



The Corporation of the County of Wellington

Social Services Committee

Minutes

November 9, 2022

County Administration Centre

Guthrie Room

- Present:** Warden Kelly Linton
Councillor David Anderson (Chair)
Councillor Campbell Cork
Councillor Don McKay
Councillor Steve O'Neill
Mayor Cam Guthrie
- Also Present:** Councillor Gregg Davidson
Councillor Jeff Duncan
Stephen Dewar, General Manager/Chief, Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service
Keegan Kozolanka, Reporter, Guelph Today
- Staff:** Luisa Artuso, Social Services Administrator
Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works
Donna Bryce, County Clerk
Shauna Calder, Manager of Finance
Mandy Koroniak, Director, Children's Early Years
Mark Poste, Director of Housing
Michele Richardson, Assistant Director, Human Resources
Scott Wilson, CAO

1. Call to Order

At 1:00 pm, the Chair called the meeting to order.

2. Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3. Delegation:

3.1 Stephen Dewar, Chief/General Manager, Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service

1/9/22

Moved by: Councillor McKay

Seconded by: Mayor Guthrie

That the Paramedic Offload Delay and Ambulance Resource Depletion Update Report by Stephen Dewar, Chief/General Manager, Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service

Carried

4. Social Services Financial Statements as of October 31, 2022

2/9/22

Moved by: Warden Linton

Seconded by: Councillor Cork

That the Social Services Financial Statements as of October 31, 2022 be approved.

Carried

5. Ontario Works 2023 User Fees and Charges

3/9/22

Moved by: Warden Linton

Seconded by: Councillor O'Neill

That the 2023 User Fees and Charges for Ontario Works be approved.

Carried

6. Social Services Preliminary 2023-2032 Ten-Year Plan

4/9/22

Moved by: Councillor McKay

Seconded by: Councillor Cork

That the Preliminary 2023-2032 Social Services Ten-Year Plan as set out in the report be endorsed and forwarded to the Administration, Finance and Human Resources Committee for inclusion in the County of Wellington's Preliminary Ten-Year Plan.

Carried

7. Children's Early Years Division

7.1 Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care System Implementation Update

5/9/22

Moved by: Warden Linton

Seconded by: Councillor O'Neill

That the report CEYD-22-08 Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care System Implementation Update be received for information.

Carried

7.2 Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care System New Positions

6/9/22

Moved by: Councillor McKay

Seconded by: Mayor Guthrie

That the two CWELCC-funded positions of Manager of Administration and Children's Early Years Funding Analyst be approved.

Carried

8. Housing

8.1 Housing Services Status and Activity Report Q1 and Q2, 2022

7/9/22

Moved by: Warden Linton

Seconded by: Councillor Cork

That the Housing Services Status and Activity Report - 2022 Q1 and Q2 (January 1 - June 30, 2022) be received for information.

Carried

9. Ontario Works

9.1 Ontario Works Statistics

8/9/22

Moved by: Councillor McKay

Seconded by: Councillor Cork

That the September 2022 Ontario Works Statistics be received for information.

Carried

9.2 Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes: Impact and Programme Evaluation

9/9/22

Moved by: Mayor Guthrie

Seconded by: Warden Linton

That report OW-22-07 Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes - Impact and Evaluation be received for information.

Carried

With unanimous consent, the following item was added to the agenda.

10. 65 Delhi Street Update - Verbal

10/9/22

Moved by: Mayor Guthrie

Seconded by: Councillor Cork

That the verbal update provided by Luisa Artuso, Social Services Administrator, regarding the renovations planned for housing units at 65 Delhi Street and the budget and sources of funding be received for information.

Carried

11. Closed Meeting

11/9/22

Moved by: Councillor Cork

Seconded by: Councillor O'Neill

That Council move into a closed meeting for the purposes of considering information explicitly supplied in confidence by Canada, a province or territory or a crown agency of any of them.

Carried

12. Adjournment

At 2:25 pm, the Chair adjourned the meeting until January 11, 2023 or at the call of the Chair.

David Anderson
Chair
Social Services Committee

Information Report



To Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee

From Stephen Dewar, Chief and General Manager, Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service

Date November 9, 2022

Subject **Paramedic Offload Delay and Ambulance Resource Depletion Update**

Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To provide an update to the Committee on the ongoing issue of significant offload delays at hospitals that affect the number ambulances available to respond to medical emergencies in the community.

Key Findings

Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service continues to be affected by extensive and frequent offload delays in hospital Emergency Departments. The offload delays have led to multiple incidents where no ambulances are available in our community to respond to emergency calls, commonly referred to as a Code Red.

Report

Hospital offload delays continue to be a significant concern for our paramedic service and present a significant drain on available emergency resources in our community.

Hospital offload delays involve the transfer of care to a patient from paramedics to hospital staff in the emergency department. A standard set by the Provincial Ministry of Health indicates that this transfer should occur within 30 minutes of the ambulance arriving at the hospital, 90 percent of the time. When hospital staff are not able to assume care for the patient, paramedics are required to continue to provide that care and are unavailable to respond to further emergency calls.

Since January 1, 2022, Guelph Wellington Paramedics have been required to stay in a hospital emergency department beyond 30 minutes (offload delay) on over 6,100 occasions. Over 5,100 of those incidents were at the Guelph General Hospital. An additional 600 offload delays occurred at Groves hospital, and the remainder included some hospitals that are outside of our area.

Offload delays have consumed over 9,400 hours of paramedic time, with most of those delays involving two paramedics.

There have been five incidents in 2022 where paramedics have cared for patients for more than 12 hours inside the hospital, and multiple occasions where 12 or more ambulances are in offload delay at the same time at Guelph General hospital. At peak times of the day, Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service staffs 15 ambulances. The overall average delay is just over 90 minutes beyond the 30 minute expected threshold.

Offload delays are a concern faced by virtually all paramedic services in Ontario as hospitals report that they are inundated with admitted patients and high patient volumes. The Guelph General hospital has reported that the issue is related to the high number of patients admitted to the hospital waiting for Long Term Care beds, causing an inability to admit patients from the emergency department and patients needing care staying in the department longer, causing a backlog.

Ontario Health produces a monthly report that includes hospital offload times at hospitals across Ontario, based on data submitted by the hospitals. That data shows that Guelph General Hospital has consistently had the longest delays and the highest average length of ambulance offload of the Waterloo Wellington hospitals, and has been in the top 10% for these times of the 115 hospitals in Ontario that reported data.

'Code Reds'

A related concern are incidents where all on duty Guelph Wellington ambulances are actively involved in providing service and there are no resources available to respond to other emergency calls in the community. This is often referred to as a Code Red. Although code reds can potentially occur with a large number of calls occurring simultaneously, recent incidents have been related to a number of paramedic resources in offload delay in hospitals and unable to respond to calls.

From January 1 through the end of October 2022, Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service has had no ambulances available to respond (Code Red) on 50 different occasions. This compares to 4 episodes in all of 2021 and no episodes in 2020. The episodes range from less than two minutes to over two hours in duration. All Code Red episodes occurred when there are ambulances in offload delay.

When no Guelph Wellington ambulances are available to respond, the closest available ambulance in other communities is dispatched to a call in our area. Similarly, Guelph Wellington ambulances have been required to respond into Waterloo, Hamilton and Halton Region when their resources are depleted.

Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service utilizes a dynamic deployment plan to move available ambulances and resources to key locations as call are occurring to provide the best response time to the next emergency call. In that deployment plan if we have only one ambulance available it is moved to either our station in Arthur or our downtown Guelph station, whichever is closer, and the supervisor moves to the other to provide coverage. When two are available both of those are covered, and

when there are three available the deployment plan calls for them to be placed in Guelph, Fergus and Teviotdale. This is regardless of where the ambulance started their shift and we do not designate them as 'City' ambulances or 'County' resources.

Mitigation

Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service has been working on several initiatives to attempt to address the offload delay and resulting shortage of resources issues. As mentioned in previous reports, we have applied with Guelph General Hospital to the Province for Dedicated Offload Nurse funding. This would allow the hospital to hire staff specifically to care for patients that would otherwise be in offload delay. We are aware that the funding for this program has been approved in the provincial budget, and that our specific application has been favourably reviewed, but we continue to wait for specific approval of our application and a funding announcement.

We have previously developed a process at Guelph General hospital that is described provincially as a 'Fit2Sit' program, by which patients who are able to wait independently are taken to the Emergency Department waiting room rather than remain in a paramedic's care. The criteria for eligible patients was agreed to by the hospital and our programs medical oversight. That program was recently enhanced to include a greater number of patients, and we have begun discussions with Groves hospital to begin a similar program there.

In addition, we have recently convened a meeting with local long term care and homeless shelter managers to attempt to reduce the number of patients being transferred from those sites.

Our service works with other services in Ontario to attempt to address these issues provincially through our Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs. Our organization has recently published an action Plan with recommendations for the province to consider to assist in reducing the impact of offload delays.

Summary

Guelph Wellington Paramedic Service continues to be affected by hospital offload delays, leading to episodes where no local ambulances are available to respond to emergency calls in our area. The service makes every attempt to minimize these incidents with mitigation strategies, and to reduce the impact of the impact of these incidents utilizing deployment strategies to best service the residents of Guelph and Wellington County.

Respectfully Submitted by:



Stephen Dewar
General Manager / Chief
Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service
519-822-1260 ext. 2805
Stephen.dewar@guelph.ca

This report was recommended by:
Colleen Clack-Bush
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Public Services, City of Guelph
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colleen.clack-bush@guelph.ca



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Shauna Calder, Manager of Finance
Date: Wednesday, November 9, 2022
Subject: **Preliminary 2023-2032 Ten-Year Plan: Social Services**

Background:

This forecast provides a high-level overview of major budget impacts and planned capital investments, and serves as a guide for departments in preparing their detailed current year operating and capital budgets. The preliminary corporate ten-year plan will be considered by the Administration, Finance and Human Resources Committee on November 29, 2022, and the forecast will be updated at the time the budget is approved early in the New Year.

Housing Services – Operating

- Grants and subsidies are decreasing by \$2.5 million. The most significant change relates to the removal of one-time COVID-19 funding of \$2.7 million. Other funding reductions include the ending of the Investment in Affordable Housing programme (IAH) as of March 2023 and continued reductions to federal funding for County-owned social housing buildings and non-profit and co-operative providers. The funding reduction from senior level of government place additional pressure on the municipal tax levy as costs continue to rise to operate social and affordable housing. Increases to funding allocations for both the Homelessness Prevention Programme (HPP) and Reaching Home partially offset the funding decreases described above.
- Budgeted rent collections from our County-owned social housing units include a 1% (\$57,500) increase over 2022. Rent collections are tracking slightly under budget this year driving a conservative revenue projection for 2023.
- Salaries, wages, and benefits includes the annualization of the Policy Analyst (contract ending March 2024) and Custodian positions added in 2022. In addition, The Housing Stability Coordinator position originally budgeted to end July 2023, is proposed to be extended until March 2024. This contract is completely funded through the Reaching Home allocation.
- Supplies, materials & equipment has increased by \$45,000. This accounts for increases in plumbing costs as well as one-time expenditures related to upgrading of office equipment.
- The Purchased Services line has increased by \$110,000. Cost increases have been seen in the areas of snow removal, grounds maintenance, painting, and utilities as the high cost of living drives contract prices up. These costs are partially offset by the removal of one-time COVID related cleaning costs from the budget in 2023.
- Overall, the social assistance line is decreasing by \$750,000. There are several changes that are taking place in this expenditure line.
 - COVID related expenditures in the amount of \$2.7 million that relate directly to the removal of the one-time grant described above have reduced the social assistance line.
 - The ending of the Investing in Affordable Housing programme as of March 2023 removed approximately \$330,000 in revenue and expenditure from the housing budget. This loss of funding leaves a significant gap in our community as this funding provided

rent supplement supports to many. To offset the loss of funding and continue to support households that are in receipt of these supports, a municipal contribution of \$200,000 has been added to the 2023 budget with a further allocation of \$350,000 being added in 2024.

- The non-profit and co-operative housing provider budget line is projected to increase by nearly \$500,000 in 2023. Provincial cost indices have been received and are increasing significantly in line with inflation rates seen over the year. These projections will be adjusted as budgets for each provider are completed over the next several months.
- Increases in Reaching Home funding require the addition of offsetting expenditures. Reaching Home is 100% funding that does not require a municipal cost share.
- The Homelessness Prevention Programme has experienced significant pressures throughout 2022. Staff have reviewed current spending and community pressures and have adjusted this budget area to reflect current need. Overall, the budget proposes increased costs of \$700,000 to support pressures in the shelter system and contract cost increases related to inflation.
- A budget allocation of \$650,000 has been added to the social assistance line to support our non-profit housing providers with capital pressures. This one-time budget allocation is funded through the Housing Regeneration Reserve Fund and will not impact the municipal tax levy.
- A reduction in debenture payments for County owned social housing units has decreased the transfer payment line (\$43,000 City and \$12,900 County).

Housing Services – Capital

- Capital spending on County-owned social housing units totals \$49.5 million over the ten-year forecast. This represents an increase in total spending when compared to the 2022 capital forecast caused by the addition of a project for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) initiatives to address climate change priorities (\$2.3 million). Beyond 2023 the capital budget is increasing by \$285,000 in 2024, by \$220,000 in 2025, and by an average of \$175,000 in 2028 through 2032 providing staff with a predictable and stable level of funding to address aging facilities and increasing costs.
- The split between the County and City portions of capital funding is based on the three-year average prior residence of tenants in County-owned buildings. The County portion of the capital funding comes from the Housing Capital Reserve.
- Two provincially funded projects continue in 2023.
 - COCHI capital budget totals \$158,000.
 - OPHI capital budget totals \$279,000.
- New to the capital forecast:
 - An allocation of \$250,000 per year (starting in 2024) over the ten-year planning period for Greenhouse Gas (GHG) projects as part of the implementation of corporate climate change initiatives. For 2023 the budget has been set at \$90,000 to complete the required audits which will inform future years work.
- Staff continue to work on capital budget estimates for the 65 Delhi Street project. We anticipate that a capital project will be included in the January budget report outlining the proposed costs and funding sources. It is anticipated that there will be no tax levy impact for the City or County as a result of this project.
- A detailed listing of projects at County-owned units is attached to this report.

Affordable Housing – Operating

- Budgeted rent collections from our Affordable Housing units are increasing by 3.6%, or \$45,000 in order to align the budget more closely to actual rent collections over the last several years.
- Salaries, wages and benefits reflects the annualization of Custodian positions filled in 2022.
- Minor adjustments have been made to budgeted expenses for supplies, materials and equipment and internal charges based on a review of 2022 costs to date.
- Increases in the purchased services line relate to higher painting costs as well as increases to utility costs.
- The budgeted contribution to the County’s Housing Development Reserve remains at \$1.2 million in 2023 and increases to \$1.4 million for the remainder of the ten-year plan. Contributions to the reserve also includes the net municipal revenue generated from each of the affordable housing properties to provide funding for future affordable housing opportunities.

Affordable Housing – Capital

- Facility improvements for County owned affordable housing buildings total \$770,000 over the ten-years and are funded through the Housing Capital Reserve.
- The provision to construct new County-owned affordable housing units throughout the County remains in the forecast. Staff will continue to monitor funding opportunities from senior levels of government for these builds and review project timing in the annual budget process.

Ontario Works - Operating

- The grants and subsidies line is decreasing by approximately \$535,000 in 2023. This budget adjustment reflects the fact that caseload did not rise as quickly as original anticipated for 2022. Staff are projecting a 3% increase over 2022 year-end projected actual costs. Ontario Works benefits are 100% provincially funded and increases will not impact the municipal tax levy.
- Staff have received confirmation that the provincial administration funding for Ontario Works will remain at the same level as received in 2022 (frozen at 2018 actual expenditure levels). This has resulted in increased municipal costs of \$135,000 for the County and \$210,000 for the City.
- The supplies, materials & equipment line is increasing by approximately \$40,000 and this is related to lifecycle purchases of IT equipment.
- The purchased services line is increasing by approximately \$40,000. Areas of increase include security and snow removal. Security cost increases are one-time in nature related to security services being contracted to address safety concerns at our Guelph service locations.
- The Social Assistance line is decreasing \$590,000. This is directly related to the caseload projections described above and does not impact the municipal tax levy requirement.
- Funding for Agencies has decreased by \$111,000 in 2023. This funding reduction is in line with previous commitments made to the Integrated Youth Service Network. Funding is provided from the Shared Services Stabilization reserve and does not impact the County tax levy.
- The cost-sharing ratio for administration expenses between the County and City has been adjusted based on the caseload split experienced in 2022. This resulted in a projected increase in cost of \$16,000 for the County and a corresponding decrease for the City.

Ontario Works - Capital

- The ten-year capital plan includes facility improvements at the administration offices located at 129 and 138 Wyndham Street in Guelph, and St. Andrews Street in Fergus. The ten-year total capital budget is \$2.2 million. The County's portion of \$605,000 is funded from the Property Reserve and the City's funding contribution for capital works at the Guelph locations is \$1.6 million.

Children's Early Years - Operating

- The provincial funding allocation for 2023 has not yet been received. The 2023 budget, as well as the ten-year plan, assumes no changes from the 2022 allocation with two exceptions:
 - Workforce funding has been reduced by just over \$1 million to reflect the final quarter of funding in 2023 for this 100% funding pot.
 - The addition of \$12.6 million in additional grant funding related to the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Funding Agreement (CWELCC). Official funding allocations have not been received, however based on available information staff have been able to make a conservative estimate for budget purposes. All funding is 100% Federal requiring no municipal cost share and adjustments will be made as funding commitments are received.
- The user fee budget has been cut in half (a decrease of \$626,000) to reflect the required parent fees reduction of 50% at the County's directly operated child care centres. Loss of parent fees is directly offset by federal funding resulting in no municipal tax impact.
- Both the internal recoveries and internal charges lines are increasing as a result of the use of CWELC funding to offset reduced parent fees that the County's directly operated child care centres. These lines offset each other and do not impact the bottom line.
- The salaries, wages and benefits line includes the addition of two new positions to administer the Canada Wide agreement. A separate report on this agenda provides more details on these positions which will be 100% funded through the federal Canada Wide administration funding. Staff have also removed one-time screener positions required in 2022 from the budget.
- Supplies, materials and equipment is increasing by \$60,000 as a result of lifecycle replacement costs for IT equipment and increased software licensing costs for OCCMS.
- The Social Assistance line is increasing by approximately \$10.8 million. An increase of \$12.6 million related to the CWELCC funding previously mentioned is offset by the removal of the one-time Workforce funding allocation.
- Insurance and Financial has increased by \$32,000. Staff have completed several initiatives to offer parents more choices in payment options for their child care services. These enhancements have increased bank fees (\$17,000). The rest is related to inflationary increases in insurance costs.

Children's Early Years – Capital

- The ten-year capital plan for Children's Early Years includes \$565,000 for lifecycle repairs and replacements at Mount Forest Child Care and Learning Centre and \$110,000 at 133 Wyndham Street in Guelph. Work at Mount Forest is a 100% County cost funded from the Property Reserve. Improvements to 133 Wyndham Street are cost shared with the City of Guelph.
- New to the budget is the addition of a Billing and Waitlist Software project over 2023-2024 in the amount of \$125,000. Solutions are currently being researched and the result will improve both waitlist and billing applications.

Overall Social Services 2021 Budget Impact

The preliminary 2023 Budget for Social Services (operating + capital) reflects a tax levy increase of 8.3% for the County and 6.7% for the City, as outlined in the table below:

COUNTY OF WELLINGTON					
2022 SOCIAL SERVICES NET BUDGET COMPARISON - OPERATING & CAPITAL					
(all figures in \$000's)					
	Approved 2022 County Budget	2022 Budget Projections for 2023	Proposed 2023 County Budget	% Change from 2022 Projections for 2023	% Change from Approved 2022 Budget
City Tax Levy Requirement					
Social Housing	\$ 16,711	\$ 17,300	\$ 18,115	4.7%	8.4%
Ontario Works	3,678	3,350	3,423	2.2%	-6.9%
Children's Early Years	3,025	3,904	3,450	-11.6%	14.0%
Total	\$ 23,414	\$ 24,554	\$ 24,987	1.8%	6.7%
County Tax Levy Requirement					
Social Housing	\$ 4,808	\$ 4,988	\$ 5,116	2.6%	6.4%
Ontario Works	1,369	1,422	1,488	4.7%	8.7%
Children's Early Years	1,777	2,335	2,110	-9.6%	18.7%
Affordable Housing	1,200	1,200	1,200	0.0%	0.0%
Total	\$ 9,155	\$ 9,945	\$ 9,915	-0.3%	8.3%

The detailed 2023 operating budget and revised ten-year plan will be presented to the Committee in January.

Recommendation:

That the preliminary 2023-2032 Social Services Ten-Year Plan as set out in this report be endorsed and forwarded to the Administration, Finance and Human Resources Committee for inclusion in the County of Wellington's Preliminary Ten-Year Plan.

Respectfully submitted,



Shauna Calder, CPA, CGA
Manager of Finance



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

CEYD-22-08

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Mandy Koroniak, Director of Children’s Early Years Division
Date: Wednesday, November 09, 2022
Subject: Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System Implementation Update

Background:

On June 8, 2022 and September 14, 2022, Social Services Committee received reports to provide information and updates about the 100% federally funded Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System. This report provides a current update on the implementation of the CWELCC System.

Update:

The Ministry of Education made its 2022 CWELCC Guidelines available in April, 2022. On August 17, 2022, the Ministry of Education updated its 2022 CWELCC Guidelines and made regulatory changes to O. Reg. 137/15 to encourage participation in the CWELCC System, including extending enrolment dates for licensees to sign on to the CWELCC system to November 1, 2022.

There are 47 licensed child care providers in our service delivery area that provide a total of 85 licensed child care programmes. As of November 1, 2022, all child care programmes have indicated their intent to either opt-in or opt-out of the CWELCC System. A summary of the 85 notifications of intent to opt-in or opt-out of the CWELCC System received from child care programmes is shown in the table below:

CWELCC Notifications of Intent Received from Licensed Child Care Programmes as of November 1, 2022

	County		City	
	Non-Profit	For-Profit	Non-Profit	For-Profit
Opting In	17 (85%)	7 (88%)	29 (94%)	19 (76%)
Opting Out	3 (15%)	1 (12%)	2 (6%)	7 (24%)

At this time, the Children’s Early Years Division has 17 signed CWELCC funding agreements with licensed child care programmes. The County’s 4 Directly Operated Child Care Centres and our Directly Operated Home Child Care Agency are enrolled in the CWELCC System and do not require a CWELCC funding agreement. A total of 22 programmes are currently in receipt of funding to support fee reduction under the CWELCC System. The Children’s Early Years Division continues to receive applications and enroll the remaining licensed child care programmes that have opted-in to the CWELCC System.

Recommendation:

That the report CEYD-22-08 Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System Implementation Update be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Koroniak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping tail.

Mandy Koroniak
Director of Children's Early Years Division



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

CEYD-22-09

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Mandy Koroniak, Director of Children's Early Years Division
Date: Wednesday, November 09, 2022
Subject: **Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System New Positions**

Background:

In 2022, funding was provided to the County, as the service system manager for child care and early years, to implement the 100% federally funded Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System in the County of Wellington and City of Guelph. It is the responsibility of service system managers to administer the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System in a manner consistent with any direction provided by the Minister, as outlined in O. Reg. 137/15. Further information about the CWELCC System and implementation updates were shared by Children's Early Years in reports CEYD-22-04, CEYD-22-05, and CEYD-22-08.

Update:

Funding provided to the County under the CWELCC System in 2022 included \$249,094 in administration funding. This funding is a specific allocation under the transfer payment agreement with the Ministry of Education to support administrative costs associated with the implementation of the CWELCC System. There are no administration cost sharing requirements on the CWELCC System administration allocation. CWELCC System administration expenses must represent actual expenses incurred for programme administration and may be used to support costs related to implementation, transition and IT costs associated with supporting the CWELCC System.

Current positions in the Children's Early Years Division have undertaken initial implementation of the CWELCC System, however additional staff are needed to meet the ongoing demands of administration and oversight of this programme. Staff have identified that two CWELCC-funded positions are required:

- 1 FTE Manager of Child Care Administration to administer and monitor the CWELCC System, including receiving agreement and funding applications, monitoring financial reports, maintaining statistics, budget and payment schedules, and monitoring and ensuring the accuracy of all Ministry and County reporting requirements.
- 1 FTE Children's Early Years Funding Analyst responsible for data collection and analysis of information related to the CWELCC System, including the design of reports, review of payments, service data, and financial reports received from service providers, and supporting reconciliation processes.

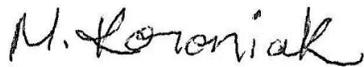
Financial Implications:

The combined annual estimated cost for these two positions is \$225,000. This cost will be fully funded through the CWELCC System administration allocation, which is 100% federally funded with no municipal cost sharing requirements. Staff are anticipating having these positions in place for the start of 2023.

Recommendation:

That the two CWELCC-funded positions of Manager of Administration and Children’s Early Years Funding Analyst be approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Mandy Koroniak
Director of Children’s Early Years Division

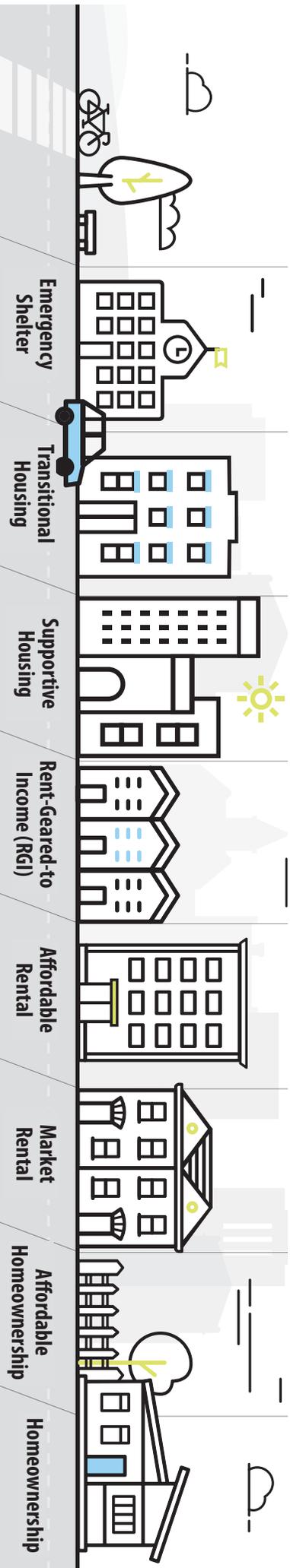


County of Wellington Housing Services

Status and Activity Report - 2022 Q1 and Q2 (January 1 - June 30, 2022)

The County of Wellington is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for Social Services for the Wellington service area (City of Guelph and County of Wellington). Within the Social Services department, the Housing Services division is responsible for the delivery and administration of provincially mandated social and affordable housing programmes, as well as initiatives to prevent and address homelessness. The work carried out by the Housing Services division and our partner organizations spans across the entire Housing Continuum.

HOUSING CONTINUUM Guelph - Wellington



The Housing Continuum, illustrated below, can be thought of as the range of housing options individuals may need over a lifetime, including temporary emergency shelter, transitional and supportive housing along with subsidized, affordable and market rental housing as well as homeownership.

Most of the work of the County of Wellington Housing Services Division as Service Manager focuses on the portion of the Housing Continuum related to Emergency Shelters across to Affordable Rental Housing.

This Status and Activity report presents information about Housing Services activities up to the end of the second quarter of 2022.

This report is organized following the Housing Continuum, beginning with the updated information about Emergency Shelter services.

Emergency Shelter

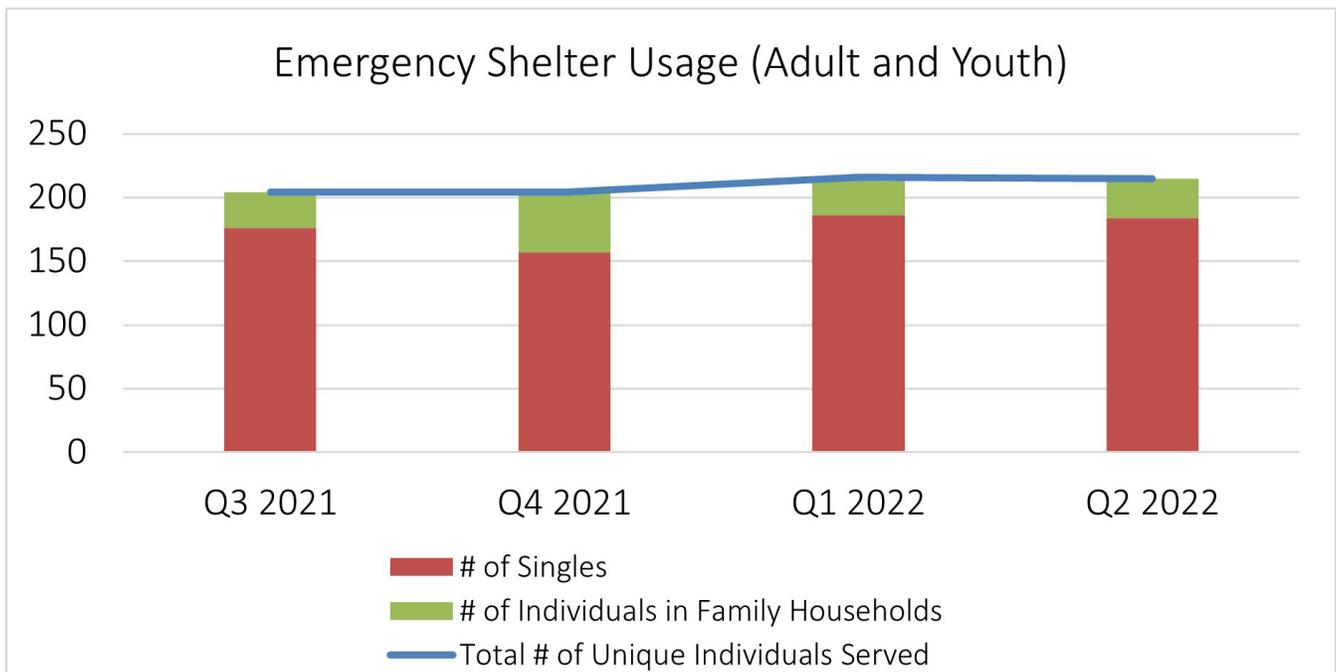
Emergency Shelters are an important part of our homeless serving system, providing necessary crisis response and housing supports to adults, youth, and families experiencing and/or at risk of homelessness. As part of the ongoing transformation of the Guelph-Wellington Emergency shelter system, emergency shelter services also include outreach and diversion services. Emergency shelters have embedded a housing-focused service orientation in their service delivery model as well as a Housing First philosophy.

At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, all adult and youth emergency shelters were closed to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. While the youth emergency shelter re-opened earlier in 2021, the adult emergency shelter locations have remained closed as of June 30, 2022. Emergency shelter services for adults, temporarily located at Loyola House, were relocated to the Holiday Inn Express (HIE) in Guelph as of November 2021.



As of June 30, 2022, there are a total of 73 emergency shelter beds across the Wellington service area.

The graph below includes information about emergency shelter usage including youth emergency shelter as well as all adult emergency shelters up to the second quarter of 2022.

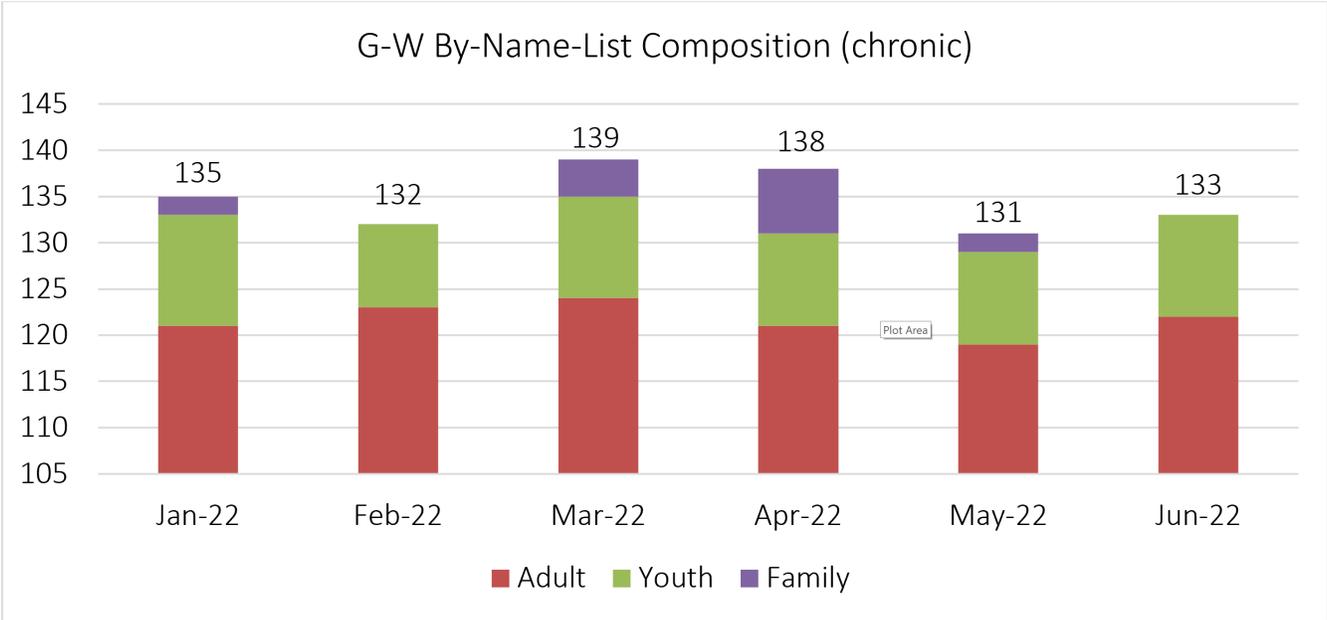


Preventing and Responding to Chronic homelessness: the Guelph-Wellington By-Name-List (BNL)

The County of Wellington in collaboration with our community partners are working to transform our local homeless serving system and end chronic homelessness. Individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness have been experiencing homelessness for over 6 months and often need supportive housing.

What is the Guelph-Wellington By-Name-List?

The Guelph-Wellington By-Name-List (G-W BNL) is a real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness in Guelph-Wellington. The County of Wellington manages the G-WBNL which helps service providers prioritize needs, track changes in housing status as individuals and families move in and out of (chronic) homelessness and inform overall actions as we move towards ending chronic homelessness in our community. The graph below shows how the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness who are active on the BNL fluctuates from month to month between January and June 2022. During this period, there was a monthly average of 135 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness active on the Guelph-Wellington By-Name-List (BNL).

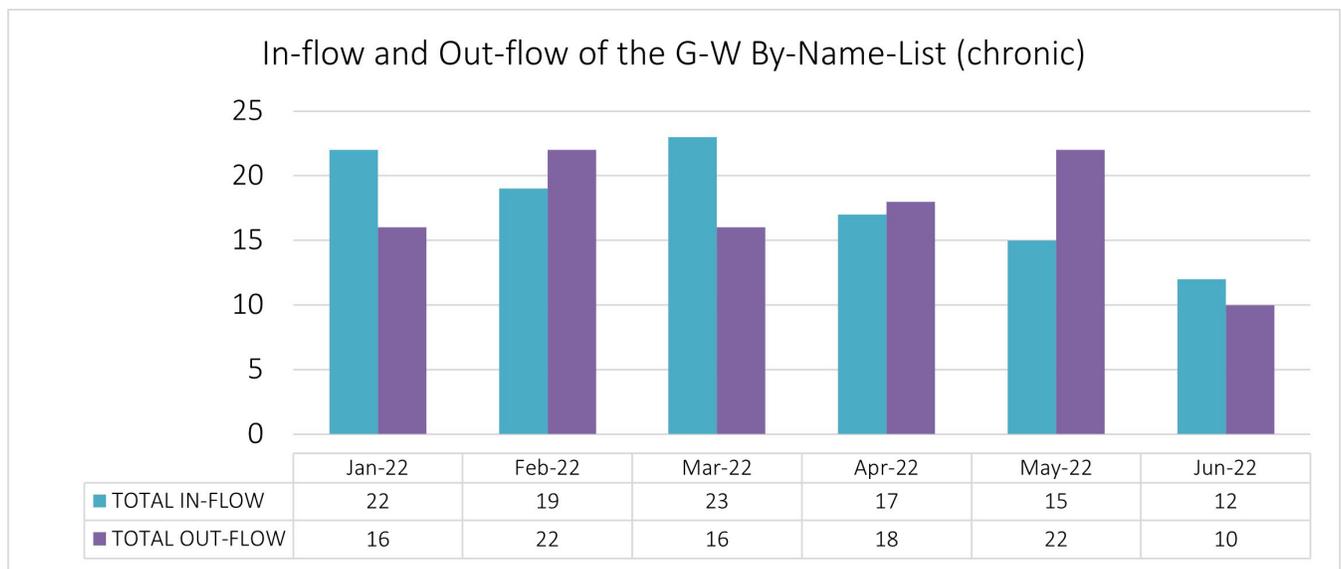


In-flow and Out-flow the Guelph-Wellington By-Name-List (chronic)

In-flow refers to new names on the BNL and out-flow refers to individuals exiting the BNL into a housing placement or when they become inactive. Information gathered through the Guelph-Wellington BNL helps us understand who is coming into the homelessness system (in-flow) and who is being housed/leaving the system (out-flow).

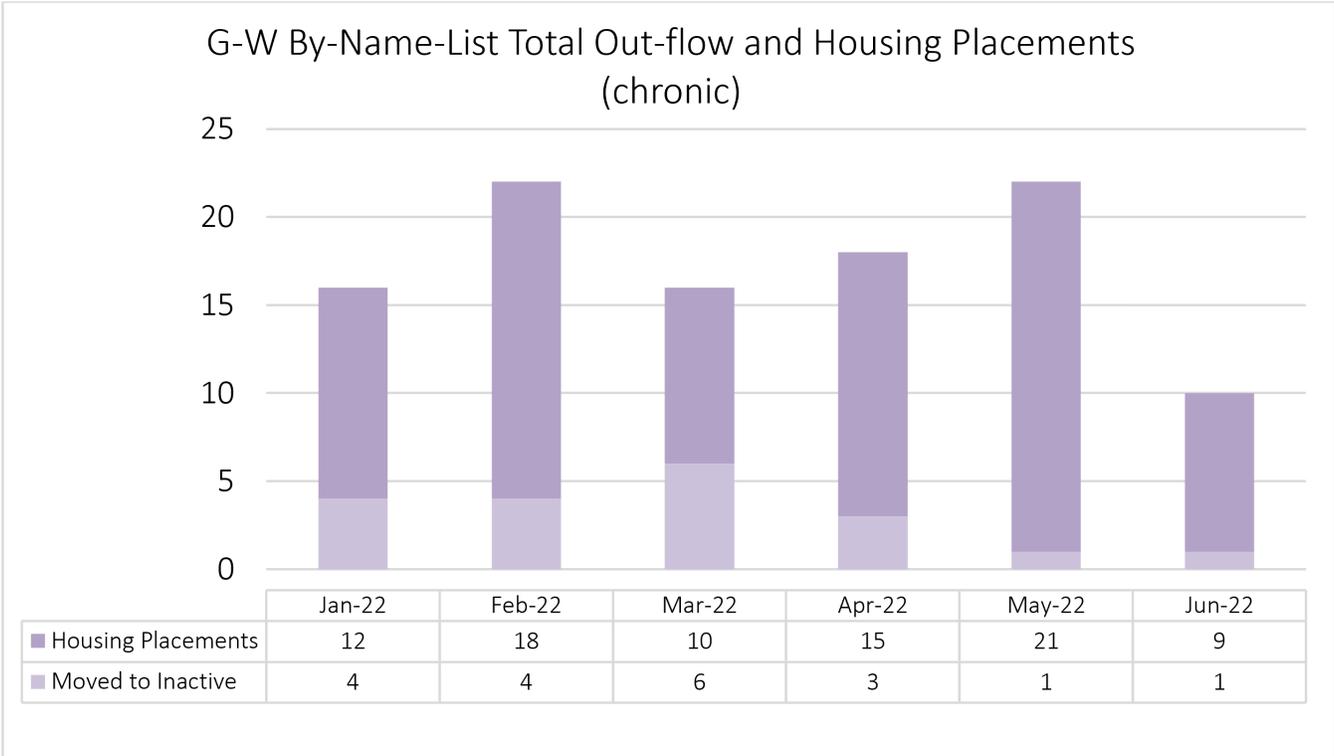
Monitoring BNL information helps us target outreach and diversion strategies to help reduce in-flow and, helps inform local resources and strategies that connect individuals with permanent housing solutions, which increases out-flow.

The monthly fluctuations of new individuals coming onto the BNL (in-flow) individuals exiting the G-W BNL (out-flow) shown in the graph below do not include the total number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness who are active on the G-W BNL. On average between January and June 2022, monthly in-flow was 18 and monthly out-flow was 17.



G-W BNL Outflow: Housing Placements for Individuals Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

Individuals housed from the G-W BNL are accommodated in various housing types, including market rentals, affordable rentals, Rent-Geared-to-Income housing (RGI), supportive and transitional housing. The number of housing placements from the G-W BNL varies each month.



Between January and June 30, 2022: There are a total of 85 housing placements for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness on the G-W BNL.

Transitional Housing:

Transitional Housing refers to temporary or time limited housing units that provide an intermediate step between emergency crisis shelter and permanent housing. Transitional housing units provide a safe and stable housing option along with individualized wrap-around support services that could include health, mental health, substance use supports, counselling, job training and placement, community activities, and help with life skills.



As of June 30, 2022: There are a total of 20 Transitional Housing units across the Wellington service area (Guelph and Wellington County).

Supportive Housing

Supportive Housing refers to housing that combines rental assistance (i.e., rent subsidy) with individualized health support services for people with high needs related to physical or mental health, developmental disabilities, or substance use. Supportive housing units can be delivered in “scattered sites” across different housing provider locations or can be purpose-built housing.



As of June 30, 2022: There are a total of 40 Supportive Housing units across the Wellington service area (Guelph and Wellington County).

In addition, as of June 2022 there are an additional 72 units of Supportive Housing in development, expected to become available in 2023.

Rent- Geared-to-Income (RGI) Housing

Rent- Geared-to-Income (RGI) is also referred to as social housing or subsidized housing. Rent- Geared-to-Income housing are units for which the tenants pay no more than 30% of their household income on rent. The remainder of the rental cost is subsidized through government contributions.



As of June 30, 2022: There are a total of 2,849 RGI units across the Wellington service area (Guelph and Wellington County).

Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing rental units refer to government - funded housing where the rent is at or below the average market rent of a unit in the regional market area. All Affordable Housing placements are assigned chronologically.

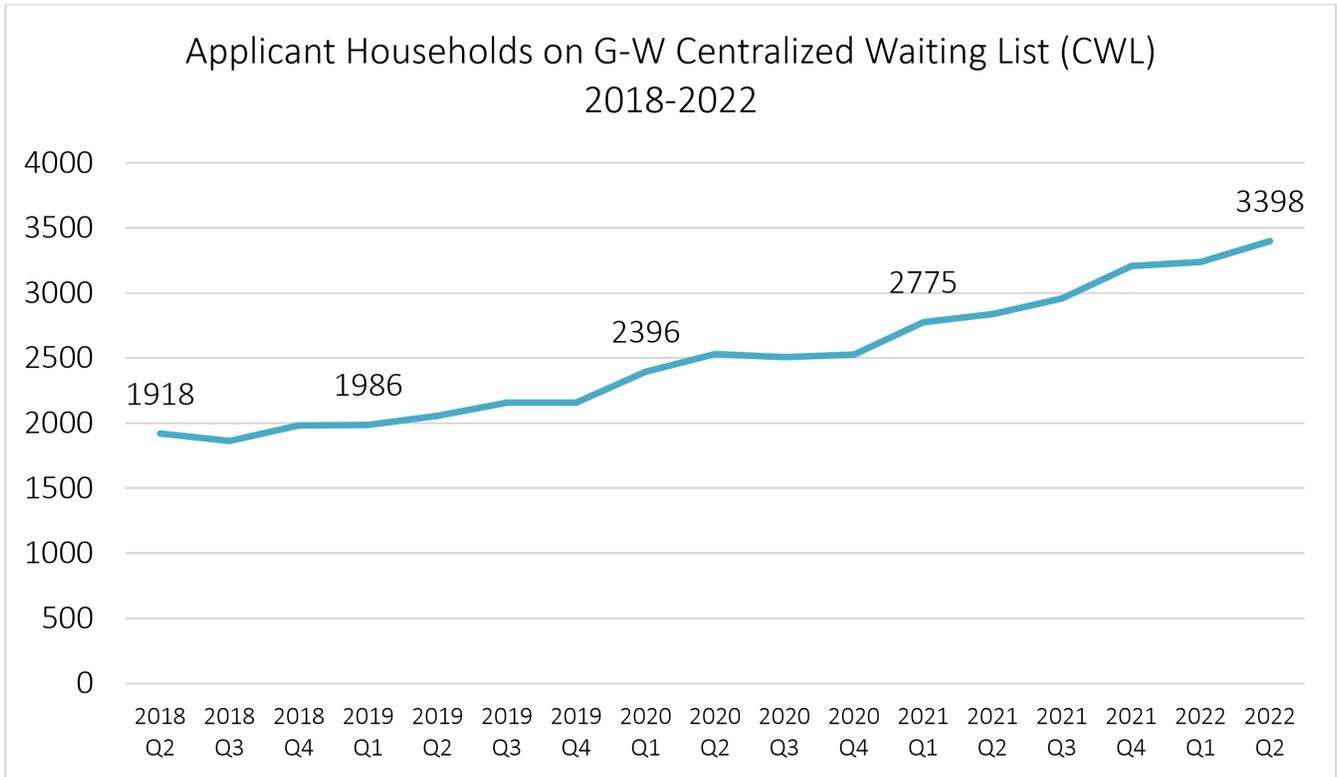


As of June 30, 2022: There are a total of 616 Affordable Housing units across the Wellington service area (Guelph and Wellington County).

In addition, as of June 30, 2022, there are an additional 65 units of Affordable Housing in development expected to become available in 2023.

Centralized Waiting List (CWL)

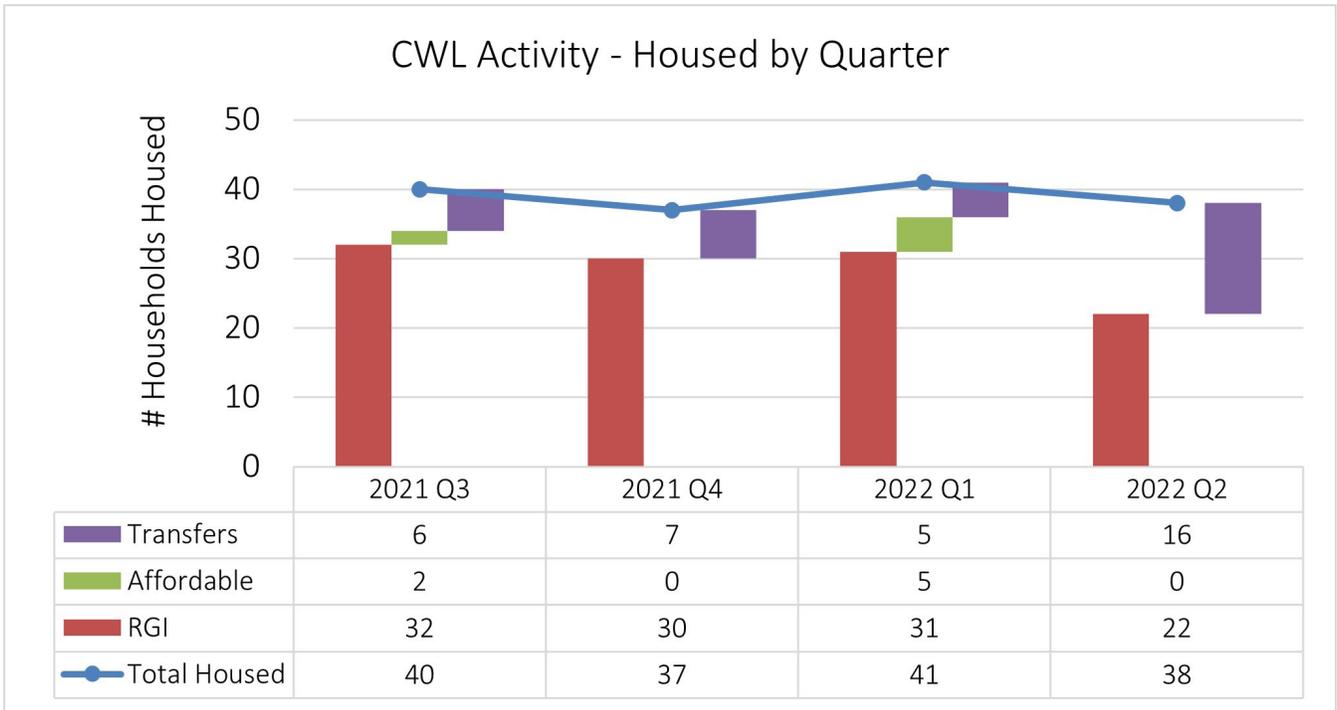
As part of the Service Manager role, the County of Wellington manages the Guelph-Wellington Centralized Waiting List. The Centralized Waiting Lists in each service manager area have been established in compliance with criteria set out in the Housing Services Act, 2011 and the Regulations for the purposes of allocating Rent-Geared-to-Income, Rent Support and Special Needs housing units. Affordable housing applications are also managed through the CWL process by Housing Services.



The graph above represents eligible households waiting for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing on the G-W CWL, showing a total of 3,398 households on the CWL as of June 30, 2022. Overall, the total number of households on the CWL waiting for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing continues to trend upwards.

Centralized Wait List (CWL) Housed Data

The housing placements from the CWL, illustrated below, include households housed in RGI units, affordable housing rental units as well as household transfers from one RGI unit to another. When a CWL applicant household is housed, their application is removed from the CWL.



Restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic remained in place to protect the health of staff and the public in the first half of 2022. Housing placements in 2022 Q1 and Q2 have remained lower than the pre-pandemic average of 60 placements per quarter in 2019 (pre-pandemic).

County of Wellington - Ontario Works



2019-22 County / City Caseload

Monthly County of Wellington Caseload	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change From Previous Month Cases	Change From Previous Month %	Change From Previous Year Cases	Change From Previous Year %
January	398	375	289	300	13	4.5%	11	3.8%
February	397	371	286	318	18	6.0%	32	11.2%
March	402	383	291	342	24	7.5%	51	17.5%
April	414	386	292	355	13	3.8%	63	21.6%
May	411	370	290	355	-	0.0%	65	22.4%
June	402	350	284	352	(3)	-0.8%	68	23.9%
July	381	330	289	338	(14)	-4.0%	49	17.0%
August	381	322	287	351	13	3.8%	64	22.3%
September	372	306	269	362	11	3.1%	93	34.6%
October	374	316	265					
November	369	298	281					
December	354	296	287					
Total	4,655	4,103	3,410	3,073				
Average	388	342	284	341			57	20.2%

Monthly City of Guelph Caseload	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change From Previous Month Cases	Change From Previous Month %	Change From Previous Year Cases	Change From Previous Year %
January	1,612	1,680	1,279	1,315	51	4.0%	36	2.8%
February	1,600	1,697	1,241	1,334	19	1.4%	93	7.5%
March	1,610	1,712	1,243	1,394	60	4.5%	151	12.1%
April	1,611	1,772	1,222	1,397	3	0.2%	175	14.3%
May	1,658	1,667	1,212	1,409	12	0.9%	197	16.3%
June	1,669	1,578	1,201	1,434	25	1.8%	233	19.4%
July	1,668	1,522	1,203	1,425	(9)	-0.6%	222	18.5%
August	1,699	1,482	1,176	1,398	(27)	-1.9%	222	18.9%
September	1,672	1,392	1,111	1,414	16	1.1%	303	27.3%
October	1,647	1,355	1,108					
November	1,640	1,325	1,177					
December	1,651	1,297	1,264					
Total	19,737	18,479	14,437	12,520				
Average	1,645	1,540	1,203	1,391			188	15.6%

County of Wellington - Ontario Works



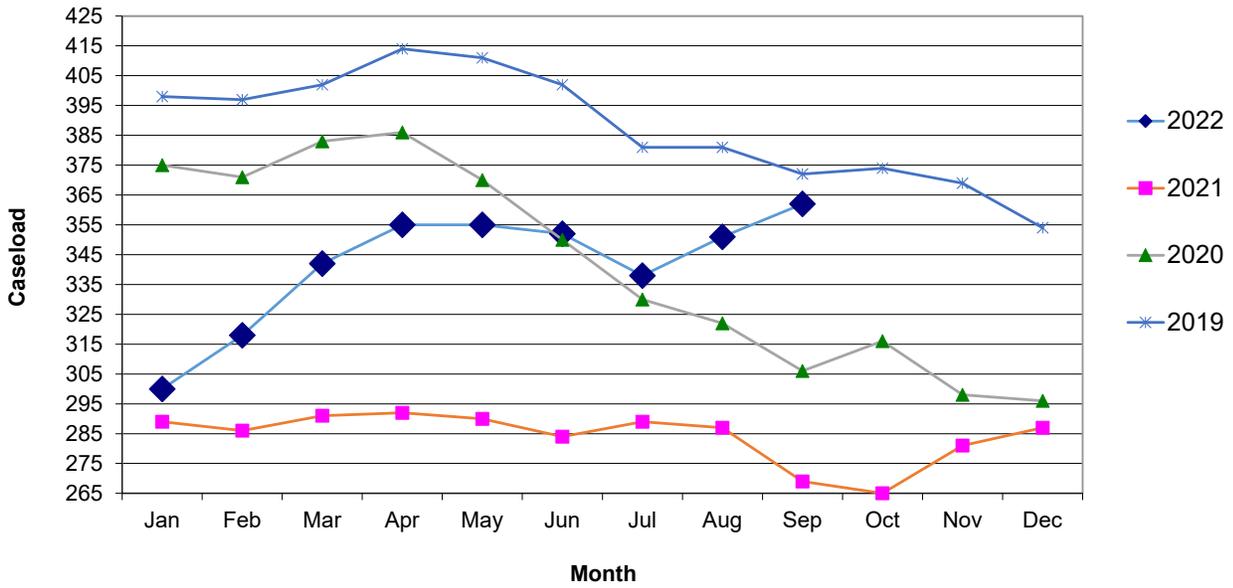
2019-22 County / City Caseload

Monthly Total City and County Combined Caseload					Change From Previous Month Cases	Change From Previous Month %	Change From Previous Year Cases	Change From Previous Year %
	2019	2020	2021	2022				
January	2,010	2,055	1,568	1,615	64	4.1%	47	3.0%
February	1,997	2,068	1,527	1,652	37	2.3%	125	8.2%
March	2,012	2,095	1,534	1,736	84	5.1%	202	13.2%
April	2,025	2,158	1,514	1,752	16	0.9%	238	15.7%
May	2,069	2,037	1,502	1,764	12	0.7%	262	17.4%
June	2,071	1,928	1,485	1,786	22	1.2%	301	20.3%
July	2,049	1,852	1,492	1,763	(23)	-1.3%	271	18.2%
August	2,080	1,804	1,463	1,749	(14)	-0.8%	286	19.5%
September	2,044	1,698	1,380	1,776	27	1.5%	396	28.7%
October	2,021	1,671	1,373					
November	2,009	1,623	1,458					
December	2,005	1,593	1,551					
Total	24,392	22,582	17,847	15,593				
Average	2,033	1,882	1,487	1,733			245	16.5%

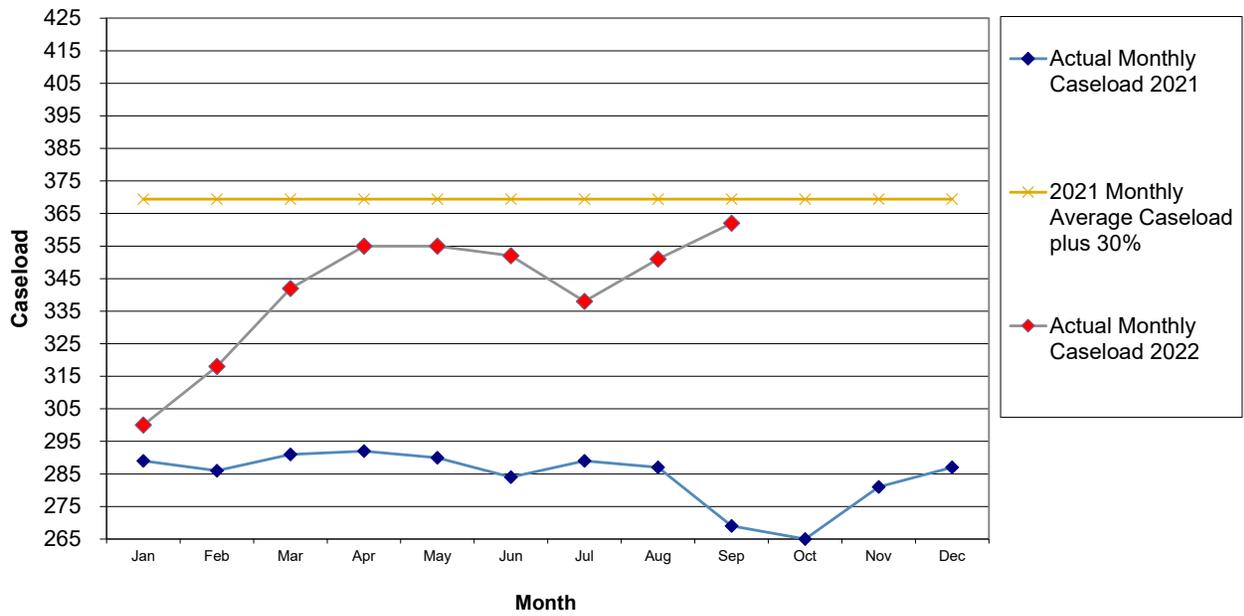
Monthly City/County % Share of Caseload	2019		2020		2021		2022	
	City	County	City	County	City	County	City	County
January	80.2%	19.8%	81.8%	18.2%	81.6%	18.4%	81.4%	18.6%
February	80.1%	19.9%	82.1%	17.9%	81.3%	18.7%	80.8%	19.2%
March	80.0%	20.0%	81.7%	18.3%	81.0%	19.0%	80.3%	19.7%
April	79.6%	20.4%	82.1%	17.9%	80.7%	19.3%	79.7%	20.3%
May	80.1%	19.9%	81.8%	18.2%	80.7%	19.3%	79.9%	20.1%
June	80.6%	19.4%	81.8%	18.2%	80.9%	19.1%	80.3%	19.7%
July	81.4%	18.6%	82.2%	17.8%	80.6%	19.4%	80.8%	19.2%
August	81.7%	18.3%	82.2%	17.8%	80.4%	19.6%	79.9%	20.1%
September	81.8%	18.2%	82.0%	18.0%	80.5%	19.5%	79.6%	20.4%
October	81.5%	18.5%	81.1%	18.9%	80.7%	19.3%		
November	81.6%	18.4%	81.6%	18.4%	80.7%	19.3%		
December	82.3%	17.7%	81.4%	18.6%	81.5%	18.5%		
Average	80.9%	19.1%	81.8%	18.2%	80.9%	19.1%	80.3%	19.7%

Note: City/County splits are based on % municipal breakdown caseload report as a % of the Official Stats on the Operational Report

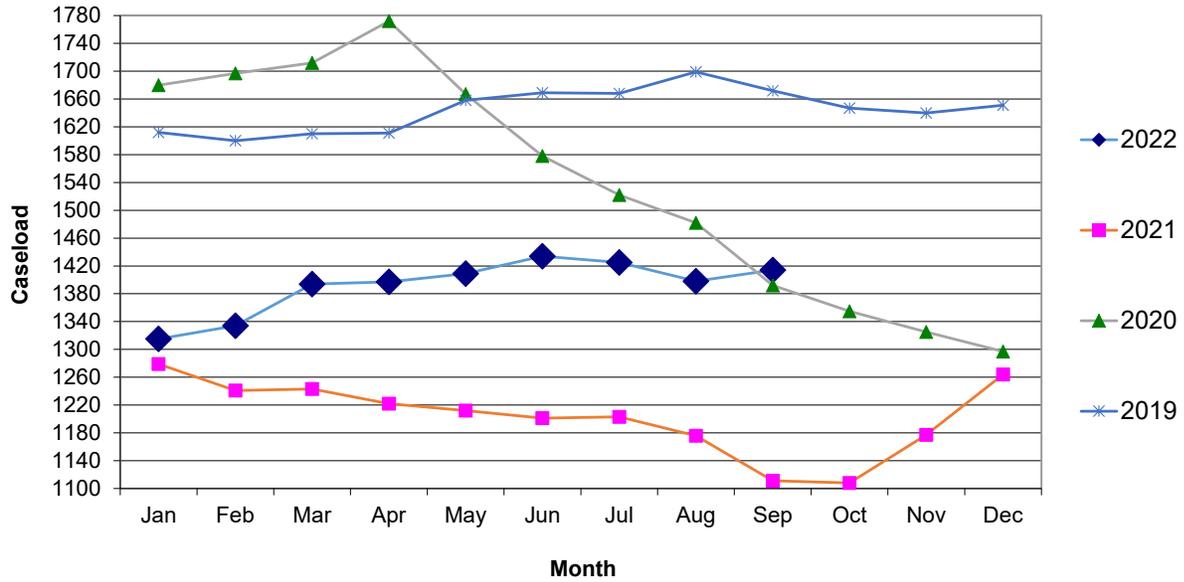
County of Wellington Ontario Works Caseload - January 2019 to September 2022



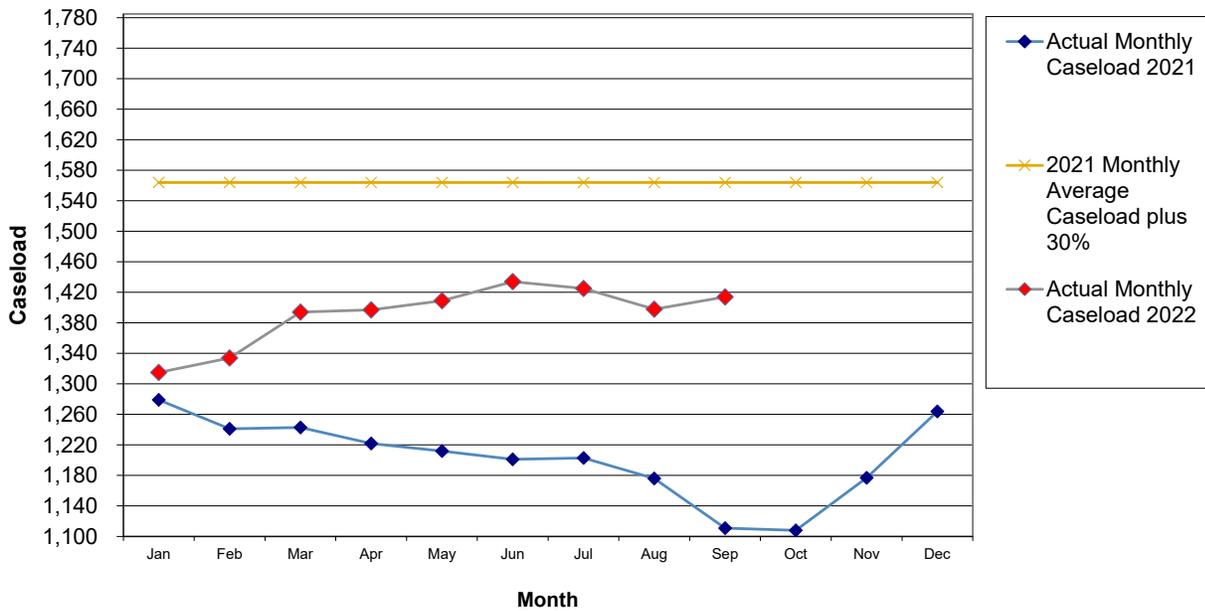
County of Wellington Ontario Works Caseload Budget/Actual Comparison



City of Guelph Ontario Works Caseload - January 2019 to September 2022



City of Guelph Ontario Works Caseload Budget/Actual Comparison





COMMITTEE REPORT

OW-22-07

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Stuart Beumer, Director of Ontario Works
Date: Wednesday, November 09, 2022
Subject: **Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes: Impact and Programme Evaluation**

Background:

In April of this year, information was provided to the Social Services Committee summarizing the digital equity initiatives being undertaken by the Ontario Works (OW) division to better meet the needs of individuals and families in receipt of OW assistance and newcomer settlement services. Since that time, the OW division has completed further work with clients and staff to better understand the impact of these programmes that have been initiated since the onset of the pandemic.

The attached document “Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes: Impact and Programme Evaluation” summarizes the digital equity programmes currently being offered to clients through the Ontario Works division. It also summarizes the results of a recently completed survey with Ontario Works and Settlement Services clients that have accessed these programmes. The report also includes feedback from Ontario Works staff and provides a brief summary of work happening at the community level to address digital equity issues.

Highlights of Survey Results:

Throughout September and October of this year a client survey was conducted with individuals that have accessed the Get Connected cell phone programme and the device lending initiatives provided through Ontario Works. In addition, feedback was solicited from Ontario Works staff who work directly with individuals receiving these supports, in an effort to assess the impact of these programmes from their perspective.

The following are highlights from this impact analysis:

- 100% of client survey respondents indicated that having a phone made it easier to access services and supports and the majority reported positive life changes as a result
- OW Caseworkers have appreciated the ability to connect more easily with clients, especially those who are homeless or with other complex challenges
- Borrowed devices have assisted clients in accessing education, training and English as a Second Language (ESL) programmes
- The majority of respondents are comfortable using devices for daily communication (email, texts, video calls); however, their confidence reduces significantly when it comes to more advanced functions, such as working with or creating documents or installing applications.

Next Steps:

The Ontario Works division is committed to continuing to support the digital needs of clients on a prioritized basis and within allowable OW programme expenditure and service guidelines. Staff are also committed to working with the province, local service providers and other interested organizations and businesses to continue to advocate for residents in Wellington and Guelph most impacted by poverty and other complex challenges.

Financial Implications

The digital equity initiatives being supported through the Ontario Works Division will not have any impact on the County's 2023 Budget and 10 Year Plan.

Attachment: Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes: Impact and Programme Evaluation, October 2022.

Acknowledgement:

Dunja Lukić, Social Planning and Policy Analyst completed the analysis and authored the attached document.

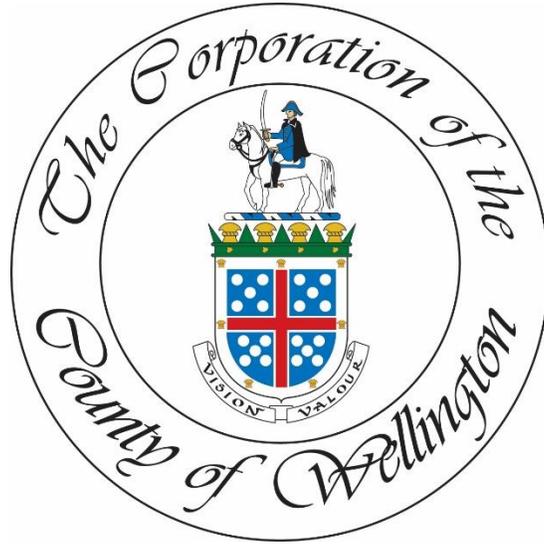
Recommendation:

That report OW-22-07 Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes - Impact and Evaluation be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,



Stuart Beumer
Director of Ontario Works



**Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes:
Impact and Programme Evaluation**

October 2022

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Introduction

The rapid shift to virtual services across all sectors during the pandemic highlighted the necessity of reliable access to the internet and to digital devices. This shift also revealed the existence of a digital divide in our community – the gap between those who can access and use information and communication technologies in their daily lives and people who cannot. With essential supports such as medical appointments, court hearings, and training programmes shifting to hybrid or virtual delivery, the need to address digital equity in our communities has become a clear imperative.

Digital equity is described as a state where individuals can readily and effectively access and use technology to participate in society. For those in our community who are unsheltered, living in poverty, and facing complex challenges, the pandemic closures of public spaces such as libraries further reduced access to computers, Wi-Fi, and other digital devices critical to accessing healthcare and social supports.

Accessing essential services and supports online also poses challenges to residents of rural areas, where high-speed, reliable, and affordable internet access may not be readily available. Along with other divisions and Departments across the Corporation of the County of Wellington, including Housing Services, Children’s Early Years division, the County Library Department and Economic Development division, Ontario Works (OW) has undertaken initiatives to address the digital divide and work towards digital equity for residents in the City of Guelph and the County of Wellington.

Ontario Works Digital Equity Programmes

In line with the provincial Digital and Data Strategy in the Ontario Onwards Action Plan (October 2020), the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) released a vision for social assistance transformation in early 2021. This new vision focused on redesigning service delivery roles and responsibilities, including the automation and centralization of financial assistance. In the transition to online services, MCCSS has recognized the digital divide as a barrier for social assistance recipients.

The Ontario Works division implemented two new programmes to address these concerns and bridge the digital divide for OW recipients and settlement services clients in Guelph and Wellington County.

Get Connected Programme

In 2021, Ontario Works partnered with the Guelph Community Health Centre, Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis, Sanguen, and Compass Family Services through a United Way grant to distribute phones and low-cost plans to clients of these agencies who needed them. The Ontario Works division supported OW clients specifically through dedicated funding for phones and low-cost talk and text plans for up to two years to help them meet their employment and life stabilization goals. Since the start of the programme, 205 OW clients have been provided a Wi-Fi-enabled smartphone with a referral from their caseworker based on their ongoing need for a device, and subject to manager approval. The demand for this programme continues to grow and there are additional clients in the process of receiving a phone.

The majority of Ontario Works clients participating in the Get Connected programme access specialized supports through a Life Skills caseworker due to complex barriers such as homelessness, mental health challenges and addictions. These clients require a device to receive medical care and social supports, as

well as facilitating the search for housing. The programme is also supporting OW clients who have been victims of human trafficking and domestic abuse and is enabling clients to fulfill legal responsibilities such as attending court appointments. In addition to supporting clients in achieving greater stability in their lives, the majority of participants in the Get Connected programme are also searching for work and are able to complete interviews and connect with employers over the phone.

Device Lending Programme

Ontario Works launched a device lending programme for OW and Settlement Services clients in March of 2021. 60 Chromebook laptop computers, and 35 internet hotspots are available to OW and Settlement Services clients on longer-term loan to support employment and education goals, to enable access to virtual programmes and services, and to foster social inclusion and well-being. Increasing access to these devices for clients in the rural townships has been facilitated through collaboration with the County of Wellington library network. Clients residing outside of the City of Guelph are able to pick up and return their devices at any County library branch. The 95 devices available for loan to Ontario Works and Settlement Services clients have been borrowed more than 200 times since the launch of the programme in early 2021.

The device lending programme has enabled clients to complete English as a Second Language (ESL) courses online, attend workshops and training through Continuing Education and other local service providers, participate in employment readiness programmes through the Ontario Works office, and search for work.

Refurbished Computer Purchases and Referrals

Through an established partnership with Renewed Computer Technology and Hope House, Ontario Works has the ability to provide a limited number of desktop or laptop computers to support clients and their dependents with educational goals or to address issues of social exclusion. Requests for a computer are assessed by OW Caseworkers based on a member of the household's participation in educational programmes, community involvement, or need for social connection and participation. Computer purchases from Renewed Computer Technology are issued using the provincially funded "Other Employment and Employment Assistance Activities Benefit", up to a maximum of \$235 per 12-month period.

Ontario Works Caseworkers also provide regular referrals to local literacy and basic skills service providers for Digital Literacy Programmes such as Northstar Digital Literacy.

Programme Funding

Refurbished computer purchases, the Get Connected Phone Programme and the Device Lending Programmes are funded through existing Employment Services budget allocations. County purchasing agreements and rates are used whenever possible to secure the best possible rates. The cost to fund the current initiatives is approximately \$4,500 per month and has slowly increased as the number of OW and Settlement Services clients supported through the programmes grows.

However, planned changes in social assistance programme delivery, particularly with regards to Employment Services, may impact the ability for costs to be covered within the OW budget resulting in

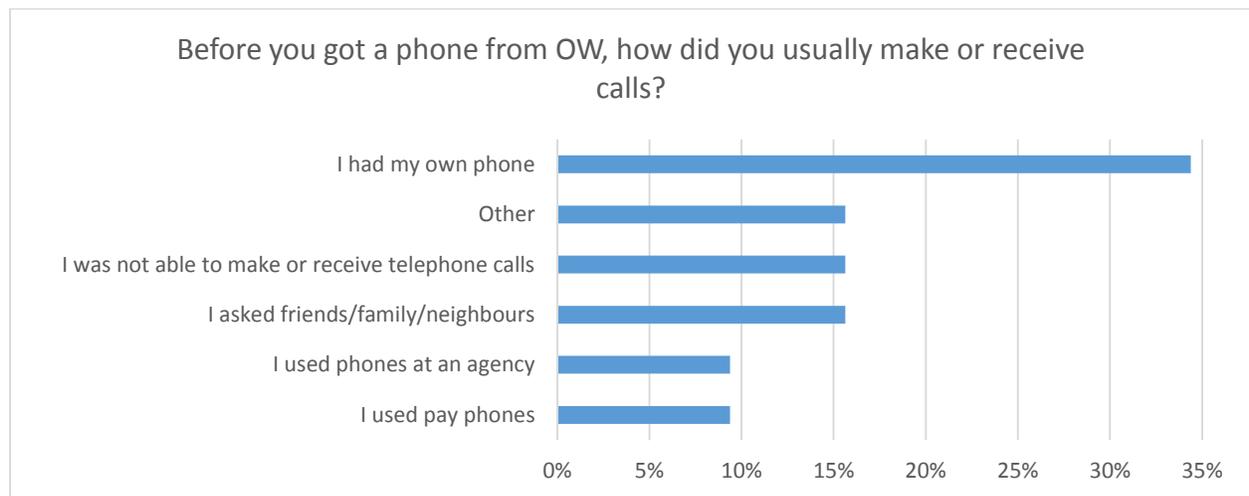
the inability to continue to deliver and fund this type of support to clients unless additional funding is provided to sustain these important programmes.

Programme Impacts

The Ontario Works division conducted a survey in September 2022 to better understand the impacts of digital equity programmes for Ontario Works and Settlement Services clients. The survey offered the opportunity for clients to identify changes experienced in their lives as a result of participating in the phone and/or device lending programmes, and to provide feedback about their experiences using the devices. A total of 38 client responses were obtained through an anonymous online survey as well as a survey administered in person by caseworkers. The response rate reflects the significant challenges and complex barriers faced by most clients participating in these programmes, many of whom are navigating homelessness and other crisis situations. Caseworkers and Settlement Workers were also asked to provide feedback about how the programmes have helped them work with clients and what they have observed about the impact of these programmes on the lived experiences of their clients.

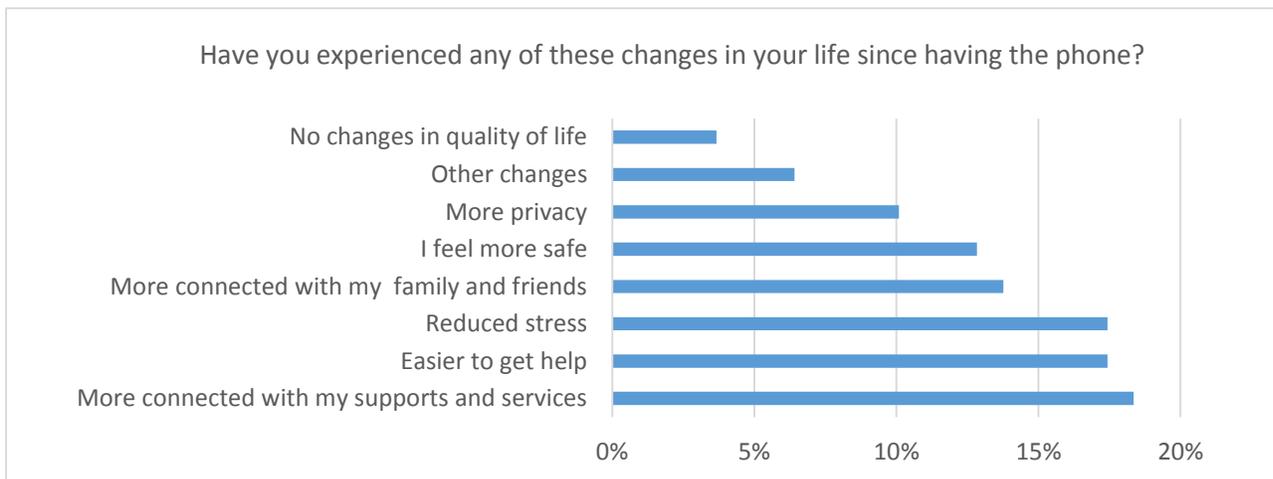
Get Connected Programme

A total of 25 clients who participated in the phone programme responded to the survey, with more than two thirds indicating that they were not able to make calls or that they relied on pay phones, friends and family, or service providers for telephone access prior to receiving a phone through Ontario Works.



Respondents indicated that they use their phones to connect to public Wi-Fi (47%) or to the internet at home (44%). Half of the respondents (48%) also indicated that the phone they received is the only device they are able to use on a regular basis to access the internet.

All respondents (100%) indicated that the phone provided made it easier to access the services and supports they need. Making and attending appointments (35%), staying in touch with family and friends (31%), and staying connected to workers and other supports (16%) were identified as common uses of the phone. The majority of respondents reported experiencing multiple positive life changes as a result of having the phone, including being more connected with formal and informal support networks (32%), reduced stress and increased ability to get help when needed (35%), greater sense of safety (13%) and more privacy (10%).



A number of respondents indicated that having a phone allowed them to function independently and participate in their communities, which they were not able to do prior to participating in the programme:

“I am now able to communicate fully with the most commonly used formats making it easier to function in society”

“[Having a phone] has allowed for greater independence and conducting day to day activities”

“[Having a phone] is really helpful, especially because I couldn’t do much without internet when I went to school or was outdoors I had no means of communication”

Many respondents shared that they were able to look for work and obtain employment as a result of having a phone. One client indicated that they “found a good full-time job within days of getting the phone”.

Caseworker feedback corroborates the impact of the programmes on the lives of their clients. One caseworker shared that:

“A client was actively job searching without a telephone and though he was qualified for the jobs he was applying for...he was always told he had missed the opportunity or that they don’t hire that way. After receiving an OW phone he put out an updated set of resumes with a phone contact and was hired for part time employment within two

weeks. He has been able to maintain that employment and is looking for a second part time job.”

Another caseworker working with clients in the rural areas of the County shared that the phone programme enabled the caseworker to provide support to a client in crisis:

“[The client] has been heavily traumatized; in and out of homes, abused and generally at risk of serious harm. By providing her with a phone, we were able to assist her with a lifeline to call resources in the community that she would otherwise not be able to contact when in crisis, which helped lower her overall level of risk.”

The phone programme has also impacted service delivery and enabled caseworkers to maintain contact and provide ongoing support to clients with complex challenges:

“The phone programme has not only meant a lot for my clients but has also helped me do my job better. I am able to contact those who are most in need (usually without an address) which allows us to have open communication. This makes it easier for them to reach out to me when they need help and also prevents me from having to suspend their files just to get them to make contact. It has aided in lessening their isolation as well as connecting them with their support networks, including keeping up-to-date with important meetings.”

Device Lending Programme

A total of 11 clients who borrowed Chromebook laptops and six clients who borrowed hotspots responded to the survey, with the vast majority (70%) indicating having internet access at home. Most respondents borrowed the devices to participate in education or training, with all respondents indicating that the device made it easier to access supports and services:

“[This programme] was very helpful in my ESL learning journey. The programme assisted me to contact the teachers and join the online classes. This programme had an amazing impact on my learning and my settlement.”

Clients also shared that the device lending programme assisted with social inclusion:

“[The programme] has been a life changing luxury for my son and I especially during covid or there would have been complete isolation”

Settlement workers also identified learning and social inclusion as positive impacts of the programme, including enabling newcomers to attend their virtual Canadian citizenship ceremonies and participate in an online financial literacy programme for understanding the banking system in Canada.

“The device lending programme has a fantastic impact on the newcomers in the County of Wellington, especially, during the lockdown and online learning, as they were able to use these devices to study English, to communicate with their families back home, and to meet with their service providers such as doctors, case workers and settlement workers”

Digital Literacy

Survey respondents were asked about their confidence in using the features of the device(s) they received or borrowed through Ontario Works. The majority of respondents indicated high levels of confidence in using their devices to check emails (82%), participate in video calls (73%) and look for information online (73%). Reported levels of confidence reduced considerably when it came to using applications to create documents (such as Google Docs) or to complete more advanced functions such as installing video conferencing applications. The few respondents who indicated that they needed help to use their device were all able to resolve their issues, with the preferred method of receiving troubleshooting help being one-on-one support from their caseworker.

Digital Equity Community Advocacy

A number of organizations supporting municipal governments, including the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) have identified that digital equity is a growing priority in a rapidly changing service delivery environment.

As part of a pre-budget submission in February of 2022, OMSSA identified that “as the government shifts to involve further online services people need to be provided with funding (including a financial benefit for technology) as part of a Digital Access Strategy”¹, recognizing that many individuals in receipt of social assistance do not have access to high-speed internet or cell phone service.

Similarly, AMO identified bridging the digital divide as a key policy priority for pandemic recovery in a 2020 memo to the Prime Minister’s Office and the Privy Council Office, recognizing that internet access is a “lifeline [that] enables access to food, medicine and medical services, family, schooling and...work” and that inequities in connectivity were exacerbated during the pandemic, underscoring an economic and social need for connectivity in underserved and unserved communities².

At the federal level, the FCM has identified broadband access as a focus area, stating that “COVID-19 has shown just how urgent it is to close Canada’s digital divide” with millions of Canadians turning “to the Internet for work, for school – and for basic human connection” during periods of lockdown³.

Locally, County of Wellington Social Services staff are involved in work to bridge the digital divide through a local Digital Equity Coalition with other service providers from the City of Guelph and the County of Wellington. This collaborative community group has identified key priorities for advancing digital equity across our service area, in partnership with the provincial Alliance for Healthier Communities. The local Digital Equity Coalition has identified three areas of focus, including advocacy, access to devices and networks, and capacity building to address digital literacy gaps in Guelph and

¹ Ontario Municipal Social Services Association. (2022, February 11.) *OMSSA 2022 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission*. https://www.omssa.com/docs/OMSSA_2022_Provincial_Pre-Budget_Submission.pdf

² Association of Municipalities of Ontario. (2020, September 16). *Supporting Communities: Driving Recovery in the Wake of COVID-19 Policy Memo to the Prime Minister’s Office and the Privy Council Office*. <https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2020/SupportingCommunitiesDrivingRecoveryintheWakeofCOVID19AMO%20Submission20200916.pdf>

³ Federation of Canadian Municipalities. (n.d.) *Focus Areas: Broadband*. <https://fcm.ca/en/focus-areas/broadband>

Wellington. County of Wellington Ontario Works was invited to present at Community Health and Wellbeing Week hosted by the Alliance for Healthier Communities in October 2022 to share the County's efforts to address digital equity with community agencies and service providers across Ontario.

Looking Ahead

Virtual and hybrid service delivery has now become a permanent feature of how we socialize, connect, participate in our communities and access essential supports. County of Wellington Ontario Works is committed to working with MCCSS, local service providers and other stakeholders to continue to advocate for increased access to the internet and digital devices for those most impacted by poverty and other complex challenges.

Anticipated changes related to the delivery and funding of Social Assistance may present challenges to the longer-term delivery and funding of these services and this heightens the need for advocacy to ensure more accessible and affordable digital access for all members of our communities.

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