



	REPORT No.: 2021-09
MEETING DATE: MARCH 18, 2021	DATE PREPARED: FEBRUARY 26, 2021
SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES RELIEF FUND UPDATE – CHILD CARE, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND SHELTER	

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 Child Care operations and EarlyON programs, Social Assistance programs and Emergency Discretionary Benefits, and the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND

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

With the closure of schools and the need to support families, an Emergency Child Care program became operational the week of April 27, 2020. After the province began to re-open, the Premier announced that child care centres would be able to re-open on June 12, 2020 and that Emergency Child Care would end on June 26, 2020. Since that time, child care centres throughout the District of Thunder Bay have remained open, following enhanced safety guidelines established by the Ministry of Education and the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.

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, 2020, 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 is provided to assist operators in addressing 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 and has delivered \$1,202,000 to operators to date.

The Emergency Discretionary Benefit offered through the Ontario Works (OW) program enabled the immediate provision of financial assistance to an applicant in a crisis or in an 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. After providing the Emergency Discretionary Benefit through 5 months, this initiative was discontinued at the end of July.

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 province initiated several phases of the SSRF, and TBDSSAB received funding allocations under all phases for both operational and capital expenditures.

Over the past several months, the Board has been provided with updates on the programs and supports offered under the SSRF funding, and details on the impacts on those served.

COMMENTS

Child Care and EarlyON

Child care centres have been operational through this school year, with limited enrollments as required by public health. Throughout this time, TBDSSAB has been working with each operator to address pressures related to the pandemic and to support the ongoing viability of each operation. There was one child care operator that chose not to re-open following the provincial closure and the families from this centre were contacted to find child care support in other centres.

The new Pedagogical work with the child care and early years systems continues to move forward. Child care programs are joining together with the TBDSSAB team to work along side of one another virtually. Pedagogical documentation and articles are being shared and teams are coming together to think deeply about children and their learning. Child care program supervisors have entered into a book study with the TBDSSAB team, Confederation College faculty and Ministry of Education to engage in Pedagogical conversations as a community of practice. In addition, 22 community members, along

with 80 other participants from across Ontario, continue to orient to this new approach by participating in a Piazza ORA (Ontario Reggio Association) with Pedagogista Tizianna Philiipini from Reggio Children.

On February 26, 2021, the Medical Officer of Health for the Thunder Bay District Health Unit sent a memo to school boards with schools located in the Thunder Bay area suspending the provision of all in person learning as well as before and afterschool programs until March 15, 2021. This also impacts non-school based child care programs that are for school age children. Child care from birth to preschool was not included in the suspension instructions and as such can remain operational. Schools and before and after child care programs outside the Thunder Bay area are not impacted by this closure.

EarlyON centres continue to engage with families and provide programming and activities through a remote delivery plan. Families are involved through a virtual platform and, in some cases, the EarlyON centres have delivered materials and resources directly to families for their use.

Social Assistance and Emergency Discretionary Benefits

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) initiated additional funding through Ontario Works (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 for cleaning supplies. The province announced that effective July 31, 2020 the Emergency Discretionary Benefit would be discontinued.

The following table outlines the Emergency OW Discretionary funding issued while the program was available:

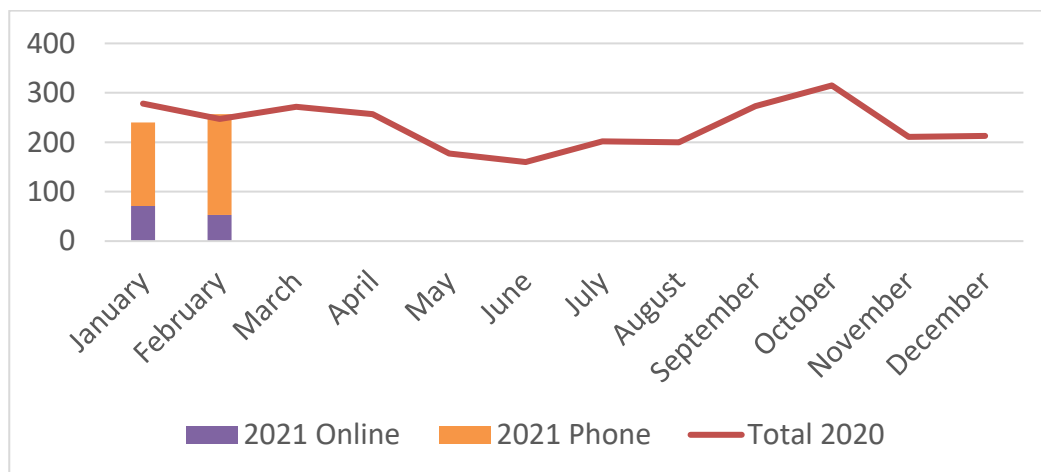
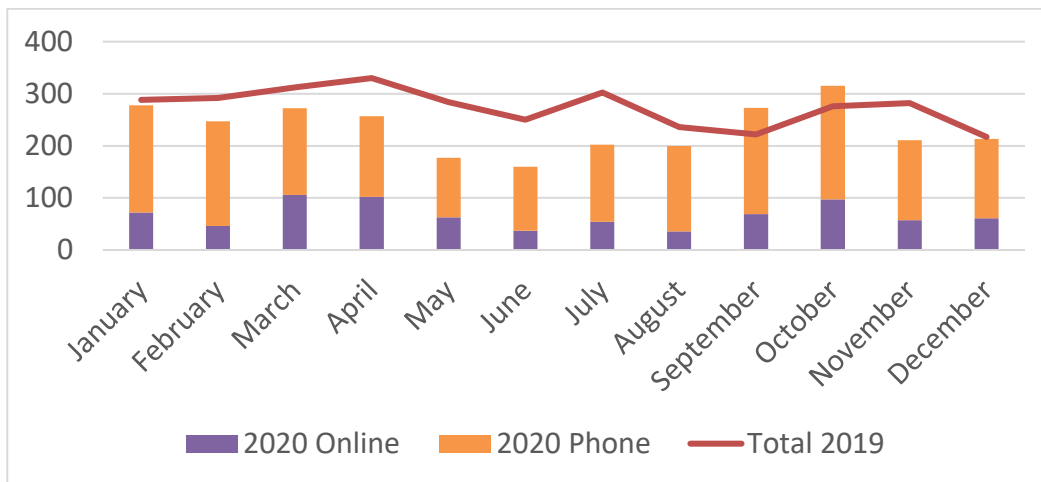
Month	Amount
March	\$ 400
April	109,650
May	274,000
June	277,100
July	253,300
Total:	\$ 914,450

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. Training has continued to be offered, both virtually and in-person when allowed. TBDSSAB continues to engage with Confederation College for the delivery of the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) program to facilitate academic upgrading for clients. In support of virtual learning, TBDSSAB has established a laptop loaner program which provides computers to clients to access virtual training.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Social Assistance team has primarily served clients through telephone contact. Caseworkers who are assessing applications for OW eligibility also complete a risk assessment in order to grant assistance prior to the applicant submitting verification documents. This expedites the application and review process while reducing the need for individuals to attend at the office thereby reducing overall numbers in the building.

In addition, Caseworkers have been allocating time during the day to reach out to clients and do wellness checks. Since March 2020, Caseworkers have made 6,592 wellness calls to clients to support their needs during the pandemic.

Over the past year, the total number of OW applications has declined, likely because of federal government supports offered during the pandemic. The following charts show the OW applications received each month in 2020 and in January and February of 2021:



Housing Programs

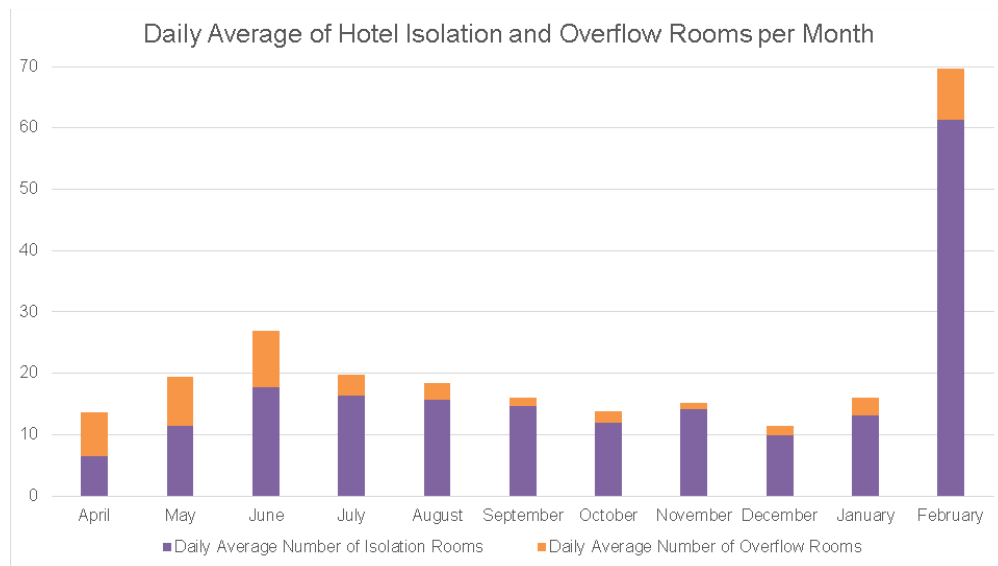
Throughout the pandemic, supporting tenants has been a priority. The Housing Programs team reached out to TBDSSAB tenants through regular wellness calls (over 750 calls made in 2020), provided food security measures through delivery of meals and groceries, arranged supply delivery as needed and delivered personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves and cleaning supplies. Staffed tables have been established at properties to promote COVID-19 education and the importance of staying safe and following public health advice. Additional security has been provided in high traffic buildings to support physical distancing and the wearing of PPE. Further supports to tenants, clients and the community has been provided through rent supports and arrears programs, to support and maintain housing for those adversely affected by COVID-19.

In instances where TBDSSAB has been made aware that a tenant is COVID-19 positive, Tenant Support Workers and Property Management Officers have engaged with the household to offer assistance and to support positive mental and physical health.

To address the needs of the homeless and those precariously housed during the pandemic, Administration has been working with partners to facilitate an isolation shelter for those who require separation from the general population due to possible exposure to COVID-19 or while awaiting test results. Use of this isolation shelter has varied since April 2020, based on community and healthcare needs, but there have been individuals in the isolation shelter throughout the pandemic. Recently, usage of the isolation shelter has increased dramatically with the increase of COVID-19 cases in the community. TBDSSAB has been able to secure additional isolation shelter spaces to meet the growing demand.

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 expanded the overflow shelter program through arrangements with several hotels. There has always been the capacity in the emergency shelter system to expand using overflow, however with the increased need for isolation sheltering and with the public health requirements to reduce capacity at the emergency shelters and maintain a static bed list at times, and most recently, the extreme cold weather, the need for overflow sheltering has increased.

The following chart shows the isolation and overflow shelter usage from April 2020 through February 2021:



TBDSSAB continues to work with community organizations to address the needs of our vulnerable population.

The following outlines all the SSRF funding received, and the allocations projected through March 31, 2021:

	SSRF Phase I	SSRF Phase II	SSRF Holdback	Total
Capital	-	1,155,000	1,781,211	2,936,211
Community Support Applications	216,784	93,266	-	310,050
Isolation Hotel	419,995	213,736	-	633,731
Overflow Hotel	116,019	36,263	-	152,282
Supports to Housing Providers	26,873	-	-	26,873
Rent Supports	98,698	200,000	-	298,698
TBayTel Phone Services	13,919	17,216	-	31,135
Communications & Technology	11,867	-	-	11,867
Security	172,393	40,600	-	212,993
Additional Cleaning and PPE	78,080	29,164	-	107,244
Administration	33,672	55,214	55,089	143,975
Total	\$ 1,188,300	\$ 1,840,459	\$ 1,836,300	\$ 4,865,059

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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.

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



The SSRF is a 100% provincially funded program. TBDSSAB received \$1,168,300 under SSRF Phase I from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), \$1,840,459 under SSRF Phase II, and \$1,836,300 from the SSRF Holdback. The SSRF Phase I allocation is fully spent and Administration is projecting to spend the entire SSRF Phase II and SSRF Holdback allocations by March 31, 2021. In addition, Administration has identified an additional need of between \$125,000 and \$300,000 to the MMAH due to the substantial increase in isolation shelter usage beginning in February.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that this report provides the Board with information relative to the status of Child Care operations and EarlyON programs, Social Assistance programs and Emergency Discretionary Benefits, and the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic.

REFERENCE MATERIALS ATTACHED

None

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