

ONTARIO WORKS PARTICIPANT SURVEY

This report highlights the results of Ontario Works (OW) Customer Satisfaction Survey administered by Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB). Ontario Works Participant Survey was designed to gather information from OW recipients in relation to their perceptions of OW service delivery. The survey collected information from OW recipients residing in the District of Thunder Bay who are provided services through TBDSSAB's four Delivery Agents, namely, the City of Thunder Bay, Municipality of Greenstone, and the Townships of Manitouwadge and Schreiber. Of important note is the survey project was not intended to be formal research and accordingly is absent of formal research design. The survey results are intended for administrative internal purposes only; they are not statistically significant and should not be generalized to the OW caseload population.

The overall purpose of this survey was to obtain a general sense of client perception of OW service delivery through frequency of response to determine the areas we are perceived to be performing well; and the areas which clients perceive we could do better.

Methodology:

A mail-out survey was sent out to OW recipients in the District of Thunder Bay and surrounding areas. The mail-out package included a stamped and addressed return envelope for responses.

The survey questionnaires were mailed out January 26th, 2007 to 2,268 adult OW recipients residing within the TBDSSAB's service area within the District of Thunder Bay. A third party consultant developed, received and compiled the completed surveys to maintain respondent confidentiality. There were 411 completed surveys received by February 28th, 2007, an overall response rate of 18.1%. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1.

Survey Results

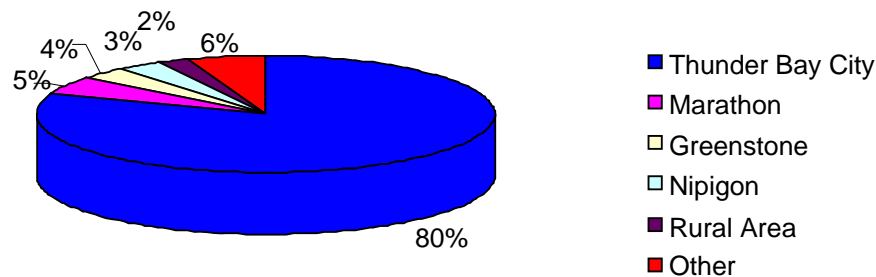
Respondent Characteristics

To determine the characteristic of respondents, demographic type questions were asked such as: geographic location, household composition, length of time on OW and how many times respondents have applied for OW.

Residence of Respondents

Thunder Bay city comprised the largest proportion of respondents representing 80% of the total. Respondents from Marathon and Manitouwadge accounted for 5%; Greenstone (Geraldton, Longlac, Nakina, Beadmore) 4%; Nipigon, Red Rock, Terrace Bay, Schreiber and Dorion 3%; rural area outside of Thunder Bay 2%; and other areas 6%.

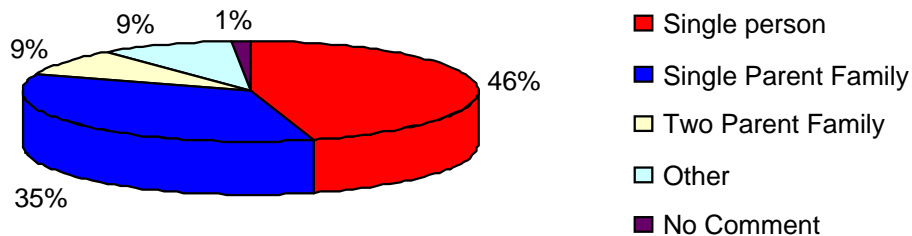
Figure 1



Household Composition

Single persons comprised the largest proportion of respondents accounting for 46% of the total (see Figure 2). Single parent family's represented 35%, two parent family 9%; other 9% and 1% did not provide a response.

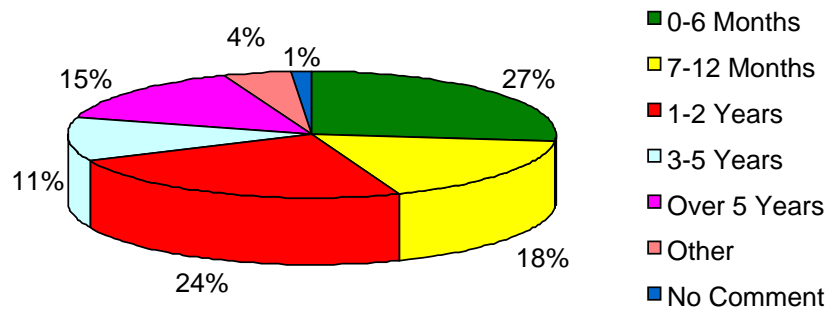
Figure 2



Length of time on OW

Fifteen percent (15%) of respondents indicate they have been recipients of OW over 5 years. Eleven percent (11%) of respondents recalled they have been on OW for at least 3-5 years, 24% reported 1-2 years, 18% stated 7-12 months, and 27% recalled 0-6 months. Four percent (4%) of respondents provided "other" insufficient information in their explanations and one percent (1%) of respondents' provided no comment.

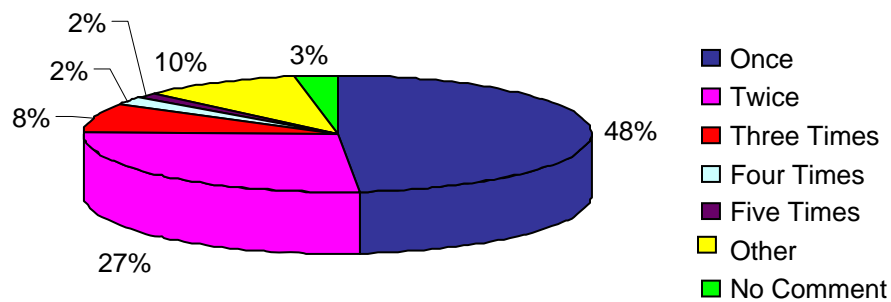
Figure 3



Number of Times Applied for and Received OW Assistance

When respondents were asked how many times they applied for and received OW assistance in the last five years, the most frequent response provided was “once” (48%). Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents reported “twice”, 8% “three times”, 2% “four times”, and 2% “five times”. Ten percent (10%) of respondents provided other insufficient information in their explanations to accurately determine a number and 3% provided no comment.

Figure 4



Five of the respondents reported “other” and further indicate that while they had not applied for assistance in the last five years they had been in receipt of ongoing OW assistance for 5 years or more.

Respondents Satisfaction with Service Delivery

In respect to a number of items, respondents’ were asked to respond to the following question “Which of the following things has been explained to you by a Caseworker or Case Manager?” by choosing one of the following responses, “yes”, “no”, “can’t remember” or “doesn’t apply to me”. As illustrated in Table 1 most of the respondents are satisfied with the information they received from Caseworkers regarding services.

Ninety-two percent (92.70%) of respondents recalled that they received sufficient information from their Caseworkers regarding when to report changes in their circumstances, and 91.97% recalled that their rights and responsibilities have been explained to them. Eighty-nine percent (89.05%) of respondents recalled their Caseworkers explained how they can contact them, and 86.37% indicated that they have been shown how to fill out their Income Reporting Statement.

While the majority of respondents positively agree with the statements presented in Table 1, there were some respondents who do not agree. Fifteen percent (15.32%) indicated their Caseworker/Case Manager did not explain benefits they might be eligible for, and 16.78% recalled their Caseworker did not explain how to appeal a decision that they disagree with.

Table 1 Explanations about services

	YES (%)	NO (%)	CAN'T REMEMBER (%)	DOESN'T APPLY TO ME (%)	DID NOT RESPOND (%)
When to report changes in your circumstances	92.7	3.4	1.9	0.2	1.7
Your rights and responsibilities	92.0	3.2	3.2	1.0	0.7
When you need to get in touch with them	89.1	5.1	4.1	1.0	0.7
How to fill out your Income Reporting Statement	86.4	8.3	1.7	2.2	1.5
The benefits you might be eligible for	76.6	15.3	6.1	1.2	0.7
How to appeal a decision you disagree with	60.8	16.8	13.9	7.1	1.5

* The percentages provided in the tables have been rounded independently; group of percentages may not total 100.

As illustrated in Tables 2 - 4, respondents reported less information was explained about community programs, specific OW programs and support programs. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents indicated their Caseworker/Case Manager did not explain how to apply for subsidized housing, and 25.3% reported their Caseworkers did not explain how to apply for disability pension. Twenty-three percent (23.60%) of respondents recalled their caseworker had not explained health and support programs in the community that might assist them.

Table 2 Explanations about Community Programs

	YES (%)	NO (%)	CAN'T REMEMBER (%)	DOESN'T APPLY TO ME (%)	DID NOT RESPOND (%)
Community programs that are available to help you increase your education	51.1	22.6	8.0	16.5	1.7
Community Programs that are available to help you find a job	50.4	19.0	9.0	18.7	2.9
Health and support Programs in the community that might help you	42.8	23.6	14.4	16.3	2.9
Community addiction services Programs which can help clients who have addictions	27.5	14.8	3.2	51.8	2.7

The percentages provided in the tables have been rounded independently; group of percentages may not total 100.

Table 3 Explanations about Support Services

	YES (%)	NO (%)	CAN'T REMEMBER (%)	DOESN'T APPLY TO ME (%)	DID NOT RESPOND (%)
How to apply for subsidized housing	35.3	27.0	10.2	26.0	1.5
How to apply for disability pension	30.6	25.3	4.9	37.2	1.9
What you need to do to get child support	29.2	15.6	3.4	49.4	2.2
How to get help with child care costs	27.0	17.8	5.3	47.9	1.9

* The percentages provided in the tables have been rounded independently; group of percentages may not total 100.

Table 4 **Explanations about OW Programs**

	YES (%)	NO (%)	CAN'T REMEMBER (%)	DOES'NT APPLY TO ME (%)	DID NOT RESPOND (%)
Educational programs available at the Employment Resource Centre (Thunder Bay residents)	53.5	17.0	7.8	20.0	1.7
The OW Addiction Services Initiative, which assists clients who have an alcohol or other substance addiction that is a barrier to employment	28.0	13.9	4.4	51.3	2.4
How to get involved with the Learning, Earning and Parenting Program if you are a parent under the age of 22 years and have not yet achieved your high school diploma	20.9	11.7	3.6	61.1	2.7

* The percentages provided in the tables have been rounded independently; group of percentages may not total 100.

Response to Telephone Calls:

Following corporate standards, caseworkers are required to respond to voice mail messages within two (2) business days. The majority of respondents were positive about the response they get from Caseworkers when they leave a message to be contacted. The greatest proportion of respondents (76.6%) reported their calls were returned in time. Thirty-eight percent (38.19%) reported their calls were returned the same day, and 38.4% said next business day.

Although majority of respondents indicated their calls were responded to within the two business day standard, 21.2% of respondents perceived it took longer than one or next business day. They indicated it took from seven business days to two weeks for staff to return their call or at times not at all.

Table 5 Response to telephone calls

	Number	Percentage
Same day	157	38.2
Next business day	158	38.4
Other	87	21.2
No comment	9	2.2

Response to Letters

Caseworkers are required to respond to written requests within 10 business days. As presented in Table 6, 56.9% of respondents reported staff responded to their letters one or two weeks, with 39.4% reporting less than one week and 17.5% stating one to two weeks. Twenty-six percent (26.8%) of respondents reported that this statement does not apply to them because they do not write or sent letters and only use the telephone. Seven percent (7%) of respondents did not provide a response.

Table: 6 Responses to Letters

	Number	Percentage
Less than one week	162	39.4
One to two weeks	72	17.5
Other (includes 110 responses [26.8%] does not apply)	146	35.5
Did Not Respond	31	7.5

Respondent's Perception of OW Services

The majority of respondents were positive about their experience with OW service delivery. Ninety-one percent (91%) of respondents chose "always" or "usually" to the statement they had been told what information they need to bring to their appointment. Eighty-five percent (85%) reported they are aware of information required to complete the application, 83% stated they understand the written information they receive and 83% indicated they are able to understand the forms that they have to fill out and are able to communicate in a shared language with staff.

While respondents replied positively to most statements, few others reported less favourable responses. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of respondents indicated the office location is not convenient, 29% reported the waiting room is not comfortable and 25% stated they "sometimes" or "never" find the automatic telephone system and voice mail

easy to use. Fourteen percent (14 %) of respondents indicated they “sometimes” or “never” understand the written information they receive with an equal proportion reporting they do not understand the letters they receive.

Table 7 Respondents Perception of Services

	ALWAYS (%)	USUALLY (%)	SOMETIMES (%)	NEVER (%)	DOESN'T APPLY TO ME (%)	DID NOT RESPOND (%)
I feel that my background and culture are respected	51.6	23.1	11.9	2.4	7.5	3.4
I know who to call if I have a question or a problem.	56.4	26.5	11.9	2.9	0.5	1.7
The automatic telephone system and voice mail are easy to use	40.9	23.1	16.3	9.4	7.8	2.2
Staff and I are able to communicate in a shared language.	65.5	18.2	6.1	3.4	5.6	1.2
Staff takes the time to explain things to me.	56.4	23.3	12.4	3.6	0.7	1.5
I am aware of information required to complete the application.	60.3	25.3	9.2	1.2	1.7	2.2
I have been told what information I need to bring to my appointments.	73.2	18.7	4.1	1.2	1.0	1.5
I am able to understand the forms I have to fill out.	55.5	28.0	13.6	0.7	0.7	1.5
I understand the written information I receive.	55.7	27.7	13.4	1.0	0.5	1.7
I understand the letters I receive.	54.0	29.4	13.4	1.5	0.5	1.2
The office location is convenient for me.	48.4	19.5	14.8	14.8	1.0	1.5
The office hours are convenient for me.	54.7	27.5	11.2	3.6	1.2	1.7
The waiting room is comfortable.	37.7	27.3	17.5	11.7	4.4	1.5

*The percentages provided in the tables have been rounded independently; group of percentages may not total 100.

Comments from Respondents

There were three (3) open-ended questions included in the survey.

1. How has the Ontario Works program or staff helped you?

Eighty-seven percent (87%) of respondents answered the first question from which the following nine themes emerged:

- Financial assistance (shelter, food, transportation)
- Education (courses, training)
- Employment assistance (resume, job search, incentives)
- Medical assistance (drug card, glasses, dental)
- Mental health (access to addiction counselors)
- Disability (access to ODSP)
- Support services (child care)
- Information (various services and programs)
- Frustrations

The most common comment respondents provided was that they are satisfied with the support and services that OW provides for them and their family. Respondents who took part in the survey indicated that the basic financial assistance OW program provides helped them avoid becoming homeless, provided their families with food and clothing, opportunity to return to school and pursue better career path, get them into training which eventually leads to better employment opportunities, meet their medical needs and assisted them in the struggle to gain back their dignity.

Many of the respondents were also pleased with the staff and the support they received. They reported on how staff went out of their way to help them access various services and supports. For example, helping them fill-out medical forms, providing assistance with resumes and preparing them for job interviews, listening and understanding their situation, and above all respectfully treating them as human beings.

In all, respondents' statements attest to the importance of the financial, educational, employment, medical, mental health, information, social support, disability assistance and other essential services that OW provides.

While respondents' overall satisfaction with services is high, there were also a proportion of respondents who provided suggestions on how OW can do better in certain areas. Some of the comments voiced by few of the respondents (7.8%) reflected concerns about poor communication between respondents and staff, lack of sensitivity and understanding of respondents' situation, and lack of listening skills.

2. What things could we do better to help you?

Seventy-five percent (75%) of those who participated in the survey responded to this question and 16 common themes emerged amongst the suggestions:

- Improve communication (contact information, appointments, mail, telephone, suspension letters, respect, patience, understanding)
- Improve information dissemination (Community programs, support services, child support, missing information and various services,)
- Assist recipients with ODSP-Application (Filling-out forms)
- Ensure a non-judgmental atmosphere (respect, understanding, patience)
- Be familiar with my situation (empathy, respect).
- Limit excessive changing of Caseworkers (improve continuity, trust)
- Have one Caseworker per client (two workers at a time is confusing)
- Create a system to address Caseworker/Client issues (complaint resolution process, addressing frustrations)
- Improve the waiting room area to accommodate the needs of children and individuals with disability
- Provide a better location for the office (easily accessible for recipients living in north or south ends of the city, parking)
- Enhance Education programs (funding system, support and encourage education past grade 12 diploma)
- Improve employment services (better incentives, provide non-emergency dental benefits)
- Improve transportation assistance (bus passes, assistance with fuel)
- Increase basic allowance (stop the claw-back of NCB's, provide affordable housing)
- Provide basic telephone allowance for individuals who are vulnerable (pregnant, elderly) and those who are actively pursuing employment

3. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your experiences with the Ontario Works Office?

Forty-nine percent (49%), of respondents provided additional comments that were more general in nature. The most frequently stated comments (38.7%) made by respondents' was that OW staff are helpful, pleasant, knowledgeable and courteous.

Summary

The goal of the Ontario Works Participant Survey was to gather information from OW recipients in relation to their perceptions of OW service delivery. The outcome of the study indicates that most of the respondents are pleased with the service and programs offered by OW. Satisfaction with specific aspects of service is reflected in high positive ratings, with few respondents reporting dissatisfaction with the services they receive. Furthermore, respondents rated the performance of staff as highly professional (courteous, helpful, supportive, etc.). The overall outcome of the survey based on respondents views and rating is positive. Therefore, based on this outcome, the following supposition is drawn:

- The majority (73%) of respondents perceived OW services positively and are satisfied with the services received.
- Most respondents hold a positive opinion about OW staff and the services they provide. Respondents indicated staff is knowledgeable, courteous, helpful and supportive.

Relative to some of the negative experiences reported, of note is staff's ability to respond to the needs of clients and make referrals to programs and community agencies is largely dependent upon information the client discloses, as well as the availability of programs and services. In addition, the wording of some survey questions was problematic. For example, one question inquired if a caseworker explained how to appeal a decision that is disagreed with. Letters of decision sent by caseworkers to clients explain how to appeal a decision that they do not agree with. However, if a respondent perceived explanations are verbal they may have responded "no". Of note was within several survey responses, respondent negative answers to some of the questions illustrate inaccurate perceptions that OW staff have the authority to change areas which are highly regulated (i.e., amount of financial assistance and benefits).

As it makes service enhancements, Administration continues to be mindful of respondent's perceived challenges with service delivery and suggestions. In the area of communication for example, Administration has implemented a video which provides consistent messaging on the right and responsibilities of OW recipients as well as available Ontario Works programs. Within the video applicants are repeatedly encouraged to ask their caseworker questions about services and benefits available to meet the applicant's needs. Thus, the video provides a means to not only provide consistent information to clients, it also encourages applicants to ask questions and share information with their caseworkers which will in turn help caseworkers to better assist them.

Although the survey was not a formal research project, the wording of questions were at times problematic and the results cannot be generalized, the perceptions of service delivery reported by clients are none-the-less important to Administration when making internal decisions concerning client service and service delivery enhancements.