



	REPORT No.: 2020-23
MEETING DATE: MAY 21, 2020	DATE PREPARED: MAY 4, 2020
SUBJECT: COVID-19 RESPONSE	

RECOMMENDATION

For information only.

REPORT SUMMARY

To provide The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB or the Board) with information regarding the response related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND

On March 12, 2020, the Province of Ontario announced that all publicly funded schools in Ontario would be closed for two weeks following the March Break in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A state of emergency was declared by the Province of Ontario on March 17, 2020 followed by additional announcements from the province on March 23 and on March 30, 2020 of a series of emergency orders including: the closure of non-essential businesses, the prohibiting of gatherings of more than five people, the closure of all public recreational amenities, the continued use of off-peak electricity pricing, the limiting of workers to work in a single long-term care facility, and work deployment measures for municipalities across the province.

On April 14, 2020, on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, and with the approval of the Ontario legislature, the Ontario government extended the Declaration of Emergency under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* for a further 28 days. Additionally, the Province of Ontario stated at this time all previously announced emergency orders will remain in effect until at least May 6, 2020.

On April 26, 2020, Education Minister Stephen Lecce announced that the closure of publicly funded schools would continue until at least May 31.

As an essential service, TBDSSAB remains open for business to serve clients and tenants and the service systems that fall under responsibility.

COMMENTS

On April 1, 2020, the Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), provided a letter to the TBDSSAB Chair announcing a funding allocation under the \$200 million Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF), supported by the MMAH and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), to respond to increased demand for services and supports as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

MCCSS is providing up to \$52 million province-wide to allow Caseworkers to approve additional discretionary funding to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support clients for COVID-19 emergency related costs. In addition, the rules for Ontario Works Emergency Assistance have been changed to allow a longer eligibility period.

TBDSSAB is eligible to receive up to \$1,168,300 in 2020/21 from the MMAH, with \$584,150 available immediately and the remaining 50% allocated at a later time, following Ministry review and reallocation determination. The funding will allow communities to expand a wide range of services and supports for vulnerable populations based on local need and will allow Service Managers to help a diverse range of vulnerable people in need in the community including people living in community or supportive housing, people with low incomes, social assistance recipients, or others who require social services support as well as those that are experiencing homelessness. The funding is provided through the existing Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI).

Following are details on how TBDSSAB is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and information on each area of service impacted.

Office Operations

New measures have been implemented in the Intake & Eligibility area at the main office and these have been successful in reducing the number of people needing to come into the office.

During the first week of March, an average of 300 people entered the building daily. On March 30, 2020, following implementation of restriction measures, 161 people were served by staff in the vestibule, with only 54 people requiring screening and entry to the office for service that required face to face contact or other resources.

On April 30, 2020, 140 people accessed the vestibule service area, with 52 requiring further access to the building. Most visits were to access the lobby phone or to make rent payments. Cheques for individuals were delivered to the door to reduce the number of people inside the office.

TBDSSAB has increased the cleaning in all offices, reducing the risk of any virus spread. Overnight cleaners are sanitizing door handles, railings, taps, and other surfaces, in addition to the regular cleaning. In addition, staff in the office are cleaning common surfaces like printers and coffee stations throughout the day.

Child Care Services

In response to the province's direction to provide emergency child care for essential workers, TBDSSAB reached out to child care centres to seek interest in opening to care for children during the pandemic.

Child Care Early Years programs have planned and implemented the opening of 3 Emergency Child Care Centres to date. The Geraldton Centre and Schoolhouse Playcare in Thunder Bay opened on April 24, 2020 and the Algoma Child Care Centre in Thunder Bay opened on April 28, 2020.

The application for essential workers went live on April 17, 2020 and applications received were screened and prioritized based on a variety of factors. As of April 30, 2020, 127 applications have been received, with 51 children being placed into child care centres.

The breakdown is as follows:

Date Placed	School House - Grey Street	Algoma	Geraldton	Total Placed
Apr-22		1	12	13
Apr-23		6	2	8
Apr-24		6		6
Apr-27	6	6		12
Apr-28	1	2		3
Apr-29	7		2	9
Total:	14	21	16	51

TBDSSAB is encouraging essential services workers to apply even if they do not have an announced child care centre in their area. This is to gauge demand in each area. Staff continue to reach out to child care providers to open to fill demand. Currently, applications are prioritized by those who are front line emergency services workers including medical care providers, paramedics, fire services and emergency room workers.

Social Assistance Supports

On March 17, 2020, TBDSSAB enacted a plan to minimize face to face contact with clients in order to protect both clients and staff including completing all appointments by phone with the exception of the Verification Interview (VI). After the emergency orders were declared by the province, the VI process was also completed by phone.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) authorized the ability for local Service Managers to grant assistance and make changes to client files without verification based on a risk management model. This meant that in-person signatures and provision of identification were not immediately required to access supports.

MCCSS expanded the provision of Ontario Works Emergency Assistance (OWEA) from 'not more than 16 days in a 6 month period' to '48 days with no time limit'. The OWEA allows for the immediate provision of financial assistance to an applicant in an emergency to cover basic needs, shelter and benefits. TBDSSAB has granted 18 OWEA cases under this expanded program to date.

The Social Assistance Discretionary Benefits Program has also been expanded for extraordinary expenses related to COVID-19 to include personal protective equipment or cleaning supplies. Requests are being granted at \$50 for singles and \$100 for families to help with these extra expenses. Since the announcement of this benefit, through April 30, 2020 over 1,500 requests for COVID-19 Emergency Discretionary benefits have been granted, with \$108,000.00 issued to social assistance recipients. The emergency discretionary benefits program has been extended for 3 months; amounts of up to \$100 for singles and \$200 for families may be issued beginning in May for those that meet the program criteria.

Cell Phone and Internet Supports

TBDSSAB has partnered with Tbaytel under the Tbaytel for Good Program to provide cell phones and service plans for people with low income at no cost until the end of June, 2020. There were 61 devices provided and all have been allocated. Staff is also working with Tbaytel to install free WIFI hot spots in 5 TBDSSAB owned housing buildings this week. Tbaytel hosted an Instagram Live event on April 27, 2020 to officially announce the Tbaytel for Good Program for 2020.

Homeless Supports

TBDSSAB has partnered with several organizations to fund an isolation hotel program for people who are suspected COVID-19 positive or who are awaiting test results, as well as an overflow shelter program to ensure safe places for homeless individuals to stay if the emergency shelters are full. This program is led by the health sector, with TBDSSAB offering financial support.

An overflow shelter system has been established to address the needs of homeless individuals who cannot access the existing emergency shelters. There are times when emergency shelter beds are full, and individuals require alternate locations for shelter. Additionally, if an individual has other factors that prevent them from accessing the emergency shelters, then alternate arrangements are in place. The overflow shelter system is an extension of the existing system plan that seeks to maximize the capacity of the existing shelter system and grow as need requires.

Once an individual is triaged into the overflow shelter, they are contacted by a TBDSSAB Caseworker who ensures income support is set up. The TBDSSAB Transitional Outreach Support Worker is then tasked to connect with the individual to discuss more permanent housing options such as possible housing applications, or to undertake screening programs to potentially enter supported programs. This is an extension of the existing emergency shelter support process.

Through April, a nightly average of 7 people have accessed the overflow shelters.

Housing Programs Supports

Outreach and support have been increased in TBDSSAB-owned housing, as well as with non-profit housing providers to ensure that those in need during the pandemic receive supports. Wellness calls are made by Tenant Support Workers and Property Management Officers, and food hamper deliveries are made in cooperation with the Good Food Box.

In order to reinforce the severity of the pandemic to tenants and guests in some higher traffic TBDSSAB-owned housing buildings, occasional screening tables have been set up by TBDSSAB staff at the front entrances at Spence Court and at McIvor Court. Staff ask screening questions and discourage unnecessary visiting. The goal is to remind tenants and their guests not to congregate. If these tables are effective in this goal, implementation in other buildings will be considered.

Administration is reaching out to community housing and supportive housing providers to determine the need for cleaning supplies, PPE and requirements for assistance with measures to implement appropriate social distancing and self-isolation. Financial supports have been made available to assist with these COVID-19 related additional costs.

Food Security

TBDSSAB has partnered with Roots to Harvest and the Good Food Box to provide delivery of food bags to 120 seniors per week, with an additional 250 bags of food to families per week supported by the school nutrition programs. In addition, Monday through Thursday each week, TBDSSAB staff support the distribution of 100 lunches to children in TBDSSAB family neighbourhoods provided through the Boys & Girls Club. Food security in communities outside the City of Thunder Bay has been supported through funding requests to the Social Services Relief Fund Program and the Good Food Box distribution.

Social Services Relief Fund Program

TBDSSAB has established an Emergency Pandemic Fund, supported by funding from the province's Social Services Relief Fund, to assist communities and organizations by offering housing and related supports to individuals and households dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Information on this fund has been distributed widely across the District, and submissions are reviewed as received.

The following table identifies the organizations who have been awarded funding to date.

Organization	Funding Amount
Salvation Army	\$ 7,351.00
Greenstone Harvest Centre	3,000.00
Nipigon Red Rock District High School	1,800.00
Urban Abbey	32,800.00
Geraldton Composite High School	3,200.00
Marathon Community Collective	4,500.00
Grace Ministries	24,828.71
Marjorie House	15,600.00
Total:	\$ 93,079.71

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS



The Social Services Relief Fund is provided through the province of Ontario for use by Service Managers and does not require municipal contribution. An initial \$584,150 was provided to TBDSSAB, with eligibility for an additional \$584,150 to be determined by the province at a later date. Social assistance supports and the cost for emergency child care have also been funded from the province.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that this report provides the Board with information relative to the TBDSSAB response to the COVID-19 pandemic and supports offered throughout the District of Thunder Bay.

REFERENCE MATERIALS ATTACHED

None

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