

receipt of Social Assistance. The full plan has not been shared at this time, and more information will be forthcoming.

Centralized Intake (Ontario Works)

The Ministry has launched a prototype for Centralized Intake in select Municipalities starting in November 2020. Centralized Intake involves the processing of applications for Ontario Works financial assistance from initial intake through to grant using a digital process and through a centralized Ministry based team. Following grant, the file would be transferred to the local office to complete other case management activities, including developing an Action Plan and referrals to employment agencies or other community services. Intakes will continue to be completed in local offices for individuals who do not have access to a phone or internet, and for those who are unable to be digitally verified, including applicants under the age of 18 and those requiring a translator.

Northumberland County will be joining the second phase of the Centralized Intake Prototype starting in February 2021. The impacts to the workload are not known at this point, however the intention would be that there is a reduction in administrative activities to allow for more time to be spent on higher-value direct client service. There will be no impact to the financial allocations from the Ministry for the Ontario Works Administration budget in 2021.

Electronic Document Management & MyBenefits (Client Portal)

Starting on November 23, 2020, all Ontario Works sites have been enabled to utilize the Electronic Document Management system for clients who attach documents through their MyBenefits portal or for documents that are “digitally born”. Ontario Works clients who are registered with MyBenefits are now able to attach documents relating to their income or their accommodation costs through their access to this online service. Documents are then maintained electronically through their digital file. This reduces the need to print off information and maintain documents in a physical file.

In addition to attaching information, the Ministry is currently piloting a “two-way messaging system” for clients and caseworkers. Clients will be able to send messages through their MyBenefits portal, and caseworkers will be able to respond through the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). Both staff and clients will also be able to attach documents through this system. All messages will be maintained as a record in SAMS. This will reduce the reliance on email as a form of communication, reduce the printing associated with correspondence (for records management purposes) and enhance the client experience through offering alternate methods of contact.

2021 Ontario Works Service Plan & Outcomes

As an Employment Services Transformation Prototype Site, we are currently working with the Ministry on the Service Plan and Outcomes expectations. Since we will be in a transition year, it is expected that our Outcome Measures will be a temporary element, while baseline data is being gathered. Initial indications of outcomes include measures relating to:

- Number of returning clients to Ontario Works within 1 year of exit;
- Percentage of the OW Caseload with the Common Assessment completed;
- Percentage of the OW Caseload with an Action Plan;
- Percentage of the Caseload with at least one Action Plan goal completed;

- Percentage of Completed Referrals accepted by the Service System Manager;
- Average Time to Complete a Referral to the Service System Manager; and
- Number of cases exiting to employment.

Consultations

Not applicable

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

We are governed by the *Ontario Works Act, 1997* and regulation for program delivery. We are guided by the Social Assistance Recovery & Renewal Plan and the Service System Manager for Employment Services Transformation Prototype.

Discussion/Options

Not applicable

Financial Impact

Not applicable

Member Municipality Impacts

Not applicable

Conclusion/Outcomes

This report has been submitted for informational purposes on program updates relating to the Ontario Works Program.

Attachments

Not applicable

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Report 2021-21

Report Title: Cannabis Use - Pilot Project with Police Services Review

Committee Name: Social Services Committee

Committee Date: January 13, 2021

Prepared by: Sarah Tanner, Community Services Manager

Reviewed by: Lisa Horne, Director of Community and Social Services

Strategic Plan Priorities: Thriving and Inclusive Communities

Recommendation

“Whereas the County recognizes the need to develop a range of responses to Cannabis use across Northumberland;

And whereas the County continue to work alongside Police service partners to create opportunities to inform, educate and promote safety and well being;

And whereas the County are the lead organization coordinating and developing the Northumberland Community Safety and well-being plan;

Now therefore be it resolved that Council directs staff to continue to investigate opportunities and outcomes associated with continued collaboration and outreach capacity to work with Police services;

Further be it resolved that this report be used to inform action planning within the Community safety and well-being plan.”

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform council of the pilot project, known as “Summer of Wellness” which involved Community Outreach Worker from Community and Social Service Department working directly with Cobourg Police Service and Port Hope Police Service

The Summer of Wellness Pilot project was developed to have a community outreach caseworker from NCCSS paired with a police officer to offer information, supports and meet immediate needs of individuals self-identifying as using cannabis, businesses identifying concerns around cannabis use, and provide general access to services throughout the community.

Background

Through the Ontario Cannabis Legalization Implementation Fund (OCLIF), the Province provided municipalities with \$36.74 million in direct funding to help with the implementation costs of recreational cannabis legalization. These funds were designated to address the implementation costs directly linked to the legalization to recreational cannabis consumption. Using the Ontario Legalization Implementation Fund, Northumberland County Community and Social Services developed the Summer of Wellness Pilot project which was designed to support community members and build trust and relationships while providing education on cannabis consumption including safe use and wellbeing, and building wellness supports. The Community Outreach worker worked more than 125 hours directly with police officers on the street over the three month period of this pilot. The time was split between Port Hope and Cobourg Police Services.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, supports and services needed to be tailored to meet the needs of the community and support current health related guidelines and priorities. It has been noted by Statistics Canada, “Canadians who report lower self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic are more likely to report increased use of cannabis, alcohol and tobacco.” (Statscan, 2020) People who have experienced a decline in their well-being due to COVID-19 are reportedly using marijuana to cope with the impacts the pandemic has had on their overall mental wellness. (Statscan, 2020)

Based on both local and provincial news reports depicting increases in illegal cannabis seizures and charges, it is observed there is an increase in larger-scale illegal cannabis moving throughout Northumberland County. While the Summer of Wellness Project was underway there were several news articles produced indicating arrests and seizures of illicit substances including cannabis. See appendix A noting the news articles circulated throughout the community depicting increases in cannabis consumption, illegal trafficking of Cannabis and some of the local stats on Cannabis within Northumberland.

During 2019, the Ontario Provincial Police cited 25 warrants executed due to illegal cannabis enforcement within the Central region. Of these warrants; 195 arrests were made, and OPP seized; 36 firearms, cash valued at \$76,337, \$514,800 worth of proceeds of crime, Cannabis

valued at \$143 Million and 122,000 cannabis plants. These warrants were executed as a means of dismantling the illegal grow operations known within each region that exploit or abuse the legal cannabis market.

Cannabis use continues to increase within Canada. The most recent Cannabis Stats Hub reflect 18.4% of males and 15.1% of females in Canada used cannabis over a three-month period. The age range predominantly using cannabis is 25-34 at 26.9% followed by ages 15-24 at 24.0%. In total, it noted a marked difference of 14.9% of people identifying as using cannabis prior to legalization vs. 16.8% of people identifying as using cannabis after legalization. (Statscan, 2020)

Through conversations with local law enforcement and community partnerships, the need for outreach to support people involved in mischief calls where cannabis use is present was identified. Street Outreach in which resources, information, short term case management and wellness supports could be offered was a key priority for this pilot.

Further, given the changes within our local cannabis landscape including legalization and new cannabis shops applying to open within Cobourg, dissemination of information around safe and legal access to cannabis became a key priority.

Consultations

Initial internal consultations have occurred with key County departments including Finance, Community and Social Services, and the Chief Administrative Officer. These initial consultations helped us to frame the pilot project activities.

Initial consultations took place with the EMS chief and senior staff. However, due the COVID 19 pandemic, we were unable to develop the pilot project with the EMS service

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

All due diligence was considered. Previous agreements with Police Services and NHH Mental Health Services, and Police Services with Forestry operators were considered to develop terms, costs and risk identification and mitigation for the pilot project.

Discussion/Options

Targeted outcomes

The outcomes targeted through the Summer of Wellness pilot project support the purpose and requirements of the Federal Cannabis Act (2018) to promote alignment and oversight of resources. The Summer of Wellness pilot project also aligned with work being done on a provincial and federal level while meeting individuals in the community using a street level outreach approach alongside local law enforcement.

The Ontario Cannabis Act outlines the purpose of the Act as;

“The purpose of this Act is to protect public health and public safety and, in particular, to;

- protect the health of young persons by restricting their access to cannabis;
- protect young persons and others from inducements to use cannabis;
- provide for the licit production of cannabis to reduce illicit activities in relation to cannabis;
- deter illicit activities in relation to cannabis through appropriate sanctions and enforcement measures;
- reduce the burden on the criminal justice system in relation to cannabis;
- provide access to a quality-controlled supply of cannabis; and
- enhance public awareness of the health risks associated with cannabis use.” (Cannabis Act, 2018)

Within the Summer of Wellness pilot project, these cannabis act requirements have been prioritized in the following ways;

- speaking with local youth through connecting with school officials and having a presence in high traffic areas within the community,
- engaging in conversations with individuals identifying as using cannabis around safe access etc.,
- engaging in conversation with community members around the legalities of cannabis use within the community,
- developing tools and strategies to enable people to access accurate and timely information.

This pilot project increased opportunities to make a positive impact on education concerning cannabis use and subsequently connect people to local resources including health services, legal supports, financial supports, etc.

The Summer of Wellness pilot project strived to identify and collect data relating to Cannabis use within Northumberland. Through various community partnership tables including THRIVE, Northumberland Substance Use group, and the situation table, the pilot project was able to collect data which reflects much of the anecdotal evidence and data collected through the pilot project.

Unintended outcomes

Within the Summer of Wellness Pilot project, there were positive unintended outcomes that emerged from having a community outreach caseworker working alongside law enforcement daily. Throughout the course of the Summer of Wellness pilot project, police and community outreach were able to identify areas in which information sharing and relationship building could occur. The outreach case worker shared resources and knowledge with individual police staff concerning community agencies and services that were unknown by staff previously. The outreach worker was

able to share referral, eligibility and service details with Police staff who reported that this will be useful in other work that they do.

The pilot project has noted data around improved access to services for community members throughout the County. Police were able to identify individuals they had spoken with regarding concerning behaviors in the community including cannabis use. The community outreach caseworker and the police were then able to speak with the individual or group to discuss safety, community resources and to make calls/ attend services with the individual or group to ensure they are linked with appropriate supports.

Another impact the pilot project encountered was due to COVID-19, a number of services have not had their offices open and/or are using remote access to service- this has left a number of people without any contact with the services they rely on for life stabilization and crisis support. Having a community outreach caseworker and police on the streets, readily available to meet the immediate needs of community members broke down a number of barriers for people who may not have access to a phone, a private space to call, a virtual platform, etc.

Having a Community Outreach Worker and uniformed officer in the community speaking with businesses and building community relationships has had an impact in informing some of the Community Safety and Well- Being (CSWB) planning work occurring within the County. Some local businesses provided feedback around some of the strengths and weaknesses they are experiencing since cannabis legalization- this has aligned with several of the goals identified through CSWB planning.

Interprofessional collaboration between law enforcement and Northumberland County Community and Social Services has been observed and cultivated throughout the pilot project. The immersion of the community outreach caseworker into day-to-day police service has impacted service delivery in a positive way. The Community Outreach Worker has been able to provide a great deal of information on resources within the community, and different programming offered by Northumberland County Community and Social Services. Subsequently front-line officers have provided insight into the work being done by officers in the community to support high acuity and vulnerable individuals. The collaboration of each discipline has allowed a holistic, client-centered approach to working alongside and supporting vulnerable members of Northumberland County.

Many people who engaged with the Summer of Wellness pilot project were accessing several local services and had several interactions with law enforcement. The coordination between Community Outreach Worker and Police allowed for swift wrap around supports to connect these individuals and families to the appropriate supports in the community. At times, this included holding case conferences to coordinate support and ensure the individuals' needs and wants are being met. This became a seamless approach to rapidly connecting individuals and families to the appropriate supports in the community and enhanced referrals and knowledge sharing between law enforcement and Northumberland County Community and Social Services.

Observations

Over the course of the three month pilot cannabis project, the outreach worker and law enforcement were able to connect with approximately 321 individuals to provide wellness supports including short term case management, providing community information, direct connections to supportive agencies and general information. Initially, the pilot project focused on being present in high traffic areas in which nuisance behavior had been reported to police. As the pilot project became more known within the local police departments, direct referrals for support started to happen. This included follow ups to police calls regarding cannabis use for people who were looking to connect with community resources.

Financial Impact

Currently, there is no financial impact, funding for this pilot project was a provincial fund.

Member Municipality Impacts

This pilot was operated across Cobourg and Port Hope as an initial area to investigate and determine efficacy of this partnership. All police service across Northumberland expressed interest in working with the pilot project. However, due to the timing of the pilot and the capacity available the OPP were unable to take part in the implementation of the pilot.

As previously mentioned, due to the spread and restrictions brought about by COVID-19 EMS were not able to participate in the initial stages of the pilot.

Recognizing cannabis is used across the county, there is a need to replicate and develop this work for all community however this initial funding has concluded, and we will determine future interprofessional collaboration opportunities.

Conclusion/Outcomes

Port Hope

In Port Hope, the Community Outreach Worker worked primarily alongside the designated community services officer. Given the community connections engrained in Port Hope Police approaches, it was a seamless approach in connecting with local businesses, landlords, and community members.

In Port Hope, Summer of Wellness focused time on canvassing the needs addressing concerns noted by local businesses. This included direct referrals to the Community Safety and Wellbeing feedback and consultation opportunities alongside direct connections with law enforcement as required. The concerns identified included trouble with accessing transportation for individuals after hours who may be unfit to drive due to cannabis consumption, youth having access to vaping products underage and general responses to mischief calls and follow up supports for community

members. This information was collected to inform the approaches Northumberland County Community and Social Services and Port Hope Police Service were to use in engaging residents in discussions around safety within the Port Hope community.

Public schools expressed interest in having Summer of Wellness attend the school to speak with students about cannabis use and local agency connections. Through the Summer of Wellness, an information booth was set up with information for students to access information on marijuana use, safe practices, and the legal implications of underage smoking. Through this information booth several students connected to various community agencies including NCCSS for further supports. This included some students being connected to the Community Outreach Worker for short term case management to get connected with housing supports, Ontario Works, etc.

Cobourg

Through the street level outreach provided, Summer of Wellness was able to connect with several people seeking support in accessing services. This included several people currently working with an ODSP caseworker who needed further case management supports. Through Summer of Wellness, the Community Outreach Worker was able to provide a direct connection for individuals in connecting with their case worker and re-engaging in case management supports. At times this included advocating with individuals, completing referrals, and attending local services such as the food bank with people to ensure they can access the appropriate supports they require in a timely fashion.

The street level outreach provided the opportunity to build relationships between law enforcement, Northumberland County Community and Social Services, individuals in the community and local community partners. Through these relationships, there has been a means of providing information on local supports as well as internal processes to access services. This includes providing individuals and community partners with timely responses to inquiries, information on intake procedures and supports available throughout the county. In many instances this led to individuals accessing services such as medication coverage or support in paying rental arrears to promote wellness and life stabilization.

COVID-19 Implications

Given this pilot project ran throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic, this had a significant impact on the way in which the pilot project was facilitated and utilized. At times, the outreach worker and law enforcement were some of the few outreach supports available to individuals in the community due to COVID closures of other services. The outreach worker was able to meet people in the moment and provide tailored support to meet their needs. Limitations due to the number of agencies closed and available by phone led to the outreach worker using advocacy and community connections to ensure that individuals were able to receive required supports.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on substance use locally, this includes cannabis consumption. There have been increased wait-times for delivery from the Ontario Cannabis store, many unregulated dispensaries were closed- Including those on Alderville First Nation just North of Northumberland County. It was reported through community networks that there were increased concerns with people selling drugs in the community and not producing the substances due to travel restrictions, etc. This has led to an increase in illegal production and some individuals starting to produce their own cannabis.

COVID-19 limited the number of social gatherings and business operations therefore, this made it challenging to interact with people using an informal approach. Due to these restrictions, people were not as overtly observed using cannabis and instead many people reported using it in their homes alone. This engaged several conversations around safe use alone and using different applications to monitor your substance use. It has been reported through the Northumberland Substance use group there has been a noted increase in cannabis use among adults as a direct result of COVID-19.

Impacts

The pilot project worked with people aged between 15 years and up to 69 years. 60% of people were male and 50% of the people were receiving ODSP and interestingly all the women that we spoke to were ODSP recipients.

The pilot project was able to identify areas of improvement in communication between service agencies, law enforcement, and pilot project development, provide information on cannabis, wellness and harm reduction to Northumberland County residents, and engage in consultation with residents, business owners etc. on the impacts of cannabis use and legalization in Northumberland. As an example of this is the difficulty that people reported in contacting caseworkers in OW and ODSP. The outreach worker was able to assist by making calls, referrals and connecting people directly to their caseworkers.

More than 321 Northumberland County residents were provided information on cannabis, wellness and harm reduction in conjunction with short term case management, timely referrals to community agencies, and information sessions. Many people accessing support from Community outreach were working with local law enforcement after having several dealings with police. In some instances, police referred clients to speak with the Outreach worker and officer working in the pilot project. This further demonstrates that the pilot project contributed to a knowledge exchange between law enforcement and social services. The Summer of Wellness pilot project took on a collaborative approach to walking alongside community members to support them in connecting with services, identifying needs.

An added outcome from this pilot project, which focused on working with people using an outreach approach, there was a great deal of consultation with People with lived experience. Often

community members provided feedback on experiences they have had within the community, this included identifying barriers to service pathways. We were able to look at service pathways and identify alternative routes or provide suggestion for improvement- this information has informed the development of the Community Safety and Wellbeing plan.

When speaking with individuals in the community, there were several requests surrounding access to food and homelessness resources. Through the Summer of Wellness pilot project, we were able to provide rapid connection to service including local food banks, Shelter, financial supports, advocacy, legal advice and harm reduction supplies. Given some of the unique supports required by community members, Summer of Wellness purchased gift cards to offer people a hot meal, funds to purchase cell phones, funds to purchase warm clothing etc. This demonstrated a significant impact in the community meeting immediate needs of individuals while building relationships and trust within the community.

Cannabis was the primary focus when providing supports to community members, this included conversations on safe use, information on resources including social media/app demonstrations and mindfulness supports. The Outreach worker used a small tablet as a tool to demonstrate apps to youth and community members. This proved to be very successful and community members were interested in trying apps that helped them learn facts about cannabis, measure their own use, learn about safety measures and how to check and identify resources in the community. This tool increased engagement and offered a useful way to initiate learning and conversations.

Attachments

Appendix A: Cannabis news articles

<https://todaysnorthumberland.ca/2020/10/22/opp-dismantles-significant-illegal-cannabis-production-networks/>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7262337/cannabis-growop-bust-cramahe-township/>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7262672/cobourg-women-arrested-meth-crack-cocaine-magic-mushrooms-seized/>

<https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/10188996-police-seize-80k-36k-worth-of-drugs-after-warrants-executed-in-campbellford/>

<https://todaysnorthumberland.ca/2020/10/22/opp-dismantles-significant-illegal-cannabis-production-networks/>

<https://todaysnorthumberland.ca/2020/10/21/port-hope-council-cannabis-production-resolution-support/>

<https://todaysnorthumberland.ca/2020/09/01/opp-seize-over-800-cannabis-plants-on-property-in-trent-hills/>

<https://todaysnorthumberland.ca/2020/08/26/public-input-open-for-cannabis-retail-store-application-in-downtown-cobourg/>

<https://todaysnorthumberland.ca/2020/08/21/opp-and-partners-dismantle-significant-illegal-cannabis-network/>

<https://todaysnorthumberland.ca/2020/03/30/northumberland-opp-cannabis-and-cash-seized-during-warrant-execution/>

<https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/10234398--137k-worth-of-contraband-seized-at-warkworth-institution/>

<https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/10220168--529k-worth-of-marijuana-plants-seized-after-bust-in-hamilton-township-northumberland-opp/>

<https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/10218336-2-recreational-marijuana-stores-coming-to-king-street-in-downtown-cobourg/>

<https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/10161352-cannabis-with-street-value-of-870k-seized-by-opp-in-trent-hills/>

<https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/10143898-19-people-charged-1-874-plants-300k-in-cannabis-bud-seized-after-hastings-area-bust/>

<https://www.northumberlandnews.com/news-story/10134210-update-3-444-plants-41-pounds-of-processed-marijuana-more-seized-in-3-9m-bust-in-cramahe/>