, the education levels of Northern Ontario residents are lower than Ontario residents as a whole and the variance is increasing. Northern Ontario residents have a higher percentage of people with less than a high school diploma and a lower percentage of people with a university degree. Only 18.3% of people in Thunder Bay have a university degree, compared to 23.7% of people within Ontario¹⁰. Given the increasing pool of persons looking for work, there is a tendency for employers to look beyond basic qualifications (i.e., basic to intermediate-level literacy) when making hiring decisions by choosing applicants with higher educational attributes. People without basic education have limited opportunities and face the greatest challenges and barriers to accessing the work force as a high school diploma continues to be a prerequisite for many jobs. It is projected that most new jobs in the future might require a postsecondary education. The fastest growing occupations in Northern Ontario require a university education.

In 2004 the national unemployment rate for people aged 25 to 44 years who did not complete high school was 12.2%, while those whose highest level of education was just a high school diploma had an unemployment rate of 6.8%¹¹. The rate of employment is significantly higher for individuals who have a high school diploma which demonstrates that higher levels of education can provide better employment opportunities. Individuals with less than a high school diploma have relatively low labour force participation rates and high unemployment rates.¹² Rural areas of the country tend to have higher drop-out rates than urban parts of Canada. In the comparison of school dropout rates for young men and young women, the rate of dropouts for males was 12.2% in 2004-2005 and 7.2% for females. According to Statistic Canada's "Youth in Transition Survey", male dropouts cited the desire to earn money as a main reason of quitting high school; while 15.9% of female dropouts cited pregnancy or taking care of a child as key factors for dropping out before completing high school.

⁸ Youth Out-Migration in Northern Ontario, 2001 Census Research Paper Series: Report #2, October 31, 2002.

⁹ Southcott, Chris (2007) *Youth Out-migration in Northern Ontario: 2001 to 2006*. Lakehead University.

¹⁰ Trends, Opportunities and Priorities, North Superior Training Board, A Community Action Plan: January 2006.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, Provincial Drop-out rates – Trends and Consequences (2005).

¹² Education Indicators in Canada, PCEIP (2005, 2006)

Many employers are looking for employees who have a high school diploma. The percentage of people without a high school diploma in Northwestern Ontario at the time of the 2001 census was 33.5% compared to 29.7% for Ontario as a whole. The labour market rewards those with an education. High school drop-outs have a harder time finding a job as employers are looking for employees who have “soft skills” and have proven that they can learn and work. The youth unemployment rate is higher in Northern Ontario than in Ontario as a whole. Since some of the recipients of Ontario Works are high school drop-outs, there is a need for them to obtain the education and needed skills to be able to find worthwhile employment. As a result, the Thunder Bay Ontario Works office has partnered with the Lakehead Board of Education and Confederation College to assist clients obtain their high school diploma or equivalency and/or obtain basic to intermediate computer skills. Within the District, clients are referred to the nearest education or literacy program as appropriate.

Crime

McLean’s magazine has ranked Thunder Bay as 15 out of the 100 most dangerous Canadian cities based on violent crime statistics. Police Chief Herman reports the City is taking steps to address its violent crime rate and that most of the violence can be traced to high levels of drug and alcohol abuse in Thunder Bay. Intuitively, reduction in servicing through the Ontario Works Addiction Services program will result in fewer residents addressing their drug and alcohol abuse and potentially facilitate an increase in violent crimes in the community and social cost for prosecution, incarceration, parole and eventually promote long-term dependence on Ontario Works financial assistance due to significant challenges in obtaining employment with a criminal record, particularly when compounded with substance abuse issues.

Health

We have found that many of our Ontario Works clients are underserved by the health, mental health, addictions, and developmental services systems and struggle to maintain Ontario Works eligibility as a result. Psychological assessments obtained over the last four years reveal many Ontario Works clients have undiagnosed mental illnesses, addictions, undiagnosed and unsupported developmental delays, FAS/FAE, and undiagnosed neurological problems. Severe, unmanaged, unsupported, or undiagnosed health problems, and particularly mental health problems, can make it much more difficult (and at times impossible) for social service clients to both attain independence and even to maintain eligibility for social service programs. Participation in Ontario Works in particular requires a basic level of ‘health’ or functional ability to complete mandatory program activities as outlined by legislation and clients’ participation agreements.

The assumption is generally made that persons in receipt of social assistance are capable of independent living; however we have found many clients have fallen through significant cracks in the health care system and are struggling to cope with basic activities of daily living which further result in barriers to employment. Providing services to this harder-to-serve clientele places significant demands upon existing caseworker staff time.

The social service system relies upon the health care system to address medical conditions which may present a functional barrier to independence, and by extension, participation in social service programs geared towards achieving or maintaining independence. TBDSSAB understands that it is the mandate of the health care system to identify persons with non-remediable medical conditions which prevent independent living with or without supports, and to make arrangements for long-term care and treatment. When the health care system does not function in this expected sense, the difficulties created for social service clients and systems are significant.

Many of our Ontario Works clients do not have family physicians. Family physicians act as the entry point to most specialized and supportive health services which would assist our clients to function independently and maintain or improve their quality of life. The shortage of family physicians in the District of Thunder Bay is well documented – it is estimated that up to one-third of the residents of Thunder Bay do not have a family physician and the proportion of Ontario Works clients without one is much higher.

Maintaining or achieving oral health continues to be a struggle for recipients of social assistance. While basic mandatory dental benefits are available for children and emergency dental assistance for adults, the current levels are insufficient to support overall health. Recipients of social assistance in the North continue to experience difficulty accessing dental services as dental professionals are choosing not to service this clientele due to lower remuneration and high no show rates.

Social assistance recipients live in poverty and are under nourished and due to financial restraint face significant challenges in accessing nutritional, healthy foods. Recipients are preoccupied with obtaining their basic needs (daily food, obtaining & maintaining affordable housing, hygiene, clean and presentable clothing) and this often creates barriers to learning and being able to focus on employment. Absence of nutritional food results in poorer overall health and creates greater need of other social and health systems.

ECONOMIC

Economic Indicators

*Canada*¹³

Employment growth continued in February 2008 with gains estimated at 43,000, pushing Canada's employment rate to a new record high (63.9%). Employment growth over the last 12 months stands at 361,000 (+2.2%). Employment growth in February was mainly in construction; public administration; and professional, scientific and technical services. These gains were partly offset by declines in manufacturing and natural resources which have historically been major industry in Northern Ontario. Large gains in construction; business, building and other support services; and public administration were partly offset by the continued decline in manufacturing employment.

¹³ From <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Subjects/Labour/LFS/lfs-en.htm>

Ontario and Northern Ontario¹

In February, employment in construction increased by an estimated 21,000, all in Ontario. Nationally, employment in this industry is up 8.5% (+94,000) from 12 months ago. Manufacturing employment declined by 24,000 in February, bringing total losses over the last 12 months to 106,000 (-5.1%). Manufacturing now represents 11.6% of total employment, a record low and far from the 15.0% share observed at the end of 2002, the start of the most recent decline. Employment in natural resources was down in February (-9,000). Over the previous 12 months, this industry declined by 4.2%, with most of the losses in support activities for the mining, oil and gas sector.

Ontario recorded strong employment growth in February 2008 (+46,000), nearly all in full-time work. These latest gains pushed the overall unemployment rate in the province down 0.2 percentage points to 6.1%. Over the last 12 months, employment growth in Ontario stands at 2.0%, just slightly below the national average (+2.2%). Although manufacturing in Ontario continued to lose workers in February (-20,000), these declines were more than offset by strength in construction (+31,000); business, building and other support services (+20,000), as well as public administration (+11,000).

Northern Ontario's employment declined by 1.0% in 2006 and its unemployment rate of 7.4% was the highest among all four Ontario regions (Labour Market Information, May 2007). Employment growth in Northern Ontario was primarily driven by part-time jobs in the first quarter of 2007 (Labour Market Information 2007). In comparison to Ontario, part-time jobs encompass a huge proportion of employment in Northern Ontario. Northern Ontario has a higher percentage of sales and service occupations and a lower percentage of occupations unique to processing, manufacturing and utilities. The year-over-year increases in employment in terms of occupation occurred in sales and service occupations in the first quarter. The main industry driving employment growth in the first quarter was accommodation and food services, while a huge year-over-year decline was in construction. There has been a decrease in low-skill occupations such as cashier, food and beverage workers and retail trade workers. The occupational skill levels in Northern Ontario are lower than Ontario as a whole which reveals that there are fewer opportunities for people with lower education levels, such as Ontario Works clients to find ongoing employment.

Thunder Bay and Area

Thunder Bay District has been hard hit by the forest industry crisis. As of September 2005, the total year-to-date job loss total was up to 7,700 in the resources and manufacturing sectors. Job losses have been evenly split between full- and part-time jobs. Poor market conditions are now affecting the area sawmills which are facing indefinite closures and reduced production.

Aboriginal Workforce

The Aboriginal population of Thunder Bay grew by 22% from 2001 to 2006, according to the 2006 census. Even though Aboriginal numbers are growing, Aboriginal labour force participation and employment rate are historically lower than the region as a whole. The average income of Aboriginal persons in the region of Northern Ontario is lower than the regional or provincial average¹⁴.

Income Levels

The average income level of individuals in Northern Ontario is lower than the provincial average. In 2000, the average incomes in Northern Ontario were 16.3% less than the Ontario average (Income levels in Northern Ontario, 2003). This disparity is expanding as the forestry crises in Northern Ontario continues with more people being laid off from high paying jobs due to downsizing and closures. Northern Ontario has a significantly lower percentage of high income earners compared to the rest of Ontario and it has a higher percentage of low income earners. Low paying jobs make it more difficult for Ontario Works clients to earn enough wages to exit from social assistance. Consequently earners in Northern Ontario will not earn as much as other residents in Ontario. For part-time employment, Northern Ontario has a higher percentage of part-time income earners. Given that Northern Ontario has a higher percentage of part-time employment recipients of social assistance continue to face significant challenges earning a sustainable income on part-time hours.

Local Labour Market Conditions

Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario labour markets increasingly reflect the negative impact of the on-going forestry crisis and the continuing uncertainty in the region's traditional employment areas. Labour market conditions in Thunder Bay's Census Metropolitan Areas became worse in 2006 and the labour force declined more than 5% (TOPS, North of Superior Board, 2007). Small business owners in Thunder Bay have reported a growing concern with a negative economic growth climate and question the sustainability of their businesses in the near future¹⁵.

The 2006 Thunder Bay Ventures Small Business Opinion Survey indicated that only 15 percent of business owners believe there will be an increase in economic growth over the next year. Although the 2007 survey shows a slight more (22%) respondents expressed this hopefulness; the concerns of high energy rates, gasoline and fuel oil rates, insurance rates, and the general economic situation in the City remain the same as last year. According to the recently released Manpower Employment Outlook Survey, Thunder Bay employers expect a gloomy first quarter (2008) with Net Employment Outlook of -14%. New hiring prospects remain unfavourable for the City (Manpower Employment Outlook Survey, Canada, First Quarter, 2008).

¹⁴ Trends, Opportunities and Priorities, North Superior Training Board, A Community Action Plan: January 2006

¹⁵ Trends, Opportunities and Priorities, North Superior Training Board, A Community Action Plan: January 2006.

The labour markets in Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario are starting to reflect the impact of the on-going forestry crisis and the continuing uncertainty in the region's traditional employment areas. The District of Thunder Bay continues to experience the impact of the forestry crisis which are reflected in the on-going paper mill closures and downsizing. As indicated in the 2005 Service Plan, the District has experienced a permanent loss of over 1100 high paying, full-time positions in the pulp and paper industry with numbers continuing to rapidly increase. Higher energy costs, a stronger Canadian Dollar, softwood lumber agreement and low prices for some products are cited as some of the factors leading to mill closures and downsizing. Northwestern Ontario has 15,300 direct jobs in the forest industry and an additional 19,100 indirect jobs connected to the industry¹⁶. Approximately 75% of jobs in some of the Northwestern Ontario communities depended on the forestry sector. Given the dependency in this sector, the forestry crises have severely impacted these communities with no foreseeable economic recovery in sight.

Neenah Paper in Terrace Bay suffered a major shutdown in 2005 when it laid off more than 350 employees. Nonetheless, the mill has now re-opened as Terrace Bay Pulp Inc. under a new owner, "Buchanan Forest Products" and has hired approximately 325 laid-off mill workers back to work (TOP 2007). However, the on-going strike by 250 loggers and truckers who were former Neenah Paper employees has not yet been resolved.

Over the last few years a number of mills have closed down in the District of Thunder Bay and region. Thunder Bay continues to face serious economic challenges as the strain on its resource-dependent economies increase. Downsizing and closures over the last couple of years of/at Cascade Fine papers, Sturgeon Timber, Abitibi-Consolidated, Buchanan Forest Products, Great West Timber and Northern Hardwoods, Norampac, Sturgeon Timber, and Golden Giant Mine has resulted in the loss of over 2,100 good paying full-time positions. In February 2007 the plywood mill in Nipigon burned down leaving 130 employees without work. The Mill was the main employer in the town. Plans to rebuild the mill have so far not materialized. TNS Canadian Facts, Young Americans, and Bell closed down their call centres in Thunder Bay resulting in over 350 employees losing their jobs. These reflect the loss of basic entry positions previously accessed by Ontario Works participants.

Lakehead Public School Board school closures will have a negative impact on employment in the city of Thunder Bay. In 2005, the school board closed five schools and in 2007 three elementary schools were closed as well as two high schools. The Board has delayed closing four schools until June 2009 and will have a surplus of teachers and support staff. Administrative, teaching and technical job losses have not yet been reported. In the District, Superior-Greenstone District School Board has cut 13.25 teaching positions from its elementary teaching positions as a result of declining school enrollment. Last year the Board eliminated 12 elementary teaching positions (Labour Market Bulletin – 2007).

Job losses in the forestry and other higher paying industry jobs are taking their toll on the secondary labour market due to losses in revenue.

Potential Job Opportunities

¹⁶ Forestry Job Crisis, Northwestern Ontario Associated Chamber of Commerce, www.noacc.com.

Bombardier has officially signed a \$548 million contract with the Toronto Transit Commission to build subway vehicles. This is positive news for the Thunder Bay plant and area as an estimated 300 employees may be hired. Bombardier has also won a \$113 million contract to build 34 rapid-transit vehicles for Vancouver SkyTrain system. (TOP Report, North of Superior, January 2007). Given previous significant lay-offs and union call back rights, it is anticipated that limited opportunities will be available for Ontario Works participants.

The new Molecular Medicine Research Centre (MMRC) in Thunder Bay will be opening soon. The MMRC could potentially create over 200 research related jobs and an additional 400 to 600 spin-off jobs in the next five years. The MMRC partnership is comprised of Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Regional Health Science Centre, Sunnybrook Research Institute at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and Phillips Medical Systems. At present, the Centre is actively recruiting scientists. (TOP, North Superior, January 2007). The MMRC is anticipated to provide economic incentive to Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario which will hopefully support secondary service sector industry job opportunities in the District of Thunder Bay.

The City is in need of police officers. The Thunder Bay police chief has recommended that the City apply to the provincial government for 100% funding for eight new police officers. Limited education and/or criminal records may pose barriers to many Ontario Works participants accessing policing job opportunities that may arise.

The sustainable employment opportunities in Thunder Bay are in professional fields. The majority of social assistance recipients would not possess the qualifications for these positions which require high literacy levels and varying years of post secondary education. We have observed that the vast majority of social assistance clients have multiple barriers to employment, including but not limited to learning disabilities, physical and mental health issues, low literacy levels and limited education. Any new job opportunities for unskilled workers will attract many experienced laid-off mill and mine workers, making it difficult for OW clients to compete for positions.

Superior Thermowood in Kakabeka Falls is developing a process that will change softwood into hardwood using a machine called an EcoDryer. The company hopes to expand its workforce from 12 to 30 employees. Its long-term plan is to have three EcoDryers on site, which would create approximately 85 jobs.

North American Palladium at Lac Des Illes Mine has begun expansion of its underground operations. This expansion will add 40 to 50 new jobs to the labour market. While the expansion will provide new jobs, the number of people hired will not offset the losses experienced when the mine laid-off 60 people from its open-pit mine.

Union Gas will be building a pipeline through Thunder Bay as a result of the decision of the Ontario government to close all coal burning power plants. Construction of the pipeline will begin this spring or summer, however it is unknown whether new employment will be created and if so, whether the employment created will offset those lost to date and for how long this employment will last.

New retail establishments in the City of Thunder Bay creating full- and part-time jobs include:

- HomeSense
- Mitsubishi dealership – hopes to expand its workforce to 15-20 positions
- LCBO – opened new store
- Salvation Army – opened new store
- Old Navy
- Pier One
- Starbucks Coffee
- EB Games
- The Shoe Company
- The Running Room

Superior Propane a new inbound call centre is opening a new regional administrative centre in Thunder Bay, The Company is hiring for sales, accounting, collection and administrative positions. The new centre is expected to initially create 35 jobs and eventually expand to 100 jobs in the future.

Caseload Description

Caseload Profile	Source(s)	Prior Year Actuals	Year 1 Forecast	Year 2 Forecast
Average monthly number of applicants	Delivery Agent	346	403	403
Percentage of applicants given the literacy screening assessment	N/A	n/a	n/a	n/a
Average monthly caseload (including temp care, excluding ODSP)	Benefit Unit Summary Report	2,262	2273	2273
Average monthly number of Ontario Works participants with participation requirements	Benefit Unit Summary Report (less deferred below)	1,773	1747	1747
Average monthly number of Ontario Works participants with deferred participation requirements	Expenditure Detail Report	808	814	814
Average participant to worker ratio	Delivery Agent	95:1	95:1	95:1
Average monthly number of ODSP participants	BUS Report	145	150	155
Percentage of cases on assistance less than 4 months	Data Resource Guide	27%	27%	27%
Percentage of cases on assistance between 4 months and less than 1 year	Data Resource Guide	35%	35%	35%
Percentage of cases on assistance between 1 year and less than 2 years	Data Resource Guide	19%	19%	19%
Percentage of cases on assistance 2 years or more	Data Resource Guide	19%	19%	19%
Percentage of caseload with earnings from employment	Employment Outcome Data Report	11%	10%	10%
Caseload Profile	Source(s)	Prior Year Actuals	Year 1 Forecast	Year 2 Forecast
Percentage of cases exiting employment	Employment Outcome Data Report	20%	18%	18%

Average monthly number of sole support parents	Benefit Unit Summary Report	963	951	951
Average monthly number of 16 and 17 year old parents without high school	Data Resource Guide	11	11	11
Average monthly number of 18 to 21 year old parents without high school	Data Resource Guide	150	150	150
Average monthly number of LEAP participants	Data Resource Guide	77	77	77
Total number of LEAP graduates	YTD Report	3	6	6
Percentage of participants provided with FTEB/OEEAAB	Data Resource Guide	38%	38%	38%
Percentage of participants provided with an advance child care payment	Data Resource Guide	0%	0%	0%
Percentage of participants receiving Ontario Works child care and/or regular child care subsidies (DNA)	Child Care Management System	11%	11%	11%
Percentage of participants provided with child care support through earnings exemptions for child care expenses	Data Resource Guide	1%	1%	1%

Skills Development Needs

In order to increase the employability of Ontario Works clients, there is a significant need to enhance some of our participants' literacy skills. The following chart shows the education level of our Ontario Works applicants as of June 26, 2008.

Highest Level of Education Completed

Education Level	Number of Cases	Percentage of Caseload
Less than Grade 6	39	1.65
Grade 7 - 8	235	9.94
Grade 9-11	1149	48.60
Grade 12	504	21.32
Grade 13/OAC	12	.51
Post Secondary	420	17.77
Unknown/No Education	5	.21
Total	2364	100

Education Levels

Given the increasing pool of persons looking for work, there is a tendency for employers to look beyond basic qualifications (i.e., basic to intermediate-level literacy) when making hiring decisions choosing applicants with higher educational attributes. People without basic education have limited opportunities and face the greatest challenges and barriers to accessing the work force as high school diploma continues to be a prerequisite for many jobs. It is projected that most new jobs in the future might require a postsecondary education. The fastest growing occupations in Northern Ontario require a university education.

The above chart provides insight into the education level of our June 2008 Ontario Works applicants and indicates majority (60.19%) of our clients have not completed Grade 12. In order

to address the limited literacy skills of our clients, Ontario Works in partnership with Colleges, School Boards and various literacy organizations in the community have developed specific skills upgrading and literacy programs tailored to meet the unique needs of these individuals. Ontario Works recognizes education as an important component of employment. It is our goal to build and maintain partnerships and work towards enhancing literacy opportunities for our clients.

High School Drop-Out

Many employers are looking for employees who have a high school diploma. High school drop-outs have a harder time finding a job as employers are looking for employees who have “soft skills” and have proven that they can learn and work. The youth unemployment rate is higher in Northern Ontario than in Ontario as a whole. Since some of the recipients of Ontario Works are high school drop-outs, there is a need for them to obtain the education and needed skills to be able to find sustainable employment.

Occupational Training Requirements

As indicated above, educational levels of our caseload is below what would be required to access a professional occupation and often pose challenges to opportunities for basic entry positions. To try and address this gap and raise the awareness of the importance of higher education in accessing stable employment, our Employment Resource Centre is placing a higher focus on assisting Ontario Works participants to obtain their high school diploma or equivalency and encouraging them to go on to post secondary training. Those whose goals are not to pursue post-secondary training are supported to engage in work related training through the ERC or other education and training programs available in the community. Through this route a higher potential exists for recipients of social assistance to obtain sustainable employment, contribute to the economy and build healthier communities.

Community Engagement

Ontario Works has many partnerships within the community that allow Ontario Works staff members to provide enhanced servicing through referral services to meet the identified needs of clients. Ontario Works staff members try to increase opportunities for Ontario Works participants by working continuously with different agencies and organizations to meet client and agency employment and skill development needs. Ontario Works administration strives to establish and maintain linkages which eliminate duplication of services, utilize best practices and builds upon existing community capacity.

Partnerships with Related Initiatives, Programs and Services

Ontario Works administration and staff participate in various committees within the District of Thunder Bay. The committees undertake to share information and work together in improving our communities, and the services available to its members.

District Ontario Works Administrators work directly with available community partners to develop services, and community and employment opportunities for clients. Employment resource services are provided directly by delivery agents according to client identified need. Due to the economic crises being experienced within the District, the TBDSSAB participated in the Community Adjustment Committee for the Schreiber and Terrace Bay areas. Similarly, the Manitouwadge Ontario Works Delivery Agent is involved with the Manitouwadge Community Adjustment Committee. While opportunities are being sought out for clients within the District, until the economic situation improves the availability of services and opportunities mainly exists within the City of Thunder Bay which is likewise experiencing economic challenges as previously identified.

Prior to December 31, 2005, the City of Thunder Bay Ontario Works office utilized enhanced funding to provide educational services (structured learning) for Ontario Works recipients onsite at its Employment Resource Centre (ERC). Our partnership with the Lakehead Board of Education continues to be successful in providing an on-site teacher to facilitate structured learning for Ontario Works participants working on credits for their High School Diploma. Our partnership was established with Confederation College has also been very successful and continues to collaborate with and expand upon educational and skill training services available to Ontario Works clients at the ERC.

The TBDSSAB contracts with the Ontario March of Dimes to provide employment development and placement services for Ontario Works participants including extension of services to provide specialized training and employment placement services for participants in Addiction Services. In 2008 the TBDSSAB was a fortunate recipient of surplus employment funding which enabled it to partner with the Ontario March of Dimes and Canadian Mental Health Association to pilot a Training and Employment Internship Program with five larger employers in the City of Thunder Bay. Since inception employer interest in this pilot project has grown opening a new and creative path of opportunity for employers to tap into the Ontario Works participant labour pool and, for clients to obtain skills training and experience and potentially permanent employment.

The TBDSSAB has numerous partnerships with community agencies throughout the District to provide community placement opportunities, services for LEAP participants, literacy and training, addiction assessment and treatment services, mental health assessments, referrals to health services, among many other services for clients.

The City Ontario Works Woodworking program is a community placement strategy that partners with non profit organizations to provide carpentry assistance that would not normally be affordable to agencies and allows the program to use these projects as their learning and building experience. Community partners assist in expenses incurred to operate and provide this community placement opportunity.

Client needs are assessed on an ongoing basis to determine service needs. Referrals to different agencies and organizations are made to meet client needs.

Strategies to Coordinate

Ontario Works staff members participate on various committees and attend meetings and presentations on various programs in the community. As well, staff members try to learn what different training opportunities are available from different agencies. District Delivery Agent caseworkers keep current on various community agencies on a one-to-one basis, whereas the City Ontario Works has quarterly caseworker meetings where representatives from various community agencies are invited as guest speakers. The sessions include an overview of the guest agency's programs, referral criteria, program goals and objectives, and a question and answer period for staff. The goal of these sessions is to ensure that staff is familiar with the variety of programs available throughout the community. The information sessions and one-to-one contacts encourage networking and partnerships among the community agencies.

Staff has established long-standing working relationships with many agencies. Meetings occur with representatives from different agencies to discuss possible strategies for improved service and to address issues within the community. Cooperative planning, development, and delivery of service have become an established practice of Ontario Works staff.

Ontario Works has a close working relationship with the Tourism and Economic Development Division at the City of Thunder Bay. In instances where new companies are looking at establishing themselves in the city, they have requested that we hold job fairs, collect resumes, conduct pre-screening of potential employees and schedule interviews on their behalf.

Literacy and Basic Skills Training Providers

Literacy services are provided by Literacy Northwest which supports and promotes adult literacy through the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program. The LBS program assists adults to develop basic skills in reading, math, communication and computer skills. The program includes information and referrals, a literacy assessment, training plan development, training and a follow-up. Other providers of literacy programming to Ontario Works clients include Alpha Thunder Bay, Anishnawbe Skills Development Program, Confederation College, the Contact North Offices in Terrace Bay and Nipigon, Northern Lifeskills and Literacy Program, Schreiber/Terrace Bay Adult Learning Centre, Superior North Literacy in Nipigon/Red Rock, and the Thunder Bay Literacy Group. Alpha Thunder Bay provides tutoring and instruction to Francophone adults. The Anishnawbe Skills Development Program aids native adults in improving their literacy/numeracy skills, as well as computer basics and online literacy. Confederation College has partnered with a variety of community agencies to provide literacy and basic skills training accessible by Ontario Works clients primarily adults seeking college entry and adults wanting grade 12 equivalency. The Northern Lifeskills and Literacy Program provide literacy and basic skills training to deaf adults. The Thunder Bay Literacy Group aids adults in improving basic reading, writing, math and computer skills.

Community Placement Sponsors

TBDSSAB has partnered with over 100 non-profit and public organizations through formal community placement agreements. Over the last two years Ontario Works participants have been focusing more on more formal education and employment skills training which has resulted in a reduction in community placement participation. However, both formal and informal community placements continue to be a valuable resource for Ontario Works participants. Community Placements give Ontario Works recipients an opportunity to volunteer at a community service activity in a non-profit or public sector agency or organization. Participants gain valuable work experience through on-the-job training in janitorial services, woodworking, income tax preparation, hair cutting, etc. Participants are given financial assistance for child care, transportation, placement-related training and special clothing and equipment in order to cover costs that are associated with obtaining placements. Over 450 participants take part in the Community Placement Program annually.

Employment Placement Services

The employment broker that finds placements for Ontario Works clients is the Ontario March of Dimes. Many other employment programs in the community will refer participants to the Ontario Works Employment Placement Program if they are an Ontario Works recipient that they have been working with and they qualify for this program. However, many Community Agencies have access to higher wage subsidies that participants can qualify for, therefore those programs are usually accessed first as they are financially more appealing for employers. To date the pilot Training and Employment Internship Program is demonstrating the value of creative, flexible programs that provide incentives to clients and employers that facilitate employer-employee connectivity. It is hoped that additional annualized employment funding will be available to TBDSSAB to turn the pilot into a permanent program that can potentially be extended to be delivered through the District Delivery Agents.

Employment Resource Services

Within the District, employment resource services are provided directly by delivery agents and/or referral to community partners. Within the City delivery agent, the Ontario Works Employment Resource Centre offers services such as computer access, job boards, fax, photocopy, workshops and training opportunities, Community Placement and Employment Placement opportunities, telephone use and client voicemail for employers.

The public libraries allow access to computers for job search. YES Employment Services, Confederation College, Nipigon Chamber of Commerce, Superior Training Employment Program, (STEP), and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada have resource centres for clients with access to computers in order for clients to search for jobs also.

Financial/Audit Planning

Financial and Audit Planning services are available to participants by the Thunder Bay Counselling Centre (*formerly Family Services Thunder Bay*). The Thunder Bay Counselling Centre provides counseling and third party intervention for budget, money and debt problems. They have credit counsellors who help Ontario Works clients get out of debt by assessing their

financial concerns; developing a personalized spending plan; setting up a repayment plan with creditors; and determining their financial goals. They also provide information and resources on money management, budgeting and financial fitness as well as offering credit clinics. Additionally, they can make referrals to other community resources. The help can range from the development of a personal budgeting plan to direct involvement with creditors to assist in arranging reduced payments that customers can manage. The TBDSSAB's experience with the Ontario Works caseload has demonstrated that due to the limited income social assistance recipients receive, that budgeting workshops can offer little to assist clients address their debts.

The City delivery agent's Employment Resource Centre has also developed and provides a budgeting workshop to the ASI participants and specialized client groups on an as needed basis. While the Thunder Bay Counselling Centre focuses upon counseling and intervention once debt problems occur, budgeting workshops as debt prevention is a job retention strategy provided through the Employment Resource Centre. Appropriate timing of financial planning workshops is necessary to facilitate the achievement of independence from social assistance after 3 months of clients obtaining employment earnings.

The Schreiber/Terrace Bay Adult Learning Centre, Marjorie House Outreach, the Public Library and the Local Health Unit have provided seminars for financial planning in the District.

Collaborative Community Servicing

A variety of social challenges being experienced by Ontario Works participants can result in significant barriers to employment that appear to be less recognized or understood by levels of government which are not directly involved in service delivery. Consequently the TBDSSAB sees the value in collaborative work between front line staff and community agencies to assist shared clients towards addressing these challenges, achieving a better quality of life for themselves and their families, and removing the barrier to employment.

Child Welfare

Child welfare services are provided by Dilico Anishinabek Family Care and by the Children's Aid Society. Ontario Works caseworkers work in collaboration with child welfare workers where clients are shared and appropriate consents are obtained.

Family Violence

Services in the District of Thunder Bay dealing with family violence issues are offered through Beendigan Inc., Children's Aid Society, Faye Peterson Transition House, Marjorie House, Food Bank, OPP and the Thunder Bay Sexual Assault/Sexual Abuse Counselling and Crisis Centre. Ontario Works Delivery Agents work in collaboration with violence against women service agencies in meeting the needs of shared clients. These agencies provide a wide range of services to provide support and education (parenting, alcohol and drug assessment and services, child witness counseling and support, transition supports, referrals, emergency shelter and clothing, outreach, etc.).

Housing

The housing programs provide affordable housing for people with low and moderate incomes. The TBDSSAB is responsible for the administration of social housing in the District of Thunder Bay. It is the sole shareholder of the Thunder Bay District Housing Corporation (TBDHC) and all 27 non-profit social housing providers have a direct reporting relationship with TBDSSAB through the Housing Services Division which administers over 10 different housing programs. Ontario Works clients have access to the social housing programs for which they are eligible according to the protocols established for each program. Ontario Works caseworkers collaborate with the Housing Services Division's Coordinated Access Services as well as social housing providers to assist client placement into social housing. Waitlists for housing exist resulting in challenges for Ontario Works recipients to access affordable housing, particularly single bedroom units. Supportive housing is not administered by the TBDSSAB. Accessibility to a sufficient number of affordable supportive housing units is needed by social assistance recipients so that they can obtain or maintain independent living and work towards employability where they are physically and psychologically capable.

The Ontario Works and Housing Services Divisions work in partnership to administer the Emergency Rent & Energy Assistance Fund (EREF) a homelessness prevention program developed to promote housing stability and prevent homelessness by assisting low-to-moderate income tenants through one-time provincial funding in order to avoid eviction by funding rent or prevent disconnection or facilitate reconnection of energy services through assistance with client energy arrears. The TBDSSAB has unsuccessfully requested additional energy emergency funds (EEF) as the annual allocation has been insufficient to meet the needs of low-income families in the Board's service area. This is particularly disconcerting as the cold winters in the North can pose health and safety issues for households without heat. Additional provincial EEF funding is required to meet the needs of low-income households in the District of Thunder Bay who are facing eviction or disconnection of energy services.

Access to affordable housing within the limitation of the maximum shelter allowances continues to pose a significant barrier to clean, affordable and safe housing for many Ontario Works recipients. There are waitlists for affordable housing and absence of sufficient supportive housing continues to pose significant barriers to employment for clients who are understandably preoccupied with trying to meet their basic needs.

Mental Health

Within the City of Thunder Bay and some district areas, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)¹⁷ offers mental health services for Ontario Works clients. In the District services can be accessed through North of Superior Programs and the Mental Illness Support Network. Some of the programs of the CMHA include:

- The New Foundations Clubhouse program provides opportunities for the psychiatrically disabled to enhance their mental health and live to their fullest potential through activities jointly shared by members and staff. Participants join in activities to attain employment and housing as well as for social recreation.
- The Rehabilitation Action Program helps people improve their social skills while they are recovering from mental illness. It helps people enhance their social and relationship skills and build social networks.

¹⁷ Canadian Mental Health Association, February 2, 2006. www.cmha-tb.on.ca.

- The Steps to Employment Program is made to increase the employability of people who live with a mental illness. The program is designed to help people obtain and keep employment in order to live a full life. Participants of the program are given training before finding employment so that they can be employment ready. The training includes vocational life skills training, training placements, and job coaching.

Addiction Treatment

Ontario Works clients who are not participating in the TBDSSAB's Addictions Services employment program and who request assistance for their addiction are referred by their Caseworker to addiction services available within the community. Ontario Works participants in the Addictions Services (ASI) program are provided with services through specialized Ontario Works Addiction Counsellors and in partnership with the Thunder Bay Counselling Centre who has been contracted by the TBDSSAB to provide assessment and outreach treatment/support services. Since implementing the ASI program the TBDSSAB has observed that the need of Ontario Works participants for this program is constant, high and that current capacity is unable to meet client need to address substance addictions that are posing a barrier to employment. Addictions are a significant and increasing social problem within the District of Thunder Bay. The TBDSSAB's funding for its ASI program is scheduled to be significantly reduced by 2010 and is expected to have significant negative impacts upon the TBDSSAB's ability to provide services within the District of Thunder Bay and consequently to the critical services and supports needed by Ontario Works participants with addictions to address this barrier to employment.

The foundation for the ASI program is the provision of intensive case management and that is specialized to the clients' needs and case conferencing with community partners to ensure that clients are obtaining the services needed and are moving through the addiction treatment services to remove addictions as a barrier to employment. Due to the co-occurring disorders often present with addictions, outreach intensive case management services are available for higher need participants experiencing mental health issues, women's issues, youth and clients requiring stabilization. Ontario Works Addiction Counsellor intensively case manages ASI participants who have moved through the continuum of addiction services and are a stage of change where increasing employability is appropriate. In addition, Ontario Works Addiction Counsellors manage the participation agreements for all ASI participants, employment related expense issuances and Ontario Works Case Workers manage the financial services. Ontario Works Addiction Counsellors work with our community partner, the Ontario March of Dimes, relative to employment skills development and placement. North of Superior Programs, an addiction agency servicing the district, has experienced significant human resources challenges over the last few years. Consequently, ASI participants residing within the district have increased reliance for addiction services upon the Ontario Works Addiction Counsellor providing services to the ASI participants residing in the district. The need for services from the ASI Addiction Counsellor in the District has been steadily growing in 2008. The District of Thunder Bay communities have been experiencing increased substance abuse making this a program which is essential to promote community wellness. Existing methadone clinics are full and there are Ontario Works clients waiting to engage in the ASI program. Due to the absence of medical detoxification services, the majority of ASI participants attending residential treatment are required to be sent outside of the community for treatment.

ASI staff has developed several programs to address substance use issues which are currently not available in the community and they work collaboratively with addiction services agencies to facilitate ASI participants in obtaining the services they need to address their barriers to employment. St. Joseph's Care Group is a key addiction agency that provides alcohol and drug dependency treatment services for both youth and adults at the Sister Margaret Smith Centre and detoxification at the Balmoral Centre. The Sister Margaret Smith Centre provides gender and culturally sensitive individual and group counseling through residential and out-patient treatment. Addiction treatment services are also provided by the Thunder Bay Counselling Centre and the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre which provide complete substance abuse assessment, referral and support. A variety of treatment and/or rehabilitation counseling and support services are provided by a number of other agencies in the City of Thunder Bay. Three C's Reintroduction Centre is a 12-bed facility for males ages 16 and over with problems related to drugs and alcohol that have already been through a treatment program. Thunder Bay Seaway Non-profit Housing Corporation has 15 housing units and nine (9) one bedroom and six (6) two bedroom shared accommodation of housing for recovered adult substance abusers who must be in Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous and have come out of treatment or a recovery home. These adults must be in school or the equivalent to school. Crossroads Centre Incorporated is a 40-bed recovery home for male and females 18 years of age and over who suffer from substance abuse disorders. Dilico Ojibway Treatment Centre is a continuing care, short term residential treatment centre offering services in Ojibway and English. Services are delivered to First Nations people who reside on and off Reserve in the City and District of Thunder Bay. Ka-na-chi-hih- Specialized Solvent Abuse Treatment Centre is a long term residential treatment centre for chronic solvent-abusing Aboriginal clients 16-25 years of age. New Experiences is an outpatient agency which offers a dual disorder program providing substance abuse and mental health programming for youth. Northwestern Ontario Concurrent Disorders Program is an outpatient program which offers assessment, psychiatric care, assertive community treatment and case management of clients with concurrent disorders. North of Superior Programs is an assessment, continuing care and family intervention agency which offers counseling, referral and follow up services for individuals suffering from the effects of chemical abuse and problem gambling issues. The program is located in Longlac, Manitouwadge, Marathon, Nipigon, Terrace Bay and Geraldton.

Demand for services, absence of a medical detoxification program, and the need for appropriate addiction treatment which is often only available out of town all pose challenges for the TBDSSAB and its valued community partners in providing a sufficient level of services to meet the high needs and thus service demand of this extremely vulnerable population.

Health

Participation in Ontario Works in particular requires a basic level of 'health' or functional ability to complete mandatory program activities as outlined by legislation and clients' participation agreements. The assumption is generally made that persons in receipt of social assistance are capable of independent living; however we have found many clients have fallen through significant cracks in the health care system and are struggling to cope with basic activities of daily living which further result in barriers to employment. Providing services to this harder-to-serve clientele places significant demands upon existing caseworker staff time. For Ontario Works clients to be successful it is necessary for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and

Local Health Integrated Networks to ensure that health care services are accessible to Ontario Works participants in a timely manner. Staff participates on various committees made up of community agencies who deliberate upon the challenges, however provincial and LHIN leadership is needed to essential to address the gaps in services.

Criminal Justice/Corrections

A large number of services in the community connected to criminal justice and corrections. The following are organizations that provide criminal justice and corrections services such as Legal Aide, Corrections and Parole, John Howard Society and Salvation Army amongst many other police and criminal and justice agencies. Where possible, the TBDSSAB works in collaboration with these forms of agencies in assisting clients obtain services within the community to remove barriers to employment.

Child Care

Communities Together for Children is a community agency which provides information, support and resources for parents seeking child care as well as child care givers. Child care is offered to recipients of Ontario Works through formal (licensed child care) and informal (financial assistance with the cost of babysitting fees) assistance to remove child care as a barrier to employment. On average, 1300 families or 1800 children are assisted through this program each year.

District Servicing

District caseworkers endeavor to provide holistic servicing however it is not without significant challenges. Within the District access to services and transportation are major challenges due to geographic location and, absence or limited services within the communities. Similarly Ontario Works participants who reside outside in municipalities serviced by the City of Thunder Bay Delivery Agent have expressed challenges with the current limited transportation financial assistance as there is no accessible public transportation. Increased financial supports for transportation are needed by Ontario Works recipients residing in Northern Ontario so that they can meet their participation requirements.

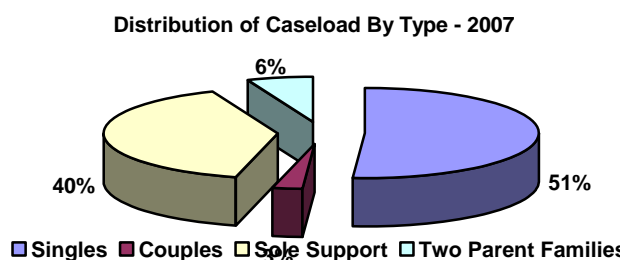
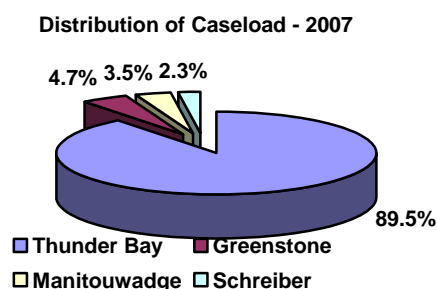
Section 3: Program Management

Service Delivery Rationale and Analysis of Resources

Ontario Works Delivery Agents

Given the TBDSSAB's vast geographic service area of 103,368 km² holding 15 member municipalities and unorganized areas, the Board currently contracts with four member municipalities to delivery services on its behalf. The TBDSSAB is currently deliberating upon whether it should become the direct employer of those who deliver services. The four delivery agents: City of Thunder Bay, Municipality of Greenstone, Township of Manitouwadge and Township of Schreiber service the regions of designated member municipalities and unorganized areas through five main offices and a number of satellite offices. Due to the vast area to be served the TBDSSAB is not able to access economies of scale in service delivery as would

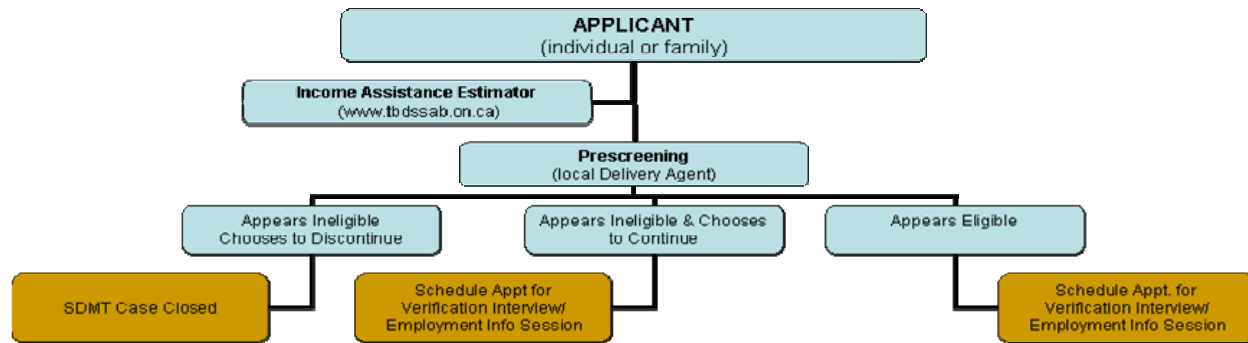
CMSMs and thus service delivery within the District of Thunder Bay is more demanding upon human and financial resources. Each of the four delivery agents utilizes a service delivery model that best meets the needs of their respective service areas (e.g., some have a generalist caseworker model where there is one person located in an office, others may use a specialist caseworker model to separate financial and employment assistance or, a combination of generalists and specialists depending upon the caseload assignment and necessity to travel to provide services). After conducting a comprehensive review of the City of Thunder Bay Service Delivery Model Administration for the TBDSSAB implemented a significant change in its service delivery model to streamline service delivery by correcting the negative effects of band-aid administration of the many provincial initiatives which have sporadically been implemented and to better service clients within the new employment funding framework. The City’s hybrid model provides the benefit of maximizing human resources capacity through the use of generalist caseworkers for intensive, LEAP and district servicing as well as caseworkers who are specialized to either the finance or employment case management and are paired to jointly provide services to clients. The City Ontario Works delivery agent also has a team of employment resource staff to provide direct training, workshops, and supports to OW participants involved in skills training, education, workshops, intensive case management as well as community and employment placements. Preliminary statistics are demonstrating improvements in servicing and outcomes, however due to continuing provincial funding restraints which prevent establishment of dedicated application team the TBDSSAB is currently unable to realize the full potential of this delivery model to service a monthly average of over 4,731 *in person* service requests in addition to a significant amount of written and telephone requests.



Local Screening

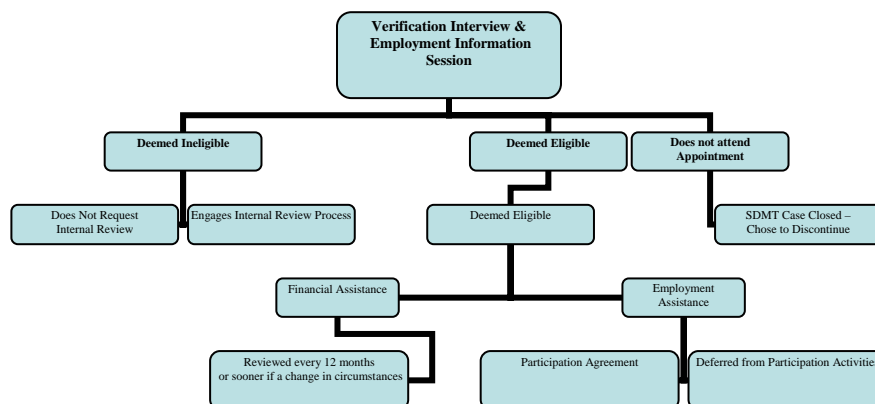
On April 1, 2005 application intake reverted back to the TBDSSAB. Clients calling to apply for Ontario Works Assistance call a local telephone number and are screened by local office staff. Most applicants are able to proceed with telephone screening and the non attendance for verification appointments has declined. Moreover, the TBDSSAB launched an eligibility estimator on its website to assist individuals with anonymous self prescreening for assistance and direction to the intake application telephone number should they elect to apply for assistance. Clients who are inappropriate for telephone screening are booked into a Verification Interview, thus by-passing the screening process. Each of the TBDSSAB’s Ontario Works Delivery Agents has their own process for booking appointments. To facilitate streamlined booking the Caseworkers Assistants who perform the screening function schedule the verification interview

appointments of applicants within the City of Thunder Bay. This is in contrast to appointments for counseling, participation agreement updates, consolidation verification process, family support, etc which are booked through a Scheduling Clerk which administers a centralized appointment booking system that has been proven to better maximize the utilization of interview rooms and time of front line staff leading to improved client servicing.



Applications

The TBDSSAB endeavors to process requests for Ontario Works assistance within four days of the screening interview as set out in the Provincial-Municipal Joint Protocol however due large influxes of applications and harder-to-serve client demands upon staff time this target is becoming increasingly difficult to meet. Recidivism rates of social assistance applications are high (approximately 70%) however SDMT needs to be updated and information verified as per the regulations. The limited availability of SDMT after hours adds to the challenge of meeting increased need. As applications are approaching the 4-day turnaround local staff will advise the supervisor to forewarn of the potential backlog in order that action can be taken. The corrective action comprises of temporary reassignment of responsibilities (reverting to a generalist model) which results in additional cost for staff overtime and backlog in other areas such as employment servicing including Participation Agreement updates. Collective Agreements provide for staff time off in lieu of overtime which then further negatively impacts service delivery as it is unrealistic to go through the expense of hiring and expending resources to training temporary staff on a sporadic basis. The TBDSSAB needs the Provincial government to understand the unique challenges the Board faces as a Northern Delivery Agent and to provide adequate provincial funding for service delivery including staffing a dedicated application team to meet the needs of citizens assisted within the Board’s vast geographic service area.



Intake and Emergency Assistance

Support expedited intake for victims of family violence

Support for victims of family violence is expedited as assessment occurs at the local level while the initial telephone intake is completed. Any situation deemed to be an emergency will be dealt with by the Caseworker Assistants or by Caseworkers, depending upon the Delivery Agent providing the service (i.e., only two of the Delivery Agents have Caseworker Assistants).

Access to Services Other than Ontario Works

Persons in need of information and referral to services other than Ontario Works may be referred to appropriate agencies by local office staff including Intake Reception, Caseworker Assistants, Caseworkers, as well as non-union and management staff. Every effort is made to provide referral assistance at initial point of contact. In many cases, callers are referred to the local Lakehead Social Planning Council, which is responsible for the Community Information & Referral to other services through the 211 service protocol.

Community Resources to Provide Emergency Help

The Ontario Works office co-ordinates community services to provide emergency help through partnerships with the Salvation Army, Emergency Shelter, Women Shelters and the Ontario Provincial Police. Staff from Ontario Works communicates with the agencies on a near daily basis to ensure that the emergency needs of applicants are met. Service agreements are in place to ensure that basic needs are provided for and where appropriate, applicants are fast-tracked to the Ontario Works office. In situations where transients are passing through, basic needs are met pursuant to agreements with the Ontario Works office to authorize per diem payment. In some situations and under extenuating circumstances, transportation is provided to move the transient to another municipality. A protocol is in place with the Ontario Provincial Police should the individual present themselves in the community after-hours. The TBDSSAB contracts with emergency shelters within the City of Thunder Bay to provide emergency shelter services. Each day Caseworker Assistants are in contact with the emergency shelters for daily bed lists and

verification of shelter services. A Caseworker Assistant also attends at each of the emergency shelters to provide onsite application servicing and referral assistance.

The TBDSSAB is involved with community action to consolidate the distribution of food bank services in the District. The Board approved funds for the payment of transportation costs relating to bulk purchases of foods and one-time funding for coordination of food distribution amongst the various food banks. There is a tremendous dependence in the community and reliance on food banks both within the rural and urban areas.

Where emergencies exist as a consequence of fire, Ontario Works staff link and/or refer victims to available services within the community for additional assistance. The Red Cross, Salvation Army, March of Dimes and food banks provides assistance in obtaining temporary shelter in hotel, replacement of clothing and food, as well as provision of recycled/refurbished furniture and household items. Information and referral services are provided to assist victims in applying for social housing.

Access information and resources to support effective participation planning

Each Delivery Agent manages appointment scheduling in a manner that fits within their municipal service delivery. Appointments with City Ontario Works front line staff for counseling, participation agreement updates, consolidation verification process, family support, etc are booked through a designated scheduling clerk utilizing a centralized appointment booking system that has been proven to better maximize the utilization of interview rooms and human resources leading to improved client servicing.

Ontario Works staff are well versed in the availability of community resources and accessing information to support effective participation planning. Although governed via different and at times conflicting legislation, efforts are made to coordinate services available through Ontario Works, Children's Services and Housing Services. Staff access resources to assist the client obtain more holistic services to meet their needs and thus facilitate removal of barriers to employment or applications to the Ontario Disability Support Program where applicable.

Ontario Works Financial Assistance is issued for basic needs, shelter, and emergency assistance. Financial assistance is available to families and individuals in need who meet eligibility requirements in Ontario. The cost of prescription medication is provided for all members of the Ontario Works benefit unit. In addition, back to school and winter clothing allowances, basic dental care, and eye care benefits are available for dependent children of Ontario Works recipients. A variety of discretionary benefits may be available to adult recipients based on need (e.g., emergency dental, dentures, prescription glasses, etc.)

Employment assistance is available to assist Ontario Works recipients in securing employment and becoming self-sufficient. Ontario Works administers regulated employment financial benefits as well as offers a range of employment programs and servicing. The types and availability of servicing varies across the District of Thunder Bay as a result of the availability or unavailability of community partners and resources. Increase in the annualized employment funding provided the TBDSSAB with the opportunity to offset some of the increasing costs in administration by movement of caseworkers with dedicated employment responsibility to the employment budget and allowing for the continuation of two contract employment resource

positions. One of these positions provides supports to community placements as well as intensive case management and outreach services for Ontario Works recipients who have significant health barriers who need assistance in obtaining the medical information required to apply for ODSP. The other position provides employment supports and case management to dependent adults and non disabled spouses of ODSP applicants. Increased employment funding also provided opportunity for the TBDSSAB to implement a training assistance program which provides financial assistance with the cost of training programs that were not accessible with the previous employment funding envelope.

The *Community Placement Program* is administered by all Delivery Agents matching a participant's skills and employment goals with a community agency or organization. Participants placed in agencies are able to gain valuable work experience through "on-the-job training". Financial support is available for transportation, child care, placement-related training and special clothing or equipment. The TBDSSAB has partnered with over 100 non-profit and public organizations through formal community placement agreements. The majority of participants self-initiate their placements, finding their own volunteer work with non-profit, public, or charitable organizations. Ontario Works has also designed community placements for the hard-to-serve participant group.

The *Enhanced Employment Placement Program* assists job-ready participants into paid employment by offsetting employer hiring and training costs. Participants are provided with training and financial assistance as they seek out employment opportunities within private and public sectors or within not-for-profit organizations. Financial support is available for transportation, child care, and other employment expenses to assist in the job search process and maintain employment secured through this program. The TBDSSAB has entered into formal employment placement agreements with three agencies that assist participants to find jobs with employers in the community.

Employment Supports (training) and counseling services are provided to participants of Ontario Works. Training includes WHMIS, Smart Serve, Hospitality Training, Customer Service Training, Janitorial Training, computer training, Resume, Cover Letter and Interviewing workshops amongst many others in the City. In the District caseworkers assist clients to access community training including but not limited to WHMIS, Smart Serve, computer, literacy, education, etc. Financial assistance may include the cost of travel, registration fees, safety equipment, and clothing necessary to obtain employment. With the end to enhanced funding, the TBDSSAB entered into creative and mutually beneficial partnerships with educational and community agencies to provide on-site servicing for participants at the City's Employment Resource Centre. In many of these arrangements the TBDSSAB provides the space and supports to clients, where the partner provides or participates in direct programming and covers all or some of the external costs for teachers, instruction and equipment.

The *Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP)* provides intensive case management assistance to young parents aged sixteen to twenty-one years who have not finished high school and are receiving financial assistance through Ontario Works or ODSP. LEAP provides supports and incentives and promotes the completion of high school, participation in school co-op programs, apprenticeship programs, work experience programs, summer job experience, and

community participation towards the attainment of employment skills. LEAP also promotes learning about parenting and child development through participation in parenting or child development programs within the community. Upon successful completion of the three components of the LEAP program, participants are given a \$500 bursary towards post secondary education for themselves or their child. On average, seventy young parents participate in the program each month.

The *Addiction Services Initiative (ASI)* assists participants of Ontario Works who have an addiction to alcohol or other drugs that poses a barrier to employment. Two specialized Ontario Works Addiction Counsellors manage a caseload of approximately 225 clients and work with a community agency based outreach team that provide persistent outreach to approximately 135 of the ASI participants. The Manitouwadge Delivery Agent provides one specialized Ontario Works Addiction Counsellor to deliver ASI services in the District. Our key commitment is to provide a high level of service to ASI participants in order to enable them to deal successfully with their addiction(s) and move back into the work force. The TBDSSAB's service delivery model was developed in collaboration with an Advisory Group of addictions treatment and service agencies and later extended to Child Welfare agencies, probation and parole and other important stakeholders. The model was developed to respond as best as possible within the confines of provincial and municipal funding to the needs of Ontario Works participants and address gaps in the addiction service system within which clients were being lost. Intensive case management and persistent outreach services are proven necessities in keeping clients with addictions engaged in addiction treatment and support services so that they can address their substance addictions as barriers to employment. Provincial funding for the TBDSSAB's service delivery of the ASI program has been slated for significant reduction in 2010 which will have a negative impact upon clients and District of Thunder Bay communities. The current ASI funding level is a necessity in responding to the continuing demand for service from Ontario Works clients needing to remove this barrier to employment and move forward towards achievement of their self potential including employment outcomes. A reduction in ASI funding will intuitively result in long-term increases in social assistance payments and dependency as the addictions remain untreated and consequently financial costs to other social and health care systems. The ASI program alleviates loss of life and, reduction to servicing under this program may undermine the existing deterrent nature that accompanies connection with services.

The *Literacy screening and training program* was established to assist Ontario Works participants who cannot get or keep a job because they do not have basic reading, writing, and math skills. The program connects participants with training providers based on the individual needs of the client. Screening is done during verification interviews however, under certain circumstances, participants may be exempt from the literacy program.

Other Ontario Works Supports which historically have been provided to serve the needs of Ontario Works participants include:

Ontario Works Applications: in 2007 4,147 applications received of which 1,100 applicants chose to discontinue their application, 884 were deemed ineligible and 2,745 were granted assistance. As mentioned earlier application screening and verification interviews are under great human resources pressure in the City Delivery Agent due to the combination of these responsibilities together with case management and other tasks. Within the City there are three

Caseworker Assistants assigned to the screening function as well as emergency hostels, emergency assistance, reinstatements, eligibility determination for the Emergency Rent and Energy Fund as well as other administrative responsibilities. The frequency of applications within the District is more manageable, however due to geographic distances these resources cannot be engaged to assist during months of high applications and reinstatements in the City.

Internal Review and Appeal Services: Applicants and recipients of Ontario Works wishing to challenge decisions of ineligibility for mandatory benefits may request an internal review and further appeal to the Social Benefit Tribunal (SBT) if they continue to disagree with the decision. An independent Internal Review/Case Presenting Officer performs the internal reviews and represents the Ontario Works Administrator at SBT hearings. In 2007 there were 308 internal reviews conducted by 1.05 workers and 40 scheduled appeals. The number of appeals represents 1.4% of all applications granted which is low and indicative of the good work that staff doing.

Addiction Services (AS): Financial support, counseling, intensive case management, and appropriate referrals into the integrated community addiction services system are provided for Ontario Works participants within the District of Thunder Bay who have an addiction to alcohol or other drugs which poses a barrier to employment. There were 392 individuals participating in AS in 2007.

Family Support (FS): Assists Ontario Works recipients, who are custodial parents of dependent children, pursue financial support to which they may be entitled, including preparation of support agreements when support obligations are not contested. Referrals totaling 687 were made in 2007. The TBDSSAB currently has two Family Support Workers in the City of Thunder Bay and has contracted with the Township of Schreiber for provision of a contracted person who delivers Family Support, Eligibility Review, the Consolidated Verification Process as well as Internal Review and Case Presenting services for the three District Delivery Agents. The Enhanced Family Support Initiative funding framework is problematic as while Family Support Workers have high workloads and go to extremes to assist clients in obtaining support agreements or court orders, they have no control as to whether or not the Family Responsibility Office collects upon them. Moreover, external factors such as the economic downturn, payor incarcerations, payor residence and employer unknown, payors being social assistance recipients themselves or are residing on First Nations Reserves where support enforcement is not occurring all directly impact whether or not performance targets can be achieved. The funding framework and performance targets should be based upon the services provided (that which is in control of Service Managers) versus upon outcomes which are under the control of the province (i.e., FRO) or others.

Eligibility Review (ER): Investigates and assesses eligibility of recipients alleged to be abusing the social assistance system. In 2007 a total of 129 allegations were investigated by 1.05 persons. In 2007 the City of Thunder Bay Delivery Agent which usually has two full-time ER officers was short staffed by one due to a terminal illness. This vacancy has now been filled. The .05 is reflective of the District Eligibility Officer who also provide Family Support Worker, Consolidated Verification Program services, Internal Review and Case Presenting Services for the three district delivery agents.

Child Care assistance is provided in partnership with the Children's Services Division. Ontario Works participants may access either informal child care through their Ontario Works

caseworker or formal child care with fee subsidy through the Children's Services Division. Ontario Works caseworkers in the District Delivery Agents are utilized to perform child care fee subsidy income testing and track attendance. Informal child care is direct funding for Ontario Works participants and from an administrative perspective the inclusion of this funding with the Children's Services Division budget (which is separate and apart from the Ontario Works Division and its budgets) is inefficient. A streamlined approach for informal child care benefit would be to include funding for this benefit within the Ontario Works client benefits budget and remove it from the Children's Services Budget. Funding for Ontario Works clients for formal child care remains appropriate for inclusion within the Children's Services Budget as they are administering fee subsidy and other programs for licensed child care.

Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program funding is funded by the Province at 100 percent. The TBDSSAB distributes funding to agencies within the District who assist individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in a variety of ways be it supports to daily living for persons with health issues or a homeless outreach program to assist harder to serve low income resident navigate through systems to access housing.

Emergency Energy Fund is provided at 100% provincial dollars however the current amount of funding is insufficient to address the needs of low-income citizens in the District of Thunder Bay. For the second year in a row, the funds have run out before the end of April. The TBDSSAB currently receives \$33,630 annually and has repeatedly requesting more funding from the province without success. The 10% allowance from administration fees is insufficient to pay for the human resources needed to administer this initiative. The TBDSSAB urges the province to increase this funding as non payment of utilities within the Northern winter extreme condition can result in life threatening situations, as well as promotes eviction and increased homelessness as well as applications for Ontario Works financial assistance.

National Child Benefit Reinvestment Funds have historically been administered directly by the TBDSSAB through Ontario Works or indirectly through partnership with community agencies to deliver services to alleviate the effects of child poverty. Ontario Works had been issuing payments directly to recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. Partnerships with community agencies were developed to deliver breakfast and other nutritional programs, provide family poverty prevention initiatives to urban aboriginal low income families, provide basic recreational opportunities for children amongst many other services. The TBDSSAB has yet to deliberate upon the future of the NCBRF which official program is destined to cease due to the provincial restructuring of social assistance in Ontario.

Staff Training and Development

The TBDSSAB continues to support Ontario Works staff through the provision of contracted training to meet identified needs as well through provincial initiatives such as the Advanced Caseworker Training and upcoming Sail. Delivery Agents provide local training for their respective staff and within the City of Thunder Bay development of a comprehensive training program has occurred and has received positive feedback from temporary staff. Over the next few years the training program will continue to be refined and extended to other positions within Ontario Works. Should the TBDSSAB become the employer this training program would evolve to incorporate the various district delivery models. A balance between training opportunities and servicing clients and appropriate timing of training is imperative to facilitating timely delivery of services to clients. Backlogs occur as a result of training and it is often difficult to catch up in a timely manner due to the limitation of hours of SDMT, hours of operation under collective agreements, and the financial and servicing costs resulting from overtime.

Business Practices

The service delivery model of the City Delivery Agent which services the majority of TBDSSAB Ontario Works clients has undergone extensive review and changes. Minor refinements occur from time to time, however over the next two years changes to the service delivery model is not anticipated to any significant degree unless additional cost-shared funding is provided by the province and the TBDSSAB for a dedicated application team. Other than the necessity for a dedicated application team, both clients and staff need time to adjust to the changes. Due to staff health issues and absences which are the norm with an aging work force, the City Delivery Agent has yet to experience the full potential of the service delivery model within its full FTE staff complement. Within the TBDSSAB's 2008 budget submission is request for provincial funding for a Quality Assurance/Regulatory Analyst position to ensure that policy and training materials are kept current with Ministry directives and legislative changes, to conduct file reviews to better ensure regulatory and policy compliance, to perform reviews of the contracted services being provided through by community partners, assist with causal analysis and correction of erroneous overpayments, and develop and manage a better communication system through screening, consolidation of incoming communication and electronic management of a communication resource database which would facilitate more efficient use of human resources and address administrative backlog. Given the significant administrative challenges with incoming communication in various and the breadth of our partnerships with community agencies, complexity of SDMT and Ontario Works Administration, this position is a necessity of the TBDSSAB is to continue to explore and expand its relationships with community partners.

Should the TBDSSAB become the employer within the next two years, a review of the district service delivery models will occur and efficiencies are anticipated in collection of data and budget management.

Relative to business practices effecting employment servicing, the TBDSSAB strives to utilize the cost-shared employment funding in a manner that maximizes the budget to provide a breadth of services, training opportunities, and financial employment supports for participants. Accordingly, the TBDSSAB plans to continue to deliver responsive employment programming in a manner that meets the needs of participants and employers and maximizes capacity through

productive partnerships with community agencies and business. The TBDSSAB is currently developing stand alone employment assessment and case management software to better assist front line Ontario Works staff in assessment of client barriers to employment as well as perform a variety of administrative functions to assist Administration with service planning that meets the changing needs of clients. This software has minimal overlap with SDMT information and is anticipated to be implemented within the two year cycle however will take time before it is fully populated and functional with existing client information due to limited resources to meet with existing clients to perform the assessments and populate the software.

The TBDSSAB is interested in working with the province in development of software that permits the collection of tombstone application data for population into SDMT, the Ontario Child Care Management System and Yardi so that shared clients with proper consents only have to provide their basic information once to apply for assistance from one or more of the programs. Should this be accomplished future changes to the delivery model will be made to better integrate the application processes for Ontario Works, Child Care and Housing Services.

Section 4: Outcome Strategies

Service Strategy Rationale

Within existing limited staffing resources relative to demands of time upon various client groups, Ontario Works caseworkers must ensure to balance services amongst all types of benefit units with varying levels of educational achievement to support a steady flow of client achievement to maintain employment funding levels (i.e., as much or more attention needs to be focused upon increasing employability through removal of barriers which intuitively is expected to progress to employment earnings and exits to employment in absence of crisis and further barriers arising). The former service level funding promoted staff's focus on placing clients into existing services to achieve funding for continued programming rather than putting client needs first. In contrast over the last few years in response to direction Ontario Works staff have reverted to grassroots social work through the providing individualized assistance to clients to overcome barriers and assist them with their educational and employment needs as best as possible within the confines of the legislation, provincial policy and funding.

Caseloads within the District Delivery Agents are manageable to afford caseworkers with sufficient time to get to know their clients needs. However the City delivery agent caseworkers administering financial and employment services administered to mainstream clients are managing caseloads in excess of 210 between each pair and thus face challenges in developing strong and positive working relationships with clients. While this challenge cannot be overcome with existing caseload levels (caseloads of 75:1 employment worker would be appropriate, more efficient and effective) a strategy for a concentrated caseload existing within caseworker pair caseloads was implemented. Each caseworker with employment responsibilities is required to manage a concentrated caseload of up to 34 participants with whom if they are not engaged in daily education or skills programming at the Employment Resource Centre, will meet in person on a monthly basis to provide concentrated employment supports and assistance. Staff in the Employment Resource Centre also provides one-to-one services on a scheduled and drop in basis for the mainstream caseload.

Existing skills programming and services will continued to be provided to Ontario Works participants so long as funding and community partner resources remain unchanged. It is hoped that the success of the 2008 pilot of the Training and Internship Program will bring forth provincial support through additional annualized employment funding. Given the Ontario Works participant low education levels, focus and support to clients in achieving their high school diploma is a priority. Sustainable employment in the North most often requires post secondary education and staff are encouraging clients to make use of whatever resource may be to their avail to engage in opportunities to achieve a better quality of life and independence from social assistance. The TBDSSAB currently has strong partnerships with community agencies and offers a wide range of services which is response to client and employer needs. Over the next two years the TBDSSAB will continue to offer and market existing services as well as potentially develop or facilitate access to other programming as needs and resources are identified.

Given the pending significant reductions to the TBDSSAB's ASI program a comprehensive third party review was commenced in 2007 and is expected to be complete in fall of 2008. Changes to the TBDSSAB's service delivery model over the 2008 service year will remain unchanged. The outcome of the review will be deliberated upon by the TBDSSAB and the province will be requested to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding the future of this program.

Linking of Strategies to Outcome Measures including Increased Employability Strategies

As identified earlier, our service strategy is the provision of fundamental grassroots social services which assist Ontario Works participants address their barriers to employment. Applying humanistic theory and Maslow's Heirarchy of Needs within the milieu of employment servicing, we endeavor to provide a continuum of more holistic services to assist Ontario Works participants on an individualized basis overcome their barriers to employment. Increasing employability equates to removal of barriers which may range from assisting participants towards meet their basic needs and employment supports within the financial confines of the legislation, referral to other community resources to access services and supports to address health and other social barriers to employment, provision of ASI services, in-house education, skills and training programs as available depending upon the Delivery Agent, community education, skills and training programs and workshops, community and employment placements and supports which provide opportunities for skill building, work experience and job references. We feel that removal of barriers is the key towards removal of life challenges thus promoting a higher quality of life which includes assisting clients who are physically able to work to achieve increased their employability, obtain and maintain employment and financial independence. For Ontario Works clients who are physically unable to work and wish to apply for ODSP assistance, again depending upon the geographic location and availability of services in the community we provide varying degrees of assistance (depending upon functioning and complexity of situation) ranging from assistance with completion of the client portions of the ODSP application form through to assistance in navigating the system including accessing a physician if they don't have a family doctor and providing outreach type supports to assist them attend their medical appointments and obtain the medical information required. Our continuum of services is flexible in that depending upon the client's current individual needs they may access services at any point along the continuum that corresponds with outcome measures.

As indicated earlier, smaller caseloads in the District Delivery Agents facilitate the provision of holistic services and high functioning client-worker business relationships. Due to high caseload to worker assignment within the City the caseloads employment workers are providing concentrated case management for a limited number of participants (based upon capacity of worker time and SDMT availability). The concentrated case management caseloads is a strategy to facilitate the range of outcomes (increased employability, increased employment earnings, exits to employment) and achievement of the employment targets identified each service year.

The Employment Training and Internship Program being piloted is an excellent example of a strategy to link increased employability services to employment outcomes by maximizing and building upon existing capacity, utilizing strong community partnerships and engaging in more structured partnerships with the business community. Through partnership between Ontario Works, the Ontario March of Dimes and Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Works participants are provided with a range of skills and training which meets host employer needs. Many participants for this program are drawn directly from completion of existing in-house or community based training and existing Ontario Works employment resources staff is used to facilitate this process. After training the Ontario Works participant enters a 4-week internship with the host employer during which time the participant and employer are provided with intensive employment supports including counseling and modeling of job retention strategies to support sustainability of an employee-employer relationship after the internship has ended. If the Ontario Works intern is successful in the internship s/he may receive an offer of employment from the host employer. If they are not offered a position is available, the Ontario March of Dimes will assist the Ontario Works participant to draw upon the skills learned and experience and references obtained to acquire employment placement elsewhere. Both Ontario Works participants and host employers are provided with incentives to participate and develop positive working relationships. Within the few short months that this pilot has been operating in 2008 employer interest in participating has grown from 5 to 13 employers. The TBDSSAB was fortunate to access Northern 2007 surplus provincial employment funding of \$127,720 (added to 2008 employment budget) on a one-time basis to pilot this nine month project between March 1 and December 31, 2008. The TBDSSAB cost-shared in this initiative by contributed a further 20% (\$32,430) of the cost. Annualized additional employment funding of approximately \$216,200 (\$172,960 provincial, \$43,240 municipal) per is needed to sustain this program through to the calendar year of 2009 and beyond. Of important note is that of the 20 Ontario Works participants who have completed their internships thus far, 9 were offered employment by their host employer and an additional 4 have obtained employment elsewhere demonstrating a preliminary 70% success rate for this pilot.

Action Steps and Resources

Employment

Given that the TBDSSAB maximizes the employment funding envelope to maximize capacity and service delivery, in absence of further provincial funding it must stay on course to continue to maintain relationships and strategies in place. Moreover monitoring and evaluation of existing services is an essential ongoing process to ensure that service delivery responds to client need and delivers the program within budget and service requirements.

The TBDSSAB will continue with development and implementation of the employment assessment software. Additional one-time employment funding in 2009 would assist the TBDSSAB to obtain temporary staff to perform the assessments and populate data into tool as valuable service planning data and front line staff time efficiencies will be garnered once the tool is fully operational and populated.

Ontario Works Administrations within the District of Thunder Bay strive to employ highly qualified staff to provide quality services. For example, caseworker staff of the City of Thunder Bay Delivery Agent either poses a diploma in social service worker or a degree in social work. Addiction Counsellors of the ASI program possess special qualifications and expertise in the area of substance addictions. The TBDSSAB requires that community partners in the provision of contracted services employ qualified staff to facilitate the provision of efficient and quality services.

Ontario Works Staff will continue to maintain and build partnerships for additional servicing as capacity allows in response to the need for services.

Administration

In addition to the annual budget requests, the TBDSSAB foresees the need for provincial cost-sharing on additional costs in 2009 and beyond relative to the coverage of former in-kind municipal service costs, a Quality Assurance/Regulatory Analyst position as well as potential financial assistance for addressing the service gap relative to applications and meeting the four day turn around. The TBDSSAB's administration will be reviewing the existing process and making recommendations to the Board. Potential changes relative to the TBDSSAB becoming the employer of Ontario Works staff require comprehensive analysis.

Stakeholder Linkages

The TBDSSAB and other Ontario Works Service Managers have been working within the new funding model over the last few years. Existing Stakeholder relationships/linkages have been redeveloped and new linkages have been established and currently exist in manner that leverages support to employment outcomes for clients who are physically and psychologically able to work. As previously indicated Ontario Works Administration and Staff are actively engaged with stakeholders and strategies have been implemented to provide a continuum of services that are responsive to stakeholder needs within the confines of the legislation and funding envelopes.

The TBDSSAB is interested in developing a stronger partnership with the Ministry to maintain existing program funding for all employment programs and support for new strategies that support financial independence and a higher quality of life for Ontario Works recipients.

Addressing Service Gaps

The following service gaps have been identified within this plan followed by information concerning the TBDSSAB and Ontario Works staff's role and recommendations for addressing same:

- ***Inadequate social assistance rates*** are creating barriers to Ontario Works participant's attainment of basic needs resulting in a preoccupation with activities towards meeting basic needs (e.g., attending food banks, free clothing agencies, looking for more affordable housing, etc.). Recommendation: that provincial regulatory amendment are made to financial assistance rates to make these rates on par with basic financial assistance rates prior to the 21% reduction instituted by the Progressive Conservative Party plus retro-active cost of living increases. This would be a positive step towards reduction of child and family poverty and would increase the quality of life for our most vulnerable and at risk citizens, thus allowing them to refocus on increasing their employability and accessing job opportunity that promote financial independence from social assistance.
- ***Transportation*** issues due to geographic challenges. Ontario Works staff provides financial assistance for transportation and employment supports as provided in the legislation and provincial directives. Recommendation: that in recognition of the distances that must be traveled that the province make changes to allow for additional transportation assistance for Ontario Works recipients who reside in areas that do not have access to public transportation.
- ***Application Intake*** delays and inability to meet applicant need and the four-day requirement within the City of Thunder Bay occurs frequently each calendar year. In response Ontario Works staff are temporarily reassigned to provide application intake services resulting in case management activities and regulated participation updates falling behind. Recommendation: that provincial and municipal funding be provided to staff a dedicated application team to meet applicant needs, regulated requirements, and produce greater efficiency in service delivery. As the environmental scan and Statistics Canada information demonstrate more and more residents of the District areas are moving to the City of Thunder Bay for services. Further, that the migration of aboriginal peoples from reserves to the City of Thunder Bay is occurring at a steady rate. It is estimated that between 50 – 70% of the TBDSSAB's caseload is of aboriginal ethnicity. A dedicated application team that includes qualified aboriginal staff would support to provision of culturally sensitive services at entry to the system.
- ***Child Care for Ontario Works Sole Support Recipients who require hospitalization*** is not readily available on a 24 hour basis. Although infrequent yet still problematic sole support recipients face significant challenges when needing to enter hospital for medical procedures requiring one or more overnight stays. Currently the TBDSSAB provides financial assistance with the cost of such child care through the use of National Child Benefit Reinvestment Funds (NCBRF) in these exceptional situations, however as indicated earlier the future of continued municipal funding as a result of provincial social assistance restructuring has yet to be determined. Member municipalities do not provide the TBDSSAB

with additional municipal funds for Ontario Works beyond the program cost-sharing arrangements with the province. Recommendation: that the Directives be amended to provide financial assistance for 24 hour child care in such exceptional circumstances. Alternatively, such families may be faced with Child Welfare Agencies taking temporary care of these children at a higher expense than the direct provision of financial assistance.

- ***Counseling Support for Students in the SAM (Single Adolescent Mothers)/MISOL (Mothers in Search of Learning) programs and for High School Students overall*** would facilitate the achievement of higher education and thus reduce current high drop out rates and potential future need for social assistance. In the past using Enhanced Funding the TBDSSAB provided intensive support (beyond the LEAP program) to students attending the SAM/MISOL program as well as students in the Structured Learning centre of the Employment Resource Centre. This intensive service supported positive outcomes (i.e., attainment of high school diplomas) for an increasing number of independent learners. Absence of this intensive case management has demonstrated negative outcomes in student attendance due to challenges in coping with crisis as well as parenting challenges. Recently Ontario Works staff met with stakeholder to encourage the Lakehead School Board to provide social work support to students of this program. Recommendation: that provincial government develop a comprehensive strategy to support maintenance and post secondary education for low income families through the provision of education grants to low-income families, exclusion of educational loans as income relative to social assistance benefits, and for funding to be allocated to Educational Boards for the provision of social workers for students in all high schools to promote attainment of education and encouragement of post secondary education, provide counseling and support on pregnancy prevention, and supports to single adolescent parents thus promoting higher quality of life and prevention of high school drop out and future need for social assistance.
- ***Service Delivery Model Technology*** that supports both the financial and employment service delivery and provides functionality to manage housing and child care programs in an efficient and effective manner is needed. The TBDSSAB is responding to the gap in service relative to adequate employment servicing technology through the current development of employment service delivery software. Recommendation: that the provincial government either upgrades SDMT to meet service delivery administrative needs for all social assistance programs or, to obtain new technology which does.
- ***Dental care*** assistance through Ontario Works for adults is insufficient to meet recipient needs. Social assistance recipients in the North are continuing to face difficulties accessing dental services as dental professionals are choosing not to service this clientele due to lower remuneration and high no show rates. Recommendation: that the provincial government legislative for financial assistance be provided for Ontario Works adult recipients to access dental services (beyond emergencies) and that remuneration for dental services be provided at adequate levels to increase accessibility to dental services.
- ***Insufficient trained resources to provide service delivery during staff training programs exceeding one day in length*** resulting in backlog of service delivery and not meeting regulatory time requirements. Recommendation: that the timing, training location, cost and impact of service delivery be taken into consideration when providing staff training

opportunities and that sufficient and adequate financial and human resources and timing be afforded to Service Managers to facilitate staff training.

- ***Types and availability of services within smaller district communities varies*** resulting in gaps to accessing needed services. Currently Ontario Works staff in the District has linkages with existing community partners to maximize educational, skills, community and employment placement opportunities among other services for Ontario Works participants. The provision of additional financial assistance for transportation, accommodation and child care would assist to bridge the gap by facilitating access to services in the nearest municipal location with agencies providing the needed service.
- ***Addiction Services*** required by Ontario Works participants are in high demand however current staffing levels in Ontario Works and with our partners are insufficient to quickly respond to the large demand. This program is currently slated for reduction in provincial funding which if proceeds will increase this gap in service for Ontario Works participants resulting in less Ontario Works participants who have addictions as a barrier to employment will be assisted and continued long-term dependence upon social assistance will result in the midst of further physical and mental health deterioration at greater cost to other social and health care systems.
- ***Family Support Services*** are currently provided by Ontario Works staff that manages high request levels. However, the Enhanced Family Support Initiative funding framework is problematic as while Family Support Workers have high workloads and go to extremes to assist clients in obtaining support agreements or court orders, they have no control as to whether or not the Family Responsibility Office collects upon them. Moreover, external factors such as the economic downturn, payor incarcerations, payor residence and employer unknown, payors being social assistance recipients themselves or are residing on First Nations Reserves where support enforcement is not occurring all directly impact whether or not performance targets can be achieved. Recommendation: the funding framework and performance targets be based upon the services provided (that which is in control of Service Managers) versus upon outcomes which are under the control of the province (i.e., FRO) or others.
- ***Energy Emergency Fund*** provides critical financial assistance to low-income families to address energy arrears, maintain a healthy environment, and prevent eviction, homelessness and greater demand upon other social services. A service gap exists in that the provincial annual allocation of \$33,630 is insufficient and the TBDSSAB has repeatedly requesting more funding from the province without success. The 10% allowance from administration fees is insufficient to pay for the human resources needed to administer this initiative. Recommendation: that the provincial government increase the energy emergency fund to \$134,520 annually to meet the needs of Northern residents residing in the TBDSSAB's geographic service area thereby further preventing eviction and increased homelessness as well as applications for Ontario Works financial assistance.

In addition, this service plan has identified a number of service gaps within the community that are outside of the TBDSSAB's mandate or control that pose challenges for Ontario Works participants thus creating barriers to employment. Provincial government leaderships and commitment is needed to address these gaps:

- ***Communication and collaboration*** between the province and Service Managers at the current level and flow is resulting in gaps in service. Recommendation: The TBDSSAB needs the province to respond to Service Manager's needs for better communication, consultation, advance notice of change and appropriate time to implement new or changing provincial directives or initiatives so as to not place the existing service delivery models in a state of dysfunction resulting in inefficiencies. As much as possible service planning at the front line needs to be collaborative and proactive in mind of a changing environment rather than reactive to a changing environment.
- ***Economic and job opportunities*** within the District of Thunder Bay require enhancement to realize sustainable employment opportunities for social assistance recipients. While Ontario Works staff engage with Economic Development and Tourism stakeholders to facilitate employment opportunities for clients, leadership and assistance to municipalities is required by higher levels of government to facilitate business staying in or coming to the North. Recommendation: that the provincial and federal governments initiate economic incentives for business to stay in or move to the North and provide mandatory full-time permanent employment with benefits to residents of the North. Further, that both provincial and federal government creates sustainable employment opportunities for Northern residents by relocating government offices to Northern municipalities. That promotion and incentives be provided to support employment opportunities for aboriginal peoples given that according to Statistics Canada Census that this population is under employed and has lower employment income levels.
- ***Conflicting legislation*** and separate service delivery technology for Ontario Works, Child Care and Social Housing programs creates inefficiencies in client services and promotes gaps in service. Recommendation: that the province undertake legislative amendments so that eligibility requirements correspond and regulatory changes to not create challenges in accessibility to services.
- ***Health Care*** and the inadequate levels of physicians and specialists in the North is resulting in gaps in the health care system which impact upon Ontario Works participant's abilities to overcome barriers to employment. The social service system relies upon the health care system to address medical conditions which may present a functional barrier to independence, and by extension, participation in social service programs geared towards achieving or maintaining independence. Recommendation: that the provincial government and Local Integrated Health Networks address the current service gaps in the District of Thunder Bay and Northern Ontario.
- ***Medical Detoxification Services*** are desperately needed in the District of Thunder Bay given the increasing addition social challenge facing Northern communities. Currently through the ASI program the TBDSSAB assist Ontario Works participants to access these specialized services through transportation at great expense to services located outside of the community. Recommendation: that the a medical detoxification facility and services be located in the City of Thunder Bay to provided services to Northern Ontario residents who require these services.
- ***Housing***, in particular access to safe and affordable housing within the current maximum shelter allowance rates for Ontario Works participants continues to be a gap in service,

particularly relative to the need for one bedroom units. Moreover, insufficient support housing continues to pose significant barriers to employment for Ontario Works participants who are able physically able and desire to work, however require supportive services to maintain independent living. Ontario Works staff works in partnership with community agencies, Housing Services and Housing Providers in an attempt to bridge this service gap within their limited capacity. Recommendation: that regulated maximum shelter allowance rates be increased to provide all Ontario Works clients with access to safe and affordable housing and, that adequate supportive housing be implemented in the District of Thunder Bay to support independent living and remove housing as a barrier to employment.

Increased Employability Strategies

Applying humanistic theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we endeavor to provide a continuum of more holistic services to assist Ontario Works participants on an individualized basis overcome their barriers to employment. Increasing employability equates to removal of barriers which may range from assisting participants towards meet their basic needs and employment supports within the financial confines of the legislation, referral to other community resources to access services and supports to address health and other social barriers to employment, provision of ASI services, in-house education, skills and training programs as available depending upon the Delivery Agent, community education, skills and training programs and workshops, community and employment placements and supports which provide opportunities for skill building, work experience and job references. We feel that removal of barriers is the key towards removal of life challenges thus promoting a higher quality of life which includes assisting clients who are physically able to work to increased their employability, and obtain and maintain more sustainable employment and financial independence.

Monitoring Service Strategies

While accountability to taxpayers for service costs is a recognized necessity in the delivery of public services, the potential attachment of funding for servicing future clients to the achievements of existing clients is inappropriate. Under the current funding framework Ontario Works Service Managers must rely upon the province for accurate and timely statistical information on outcomes as well as the ability to renegotiate baselines in response to economic and social conditions impacting successful employment achievements of clients. In absence of the employment assessment software currently under development when determining baselines and outcome performance targets the Ontario Works Administration relies heavily upon provincially provided statistical data and researches external economic and environmental data to estimate potential trends in service needs and employment outcomes. The Data Resource Guide is information that is reviewed on a regular basis to monitor outcomes relative to performance targets and take appropriate action if needed. Where possible the TBDSSAB has been utilizing trend analysis within its service planning, however this at times proves to be challenging as the source of statistical information changes resulting in non comparable data. We look forward to a time when our employment software that is currently under development is fully operational and populated, as valuable information will be garnered to assist in servicing planning and monitoring.