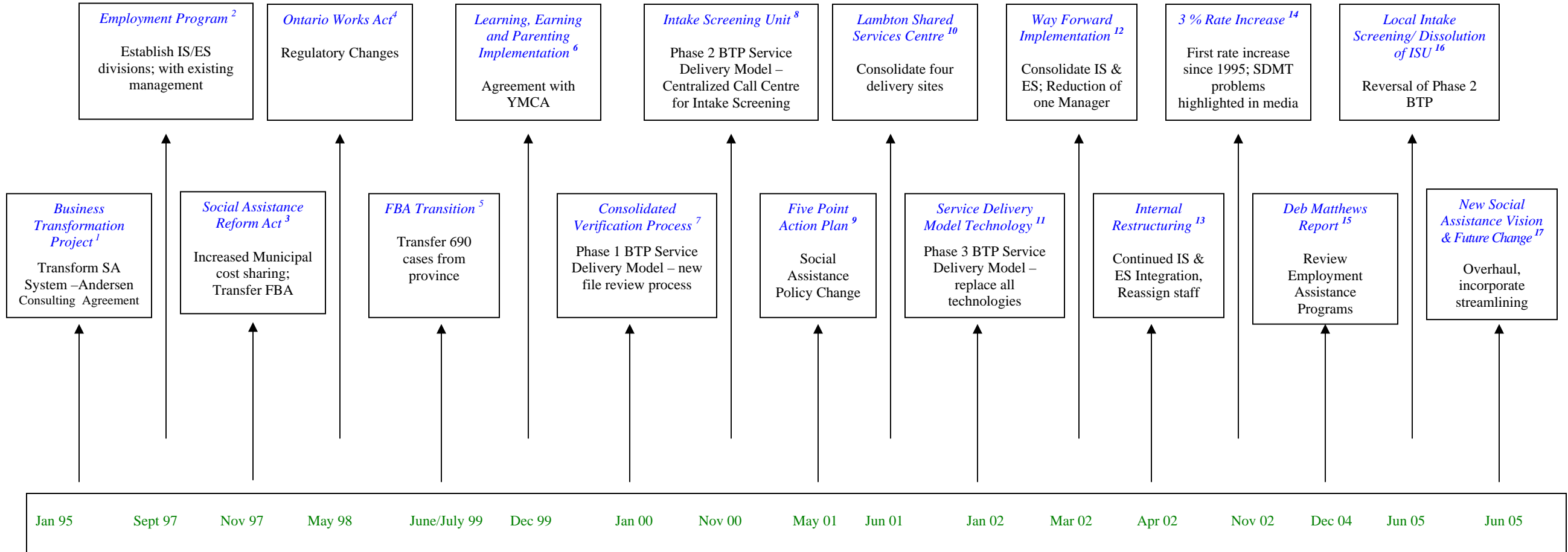


**SOCIAL & HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION
SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
ONTARIO WORKS**

HISTORICAL IMPACTS TIMELINE



**SOCIAL & HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION
SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT - ONTARIO WORKS**

CASELOAD TRENDS

The Ontario Works caseload in Lambton County has seen a steady decline since January 1995 (3,338) to September 2005 (1,713). The caseload has fluctuated over the past 10 years in response to local labour market conditions and provincial policies such as the 22% rate reduction in 1995, the transition to Ontario Works through 1998-1999 and the transfer of 690 Family Benefit cases from the Province in 1999.

Income Support casework staffing has mirrored the caseload trend, dropping from 28.8 workers in January 1995 to 24 workers in June 1999. Staffing increased to 31 to accommodate the Family Benefit transfer of 690 cases in July 1999, and had dropped to 22 by January 2001 and to 16 by September 2005.

Prior to CWT implementation, the approved provincial worker to client ratio was 1:90. As municipalities struggled with the implementation of new initiatives including employment, CWT and SDMT, ratios began to increase with resulting pressures for staff. Locally, caseload ratios have stayed within a range of 1:90 – 1:120 over the past 10 years.

Chart 1 – Total Caseload

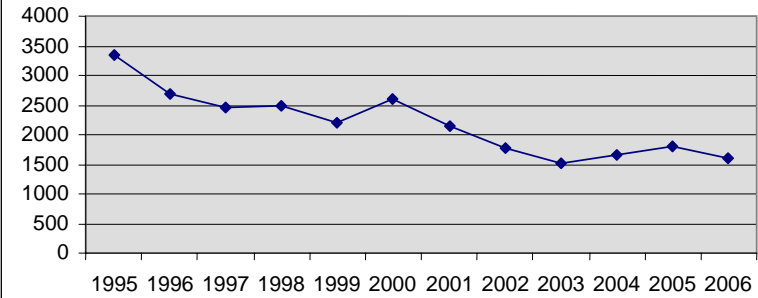


Chart 2 - Number of Caseworkers

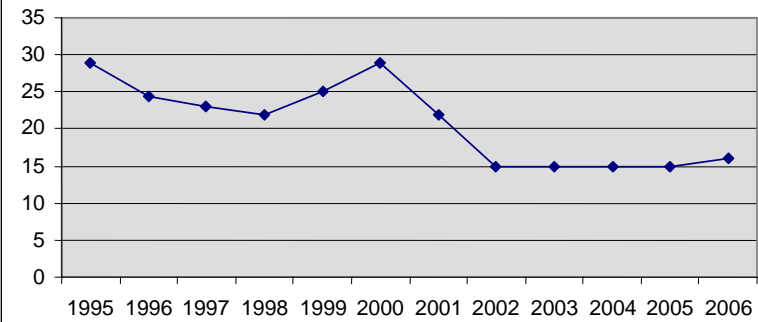
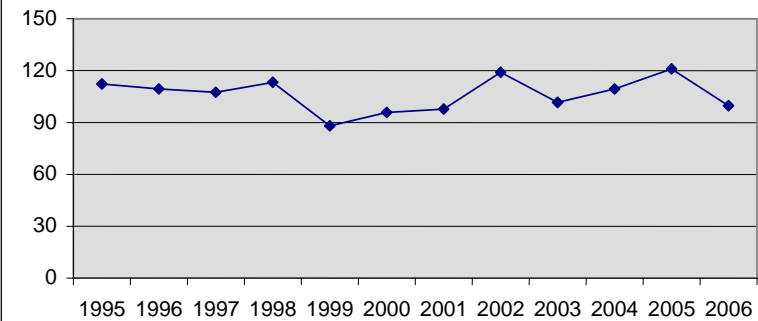


Chart 3 - Worker to Client Ratio



**SOCIAL & HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION
SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
ONTARIO WORKS**

HISTORICAL IMPACTS BACKGROUND

Business Transformation Project (BTP) ¹

- In 1995/96, Ministry of Community & Social Services (MCSS) initiated the Business Transformation Project (BTP) to develop new business processes and technologies to support the transformation of the Family Benefit and General Welfare programs into Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs.
- Goal to achieve single tier delivery of new social assistance and employment initiatives; replacement of interim computer technologies.
- Ministry entered into four year agreement with Andersen Consulting on January 27, 1997 with possibility of one year extension.
- Resulted in significant change to delivery of social assistance from 1995 – 2002; intensive internal planning effort; redefined local business processes and strategies for service delivery based on provincial standards; staffing models adjusted accordingly; provincial policies and processes adopted to meet local needs.
- Pending regulatory and technology changes resulted in reorganization; existing management reassigned resulting in two divisions, Income Support and Employment Support.

Ontario Works Employment Program, CWT/OWT Implementation ²

- 1996 Regulatory changes under General Welfare Act to implement Ontario Works program; provide financial assistance with mandatory participation requirements designed to achieve shortest route to employment.
- Developed Ontario Works Business Plan; implemented September 1997; recruited 12 caseworkers, 1 clerk; procedural and policy impact across two divisions; co-located Employment Division with Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

- Provincial discussions commenced around service delivery ie. super worker delivering both income and employment vs specialized worker delivering income or employment; implemented differently across province with no clear advantage to either option.
- Caseworker Technology and Ontario Works Technology implemented; moved application and file management from paper/manual process to computerized process; formal business process review resulted in extensive business process redevelopment affecting all operations; changes were in direct response to Provincial initiatives.
- Transitioned from home visit to office based interviews; required renovations to Wyoming and Point Edward social services offices.
- Coordination of service and communication amongst three offices (Wyoming, Point Edward, HRDC).
- Encountered difficulties in linking new computer databases with cheque production system (CIMS) requiring workarounds and continuous adjustment.
- Significant provincial policy shift introduced eligibility contingent on participation requirement with penalties for non-compliance.
- Formal training required; two week provincial technology training; two week employment training through purchase of service with Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA).
- Internal training required on policy shift, new processes and procedures, technology workarounds.

Social Assistance Reform Act ³

- Social Assistance Reform Act (SARA) supported the transition from *General Welfare Act* to *Ontario Works Act* and transition from *Family Benefits Act* to *Ontario Disability Support Program Act*.
- Introduced authority for provincial downloading of sole support, foster and aged cases to municipal caseloads from province.

- Introduced service system manager role for CMSMs.
- Municipalities assumed responsibility for cost sharing of the following social assistance items effective January 1, 2000:
 - 20% on FBA client allowances, drug, dental, vision and other benefits
 - 20% on GWA drug, other benefits (previously 100% provincial)
 - 20% on GWA dental and vision benefits (previously 50% provincial)
 - 50% on FBA cost of administration
- Significant financial impact to the Corporation in assuming additional social assistance expenditures of \$4,618,220 in 2000; increased to \$7,004,674 in 2005 based on 3rd quarter year end estimate.

Ontario Works Act, May 1, 1998 ⁴

- Dedicated significant effort to manage the implementation of Ontario Works Act and Regulations and the repeal of General Welfare Assistance Act and Regulations during 1998, 1999 and 2000.
- Involved social policy shift under Premier Mike Harris.
- Transition Directives issued commencing April 1998 through April 1999 which outlined policy changes requiring interpretation; assessment of impact on local practices; development of communication strategies; implementation on a 'touch the file' basis for numerous changes with negative financial impact for clients; development and delivery of training; compliance monitoring.
- Backfilled casework supervisor and caseworker to assist with planning and implementation.
- Provincial CWT, OWT and CIMS technology did not keep pace with policy changes, requiring manual workarounds to ensure entitlement accuracy and program integrity.
- Management and staff encountered overload and steep learning curves with continuous technology and policy changes implemented since 1995.
- Goal met to maintain client service through transition.
- Concurrent planning occurred for the transfer of Family Benefit cases.

FBA Transfer July 1999 ⁵

- Required to develop mandatory Vision Care Benefit Plan for dependent children prior to transfer; developed in-house procedures based on former Family Benefit plan provisions.
- Required to develop mandatory Dental Benefit Plan for dependent children prior to transfer; negotiated agreement with Lambton Health Unit for Dental Consultant to administer plan; established eligibility parameters based on former Family Benefit plan provisions; extended process to include discretionary dental benefits for Ontario Works recipients.
- Negotiated Terms of Reference, Memorandum of Understanding and Communication Protocols with MCSS South West Region; CUPE 2926 negotiations re MCSS staff transfer.
- Two stage transfer of 690 sole support, aged and foster cases from Province in June 1999 and July 1999; included electronic and physical file transfer.
- Required to demonstrate capacity in functional areas resulting in recruitment of 2 Family Support Workers, 1 Eligibility Review Officer, 2 Casework Supervisors, 1 Program Support Supervisor, 7 Income Support Caseworkers, 1 Case Aid.
- Space constraints required negotiation of lease for 4th social services office at Bayside Mall (temporary location); co-located with Government Information Counter.
- Completed formal file review/update on 690 transferred files and relevant Ontario Works regulations applied.
- Regulation changes established mandatory benefits under ODSP program effective May 1998 but technology did not support provincial delivery; OW continued management with eventual transfer of 245 Special Necessity files to province in November 1999.

Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) ⁶

- Provincial policy initiative required development of business plan; implementation.
- Regional tables and OMSSA provided information on best practices.
- Alternative service delivery option explored in requesting proposals from community agencies to provide the required supports to young parents.
- Entered into agreement with YMCA to manage individual service plan to ensure all components of learning, earning and parenting were arranged and monitored; OW caseworker continued to monitor eligibility for monthly assistance, liaise with Y staff.

- LEAP received Donner Canadian Foundation Award for Excellence in the Delivery of Counselling Services in 2002.

Consolidated Verification Process (CVP)⁷

- First phase of new Service Delivery Model under BTP; established new case file review process based on third party verification and identified risk; implementation of new interim databases MATT and NORA.
- Selected as early implementation site effective January 2000.
- Alternative approach taken in assigning CVP workers to existing teams rather than establishing separate teams as in other pilot sites.
- Casework supervisor backfilled on short term basis to develop business plan, train staff and implement process.
- Staffing needs determined on basis of reviewing caseload within 18 month period vs existing standard of 12 months.
- Reassigned 4 existing caseworkers (1 per casework team); recruited 1 clerk; eliminated 2 casework positions due to declining caseload (attrition).
- Provincial funding received at \$32.00 per case reviewed.
- Provincial savings to be reinvested into SDM program development.
- Municipal savings to be reinvested locally however proved difficult to reinvest 'unspent' social assistance payments or overpayments recovered over time; as CMSMs struggled with cost of administration shortfalls, CVP savings continued to be cited by province as a potential solution.

Intake Screening Unit (ISU) – November 2000⁸

- Second phase of the new Service Delivery Model under BTP.
- Alternative provincial delivery approach with implementation of two step intake process; first step or initial screening conducted in one of 7 centralized Intake Screening Units (ISU) and second step or verification interview conducted in local offices.
- South West Region Implementation team established February 2000 to plan for implementation of Grey County ISU and Release 1 of SDM Technology.
- Backfilled Income Support Manager and caseworker to facilitate planning and implementation; conducted third internal business process review to assess impacts, develop procedures, develop and deliver training.

- Regional planning tables and OMSSA networking provided lessons learned from pilot sites which was incorporated into local planning; locally developed measures used as best practices in other CMSMs ie. scheduling, employment orientation session on desktop.
- Provincial discussions continued re: super worker vs specialized worker model as SDM unfolds; CMSMs starting with one model often moved to another; super worker model involved information/knowledge overload for caseworkers and required smaller caseload.
- Intensive negotiation of delivery protocols between Ministry, Grey County ISU and SW Region delivery agents.
- Province funded 50% of ISU cost of administration with SW Region delivery agents funding balance on a proportional basis to their average annual caseload.
- Municipal share was to be covered through program savings resulting from ISU however complexity of technology, need to coordinate service between ISU and local office, increased ministry documentation and verification requirements, duplication of effort in verifying ISU data did not result in reduction of staff at local level or across province.
- Service standard decreased; applications completed 96+ hours from screening compared to previous local standard of 24 – 48 hours.
- Concurrent implementation of 22 policy bulletins affecting OW eligibility.

Five Point Action Plan- May 3, 2001⁹

Minister announced five point action plan for social assistance including:

- Double community placements.
 - Funding for innovative placement programs.
 - Mandatory literacy screening.
 - Advanced caseworker training.
 - Mandatory drug treatment.
- Action plan completed over several years, with Addiction Services Initiative currently in pilot phase.

Lambton Shared Services Centre – June 2001 ¹⁰

- Integrated 4 income support offices into single operation.
- Fourth business process review conducted to reflect single operation; training developed and delivered.
- Consolidated two CIMS offices into one including server, cheque production, data entry, transfer of active and inactive files and records, reports; involved extensive planning with Information Services Branch in Toronto.
- Clerical team duties reassigned to minimize duplication of effort and provide facility reception in addition to divisional support.
- Reduction 1 FTE supervisor; consolidated 4 income support teams into 3 teams (2 income support and 1 specialized CVP team).
- Release 2 CVP funding strategy implemented (\$160.00 per case over baseline)
 - Reassigned 2 income support caseworkers to CVP duties; recruited 2 CVP caseworkers on time limited basis; increased total CVP complement to 9.
 - Staff increase covered through additional 100% provincial funding.
 - Moved back to annual review vs 18 month review; ensured staff in place to complete SDM conversion January 2002 as electronic file information did not transfer from CWT.
 - CVP caseworkers continued to be included in worker to client ratio which ran counter to the developing provincial trend to exclude.

Service Delivery Model Technology - January 7, 2002 ¹¹

- Third and final component of new Service Delivery Model through BTP.
- Implemented Service Delivery Model Technology; 800+ eligibility rules based computer program including applications, case management, payment processing, employment planning, and reports.
- Income support manager, caseworker and supervisor backfilled to support implementation.
- Fifth business process review conducted to assess impact on employment and income support operations; replaced all existing technologies; developed new business practices; developed local computer applications in areas not supported by new technology; developed local income and employment training binders related to every aspect of service; required to develop SDM processes where provincial information lacking.

- Extensive period of adjustment and steep learning curve for all staff.
- CVP team updated all income support (financial) files; full data capture required.
- ES team converted all employment files as data did not convert to SDM from OWT.
- Thousands of pages in communications and manual workarounds distributed by Social Assistance and Municipal Operations (SAMO) related to system problems on annual basis since 2002; thousands of SIRS or problems identified.
- Extension of Andersen Consulting contract for two years to work on issue resolution and transition programming to province.

Way Forward Implementation – April 1, 2002 ¹²

- Way Forward Report released fall 2001; implementation January 2002.
- Income Support and Employment Support Divisions consolidated into single Ontario Works Program effective April 1, 2002; delayed due to SDM Go Live January 2002.
- 1 FTE manager reduced; 1 FTE Administrative Assistant added; positions moved to Social Planning and Program Support.
- Structure reorganized – community placement staff assigned to Special Services Supervisor; Eligibility Review Officers assigned to CVP Supervisor.
- Child Care needs test function and 4 FTE moved from Children's Services Division to Ontario Works Program, reporting to Special Services Supervisor.
- CVP Caseworkers removed from worker to client ratio commencing January 2002.

Internal Restructuring – November 2002 ¹³

- Internal restructuring required to further integrate income and employment support activities based on consolidation of two divisions and intent of Way Forward Report.
- Caseload declining but increasingly hard to employ; required to establish base from which to build; plan to increase revenue as provincial targets not being achieved in employment.
- Integrated 2 income support and 1 employment support teams into 3 consolidated teams each with 5 IS and 2 ES workers; casework supervisors reassigned and trained.
- Work assignments adjusted to fully utilize existing capacity and accommodate complexity of SDM; employment focus integrated into income support delivery; clerical support assumed administrative tasks performed by caseworkers.
- CVP team reduced from 9 to 6 as SDM conversion completed; 2 positions reduced, 1 position reassigned to support policy and training.

- Implemented standards for scheduled appointments, office hours, intake free days for IS, ES and CVP caseworkers to improve productivity and client service.
- Implemented measures to ensure clients engaged in employment activity immediately on application providing better service, improving performance and increasing revenue.
- Commence intensive workshop development targeted to hard to employ and sole support (FOCUS, Sole Support Parent Fair, Diversions and Mentoring).
- Implemented Intensive Case Management (ICM) position dedicated to hard to employ; principle adopted by ES caseworkers upon working with clients exiting workshops.
- Developed in house computer programs to enhance service delivery ie. scheduling and appointment booking program, letter writing program; obtained SDM daily extracts to enable linking of data between programs, streamline and eliminate duplication.

Rate Increase – May 18, 2004 Provincial Budget Announcement ¹⁴

- Ontario budget announcement included a 3% increase in basic needs and shelter for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support plan recipients.
- Estimated six months required to program SDMT for rate change; Ministry and Andersen Consulting under fire in the media.
- SDMT upgrade to produce one time special payments in September and December to compensate for inability to increase monthly payments; assessment for local impacts; manual workarounds required; SDMT upgrade for rate change effective February 2005.

Deb Matthews Report – December 2004 ¹⁵

- Deb Matthews, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister released report *Review of Employment Assistance Programs in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs*; travelled province seeking input from front line staff, clients and stakeholders.
- Report considered first step in focusing discussion and guiding change to social assistance system.
- Reforms to be made with acknowledgement that rules and administration should be simplified; there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach; job retention should be given as much priority as getting a job.
- Number of recommendations made to improve system including closure of Intake Screening Units due to duplication of effort.

- Transition Directive December 15, 2004 introduced 20 policy and housekeeping changes which implemented streamlining measures; required assessment of local impact, communication strategy, development and delivery of training.

Local Intake Screening and Dissolution of ISU – June 2005 ¹⁶

- November 2004 AtFocus *Incorporated Review of Intake Screening Units* commissioned by MCSS concluded that ISUs as currently operated were no longer an acceptable alternative.
- December 2004 Deb Matthew’s report recommended closure of ISUs.
- December 15, 2004 Ministry announced that ISUs would close by June 15, 2005.
- Municipal funds previously redirected to ISU available to support local screening, however Ministry reinvested a ‘portion’ of provincial ISU savings into local screening.
- Reversal of BTP service delivery model for intake screening in centralized units; savings had not materialized, considered duplication of effort; involved return of intake screening function to local offices.
- Business Plan required; business process analysis conducted; developed local intake computer application to facilitate screening; installed automatic call distribution system; communication strategy; development and delivery of training.
- Coordinated transition from ISU to local office through Regional SDM table.
- Concurrent with resumption of local screening, CVP workers reduced from 6 to 5 as exceeding provincial targets needed to achieve full provincial funding; 1 position reassigned to income support as worker to client ratio had increased to 1:122 by March 2005.

New Social Assistance Vision and Future Change ¹⁷

- New vision for social assistance: *A simplified, streamlined 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.*
- Adopting a results based approach with implementation of Employment Outcome Funding in place of activity based Service Level Funding.
- Building on knowledge gained through Advanced Caseworker Training Initiative (2003/2004); move from shortest route to employment philosophy to one based on acknowledgment of small steps necessary to transition clients to sustainable employment.

- Emphasis on moving to 'sustainable' employment vs any employment; examining job retention strategies to reduce recidivism among hard to employ; JobsNow pilot underway.
- Ontario Works Directives Update Project commenced June 2005 and is ongoing; systematic update of provincial policy directives; 28 directives received June, July and December 2005 in addition to 10 Transition Directives with new regulatory changes; requires review, analysis of impact, development and delivery of training.

**SOCIAL & HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION
SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
ONTARIO WORKS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 10 years, the County of Lambton has developed an integrated Ontario Works program that is responsive to the needs of clients, meets Ministry objectives, utilizes best practices and takes a reasoned approach to planning.

The accompanying *Historical Impacts Timeline* provides an overview of the major events that have impacted and subsequently governed the delivery of the Ontario Works (OW) program since 1995. As caseload fluctuations play an integral part in program management, the accompanying *OW Trends* includes information on caseload and client to worker ratio during this period. Additional details regarding each event noted on the *Timeline* may be found in the footnotes contained in the accompanying *Historical Impacts Background* document.

Business Process Reviews

The Provincial Business Transformation Project (1995 – 2002) was responsible for the redesign of the social assistance system and generated massive change. Initiatives such as Caseworker Technology (CWT) and Service Delivery Model Technology (SDMT) were broad in scope and impacted every aspect of operations within the Income Support and Employment Support Divisions. Formal project planning methods were employed and weekly status reports submitted to the Province. Planning was well defined including the development of communication and human resources strategies, assessment of technology and training needs, process change planning including gap analysis and action planning, issues management, readiness assessment and Go Live or contingency planning.

Implementation of the other initiatives noted on the Timeline was smaller in scope affecting one or more functions within Income Support and/or Employment Support. However, consistent planning principles were employed with each initiative ensuring that communication, training, business process analysis, technology and readiness assessments were completed.

Frequent and continuous provincial policy change necessitated the development of a consistent approach to evaluate the impact on client service, local policy and procedures. The complexity of the regulations and the technology that supports delivery requires the development and delivery of comprehensive training.

As part of initiative planning and ongoing program management, the Department regularly incorporates a review of practices employed by other Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs). Informal telephone surveys have been conducted to determine how other CMSMs are implementing initiatives or provincial policies. In addition, staff participates in regional and provincial roundtable discussions facilitated by the Ministry or the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) which regularly share information on program delivery.

Review of Staffing Levels

The implementation of new provincial programs and initiatives has had a direct impact on staffing levels. The Department has engaged a responsible approach to recruitment which considers existing capacity for the provision of service prior to recruitment for new initiatives or in filling a vacancy.

The caseload and casework staffing numbers as noted on the accompanying *OW Trends* document clearly demonstrates that as caseloads fluctuated, the number of caseworkers assigned fluctuated. The Department has maintained caseloads within a 90 – 120 cases per worker range which is considered consistent with other CMSMs with similar delivery styles.

Layered on caseload ratios was the implementation of new provincial initiatives. The July 1999 Family Benefits Allowance (FBA) transfer of 690 cases from the province necessitated the recruitment of 7 caseworkers and supporting positions. After the transfer, caseloads began to decline such that the implementation of the new Consolidated Verification Process (CVP) in January 2000 was accomplished with the reassignment of 4 caseworkers and the redistribution of the associated caseloads. By January 2001, the caseload had declined further

and the number of caseworkers fell below pre-transfer levels through attrition and termination of temporary contracts.

Events unique to the County of Lambton further impacted staffing. The implementation of Way Forward in April 2002 resulted in the consolidation of the Income and Employment Support Divisions, the reduction of a full-time Manager and the transfer of positions to Social Planning and Program Support team. In keeping with the Way Forward recommendations, the department further integrated the financial and employment components of the program by integrating casework teams, reassigning staff across functions, restructuring duties among income, employment and clerical support and the reduction of two casework positions.

Alternative Service Delivery

The redesign of the social assistance system was in and of itself an undertaking to develop a new service delivery approach. The new system created one-tier service for sole support parents, aged persons, and foster parents in the transfer of FBA cases in 1999; introduced technology in case management and payment production with implementation of CWT, OWT, SDMT; established a new program that made financial eligibility contingent on employment participation; and established new processes designed to improve program integrity. As service system managers, CMSMs were responsible for the delivery of the new system within provincial standards and regulatory requirements.

The Intake Screening Unit component of the Business Transfer Project redesign illustrates an alternative service delivery approach that was attempted by the Ministry commencing in 2000, and subsequently abandoned in June 2005. The centralization of intake screening within 7 regional call centres was based on the premise that a significant percentage of applicants would be screened out and savings would result if unnecessary verification interviews were avoided in local offices. However, over time the numbers did not support the premise and municipal savings failed to materialize as 85% - 90% of applicants moved to a verification interview. Additionally, the time needed to conduct interviews actually increased with the introduction of Ministry requirements such as literacy screening and employment orientation sessions in addition to coping with the inherent complexity of the new SDM technology.

Much discussion has taken place over the course of the past 10 years on the optimal casework model for the delivery of Ontario Works and whether it is a super worker or specialized worker model. Some offices actually moved from one model to another and then back in an effort to find the best approach. Over time it became apparent that there were strong benefits

and equally strong detractors to both models with no real financial or service benefit in one over the other. Lambton has employed a specialized model since 1996 and has modified the approach over time taking advantage of opportunities to integrate employment planning into financial delivery. Should Council determine it advisable, a formal review of alternative delivery approaches and corresponding cost benefit analysis could be conducted by a consultant for approximately \$85,000 - \$100,000.

Benchmarking and Performance Measures

There are no formal comparators regarding benchmarks or performance measures in Ontario Works. A review of the Ontario Centre for Municipal Best Practices and Ontario Municipal CAOs Benchmarking Initiatives websites reveals that benchmarks are being established in a number of areas, but are not available for the Ontario Works program.

Service delivery is guided by Ministry program standards which are contained within the Ontario Works Directives. The results of annual provincial audits have consistently demonstrated that the Department has a solid understanding of program requirements and in 2005 was the only CMSM in the Southwest Region to escape financial sanctions.

The Ministry has been making SDMT statistical reports available on an annual basis to assist with Service Planning. Commencing in 2006, the Ministry is committed to monthly reports to assist with performance measurement particularly in the area of employment outcomes. In June 2006, a report will be prepared which summarizes the available Ontario Works performance measures and when possible will provide a comparison to other delivery agents or the provincial average.