



Committee of Whole

Meeting Date: May 11, 2021
Submitted by: Cindy Howard – General Manager, Finance and Community Services
SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATE

BACKGROUND:

Social Services includes Ontario Works, Child Care and Early Years and Homelessness Prevention. The City of London is the CMSM for Middlesex London, however through contracted service agreements the County of Middlesex is responsible for service delivery in the County for Ontario Works, Child Care and Early Years and Homelessness Prevention.

Ontario Works (OW) is a mandatory program that provides legislated income and employment supports to eligible participants. Individuals receiving financial assistance through Ontario Works participate in a wide range of employment assistance activities which focuses on helping people prepare for and find work in order to become financially independent.

The Ontario Works Department is committed to ensuring that households in need have access to the financial, community and employment supports they need.

Child Care and Early Years includes the planning and funding of licensed child care programs; administering financial assistance for eligible families through fee subsidy; allocating additional resources to families; programs that provide care to children with special needs and oversight of EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) aims to prevent and end homelessness by improving access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing and homelessness services for people experiencing homelessness and for people at-risk of homelessness.

ANALYSIS:

General:

Social Service staff continue to provide essential services and respond to urgent needs. COVID-19 has impacted many community members who have required additional supports. Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, Social Services has worked in partnership with community agencies to address the additional pressures that our clients and other low income and/or vulnerable households are experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

Ontario Works:

Ontario Works staff are committed to ensuring that households in need have access to the financial, community and employment supports. Additional supports have been offered throughout the COVID-19 emergency. New applications are still being accepted online or by calling 519-930-1013.

Participants that are currently in receipt of Ontario Works are able to provide information to caseworkers using the following delivery options:

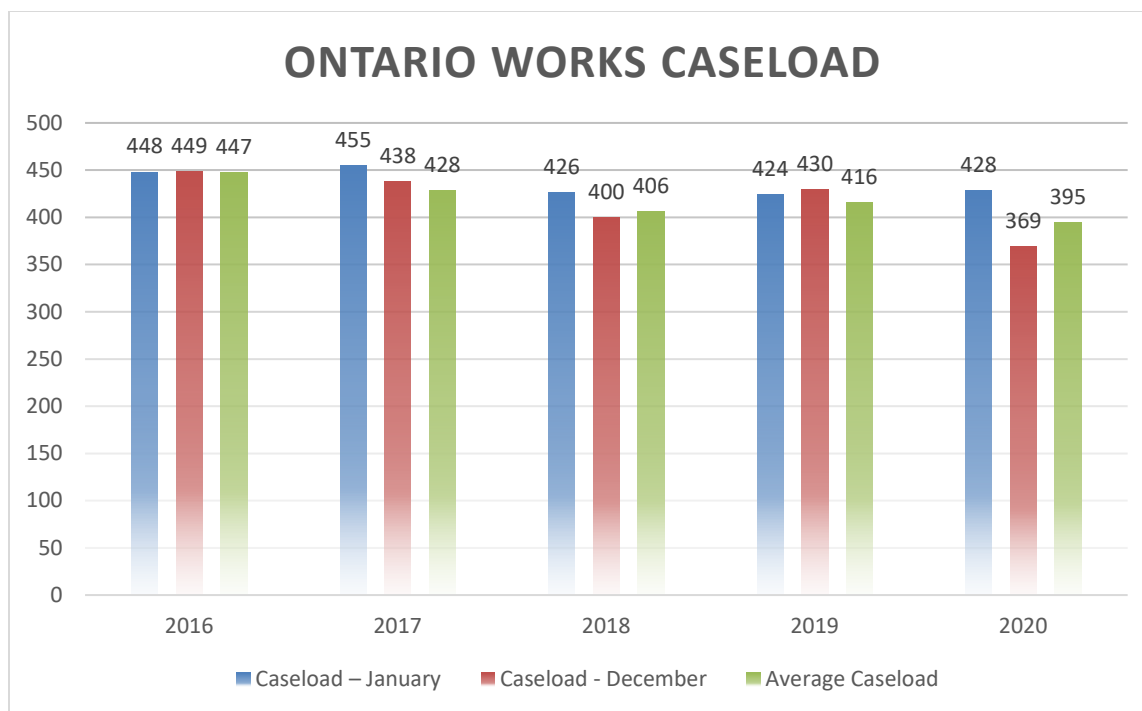
- Outdoor Social Services mailboxes (Glencoe, Parkhill and Strathroy);
- Canada Post Mail;
- Fax to 519-434-9050; and/or
- Email: socialservices@middlesex.ca

Caseload

The Ontario Works Caseload size fluctuated throughout the 2020 year. The caseload experienced small declines in the months January to April and larger declines in the months May through December.

The 2020 caseload decrease trend is consistent with what many of the municipalities in Ontario have been experiencing. Our caseload decrease was impacted by clients exiting to employment, individuals moving on to post secondary education, applications being approved for ODSP and federal financial supports (EIB, CERB and CRB). The federal supports presenting as the most significant factor as a result of COVID-19. For instance, from January to December 2020, 35% of individuals/families leaving the Ontario Works case load were due to their incomes being over the eligible allowable income amount, either from employment or other income support programs.

In 2020, 18% of our clients who applied for ODSP were granted.



When the provincial and federal benefits end, we are projecting our caseload numbers will increase significantly. The Ministry has provided information forecasting a possible 20% increase in the OW caseload for 2021/2022 however that will depend on a number of factors including what decisions the Federal government makes on COVID-19 related financial support measures.

Federal government benefits, included:

- Canada Emergency Recovery Benefit (CERB)
- Employment Insurance (EI)
- Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB)
- Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB)

COVID-19 Emergency Benefit for OW & ODSP clients

A limited provincially funded, Emergency Benefit temporary benefit was created in March 2020 and available until July 2020 to assist with immediate and exceptional costs related to COVID-19 for Ontario Works and ODSP clients.

- Singles on social assistance are eligible for a flat rate of \$100 per month.
- Families on social assistance are eligible for a flat rate of \$200 per month.

To support immediate need and exceptional costs related to COVID lockdown in December, Emergency Benefits were issued to Middlesex County's Ontario Works singles and families.

Other supports and communications

A monthly Social Services resource newsletter distributed to OW clients has informed them on available community supports and Government agency information related to Covid-19 Emergency Benefits.

Also available is the Community Supports page on the County of Middlesex Website under COVID-19: Information and Updates and OW Programs.

Employment

The level of employment assistance for Ontario Works participants is customized to the individual's personal circumstances and readiness for employment. Employment activities may range from basic needs such as supports for stable housing to participation in an addiction program to job placement and retention services.

This last year has proven to be a challenging for many to participate in employment activities. However, the exits from Ontario Works to employment from 2019 to 2020 actually increased. The period of March to September there were only three less exits to employment from 2019 to 2020. Of all case closures 14% were due to exits to employment.

We continue to work closely with our community employment agencies to assist our clients to look for and maintain employment. Currently the province has waived all participation requirements and reviews; however, our two employment caseworkers have continued to connect to clients to complete a wellness check-in to ensure clients know what supports are available.

The Skills Advanced Ontario – Skill2Succeed project has been rolling out over the past six months in London. We will be reviewing the findings and outcomes related to the project from previous cohorts in order to understand experiences, learnings, and successes of this project and how it will support the County's implementation. This project is a sector-focused workforce development pilot that will support partnerships that bring together sector-based employers, employment service providers, workforce and economic development services, Ontario Works, and training providers to develop a pool of job-ready, skilled workers that meet local workforce development needs.

Priorities in 2021 include the focus on youth, long term and low literacy skilled clients. We have started conversation with our community partners, including Literacy Link South Central to complete an Educational Interview that will help clients decide on the best path to obtain their GED, OSSD, Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) certificate or post secondary education.

Children's Services

The Early Years and Child Care sector was impacted greatly due to Covid-19 and the shut downs. In March 2020 all licensed child care centres were closed due to the imposed restrictions. In June 2020 the centres slowly started reopening their doors with a multitude of new guidelines, policies and procedures which were mandated to be followed.

The Safe Restart Funding supports committed by the Ontario and Federal governments are to ensure a safe, sufficient and adequate supply of child care was available to support the gradual return to work of parents as the economy reopen. The County was allocated \$554,399.85, this funding covered costs associated with such things as enhanced cleaning, PPE, support for short term vacancies and administrative costs. This funding was provided to eligible licensed child care operators.

The County of Middlesex was able to fund eligible licenced Child Care Centres with a one-time "2021 Provincial Re-Investment Funding". This limited time funding was provided to support increased costs of operating child care during the COVID-19 outbreak from January 1 through March 31, 2021. The total amount issued to eligible licenced Child Care centres in the county was \$236,494.88.

During the Winter lock down we had six of our licensed child care centres provide Emergency Child Care to school aged children while the school were closed. The last week of service (Jan 25th to 29th), there was an average of 77 school aged children supported daily.

April 12th, 2021 the decision was made to transition schools to online learning for the foreseeable future. The current Spring lock down, the same six child care centres (listed below) have opened their services to School Aged children.

For information and to register children, families can contact the licensed child care centre directly. The contact information for each centre is listed on the [Middlesex Website](#) or www.middlesex.ca/departments/social-services/emergency-child-care

Emergency Child Care Centres in Middlesex County

<u>Belvoir Co-operative Nursery School</u>	634 Longfield St. Mount Brydges, ON N0L 1W0 P: 519-652-3419 E: <u>belvoircoop@gmail.com</u>
<u>Kids Ko. Childcare Centre</u>	22568 Komoka Rd. Komoka, ON N0L 1W0 P: 519-472-0002 E: <u>cristin@kidsko.ca</u>
<u>Mt. Brydges Sonshine Daycare</u>	22243 Allen Rd. Mt. Brydges, ON N0L 1W0 P: 519-264-1717 E: <u>sonshinedaycare@live.ca</u>
<u>Simply Kids – Strathroy</u>	376 Carrie St. Strathroy, ON N7G 3E3 P: 519-246-1304 E: <u>strathroy@simplykidschildcare.com</u>
<u>YMCA - Mary Wright</u>	213 Carroll St. W. Strathroy, ON N7G 1A8 P: 226-973-9849 E: <u>fiona.hunter@swo.ymca.ca</u>
<u>YMCA - Wilberforce</u>	340 Beech St. Lucan, ON N0M 2J0 P: 519-857-6580 E: <u>michelle.fenn@swo.ymca.ca</u>

Throughout 2020 and continuing in 2021 Child Care staff and management continue to meet with the child care centres on a regular basis to ensure our centres feel supported and have information in a timely manner. In early February 2021, the County invited the Early Years and Child Care Division – Ministry of Education to speak with the licensed child care centres to ensure consistency of the implementation of the changing Covid-19 guidelines.

Prior to the closure in March 2020 all of our licensed child care centres were full. We had a waitlist of 22 children. The waitlist was reviewed monthly and families were offered spots once the centres started reopening in June 2020. Currently we have 41 children on the waitlist. The larger number is due to a few contributing factors; parents reluctance to send their children to care due to COVID and lack of space at a specific centre. When we move past COVID, we anticipate the wait list to grow. The majority of the local municipalities are growing and this is expected to put additional pressures on licensed child care spots.

In 2020 there has been some changes in licensed child care spaces. In March 2020, Buzzy Bees in Ilderton closed. New licensed child care centres opened since November 2019; Angels Daycares opened in Arva and Kilworth and Kids Ko Childcare Centre opened in Komoka. In March 2021, Angels Daycares in Thorndale opened its doors to the public.

In collaboration with the Licensed Child Care Network (LCCN), the County met on April 29th, 2021 with Province of Ontario Ministers Stephen Lecce, Jeff Yuruk and Monte McNaughton to discuss current and ongoing needs of the community and the upcoming changes with the National Child Care Plan. The parent and the LCCN representatives spoke articulately and passionately for all of London and Middlesex.

Housing Supports

There was a significant increase in our homelessness population in 2020, especially in November, December and January (2021). Over twenty individuals and families accessed Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) phase 1 and 2 for housing supports (temporary motel stays, food vouchers, clothing, phones and essential items). A local motel has been working in partnership with Social Services and CMHA-Middlesex to provide temporary shelter, supports and guidance. Without this support many of our homeless population who accessed the motel would have been without shelter throughout the winter months and during the many provincial Covid-19 lockdowns.

On November 9, 2020 a fire at the Albert Street apartments displaced many renters. Social services worked with Red Cross and London-Middlesex Victim Services to ensure everyone was sheltered and supported in hotels in London and Strathroy.

Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB)

COHB began On April 7th, 2020 and will end on March 31, 2029. COHB is jointly funded by the federal and provincial governments

COHB is a portable housing benefit program where funding is paid directly to low-income households that are on, or eligible to be on, a social housing waiting list, and to households in financial need living in community housing.

Service Managers (London) identified and selected eligible households and assisted with the application submission to the Ministry of Finance (MOF). MOF then approved the eligibility and issued monthly payments directly to the households.

In 2020 six Social Services referrals which were accepted – four from Ontario Works and two from the Community Navigator. In 2021 due to an overwhelming response, limited funding available and a two day turnaround to submit applications only two households were referred by the Community Navigator and approved by the Service Manager (London) for Middlesex Social Services.

This type of funding is very important to our community members as there is a lack of social housing in the county, which prompts residents to rely on market rent availability. COHB allows low-income households to close the gap between their income and housing expenses. The County should be highlighting the importance of this program with MPPs and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Due to the lack of social housing in the County, the social housing wait list will continue to increase until new or existing rentals become available.

The chart below is a breakdown of housing waitlists, eligible applications, priority applicants, and other stats related to social housing in the County.

Social Housing Dashboard 2020 - Year in Review - Middlesex County

Total Housed	Average Housed per Month	Waitlist as of December 31	Increase from 2019
29	2	242	37
% change from 2019		% of Change from 2019	
0.00		1.1	

Urgent & Special Priority Applicants Housed	
SPP	8
Homeless	8
Social	1
Medical	1
Non Urgent	12

Total Eligible Applications	Average per Month
242	20
% change from 2019	
1.10	
Total Unprocessed Applications	1,111

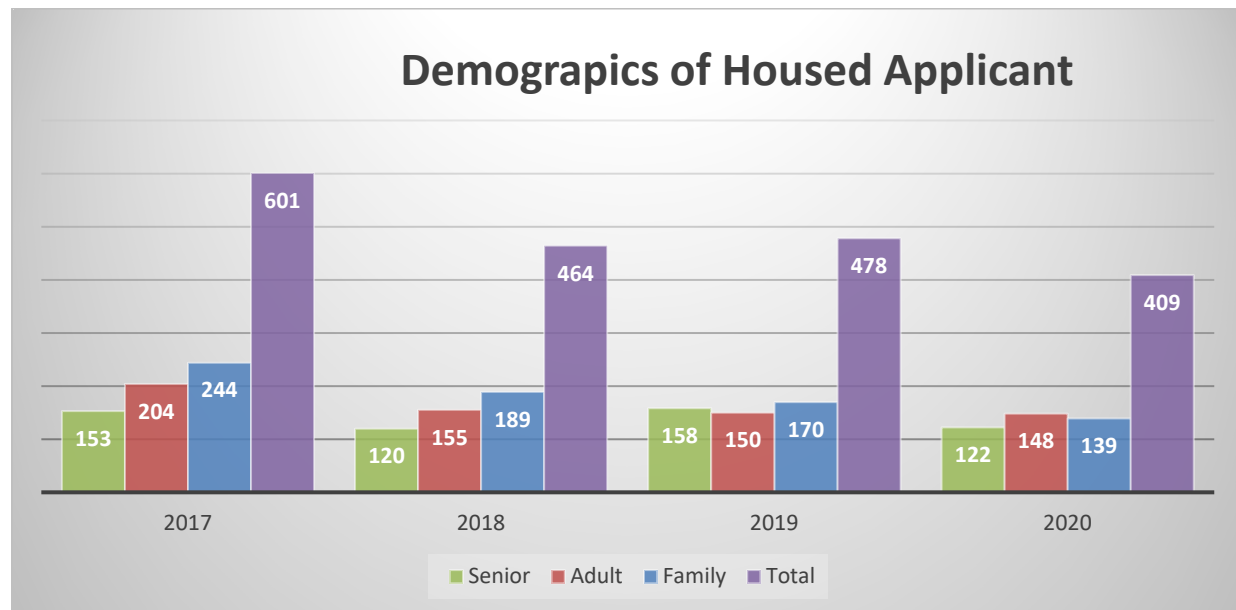
Household Type Housed	
Senior	11
Adult	9
Family	9
Total Housed	29

Total Eligible Applications - Household Status	
SPP	15
Urgent	82
Non Urgent	145

Total Eligible Application - Household Type	
Adult	53
Family	41
Senior	51

Total demographic of applicants housed: 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 – London and Middlesex

The graph below reflects the demographic of applicants over the past 4 years who have been housed in the London and Middlesex area. The total number of housed has decreased over the years due to the limited availability of social housing both in London and Middlesex.



Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) & Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)

In March 2020, in response to COVID-19, Ontario announced an initial investment of \$148 million to support municipalities, food banks, homeless shelters and individuals.

- The CMSM allocation was \$3,475,300.
- The County received \$36,825.86 from the Provincial Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF Phase I). Consistent with CHPI funding the County received approx. 1% of the CMSM allocation.
- These funds were allocated to protect the health and safety of the province's most vulnerable people during Covid-19. Funds were directed at supporting people in community housing, supportive housing, food programs, people with low incomes and those experiencing homelessness.

- SSRF Phase 1 funding will flow through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI).

The following chart maps out where the funds were utilized for SSRF Phase One.

Phase One		
Community Program	\$7,966.00	22%
Food Bank	\$10,000.00	27%
Hotel Stay	\$16,927.92	46%
Other	\$831.94	2%
Rent Arrears	\$1,100.00	3%
Grand Total	\$36,825.86	100%

SSRF Phase 2

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced on August 2020, that a Social Services Relief Funding Phase 2 was available for individuals in financial crisis with no access to other supports. The CMSM received \$1.3 million for SSRF Phase 2.

The funding intent was to support a diverse range of vulnerable people, create longer-term housing solutions for people in need, and ensure that the housing and homelessness sector has the tools and supports they need to safely and successfully transition to life stabilization recovery.

Middlesex Social Services submitted a business plan and was successful in securing \$344,584 of SSRF Phase 2 funding for a “Whatever It Takes Fund” and Capital and Operational Projects. Social Services worked with community partners to understand the impacts and financial challenges that community residents and agencies were experiencing during Covid-19.

The SSRF supports were offered to community members who were displaced due to a crisis, at risk of becoming homeless, or currently experiencing homelessness are but not limited to: Motel stays, eviction/cut off prevention, last months rent, cell phones, transportation around town, grocery card, personal hygiene products, food banks, meal programs, breakfast programs, Goodwill bucks.

An application form was created for community providers to submit a request for the SSRF Phase 2 Funds.

This chart reflects the SSRF financial supports offered to community members and programs (the CHPI program was able to cover any overages).

Phase Two		
Food	\$2,434.43	1%
Hotel Stay	\$48,759.34	14%
LMR	\$1,307.69	0%
Rent Arrears	\$9,761.50	3%
Utility Arrears	\$5,482.49	2%
PPE	\$3,410.00	1%
Community Program	\$100,280.34	29%
Food Bank	\$22,500.00	6%
Operational Project	\$30,000.00	9%
Admin and other costs	\$57,370.95	17%
Capital Project Funds	\$65,000.00	19%
Grand Total	\$346,306.74	100%

SSRF Phase 3

The SSRF Phase 3 is to continue to help a diverse range of vulnerable people to meet their short-term critical needs, including people living in community housing, supportive housing, people with low incomes, social assistance recipients, or others who require social services support as well as those that are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless.

The CMSM received an additional \$5,567,813 in provincial funding for SSRF Phase 3.

March 2021, the Social Services department submitted a business plan to the Service Manager (London) totalling \$431,818.22. The business plan was reviewed and approved by both the City of London and the Ministry Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) on May 4th, 2021.

The Phase 3 funding guidelines set by MMAH did not allow for any capital projects requests.

The following chart details the outline of what the Social Services office determined were the needs of the communities. A review of all monies spent in Phase 1 and 2 and an environmental scan of the community helped with this determination.

Phase Three		
Hotels	\$ 128,125.80	30%
Whatever it takes fund	\$ 33,615.00	8%
Eviction/cut off prevention/LMR/Rental Deposits	\$ 25,000.00	6%
MCHB (Middlesex County Housing Benefit)	\$ 67,500.00	16%
Transportation	\$ 120,000.00	28%
Housing Support Worker - CMHA and Rooms	\$ 45,000.00	10%
Admin and other Costs	\$ 12,577.22	3%
Total Amount of Original Request	\$ 431,818.02	100%

Community Homeless Prevention Initiative (CHPI)

Josh Smith has been Middlesex County Library Board's Community Navigator since September 2020. Josh has connected with community partners throughout Middlesex County to discuss what the gaps are related to housing needs, homeless prevention and community referrals/supports. From these conversations Josh has determined what the needs of Middlesex County residents are and how to support the many individual he serves. Through a pilot project with the local motel Josh works with homeless individuals in applying for housing and other supports.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted food insecurity within our communities. An increase in the need for breakfast and lunch programs, food banks, meal take away packages, grocery cards, etc. has been significant.

When the above costs to supply food to communities increased due to stay at home orders, funding was available through our Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) to meet the need.

Local churches and thrift stores have also supported community members with clothing and personal essentials during Covid. Funding to continue these supports has been offered and available through SSRF and CHPI funding.

Listening to community members/partners and residents Social Services we continue to meet the needs of our most vulnerable population within our communities.

Community Services Partnerships

In December 2020, the Middlesex Social Services and Community Partners Network (MCSSPN) was initiated and created by Social Services. This network has brought together different community agencies in a way that had not been done before. With the support of Social Service management, this network has been meeting on a monthly basis in order to share pertinent information related to community needs and to create a space where the community partners can share issues and/or gaps that have or may impact our communities.

Social Services continues to be involved with these important community groups:

- Community Safety and Well Being;
- Middlesex Children's Service Network;
- Middlesex Workforce Development Partnership;
- Skills Advanced Ontario – Skill2Succeed;
- Middlesex Situation Table;
- London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership;
- Strathroy Human Resources Group;
- Middlesex Rural Alliance DVAW; and
- Social Housing Operational Advisory Committee.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The programs are within budget and any new programs are 100% provincially funded.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

Strategic Focus	Goals	Objectives
Cultivating Community Vitality	Advance a diverse, healthy, and engaged community across Middlesex County	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote and support community wellness• Innovate social and community services• Attract, retain, and engage youth in our community• Champion and encourage active transportation and public transit opportunities
Promoting Service Excellence	Innovate and transform municipal service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anticipate and align municipal service delivery to emerging needs and expectations• Engage, educate and inform residents, businesses, and visitors of county services and community activities• Strengthen our advocacy and lobbying efforts with other government bodies• Collaborate with strategic partners to leverage available resources and opportunities• Build organizational capacity and capabilities