



	REPORT No.: 2020-50
MEETING DATE: OCTOBER 15, 2020	DATE PREPARED: SEPTEMBER 28, 2020
SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES RELIEF FUND, EMERGENCY DISCRETIONARY BENEFITS AND CHILD CARE UPDATE	

RECOMMENDATION

For information only.

REPORT SUMMARY

To provide The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB or the Board) with updated information regarding the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund, Emergency Discretionary Benefits and the re-opening of child care centres and EarlyON programs in the District of Thunder Bay during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND

At the April 16, 2020 meeting, the Board was provided with initial information and plans for the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF), Emergency Discretionary Benefits and the Emergency Child Care (ECC) program. Updated information was provided at the June 18, 2020, the July 16, 2020 and again at the September 17, 2020 meetings and this report provides the most current information.

The SSRF allows communities to expand a wide range of services and supports for vulnerable populations impacted by COVID-19 and allows Service Managers to assist vulnerable people who are experiencing homelessness, living in community or supportive housing, people with low incomes, those receiving social assistance benefits, or others who require social services supports.

The Emergency Discretionary Benefit offered through Ontario Works (OW) enabled the immediate provision of financial assistance to an applicant in a crisis or emergency situation. The provision of financial assistance in an emergency may include an amount for basic needs, shelter and benefits. This program complements additional resources provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to directly support individuals and families in financial crisis who are not able to access federal assistance.

Emergency child care became operational the week of April 27, 2020. The Premier announced that it would end on June 26, 2020 and that child care centres would be able to re-open on June 12, 2020.

COMMENTS

Through the SSRF, TBDSSAB established an Emergency Pandemic Fund to assist organizations by offering housing and related supports to individuals and households experiencing financial pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Information on this fund has been distributed widely across the district and submissions are reviewed as received. Eligible activities under this funding program include the provision of shelter, rent supports, food and clothing, access to cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE), transportation and other support services related to the impacts of COVID-19.

The following table outlines the Emergency Pandemic Fund grants awarded up to September 30, 2020:

Table 1:

Organization	Proposal	Communities Served	Amount
Boys and Girls Club	Food security for vulnerable community	Thunder Bay	\$ 5,000
Geraldton Composite High School	Backpack nutrition program	Greenstone	3,200
Grace Ministries	Provide isolation shelter staffing 24/7 (3 approved applications, net of \$819 returned)	Thunder Bay	81,736
Greenstone Harvest Centre	Food security for vulnerable community	Greenstone	3,000
Marathon Community Collective	Food/clothing/supplies; accommodation; transportation; support services	Marathon	4,500
Marjorie House	Food security for vulnerable community (3 approved applications)	Marathon	52,100
Nipigon Red Rock District High School	Food security for vulnerable community	Nipigon/Red Rock	1,800
North of Superior Healthcare Group	Offer programming and supports to tenants	Marathon	1,344
Salvation Army	Social distancing measures, enhanced screening, maintaining good nutrition and hygiene (2 approved applications)	Thunder Bay	9,781
Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan	Food security for vulnerable community	Thunder Bay	4,500
Urban Abbey	Provide illness isolation space and support to homeless (2 approved applications)	Thunder Bay	40,960
		Total:	\$207,921

Administration is also working with partners to facilitate an isolation shelter for homeless individuals who require separation from the general population due to possible exposure to the virus or while awaiting test results. From April 2 through September 30 there was an average of 16 individuals staying nightly at the isolation shelter in Thunder Bay; periodically there have been isolation hotel stays required in Greenstone and Manitouwadge, and facilities have been established in other communities to be accessed as required. Meals, laundry and other supports are provided to those staying in isolation.

To address the needs of those requiring shelter, where the existing emergency shelters are full or where individuals are unable to access the existing shelters, TBDSSAB has expanded the overflow shelter program through arrangements with several hotels. As of September 30, 2020, there has been a total of 976 room nights accessed under this emergency shelter initiative.

Administration has continued to reach out to community housing providers and supportive service providers to determine the need for cleaning supplies, PPE and requirements for assistance with measures to implement appropriate social distancing and self-isolation. This includes community housing units directly owned by TBDSSAB. Based on varied needs and initiatives identified, a total of \$113,940 has been expended through September 30, 2020.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became increasingly apparent that many TBDSSAB tenants and clients were lacking in technological supports. In response to this issue, TBDSSAB partnered with Tbaytel to provide 66 phones to be distributed to clients and tenants in the District of Thunder Bay. Tbaytel provided the devices to TBDSSAB at no cost and offered free service plans through June 30, 2020. TBDSSAB has continued to provide connection service to these individuals, planned through March 2021, funded through the SSRF.

The following table outlines the actual and committed SSRF expenditures up to September 30, 2020:

Table 2:

Organization	March – September 2020 Actuals	October 2020 - March 2021 Committed/ Projected	Total
Community Support Applications (total from Table 1)	\$207,921		\$ 207,921
Isolation Hotel	459,917		459,917
Motel Stays	90,315		90,315
Transportation	1,205	-	1,205
Community Housing Cleaning (Non- Profits)	25,558	-	25,558
Phone Services	8,103	16,206	24,309
Rent Supports	-	122,400	122,400

Internal Resources:			
Communications & Technology	9,248	-	9,248
Personal Protective Equipment	34,340	10,000	44,340
Security	45,400		45,400
Additional Cleaning	34,200	25,800	60,000
Other			-
Administration	91,621	25,209	116,830
Total:	1,007,828	199,615	\$1,207,443

The projected total of the SSRF expenditures exceeds the current allocation provided by the province by \$39,143, however there are opportunities to revisit the forecasted amount amounts and realign based on community need. The Administration expense may be revisited and reduced from the current 10% allocation should pressures in other areas be realized. The provincial allocation would not be exceeded without direction from the Board.

On August 12, 2020, the province announced that a second phase of SSRF funding was being made available. TBDSSAB received notification that it is eligible to receive an initial planning allocation of \$1,840,459, though actual funding is based on a business case submission. Administration prepared and submitted a business case for the full eligible amount, further indicating opportunities for additional projects and services should further funding be made available.

MCCSS initiated additional funding through OW Discretionary Benefits to assist with extraordinary needs due to COVID-19. OW recipients could apply for additional funds for items such as personal protective equipment (masks, gloves etc.) as well as cleaning supplies. The province announced that effective July 31, 2020, this Emergency Discretionary Benefit would be discontinued.

The following table outlines the Emergency OW Discretionary funding issued:

Table 3:

Month	Amount
March	\$ 400
April	109,650
May	274,000
June	277,100
July	253,300
Total:	\$ 914,450

Training for OW participants has resumed and has been offered through a virtual platform. TBDSSAB staff are trained on how to create and deliver online training for clients. From June through September, 26 participants participated in online programming. Workshop Coaches have run 3 Soft Skills online sessions, 1 WHMIS course online, 1 Essential Skills course and have assisted 2 clients with Smart Serve online.

In July, the Premier announced that all child care and EarlyON centres would be allowed to resume operations with normal capacity, subject to revised provincial guidance requirements. From this date through September 30, 44 child care centres were operational. Currently, EarlyON centres are offering virtual programming. Updated guidance documents regarding the re-opening of child care centres and EarlyON Child and Family Centres were received from the province. Administration is working with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit to ensure that all required policies and procedures are developed and shared with programs.

On August 14, 2020, TBDSSAB received information from the Ministry of Education announcing the Federal Safe Restart Funding (SRF) initiative. Funding will be provided through CMSMs and DSSABs to operators which can be used for additional personal protective equipment (PPE), enhanced cleaning, additional staff to meet health and safety requirements, support for short term vacancies as operators transition to return to full capacity, and minor capital required in accordance with the Ministry's reopening operational guidance or local public health requirements. TBDSSAB has been provided an allocation of \$1,800,039.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Social Services Relief Fund is a 100% provincially funded program. TBDSSAB was eligible to receive up to \$1,168,300 and received confirmation from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on August 12, 2020 that it would receive the full allocation. TBDSSAB is projecting to spend the entire allocation by March 31, 2021.

The OW Emergency Discretionary Benefit is also 100% provincially funded.



The Federal Safe Restart Funding initiative is a 100% federal/provincially funded program. TBDSSAB was notified that it is eligible to receive \$1,800,039 to assist child care and EarlyON operators return to full operation. All funds are to be fully expended by March 31, 2021.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that this report provides the Board with information relative to the Social Services Relief Fund, the Emergency Discretionary Benefits program and the re-opening of child care centres and EarlyON programs in the District of Thunder Bay during the COVID-19 pandemic.

REFERENCE MATERIALS ATTACHED

None.

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