Evaluation of Ontario Works Demonstration Pilot Projects: Final Report

(City Council at its regular meeting held on October 3, 4 and 5, 2000, and its Special Meetings held on October 6, 2000, October 10 and 11, 2000, and October 12, 2000, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Community Services Committee recommends the adoption of the report dated August 24, 2000, from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services.

The Community Services Committee reports, for the information of Council, having requested the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to report to the Community Services Committee of the new Council on the submission from the Learning Enrichment Foundation, and on any comments from Goodwill Industries.

The Community Services Committee submits the following report (August 24, 2000) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:

Purpose:

This report summarizes the principal findings from the evaluation of the Ontario Works Demonstration Projects conducted by the firm Applied Research Consultants (ARC). Initially, the selection of the consultant and the overall management of the evaluation process are described. Salient features of both Goodwill’s and Learning Enrichment Foundation’s (LEF) demonstration projects are then briefly reviewed. Subsequently, the key objectives of the evaluation are identified, and the consultant’s principal findings discussed. Finally, the implications for Toronto Social Services’ (TSS) delivery of employment services are considered, specifically in the context of the new Ontario Works (OW) funding model recently introduced by the Provincial Government.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

No changes are required to existing budget allocations.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

(1) this report be received as the final Evaluation of the Ontario Works Demonstration Projects;

(2) staff complete expeditiously the financial reconciliation with the two community organizations which participated in the project; and

(3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.
Ontario Works’ three program components, Employment Supports (ES), Employment Placement (EP) and Community Participation (CP), provide opportunities for clients to be engaged in a variety of activities which lead to jobs, or which increase their employability. However, as the Department has discussed in earlier reports to Council, the original funding model under OW inhibited the movement of funds between these program streams. It also limited the City’s ability to develop and fund programs that would blend program streams and integrate service delivery to better meet clients’ needs.

By mid-1998, staff from a number of community based organizations already delivering services under contract with TSS, including the LEF and Goodwill Industries, had proposed the development of pilot projects under OW which would test blended service delivery models. At the same time, the Ministry indicated it would allow greater flexibility under the OW program guidelines and funding formulas to permit local delivery agents to explore integrated service delivery proposals from community agencies.

In response to proposals from both agencies, and in conjunction with the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), TSS staff began negotiations with the aim of developing pilot projects that would combine training supports available under the ES stream and experiential learning or work placements provided through the EP program stream. In July 1998, City Council subsequently approved the development and funding of such demonstration projects. Council also directed that “the Department, in concert with the area office of the MCSS, evaluate the outcomes of the demonstration projects in order to determine the benefits of the (blended model) approach.”

Based on their blended model proposals, TSS finalized contract negotiations during the latter half of 1998 with LEF and Goodwill Industries. In its May 4, 1999, report to the Community and Neighbourhood Services Committee, entitled “Ontario Works Demonstration Projects”, TSS provided a detailed description of the two projects and of the Division’s proposal to conduct an evaluation of the project’s outcomes.

To oversee the evaluation process, a Steering Committee was established comprised of two representatives from Goodwill and LEF, two representatives from MCSS, and TSS staff (see Attachment 1). Provincial staff supported the evaluation throughout and, consistent with City Council’s direction, worked in conjunction with TSS to oversee the successful completion of the process.

The Steering Committee met a number of times over the summer of 1999 to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP). ARA-KPMG Consulting, who possessed substantial experience both in developing evaluation frameworks and RFP processes, assisted the Committee in this task. The Steering Committee subsequently reviewed and signed off the RFP, including the evaluation goals and focus. The RFP was issued in late July 1999. Responses were received and evaluated the following month.
In September 1999, the firm ARC was contracted to conduct the evaluation, and the Steering Committee met with the consultants to launch the evaluation. ARC has conducted major evaluations of employment and social assistance programs across Canada. They have undertaken numerous evaluations for Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), and have also worked for various ministries and government agencies in Ontario, New Brunswick, British Columbia and Alberta. A significant strength is their expertise in both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

As per Council’s direction, a sub-committee of Community Services Committee, comprised of Councillors Duguid, Davis, Jones, Mammoliti, and Mihevc, was established in the fall of 1999 to support Toronto Social Services’ consideration of blended models, pending the outcome of the evaluation. TSS staff have met with the sub-committee periodically to provide updates on the progress of the evaluation and to discuss issues related to the delivery of OW.

At key points, the staff Steering Committee also met to review the evaluation’s progress. In February 2000, the Committee met with the evaluator to review interim findings, and to provide input to the consultant regarding the design of the quantitative component of the evaluation. A final meeting was held in early August of this year to review the draft’s final report. Provincial staff have also carefully reviewed the final report and provided feedback consistent with their advisory role throughout the process.

In August 2000, as per the terms of its contract with TSS, ARC submitted its final report to TSS, entitled “Evaluation of Ontario Works Demonstration Pilots”. The length of time required to complete the evaluation reflects the fact that the final success of the projects could not be determined until it was known how many clients had sustained employment for six months following their period of formal programming and job search. These results only became known in the late Spring of 2000.

This report summarizes the consultant’s principal findings regarding the outcomes of the demonstration projects. A more in-depth discussion of the evaluation findings is contained in Attachment 2, which includes the consultant’s executive summary. ARC’s full report is available through the City Clerk’s office.

TSS’ original intent was to use the results of the evaluation to inform future programming decisions in delivering OW in Toronto, specifically regarding the viability of blended approaches to service delivery. It must be noted that this objective has been largely superseded by the introduction of new funding arrangements for the OW program by the Province. However, the evaluation findings do yield important lessons that can be applied to the ongoing delivery of OW in the City. These issues will be discussed more fully in the last section of the report.

A brief description of the salient features of both the Goodwill and LEF demonstration projects is provided prior to reporting on the evaluation.
Comments:

(I) Demonstration Project Features:

TSS negotiated contracts with both Goodwill Industries and LEF that established the basis for the operation of the demonstration projects. The terms of the agreement between the agencies and the City included:

(1) negotiated and agreed upon performance standards;

(2) funding structures that provide financial rewards for meeting performance standards but limit funding if there is non-achievement of these standards;

(3) standard maximum time frames for client involvement in the projects; and

(4) standard and clearly specified reporting requirements.

The core components of these contract stipulations are briefly described below.

At this point, it is necessary to briefly note the backdrop against which the demonstration projects were being established. Throughout 1998, the overall OW program was in a period of transition. Under the new Ontario Works Act, which came into effect in April 1998, all adult OW clients were required to participate in OW activities leading to employment, although for some clients these obligations could be deferred. The Province also introduced more rigorous program monitoring and performance requirements. At the same time, Toronto Social Services’ OW caseload continued to change substantially, as the proportion of families with children, notably single parent families lead by women, increased sharply. (TSS’ August 23, 1999, report to Community Services, entitled “Ontario Works Caseload Profile” provides a comprehensive analysis of changes in the caseload from 1995 to mid-1999.) In addition, evidence suggested that an increasing proportion of the caseload faced more serious employment barriers, and would require intensive interventions to return to work.

TSS recognized that these factors substantially altered the context within which its contracted organizations operated, and communicated the changes to all EP, ES and CP service providers.

Goodwill Industries:

The Goodwill Industries Demonstration Project blended the provision of training with job search assistance and supports. The Goodwill Project served 83 OW clients. The maximum length of time for client involvement was ten months.

Goodwill was funded in two ways: first, the agency was paid for individual training courses taken by clients (costs vary depending on length and content of courses); and second, a flat fee was paid for each client that obtained and sustained employment. Payment for the training portion of the Pilot Project was to be made following each client’s successful completion thereof. Therefore, all fees were paid in arrears.
The performance standard negotiated with Goodwill specified that 70 percent of participants in the Project would obtain jobs no later than four months after clients enter the job search phase. These participants must generate sufficient employment earnings that they totally exit social assistance for a minimum of six months. If Goodwill achieves the performance standard agreed to, the agency’s agreement with TSS stipulates that it will receive approximately $248,000.00, which equals an average of approximately $3,000.00 per client, over the length of the Project. If the negotiated performance standard is not met, Goodwill will be required to reimburse the City the three and six-month fees for each unsuccessful participant.

Learning Enrichment Foundation:

The Learning Enrichment Foundation project was a broad-based model of service delivery. In conjunction with the client, LEF completed an assessment of the range of services required, which could include training and CP placements, again followed by job search and placement support. The project served 500 clients. The maximum length of time for client involvement was ten months.

Funding for the project was based upon a set fee per client. The fee did not vary with the type or number of services provided. Under the terms of the agreement with the City, 65 percent of the overall fee was to be paid up-front in advance of services being provided to the client. Thus, in 1998, LEF received approximately $950,000.00 for the 500 clients that were registered in the project, or $1,903.00 per client. This funding approach was approved on an exceptional basis for the demonstration project, in that Provincial OW Directives do not allow municipalities to pay contracted agencies in advance for services under the ES, EP or CP program streams. The remaining fees, approximately $1,025.00 per client, were to be paid in arrears based on clients’ success in obtaining and sustaining jobs. The total potential value of the LEF contract was $1.46 million.

LEF committed to an 80 percent success rate with the clients referred to the demonstration pilot. Thus, a minimum of 400 participants were to obtain jobs no later than ten months after the client’s formal registration in the project. Based on the level of earnings attained, clients were to exit social assistance for a minimum of six months. If the agreed upon performance standard is not met, LEF would be responsible for reimbursing fees pre-paid by the City for each unsuccessful participant.

(II) Evaluation Goals:

Based on Council direction, and the common approach to the evaluation that was worked out by the Steering Committee, the evaluation had three clear objectives:

(1) to determine the extent to which the two pilots have met their contractual obligations;

(2) to compare the outcomes of mainstream OW participants with those achieved by the demonstration pilots; and
to compare cost-effectiveness between mainstream OW activities and the demonstration pilots.

The following section focuses on the key findings that relate to these primary outcomes. However, as noted above, the evaluation also included a qualitative component that focused on clients’ and agencies’ perspectives and their perceptions of the demonstration projects, as well as a demographic profile of the demonstration project participants. Attachment 2 discusses these areas. Overall, the evaluation drew on a range of information, including a review of documents, interviews with key informants, focus groups with clients of the two pilots and mainstream agencies, and quantitative analysis of administrative data.

(III) Key Outcomes:

The quantitative analysis undertaken by ARC forms the heart of the evaluation. Two basic sets of findings emerged:

(1) the success of the demonstration projects in relation to the clearly specified performance standards delineated in the contracts with Goodwill and LEF; and

(2) the determination of the effects of participation in the demonstration projects on the amount of social assistance benefits received by clients and on the level of client earnings.

Data limitations did not allow for the comparison of cost-effectiveness between mainstream OW activities and the demonstration pilots. As a result, it was not possible to undertake the analysis necessary to meet this evaluation objective.

(1) Contractual Success:

As was noted previously, under the terms of their contract with TSS, Goodwill agreed to a performance standard of 70 percent, whereby this proportion of the clients accepted in the demonstration pilot would obtain employment within the specified time frame. LEF agreed to an 80 percent performance standard. Successful clients were those who obtained work for at least six months and had sufficient earnings to render them ineligible for social assistance benefits during that time. Table 1 displays the success rates achieved by Goodwill and LEF.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Goodwill</th>
<th></th>
<th>LEF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both agencies achieved quite similar results. In Goodwill’s case, nearly 45 percent of clients remained employed for six months and did not receive OW benefits, compared to 44 percent of the LEF client group. The original contracts do include a provision whereby both agencies would be required to reimburse part of the fees paid by TSS for each unsuccessful project participant.

While not achieving their initial success targets, the demonstration projects proved to be a valuable source of information about the implications for clients, for service deliverers and for TSS of the transformation of social assistance from an income support program under GWA to an employment focused program under OW. In that respect, the projects, and their evaluation, provide important lessons that can be applied to the ongoing delivery of OW in the City. These issues will be discussed more fully in section 3 below.

(2) Effects on Social Assistance Benefits and Earnings:

A standard evaluation approach is to determine what effect participation in a demonstration project has on specific outcomes for participants. In this study, the evaluator set out to explore this question: what would have happened to the participants, in the absence of the demonstration projects, if they had participated instead in other employment and training programs available to the OW mainstream client group?

A comparison group is commonly employed to answer the above type of question. The essential requirement for the comparison group in this evaluation was that it be comprised of people who could have participated in the demonstration projects. The comparison group developed by ARC was comprised of 2,292 mainstream OW participants who had received either Employment Placement or Skill Development services starting between August 1998 and October 1999. Using a complex but widely accepted statistical procedure, these candidates were then matched, one-to-one, with both Goodwill and LEF project participants, based on information available for both (such as gender, age, marital status, education, family composition, and length of time before being referred). The clients most closely matching those in the demonstration projects based on these characteristics were then selected. ARC’s final report provides a more detailed technical explanation of the selection process.

The matching process was successful, meaning that the selected clients actually matched quite closely the participants in the two demonstration pilots. On this basis, it was then possible to assess the extent to which observed changes in the amount of social assistance benefits received by project participants and their level of earnings could legitimately be attributed to having participated in the demonstration projects. These outcome measures were selected because they speak to the degree to which clients improve their financial situations and the City reduces its social assistance costs.

The quantitative effects of participation in a demonstration pilot on social assistance benefits and on earnings are shown in Table 2.
Table 2  Effects on Social Assistance Benefits and Earnings, by Pilot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Goodwill Effect ($)</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>LEF Effect ($)</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.A. Benefits</td>
<td>- 100.42</td>
<td>.04934</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>.79310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings</td>
<td>107.86</td>
<td>.01255</td>
<td>16.85</td>
<td>.27626</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 indicates that participation in the Goodwill demonstration pilot resulted in an attributable reduction in social assistance benefits of $100.00 per month and a concomitant increase in earnings, in the narrow sense described above, of $108.00 per month. In both cases, the findings were statistically significant. In other words, the analysis offers strong evidence that, compared to what they would have experienced had they received mainstream OW interventions instead, Goodwill participants received $100.00 less in assistance, on average, and earned $108.00 more per month. Seen from the other perspective, had they been assigned to mainstream programming, Goodwill participants would have received $100.00 more in assistance and earned $108.00 less per month. Therefore, based on this analysis, the Goodwill demonstration pilot had a demonstrably positive effect.

A cautionary note is in order here, however. The findings apply only to the actual participants in the demonstration project. Because of the small numbers of clients involved in the Goodwill demonstration project, it would not be advisable to make inferences based on these findings. For example, Goodwill’s participants may not be representative of potential future participants in any similar project. Any sizable differences in client characteristics would certainly impact the observed outcomes.

The corresponding numbers for LEF are increases of $5.00 in social assistance benefits and of $17.00 in earnings, per month. In LEF’s case, however, neither effect is statistically significant.

(3) Lessons from the Demonstration Projects:

The demonstration pilots were initiated in the first year of the OW program’s implementation in Toronto, a period of fundamental change in the nature of social assistance delivery in Ontario. A number of important lessons emerged from the evaluation that speak to the implications of these changes for clients, for service deliverers, and for TSS. This section briefly discusses these lessons.

Program Success:

As the consultant indicates, the demonstration pilots were implemented at a time when the social assistance program, the City’s caseload and the way in which agency performance was measured were all changing significantly. As noted earlier in this report, the new OW caseload was comprised predominantly of families. Evidence also suggested that an increasing proportion of the caseload faced more serious employment barriers, and would require intensive interventions to return to work. In fact, according to ARC’s final report: “The combination of these major shifts - General Welfare to OW, single clients to families with children, limited numbers of
employable clients participating in training and employment programs to mandatory participation requirements for all adults - signalled the emergence of significantly new service delivery context, for both TSS and its service delivery partners.”

One important implication of these changes relates to the way program success is understood in terms of assisting clients to become independent. In the demonstration projects, consistent with OW performance standards, success was defined as the proportion of clients participating that could generate sufficient earnings to leave OW completely. Obviously, families, particularly large families, need significantly higher earnings to exit OW completely than do single people. This was clearly demonstrated in the Goodwill project, where 65 (78 percent) of the participants obtained full or nearly full-time employment, but only 37 (45 percent) obtained sufficient employment earnings to render them ineligible for social assistance for the requisite six months. In most cases, the reason the remaining 28 clients did not leave assistance was because their level of earnings were not sufficient to support a larger family.

Where families are involved, especially those that do not have recent labour market experience, obtaining part-time employment is itself an important and perhaps necessary step towards compete independence.

The first lesson that can be drawn from the evaluation is that it is important for the OW program to recognize the value of intermediate steps to full independence. This follows from the fact that there is an increasing number of families in receipt of OW who are headed by adults that have limited recent employment experience. Heads of families who obtain full-time employment but do not leave OW, or those who obtain part-time employment and increased earnings, are successfully re-entering the labour market. Based on the experience of the demonstration projects, there may be a sound basis for viewing success as a series of incremental steps progressing towards full independence for the increasing proportion of the caseload comprised of families, particularly single parents that have been out of the labour force for extended periods.

At the same time, another key lesson related to program success clearly emerged. The evaluation showed that the agencies’ experience of delivering employment services under the former GWA program, including the success rates that had historically been reported, did not provide an accurate basis for setting realistic performance targets under OW. As the consultant notes: “Both agencies clearly believed that the demonstration project was a case of “business as usual. In fact, conditions in which they were delivering services had changed.” Over the past several years, this change has been recognized across the OW program. In 1999, for example, for the EP program as a whole the success rate for the 20 agencies involved averaged 34 percent.

Program Funding:

As noted in section I, Provincial OW directives do not permit funding to be provided to agencies in advance of the delivery of services. An exception was made in the case of the LEF project where nearly $1 million was provided to the agency up-front. It is apparent that in a program that has rigorous program performance standards, providing substantial up-front funding creates significant risks and pressures for agencies. In the case of the demonstration projects, as per the original contracts, both agencies agreed to reimburse part of the fees paid by TSS for each unsuccessful project participant. Provision of up-front funding also seriously reduces TSS’
flexibility to respond to ongoing changes in the caseload, and to emerging client service needs. It also creates the potential for inconsistency in terms of how agencies are funded.

The experience of the demonstration projects reinforces the desirability of providing funding to agencies for service provided. Based on the evaluation outcomes, it is TSS’ view that the current Provincial OW provision that prohibits agencies from obtaining up-front funds is sound, and that any future proposals regarding alternative approaches to service delivery should adhere to this funding provision.

(III) The Demonstration Projects in the Context of the New OW Funding Model:

The original intent of TSS was to use the results of the evaluation to inform future programming decisions in delivering OW in Toronto, specifically regarding the viability of blended approaches to service delivery. However, it must be noted that the introduction of a new funding model by the Province significantly alters the context within which TSS delivers employment services to OW participants.

The new funding model provides much greater flexibility regarding how OW employment program resources can be used. Under the new model, funding for Employment Assistance is provided to delivery agents based on levels of service (defined as basic, intermediate and advanced), rather than specific activities within the three OW program streams. Program funding now varies according to the levels of service provided, which begins to address the increased costs associated with serving less job ready clients. The new framework will provide clients with access to a different mix of services including more programs with a work placement attached. As a result, TSS will be required to determine how best to provide these services to OW participants. At the same time, the recent funding changes increase Provincial performance expectations in terms of the effective use of program resources to ensure needed services are identified and made available to clients.

The new model substantially changes the way in which services will be provided to clients on social assistance. In this light, the demonstration projects take on a different role. Rather than providing a direct basis for refining OW, in the context of the new funding model a number of broader lessons have been learned which will assist TSS adapt and improve its service delivery model, including the way in which services are provided to clients by agencies.

Conclusion:

In 1998, TSS funded demonstration projects with Goodwill Industries and the Learning Enrichment Foundation, the aim of which were to test a blended approach to service delivery under the ES and EP program streams of OW. While the agencies were unable to fully meet the terms of their performance standards they were successful in achieving significant social assistance program savings. The demonstration projects should be recognized for the broader success in re-engaging clients in the labour force through part time earnings, obtaining entry-level positions and acquiring new levels of confidence and self-esteem. All of these support clients in their goals to achieve full independence and fulfil their employment goals.
Additionally, the Division benefited from the lessons learned in designing future programs for clients under the new funding model.

Contact:

Heather MacVicar
General Manager, Social Services Division
Tel: 392-8952/Fax: 392-8931
Email: hmacvic@city.toronto.on.ca

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Demonstration Steering Committee Members
Attachment 2: Description of Secondary Findings
Attachment 3: Evaluation of Ontario Works Demonstration Pilots, Executive Summary

Attachment 1: Demonstration Steering Committee Members

Joe Valvasori, Manager Ontario Works Placements, Learning Enrichment Foundation
Sharon Myatt, Vice-President, Goodwill Industries
Alina Mitchell, Manager, Manager, Program Teams
Margaret Mitchell, Program Supervisor, MCSS, Toronto Regional Office, MCSS
Elizabeth Moffatt, Senior Policy Analyst MCSS, Ontario Works Branch
Carol Williams, Director, Toronto Social Services
Brenda Nesbitt, Director, Toronto Social Services
Joe Manion, Manager, Toronto Social Services

Attachment 2: Description of Secondary Findings

The initial Terms of Reference for the evaluation acknowledged the desirability of incorporating a demographic profile of the clients participating in the demonstration projects, as well as a qualitative component that focused on client perspectives, and their perceptions of the demonstration projects. Both LEF and Goodwill also strongly supported the inclusion of agency perspectives on the experience of participating in the projects. The following section briefly highlights key findings and issues in these areas. ARC’s final report contains additional detail regarding this component of the evaluation.

(i) Demographic Profile of Goodwill and LEF Clients:

The consultant identified the following differences between Goodwill’s clients and the mainstream group. A much greater proportion of Goodwill’s clients tended to be female. A substantial proportion of Goodwill’s clients were single parents, which accounted for the fact they were more likely to be divorced or separated, than the mainstream group. Goodwill’s clients were also more likely to have completed Grade 12 than the mainstream group, but less likely to
have any post-secondary educational experience. There was a greater likelihood that they received their education in Canada compared to the mainstream group.

LEF’s clients were also more likely to be female than the mainstream OW group. Similarly, LEF’s clients were marginally older (median age 39) than the OW mainstream group (median age 38), were less likely to be married, and were significantly less likely to have any children. Although in real terms the proportions of clients with different levels of education varied minimally between the LEF group and mainstream OW clients, the differences were statistically significant due to the large size of the LEF sample. The primary difference was the proportion of LEF clients who had completed college or had attended university (7.6 percent) versus the mainstream OW group (12.1 percent). At the same time, only 4.8 percent of Goodwill’s clients had this level of education. Finally, the median length of time LEF’s clients received assistance before they were referred to the agency was 21 months compared to 18 months for the mainstream OW group.

As the consultant notes, this descriptive analysis indicates that there are several aspects in which participants in the two demonstration pilots differed from clients who received mainstream OW programming. However, the consultant cautions that the level of analysis “does not indicate whether the observed differences are associated with or influence in any way the outcomes of participating in the demonstration pilots, relative to mainstream programming.”

What was apparent was that the differences indicated the need to be selective in creating valid comparison groups for the purposes of undertaking meaningful quantitative analysis. To this end, the methodology employed by ARC, which was briefly discussed in the main report, relied on the construction of the comparison groups that neutralized the observed differences between demonstration project and mainstream clients to the extent possible.

(II) Qualitative Methodology and Findings:

As per the evaluation’s initial terms of reference, the consultant undertook a qualitative analysis of client and agency perspectives. This section provides a brief overview of information obtained, and the primary themes identified.

(A) Client Perspectives:

As part of the evaluation process, ARC conducted six focus groups with LEF, Goodwill and mainstream OW clients. Separate focus groups were held with clients who had found work and those that had failed to do so. A total of 31 clients were interviewed. As the consultant notes, the clients who participated in the focus groups were not intended to be statistically representative of participants from the different agenciesstreams. Rather, the aim was to record clients’ impressions regarding the supports and services they received from the respective organizations and agencies. A detailed discussion of the methodology and findings is contained in the ARC final report.

Overall, the clients interviewed who participated in the demonstration projects were satisfied in a number of ways: they indicated the staff were supportive and helpful, and that the environment
was positive; they had, by and large, received the supports required to participate through TSS without problem, (e.g., transportation allowances and child care), and there was a general sense that the training and support they obtained helped to improve their skills.

However, there was also a pervasive feeling among clients that the training and other services they received did not make them job ready. Even those who had found work, or been placed, felt that the training component had not been very helpful. There was also a general feeling that training courses crammed too much content into too short a period, especially for clients who did not have a strong command of English. The final major theme was the need for better information about the training. With better information, students would have had more realistic expectations and, in some cases, would have selected different courses.

(B) Agency Perspectives:

As part of the evaluation, the consultant interviewed key informants at both LEF and Goodwill to solicit their views on the demonstration pilots. The major issues, problems and concerns noted are briefly reviewed below. In some respects, the agencies’ views reflect typical start-up problems that occur with any new project. However, in certain cases, the views voiced differ from TSS staff perception of the circumstances surrounding the implementation of the demonstration projects. Therefore, an overview of TSS experience in implementing the demonstration projects is provided.

From the outset, LEF staff indicated that they were confident they could meet the 80 percent performance target, citing their previous success moving social assistance clients into jobs under the General Welfare Assistance (GWA) program. Goodwill indicated that it had certain reservations, but decided to proceed given the additional funding negotiated as part of their demonstration project proposal, plus the opportunity to improve client outcomes.

Both agencies identified a number of concerns related to: what clients were referred, how and when; the availability of supports for clients; performance standards; and reporting and administrative requirements. In some cases, in fact, the issues raised relate to the stipulations that were mutually agreed to in the contracts signed by TSS and the agencies. This section does not review all the concerns noted, which are described in detail in the consultant’s final report. Rather, the focus is on client referrals and the job-readiness of clients referred to the demonstration projects.

As the consultant’s final report indicates, in important ways the issues raised by the key informants suggest the agencies may not have fully realized the implications of the implementation of the OW program for service delivery. Thus, while both agencies clearly believed that the demonstration project was a case of “business as usual”, in reality, the environment in which they were providing employment services to clients had changed dramatically from that which was in place under the former GWA program.

It should also be noted that TSS dedicated substantial resources to support the implementation of the demonstration pilots. Specific staff resources were assigned to work with LEF and Goodwill during the enrollment period and to trouble shoot around any issues related to the referral of
clients. All TSS local offices were provided with information about the demonstration pilots, and efforts were made to inform caseworkers about the types of clients who might best benefit from a blended model approach to service delivery. In effect, the Division provided more focused and extensive assistance to the demonstration projects than to any other agency delivering employment or training programs to mainstream OW clients.

Client Referrals:

Client referrals were the key issue identified by Goodwill and LEF. Both agencies indicated that clients were referred on the basis of possibly incomplete client assessments by TSS, that key information about clients was not provided to the agencies in certain cases, and that certain clients were not aware that they were participating in the demonstration projects. Most notably, both agencies noted that they felt the clients referred were “hard to serve” and made greater demands on agency resources than anticipated. LEF specifically felt that its ability to meet its performance standard was affected by the type of clients referred from TSS.

To some degree, the agencies’ frustrations may be a reflection of the substantial changes in the OW caseload over the past several years. There is general agreement that the period of substantial caseload decline between 1995 and late 1998 saw the most employable individuals leave social assistance. The most notable outcomes were the sharp decrease in the number of single people on social assistance, and the equally significant increase in the proportion of families, specifically female led single parent families. What has emerged is a caseload with an increasing number of clients who are “harder to serve”, and have either received social assistance for an extended period, or lack the skills to compete in the labour market. Other agencies delivering employment services to TSS clients have also observed and commented on the noticeable change in the caseload, and in the numbers of clients they serve who face a range of barriers to obtaining employment.

In 1998, OW was still a new program. As with other agencies delivering employment services, the bulk of LEF and Goodwill’s previous experience involved delivering employment services under the former GWA program. Because employment services were not a core function of GWA, agencies faced limited accountability, and there was minimal monitoring and tracking of client success. The significant changes that occurred under OW created far different circumstances for program delivery, and for the measurement of success rates specifically. For example, under the current EP program, which serves more employment ready clients, Goodwill and LEF have negotiated performance standards of 45 percent and 30 percent respectively for 2000, meaning that this proportion of clients accepted by the respective agencies are expected to find and sustain employment. For the EP program as a whole, on average, the success rate for the 20 agencies involved is 34 percent.

Both agencies also expressed concerns regarding the level of administrative and reporting requirements that were mutually agreed to as part of their contracts, and noted that a significant workload was associated with meeting TSS’ expectations. Again, this change in the delivery expectations reflects the introduction of OW. Under the former GWA program, agencies were block funded to provide employment services. However, under the Provincial rules governing OW, EP agencies are paid on a per client basis based on program savings generated when a
client obtains employment and leave assistance. Agencies providing training are also paid on a per client basis. In both cases, all funds are paid in arrears.

Given the new Provincial performance based funding system, TSS was required to establish clear performance standards for service delivery, and to monitor agency outcomes on an ongoing basis. TSS recognized that these factors substantially altered the context within which its contracted organizations operated, and communicated the changes to all EP and ES service providers in early 1998.

(A copy of the Attachment 3 referred to in the foregoing report was forwarded to all Members of Council with the agenda of the Community Services Committee for its meeting on September 14, 2000, and a copy thereof is on file in the office of the City Clerk.)

The Community Services reports, for the information of Council having also had before it during consideration of the foregoing matter a communication (September 12, 2000) from Ms. Eunice Grayson, Executive Director, The Learning Enrichment Foundation, in connection with the foregoing matter.

Mr. Joe Valvasori and Ms. Eunice Grayson, Executive Director, The Learning Enrichment Foundation, appeared before the Community Services Committee in connection with the foregoing matter.