
DATE: August 20, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **FAMILIES FIRST RESEARCH RESULTS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services
Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
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RECOMMENDATION

That staff continue to engage senior level officials, at all affected provincial Ministries, in discussions to establish a provincial commitment to the province-wide implementation of the Families First program;

And further, that the advocacy strategies and next steps as outlined in the report of the Commissioner of Human Services, Commissioner of Health Services and Medical Officer of Health, dated August 20, 2010, titled "Families First Research Results and Proposed Next Steps" be endorsed.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Families First is a Region of Peel program for sole support parents that augments social assistance (Ontario Works) with additional health, employment and child care services, as well as recreation opportunities for their children.
- Between September 2000 and December 2006, 1460 sole support families receiving social assistance (program participants and a control group) were subject to intensive study by Dr. Tracy Peressini of the University of Waterloo, who has now submitted preliminary findings of her evaluation respecting the effects of the program.
- Research indicates there are significant improvements in the lives of sole support parents and their children receiving intensive case management interventions through the Families First program.
- The Research also suggests significant savings to taxpayer-funded programs in the areas of social assistance, health care, education and corrections.
- Costs to implement the program appear to be off-set by earlier exit from social assistance and significantly reduced recidivism.
- The program helps individuals and families to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life of the community.
- The Families First program demonstrates that integrated program delivery with shared case management has value and is aligned with the Region's Human Services Plan.

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FAMILIES FIRST RESEARCH RESULTS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS**DISCUSSION****1. Background**

Implemented in 2000, Families First is an intensive case management program designed to assist sole support families in receipt of Ontario Works social assistance, in improving their lives and the lives of their children. In September 2000, Regional Council demonstrated leadership by passing a resolution to invest in a program that has the potential to influence public policy and future programs. This social investment in families was anticipated to make a favourable difference in their future need for human services. Based on a previous study by Dr. Gina Browne, the Families First program is a unique program with a landmark research evaluation component completed by Dr. Tracy Peressini of the University of Waterloo.

The intention of the research was to determine whether sole support families in receipt of financial subsidy who are afforded additional health, employment and child care services, along with recreational opportunities for their children, exit social assistance at a greater rate than those families not receiving such supports.

2. Integrated Service Delivery Model

Families First is an integrated service model which includes social assistance, services for children, health and recreation through the partnership between Ontario Works in Peel, Public Health and Children's Services. Appendix I provides a detailed description of each of these components.

Between its start in September 2000 and July 2009, the program also involved three community agencies: Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Drop-in Centre (DBNC), Brampton Neighbourhood Resource Centre (BNRC) and Caledon Community Services (CCS). In August 2009 the recreation component of the program was brought in-house and is now being administered by Ontario Works using its established financial infrastructure which is more cost effective and streamlines services and supports to clients.

Referrals to the program are made by Ontario Works staff. An initial assessment is completed of the participant's health, employability, child care needs and the recreational needs and interests of the children. Referrals are then made to appropriate regional services, such as Children's Services for formal child care, Public Health Services for an assessment by a public health nurse and Ontario Works for employment supports and recreational activities.

From September 2000 to December 31, 2006, a total of 2,823 sole support parents in receipt of OW assistance were referred to the Families First program and 2,418 families received Families First supports. The activity within the entire program during that period is reflected as follows:

Families First Program Activity	December 31, 2006
Families Referred to Families First	2823
Families Served in Families First	2418
Families First Program Exits	1696
Families First Program Exits that Exited OW	1189
Children registered in formal childcare	349
Families participating in Research	1460

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3. Research Methodology

From inception of the program in 2000 to December 31, 2006, 2,418 sole support parents were accepted into the Families First program. However, for the purpose of the research evaluation, 1,460 Peel families (in the research and control groups) were studied by Dr. Tracy Peressini's research team. The research group totalled 1010 families and was compared to a control group of 450 families.

The research team followed the families for 24 months and the in-depth analysis involved a detailed questionnaire (comprised of several recognized evaluative tools) to determine the social, emotional and physical well being of parents and children in each family.

The questionnaire was administered at: entry into the program, 12 months, 18 months, 24 months and at exit. The 24 month timeframe allowed the researcher to compare the effectiveness of the Families First program and its program component interventions.

The Families First evaluation began in September 2000. The data collation and cleaning phase was completed by December 2007, and the analysis of the data was conducted from January 2008 to December 2009.

During the evaluation 4,123 interviews were conducted by researchers with parents about themselves and 10,061 interviews were conducted with parents about each of their children.

The Families First program has continued in its current state to assist sole support parents and their families on an ongoing basis. To date, more than 3,800 sole support parents have participated in the Families First Program and more than 4,300 children received Families First supports through the recreational component. Children received recreational supports in over 21,000 instances.

FINDINGS

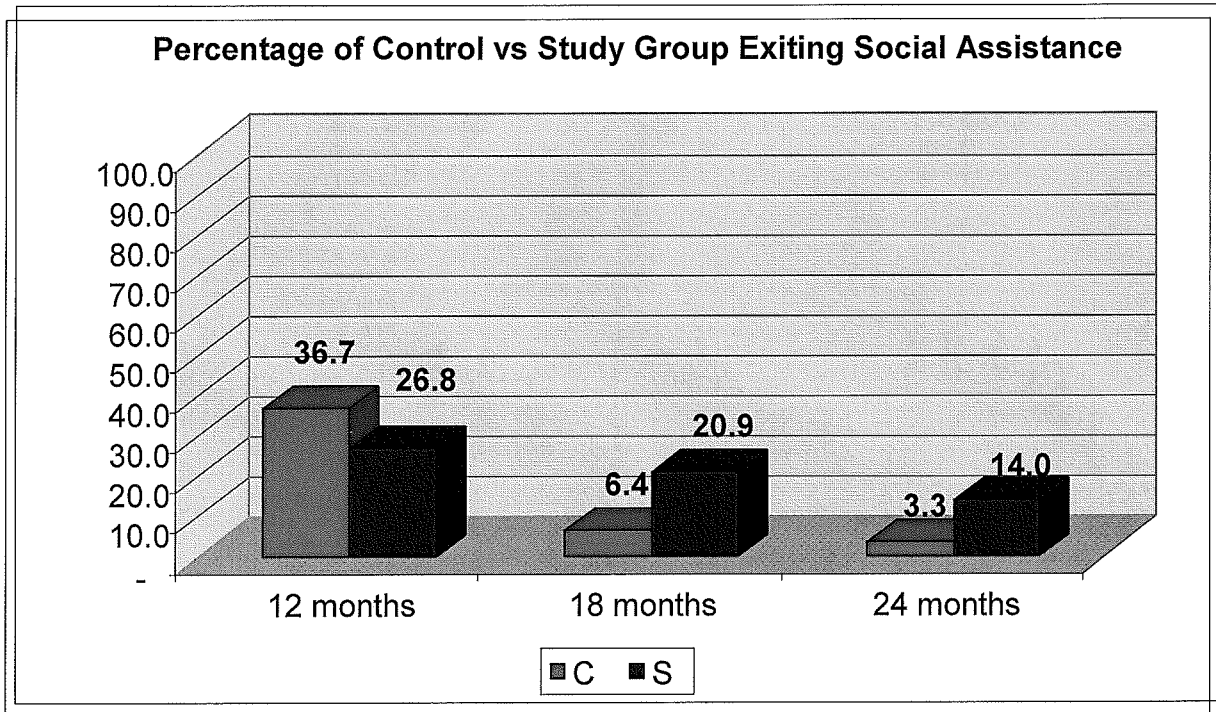
1. Preliminary Research Findings

Preliminary research findings (comparing the outcomes of the 1010 study families against the 450 families in the control group) indicate that the impact of the Families First Program is progressive and cumulative, with program participants three and four times more likely to exit social assistance by 18 and 24 months respectively, than their OW counterparts.

Please refer to the table below:

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Positive impacts of the supports provided through the Families First program are not seen earlier than 18 months. This is likely attributable to the high levels of psychological distress (including health concerns, employability issues etc.) experienced by the parents in the Families First program at the start of the program. Further analysis will be completed to further explain this trend.

Living on social assistance can be debilitating and demoralizing; having a program such as Families First has proven to have long term positive effects.

Some of the preliminary research findings observed by following the 1010 study and 450 control group families include the following:

- A shift to greater self-reliance through education and employment and less reliance on Ontario Works and Employment Insurance as sources of income; data indicates a 10 per cent increase in engagement in employment related activities
- Significant improvement in social, physical and mental health of both parents and children
- Significant and important declines in levels of psychosomatic disorders, anxiety and depression among families in the program
- Declining dependence on social and health services
- Enhanced educational credentials, job skills and employability
- Improvement in family health, functionality and independence, resulting in less reliance on public and social supports
- Providing recreational supports for families improves the social, physical and mental health of parent and child alike, and increases overall family health and functioning.

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Preliminary results indicate that all of the Families First program interventions work in unison and are collectively responsible for the positive and significant changes in the parents and their children. These results will be quantified following the publication of the research results.

2. Families First Program and Evaluation Expenditure

A detailed analysis of overall cost savings and return on investment will be completed once final report is available. However, based on the findings there are significant cost saving opportunities for the province in the form of reduced social assistance payments, reduced health care costs and improved school and education outcomes, resulting in savings in the criminal justice and correctional systems.

As these are all areas of provincial responsibility their continued interest in Families First is anticipated.

CURRENT AND FUTURE ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

1. Current Provincial and National Opportunities

Early on, Region of Peel's Families First initiative caught the attention of both governments and agencies at the local, provincial and federal levels.

Throughout the life of the program, Peel has provided ongoing updates and presentations based on preliminary findings of the research study at all levels, including:

Federal Level

- Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Provincial Level

- Updates to Ministries of Community and Social Services, Health and Long-Term Care, Childcare and Youth, Education
- Alberta Social Services to assist them to implement a similar program called Families First (including the City of Edmonton)
- Program information, assisting with program design and implementation plan to the Province of Manitoba
- Presentations to the Parks and Recreation Association of Ontario (PRAO), Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA)

Municipal Level

- Presentations and Program Orientation to the City of Toronto (who, based on Peel's preliminary results, have implemented a similar program).

To date, many municipalities have implemented the recreation component based on Dr. Gina Browne's research. These jurisdictions are anxiously waiting to see the final Families First research and program results for Peel Region.

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FAMILIES FIRST RESEARCH RESULTS AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS**2. Future Advocacy Opportunities**

As mentioned, for a number of years the Region of Peel has taken the opportunity to highlight Families First and the associated academic analysis with the Government of Ontario at both political and bureaucratic levels. The province has shown an encouraging level of interest in receiving our final research material as there are a number of linkages to ongoing initiatives with the current government, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Assistance Review.

In fact, at the recent Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference held in Windsor August 15-18, 2010, Peel Region's delegation received a commitment from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Honourable Deb Matthews) to convene a meeting of associated Ministers to discuss the potential to use our academic research to help influence the future delivery of social services in Ontario.

Building on the momentum from the provincial government and other jurisdictions across the country, and based on some preliminary discussions with Regional Councillors who have taken a long-standing interest in Families First, staff is recommending the following next steps:

1. Conduct an independent Peer Review of the final research report prior to publication to validate methodology and results within the research paper;
2. Forward the final Research paper including assessment of outcomes, implications and benefits of the analysis to all affected Provincial Ministries, including: Finance, Education, Health and Long-Term Care, Community & Social Services; Children & Youth Services and Community Safety and Correctional Services;
3. Engage senior members of government from related ministries and based on the commitment from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, to promote the adoption of the Families First service model by the Government of Ontario;
4. Promote knowledge transfer to other jurisdictions by creating awareness of the research findings and making information accessible to human service professionals, governments and interested members of the public. Develop and coordinate a media and communications plan, in collaboration with any potential announcement with the provincial government;
5. Share results with key stakeholders, Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), etc.; and
6. Seek provincial funding to conduct secondary research as an important way to validate the significant impact the initial Families First study has across the province, which would include:
 - Hiring a researcher to collect aggregate data from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, to validate the self reported data obtained from the Families First program research phase.
 - Undertaking the return on investment analysis including Exit Rate comparison.
 - Investigating if further research with Boards of Education is required to substantiate the parent reported data on child outcomes.

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CONCLUSION

Since 2000, Regional Council provided its ongoing support to Families First programming and research, recognizing the positive effect the program has had on the residents of Peel and its potential to re-shape the delivery and outcomes of social assistance, as we know it today. This has been a rare and bold expression of a municipal Council's trust in staff and clients in the area of Human Services. As such, the program and its results have garnered much interest and attention.

For good reason, the province, including most recently at the 2010 AMO Conference, continues to express keen interest in receiving the results and understanding the potential impact Peel's research could have across the province. By taking the important next steps as outlined in this report, Peel will work in collaboration with the province to showcase a new and innovative approach to supporting families in most need throughout not only Ontario, but Canada.



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Medical Officer of Health



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Approved for Submission:



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HS 10-31

c. Legislative Services

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APPENDIX I

Program Components

(i) Health

Program participants who meet the referral criteria for the Families First program are offered a referral to a public health nurse. The Health component is a voluntary support service and participants who choose not to accept a public health referral are streamed into the employment component of the program where they focused on job readiness activities. Where appropriate, participants are involved in both the health and employment components of the program. The Families First public health nurses provide quality care to the family through comprehensive health assessment, supportive counselling, education, advocacy, case management and collaboration with other professionals.

(ii) Employment

Participants who enter the employment component of the program and who do not demonstrate significant employment barriers are referred to an Ontario Works employment services worker for employment counseling and pre-job readiness activities. Families First caseworkers work collaboratively with Families First employment service workers and case coordinators to provide effective financial and employment case management.

(iii) Recreation

The children's recreational interests are assessed and linked to appropriate recreational providers. Up to \$170 per child per 12-month period is issued to cover recreational programs or equipment costs. The type of activities include acting/drama, arts and crafts, basketball, baseball, boxing, computer camp, dance, football, scouts/guides, golf lessons, gymnastics, hockey, horseback riding, martial arts, and various types of music/singing lessons, skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding, soccer, swimming, weightlifting, and yoga. Comments and letters of appreciation from parents inform and confirm they are delighted with the improvement in social skills and academic grades that they attribute to their child's participation in the recreational activity

(iv) Child Care

If required, referrals are made to Children's Services for formal childcare. Children's Services staff help identify child care needs required by participating families. Through the programs and workshops offered in the centres, Families First participants (receiving formal child care benefits) have the opportunity to interact with other families and increase their knowledge, support as well as community connections. Children benefit from a stimulating learning environment and healthy childhood development provided from their placement. Social skills are also continually developed through interactions they have with other children. Parents develop confidence in caring for their children, alleviating some life stresses. Child care funding ultimately supports the individual's goals and plans of each family.