

---

# Niagara Region

---

**REPORT TO:** Co-Chairs and Members of Public Health and Social Services Committee

**SUBJECT:** Community Services/Niagara Regional Housing Pilot: Family Support Worker Shared Service Agreement

---

## RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommends to Regional Council that this report be received for information.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Child/spousal support is key to increasing the prosperity for families in Niagara.
- Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) Family Support Workers (FSWs) have over 11 years of experience with assisting social assistance recipients with obtaining the child/spousal support they are legally entitled to receive under the *Family Law Act*.
- There are 865 Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) owned units that can accommodate tenants with dependents; 69% are not on social assistance.
- As a result, there are NRH families that have not received the support of an FSW to pursue child/spousal support they are legally entitled to receive.
- The goals of the pilot are to increase the number of support provisions in place and the average amount of support in pay for NRH families not on social assistance, resulting in increased income for families and the reduction of rent subsidy.
- The pilot is derived from a business case that was vetted and responded to at the March 31, 2009 NRH Operating Agreement Steering Committee (NRHOASC).
- The pilot is an example of how Niagara is developing an appropriate and meaningful way to provide a seamless integrated service that is responsive to the needs of families to address the issue of poverty.
- In the first quarter of 2010, 56 NRH families have received information, referrals and support from the FSW.
- One family has successfully moved from subsidized to market rent as a result of securing child support.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is no impact to the SAEO 2010 budget as NRH has provided the payment to SAEO for the full cost recovery of the half time FSW salary and benefits for the duration of the one year pilot.

Although early in the process, it is anticipated that NRH will see increased revenue through subsidy reduction. NRH will continue to monitor the program and determine if revenue generated through this pilot program supports associated staffing costs.

## **PURPOSE**

This report has been prepared to provide information about the Community Services/ NRH pilot to provide Family Support Worker services for NRH tenants not on social assistance.

## **BACKGROUND**

SAEO as the delivery agent for the Ontario Works program provides income support and a range of employment assistance opportunities to low income families and individuals throughout the Niagara region. SAEO focuses on early assessment and targeting of interventions to support clients in progressing toward employment in the local economy. Supports and program interventions such as mental health, victims of domestic violence and addictions programming, community/employment placements, targeted training, and job search are part of SAEO's full range of service. Community program referrals are made based on the needs of individuals in a broader family context to ensure that essential supports to independence are in place such as child care, transportation, and housing.

As a condition of eligibility, social assistance recipients are required to make reasonable efforts to pursue all available income including child support or spousal supports which he/she, or a dependent may be entitled.

SAEO employs seven FSWs that assist social assistance recipients with obtaining the child/spousal support they are legally entitled to receive under the *Family Law Act*. If support is in pay, the adequacy and compliance with pertinent legislation such as the Child Support Guidelines is reviewed. If support provisions are not in place the FSW assists the parties in negotiating a support agreement as this process tends to be less adversarial and reduces administrative costs. The outcome is an increase in the number and value of child/spousal support arrangements that are in place for clients resulting in a reduction of the funding required through the Ontario Works program. SAEO has consistently demonstrated a high level of performance in both the number and value of support agreements.

NRH provides affordable housing through the calculation of rent that is based on the household's income; including child and spousal support. Each tenant is required by legislation to pursue all income sources to ensure that rent subsidy is paid at the correct rate for the household. NRH tenants that are in receipt of social assistance receive the support of an FSW to pursue child/spousal support.

December 2008, SAEO submitted business case 11.2 Increase Tenant Income to NRH that outlined methods for NRH tenants to increase their sources of incomes. The business case outlined the opportunity to utilize the skills and experience of a SAEO FSW to assist NRH tenants that are not in receipt of social assistance with obtaining child/spousal support. The business case was vetted and responded to at the March 31, 2009 NRH OASC. The Community Services/FSW Shared Service Agreement pilot is the result of original the business case. The overall goals of the pilot are to increase the amount of support provisions in place and the average amount of support in pay, resulting in increased income for families and a reduction in rent subsidy.

SAEO and NRH staff met several times throughout the year to develop the pilot program and Shared Service Agreement that would allow for a part time SAEO FSW to assist NRH tenants to pursue child/spousal support. NRH identified approximately 135 households that would meet the description of the pilot. An update was provided to the NRH OASC in November 2009 indicating that the pilot would begin in January 2010.

Since the release of the "Legacy of Poverty? Addressing Cycles of Poverty" report and the "Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region" report, Niagara has demonstrated strong leadership in its work to develop appropriate and meaningful ways to increase prosperity for families in Niagara.

As outlined in COM 65-2009 the Response to Provincial Consultations on the Ontario Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy, there are social and economic benefits to providing integrated support services.

## REPORT

The pilot was launched on January 4, 2010. In the first quarter of 2010, 56 NRH families have received information, referrals and support from the FSW in the following three St. Catharines NRH communities:

NRH Community	Number of Clients with Support Obligation
Christopher/Dundonald	24
Rykert	16
Manchester	16

The pilot has made an immediate impact on 20% of the families involved.

Four child support orders have been obtained; 2 private agreements and 2 court orders. The average amount in pay is \$662.00. One family has successfully moved from subsidized rent to market rate as a result of obtaining support payments. The remaining 3 families have experienced an increase in their family income which results in a reduction in the amount of NRH subsidy required.

The pilot identified 7 households that require a financial review by NRH to determine ongoing eligibility for subsidy. The FSW is working with the families to assess the adequacy of the existing support agreements.

The FSW Shared Service Agreement pilot is an example of how Niagara is developing an appropriate and meaningful way to provide a seamless integrated service that is responsive to the needs of NRH families to address poverty.

NRH has a total of 865 units that can accommodate tenants with dependents. Approximately 69% of NRH owned units are occupied by tenants who are not on social assistance and, therefore, do not receive the support of an FSW to pursue child/spousal support. As a result, it is believed that there are more than 135 NRH tenants that have not realized their full income potential; resulting in less disposable income to the family and a greater subsidy paid by NRH.

The addition of the FSW support to non social assistance NRH families through the Shared Service Agreement pilot creates a housing system that is in line with the priorities identified under the broader poverty reduction strategy. The results of the pilot will be evaluated and leveraged to generate a work plan to meet the needs of all NRH families.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

---

Brian Hutchings  
Commissioner, Community Services

---

Mike Trojan  
Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared by Wendy Stewart, Manager and reviewed by Lori Watson, Director Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities and Maryellen MacLellan, Manager, Housing Operations.*