



## Starting in the *Right Place* | A New Approach to Employment and Social Services in Toronto





*"My journey during these past two years has been extremely difficult: searching endlessly for employment, dealing with a violent separation and trying to keep the spirit of my family strong in the face of emotional breakdowns.*

*Discouraged by the constant rejection, this job has uplifted my spirit in so many ways that words cannot truly express my heartfelt gratitude.*

*I will be forever grateful to everyone who made it possible for me to regain my self esteem resulting in a better home life with my children. Being able to financially support my family on my own – I know is not too far off."*

*- Toronto Employment & Social Services client*

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### The Action Plan | From Words to Action

“*Systems of Survival, Systems of Support, An Action Plan is an ambitious and broad ranging plan. It was meant to be. What is now required is an implementation strategy, developed in collaboration with TSS' service delivery partners, that will set out a plan and process for moving from Action Plan to action.*”

Since these words concluded *Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in Toronto*, Toronto Social Services (TSS), in collaboration with many different partners, shifted the focus from concepts and ideas to implementation: from words to action.

The *Action Plan*, approved by City Council in June 2006, provided a comprehensive report on the role of social assistance in Toronto's safety net and its contribution to the well-being of individuals and families.

The *Plan* advocated for a transformed social assistance system, with a new child benefit, a more adequate rate structure, and improved benefits and supports, including dental services. It identified the need for a broader range of employment services with closer links to employers, more workplace-based training and access to transitional jobs for people with the most barriers to employment. It proposed concrete ways in which greater coordination and integration of services across the City could ensure that there were no wrong doors for people in need.

Above all, the *Action Plan* sought to advocate for, inform and shape the systemic changes needed to transform the design, management and delivery of employment services in Toronto. To that end, it articulated the pressing need for made-in-Toronto solutions to better respond to local challenges and opportunities.

Significant progress has been made in implementing the *Plan* and this report highlights the considerable work that has taken

place. Much of this report describes how TSS, other City divisions, other governments and community stakeholders have followed through and are finding new and better ways to work towards common goals.

Two years after tabling the *Action Plan*, Toronto continues to face a number of striking contradictions. These contradictions include: increasingly concentrated prosperity and poverty; economic growth accompanied by the pervasive growth of low wage, insecure jobs; and a growing pressure on the City and its services in the face of intermittent interest in city issues by other orders of government.

In Toronto, like other global cities, it is apparent that these large forces combine to create deeply-rooted problems such as poverty and exclusion. For example, the most recent gauge of the City's economic and social health, *Toronto's Vital Signs 2008* (see Box 1) highlighted a number of these pressing challenges, including:

- declining family income,
- growing poverty,
- more lone parent families in poverty,
- more immigrant unemployment,
- more precarious employment (such as temporary, contract, part-time or non-standard employment).

Sometimes called “wicked problems,” they transcend jurisdictional boundaries and cannot be addressed in isolation by any one service provider or by any one order of government. Nor can they be solved through top-down, off-the-shelf responses. On the contrary, the inter-related and deeply tangled nature of these issues demands locally driven, bottom-up, integrated and comprehensive approaches.

### Local Leadership

The complexities of these challenges and the on-the-ground solutions mean that it is increasingly important to identify and respond to economic and social issues from a local perspective. Many city residents are profoundly affected by poverty and exclusion. It is in the homes and neighbourhoods across



### Box 1: Toronto's Vital Signs 2008

In its most recent assessment of Toronto's quality of life, Toronto Community Foundation found that while Toronto remains a vibrant city that continues to make progress in many areas, significant challenges exist. These challenges include:

- Between 2000 and 2005, Toronto experienced the steepest decline in median family income of major Canadian cities. Toronto's median family income dropped 4.7% to \$41,500 (\$6,100 less than in 1990 in 2005 dollars).
- The number of families living in poverty in Toronto grew 10% in the first 5 years of the decade (outpacing the 3.3% growth in the number of families.) This compared with a provincial increase of 3.2% and a decline of 5.1% in the poverty rate across the country.
- In 2005, 30.4% of all families with children under 17 in Toronto were headed by a lone parent (compared to 20% in the rest of the Region). Over 50% of lone parent families in the City were low income (the rate in 1990 was 33%).
- The unemployment rate for recent immigrants is almost double the rate for non-immigrants. The regional unemployment rate for recent immigrants (entered the country in the last 5 years) was relatively unchanged at 11.8% in 2006 (up 4.4% from 2001). The rate was still over 90% higher than the rate for the non-immigrant population.
- Temporary work, which on average pays wages 16% lower than permanent work wages, is on the rise in Toronto and 22.7% of temporary workers also held multiple jobs in 2005 (86% rise since 2000).

Toronto that the effects of fraying safety nets and economic change play out.

**As wicked problems take root and grow in urban communities, neighbourhood-centred approaches are the essence to understanding the locally distinct nature of the issues and to formulating effective responses and actions. To be effective, plans and services must reflect community needs and build on community strengths.**

As the order of government most responsive to the needs of residents, the City has a special role to play with development, planning, management and delivery of critical policies, programs and services. City leadership is essential to ensure positive returns on the significant investments that have already been made in communities across the city.

### Strategic Responses

The imperative of City leadership was underlined with the passage of the City of Toronto Act in 2006.

The Act recognizes Canada's largest City as a responsible, accountable and mature order of government. Acknowledging the need for made-in-Toronto solutions, the Act ensures a seat at the table when provincial and federal governments are creating policies that affect urban issues such as immigration, infrastructure, income security, public health and child care.

In addition, the Act explicitly recognizes the City's authority to enter into agreements with the federal government and it sets out a new relationship with the Province based on mutual respect, consultation and cooperation.

Toronto is demonstrating its leadership in addressing precarious urban issues by championing the kinds of comprehensive strategies that are required to address wicked problems successfully. It is doing so in a range of ways, including the *Community Safety Plan*, the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*, the *Action Plan*, the Clean City, Beautiful City initiative and most

### Box 2: Agenda For Prosperity

"Economic inclusion, once thought to be a social good, is now an economic imperative.... At a time of impending, severe labour shortages, we cannot afford to have so many people underemployed or unemployed....

Good jobs are a key indicator of good health for individuals, families and communities. In Toronto, the widening gap between the rich and poor, and homelessness and poverty are economic as well as social issues."

recently, through Toronto's *Agenda for Prosperity*, released by the Mayor's Economic Competitiveness Advisory Committee in January 2008.

The *Agenda* sets out a vision for Toronto's place in the world. Based on four pillars and associated success measures, it recognizes the dual goals of increasing the City's competitiveness and reducing social exclusion. The fourth pillar, "One Toronto: Economic Opportunity and Inclusion," seeks to ensure that all residents have equitable access to the benefits of Toronto's enhanced economic competitiveness and growth.

Collectively, these strategies demonstrate a commitment to a common goal: a liveable city where there is opportunity and prosperity for all.

The implementation of the *Action Plan* is impelled by this goal. It recognizes that local leadership and action on economic development, employment planning and social inclusion are paramount to create opportunity and well-being for all.

It also reflects the intrinsic need to create a more effective system of employment and social services.

### Implementing the Plan: What was Done, What was Learned

The *Action Plan* sets out a range of actions that needed to be taken to improve the lives of underemployed and unemployed residents. It expresses a commitment to a ground-up, engaged implementation process.

Progress made to date demonstrates how this commitment has been upheld, both in terms of the way the City is pursuing integration and coordination as a starting point for service design and delivery solutions and in the way communities have been

### Box 3: Signals and Changes

Since the *Action Plan* a number of signals and changes have combined to transform the policy and funding environment that the City operates in, including:

- The 2008 Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement targeting unemployed individuals who are not eligible for training from Employment Insurance (EI) and for employed individuals who have low levels of skills or who are working in low-skill jobs
- The 2007 Canada-Ontario Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) which requires the Province to assume primary responsibility for the design and delivery of labour market development programs
- A 2006 Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formalizing a collaborative partnership on immigration and settlement issues affecting Toronto
- The provincial cabinet committee on poverty reduction that establishes tackling poverty and exclusion as a provincial government priority
- The provincial uploading of the municipal costs for the ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) and Ontario Drug Benefits (ODB)



engaged as part of the actions taken.

Residents, service users and service providers have helped shape both processes and outcomes.

In this way, the focus of implementation to date has taken a clear shape and includes:

- acting in and with local communities to plan and deliver services,
- integrating and coordinating approaches with our partners,
- focusing on poverty reduction and employment services,
- providing leadership in planning, managing and delivering services,
- building more and different partnerships with employers,
- adopting a flexible approach based on emerging lessons.

Given the scope and range of recommendations contained in the *Action Plan*, implementation is necessarily taking place in phases. In many areas rapid progress has been made. In other areas, time is required to build partnerships and to develop and grow initiatives.

*Starting in the Right Place* describes the concrete actions that are being taken, the lessons that are being learned and next steps required.

*Starting in the Right Place* is divided into three sections:

1. New approaches to delivering employment and social services,
2. Promoting service integration, providing better access and improving employment services,
3. Reducing poverty.

Section One describes the building blocks for a new approach to service delivery and concludes by identifying a new model for delivering employment and social services in Toronto.

Section Two focuses on the many concrete steps that have been taken to implement recommendations made in the *Action Plan*. This section discusses a range of important initiatives that have involved new or stronger partnerships with other orders of government, among City divisions and with numerous community partners.

Finally, Section Three focuses on poverty reduction, including the progress that is being made to develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy in Ontario.

The successes to date outlined in *Starting in the Right Place* rest heavily on the new partnerships that have been formed, the new ways of providing services that are being introduced and the new planning processes that have been put in place.

A mutual understanding of the need for collaboration and cooperation among partners has provided the impetus for the actions described herein.

More, of course, needs to be done. While this report focuses primarily on implementation to date, it also points to steps that need to be taken to continue to turn words into action.



**Implementing the Action Plan has provided numerous opportunities to observe how different approaches to delivering, managing and planning employment and social services work, how they can be adapted to work in different communities and to what degree they challenge or improve existing service delivery models.**

These lessons are indispensable. Employment and social services are currently delivered based on many different models, assumptions and approaches. These models determine from what or whose perspective the system works; how services can be accessed and where; who is eligible and for what; and how they are integrated, or not integrated with other services and supports.

Discussions about service models and approaches are often academic in nature. This is not the intent here. Rather, drawing on the knowledge gained in implementing a wide range of initiatives in partnership with other City divisions, communities and governments and by listening to the people we serve, the aim is to delineate the building blocks for a new service delivery model for employment and social services and to briefly describe the key elements of such a model.

The experiences and lessons learned to date, and enriched by the ideas underpinning implementation efforts, show the need for and inform the direction of the changes required to effectively deliver employment and social services in Toronto.

*Discussions about service models and approaches are often academic in nature. This is not the intent here.*

## Employment and Social Services in Toronto | A New Approach to Service Delivery

### The Starting Point

Whether it is in the findings from the employment services end-to-end review or the experiences of single mothers in the Investing in Families (IIF) initiative,<sup>1</sup> common themes emerge: service systems are complex, people often don't know how to access them and there are too few resources available to provide advice or help navigate through the maze.

Within large service delivery systems, some degree of complexity and corresponding challenges locating precisely the right kinds of services are often present.

Increasingly, however, there is widespread agreement that the level of fragmentation, confusion and disjointedness in the city's current service delivery systems is neither inevitable nor acceptable.

One requires very little contact with social and employment services to see that the onus to get the right services is now placed largely on the individual or family. They are responsible for:

- identifying the supports they need,
- identifying where they have to go to receive these supports,
- navigating the multiple and

systemic barriers to get services.

Thus, there is a growing realization that new service delivery models need to adopt the perspective of the service user. Whether delivery models are described as "client-centred," "client-focused" or "user-driven," experience, practice and theory are converging.

Service delivery models look fundamentally different when viewed through the eyes of service users. This is especially true when people are poor, isolated, disabled or live in communities with few services.

*Whether delivery models are described as "client-centred," "client-focused" or "user-driven," experience, practice and theory are converging.*

As articulated by two experts in the area of service integration, whenever a service delivery model is being designed, a key question is, "what the new system will look like from the participants' perspectives. Will it be qualitatively different from what they now experience?"<sup>2</sup>

Starting with people and what they need sounds simple. Yet, it requires a dramatically different approach.

Looking at the current service delivery

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<sup>1</sup> See page 23 of *Starting in the Right Place*

<sup>2</sup> Corbett, Thomas and Noyes, Jennifer L., (2007) *Human Services Systems Integration: A Conceptual Framework*. Institute for Research on Poverty: University of Wisconsin-Madison: Washington, D.C.

model through the eyes of the people using it provides the basis for a detailed understanding of what a new approach to planning, managing and delivering employment and social services in Toronto should be.

### Delivering Employment and Social Services | Foundations for a New Model

Designed from a service user's point of view, a new model for employment and social services must ensure access to the full range of employment, income and social supports within local communities. Actively engaged employers are a central part of any such model. The building blocks for such a model are briefly described here.

#### 1. Local Planning

Best practice research confirms the importance of local planning in developing successful employment strategies.

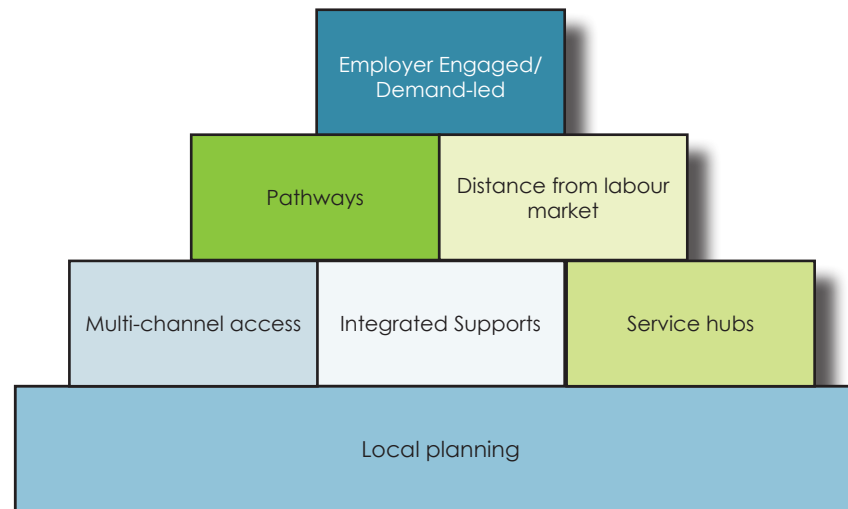
Complex big city local labour markets with multiple stakeholders demand robust local planning processes and coherent local employment plans.

Top-down mandates rarely create the necessary strategies and partnerships. The most constructive policy actions

build capacity, facilitate joint working and provide sufficient time for learning so that local initiatives can build on experience.

As demonstrated by the *Regent Park Employment Plan* (discussed in Section Two), local planning processes simul-

Figure 1: Building Blocks of a New Delivery Model



taneously identify local opportunities, needs and gaps in services, and strategies to address them.

Local planning processes can also mobilize commitment from key stakeholders by providing mechanisms for meaningful participation in planning and development actions.

Through building trust and ownership of activities, local planning can become a catalyst for creativity and innovation.

#### 2. Multi-channel Access

People need multiple, easy-to-use, access channels to services. This

includes web-based channels that give them as much control as possible in terms of applying for and receiving services and benefits. Residents must be fully informed of the services available to them. Communication avenues and materials must be user-friendly and accessible in local neighbourhoods.

With the City's Web Access to Your Services (WAYS) project (detailed further in Section Two), residents will be able to, for the first time, have secure access to Ontario Works (OW) via the Internet.

This new option for accessing services adds a valuable new entry point in addition to telephone access and walking into an office. Access can be either self-directed or assisted by knowledgeable staff.

However, it is important to recognize that service users have always emphatically stressed the importance of human contact within any employment and social services system. And people



need help navigating service systems, both to determine the kind of specific services they need and where they can get them. Outreach will continue to be a key part of efforts to increase awareness and use of services.

### 3. Integrated Supports

Service providers must take responsibility for coordinating and integrating their services so that transportation and transaction costs and people's frustration are minimized. Once a person comes in the door, they need an assessment of all service needs, including, the need for employment, financial benefits and broader social supports.

### 4. Service "hubs"

One-stop access points located in local communities are vital. Services need to be delivered where people can access them. Service users benefit when providers are visible in and connected to the communities they serve. Depending on the service, both virtual and physical service hubs make sense as sites for service integration. The work being done in TSS Employment Resource Centres is laying the foundation for future employment-focused hubs.

### 5. Pathways

Where human services are concerned,

#### Box 4: Case management

Case management is based upon a belief that the transition into work often includes much more than accessing employment: the needs of the individual and their family must be identified; the appropriate services across multiple agencies and providers must be delivered; and numerous steps in the journey towards sustained employment must be planned.

"Wrap around" case management is characterized by

1. the identification of appropriate service needs and responses building on individual strengths,
2. the coordination of necessary services and supports for each individual,
3. the use of appropriate tools and technologies to determine needs, link to services and support individual progression through a service path and
4. an infrastructure that supports each of the activities.

individual need should drive service provision. Each person presents a unique set of circumstances requiring an individualized approach. Once inside the door, people need to have service plans or pathways.

Depending upon their circumstances, many service users will benefit from wrap around case management (defined in Box 4). And people will be able to return for further support at any point, even after leaving a specific program.

### 6. Distance from the labour market

With respect to employment services, best practice and experience suggest that services are most effectively organized and delivered along a continuum, based on how ready and prepared an individual is to return to the labour market.

- People in vulnerable situations, such as poor health or crisis receive community support services and access to adequate income supports. They are encouraged to fully participate and be linked to communities through connections to local social and other supports.
- People who need education and training are helped to assess the right services based on individual strengths and requirements, given options and linked to the right resources.
- People who are ready to find work are supported in their job search and connected to the jobs and job search resources they need.
- People already in the workforce and who need help to advance or get more and better work hours and better paying jobs receive supportive services.

### 7. Engaged Employers

To provide effective services to unemployed and underemployed residents, employers need to be engaged in



a variety of ways. Their first-hand knowledge of the local economy and labour market is pivotal to labour market planning and programming.

Employers' interest and participation relates to their training and labour force needs as well as the inherent benefits they receive from supporting a vibrant labour market. Ultimately, employers must be key partners with local employment developers and planners.

### From Foundation to Services | The Elements of a New Service Model

The new service model proposed in the report has a series of elements (as shown in Figure 2).

This model is simplified, modernized and, above all, integrated and seeks to provide seamless access to employment services, income support and a range of community supports.

It achieves this goal through active engagement with employers and other key stakeholders and by adopting a community and neighbourhood focus. Each element is briefly described in the following text.

#### Employment Services

Access to high-quality employment services is key to improving the lives of low-income residents.

Figure 2: New Delivery Model Elements



As the *Action Plan* noted, OW has become the first program of last resort for an ever larger number of unemployed and underemployed Torontonians. Significant decreases in access to Employment Insurance (EI), combined with the growth of precarious jobs, mean that many more people cannot get the help they need to prepare for, find and sustain employment.

Employment services, whether delivered

by the City or by other agencies or governments, must increasingly provide individualized paths to employment. This entails providing the types and intensity of services and supports needed by residents based on how ready and prepared they are to return to the labour market.

Case management is a critical part of this system but the intensity of the case management supports and other services required will similarly depend on the person's need.

The primary features of modernized employment services are listed in Box 5 on page 16.

#### Income Support

In the face of deep, and often persistent hardship, income supports continue to play a central role in improving the quality of life of many city residents. Within OW (increasingly a source of income support for unemployed and underemployed city residents), TSS has long sought simpler processes for determining the eligibility and administration of financial benefits.

In the context of a service delivery model that is now focused more on employment, these simpler processes are ever more urgently required.

People must be able to rapidly and straightforwardly access income benefits that are adequate. It is a given

### Box 5: Key directions to improve employment services

- Simplified service paths with built in resources to guide users
- Access to all who need services
- Sensitivity to local diversity, community facing
- Inclusion for low-skilled and low-income wage earners and people on social assistance
- Connected to/engaged with local employers
- Client-centred
- Collaboration/Integration central to model
- User-defined services responsive to individual needs
- Connected to the City's social inclusion and economic competitiveness goals
- Holistic approach, full case management service when needed
- Accountability to end user
- Focus on labour market needs and matching individuals to them

that people who cannot stabilize their lives and who are desperately poor are not in the best position to compete for or maintain jobs.

### Social and Community Supports

Research continues to show that the residents of communities with concentrated poverty are often more isolated and excluded than the current service systems acknowledge.

For this reason, an integrated

employment and social services delivery model requires a new way of thinking about social and community supports.

Essential for people to find and sustain work and to maintain a reasonable quality of life, these supports include not only mainstream services like child care, mental health services and housing supports, but also community and neighbourhood services like recreation and libraries.

With respect to mainstream services, the key is creating integrated approaches to access and, through effective case management, ensure individuals get the right help when they need it.

Often, in large service systems, the value of locally delivered recreational and community services is not sufficiently appreciated.

Connecting people with services in their communities has a host of benefits. It is crucial that case managers are knowledgeable of and work with local communities and other city services to develop links and partnerships.

### Community/Neighbourhood Approaches

Any effective employment and social service delivery model must be grounded in the local economic and social circumstances of the people using it.

In priority neighbourhoods (and in areas undergoing revitalization) labour market opportunities can and must be found and/or created to help bring communities into the mainstream of city life and ongoing prosperity.

Significant efforts are necessary to engage people in these communities in the social and economic development that is reshaping their environment.

Services must be aligned to fit the profile of the community's residents and their distance from the labour market. And where services are lacking, communities must be helped to build that service capacity.

### Employer Engagement

The closer employment services are linked to the labour market the more likely they are to be successful. Meeting individual needs is key, but unless initiatives also address local labour market realities, they will not be successful.

Involving employers early is vital to long term success. Focusing on specific employers can broaden engagement by connecting to otherwise inaccessible

networks. Providing employers with a single point of contact is the key to streamlining the plethora of programs with varied rules and requirements.

Employers are service users, too. Strong links and good relationships with genuinely committed employers bolster immediate job placement and post-employment support and have the potential to influence recruitment practices in the longer term.

Employers are also key players in local economic development, and can provide access to good jobs. They can partner in coordinated recruitment events. They are crucial points of reference for identifying current and in-demand skills upon which to design training. Employers have proven to be willing and able to participate in developing new points of access for people whose labour market networks and opportunities are weak or nonexistent.



### Next Steps | Picturing a New Delivery Model

In this case, one picture equals many words. Figure 3 illustrates the primary features of a new employment and social services delivery model.

From multiple access channels, to integrated provision of employment services, income assistance and social and community supports, to the role of wrap around case management, the model builds on the best ideas and approaches from many different jurisdictions.

The model also strategically grounds the ideas and approaches in the experiences that the City has gained through efforts to balance social inclusion with economic competitiveness at the policy and local delivery levels. Of course, this is an idealized picture of what the City, with partners, service users and the Province, is striving to create. The new delivery model is a work in progress and this report will discuss many of the steps that are being taken to put in place the essential parts of the model.

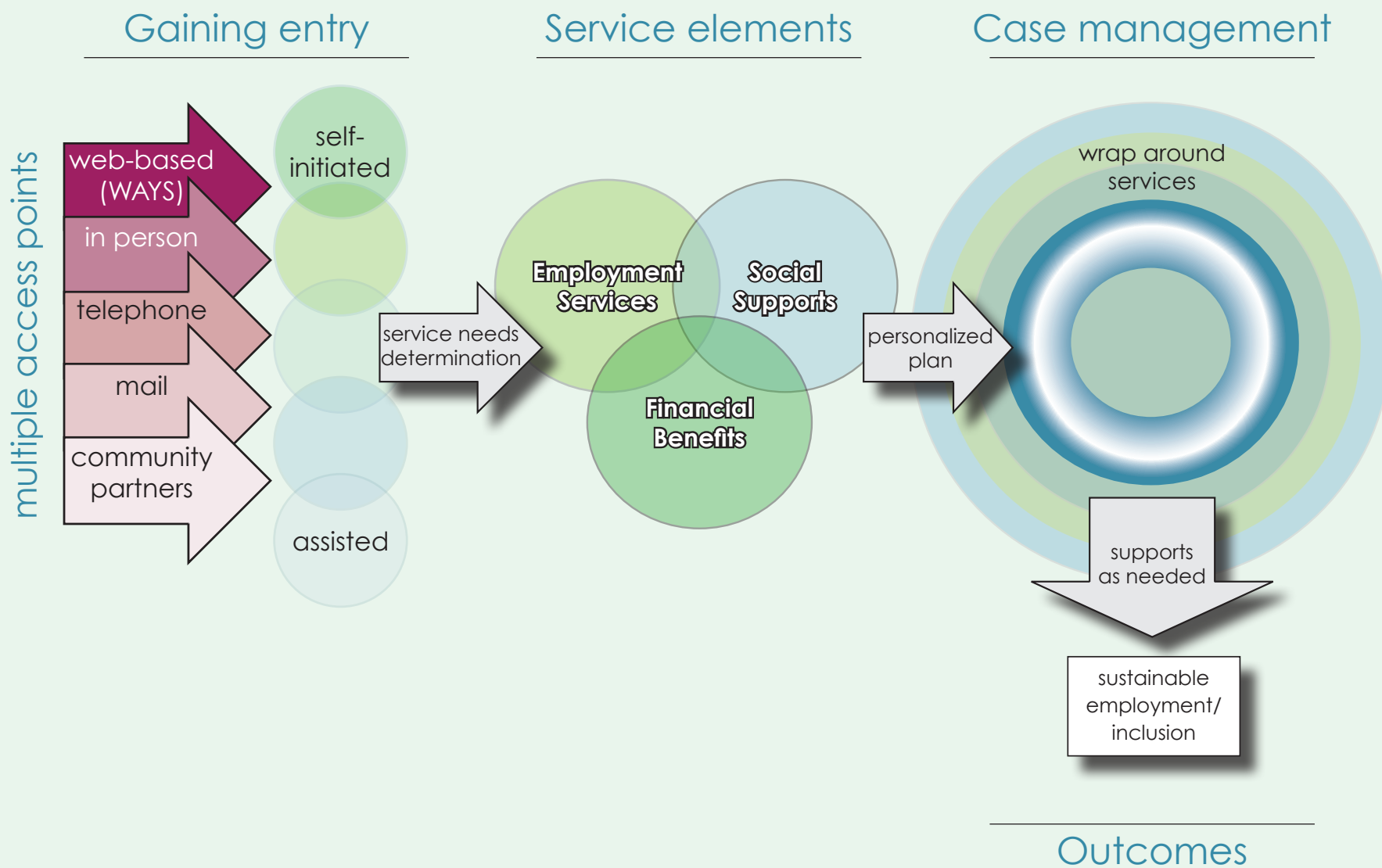
This report outlines the steps being taken to put this model into practice in local communities across Toronto.

This report looks ahead three to five years and focuses on ways to:

1. strengthen organizational capacity,
2. align roles with a new vision for service delivery and management and
3. support integrated, community-based service planning and delivery.

*Starting in the Right Place* also articulates the role TSS is well positioned to carry out with respect to planning, managing and delivering employment services in Toronto as part of a revitalized service delivery system.

Figure 3: Picturing a New Delivery Model









**Section One distills the experiences gained through the implementation of the Action Plan. In some ways, it leapt ahead. It weaves the best of what was learned from implementing integration initiatives together into a new approach: a new approach to employment services planning and delivery and in engaging a wide range of partners in neighbourhood-based collaborations. The resulting model at the end of Section One represents the culmination of this groundwork and much research and reflection.**

This section details how key *Action Plan* recommendations related to employment services planning, management and delivery, and service integration have been acted upon.

Service integration and employment services were discussed in separate sections in the original *Action Plan* report. It now makes sense to bring these two components together.

An integrated approach to service delivery and to service management and planning is the backbone of an effective service system.

This section describes a number of integration initiatives that bring together service providers from different City divisions and different governments to reach out to city residents and offer new ways of helping them.

Easy and straightforward access to services is vital in integrated service systems. The steps being taken to open up Ontario Works (OW) and new technologies to improve access to and information about the OW program are also discussed.

Access and information are crucial, but so is the quality of the services available. Gaps in employment services and the inability of many unemployed and underemployed Toronto

residents to get the assistance they need to prepare for, obtain and retain employment are well documented.

And the landscape within which employment services are planned, managed and delivered has changed substantially over the past several years. These changes have provided the City with exciting new opportunities: to implement innovative initiatives, to take on more appropriate and necessary roles in service planning and service management.

But the changes/opportunities also mean that implementation in these areas has proceeded apace with new relationships, new understandings and a growing level of trust among partners. In many ways, these relationships are at the heart of an evolving employment services system.

*Weaving the best of what was learned into a new approach, the model represents the culmination of this groundwork and much research and reflection.*

And the City, being profoundly concerned about prosperity, competitiveness and inclusion in Toronto, exercises its responsibilities as a service planner and manager within these relationships.

The latter half of this section provides an overview of the steps that the City is taking, in conjunction with other orders of government and City and community partners, to renew the employment service system in Toronto.

### Service Integration | New Ways of Working Together

*"Service integration is about more than making a few procedural changes. It is about institutional change to create a more, coherent—a holistic, human service system."*

Mark Ragan, *Building Better Human Services: Integrated Services for Income Support and Related Programs*.

No one division, service or strategy can reasonably or effectively address the breadth of needs experienced by individuals in communities across Toronto. It is only by focusing on innovation and partnerships among governments and service providers, and by creating integrated service systems that better services can be provided, especially to people who are in crisis.

Integration is not new. City services have been working together for many years. The Neighbourhood Action Teams and partnerships are a prime example of the City's commitment to integration where it makes sense.

Mirroring the developments, the *Action Plan* recognized that service integration must be a priority for the design and delivery of City services, and therefore should be consciously planned for and built into program and project designs. (Appendix A provides summaries of a number of City Integration Initiatives.)

#### Box 6: Strong Neighbourhoods

Over the last several years, the City has made significant progress in neighbourhood building through targeted investment.

The Neighbourhood Action implementation process established Neighbourhood Action Teams (NATs) in each of the City's 13 priority neighbourhoods supporting integrated City service planning and delivery from a community perspective.

NATs bring City staff from the human service divisions, police, libraries and Toronto Community Housing together in neighbourhood-based teams to coordinate and integrate service planning and delivery within a community.

In a number of the priority neighbourhoods, new Neighbourhood Action Partnerships (NAPs) have formed that go beyond City staff to include residents, local agencies, local businesses, community funders, school boards and other orders of government. As such, these NAPs represent an even broader integration effort, designed to build engagement with multiple stakeholders.

Service integration is particularly important for individuals and communities where access, availability and inclusion are a challenge. Navigating unduly complex service paths, not being able to find the right door to access services and not being able to get the right package of benefits, services and supports can be profoundly dispiriting to people at the best of times. And it can prove to be

overwhelming or worse, a tipping point, for someone who is in crisis, struggling to get by, excluded or marginalized.

In response to these challenges, the Action Plan proposed initiatives to build collaborative integrated approaches.

### Investing In Families (IIF)

A first example of the initiatives proposed in the *Action Plan*, Investing In Families (IIF), brings together City services to reach out to single parents in priority neighbourhoods whose social isolation has prevented them and their children from accessing the services they need.

IIF addresses the effects of social isolation on the well-being of poor, single parents and their children. Research shows the clear value of providing a range of integrated services to single parents in receipt of social assistance and their children.

IIF was designed to measure the impact of an integrated mix of health, social, employment and recreation services to single parent families receiving OW currently residing in one of the City's priority neighbourhoods.

With TSS assuming the role of project manager, IIF brought together the services and resources of four City divisions: Public Health (TPH); Parks, Forestry and Recreation (TPF&R); Children's Services (TCS); and TSS.

In its first year, IIF recruited over 350

single-parent led families receiving OW and living in the Jane-Finch community. The families had at least one child between six and 17 years of age and, at the time the project was initiated, they had been receiving social assistance for more than a year. Key measures of success for families participating in this initiative included:

- adopting healthier lifestyles,
- reducing reliance on social assistance,
- improving physical and mental well-being of family members,
- coordinated service delivery to improve access to appropriate services and supports.

A team of frontline City staff (public health nurses, recreationists, TSS case-workers and children's services representatives) was established to serve these families.

The comprehensive case planning approach included assessments of employment, social, financial, health and recreational needs. Assessments were most often completed in the homes of the families.

Each partnering division worked to remove administrative barriers and introduce flexible procedures for providing the best possible services to participating families.

Specifically, IIF introduced the following changes:

- Siloed processes were transformed into integrated divisional responses that better met the multiple needs of families.
- A holistic approach to identifying family needs was used.
- New and critical services were made available to family members (such as TPH, for the first time, provided mental health assessments for youth).
- Home visits and case conferencing enabled service needs to be assessed more efficiently and effectively.
- New automated solutions were introduced to improve consistency in information collection, organization and case management.

By May 2008, IIF team members made over 700 home visits and 1,800 interventions including more than 200 health related referrals. The key successes to date are that

- **IIF families were two and a half times more likely to leave OW** for employment than single parent families in other priority neighbourhoods.
- **Seven out of every ten IIF families took the opportunity to**

### Box 7: University of Western Ontario's Ontario Works Single Mothers in Toronto study

**Research shows that single mothers receiving social assistance are one of the most likely groups in society to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** In the winter of 2008, TSS supported a University of Western Ontario research project that surveyed 249 single mothers in receipt of Ontario Works in Toronto. The purpose was to better understand how various adversities (such as a life threatening auto accident), psychological trauma (such as being stalked) and assaultive trauma (such as rape or spouse abuse) influenced the severity of PTSD symptoms among mothers. The study found that:

- While rates of adverse events among those surveyed were similar to the general population, rates of psychological and assaultive trauma were ten times that of the general female population.
- Between 78% and 80% of those survey experienced at least one adverse, assaultive and psychological trauma over their life time.
  - During childhood (less than 18 years old) emotional abuse and witnessing spousal abuse were the most prominent traumas.
  - During adulthood (18 years and older) emotional spouse abuse, physical spouse abuse and being stalked were the most prominent traumas.
- The study showed that about 30% of the study participants met the criteria for a probable PTSD diagnosis and another 15% for partial PTSD.

The study provides a trauma profile examining the traumatic experiences that impact single mothers living on social assistance. It clearly shows that interventions must attend to the individual and consider how personal, health, and social resources influence a woman's current and long-term mental health.

**engage with their local communities** through recreational activities.

- 60% of families asked for a referral to TPH.

IIF recognizes that families living in isolation and deep poverty need more than basic supports delivered through traditional approaches. For many, identifying their needs and the needs of their families and then navigating the often complex and disconnected bureaucracies are not a reasonable expectation.

In fact, findings of a recent study by University of Western Ontario researchers (see Box 7) on single parent OW families living in Toronto shows the depth of the isolation and the extent of their needs that present significant barriers to lifting themselves out of isolation and re-engaging in society.

### Homeless to ODSP Project Engagement (HOPE)

Imagine you were someone with a disability living on the streets and how many services you might need.

*You would need to know what is available, how to get it and you would be expected to find your own way through the different service silos.*

In a disjointed, complex and difficult service delivery system, how would you access those services? You would need to know what was available, how to get it and you would be expected to find your own way through the different service silos.

In 2007, TSS began project HOPE. It brought together ten community partners, other City divisions and provincial ODSP staff. The project's goal was to make it easier for people with disabilities and without housing to apply for ODSP and secure a permanent home.

HOPE is a service integration initiative focused on ensuring that homeless people are:

- able to access the appropriate income support programs,

- linked to the appropriate community agencies to address their housing and health care needs,
- connected to social supports that help to establish them in the community.

The community-based, health care organization, Street Health, in its 2006 study, found that of the study's 85 participants:

- All needed help accessing ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) benefits.
- Almost all had more than one serious health condition.
- **87% had not been able to sustain work for seven or more years.**
- About one third had previously applied for ODSP but had been denied.

Two TSS offices with high concentrations of homeless people (over 600) were selected to participate in the project.

Invaluable partnerships were established with health centers, clinics, drop-in centers and legal offices.

A new service integration model was implemented with doctors from Inner City Health Associates. Working with provincial staff, a new fast-track ODSP

application process was put in place. Information sessions were developed and held with local doctors and nurse practitioners to help them understand the medical documentation requirements of the ODSP application.

The key measures of success for HOPE were:

- increasing access to ODSP for homeless/vulnerable people,
- connecting the homeless with on-going medical support,
- housing homeless people,
- linking homeless people to other service providers and
- building stronger partnerships between TSS and community service providers.

The project's outcomes are promising. In less than a year, HOPE resulted in:

- over 130 homeless individuals getting connected with the services they need,
- 127 initiating applications for ODSP,
- to date, more than half being granted ODSP,
- a similar number being housed.

Through HOPE new and existing collaborative relationships have emerged

or have been strengthened with the community and with the Province.

These strengthened relationships result in homeless city residents getting the necessary health care, housing supports and other social supports they need.

### Strengthening Employment Services in Toronto

The need for a more integrated approach to planning, management and delivery is similarly true in the field of employment services.

As part of its endorsement of the *Action Plan*, Council requested that a comprehensive end-to-end review of employment services be undertaken.

The findings from the review identified a worrying disconnect between service provision and service user needs which points to the reality of silos, fragmentation, gaps and barriers. (A detailed description of the review and the key findings is in Appendix B.)

The review confirmed that Toronto residents and employers are faced with a large number of discrete programs delivered under the auspices of a range of governments and programs. Within these separate silos, programs are:

- highly targeted, with access often determined by program criteria rather than individual need;
- focused on short-term, rapid



### Gaining Entry | **Multiple Access Points**

The *Action Plan* made a commitment to increasing access points for city residents by investigating how secure web portals can be used to support new ways of gaining entry to OW and to getting information and services.

Both the City of Toronto and the Province have developed e-strategies to ensure easier access to information, services and resources.

A goal of Toronto's e-City strategies is to provide residents with new service options allowing 24/7 one-stop electronic access to a wide range of municipal services through a variety of access points.

To this end, TSS is working to provide residents with more access points by offering a new web-based service that allow residents to apply directly for assistance, develop customized service plans and make self referrals to training and educational opportunities wherever they have internet access.

#### **Web Access to Your Services (WAYS)**

As per the *Action Plan* and consistent with the City's 3-1-1 project and e-City goals, TSS is working with the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Algoma District Services Administrative Board to create a new way to access OW. Service users, the public and staff were consulted to develop the pilot, Web Access to Your Services (WAYS).

WAYS is interactive and offers many services including:

- around the clock access to relevant information and value-added services,
- opportunities to partner with other City and

external service providers,

- easy, on-line access to government information, services and programs ensuring that services are integrated, person-centric and efficient,
- resources that are useful to a broad audience such as individuals with disabilities, advocates and other professions.

WAYS offers people, for the first time in Canada, the ability to apply for OW on-line. The pilot of WAYS is being launched in the latter part of 2008. When fully rolled out in 2009, residents will be able to:

- assess their potential eligibility for social assistance,
- initiate an application for social assistance,
- schedule an initial interview online,
- locate and find directions to their nearest OW and ODSP offices,
- access information about OW/ODSP benefits and other TSS services,
- link to sites providing information about other income support programs, City services, and various related programs and services.

Through both WAYS and the associated Internet Redesign Project (IRP), Toronto residents will be better informed and have a say in their access to and use of services, supports and information.

By being better informed from the outset, people will be in a better position to discuss their service needs and actively take advantage of the benefits and supports available to them.



### Box 8: Informing City Residents: TSS Internet Redesign Project (IRP)

It was evident that not only was it important that there be a new channel for residents to apply for assistance but that WAYS needed to be embedded in an active internet site. The site provides not only a link to the application but the surrounding information and supports make the application meaningful and successful.

TSS new internet website provides self-directed, intuitive access to information and is designed from a service user's perspective, providing a foundation for future automated service access options.

Most importantly, they also begin to address issues of control and power. Better informed residents with more options lead to better services, and to greater accountability for the service provider and service manager.

Taken together, the WAYS and IRP initiatives illustrate continuous innovation in delivering services, engaging people in new ways and in the overall management of employment and social services.

re-entry forms of training and skill upgrading rather than career-oriented services;

- dependent on individuals themselves to navigate through the array of choices to find what they need.

Beyond this, the research demonstrated that sizable gaps in employment services exist, including:

- a lack of case management supports with little emphasis on wrap around service;
- absence of face-to-face support and guidance and lack of career planning;
- limited involvement of employers;
- both duplication and fragmentation among the many program deliverers;
- a lack of available, accessible labour market information at the city level;
- very limited planning at the system level, often undertaken in isolation within the different program silos.

There is wide agreement about what the key issues are among stakeholders, including the City, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), Ministry of Community and Social Services

(MCSS), Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) and others. Significant progress is being made thinking through, designing, developing and implementing program and services initiatives and activities.

Consistent with many of the challenges raised by the City's end-to-end review, substantial changes are now being made at the provincial level to Ontario's employment services system, including the consolidation of a range of programs under the mantle of Employment Ontario.

This section describes some key areas of work, the most important outcomes, lessons to date and the next steps that are required to further strengthen Toronto's employment service system.

### Planning and Managing Employment Services Locally

By acknowledging challenges such as service fragmentation, lack of service coordination and uneven service provision across different communities and neighbourhoods, the end-to-end review highlighted the paramount need for local employment planning in Toronto.

Such local planning is necessary

to ensure that employment services are grounded in the unique strengths and needs of different neighbourhoods and that they reflect the needs of both residents and employers.

### Planning within the City

To ensure better collaborative work among the various divisions in the City, a Senior City Employment Steering Committee has been established.

The Committee is providing leadership and strategic advice for employment delivery efforts aimed at achieving Council's priorities and improving services to residents. In particular, the Committee has identified priorities and ways to better align resources to support employment and employment service delivery.

### Intergovernmental planning

In Toronto, the complex and unique nature of labour markets and communities creates the need for partnerships among different orders of government. Two recent developments demonstrate the progress that has been made.

First, **to enhance the social inclusion of new immigrants through successful settlement, integration and employment, the three orders of government have developed a number of planning vehicles**, including:

- Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding

- Ontario region Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement working groups on settlement and language training
- Local Immigration Partnerships

Second, and critically, senior City staff are working with representatives from MTCU to establish a joint local labour market planning process.

The goal is to ensure that provincial programs are implemented in ways that better match the unique circumstances of Toronto.

To that end, there has been a commitment to an integrated local labour market planning process, leading to the creation of local labour market plans which will inform decisions on programs and services.

### Planning at the neighbourhood level

As an initial step, the City and MTCU have selected four neighbourhoods as pilot sites. The selected communities (Weston-Mount Dennis; Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park; Woodbine; Regent Park; ) face different challenges and have different opportunities.

While planning in each pilot site will support the development of people-focused, integrated and flexible approaches to local service delivery, these different contexts mean that different approaches will be required.

The first two communities are in the

early stages of developing planning capacity. The work flowing from the existing Neighbourhood Action Teams and Partnerships in these communities provides the opportunity to build on an emerging local planning infrastructure.

The latter two communities are in the midst of large-scale neighbourhood revitalization and commercial development.

This provides the opportunity to undertake new approaches to local labour market planning in the city. Each is built on commitments to local hiring, improving access to services and bringing employment services to the individuals and communities most in need of them. These approaches are discussed in more detail in the following text.

### *Planning to support neighbourhood revitalization*

As part of a wider social development plan to guide revitalization, City staff took the lead in developing an employment plan for Regent Park.

Triggering the need for this plan was the commitment from Toronto Community Housing (TCH) that the residents of Regent Park would have priority access to the opportunities created as a result of the revitalization efforts.

The *Regent Park Employment Plan* takes a long-term and extensive view to improving services, including the

creation of an employment “hub.”

Over time, the hub approach will enable the integration of core employment and enterprise services, to both local residents and local employers.

Physically located in the community and virtually connected through networks of people, agencies, employers and technologies, the hub will evolve into a focal point for local planning and service management.

In no small way, the approach to local planning in Regent Park represents a new model, based on new relationships, with key players assuming the roles needed to ensure success. The collaborative way that the plan was developed (guided by the input and involvement of residents, TCH, community agencies, the developer and all orders of government) demonstrates the success that such an approach can bring. (See Appendix C for lessons learned from Regent Park.)

These new relationships and new ways of working are essential components of the future evolution and implementation of local labour market planning in Regent Park and the development of a fully fledged hub.

Indeed, the successful approach to

### Box 9: Laying the Foundation in Regent Park

With funding from MCSS, the first step in implementing this approach took place with the launch of the Regent Park Employment Engagement (RPEE) office. Career and Employment Information Specialists from TSS work on-site to deliver holistic employment service strategies to all Regent Park residents and employers.

**Since 2007, more than 550 residents have accessed services through the office; more than 50 residents have been helped into employment and some 12 local employers are now working as partners.** There have been numerous community outreach activities to increase awareness of the office and a number of community and career fairs that have connected hundreds of residents to employment services and opportunities. RPEE will evolve into a full service employment hub providing a wide range of services, such as career information, case management, employment supports and service planning, new collaborations with community-based agencies and new partnerships with employers.

planning in Regent Park has rapidly evolved into a model for other disadvantaged communities throughout the city, such as the recently announced revitalization of Lawrence Heights that will require similar local employment planning and delivery.

#### *Planning to support commercial development*

The commercial development of North Etobicoke involves the City working with a private sector developer and the community to offer new employment opportunities across a variety of economic sectors (including the construction industry, retail, office

services and entertainment, hotel and hospitality).

In July 2008, City Council approved Woodbine Live as a “transformative project,” and recommended that a local hiring program be undertaken. Council also directed the creation of a local training plan to improve the ability of local residents to qualify for local jobs.

Pending the final decision to proceed, the developer is intending to provide for a physical space on site that will serve as an employment hub for local residents.

As with Regent Park, such a hub will provide opportunities to better plan, manage and deliver employment services in cooperation with local agencies and employers.

### Engaging Employers

Improving the planning and management of employment services depends on engaging employers. In addition to the new partnerships and relationships described already, various strategies are being established to ensure employers' perspectives are understood and included in the planning and delivery of employment services. The strategies established are described in further detail here.

### The City as an employer

As part of the City's commitment to lead by example, concerted efforts are underway to eliminate barriers and to increase employment opportunities in the Toronto Public Service (TPS).

The City's Senior Employment Steering Committee is working closely with the City's Human Resources division (HR) to support the development of a comprehensive hiring strategy that is built on the principle of priority access for the residents of Toronto's most vulnerable communities with an initial focus on youth and newcomers.

The following steps have been integral to a comprehensive hiring strategy:

- developing partnerships with a wide range of City divisions and community stakeholders,
- identifying targeted positions within the TPS,
- removing barriers to summer hires,
- conducting workshops and career/job fairs in priority neighbourhoods.

As a result of these steps in 2007, more than 2500 youth secured positions within the TPS and more than 600 of the youth were from priority neighbourhoods.

A specific example includes successful recruitment by Toronto Transit

Commission (TTC) which led to employment for 100 youth from disadvantaged communities. This recruitment was supported by Youth Employment Partnerships (YEP), a neighbourhood-based youth employment network funded and coordinated by the City.

In addition, the City is continuing to explore strategies to increase its participation as a host employer with Career Bridge, a paid internship program that provides work experience for internationally trained university graduates and professionals.

### Engaging Local Employers

The City is using a variety of approaches (geared to the distinctive needs of different employers, communities and activities) to develop closer and more productive relationships with employers.

For example, the Employer Access to Support and Employees (EASE) initiative, funded by Employment Ontario and the City, is building on the success of YEP to help the business community to attract, hire and retain youth to meet their current and emerging labour force needs.

EASE recently completed the development of a tool kit for local employers with detailed information on hiring and retaining youth.

*"The candidates we saw were well-coached and came well-prepared. We saw a lot of potential in them and are considering them for different positions because of the background and experience they had."*

- PAYE employer

### Partnership to Advance Youth Employment (PAYE)

Partnership to Advance Youth Employment (PAYE) was established in 2006 as a joint initiative between the private sector and the City. PAYE's success is the result of the leadership and active participation of several prominent Toronto employers.

Employer driven, PAYE offers youth personalized support and guaranteed interviews with employers. Some 50 employers, from diverse areas such as financial services, legal services, property management and retail, have participated in bringing job opportunities to youth living in priority neighbourhoods.

Put simply, PAYE provides youth with "a foot in the door." To date, more than 350 youth have been engaged through information sessions and employer/City-led workshops. They have attended over 600 job interviews and approximately 100 have found work. Other youth have been able to access high-quality, community-based training.



Harnessing the knowledge and expertise of the business community in this way represents a major step forward. By going into the community, coordinating and building on the activities of youth

*"There are a lot of people in these neighbourhoods that need help and want help and have the mind set to go to interviews, dress well and present themselves appropriately. They just need some guidance. You will see how well they will progress, if they are given the opportunity."*

- PAYE youth participant

outreach workers and community-based agencies, PAYE provides a coherent, community-based approach to recruitment and placement.

PAYE is an example of what can be accomplished through collaboration and partnership.

### Delivering Employment Services

As the TSS' end-to-end review highlighted, low-income residents face many challenges with employment services.

Some people are eligible for services but are hindered by the lack of face-to-face support and guidance to navigate complex systems. Others struggle because of a lack of recent work

experience and the absence of up-to-date references. And still others require more or different services.

This range of needs reinforces that employment services are compelled to:

- understand the different populations they serve,
- identify the wide range of services that people require,
- match responses to the realities of local labour markets.

In recent years, significant progress has been made to improve services and provide innovative responses to changing needs. Key elements of this work are discussed in the following text.

#### Direct Delivery: Providing Career and Labour Market Information and Services

Toronto has a rich network of community-based employment service providers, including some 28 Employment Resource Centres (ERCs).

By providing personalized services to help individuals connect to sustainable work and learning opportunities, ERCs help residents to complete successful labour market transitions.

TSS operates 14 ERCs providing personalized services that help individuals

to connect to sustainable work and learning opportunities.

ERCs are one of the few employment service access points through which unemployed and underemployed residents are able to easily obtain advice.

In 2007 alone, over 100,000 service user visits were supported in City-run ERCs. (See Box 10 on page 32 for a description of the steps taken by TSS and community partners to ensure quality service standards and continuous improvement in ERCs.)

#### Supporting Settlement and Integration of Newcomers

A number of activities are necessary to improve resident access to settlement and employment services. These include programs and services to help with accreditation, bridge training and, as already noted, Canadian workplace experience through internships such as Career Bridge.

Fluency in English is indispensable for successful settlement, integration and employment as well. Without English language skills, newcomers are excluded from many aspects of economic and social life and, as a result, face disadvantages and marginalization.

To improve service delivery in this area, TSS in partnership with MCI completed a 2006 pilot project using the Workplace Language Assessment (WLA) and a

### Box 10: Employment Resource Centres (ERCs)

To ensure that ERCs continue to develop to meet resident needs there has been investment in staffing and programming.

For example,

To support quality service delivery and standards in ERCs, ONESTEP, the Ontario Alliance of Career Development Practitioners and the City developed joint training of the Career Employment and Information Specialist in-class component. Staff in City and community-based ERCs have received this training.

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In 2007, TSS partnered with an academic from Louisiana State University to deliver the Social Capital Opportunities Regarding Employment (SCORE) program. Piloted in three offices, the SCORE program is a group facilitated process that helps participants to understand and make effective use of networks to help them access employment resources and social supports. Evaluations showed that SCORE increased motivation to re-enter the labour market and encouraged participants to identify a career path that linked short-term employment opportunities to longer-term job goals.

pre-screening process developed by the Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks (CCLB).

Staff specially trained by the CCLB conducted pre-screenings to identify people with significant language barriers. Full WLAs were then provided at TSS offices by a trained assessor.

Both staff and service users agreed that the assessment was helpful in developing realistic and achievable service plans. In particular, it highlighted the importance of English workplace language skills in obtaining and sustaining employability.

In 2008, the WLA pre-screening training was expanded and workplace language pre-screening is now delivered in all TSS offices.

### Accessing services funded by Employment Ontario

One way to improve employment services for vulnerable people is to make it easier for them to access services that are funded by Employment Ontario and delivered by community-based agencies and community colleges. Examples of the improvements include:

- bringing provincial services into TSS offices,
- training TSS staff to identify and refer eligible applicants to Employment Ontario benefits and services,

- partnering with agencies to improve access for people in need,
- working with community colleges and others to increase access to pre-apprenticeship programs and apprenticeships.

## New Program Development

### Investing in Neighbourhoods (IIN)

IIN, a key initiative from the *Action Plan*, has proved to be highly successful in placing individuals, most of whom are single parents, in jobs in the community. A key part of this includes providing supports to help them retain these positions.

IIN was designed to increase the skills of single parents from priority neighbourhoods, develop contacts with employers and obtain current references.

To date, nearly 100 single parents have been employed in jobs paying wages that range from \$12 to \$20 per hour.

17 single parents have already been offered permanent full-time jobs with employers that hired them through IIN or have been employed in other jobs and have left OW.

In addition to creating opportunities for people on social assistance, IIN has increased the service delivery capacity of community agencies as well as creating role models and community leaders.



Expanding the IIN initiative will continue to build community capacity, provide employment opportunities, enhance individual social inclusion and reach a wider population across the city. (See more about this program in Appendix D.)

### **Building on and Integrating Lessons Learned**

Continuing to foster new ways of thinking about how services are delivered and accessed is essential.

We must look beyond the established, organizational structures and deliver services from the perspective of service users.

And we need to identify new ways of working together as no single division, agency or government can do this alone.

Much progress has been made over the past two years. But in many ways, the most successful accomplishment is the creation of a framework for renewal. Building on this framework and integrating lessons learned is crucial over the next several years.



### Next Steps

The following are action steps required to sustain progress with respect to furthering service integration efforts, providing better and easier access to services and strengthening the quality and effectiveness of employment and social services in the city. These steps are the underpinnings of a multi-year strategy for change.

#### **Promoting service integration**

- Expansion of the IIF approach into other priority neighbourhoods, with partnerships, services and supports designed to meet the unique needs of each community.
- Increased access to ODSP for at-risk populations. Processes introduced in the HOPE project will be applied across the city for other at-risk populations.
- Continued focus on identifying and incorporating best practices within the City's service delivery infrastructure and throughout the international arena. This will include both using forums and workshops in Toronto to share learnings, but also promoting Toronto's positive experiences in other jurisdictions.
- Align employment and social service integration initiatives at the City with relevant provincial and federal initiatives, such as those that fall under the Canada Ontario Toronto Immigration Agreement.

#### **Increased Access**

- Design, develop and implement web-enabled access to employment services and other social

services. Continue to implement and expand other service delivery approaches, such as “no wrong door” and “front door” services and wrap around case management.

#### **Strengthening Employment Services**

##### Engaging Employers

- Ensure local employment plans are integrated into large scale local economic development projects in order to provide employment and training opportunities for low-income residents.
- Build upon the success of the IIN initiative by supporting additional employment positions for single parents on OW in priority neighbourhoods across Toronto.
- Increase outreach to employers who are willing to be partners in recruitment and job retention in local neighbourhoods and City-wide. Continue consultations with employers to identify their labour force needs and their interest in becoming partners in developing local employment plans.
- Building on the lessons learned from PAYE, expand, explore and implement approaches to meeting the employment needs of residents living in priority neighbourhoods across Toronto.

##### Planning and Managing

- Creation of customized local employment plans in priority communities. These integrated approaches to planning will inform labour market-focused planning efforts involving the

City, provincial and federal governments and local service providers.

- Development of a Toronto-based LMI system to support effective local planning of employment services. Through joint forums, workshops and symposia, share and build on experiences and knowledge gained from planning, managing and delivering employment services locally.
- Development of necessary protocols and processes among orders of government that will increase the flexibility and integration of various government initiatives aimed at increased local economic prosperity and social inclusion.
- A continued emphasis on supporting mechanisms that engage communities and service users in the planning and management of employment and social services.

### Strengthening service delivery

- Continued design, development and implementation of employment hubs in more communities. The hub model will provide a new approach to delivering integrated employment services in communities across the City. Each hub will provide a focal point for local labour force planning as well as improved access to employment services.
- Exploration of options to provide city residents more intensive career exploration and guidance, more intensive training and education, and enhanced access to necessary supports such as transportation, child care and mainstream community supports.

- Continuous improvement in the purchase of employment program services ensuring services match both current labour market and resident needs.
- Creation of tools and provision of staff training to ensure that residents are getting up to date information and services from knowledgeable staff.
- Involvement of academic researchers from universities across Canada as well as government and non-profit community organizations to apply the lessons already being learned about the unique service needs of single parents on assistance.

### Developing new program approaches

- Through the newly formed Council of Educators Planning Group, explore opportunities to support access to education for marginalized youth.
- Create new partnerships to enable individuals to access longer term training and post secondary education.
- Develop protocols with MTCU for the provision of direct referrals to such programs for low-income residents of Toronto.



**Central to the Action Plan was a series of policy and program recommendations intent on improving the incomes of our city's most vulnerable residents. While these recommendations focused primarily on the adequacy of existing social assistance benefits and supports, the Action Plan also called on the Province to adopt a more systematic approach to addressing poverty.**

Since the *Action Plan* was completed, several important actions have been taken with respect both to adequacy and poverty reduction, albeit leaving much more to do.

Two actions are of particular importance. The creation of a child benefit outside of the social assistance system is a first for Ontario and represents a new direction for social policy in the Province.

Of equal significance is a commitment by the Province to establish a poverty reduction strategy.

Beyond these actions and commitments, other steps have also been taken to strengthen the adequacy of benefits to people on social assistance and other low-income individuals.

This section reviews the advances being made to reduce poverty and the opportunities that exist to develop a more systematic approach to addressing poverty for both Ontario and in the City of Toronto.

The Next Steps section identifies the degree to which the recommendations made in the *Action Plan* have been achieved and outlines new directions that reflect changes in the policy environment over the past two years.

*Two actions are of particular importance. The creation of a child benefit outside of the social assistance system is a first for Ontario and represents a new direction for social policy in the Province. Of equal significance is a commitment by the Province to establish a poverty reduction strategy.*

### Improving Income Adequacy

The *Action Plan* posed a compelling and uncomfortable question: *Could you survive on just five dollars a day?*

The context for this question is the 1995 social assistance rate cuts and subsequent rate freeze for eight years, with rates only increasing again in 2003 and then only enough to offset inflation.

Responding to this stark context, the *Action Plan* set out specific recommendations to address the impacts of these cuts, to provide people living in poverty with the income, resources and supports they need to live in dignity and to stabilize the social assistance system while restoring the social safety net.

### The Ontario Child Benefit (OCB)

As early as 2003, the City of Toronto called for the creation of a child benefit delivered outside the social assistance system and accessible to all children in low-income families. This position was strongly reaffirmed in the *Action Plan*.

The City was not alone. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) first proposed this idea in early 2003 and, along with other municipalities and City divisions such as Toronto Public Health, supported the need for such a benefit.

In its 2007 Ontario Budget: *Investing in People and Expanding Opportunities*, the provincial government announced

#### Box 11: The Ontario Child Benefit

"The OCB initiative would consolidate social assistance benefits for children and the Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families (OCCS) into one benefit that would be paid to all low-income families with children. Unlike social assistance, which is means tested, the OCB would be income tested, meaning many more families would be eligible to receive it. The OCB would be delivered through the personal income tax system."

- Ontario Budget, 2007

the creation of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) for children under 18 living in low-income families.

It is estimated that nearly 1.3 million children across the province will receive the benefit, including more than 200,000 families in Toronto. In total, the OCB represents a provincial investment of five billion dollars between 2008 and 2011. Through this benefit, all low-income families with children now have access to a secure, reasonable and sustainable source of income.

In conjunction with the introduction of the monthly OCB payments, the Province also restructured both OW and ODSP. By removing children from social assistance, it would allow for a transformation of social assistance into a program for adults with a focus on labour market attachment.



However, although the OCB represents significant progress in addressing child poverty, it does not address poverty among single people or families without children. As single people face greater risks of poverty than other groups, the OCB cannot by itself address poverty within the Ontario population.

### Social Assistance Rates

Starting in 2003, the current provincial government instituted consistent, if small, increases in overall benefit rates, including shelter allowances as well as small one time payments.

While these increases have prevented further erosion in rates, they have not improved the incomes of people on social assistance in real terms.

Even with these modest increases and the introduction of the OCB, the purchasing power of social assistance recipients remains well below any poverty measure including the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) and the Low Income Measure (LIM).

In both City reports, *Loss of Purchasing Power* and the *Action Plan*, City Council called on the Province to offset the 1995 rate cuts by immediately increasing rates by up to 40 percent.

In their most recent report, *Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket*, TPH reiterates this position by calling on the Province to immediately increase benefit rates and tie future rate changes to the nutritious

food basket survey results and TCH average rents.

With growing concerns of an economic downturn, it is evident that much more needs to be done to safeguard the financial security of the city's most vulnerable residents.

### Benefits and Assets

In addition to recommending increased rates, the *Action Plan* made several other recommendations related to new and existing benefits along with the adequacy of asset levels for social assistance recipients. Specifically, the *Plan* recommended that:

- the Province restore preventive oral care including regular check-ups, cleanings and root canals for adults as part of its dental coverage for OW and ODSP recipients;
- options be explored for making subsidized or reduced cost transit passes available to OW recipients;
- allowable asset levels under the OW Act be increased by at least three times the existing rate.

The *Action Plan* identified a number of obstacles to finding and sustaining employment including: poor oral health, a lack of mobility and inability to accrue savings and establish any secure financial base. While limited progress has been made addressing either the need

for low cost transportation or increases to OW asset levels, there has been some progress with dental benefits for the poor.

During the 2007 election campaign, the provincial Liberal party announced a plan to develop a \$45 million dental care plan to cover preventive care for low-income Ontarians as a part of their poverty reduction initiative. The plan includes cleanings, fluoride treatments, fillings and extractions.

This is a welcome first step in addressing the long standing dental health problems facing low-income residents, but it does not include provisions for enhanced dental benefits for adults in receipt of social assistance.

To date, the provincial government has not provided details on how the new basic dental benefit for low-income Ontarians will be administered or when it will be initiated.

In early 2008, in an effort to inform the Province, The Toronto Oral Health Coalition and the Ontario Health Alliance provided a detailed proposal to the provincial government recommending how the funds for basic dental services should be spent.

With respect to adults in receipt of social assistance, the proposal recommends that, at a minimum, the new provincial plan cover emergency dental services with an emphasis on prevention and

### Box 12: Jason's Story

In February 2007, the Toronto Star, as part of their War on Poverty series, told the story of Jason Jones, a 25-year-old, unemployed Toronto resident who used all of his savings, about \$600, to have most of his rotting teeth removed. Jason lost all but four of his teeth because he could not afford to go to the dentist.

His story poignantly illustrated the grossly inadequate state of dental benefits for Ontario's working poor and people on social assistance with no access to the basic preventive care required to maintain good oral health.

basic dental services if possible.

The Board of Health endorsed this proposal in its February 2008 report, *Improving Access to Dental Care for Low Income People*.

At this time, the Province has made no commitment to increasing dental coverage for persons in receipt of social assistance.

The City will continue to call for basic dental benefits with a focus on preventive dental care for all low-income residents including people in receipt of social assistance.

### Poverty Reduction

At the time the *Action Plan* was being written, the only poverty reduction strategy in place in Canada was in Quebec where in 2002 the government adopted, *An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*.

The Quebec legislation proved to be a bellwether of future approaches to poverty reduction. In 2006, Newfoundland introduced an action plan to prevent, reduce and alleviate poverty.

Through the *Action Plan*, TSS called on the Province to undertake a concerted and comprehensive approach to address issues of poverty. The *Plan* committed the City to meaningfully engage policy and program advocates and social planning organizations whose mandates are to work for a better, fairer and more responsive safety net.

City staff have subsequently been involved in, or supported, critical actions to promote poverty reduction.

One of the most exciting developments since the *Action Plan* was tabled has been the speed with which a wide range of advocates, organizations and governments (including the Province and the City) have agreed that the best and most effective approach to addressing poverty is to start with a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

Subsequently, in the 2007 Throne Speech, the provincial government announced its commitment to develop a poverty reduction strategy with targets and measures to ensure "opportunity that is accessible to all."

The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Child and Youth Services, was appointed chair of an inter-ministerial cabinet committee on poverty reduction charged with developing a poverty reduction strategy with a first focus on reducing child poverty, complete with measures, indicators and targets to be announced by the end of 2008.

### Engaging Communities: 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction

Evolving rapidly from a small table of mostly city-based organizations, the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction has become a province-wide coalition. It is one of the primary proponents of poverty reduction in Ontario organized around the call for a reduction in poverty of 25% in five years and 50% in ten years.

Consistent with the *Action Plan* and Council direction, the role of City staff with respect to the Network has been to enable, convene, engage and support community efforts to make poverty reduction a priority in Toronto.

The Network has been a resounding success. Working with existing

organizations like Campaign 2000, the Social Planning Network of Ontario and persons with direct experience of living in poverty, the Network has galvanized support across the province for the common elements of a provincial poverty reduction strategy.

Poverty reduction strategies must draw on the experiences and perspectives of people in poverty and of community residents, service providers and advocates.

Both the Province and the City consulted with concerned stakeholders and with people who have had experience addressing poverty. (Appendix E provides a brief overview of these processes.)

In City consultations, over 150 people attended two sessions. Participants shared personal stories of struggles to pay the rent and meet their basic needs while working for minimum wage and/or receiving social assistance.

Some shared stories of the social isolation they felt as newcomers struggling to learn a new language, assimilate into a new culture and to find sustaining employment.

Others spoke of the growing racialization of poverty in Toronto; the additional burdens faced by persons with disabilities; and the need for increased access

to crucial community supports such as affordable childcare, transit and community programs.

There was widespread agreement at the consultations that poverty reduction be an urgent priority. The continued health of Toronto (plus the welfare of increasingly large numbers of its residents) depends on more affordable housing, quality jobs that provide people with a living income, a rebuilt safety net (including Employment Insurance and social assistance) and services that newcomers need to thrive in Toronto.

*People spoke passionately about the very real need for a change in how poor people are perceived.*

People spoke passionately about the very real need for a change in how poor people are perceived. The need for greater respect, greater control and greater input into decisions made about programs and services used by city residents who are poor was voiced repeatedly, and in many cases, desperately.

City staff have played a pivotal role in enabling community advocacy efforts with respect to poverty reduction and will continue to do so.

### 25 in 5 Declaration on Poverty Reduction

At a 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction forum that the City, the Social Planning Council and United Way of Greater Toronto co-sponsored, the Network released its founding declaration on poverty reduction.

The declaration outlines a three-pronged approach that seeks to ensure a multifaceted understanding of an effective reduction plan. The three-pronged approach (the declaration principles):

1. Sustaining employment means assuring a living standard above poverty for any adult who works full time throughout the year. It means fair pay and stable working conditions for all Ontarians.
2. Liveable incomes mean dignity for all Ontarians—including those unable to work.
3. Strong and supportive communities mean affordable housing, early learning and child care, public education and community programs that help people connect.

Over 300 organizations and individuals across Ontario, including the Canadian Mental Health Association, numerous City and municipal councils, and the Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario, have endorsed the approach.

## Starting in the *Right* Place | Adequacy and Poverty Reduction

(The full text of the declaration is found in Appendix F as well as a more extensive list of endorsees.)

In May 2008, Toronto City Council endorsed the principles for a poverty reduction strategy contained in the declaration, noting that the principles are consistent with the City of Toronto's objectives of social inclusion and opportunity for all.

This declaration provides a powerful guide for City actions to reduce poverty in Toronto's neighbourhoods and communities. The declaration also serves as an appropriate jumping off point to consider next steps with respect to improving the incomes and circumstances of poor Torontonians.







### Next Steps

The following are next steps aimed at continuing and wherever possible accelerating actions to reduce poverty in Toronto, and specifically to improve the adequacy of benefits provided to low-income city residents. These include both recommendations made in the Action Plan where further progress is still required, as well as emerging approaches that reflect new thinking and the evolving environment.

#### **Action Plan recommendations**

- **Assets:** The Province increase allowable asset levels under the Ontario Works Act to at least three times the maximum OW assistance rate.
- **Dental Services:** The Province fund at 100% all costs associated with the delivery of dental services currently covered through OW and the ODSP and that the Province support and fund the provision of improved basic dental services for adults on OW.
- **Subsidized Transportation:** The City, together with the Province, explore options for making subsidized or reduced cost transit passes available for all Toronto residents (including children) in the OW program.
- **Rate Increase:** Increase in the OW benefit rate structure to reflect current living standards by restoring the 21.6% rate reduction

implemented by the Province in 1995, together with the inflationary erosion of social assistance benefits that has resulted in a 40% loss of purchasing power since 1993.

- **Rationalize Social Assistance Benefits:** Adjust OW and ODSP benefit rates such that Basic Allowance includes a nutrition component that meets daily nutritional needs as determined annually by the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket.
- The shelter component maximum equal 85% of the median market rent for each local housing market based on annual statistics collected by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

#### **Emerging Approaches**

- **Minimum Wage:** An immediate acceleration of the minimum wage rate increases already planned at the provincial level, consistent with the City's current support for a \$10.00 per hour minimum wage rate.
- **Ontario Child Benefit:** Immediate acceleration of the OCB implementation so that the full benefits are realized by low-income families in 2009 instead of 2011.
- **Special Needs Supports:** Under Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, social assistance recipients are eligible for a range



of health related supports (such as diabetic supplies, hearing aids, prosthetics). As people receiving OW and ODSP age, and given the incidence of disability and ill health, these benefits are increasingly important.

There are two related issues of concern. First, there are financial caps on the provincial contribution to these benefits, which have not been changed for 15 years or more. Thus, provincial contributions no longer reflect the true costs of these items.

Second, over the past several years, the Province has de-listed a number of important health-related services such as eye exams and physiotherapy. Increasingly, the onus has been placed on the individual to cover these costs.

It is critical that the Province eliminate the caps and increase the amounts covered to reflect the current actual costs of medical items. Correspondingly, people eligible for special needs should have costs covered for all de-listed items so that they do not go without vital services.

- **Hardship Fund:** The City established a Hardship Fund in 1999. It was put in place to cover the costs of specific medical items for low-income people who are ineligible for OW or ODSP. It serves primarily poor seniors who face potentially life threatening situations if they cannot obtain needed medical items. As the city's population ages, demand for the Fund has steadily

increased. To better reflect the demonstrated need, increases to the Hardship Fund are required to keep pace.

- **Tax Free Savings Accounts:** The restructuring of social assistance and the introduction of the OCB demonstrates a welcome provincial commitment to lifting children out of poverty. The Federal government's introduction of a Tax-Free savings account, starting in 2009, provides a promising model to extend this commitment further by beginning to address the broad range of needs faced by children in poverty.

The account allows individuals to contribute up to \$5,000 per year without being taxed on withdrawals or income earned. However, while this savings account provides an incentive for low-income people to save, Ontario and other provinces have not exempted account withdrawals from their income-tested programs.

As a recent report by TD Economics<sup>3</sup> argues, low asset levels reduce the incentive for those on low incomes to participate in this new account. To encourage savings, and in turn enable greater self-reliance, the report recommends that Ontario exempt a lifetime contribution amount of \$5,000 from needs testing.

Consistent with this approach, it would be appropriate for the Province to extend the use of

<sup>3</sup> Baldwin, A., Stapleton, J. and Drummond, D. (2008), *New Asset and Income policies to assist low-income adults under Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*. TD Economics: Toronto.

## Next Steps

tax-free savings to two critical areas: employment income and child support payments. Children in low-income families are at a severe disadvantage in terms of access to necessities as diverse as transport and technology.

Rather than having additional income from these areas deducted (leaving them no better off), individuals on assistance should have the opportunity to invest these amounts in a tax-free savings account. Doing so will enable parents to build a small amount of savings to meet their children's needs.

- Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB): In its 2007 budget, the Federal government introduced the WITB to reduce disincentives to work for people on social assistance and to enhance incentives to employment among the working poor. While promising, many experts have expressed the opinion that the current levels are too low to help those who are working but poor. In a recent policy paper<sup>4</sup> the Caledon Institute stressed the need to strengthen the Working Income Tax Benefit by doubling the maximum payment for single workers (to \$1,020) and for single parents and couples (to \$2,038).
- Employment Standards: Research suggests that as well as having low-income, outdated employment standards play a part in trapping people in poverty. Indeed, as a result of the changing nature of labour markets and, in particular, the growth of temporary, contract, part-time or non-standard

employment, many believe that existing employment standards are now outdated.

To that end, the City, working with community partners and other stakeholders, will investigate ways in which employment standards can be reviewed and strengthened in support of the City's employment objectives. In particular the emphasis will be on the measures that are needed to support at risk populations such as newcomers and youth in priority communities.

<sup>4</sup>Caledon Institute (2008), Caledon Commentary: Make Work Pay, Caledon Institute: Ottawa.



## Starting in the *Right Place* | Conclusion



## New Approaches for Challenging Times

For Toronto, like other global cities, these are undoubtedly challenging times. Powerful global forces have created unprecedented and seemingly paradoxical realities, such as growing poverty and inequality despite years of strong and sustained economic growth. An impending downturn now threatens further hardship for many residents.

In response to these challenges, new approaches are emerging. There is now broad agreement in the City that balancing economic competitiveness and social inclusion is vital to a city's long term health and prosperity. And it is increasingly understood that local leadership plays a critical role in achieving this.

Significantly, though, addressing complex challenges which have their origins beyond the boundaries of cities means that leadership must be collaborative, with the support and active participation of all orders of government as well as all community stakeholders. In short, to be successful local leadership must be coordinated and connected.

Through strategies as diverse as the *Community Safety Plan*, the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* and the *Agenda for Prosperity*, the City has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to working in partnership and to aligning actions to create opportunity and well-being for all.

In a similar way, the *Action Plan* recognized that local leadership and “made-in-Toronto” solutions for economic development, employment planning and social inclusion are critical to improving opportunities for unemployed and underemployed residents. Over the past two years, as the words of the Action Plan have been translated into actions, City staff have worked collaboratively, and with other governments and community stakeholders, to ensure the successful outcomes described throughout *Starting in the Right Place*.

The early signs of change are promising. By working in and with local communities to plan and deliver services and by integrating and coordinating approaches with a broad range of partners, the implementation of the Action Plan has set in motion new relationships, new approaches and, ultimately, a new model for employment and social services in Toronto.

Over the next three to five years, as these new approaches are put to work in communities across the city, partnerships and engaged relationships will remain paramount to future actions and successes. Informed by the needs of service users, the key building blocks described in this report will increasingly underpin and guide the evolution of services and new ways of working.



## Starting in the *Right Place* | Conclusion

*For those who are isolated and under-served*, like the lone parents in Investing in Families, this means taking service to their doors and understanding and assessing the needs of the whole family.

*For those in need of a "foot in the door"*, like the youth who have been supported by the Partnership to Advance Youth Employment, it means providing outreach and engaging the full community of stakeholders, especially employers.

*For those in neighbourhoods that have fallen behind*, whether they are undergoing revitalization as in Regent Park or commercial development like North Etobicoke, it means identifying the unique needs and strengths of each community and planning, managing and delivering services accordingly.

*For those who are newcomers to Canada*, just as for people who are long-established city residents, it means providing the right mix and intensity of services they need to stabilize and to progress.

And above all else, in each of these areas and more, it means working to integrate services wherever it makes sense for service users; increasing opportunities to access services and simplifying each avenue to service.

Much has been accomplished, but much also remains to be done. Poverty and exclusion are still too much in evidence in our city. At the provincial level, a comprehensive poverty reduction plan is a must. The principles for such a plan, set out by the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction, provide a strong foundation for effective strategies to battle poverty and exclusion.

*Starting in the Right Place* epitomizes how co-ordinated local actions which engage people, and which create real partnerships among governments and service providers, can make a difference. Starting locally, but understanding the vital importance of making service systems as a whole work for Toronto residents, the challenge now is to build

on this progress. This means continuing to experiment with innovative initiatives in local communities, using the best ideas available. But it also means transforming the way employment and social services are planned, managed and delivered in Toronto.

The stakes are high. *Starting in the Right Place* signifies the City's commitment and its determination to ensure that employment and social services in Toronto contribute to the tightly connected goals of strengthening social inclusion and economic competitiveness, for individuals, neighbourhoods and Toronto as a whole.





## Appendix A

### City Initiatives

#### ARC Program

The After School Recreation and Care Model (ARC) has been developed and implemented in consultation with Neighbourhood Action Teams, local communities and key stakeholders. ARC Programs are located in schools or community centres and provide care and recreation for children six to 12 years of age in vulnerable communities. ARC programs include a variety of activities such as sports, games, drama, arts and crafts and outdoor play. To meet the needs of youth, additional opportunities for mentoring and employment are available in high-risk neighbourhood which meet the needs of youth in these communities. As of September 2008, there are 28 locations for ARC programs in the priority neighbourhoods serving up to 800 children, and providing employment opportunities for youth.

#### Child Care and Best Start Service Plans

The City provides 24,000 fee subsidy spaces, of which 20,044 are fully cost shared. In addition to maintaining these service levels, the Child Care Service Plan also provides an integrated system of services for children. This system promotes early learning and development, delivers services to children with special needs and provides parent and caregiver support through Family Resource programs. It also supports families by ensuring available funding for child care fee subsidies by maintaining fee subsidy levels.

Both the Best Start Service and Transition Plan and the City's Child Care Service Plan also identify the need to increase child care services in communities that are not receiving their equitable share. The Children's Services Capital Reserve Fund supports the growth of child care in underserved communities and supports the growth of child care in accordance with the Child Care Service Plan.

#### City Housing Strategy

The City is developing a ten-year strategy for affordable housing, facilitated by the Affordable Housing Office. The strategy, expected to go to City Council in early 2009, is based upon a number of key themes, which include: supporting vulnerable people to get and keep homes; helping people to afford rents; preserving and fixing affordable rental housing; creating and renewing mixed neighbourhoods; creating new affordable housing; and helping people buy and remain in their homes. This strategy will protect the shrinking number and locations of low-cost rental apartments, help poor households with housing costs and promote mixed communities.

#### New Aboriginal Child Care Centres

Off-reserve, culturally appropriate child care programs for Aboriginal children are being created with new provincial funding for capital and operating expenses for Aboriginal child care. This initiative is being combined with an initiative already underway in the Best Start Service and Transition Infrastructure Plan Phase 2 for an Aboriginal Child Care Project, and is expected

to create and sustain 50 new Aboriginal child care spaces to promote inclusion, prosperity, opportunity and liveability for off-reserve Aboriginal families.

### **New Affordable Housing**

Through the Affordable Housing Office, the City of Toronto has approved more than 2,000 new units of affordable housing since 2005, the vast majority of which house low-income Toronto residents at low or moderate rents. Affordable housing such as this promotes poverty reduction and social inclusion in a number of ways. For example, lower rents leave tenants with more money to meet other needs, affordable housing is available throughout the City (not only in high-need neighbourhoods) and non-profit housing fosters community development and tenant involvement.

### **Partnership Opportunities Legacy (POL) Fund**

The City's POL fund provides capital funding for partnership initiatives to support development of community and recreational infrastructure in priority neighbourhoods. In 2008, \$1.2 million was approved to build a 5000-square foot community space for local residents in conjunction with the planned construction of a child care centre at Chester Le Junior Public School. The total City investment for the community space and the child care centre is \$3.7 million. The local community is being engaged to contribute to the planning and development of the space and how it will be used.

## Appendix B

### **An End-to-End Review of Employment Services: Insights and Findings**

Laying the groundwork for an employment plan for low-income city residents, the review provided an opportunity to:

- engage stakeholders in a review of current employment service design and delivery,
- assess the needs of low-income residents,
- identify key service gaps and to propose practical steps to fill them,
- identify opportunities for service re-alignment,
- position the City within the emerging employment services delivery context in Toronto.

The end-to-end review consisted of four components:

1. a detailed literature review to identify the key issues and challenges facing employment services in Toronto,
2. in depth interviews with 40 residents seeking employment,
3. a focused survey of employers and
4. interviews with key informants.

Key to the approach of the review was capturing the experiences and perspectives of:

1. employers working with and recruiting from the current employment services system and
2. residents entering, moving through and leaving the system.

#### **1. The literature review**

The literature review confirmed a clear disconnect between existing provision and service user needs, one that is well understood and repeatedly documented.

Key themes include:

- A lack of integration, coordination and planning at the local level,
- A lack of information about services and changes in the labour market,
- Limited access to services,
- An absence of face-to-face support and guidance and a lack of career planning,
- A one-size-fits-all approach that fails to recognize people's distance from the labour market,
- Tendencies for services to be tightly targeted or available only to specific population groups.

#### **2. In depth interviews**

In depth interviews with 40 individuals were conducted, some of whom were connected to employment services through receipt of OW or EI and some who wanted to work or to access training but were not receiving any services or supports. Key findings include the following:

- The interviews found widespread “vocational confusion” both among the most and least ready to work. However, many had a clear sense of their needs but faced issues such as lack of appropriate child care and prohibitive costs for pursuing post secondary education,

leaving them to expect that they would remain on a low wage treadmill.

- Unless individuals matched a specific target group (such as recent EI recipients, youth), they were often unable to get services, for example longer term training or access to job coaches and employment developers who could contact employers on their behalf.
- Most people reported that they had no one to advise or guide them through the system even though they very much wanted to talk to someone about employment and training opportunities, as well as about assistance in interpreting and navigating labour market information and technology.
- Participants frequently spoke of the need for better connections to employers. They recognized they needed stronger job search networks. They also indicated that they felt that service providers also would benefit from more effective training and professional development.
- Finally, each person presented a unique set of circumstances requiring an individualized approach to helping them reach their employment goal. Following from this, residents spoke of the need for a different employment system philosophy: one that builds on financial and personal assets and that better supports the balance of work and education and training.

### 3. Focused survey of employers

A focused survey of employers was developed by Social Development, Finance and Administration in partnership with TSS. Part of the Employers Access to Support and Employees (EASE) project, the aim was to collect information on employer experiences attracting, hiring and retaining young people, as well as their use of various employment services in helping them do so.

Seventy-five employers responded to the survey, with a wide cross-section of sectors represented ranging from industrial and retail to non-profits and colleges and universities. Among the findings were the following:

- Almost half of respondents had accessed government or community-based employment services.
- Wage subsidies were the most frequently accessed service.

Nonetheless, many respondents had also accessed other resources including job posting services, job fairs and assistance in the recruitment and screening processes.

There is tremendous scope for government and community-based organizations to work collaboratively with employers throughout the Toronto region to develop more effective recruitment, training and retention strategies for young people.

While many employers shared positive experiences, such as prompt and efficient services, a number of challenges with the system were apparent. For example, unsuitable applicants or resumes were submitted for positions, agencies often did not truly understand the



## Appendix B

employers needs and applicants were often not adequately pre-screened.

The findings from the survey showed that employers are willing to engage and participate in City and community-based employment services, predominantly as recruiters, but also as partners and leaders with respect to improving the processes by which services are provided to employers.

### 4. Interviews with key informants

Finally, in depth **interviews with key informants**, including representatives from business, education, training and academia, were conducted. Responses mirrored those of residents, namely, the need for:

- face-to-face support,
- more flexible and individual approaches to service provision,
- a new philosophy that builds on the skills and assets of each individual and moves from “processing” to talking, listening and guiding.

But respondents also identified key elements for moving forward. For example, local planning, improved service integration and stronger partnerships among agencies, governments and employers were all seen as imperative.

While respondents underscored the fact that this is a time of immense change and opportunity, there was a concern that there was a lack of a bigger vision for a Toronto-based employment services system and that it was vital for the City to play a key leadership role.

The findings from this review, along with key lessons from existing projects, ongoing intergovernmental dialogue and emerging research are acting as important feeders into the local employment plan for the City.

The findings point to the need for a range of specific actions to address existing gaps and service shortcomings. Moreover, they also underline the fundamental absence of and need for local planning to provide much-needed oversight and coordination.

### Lessons Learned from Regent Park

Research highlights the need for locally driven labour market planning and development rather than mere implementation of national or regional programs. In Regent Park this involved taking a bottom-up approach; paying attention to distinct community and resident characteristics; and, where possible, building on what is there.

While local context is critical, it is also important to learn from successful models elsewhere and adapt them to local circumstances. In Regent Park this meant applying existing research and knowledge of the area and applying international best practice research, such as applying a “distance from the labour market” approach to determining service needs.

Successful initiatives involve broad partnerships with shared project ownership, responsibility and resources. In Regent Park this led to new processes for working together; collaborative processes between City divisions; and involvement of all key players including provincial and federal staff, residents, a core committee of community agencies and key employers.

Community involvement, from consultation to implementation and management, is crucial to success. In Regent Park, this involved engaging and consulting with the local community through the Regent Park Neighbourhood Initiative as well as a core committee of agency leaders.

## Appendix C

## Appendix D

### Investing In Neighbourhoods (IIN)

IIN is a partnership between locally based, non-profit community organizations and TSS to provide employment opportunities to people receiving benefits under Ontario Works.

Working with unemployed and under-employed residents from the City's 13 priority neighbourhoods, this program creates employment opportunities in locally based non-profit organizations and includes the following objectives:

- increasing each participant's employability,
- strengthening the service delivery capacity of agencies within under served neighbourhoods,
- fostering stronger partnerships between TSS and community organizations.

Eligible applicants living in priority neighbourhoods are matched to job descriptions created by local community-based agencies.

Almost 90% of participants in IIN are female. The wages earned by participants are fully funded by TSS and comparable to the wages earned by staff currently employed within the participating agencies.

The emphasis on job retention in IIN translated into a number of concrete actions by TSS staff which include:

- developing initial training plans with both the participant and employer;
- maintaining regular contact with participants;

- developing an "individual service plan" throughout the placement period with an emphasis on the last three months to determine next steps;
- delivering financial, literacy and career development workshops;
- assigning each participant with a single case manager responsible for addressing both employment and financial needs.

In 2007, 91 fully funded positions were established in 50 community agencies with wages ranging from \$12 to \$20 per hour. The positions included:

- Volunteer Recruiter Trainee
- Media Production Assistant
- Literacy Program Assistant
- Tamil Outreach Worker
- Intake Assistant
- Child Care Attendant
- Food Preparation Worker
- Community Engagement Worker

As a result of IIN, participants have significantly increased their income and in some situations placements have enabled them to exit assistance.

Participants are gaining valuable work experience, becoming more self reliant and developing good work habits. They are also receiving appropriate job

retention supports to aid their progression at the end of the program.

In addition, as a direct result of this initiative, participating community agencies have been able to establish new, or expand existing services, in their communities, including the provision of:

- New Outreach Workers (for example, Tamil, Bengali),
- New Women's Program Coordinators,
- Youth Program Coordinators.

## Appendix D

## Appendix E

### Poverty Reduction Consultations

#### Provincial Consultations

In June 2008, as part of their efforts to hear from communities across the Ontario, the provincial government announced a series of focused consultation sessions held in a number of communities to inform the development of Ontario's poverty reduction strategy.

Consultation sessions were by invitation only and usually limited to one or two per community. Additional sessions were organized by local Liberal MPPs and open to all who wished to attend.

A website was also established whereby all Ontario residents could express their opinions and views about poverty reduction in response to a number of pre-set questions.

In Toronto, two consultation roundtables were held with the Honourable Deb Matthews and among the many attendees were senior City staff who attended on the basis of their knowledge and expertise in related fields. The Province's formal consultation phase was completed by the end of July 2008.

[www.growingstronger.ca](http://www.growingstronger.ca)

#### City Conversations

Consistent with Council recommendations to ensure the voices of Torontonians are included in these discussions, City staff organized two Community Conversations on Poverty Reduction.

The purpose was to engage city residents and hear first hand their experiences with poverty and their ideas for reducing poverty in Toronto. The meetings were held in the Council Chambers at City Hall and at the Scarborough Civic Centre in early July 2008, with 175 residents in attendance.

In addition to these meetings and in consultation with community agencies and 25 in 5 members, the City also developed a community workbook asking for people's input.

The workbook was distributed at the community meetings, electronically through a wide range of networks and on a dedicated website. Residents were invited to respond to a set of questions and make other comments with respect to what needs to be done to reduce poverty in Toronto.



## 25-in-5 Founding Declaration

We believe in a poverty-free Ontario. A place where everyone can live in dignity and enjoy a good standard of living. Action on Poverty Reduction. It starts with a plan.

The Government of Ontario is committed to a Poverty Reduction Strategy with targets and measures to ensure "opportunity that is accessible to all." (Throne Speech, November 2007)

We are asking our government for a plan to reduce Ontario poverty levels by 25% in 5 years and by 50% before 2018. We call this the '25-in-5' campaign.

Poverty reduction makes social and economic sense. We believe in an inclusive Ontario, where everyone can develop their talents and contribute to thriving communities. We want a province with a vibrant economy and shared prosperity.

Serious action on poverty reduction is possible. The U.K. has reduced poverty by nearly 25% in the past 5 years. Quebec, as well as Newfoundland & Labrador, both have ambitious plans to tackle poverty. It's Ontario's turn.

For Ontario, it starts with a plan. A plan that brings hope and shared prosperity for all Ontarians: in urban neighbourhoods; in rural communities; among Aboriginal peoples; within racialized and newcomer communities; among single female parents; and persons with disabilities.

We call on leadership from the Province, working with all orders of government. Working with all sectors and especially with people living on low incomes, we can create opportunities, remove barriers and provide supports so that all Ontarians can live with dignity.

Ontario's poverty reduction plan should address three priorities:

1. Sustaining employment means assuring a living standard

above poverty for any adult who works full time throughout the year. It means fair pay and stable working conditions for all Ontarians.

2. Livable incomes mean dignity for all Ontarians—including those unable to work.
3. Strong and supportive communities mean affordable housing, early learning and child care, public education and community programs that help people connect.

Some of the 300 individuals and organizations endorsing the declaration are as follows:

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| • Campaign 2000 (National)                           | • Association - ALPHA Working Group on Social Determinants of Health              |
| • Campaign Against Child Poverty                     | • Ontario Public Health Association – Association of Local Public Health Agencies |
| • Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario (CMHA) | • Ontario Public School Boards' Association                                       |
| • Colour of Poverty Campaign                         | • Registered Nurses Association of Ontario  |
| • Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)  | • Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO)                                       |
| • Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario             | • The United Church of Canada   |
| • Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition      | • Toronto and York Labour Council   |
| • Laidlaw Foundation                                 | • United Way Toronto  |
| • Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies    | • Voices from the Street  |
| • Ontario Association of Food Banks                  | • Wellesley Institute   |
| • Ontario Public Health                              |   |

For a complete list, visit [www.25in5.ca](http://www.25in5.ca)

25-in-5: Network for Poverty Reduction includes more than 100 provincial organizations and people committed to action on eliminating poverty. For more information visit [www.25in5.ca](http://www.25in5.ca).

