



District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board

September 2021

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PREAMBLE

This Plan marks the beginning of the 2021/2022 service planning cycle with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). It should come as no surprise that the review of the previous cycle will include details on the significant impact the pandemic has had on the economy, operations, outcomes and vulnerable populations. With that said, while the pandemic will be a variable in the discussion, it will not be the focus, as a tremendous amount of work was completed and outcomes were achieved during this period.

This Plan will highlight important information related to caseload demographics, will provide details on current challenges, achievements and program priorities. It will also illustrate how the Ontario Works program in Nipissing remains accountable to the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB) and its funders.

In the District of Nipissing, we know that health outcomes are poor in comparison with the Province and that the treatment options for mental health and addiction are barely scratching the surface of a deeply rooted crisis in our communities. In fact, the severity of these barriers appear to be intensifying making it increasingly difficult to effectively support recipients presenting with these challenges. Homelessness and food insecurity also appear to be on the rise adding to the complexity in finding solutions. These issues continue to challenge us at both at the program and systemic levels and knowing that COVID-19, and all of the associated variants, appear to impact vulnerable populations at a higher rate, appears to be a recipe for disaster if not managed effectively.

As the Province continues to explore the value of integration and holistic approaches, DNSSAB is hopeful that healthcare related supports and services will play an integral role in the overall design. DNSSAB applauds the Ministry for recognizing the inherent relationship between the social determinants of health and the root causes of social assistance dependency. DNSSAB welcomes new and improved partnerships with the healthcare sector and is encouraged by the cross ministerial collaboration that is guiding the MCCSS Recovery and Renewal Plan.

Overall and considering the magnitude of this global crisis, the speed by which the sector and all levels of government responded was remarkable. The pandemic collectively challenged all of us to think “outside the box” to find solutions that would prevent unprecedented numbers of people from becoming reliant on social assistance. While the federal benefits diverted large numbers of people from the Ontario Works program, they also served as a disincentive for some to either return to work or seek employment. This has resulted in a labour market crisis in the District of Nipissing where employers are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain operations without adequate staffing.

While the long term impacts of the pandemic are unclear, there is no doubt that this fundamental shift in the foundation of social assistance delivery will challenge us as we move forward. For this reason, on-going evaluation, consultation and collaboration with DSSAB’s, CMSM’s and other key stakeholders inclusive of social assistance recipients, both pre and post implementation, will be essential. This will assist us with understanding if the changes are serving to improve service delivery and sustainable outcomes. DNSSAB is looking forward to participating in this transformational process.

Finally, as always I would like to recognize and commend DNSSAB’s Ontario Works team and that of our dedicated community partners who have played a significant role in helping us to serve vulnerable people living in poverty in the District of Nipissing.

Michelle Glabb

Director, Employment and Social Services
September 30, 2021

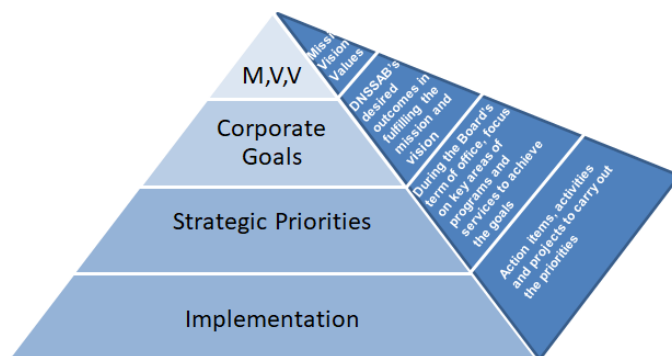
PURPOSE

The 2021-2022 Ontario Works (OW) Service Plan builds on priorities established in the previous service planning cycle and demonstrates the key strategies being utilized by Social Services to support the Program’s vision and mandate. It further provides an overview of the environmental context in which Ontario Works is delivered; as awareness of the existing political, social and economic conditions are essential to program planning and analysis. Service Providers, through the Service Plan, are also required to illustrate how current service delivery strategies are aligned with the achievement of the performance targets set in the Plan. The Service Plan further provides an opportunity to highlight achievements and best practices, set new goals, analyze resources and identify gaps in service. The Plan also provides an opportunity for service providers to communicate the role that stakeholder linkages and community partnerships play in the delivery of social assistance and employment outcomes.

REPORT PRODUCTION

This report was written by Michelle Glabb, DNSSAB Director of Employment and Social Services; Aimie Caruso, Manager of Employment and Client Outcomes and David Plumstead, DNSSAB Manager of Planning, Outcomes and Analytics. Contributions also made by other members of the Ontario Works team.

DNSSAB STRATEGIC PLAN 2020



The DNSSAB is currently engaged in the strategic planning process and the Board’s vision, mission and goals have changed since the previous OW Service Plan (2019-2020). While the strategic priorities are still in the process of being developed, the following provides a look at the Board’s new strategic direction:

DNSSAB VISION AND MISSION

VISION: Healthy, Sustainable Communities.

Healthy sustainable communities where residents have social, economic and environmental conditions and opportunities that enable them to develop to their maximum potential. Residents access the resources they need to maintain or increase their physical, emotional and social well-being and engage fully in life.

MISSION: Enable and support inclusive, accessible human services in Nipissing District.

Goals

The Board's goals represent the desired outcomes and core areas of focus to fulfill the vision. The goals transcend multiple Board terms with a timeless focus over the next 20 years, and are resilient to changes or shocks to the political, social, and economic systems and operating environments.

Maximize Human Service Impact

Residents have the highest possible quality of life and well-being.

The Board will leverage its leadership and bring together community partners and service providers, in an effort to realize common goals and maximize collective resources for the betterment of people in Nipissing District.

Remove Systemic Barriers

Systemic social issues, disparities, and inequalities are addressed and eliminated.

Through a focus on the vulnerable population the Board will advocate for affordable housing, and support the removal of persisting social barriers such as homelessness, poor mental health, addictions and poverty which threaten an individual's well-being and community participation. The related disparities and inequalities in income, education, socioeconomic status, and health are examples of barriers to individual well-being and healthy communities.

Seamless Access

Clients and residents have direct access to programs, services, or other resources when and where they are needed.

Through an innovative, integrated operating structure designed to remain current and be flexible to meet evolving needs, clients and residents can access programs and services seamlessly and when and where they need them.

Continuous Improvement and Adaptation - Learning and Growth

The Board's services are strong and maximize investment.

Taking a continuous improvement approach will lead to processes and operating methods which are efficient and effective, with high quality service delivery. The complementary focus on internal learning, growth and adaptability enhances employee and technology capabilities and strengths.

The OW Service Plan 2021-2022 has been developed to align with the Board's new strategic direction above, while also preparing for the anticipated provincial changes with respect to the Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Plan and the employment services transformation.

ONTARIO WORKS VISION AND MANDATE

Vision

To create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they can move towards employment and independence.

Mandate

To provide employment assistance and financial assistance, including life stabilization services and supports, to people in financial need. The Ontario Works program:

- Recognizes individual responsibility and promotes self-reliance through participation in life stabilization and employment activities;
- Provides financial assistance to those most in need while they meet obligations to become and stay employed;
- Effectively serves people needing assistance; and
- Is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario.

1.0 MINISTRY PRIORITIES

DSSAB's and CMSM's play a key role in implementing many of the government's priorities and are able to leverage provincial investments in infrastructure, employment, education and social services to create new opportunities for clients. This service plan will demonstrate how Nipissing's service delivery model, current initiatives and partnerships are aligned with provincial direction and are linked to the following ministry priorities:

- ❖ Recovery and Renewal
- ❖ Improving Employment Outcomes
- ❖ Leverage Local Economic Development
- ❖ Develop and Maintain Local Community Service Partnerships
- ❖ Strengthen Program Accountability

1.1 Recovery and Renewal

As Nipissing is not a pilot site for any of the initiatives currently being tested across the province, the Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Plan, inclusive of the work around Employment Transformation, did not have a significant impact on the previous cycle. With that said, from a planning perspective these upcoming transformational changes are definitely guiding decision making on numerous fronts as we move forward. While many of these changes are progressive and long overdue some continue to be viewed with cautious optimism.

1.1.1 Accelerated Digital Delivery Solutions

1.1.1.1 The Reloadable Payment Card (RPC)

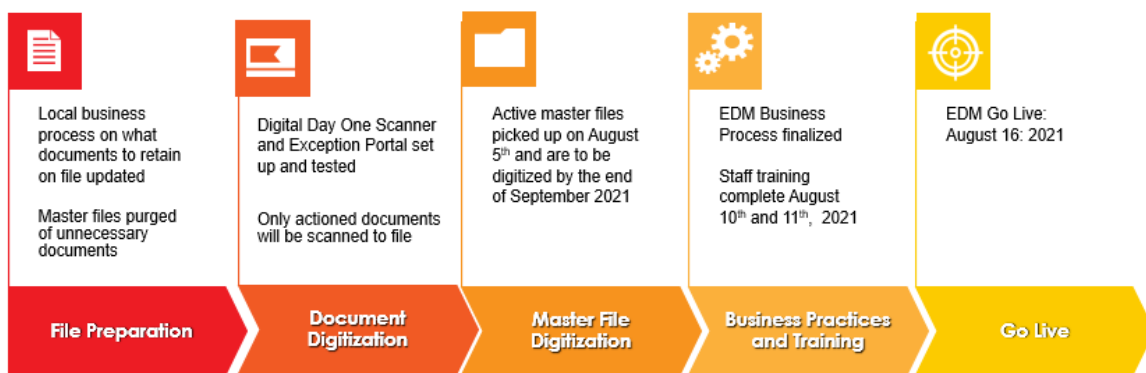
In Nipissing, the RPC initiative was implemented on April 6, 2021. With remote work, limited physical access to the office and taking into consideration that many OW clients have limited, to no access to reliable phone and internet services, the RPC initiative has been rolled out slowly as an alternative

payment option. This approach provided DNSSAB with an opportunity to refine local processes and streamline services. As per the Integrated Case Summary Report for August 2021 approximately 89% of cases receive payment by DBD, 10% by cheque and 1% by RPC. Efforts are underway to target the 10% that have been identified as receiving payments by cheque to transition these individuals to either DBD or RPC.

1.1.1.2 Electronic Document Management (EDM)

Figure 1 below illustrates Nipissing’s EDM journey from the date it was enabled on June 14th to “Go Live” on August 16th. Active master files were picked up by Nimble on August 5, 2021 to be digitized and were accessible in SAMS by the end of September 2021. In situations where terminated files are reactivated, only the current application is being digitized using the Digital Day One scanner. Historical information on reactivated master files may be digitized at a later date depending on the estimated cost and availability of resources.

Figure 1



1.1.1.3 MyBenefits

The uptake on MyBenefits has been slow and steady. According to the MyBenefits Report for Nipissing as of July 30, 2021 a total of 656 participants, on a caseload of 1657, have registered for MyBenefits with an uptake percentage 39.59%.

In light of the pandemic and potential for the reoccurrence of like events, it is increasingly important to register as many recipients as possible for paperless digital solutions. For this reason, efforts to promote MyBenefits and increase registrations through various promotional campaigns with or without incentives will continue in the current cycle.

1.1.2 Centralized and Automated Delivery

Nipissing is one of 12 OW offices across the province that are participating in the phase 5 roll out of Centralized Intake. At a Ministry engagement session on July 22, 2021, Nipissing OW along with others waiting to onboard into centralized intake were notified that the project was being postponed. MCCSS made this decision so that they can optimize and enhance internal efficiencies and capacity. In August, onboarding preparation activities for phase 5 sites resumed and a tentative go live date of December 6, 2021 has been scheduled. Figure 2 below provides an overview of the Centralized Intake roll out plan which includes a review on how this change will impact Nipissing’s current intake service delivery model. DNSSAB will also be changing its current intake software (PrarieFyre) to accommodate a new softphone solution. This solution

will enable Intake Case Managers to work remotely as throughout the pandemic they have had to remain on site due to system limitations.

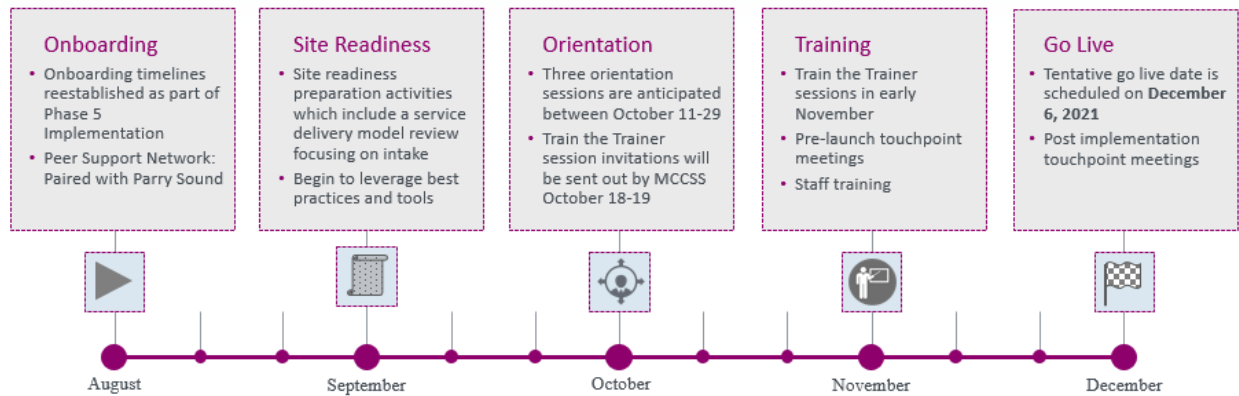


Figure 2

1.1.3 Risk Based Eligibility Review

As identified above, Nipissing is just entering the site preparation activity phase for Centralized Intake. As such, the full impact on our intake processes have not been determined. With that in mind it is important to recognize that Nipissing OW is in a good position to adapt as we transition to Centralized Intake and a risk based eligibility model for the following reasons:

1. The Nipissing OW intake team is set up so that it can adapt to meet the changing needs of the organization.
 - The number of Case Managers dedicated to Intake was reduced from 4 to 3 in 2020. Only 2 of the 3 positions are actively screening incoming applications at present due to the decrease in applications since the onset of the pandemic. The third Intake Case Manager was redeployed into an active caseload to cover vacancies.
 - All Case Manager positions in our office are trained to complete the full scope of Case Manager duties which includes intake and ongoing case management
2. From a change management perspective, staff are already accustomed to delivering services using a risk based approach.
 - Due to the geography of the District, Nipissing has had to utilize remote and risk based delivery methods to service part of the caseload long before the onset of the pandemic.
3. Remote work strategies in response to the pandemic have normalized risk based approaches to service delivery.
4. Remote work has also created opportunities to leverage technology differently
 - We are in the planning phase to implement a new soft phone solution to support remote work that will also provide us with greater flexibility to manage and track incoming calls to intake.
5. Training and implementation
 - Nipissing has a Trainer position to facilitate staff training, develop and update local processes as well as provide ongoing supports as we transition
 - Nipissing has opted to participate as a mentee in the Peer Support Network as part of our preparation activities for Centralized Intake and have been paired with the District of Parry Sound.

1.1.4 Access to Employment and Training

The physical presence of many service providers in all areas across the district is often limited despite mandates to serve the entire district. While the City of North Bay has public transportation available, the remaining parts of Nipissing District do not. As such, transportation remains a significant barrier to access employment and training. Nipissing Travellink was a local initiative funded by the Ministry of Transportation that did reduce this barrier to employment for many participants, however due to the lack of sustainable funding the initiative ended in spring of 2018. It is also important to highlight that transportation is not only a barrier to employment and training but also to health services inclusive of mental health and addiction services and treatment programs.

As illustrated in Figure 3 below, assisting clients on their path towards employment, including those with disabilities and barriers to employment, requires a range of supports and services to meet individual needs. As you will see later in this Plan, there are a number of local initiatives and long standing partnerships with the entire employment services network, that promote self-reliance and financial independence as well as positive employment outcomes. As we shift to a period of recovery from the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, Nipissing is committed to continue to build partnerships to enhance, improve and streamline processes to better equip recipients with the experience, skills and abilities to be successful in their search for meaningful and sustainable employment.



Figure 3

1.1.5 Collaborating with Municipal Partners

Change seems to be a constant in the delivery of social assistance. In addition to the changes that have occurred in response to the pandemic, there have been various other changes over the last several years that have come through income security reform, social assistance modernization and most recently the Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Plan. Given that staff are already experiencing change fatigue, it has never been more important to ensure that effective communication and change management strategies are in place.

Nipissing supports the province's commitment to client, staff and stakeholder engagement as these activities will help service delivery sites to minimize the negative impacts of change. To date, Nipissing has delivered

three staff engagement sessions using the materials provided by the province. Unfortunately, DNSSAB was not able to participate in the initial client engagement session rolled out in August, however, preparation activities are underway to allow us to participate in future opportunities. This will be achieved in part by the re-engagement of the local client advisory committee, which was placed on hold at the beginning of the pandemic. Nipissing has also reached out to the local Ontario Disability Support Program office to partner on delivering the community partner engagement information package received from the province on September 16th, 2021. A plan will be developed to deliver this material to community partners sometime in October with feedback rolled up for the province by October 29, 2021.

1.2 IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

1.2.1 Improvements to Service Design and Delivery of Employment Supports

Nipissing OW has implemented many strategies over the years several of which have been extensively tested and proven successful with others being new. Below you will find details associated with the primary strategies being utilized to sustain and improve Nipissing OW's service delivery model with respect to the provision of employment services.

1.2.1.1 Get Trained Workers (GTW) Employment Database Enhancements



The Employment Database was developed locally and includes a client database and assessment tool that is linked with GTW. The database allows staff to match clients to available training and employment opportunities as well as send targeted communications. The original employment database platform, which was developed in 2016, has seen several enhancements over the years.

In November 2020, we moved to a new platform which brought a number of new functions and enhancements as outlined below:

- **Dashboard:** The Case Management dashboard provides a visual overview of upcoming training sessions, recent job postings, the number of active clients as well as the number of pending and completed assessments.
- **Advanced Search Options:** The advanced search option features have expanded. Examples include but are not limited to; self-declared barriers to employment around mental health, addiction, physical health, housing stability and personal safety.
- **Addition of a Social Determinant of Health Question:** We continue to ask about food bank usage, access to a family doctor and access to a dentist. Previously this section included a question about indigenous status. This question has been moved to the client profile section and we have added a question about gambling.
- **Employment Profile:** The employment profile now includes details regarding employment interests which can be used to match clients to related training and employment opportunities.
- **Northern Assessment Tool:** Several OW offices across the North have adopted the same Employment Assessment tool which has increased consistency among participating service providers.

Data from the previous database was migrated to the new platform but due to the significant number of changes, a lot of work has been put into updating the database and completing new assessments. Additional

work is in progress to link the new platform to Tableau (business intelligence software) which will allow us to manipulate the data to gain additional insights into the caseload in Nipissing District.

1.2.1.2 Post Graduate Employment Supports

A workshop targeted to providing employment supports to post-secondary students was developed and implemented in the spring of 2019 in response to a historical influx of applications following the conclusion of post-secondary study periods and OSAP income. This program has continued to be offered to recent graduates and post-secondary students who are returning to studies in the fall. Participants in the workshop identify and market post-secondary skill sets, create a resume and cover letter, learn job search strategies and interview skills as well as get connected to employment opportunities available through the Get Trained Workers program. While workshop participation rates have been low throughout the pandemic, this initiative has had a lot of positive success in connecting students to part and full time employment opportunities and will continue to be offered as part of the suite of employment supports being offered through Nipissing OW.

1.2.1.3 MentorAbility

MentorAbility Canada is an employment initiative that helps to connect disabled individuals who are actively seeking employment to a short term mentoring opportunity with an employer. Mentor opportunities are up to one full day and are designed to help individuals who self-identify as experiencing a disability to develop the skill sets necessary to move towards employment and may include any of the following;

- ✓ Workplace tour
- ✓ Information about a potential career path
- ✓ Advice from people with experience in different types of work
- ✓ Guidance to improve resume
- ✓ Job-shadowing or observation
- ✓ Information about business operations and job requirements
- ✓ Interview preparation tips

DNSSAB became a MentorAbility Site Partner in December of 2020. The pandemic has limited our ability to connect recipients to this program, however some progress has been made. Figure 4 below illustrates an actual client journey where MentorAbility has proven successful.

Figure 4



1.2.1.4 PSW Collaborations

Over the last several years, an aging population and a lack of Personal Support Workers (PSW's) in the health care system prompted several collaborations with a number of local post-secondary institutions. The post-secondary collaborations were aimed at connecting social assistance recipients to post-secondary education and employment as a PSW or related field. In turn, the initiative created an opportunity to help improve the quality of life of social assistance recipients, achieve our employment outcomes and fill a labour gap in our community. Figure 5 below provides an overview of the PSW related post-secondary collaborations that DNSSAB has been involved with over the last several years.

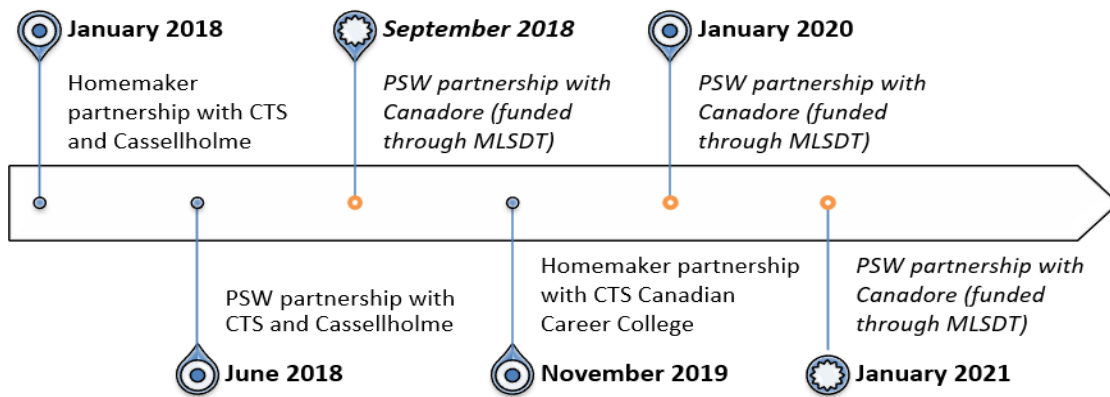


Figure 5

The most recent initiatives have been collaborations with Canadore College that are funded through the Ministry of Labour, Skills Development and Training (MLSDT). Participants of these initiatives are offered a modified course content in addition to wrap around supports and services to promote student success while attending school. It should be noted that post-graduate employment supports are also offered as part of this program. Due to the changes to the PSW course, this program is not OSAP eligible thereby allowing participants to remain connected to social assistance while in school.

As illustrated below in Table 1, to date, there have been 67 social assistance recipients participate in the Canadore PSW initiatives funded by the MLSDT. Of the 67 participants, there have been 34 graduates in total and an additional 12 participants from the January 2021 cohort that have had their program extended on a 2 year program accommodation and are on track to graduate in 2022. Of the 34 graduates, 32 have secured employment.

September 2018	January 2020	January 2021
✓ 26 participants	✓ 21 participants	✓ 20 participants
✓ 18 graduates	✓ 12 graduates	✓ 4 graduates to date*
✓ 12 employed full-time	✓ 5 employed full-time	✓ 1 employed full-time to date
✓ 5 employed part-time	✓ 9 employed part-time	

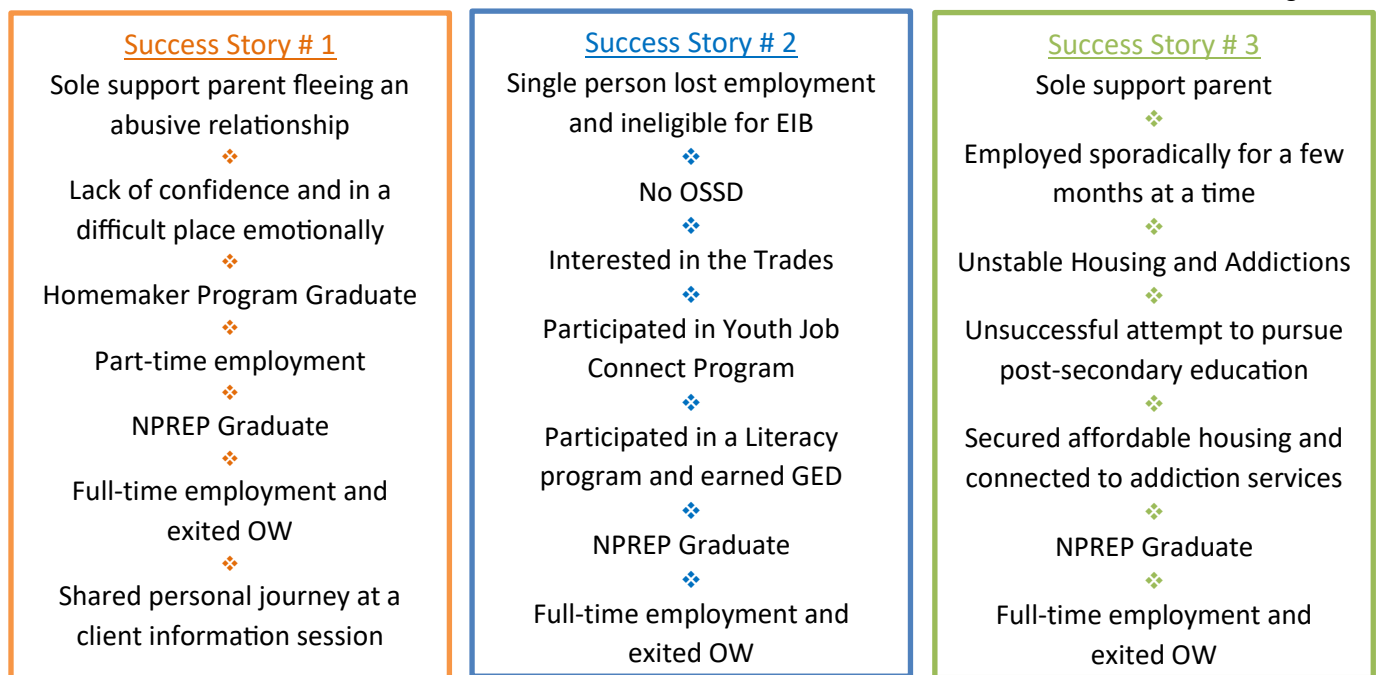
Table 1

* 12 participants from the January 2021 cohort had their program extended on a 2 year accommodation

1.2.1.5 Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program – Canadore College

The Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program (N-PREP) was initially a three year pilot program that began in 2015 and was funded under Ontario’s Local Poverty Reduction fund. After the pilot ended in 2018, the NPREP initiative has continued to support OW and ODSP students attending Canadore College through a purchase of service agreement. Unfortunately, budget restrictions have limited the level of supports available through our current model compared to what was available through the pilot program when it was funded through Trillium. Despite the limited financial resources, NPREP continues to produce positive results. As of August 2021, there have been 261 NPREP participants which have resulted in 111 graduates. There are currently 43 active NPREP students. The success stories illustrated below in Figure 6 demonstrate how education and training can offer a pathway out of poverty and off of social assistance programs and into employment.

Figure 6



NOTE: The number of NPREP participants has drastically decreased since the onset of the pandemic in large part due to the challenges associated to remote learning including access to technology and reliable internet.

1.2.1.6 Entry Level Sales and Service

According to the Monthly Jobs Report published by the Labour Market Group, the sales and service industry was the top occupational category in Nipissing District between January and April 2021. In addition, between 9-10% of all job postings were for the retail trade industry. In response, Nipissing OW is exploring opportunities to offer an Entry Level Sales and Service training program similar to one offered by the Cochrane District OW office in the fall of 2020. An expression of interest (EOI) is expected to go out in early October 2021 with the intent of offering the training to 10 participants in both North Bay and West Nipissing. Program expectations outlined in the EOI include;

- Assist participants to determine their employee readiness and interests
- Expose participants to employment opportunities within the industry

-
- Skills training relevant to sales and service industry including customer service standards
 - Assist participants to develop soft skills, conflict resolution, problem solving skills and adaptability
 - Certify participants in relevant job specific training such as:
 - WHIMIS
 - First Aid/CPR;
 - Smart Serve
 - Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
 - Food Safety
 - Provide basic computer skills in Word, Excel, Power Point
 - Provide Point of Sale training and training on inventory systems
 - Job search preparedness activities such as resume writing, interview skills, mock interviews etc.
 - Provide support for the linguistic and cultural needs for our Anglophone, Francophone and Indigenous Communities.
 - Offer an experiential learning opportunity or work placement within the sales and service industry

Additional sector specific training opportunities are also being explored for other industries including the possibility of offering Truck Driver Training. Additional research is required before moving forward with additional initiatives of this nature.

1.2.1.7 Employer Engagement – Information Sessions for Clients

In 2018, in an effort to expose job ready social assistance recipients to a variety of employment opportunities, DNSSAB began inviting local employers to host engagement sessions. This initiative not only provided recipients with a chance to inform themselves about employment pathways, it also provided a chance to learn from local employers on what they are looking for in an employee. In addition, participants were able to connect directly with employers which led to a number of interviews and offers of employment. In the context of the pandemic, the employer engagement sessions were held virtually, rather than in-person. Client access to technology has been a challenge. Despite this, the initiative continues to see some success. Employer Engagement sessions were held with a range of employers in 2020 and 2021 including:

- ParaMed Home Health Care Services
- Zedd Customer Solutions
- LeVert
- Hinduja Global Solutions Canada (HGS)
- Ontario Security Hub
- Carlton Security Group – operator 1
- Physically Handicapped Adults' Rehabilitation Association (PHARA)
- Home Instead

1.2.1.8 Strategic Program Development by Target Group

The GTW Employment Database continues to be used in Nipissing to complete targeted searches to help inform decision making around program delivery and services. For instance, through the database and Tableau we can search for clients who meet specific parameters by filtering the data. This has been especially useful in the context of employment services. Examples include;

- Sector Specific training programs including Personal Support Worker initiatives: The caseload was filtered to screen for candidates that have a secondary school diploma or equivalent, no criminal record, no significant barriers to employment and are job ready or preparing for employment.
- Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program: The caseload was filtered to identify a potential candidate pool that has a secondary school diploma or equivalent, job ready or preparing for employment and has answered no to the questions around significant barriers. From this candidate pool targeted communications are sent out to participate in Information Sessions hosted by Canadore and DNSSAB to promote the program. It is important to note that we also recruit participants for the program through direct referrals.

The examples above specifically highlight how we have utilized the database to identify candidates to participate in workshops, initiatives and programs. The database has also been used to improve our service delivery model by identifying vulnerable populations to connect them to additional supports and services. For instance, through a search in the database, it was identified that in Nipissing District, 29% of recipients self-declared a criminal record. Of those recipients only 20% were deemed “job ready” based on the employability assessment as illustrated below in Figure 7 and 8.



Figure 7

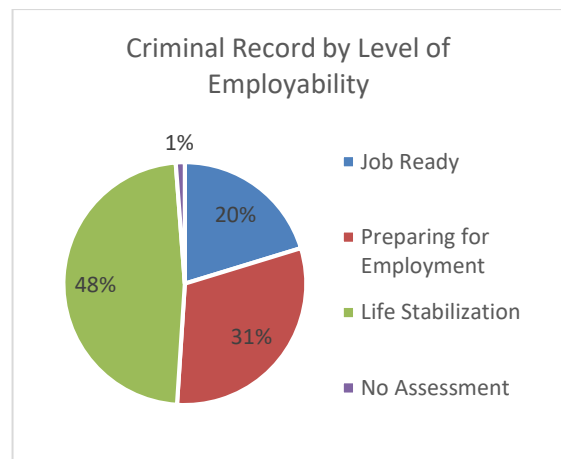
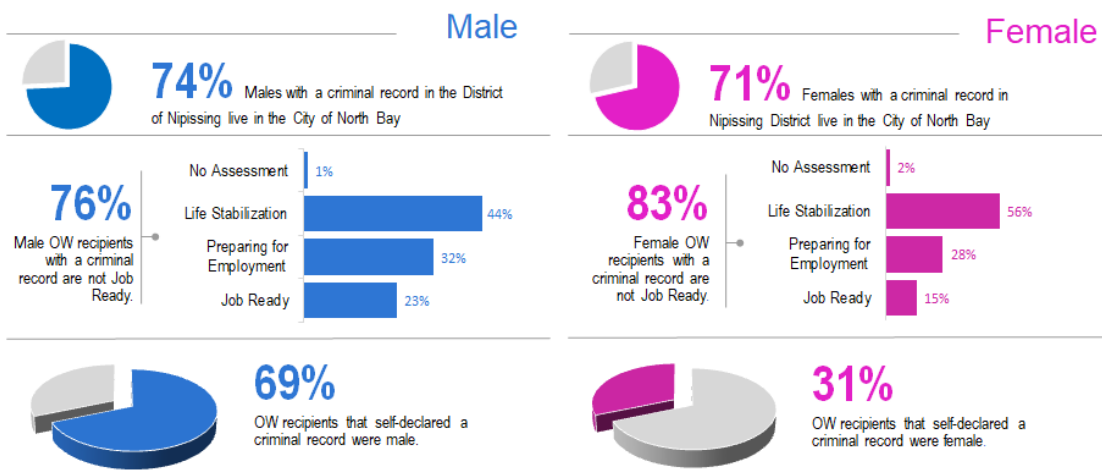


Figure 8

*Snapshots above taken November 17, 2020 from the Employment Database

People who have a criminal record often face a number of challenges and barriers including but not limited to social isolation, physical or mental health, addiction, victimization, negative peer influence, skills deficits, low levels of education, unstable housing, limited employment opportunities and damaged relationships resulting in limited personal support networks. Gaps in service, waitlists and program efficacy can create additional challenges. When social assistance recipients have a criminal record they also have to cope with the challenges associated to living on a fixed income and the associated poverty. Given the vulnerability of this population, additional analysis was completed using the Employment Database. As illustrated below in Figure 9, the majority of recipients that self-declared a criminal record, both male and female, lived in the City of North Bay. Additionally, 76% of male recipients and 83% of female recipients with a criminal record were not considered to be job ready.



*Snapshot above taken November 17, 2020 from the Employment Database

This data analysis resulted in community partner engagement and the development of new local strategies to improve outcomes for recipients with a criminal record. There are two initiatives currently underway.

1. **Social Justice Pilot:** In Nipissing, two Case Managers have been designated to pilot a specialized caseload comprised of OW recipients recently released from incarceration or who have a history of incarceration with the purpose of improving access to social assistance upon release and providing a more coordinated approach to internal and external supports in an effort to address needs and barriers. The pilot was designed to:
 - Promote individuals to complete an OW application up to 10 days prior to release to provide more financial stability upon release
 - Re-route incoming applications to designated Case Managers in an effort to create a consistent point of contact
 - Create best practices and build on existing partnerships to negotiate more effective and holistic case plans to address barriers and influence positive outcomes
 - Assist eligible participants with record suspension applications (pardon)

2. **Community Based Re-Entry Program Proposal in partnership with True Self – Debwewendizwin Program:** DNSSAB and True Self collaborated on an application for funding under the Social Development Partnerships Program – Children and Families – Financial Empowerment through Employment and Social Development Canada in the spring of 2021. The proposal was submitted by True Self to seek funding to support a re-entry program to address barriers and increase the level of employability of social assistance recipients who have been recently released from incarceration or who have a criminal record. Through collaboration and partnerships among a range of human service providers, participants will be provided with individualized supports, services and learning opportunities with the ultimate goal of connecting them to sustainable employment thereby reducing the motivation to re-offend.

1.2.1.9 Enhanced Transitional Support Case Manager (TSCM) Team

In response to the number of clients declaring mental health and addiction issues as barriers to employment, three Transitional Support Case Manager (TSCM) positions were created in 2018. TSCM’s manage a caseload

like a regular Ontario Works Case Manager but they come to the position with the education, experience and expertise to work with individuals struggling with mental health and addiction. In 2020, a fourth TSCM position was created followed by a fifth TSCM position in 2021. Please note that these positions were not increases to the overall staffing complement. The positions were created by re-profiling vacancies as they became available. It should also be noted that staff movement and position vacancies on the TSCM team have created some challenges that have resulted in the delay of building the fifth TSCM caseload.

The decision to increase the number of TSCM positions within our Case Management compliment has largely been informed by data from the Employment Database. Figure 10 below illustrates that of the 1537 recipients who have completed the new employment assessment in the database, 823 or 54% have self-declared a mental health, addiction or both a mental health and addiction issue as a barrier to employment. It is important to note that as these barriers are being self-declared it is believed that the true number of social assistance recipients struggling with some or all of the barriers listed is likely much higher.

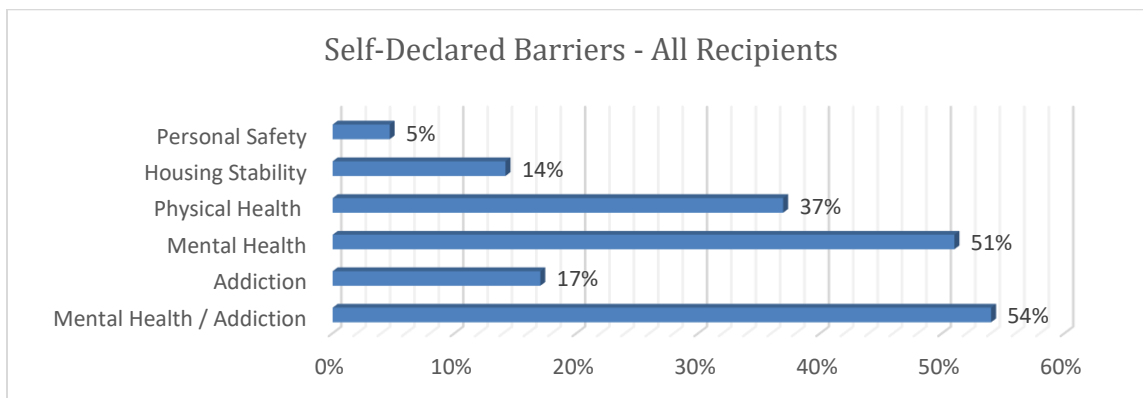


Figure 10

Snapshot taken from the Employment Database August 16, 2021

The TSCM team currently serves 230 of the most vulnerable recipients connected to Ontario Works in Nipissing District. An internal referral and screening process ensures that benefit units with recipients that have the highest needs relating to mental health and addiction are served by this team. Recipients that have completed the employment assessment and are connected to a TSCM have self-declared a significant number of barriers. As displayed in Figure 11 below, 83% of recipients connected to a benefit unit managed by a TSCM have self-declared mental health and 50% have self-declared addiction as a barrier to employment.

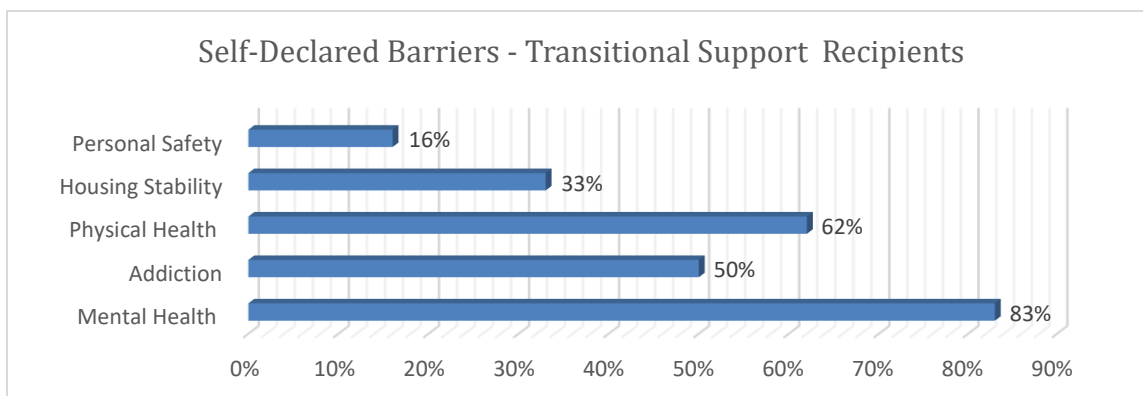


Figure 11

Snapshot taken from the Employment Database August 16, 2021

1.2.1.10 Preventative Dental Care Pilot Project

As reported in the previous Service Plan, in April 2018, Nipissing OW entered into an Agreement with the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit on a pilot project to deliver preventative/emergency dental care to OW clients and ODSP dependent adults. Like most other services the pandemic has impacted this initiative however services will resume as soon as it is safe to do so. By proactively addressing dental issues prior to them becoming emergencies, over the long term, the goal of the Pilot is to decrease spending on emergency dental and dentures and improve social assistance recipient's employment opportunities and overall health outcomes. This Pilot further seeks to decrease the number of OW and ODSP participating adults accessing emergency rooms and walk-in clinic resources for dental related issues.

Overall, the Pilot has been a success with **395** procedures being administered to 138 clients since the onset of the initiative. Complaints from Ontario Works recipients having difficulty connecting with emergency dental care have been greatly reduced. However, as services have not been available during the pandemic, DNSSAB's Social Services continues to receive reports that recipients continue to be denied emergency dental services in various municipalities throughout the District. It is believed that stigma, no shows and low dental rates are the primary factors driving this unacceptable gap in the system.

1.2.2 Enhanced Coordination and Collaboration between Ontario Works and ODSP

Nipissing OW continues to have a positive working relationship with the Ontario Disability Support Program. Due to the inherent overlaps in program delivery, ongoing coordination and communication has been essential. The following represents a few of the key areas where ODSP and OW intersect:

- **ODSP Discretionary Benefits:** In April 2019, an updated OW/ODSP Discretionary Benefit policy was implemented in an effort to open up the eligibility criteria as it was identified that the previous policy was too restrictive. Upon review, additional amendments were made to the policy in May 2021. Most significantly, the maximum allowable benefit amount was increased from \$300 to \$500. The changes to the local policy were followed by a shift in our internal processes in July 2021 to streamline all incoming ODSP discretionary requests for the District through our intake team. This change was made in an effort to increase consistency and to allow us to better monitor ODSP discretionary expenditures to ensure that the revised policy achieves the intended outcomes within the established budget.
- **ODSP Participating in OW:** Participation planning continues to occur with ODSP non-disabled spouses and dependent adults that have mandatory OW participation requirements along with voluntary ODSP applicants who choose to participate in OW activities. There are presently 50 ODSP recipients participating in OW activities. This number is expected to increase when the employment transformation is complete.
- **ODSP File Transfer:** The local file transfer process is based on the Ministry job aid available on the SA Extranet. The digitization of master files as part of the Electronic Document Management (EDM) initiative has created additional efficiencies within the file transfer process. Access to electronic files in SAMS has eliminated the need to courier hard copy files.
- **Joint Protocols:** The ODSP/OW Joint Protocol document is currently in draft and in process of being finalized due to recent changes to local policies around ODSP discretionary benefits and to tighten

up processes around letters, note templates and non-compliance. Joint Protocols also cover the following;

- Employment Related Benefits for ODSP recipients participating in the OW program.
 - OW Discretionary Vision Care for ODSP Dependent Adults.
 - OW Discretionary Dental for ODSP Dependent Adults.
 - ODSP Funerals.
- **Employment Database:** The employment database was designed to help us manage our ODSP participating in OW cases and allow us to screen eligible candidates from this participant group for training and employment opportunities. Unfortunately, with the last enhancement, we have not been able to keep some of these cases in open status due to the interface with SAMS. Work is underway to resolve this issue. In the meantime we continue to maintain a spreadsheet of active ODSP participating in OW cases.
 - **Office Sharing:** Prior to the pandemic, there was a regular ODSP presence in DNSSAB satellite offices in Sturgeon Falls and Mattawa in an effort to better serve recipients in these locations. In response to the pandemic, our satellite offices have remained closed to the public and services have been offered remotely. Due to the positive response to this initiative in the past, we anticipate that once our satellite offices re-open that this initiative will resume.

1.2.3 Enhanced Coordination and Communication with Employment Ontario

Nipissing OW as a long standing positive relationship with Employment Ontario (EO) providers throughout the District. As noted in the previous Service Plan, through consultation and collaboration with EO service providers Nipissing implemented a centralized external referral tracking process to assist with the monitoring and measurement of outcomes. This process also simplified and centralized communication making it easier for both Nipissing and EO service providers to effectively connect. The process further allows OW and EO to compare data with respect to referral numbers which can then be used to inform decision making around program planning and service delivery. Social Services also has long standing referral protocols with several other EO service providers to streamline processes to better support clients.

In an effort to further demonstrate Nipissing's commitment to engaging with EO service providers, in Mattawa and pre-pandemic, Nipissing has provided YES Employment Services (EO service provider) from North Bay with office space as there is no public transportation available for clients to access services located in the larger centre. Nipissing views this sharing of space to be a best practice and will seize opportunities when they arise to deliver services at the same site especially in the outlying areas where transportation is a significant barrier to employment. Further, in 2019, senior management from both OW and YES Employment formed a new small working group that meets regularly to collaborate on common issues to develop high level strategies on how to be proactive and creative to best meet client needs. The pandemic interrupted the work of this group but this work will resume in the near future.

Social Services also continues to be an active member of the Nipissing Employment Services Table (NEST) that is comprised of local EO employment and training service providers along with other key stakeholders. The group regularly shares program updates and ideas during bi-monthly meetings. These meetings moved to a

virtual format during the pandemic. The work of the NEST ensures that all employment service providers are on the same page and up-to-date on what is available locally to support clients in need of employment related services and supports. Members of the NEST also successfully collaborate and coordinate on the hosting of various employment related events such as local job fairs. Details related to the vision, mission, scope and purpose of the NEST can be seen below.

Vision:

All job seekers and employers in the District of Nipissing experience improved co-ordinated access to the full range of employment and training supports resulting in sustainable employment.

Mission: To

- Facilitate communication and collaboration among service agencies and within the community
- Identify gaps and duplications in employment service delivery;
- Improve employer engagement resulting in increased employment participation rates;
- Ensure long term sustainable employment outcomes across Nipissing District;
- Foster an enhanced understanding of social inclusion and acceptance issues among employers, stakeholders and the Nipissing District population at large and:
- Promote and celebrate diversity, integration, and equality of opportunity throughout the workplaces of our community.

Scope: To

The Nipissing District Employment Services Table:

- Work with employers, stakeholders, and the Nipissing District population to identify and overcome socio-economic and cultural barriers to employment;
- Recognize, collaborate, and produce coordinated action plans which address the issues and challenges marginalized groups face when entering the labour market; and
- Actively support and encourage social inclusion and integration throughout the various workplaces in the Nipissing District;

Purpose:

The Nipissing District Employment Services Table:

- Defines and addresses the needs and issues related to employment services and training by working collaboratively to find solutions
- Provides a forum where the voices of employment service providers can participate in developing and improving the service network

1.3 LEVERAGE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the information provided above in section 1.2.3, Nipissing OW continues to seize every opportunity to collaborate with economic development organizations in order to leverage provincial investments and the expertise of community partners. During the previous cycle, in **October 2020**, a new “task force” was developed with the City of North Bay’s Economic Development department along with YES Employment Services, the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce and the Labour Market Group, who is one of the provinces 26 workforce planning boards. The purpose of this newly formed planning table is for

the senior leadership of each organization to focus on “up-stream” thinking to ensure that the District is adequately prepared for the challenges facing the region and the changes happening in both sectors. The pandemic interrupted the work of this group however the commitment remains to resume discussions in the near future.

In addition to the “task force” noted above on September 24th, 2021, Nipissing OW along with other key stakeholders attended an engagement session hosted by the North Bay Economic Development department. Other attendees at the session were the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce, YES Employment, the Labour Market Group, Nipissing University and Canadore College. The purpose of the meeting was to collaborate and identify gaps between the needs of local employers and the available labour supply and collectively develop innovative pathways to curb the current workforce crisis in the District of Nipissing. The outcome of this engagement was to form a new “task force” to develop and implement key strategies aimed at educating and supporting local employers.

Further to the activities described above, the Manager of Planning, Outcomes and Analytics regularly compiles and disseminates information and data such as monthly labour force data from the national Labour Force Survey (Statistics Canada) and other information relevant to economic growth and development for key stakeholders inclusive of economic development organizations.

1.4 DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN LOCAL COMMUNITY SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS

The old adage of it “takes a village” absolutely applies to the work of the human service sector and Nipissing OW is well aware that it cannot meet the diverse needs of the caseload on its own. While some individuals may only have a few stops to make along the service continuum, others may have several with many encountering setbacks along the way. For this reason, over the years partnerships with numerous community partners have been built to ensure that participants have access to a robust selection of internal and external employment services. In order to be effective, every opportunity to take advantage of integration, leverage partnerships and plan collaboratively are seized to better meet the complex needs of clients. In many cases this collaboration grows into more formal agreements and/or protocols that clarify roles and responsibilities.

OW recipients living in poverty often have complex needs and require a wide range of supports and services. As such, Nipissing OW continues to seek cross-sector collaborations and participates on a range of committees and working groups. This work provides an opportunity to build partnerships, advocate for people living in poverty and develop strategies to improve service delivery. In addition to the partnerships developed and described under Section 1.2 – Improving Client Outcomes, the following provides descriptions of other local partnerships that enhance Nipissing OW’s services to provide a more holistic wraparound approach to the achievement of outcomes.

Given that poverty intersects with so many other human services mandates Nipissing OW has invested time and resources over the years into community partnership development, participation and maintenance. As shown in Table 2, Nipissing is well represented at community tables and committees throughout the district.

Table 2

Social Issue	Committee / Working Group	Other Partnerships and Referral Protocols
Food Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nipissing and Area Food Charter Working Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Food Banks and Churches
Indigenous / Metis Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Action Circle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Friendship Centre Metis Nation of Ontario True Self - Debwewendizwin
Addiction and Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Bay and Area Drug Strategy Committee Mental Health and Addictions Systems Table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People for Equal Partnership in Mental Health North Bay Recovery Home
Violence Against Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee of Nipissing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amelia Rising Sexual Violence Support Centre
Human Trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nipissing Human Trafficking Knowledge Network (NHTKN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Bay Police Services
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nipissing Employment Services Table (NEST) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Centre (Self-Employment) Employment Options YES Employment Services Temagami / Bonfield Libraries (Employment related photocopies) March of Dimes Agilec (South Algonquin) Get Trained Workers Business After Hours (Chamber of Commerce)
Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy Service Provider Table NPREP Working Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canadore College CTS Canadian Career College Northern College Nipissing University College Boreal St. Johns Ambulance Algonquin Safety and Training
Housing and Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nipissing District Homelessness and Housing Partnership (NDHHP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nipissing Mental Health Housing and Support Services Low Income People Involvement of Nipissing Women's Shelters throughout district Crisis Centre Low Barrier Shelter
Newcomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No targeted committee/table at this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Bay and District Multicultural

	time.	Centre
Family Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No targeted committee/table at this time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s Aid Society Family Enrichment
Legal / Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No targeted committee/table at this time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Bay Jail Nipissing Legal Clinic Legal Aid Ontario
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Service Worker Program Advisory Committee (Canadore) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ID Clinic – Crisis Centre

1.5 STRENGTHEN PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY

The Ministry continues to refine program controls to improve delivery and financial accountability. The following represents the strategies and business processes being utilized by Nipissing OW to ensure program compliance and integrity.

1.5.1 Compliance with Eligibility Verification Process (EVP) Expectations

Nipissing OW has designated 2 EVP Case Managers and established the following processes outlined in Table 3 below to ensure program expectations are met.

Table 3

Supervisor	EVP Case Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigns case audits to the designated EVP Case Managers upon receiving the audit plans Conducts file reviews on EVP cases each month for quality assurance Monitors monthly reports including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRS 350 EVP Activity Report CRS 440 EVP Performance Report CRS 580M EVP YTD Statistics Report EVP Monthly Performance Summary Report Participates in EVP Community of Practice Meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews the audit within the first week of assignment Requests the information from the client according to the CIVRS report within a 2 week period If information is submitted in a timely manner, make the necessary changes to the evidence and close the audit with an outcome If information is not received in a timely manner, the file is suspended at the end of the first 30 days of assignment until the information is received. If the information is not received, the file is closed on the last day of the 60 day cycle If an OW file that was closed for EVP reasons needs to be reinstated within a 6 month period, the original EVP auditor will reinstate the file in order to complete the EVP requirements.

As illustrated in Figure 12 below, with the exception of 2020, Nipissing OW has been able to complete EVP reviews from time of identification well within 60 days. The increase in time it took to complete EVP reviews in 2020 is a result of delays for clients to obtain and submit information during the pandemic. It should also be noted that MCCSS put a hold on EVP effective March 2020. Nipissing OW opted to resume EVP reviews in

July 2020 but initially chose not to suspend files for missing information. File suspensions have since resumed but greater flexibility around timelines to submit information continues to be practiced locally due to the pandemic. This change has brought our average time from identification to completion down to an average of 53 days which is an improvement from 2020 but still about 10 days higher than 2018 and 2019.

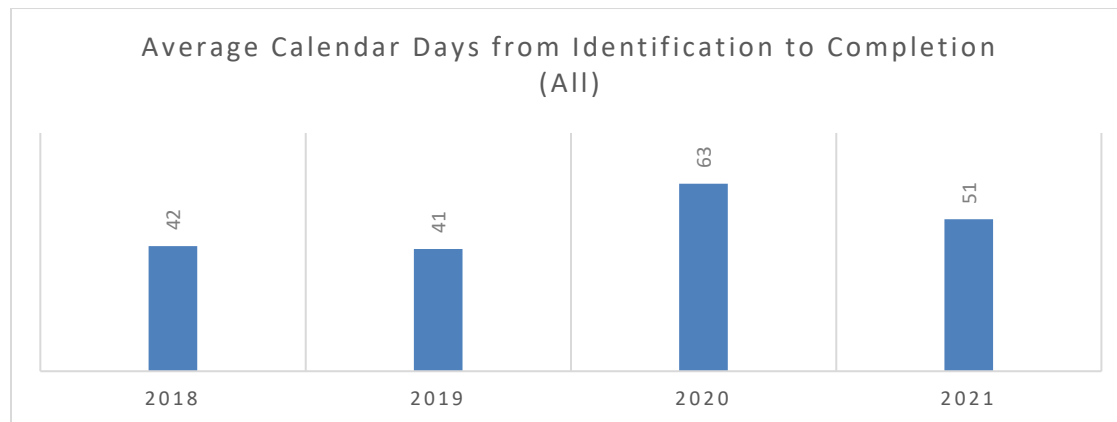


Figure 12

EVP Monthly Performance Summary - updated September 2, 2021.

1.5.2 Removal of In-Year Adjustments to Contracted Employment Outcomes

The removal of in-year adjustments on contracted employment outcomes has created an even riskier fiscal operating environment for CMSM's and DSSAB's. By removing all flexibility in-year to respond to significant changes in the local labour market or broader regional economy, CMSM's and DSSAB's are at a significant disadvantage with respect to meeting targeted achievements. The pandemic is an excellent example of how an unexpected event can impact outcomes. While ensuring that targets are always set in accordance to historical trends and available data, there is no perfect science available to predict yearly average achievements. While the Province has demonstrated some flexibility in setting targets for CMSM's and DSSAB's who experienced a negative increase between 2019 and 2020, this may or may not be enough to shield service providers from funding reductions in the current cycle. Further, as the continued availability of federal benefits has resulted in a change in the composition of the caseload with respect to the number of "job ready" participants available to connect with employment, the achievement of outcomes has become more difficult. While this is expected to change, it will continue to impact outcomes for the foreseeable future.

1.5.3 Oversight Intelligence Activities to Prevent and Reduce Financial Losses

Nipissing prefers to take a proactive versus a reactive approach to preventing and reducing financial losses. Program integrity, oversight, accountability and transparency continue to be high priority areas for Nipissing OW and DNSSAB in general. Program oversight includes a range of activities such as monthly file reviews by Supervisors and the monitoring and analysis of various Cognos and financial reports, along with various other data sources.

Nipissing OW created a Program Compliance Specialist (PCS) position in 2020 in an effort to enhance program oversight and accountability. The creation of this position allowed us to centralize key functions including managing overpayments on terminated cases, complex fraud investigations, repayment agreements,

restitution orders and family support. While Ontario Works Supervisors continue to be primarily responsible for Internal Reviews and Social Benefit Tribunal hearings, the PCS is able to support this process.

In an effort to improve local processes around overpayment recovery, Nipissing OW is in the process of expanding repayment and reimbursement options for social assistance recipients. A debit machine has been installed in our North Bay office and staff will begin accepting debit payments in the coming weeks. Additionally, Nipissing OW is in the process of being set up as an online payee to allow for online reimbursements and repayments. It is anticipated that increasing payment options will positively impact the process of negotiating repayment agreements on terminated cases with overpayments.

Fraud prevention and control mechanisms are also in place to ensure that unrecovered sources of income are being pursued, overpayments are being recovered and to prevent the misuse of financial assistance. Since the last service plan, Nipissing strengthened local policies and processes around pay directs to landlord and verification of shelter expenses. In situations of non-payment of rent, pay directs to landlords are used in an effort to stabilize housing. From a prevention standpoint, when pay directs are used appropriately, they can reduce the risk of homelessness and the need to rely on community resources like emergency shelters or client benefit programs like the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative.

While it is the responsibility of the OW Director to ensure program expenditures are within budget, it is essentially the finance department who carries much of the responsibility and work for ensuring that the integrity of the financial information being presented to the Ministry, through subsidy claims, submissions and quarterly reports, are accurate and reflect actual expenditures. Various detailed spreadsheets are utilized extensively by finance staff to assist with the reconciliation process. All financial information is presented in accordance to generally accepted accounting principles issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board. DNSSAB's approach to reporting financial information to the Ministry, the Board and the public has been to ensure transparency at all levels.

DNSSAB also has corporate policies aimed at increasing accountability and ensuring that consistent practices are being used to govern DNSSAB business. Examples include the DNSSAB Purchasing Policy and the DNSSAB Disposal of Assets Policy which were both revised in 2021.

DNSSAB's Contract Management Specialist position continues to be responsible for developing and maintaining the contract management system to ensure all contracts have been properly executed, are in compliance with the contract terms and conditions, and remain current. These contracts include property, capital and operating leases, purchased service agreements and settlements. The position liaises with legal counsel when required in developing, negotiating and managing contracts and is directly involved in resolving contract disputes. In addition to contract management this position also works closely with the DNSSAB management team to provide support and expertise in the formal bid/purchasing processes of goods and services for the organization. This position also develops, implements and provides oversight of a contract management system and associated policies and procedures to ensure contracts are well within regulatory guidelines and requirements.

Table 4 below summarizes program oversight activities that are utilized by DNSSAB to prevent and reduce financial losses.

	FUNCTION	TOOLS/ACTIVITY
PROGRAM OVERSIGHT	Program Monitoring	Social Assistance Operations Performance Reports Cognos Reports Client Surveys Manual trackers Social Assistance Extranet data Prairie Fyre Reports to track intake activity Alignment of Strategic Plan with Program Mandates Subsidy Claim Guide
	Staff Competency	Annual Competency Based Performance Reviews Ongoing staff training on both financial and employment assistance Continuous Learning and Professional Development Opportunities Talent Management Plan Succession Planning to ensure transfer of knowledge Employment Suitability Testing as part of interview process
	Risk Management	Dedicated EVP Team effective April 2017 Strategic Plan/Mission/Vision Clear Local OW, HR and Board Policies Standardized Operational Procedures Monthly File Reviews by Supervisors Review of detailed monthly financial expenditure reports Document Management Protocols Dedicated position to records management Board engagement for direction on high level decisions Approval Escalation Processes Strong Contract Management processes including multiple sign offs by DNSSAB authorities Separation of Duty Processes Detailed HR Policies to clarify expectations Internal Whistleblower Policy Internal Purchasing Policy Internal Reviews and Social Benefit Tribunals completed by Supervisor Strict adherence to third party request and MFIPPA processes New Program Compliance Specialist position New Ontario Works Data Coordinator position
	Program Reporting and Accountability	Monthly Board Reports MCSS Reporting Board Reports posted on DNSSAB website to ensure transparency Case Managers and the Program Compliance Specialist continue to pursue all potential sources of income (spousal support, EI, WSIB etc.) New Policy and Process on Pay Direct to Landlords Monitoring to ensure fraud allegation investigations have been completed and outcomes are documented

		Monitoring Overpayment recovery rates Monitoring to ensure Ad Hoc reports are complete
	Technology	Use of Tableau (business intelligence software) Creation of dashboards that highlight trends, decreases, increases.

1.5.4 Documentation requirements for OW Benefits that are Managed Outside of SAMS

All Ontario Works benefits are managed within SAMS with the exception of dollars expensed to third parties through Service Agreements primarily for employment services.

The following list represents the initiatives that were funded outside of SAMS during the previous cycle:

- North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce – 100 Jobs Pilot (funded in 2019 not 2020)
- North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce – Get Trained Workers Program
- Clark Communications – Get Trained Workers Employment Database
- North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit – Dental Pilot
- Canadore College – Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program (N-Prep)

2.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN



The scan that follows includes analysis of the previous planning cycle performance, summary census demographics for Nipissing District (see Appendices), a general description of the local OW caseload, and labour force and industry information and analysis.

2.1 SERVICE DELIVERY

2.1.1 Analyses of Previous Planning Cycle

It would be good news story if the primary reason for the significant decrease in the Ontario Works caseload during the previous cycle was due to an increase in the number of social assistance recipients connecting to the labour market. The truth is that while many social assistance recipients did connect to employment during the previous cycle, the depth of the decrease is more closely tied to the pandemic and the federal response to it.

Table 5 below illustrates the points allocated and earned in year one and two of the previous cycle. As you can see, Nipissing OW earned 1800 points by the end of year one. This was an exceptional achievement and it was believed at the time that this placed Nipissing OW in a favorable position moving into the second year. However, the impact of the pandemic in the first quarter of 2020 altered this prediction. While Nipissing has always met its targets, the end of 2020 would mark the first time it fell short on its achievements. As you can see in year two, only 100 points were earned. Therefore, Nipissing OW’s overall achievement over the two year cycle was 1900 points on the required 2000. Thankfully, this 100 point shortfall did not result in a claw back on funding due to MCCSS suspending financial penalties on the underachievement of outcomes in recognition of the impact of the pandemic.

Outcome Measure	Points Allocated Year 1	Points Earned Year 1 (2X Points)	Points Allocated Year 2	Points Earned Year 2 (2X Points)	Total Points for 2 Year Cycle
Average Monthly Employment Earnings Per Case	200	200 (partial points)	100	100 (partial points)	300
Percentage of Caseload with Employment Earnings	0	0	100	0	0
Percentage of Terminations Exiting to Employment	400	800	400	0	800
Percentage of Caseload Exiting to Employment	400	800	400	0	800
Total Points	1000	1800	1000	100	1900 (100 point shortfall)

Table 5

The series of charts that follow in this section illustrate Nipissing OW’s performance relative to the achievement of targets for the previous 2019-2020 service planning cycle, cross referenced with the onset of the pandemic on the following four outcome measures:

- Average Monthly Employment Earnings Per Case
- Percentage of Caseload with Employment Earnings
- Percentage of Terminations Exiting to Employment
- Percentage of Caseload Exiting to Employment

Figure 13 below illustrates the first measure to be reviewed is **Measure 1 - Average Amount of Employment Earnings for Participants with Earnings**.



Figure 13

As shown, in the first year of the cycle the lowest level achieved on this Measure was in May 2019 (\$812), with the highest level being achieved in December 2019 (\$918). The year-to-date average was \$865 on a

forecasted targeted achievement of \$868. For the second year of the cycle the lowest level achieved was in May 2020 (\$766), with the highest level being achieved in November 2020 (\$974). The year-to-date average was \$880 on a targeted achievement of \$891.

Of the four outcome measures, this measure was impacted the least by the pandemic. As you can see achievements on this measure rebounded quickly following the onset of the pandemic bringing achievements back up and above the 2019 average by year end. Achievements did fluctuate but not as significantly as fluctuations observed on the other three measures. This is not surprising. As noted in previous Service Plans it is harder to influence this measure through service delivery methodologies alone.

Case Managers continue to encourage their clients to approach their employers for increases in their hours and/or wage rates. However, as we know this measure is heavily impacted by unfavorable economic conditions, these efforts are most often not successful. If clients are working part time, Case Managers encourage the person to seek an additional part time opportunity. However, coordinating two or more part time jobs to make ends meet, especially when there are children in the benefit unit can be extremely difficult. Transportation and/or childcare related needs can often be barriers when trying to secure full time hours through part time work. One-to-one employment counseling, marketing clients to higher paying employment opportunities through employment placements, investing in clients through skills development opportunities, encouraging networking, and utilizing community placements when appropriate, are all strategies that can improve outcomes on this measure.

The increasing trends in part time employment and/or prevalence of minimum wage jobs also impacts achievements on this Measure. Further, outcomes are also impacted by the skill and education level of job ready clients on the caseload at any given time in relation to the employment opportunities offering higher wage rates.

Figure 14 below now illustrates overall performance relative to the achievement of targets for the previous planning cycle on **Measure 2 –Percentage of Caseload with Employment Income:**



Figure 14

As shown, in the first year of the cycle the lowest level achieved on this measure was in February 2019 (12.14%), with the highest level being achieved in August 2019 (15.55%). The year-to-date average was 13.85%. As DNSSAB did not target this measure in the first year of the cycle there was no impact on overall outcomes.

The overall lowest average achievement in the second year of the cycle (2020) was in June (4.89%) with the highest level being achieved in January 2020 (14.27%). The year-to-date average was 8.96% on a forecasted targeted achievement of 14.27%. As illustrated it can be observed that in the month following the onset of the pandemic outcomes were significantly impacted and achievements plummeted recovering a bit towards the latter part of the year. This recovery however did not bring Nipissing OW even close to the target.

Again, we know it is the impact of the pandemic on the economy that has negatively influenced achievements on this measure. Further, as you will see later on in this Plan, due to the availability of federal benefits, in Nipissing the number of job ready clients dropped significantly likely because employable people impacted by the pandemic did not need Ontario Works assistance during this period. This has changed the overall demographic of the caseload reducing the number of job ready participants.

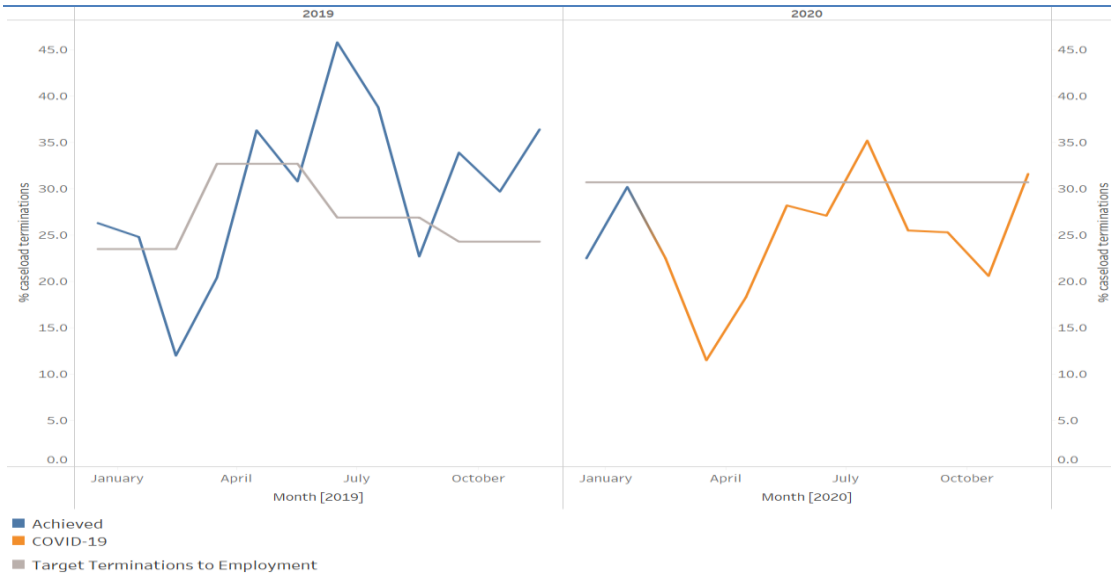
As recovery has been slow this impact continues. In year two work to influence this measure shifted to virtual delivery; a method that has achieved mixed results. During this period employment service delivery was simply less effective and fewer clients attached to the labour market. Examples of strategies utilized pre-pandemic to influence this measure are as follows. Please note that most of these activities remain suspended due to the pandemic, are virtually delivered and/or have significantly decreased with far fewer outcomes.

- Community and Employment Placements (**suspended**)
- Internally delivered one-to-one employment counselling and employment workshops (**virtual**)
- Referrals to community partners (**decreased**)
- Partnership with the North Bay Chamber of Commerce on the Get Trained Workers Program and 100 Jobs Pilot (**decreased**)
- Partnership with Canadore College on connecting clients to post-secondary education (N-PREP) as a pathway out of poverty. (**decreased**)
- Use of the locally developed Get Trained Workers employment database and assessment tool to match clients with available job opportunities. (**decreased**)

Maximizing the use of the employment supports and benefits available under the Ontario Works program continue to be promoted to set clients up for success. Although these efforts have proven to be effective more work is required to develop strategies to help clients facing more significant barriers that go beyond poverty and unemployment. As you will see later on in this Plan new strategies are either in development or underway to improve the employability of targeted populations. Like the employment measures, the overall effectiveness of current service delivery strategies on this Measure can often be skewed by client's not submitting income reporting statements after they have secured employment and received their first pay.

Figure 15 below now illustrates overall performance relative to the achievement of targets for the previous planning cycle on **Measure 3 – Percentage of Terminations Exiting to Employment**.

Figure 15



Like previous years, achievements on this measure demonstrate extreme volatility. As shown, in the first year of the cycle the lowest level achieved on this measure was in March 2019 (11.97%) with the highest level being recorded at four times that number in July 2019 (45.81%). The year-to-date average was 29.83% on a forecasted targeted achievement of 26.84%. For the second year of the cycle, the lowest level achieved was in April 2020 (11.46%), with the highest level being achieved in August (35.21%). The year-to-date average was 24.89% on a forecasted targeted achievement of 30.72%.

As you can see, in both years of the cycle, achievements plummeted in March/April and then recovered. While some of this may be related to seasonal employment ending, it is clear that the pandemic in year two impacted the depth of the decrease on outcomes on this measure. Overall the trend line on this measure year over year is similar following regular seasonable fluctuations. However, 2020 achievements are much lower in comparison.

In addition to the pandemic and as explained in previous Service Plans but remains relevant is that achievements on this measure continue to be greatly impacted by the following:

1. Outcomes for clients that have secured employment but do not submit an income reporting statement are hidden in other termination reasons such as “failure to submit IRS” rather than “voluntary withdrawal Employed”
2. Earnings/Flat Rate exemptions that allow social assistance recipients to earn more and remain eligible for Ontario Works
3. Changes to how self-employment income is treated

Efforts to increase the employability of clients are the focus of both the case management and employment teams. Like measure 2, Percentage of Caseload with Employment Income, pre-pandemic Community and Employment Placements, one-to-one employment counselling, workshops, referrals to community partners along with other local employment initiatives like the Get Trained Workers program and the 100 Jobs Pilot continue to be utilized to increase the employability of clients. Maximizing the use of the employment supports and benefits available under the Ontario Works Program are also promoted to ensure that clients have what they need to assist them as they transition from social assistance dependency to self-sufficiency through employment.

Figure 16 below now illustrates overall performance relative to the achievement of targets for the previous planning cycle on **Measure 4 – Percentage of Caseload Exiting to Employment**.

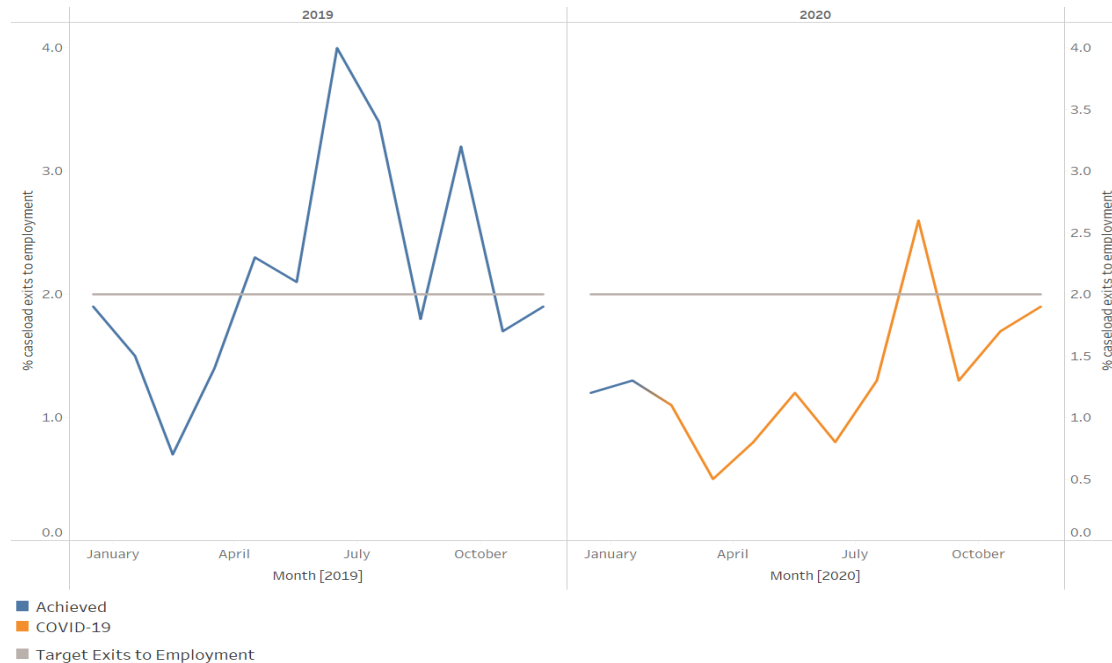


Figure 16

As shown, in the first year of the cycle (2019) the lowest level achieved on this measure was in March (0.68%), with the highest level achieved at almost six times that number in July (4.02%). The year-to-date average was 2.16% on a forecasted targeted achievement of 2.04%.

In the second year of the cycle (2020) the lowest level achieved was in April (.54%), with the highest level recorded at five times that number in September (2.62%). The year-to-date average was 1.31% on a forecasted targeted achievement of 2.22%. Like employment measure 3, Percentage of Terminations Exiting to Employment, this measure continues to reveal similar volatility with respect to the achievement of outcomes.

As this measure appears to be impacted by the same strategies, data integrity issues and poverty reduction changes noted above under Measure 3 strategies on how to influence outcomes will not be repeated here.

2.1.2 External Influences: PEST (Political, Economic, Social, Technological)

The PEST framework continues to be useful for considering external environmental factors that DNSSAB has little, or no control over but which, could influence OW operations, direction, performance, and outcomes, during the two-year service plan period. The onset of the global pandemic in March 2020 had a significant impact on OW operations and altered the course of the previous service plan – it will continue to influence operations and this plan into 2022 and beyond. The pandemic also influences the PEST analysis given its far-reaching impact across each of the PEST components:

Political

- Governments around the world were forced to respond to the pandemic with many declaring a state of emergency. This has altered most political agendas and mandates as governments scrambled to try

to contain the COVID-19 virus while also supporting businesses and citizens. At the time of this writing, the federal and provincial governments are still consumed by the pandemic with the focus now on recovery.

- The previous service plan referred to the government's intention to reform social assistance and transform Employment Ontario, which was subsequently put on hold due to the pandemic. Just recently (June 10, 2021) the province announced it is 'introducing streamlined employment supports' which will include combining OW & ODSP employment programs into Employment Ontario. While the details of this major policy change are still unknown it will have a substantial impact on local OW operations during this planning period.

Economic /Fiscal

- The economic impact of COVID-19 on the spend side has been enormous. According to the Government of Canada's Fiscal Monitor (March 2021) the government posted a budget deficit of \$314 billion for fiscal 2020-21 (compared to \$21.8 billion for fiscal 2019-20). This reflects the severe economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and the government's emergency Economic Response Plan to support Canadians and businesses facing hardship during the pandemic.
- The government financial support (above) has provided emergency pandemic relief for businesses and households. For example, according to Statistics Canada businesses in all sectors were supported through at least one of the federal CEWS, CEBA, or CECRA programs. In the first six months of the pandemic, businesses on average, had received \$83,000 in government support. The government programs also compensated for lost wages and salaries across all household income levels during the initial pandemic outbreak and lockdowns.
- Coming out of the pandemic and turning towards recovery, many economists and think tanks are expecting strong economic growth this year and into the next. As just one estimate, the Conference Board of Canada is forecasting an unprecedented 6.7% growth in real GDP this year followed by 4.4% in 2022.
- In keeping with the above, as Ontario starts to reopen the economy an upsurge in economic activity is also expected followed by a slower, gradual recovery pace.

Social

- It has become evident throughout the pandemic that COVID-19 has affected marginalized populations disproportionately and magnified inequalities in income, low-wage ('essential') workers, age, race, and geographic location.

Technological

- The pandemic crisis quickly made digitization and 'contactless' services a priority and accelerated technological advancement in areas such as healthcare, online purchasing/ e-commerce, service delivery (e.g. curbside pickup/ drive-through), business operations, and remote work. While these

technologies may be viewed as solely a response to the pandemic, some are likely to stick and be adopted into the future.

2.1.3 Demographic and Socioeconomic Summary

As part of the environmental scan, the previous two OW service plans provided an update on the 2016 census population and dwelling counts, and a summary of other key demographics based on a series of Board presentations. Statistics Canada has just completed the 2021 census and that data will be released throughout 2022. Thus, the next OW Service Plan (2023-2024) will include a demographic analysis and update based on the most recent (2021) census data available.

2.2 CASELOAD DESCRIPTION

Note: Unless otherwise stated the following data is sourced from Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance (Nipissing DSSAB), March 2021; PRAB (Policy Research and Analysis Branch). The caseload count excludes temporary care and emergency assistance so the actual caseload at any given point is approximately 4-5% higher.

2.2.1 OW Beneficiaries

As at March 2021 – the beginning of the planning period – there are 2,646 Ontario Works (OW) Beneficiaries in Nipissing District. Similar to previous planning periods, most (61.5% or 1,629) of the beneficiaries are the Primary Recipients and make up the ‘OW caseload’. The remaining beneficiaries are *dependent children* (904 or 34.1%), *spouses* (76, or 2.9%), or *adults* (37, or 1.4%).

The number of OW beneficiaries in Nipissing District is down significantly by -21.3% (716) over the same period (March 2019) in the previous service plan and is largely associated with the onset of the pandemic in 2020 - a more detailed description of the caseload, trends and pandemic affect can be found in the following sections:

2.2.2 Family Household Type

As mentioned above, there are 1,629 Primary Recipients on the Nipissing District caseload, which is a decrease of 419 (20.5%) recipients from the previous service plan. The following table shows the family household types of the recipients in Nipissing District and Ontario, for comparison purposes:

Family Household Type	Nipissing OW		Ontario OW
	#	%	%
Singles without children	1,107	68.0	61.1
Singles with children	446	27.4	30.4
Couples with children	60	3.7	6.8
Couples without children	16	1.0	1.7
Total	1,629	100	100

Table 6

The decrease in recipients has been proportional across the family household types so the caseload composition continues to be similar to previous planning periods although there are some notable

differences. Single recipients continue to represent the largest household type, accounting for a little over two-thirds of the caseload (similar as the last planning period). Singles with children (lone parents) make up another 27.4% of the caseload that is up slightly from 26.0% the previous planning period. The remainder (4.7%) of the caseload is comprised of couples, with and without children, which is down from 6.7% of the caseload in the previous service plan. The largest decrease in these households are couples without children, which have decreased by 35 and previously represented 2.5% of the caseload.

It can also be noted from the table that compared to the provincial OW caseload, Nipissing continues to have a greater share of singles, and fewer lone-parents and couples (with or without children).

2.2.2.1 Family Household Type, Nipissing OW and General Population

The table below compares the above family household composition of OW to the family household composition of the general population in Nipissing District.

The local caseload continues to be significantly over-represented with singles, with and without children, and under-represented with couples (with and without children) compared to the general population. In the case of singles, the share of OW is over twice the general population while the share of couples is around one-tenth the population. This continues to illustrate that singles and lone parents face disproportionately greater economic pressure and need for income and employment supports.

Family Household Type	Nipissing OW, %	Nipissing Population, %
Singles without children	68.0	29.8
Singles with children	27.4	11.7
Couples with children	3.7	23.2
Couples without children	1.0	32.6
Other non-family households	N/A	4.0
Total	100	

Table 7

2.2.3 Age of Dependent Children

The table below shows the general age groups of the *youngest child at home* for the (above) OW lone parents and couples with children:

Age of Youngest Child	Nipissing OW		Ontario OW
	#	%	%
≤ 5 years	314	62.1	50.2
6 -12 years	131	25.9	30.6
13 – 17 years	49	9.7	13.4
18 years ≥	12	2.4	5.8
Total	506	100.0	100.0

Table 8

Following the decrease in caseload since the last service plan, the number of dependent children is also down 18.4% (114) and is part of the overall decrease in beneficiaries mentioned earlier. However, the proportion of the general age groups remains similar to those reported in the previous service plan.

A little over 60.0% of the OW lone parents and couples with children in Nipissing have at least one child that is 5 years of age or younger while a further 26.0% have a child that is between the ages of 6- 12 years. Combined, 88.0% of the OW caseload with children have dependents that are 12 years of age or younger. The remaining OW families with children have at least one child that is between the ages of 13-17 years (9.7%) and one that is 18 years or older (2.4%).

In comparing the age groups of the youngest child at home to those of the provincial caseload, it can be noted that Nipissing has a larger percentage of children ages 5 or younger and smaller percentages across the remaining age groups, 6 years and older. This is a consistent pattern evident over the past two planning periods.

2.2.4 General Age Groups, Nipissing and Ontario OW Caseloads

The figure below shows the age distribution of the Nipissing and provincial OW caseloads at the end of the first quarter of the planning period:

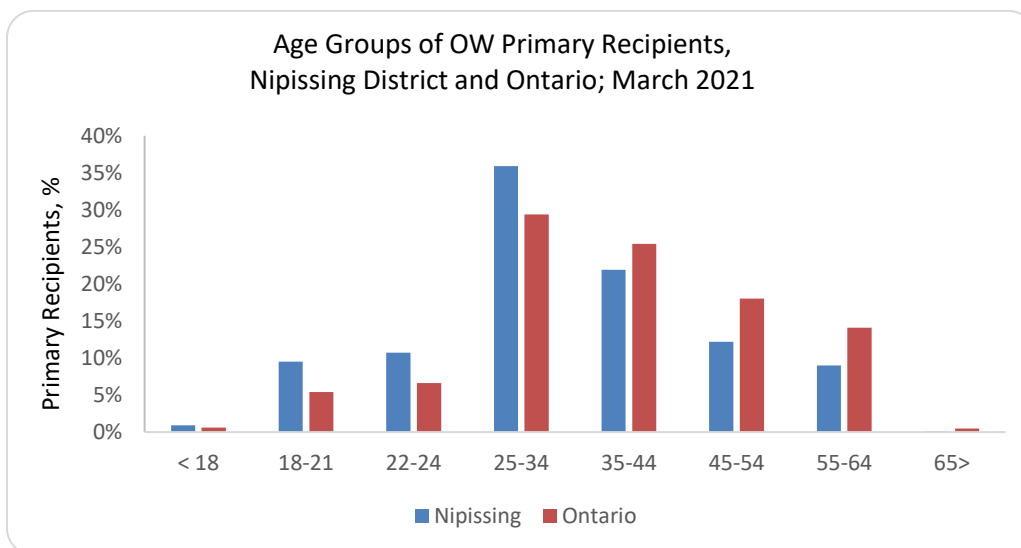


Figure 17

In comparing the above with previous planning periods, the age distribution of the OW caseload remains largely unchanged, although there are notable shifts in the 18-21 and 35-44 age groups which are described below. The local caseload also continues to be relatively younger than the provincial caseload.

In Nipissing District, about 21.0% of the OW caseload is 24 years of age or younger which is down from 25.0% reported in the previous service plan. The main decrease has been in the 18-21 age group whose share of the caseload has decreased by 3.0%. It can be noted however, that the 18-21 age group in Nipissing is still relatively high and over one and a half times the share of the provincial caseload.

Young adults between the ages of 25 and 34 years represent a little over one-third (35.9%) of the Nipissing caseload which is unchanged from the last couple of service plans. The number of recipients in this age group continues to be higher relative to the province (29.4%).

Turning to the older OW adults, those in the 35-44 age-group account for 22.0% of the Nipissing caseload which is up from 20.0% over the previous planning period. This age group represents a turning point relative to the province, whereby the Nipissing share of OW recipients in this group is now lower than the province.

The remaining caseload is mainly comprised of older recipients in the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups (12.2% and 9.0% respectively). Combined, the share of recipients in these age groups represent about one-fifth of the caseload, which is consistent with past planning periods. The provincial caseload continues to have one-and-a half times the share of OW recipients in these age groups as Nipissing District. As noted in previous service plans, a very small number (< 1.0%) of OW recipients are 65 years of age or older as they leave the caseload for other government support programs.

2.2.5 General Age Groups, Nipissing OW and General Population

The figure below compares the above age distribution for OW (2021) with the general census population (2016) in Nipissing District:

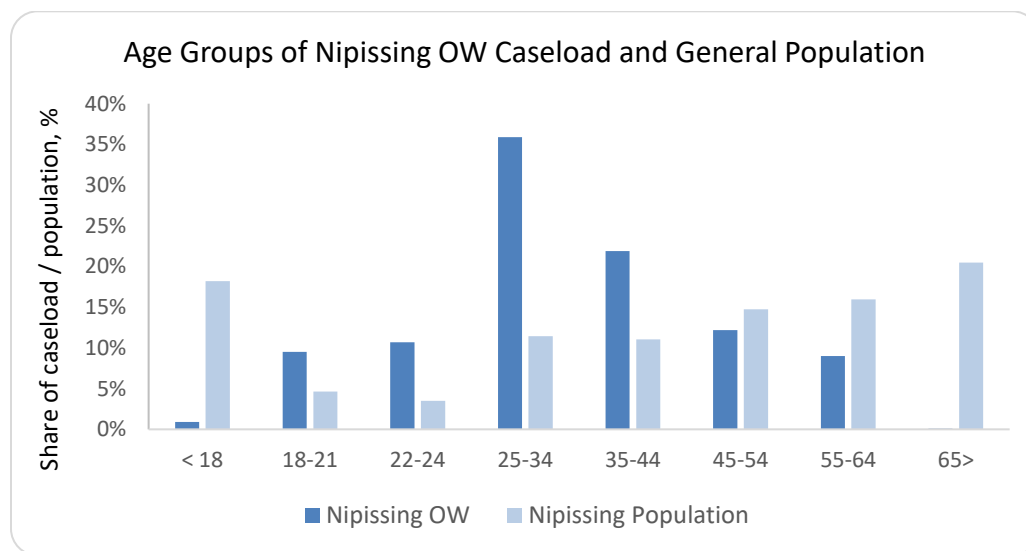


Figure 18

The OW caseload continues to be significantly over-represented with recipients who are between the ages of 18 and 44 years, and under-represented with those between the ages of 45 and 64 years. Starting with the younger OW recipients, the share of those between the ages of 18 and 24 years is two and a half times that found in the general population. This difference is the same for the next age group (25-34) also. Meanwhile, the number of OW recipients in the 35-44 age-group is about twice that of the general population.

Moving in to the older age groups, the share of OW recipients in the 45-54 age group is similar to the general population (12.2% vs. 14.7%) while those in the 55-64 age group are a little over half.

The above indicates that youth and young adults in Nipissing District are experiencing greater economic pressure and the need for income and employment supports, relative to the older adults and age-groups.

2.2.6 Education

The broad education levels of the OW Primary Recipients are shown in the table below:

Education	Nipissing OW		Ontario OW
	#	%	%
Grade 1 - 8	51	3.2	6.6
Grade 9 - 11	586	37.1	29.7
Grade 12 - 13	551	34.9	38.1
Post-Secondary	392	24.8	25.5
Total	1,580	100.0	100.0

Consistent with previous OW caseload data analyzed for past service plans, the educational composition of the Nipissing caseload remains similar although there has been a slight upward shift in educational attainment at the high school level.

Approximately one-quarter of the OW caseload has post-secondary education that is the same as the previous planning period. A little over one-third (35.0%) the caseload has completed high school (including grade 13 under the former education system) which is up from 32% reported in the previous plan. Meanwhile, 40.3% of the caseload has not completed high school, which is down 3.0% from the same period.

In comparison to the provincial caseload, Nipissing continues to have relatively fewer recipients who have completed high school or postsecondary education (59.7% vs. 63.6%) and more recipients without a high school education (40.3% vs. 36.3%).

2.2.7 Months on OW Assistance

As at March 2021, the average time on OW assistance in Nipissing District is 3.2 years which is up significantly from 2.5 years reported in the previous service plan (so on average, recipients are staying on the caseload for an additional eight months). As a comparison, the district's average continues to be significantly lower than the provincial average, which is about 4.0 years.

Figure 19 below shows the distribution of time on assistance by general groups for Nipissing District and Ontario:

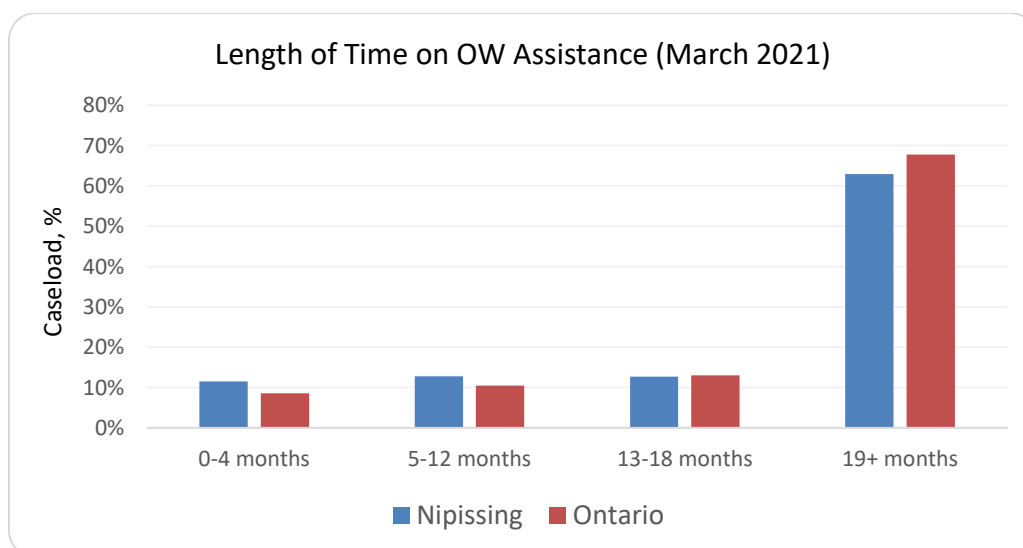


Figure 19

It can be noted that there is significant variation from the average when looking at the data by subgroups. Starting with the Nipissing caseload, 63.0% of the recipients have been on OW assistance for 19 months or more which is up from 50.0% of the caseload reported in the previous plan. This is also part of a longer-term trend where the percentage of the caseload in this longer-term group has been increasing over the past four planning periods (or eight years – see Figure 13 below). Another 12.7% have been on assistance between 13–18 months (up from 12.0%).

The remaining (24.3%) recipients have been on assistance for 12 months or less which is down significantly from 37.9% reported in the previous plan. This is also part of a diverging trend where the percentage of the caseload in this shorter-term group has been decreasing over the past four planning periods (or eight years – see Figure 13 below).

In comparison to Ontario, the time on OW assistance in Nipissing is similar, with slight differences. Nipissing has relatively fewer recipients on assistance for 19 months or longer (63.0% vs. 67.8%) and more recipients on assistance for 12 months or less (24.3% vs. 19.1%). The percentage of OW recipients on assistance for 13-18 months is the same for both caseloads.

2.2.8 Months on OW Assistance Trend

Figure 20 on the following page shows the trend for the length of time on OW assistance by the four groups described above:

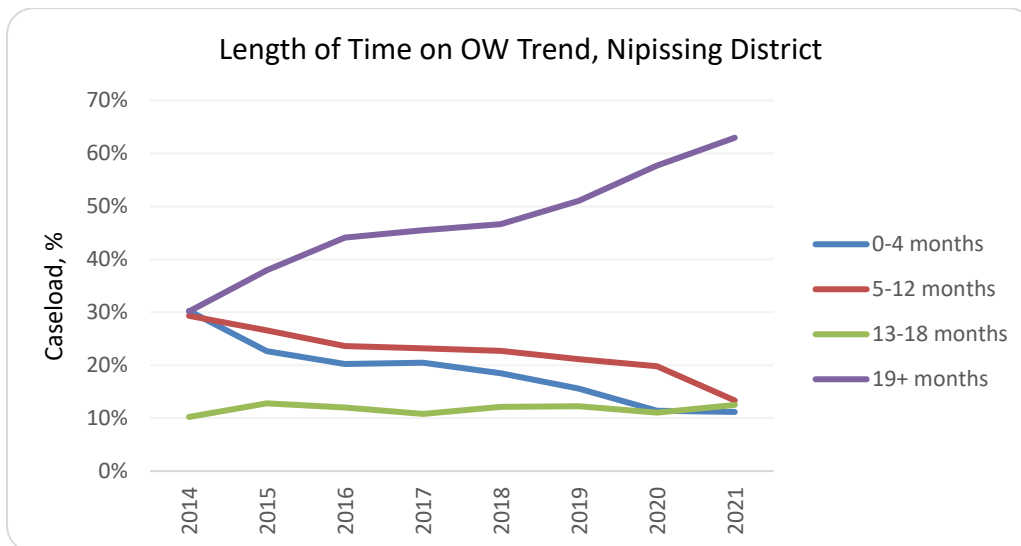


Figure 20

As noted earlier there are two diverging trends: the percentage of OW recipients staying on the caseload for 19 months and longer is increasing while those leaving the caseload within one year or less is decreasing. At the starting of the trend period (the 13-18 month group aside), the percentage of OW recipients staying on the caseload a relatively short time (<1 yr.) was the same as those staying on for longer periods (1.5 yrs. >) – about 30.0%. Since then the number of recipients on the caseload for a short time has less than halved (down to 12.0%) while those on the caseload longer has more than doubled (up to 63.0%).

These trends also point to two emerging groups and polarization of the OW caseload. In the one group are those needing relatively few supports to join the labor market and leave the caseload relatively quickly, and in the other group are those needing more supports (and may have multiple barriers) to join the labour force

and subsequently stay on the caseload longer. Extrapolating these trends out, the future caseload will predominantly consist of OW recipients who stay on the caseload for longer periods (i.e., 19+ months).

As mentioned in the previous service plan the above trends are consistent with the expected outcomes of Nipissing OW's service delivery model that began implementation in 2015. Under this model, recipients who have been assessed as 'job ready' (or 'preparing for employment') leave the caseload relatively quickly for employment while those assessed as 'life stabilization' stay on longer to address their employment barriers and receive further supports. Over time, this has the effect of increasing the overall time on assistance.

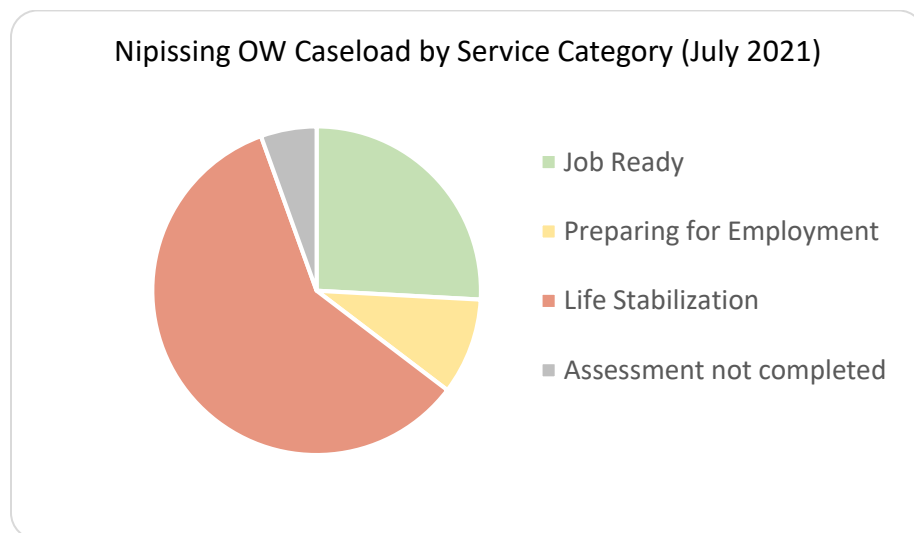
Under the current government's approach to reform social assistance and transform Ontario's employment services, a centralized service system manager will be responsible for delivering most of the employment services and programs (including OW) for a given region. Considering which OW recipients will be switching over to the new employment service provider will be a major consideration, given that a larger number of the recipients are staying on the caseload longer to address employment barriers and receive various supports.

2.2.9 Employment Readiness

Nipissing OW's service delivery model involves assessing OW applicants at the point of intake to determine their level of employment readiness. Based on the assessment results the applicants are placed into one of three service categories where they will receive targeted supports to move them towards employment and self-sufficiency.

The figure below shows the employment readiness of the Nipissing OW recipients by service category. (Note: the following data is sourced from DNSSAB's Get Trained Workers employment database and will not correspond directly with the ministry performance and caseload data due to differences in timing of reporting. Additionally, Nipissing OW is currently in the process of switching from the original employment database to an upgraded version that includes a revised common assessment tool. As the database migration testing, cleansing, and validation have not yet been completed the following data may be subject to change and needs to be interpreted cautiously at this point):

Figure 21



There are currently 1,655 OW recipients registered in the database and on the Nipissing caseload (including temporary and emergency assistance). It can be noted from the chart that job readiness assessments have not been completed for 5% (91) of the caseload.

Approximately 60.0% (980) of the recipients are in the *life stabilization* service category. This is up significantly from 34.5% that was reported in the previous service plan, although as mentioned earlier, the data needs to be confirmed after database migration (the common assessment tool has changed which may also affect the assessment results). The increase in the number of life stabilization recipients is consistent with the increasing trend shown in Figure 13 as they tend to stay on the caseload for longer periods.

As noted in previous reports and plans, the life stabilization clients generally have multiple barriers to employment and are significantly detached from the employment and job markets. Based on their intake assessments, most of the clients in this group have physical and/or psychological health issues, addictions problems, and housing instability that affect their ability to get or keep jobs.

In contrast to the group above, a little over one-quarter (26.0%) of the OW recipients on the caseload are generally *job ready* and have little to no barriers to employment. The caseload share of this group is down from 35.5% reported in the previous service plan although the same data cautionary notes mentioned above apply. These clients generally require fewer supports to participate fully in the employment and job markets and tend to be on the caseload for shorter periods of time which is also consistent with the decreasing trend in Figure 13.

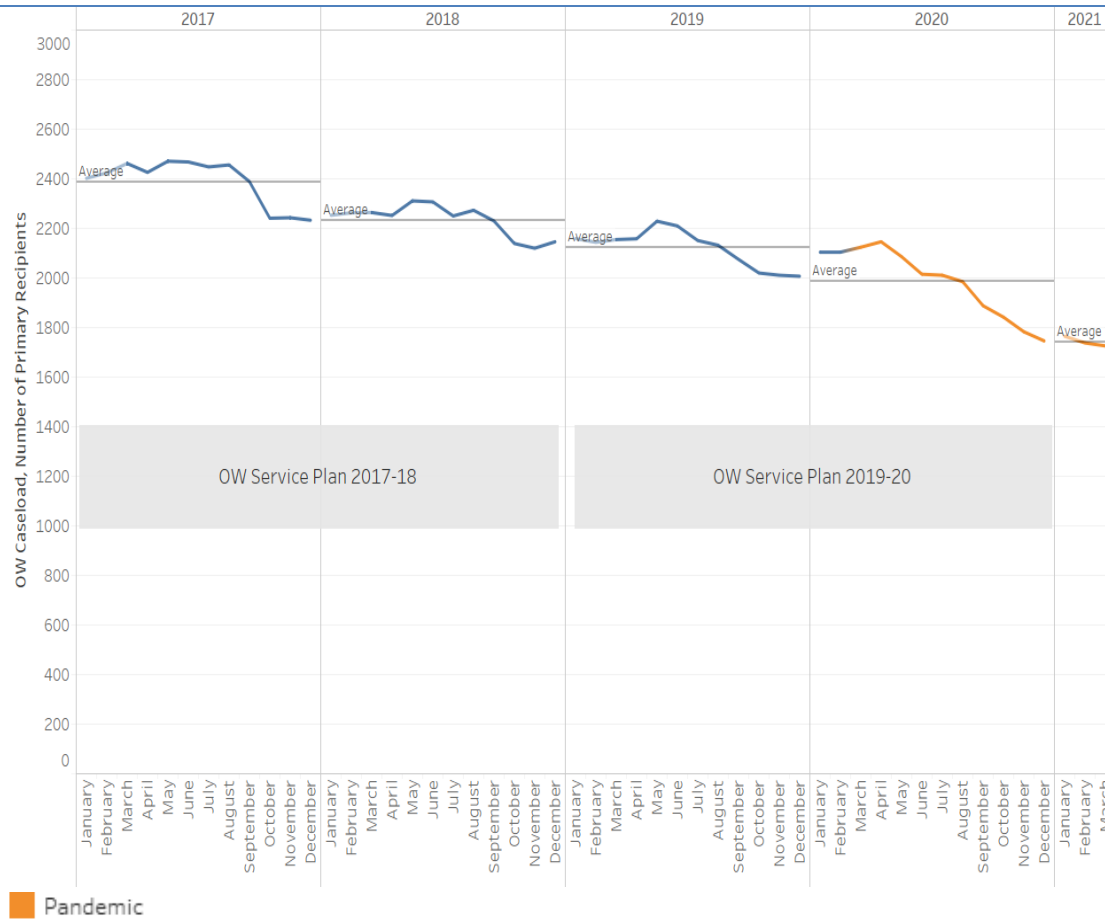
The remaining (9.0%) OW recipients are *preparing for employment* and fall somewhere in between the two groups above. These clients have some barriers to employment and may require short-term training, education, or help in addressing personal needs to move them towards job readiness.

The employment database contains a large amount of information and data on the OW recipients and caseload including demographics, social determinants of health factors, education and training, Job postings and matching, and employment outcomes. Once the database migration and testing is complete this information and data will be included in future service plans and help to inform policy development, planning, service delivery, and advocacy. The database will also play a central role in transition planning and monitoring progress through the transformation of Ontario's employment system.

2.2.10 OW Caseload Trend

The figure below shows Nipissing District's OW caseload trend over the past two service plan periods. The caseload is shown by month, and the years are separated to highlight and compare the annual caseload averages, variation, and patterns:

Figure 22



Going back to the 2017-18 planning period the caseload averaged about 2,400 recipients in 2017, although following the seasonal pattern it started to taper off and then trend downwards during the third quarter after hitting a post-2008 recession peak of about 2,500 recipients the previous year. The downward trend continued through 2018 with an average caseload of 2,230 recipients, or 170 fewer (-7.0%) than the previous year.

Through the 2019 planning period the caseload continued to decrease with an average caseload of about 2,120 recipients (down 110, or 5%, from the previous year). The caseload then jumped during the first four months of 2020 increasing by 7.0% (140 recipients). This change in trend direction overlapped with the pandemic that abruptly hit towards the end of the first quarter. Since the onset of the pandemic the caseload has fallen further, most notably during the regular seasonal change where it dropped by 12.0% (240 recipients). Currently, the caseload is sitting just below 1,700 recipients – the lowest it has been in the past 12 years and since the Great Recession (2008).

It is interesting to note that the Nipissing caseload trend is generally consistent with the provincial trend over the same period.

2.3 LOCAL LABOUR MARKET AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2.3.1 Labour Force Unemployment and Participation Rates

As stated in previous service plans, labour force data is not available for Nipissing District other than once every five years through the national census. While the census data is valuable for looking at point-in-time economic conditions or cross sectional trends and comparisons, it does not provide a current economic picture or enough data to analyze labour force conditions in more detail. Thus, for service planning purposes the monthly labour force data for North Bay (Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey) is used to assess local labour market and economic conditions.

As mentioned in previous service plans the monthly labour force data for North Bay continues to be of weak quality due to the city's small sample size in the labour force survey and subsequently greater sampling variability in the data. This is particularly true for the unemployment rate that has a relatively large standard error and coefficient of variation. However, given this is the only dataset available to try and measure labour force activity and key indicators such as unemployment in the local area, the data is still useful when interpreted cautiously with the margin of error and viewed alongside other comparable data of higher quality (for example, provincial data).

In view of the above, the following sections look at two key labour force indicators – the unemployment and participation rate.

2.3.1.1 Unemployment

The unemployment rate for Ontario, Northeast Ontario, and North Bay is shown below, going back to January 2019, which covers the previous OW service plan period. The line charts for Northeast Ontario and North Bay also show the average margin of error for the average unemployment rate during the period, at a 95% confidence level. It can be noted that the error increases significantly moving from the province (basically non-existent) to the economic region, down to the city level.¹

¹ The margin of error is a function of the sample's standard deviation divided by the square root of the sample size, so smaller samples (i.e., North Bay) result in more variability and error. For the above data, Ontario's average standard error is 0.2, Northeast Ontario's is 0.5 and North Bay's is 1.9 (the margin of error doubles for a confidence level of 95%).

Unemployment Rate in Ontario, North East Ontario and North Bay, 2019-2021 (March)

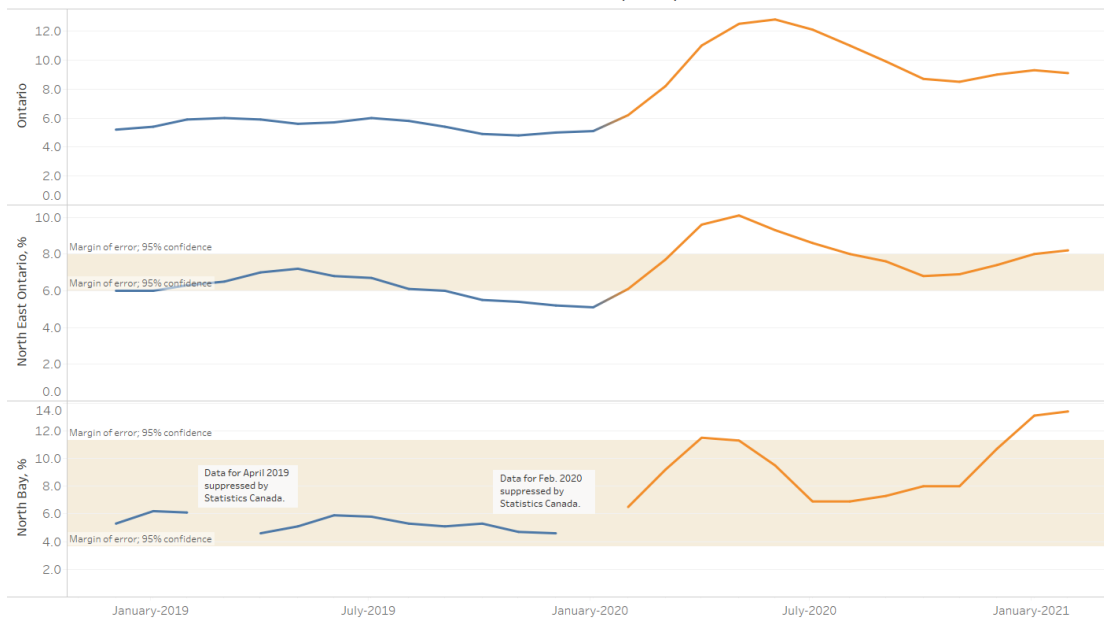


Figure 23

COVID-19

Data Source: Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 282-0122 (accessed June 10, 2019). Unadjusted for seasonality, 3-month moving average. North Bay data from the Statistics Canada monthly Labour Force Survey subscription.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on employment from the outset of the virus that started in March 2020 of the previous planning period. From the beginning of the period until March 2020, Ontario’s average unemployment rate was 5.5% and was trending down towards the end of the first planning year and into the second. This trend course was abruptly altered by the pandemic however, when the provincial unemployment rate swung sharply and started to increase, countering the normal seasonal pattern. By July, Ontario’s unemployment rate had more than doubled and peaked around 13.0% (compared to average 5.8% at the same time the previous two years) as many businesses were closed and employees laid off. Since then, the provincial unemployment rate has started to drop back down but remains elevated. By the end of 2020, unemployment was sitting at 8.5% but then crept back up to 9.1% as of March 2021.

Ontario’s relatively high unemployment during the first year of the pandemic is strongly correlated with some of the poor OW outcomes during the same period (described earlier). For example, the percentage of the caseload exiting to employment and with employment earnings was well below target as clients were unable to find employment due to many businesses being closed or simply not hiring.

It is also interesting to note that the OW caseload was decreasing through this same period of high unemployment which may seem counterintuitive (i.e., it is reasonable to think that more people, not less, would need social assistance during this period of depressed economic activity and high unemployment). One explanation is that fewer people were turning to OW as they were receiving other subsidies – such as the federal CERB – to provide them with financial support during the pandemic. If this is the case then the OW caseload may start to increase back towards previous levels once the government emergency relief funding ends and depending on the post-pandemic employment environment at that time.

Switching to the local economic region of Northeast Ontario, unemployment has followed a similar trend to the province but surprisingly, the Northeast has fared a little better during the pandemic by this measure.

From the beginning of the previous planning period until March 2020, the Northeast's average unemployment rate was 6.1% ($\pm 1.0\%$) which, given the margin of error on the estimate, is similar to the provincial rate over the same period. Prior to the pandemic, unemployment had also been trending down in the Northeast region, having dropped from 7.2% the previous summer to 5.1% by February 2020. Similar to the province however, the onset of the pandemic in March forced a trend reversal and the Northeast unemployment rate had doubled to 10.1% by June. Although relatively high, this rate was significantly lower than the provincial unemployment rate (13%) around the same time, even when accounting for the margin of error ($\pm 1.0\%$). Since then, Northeastern Ontario's unemployment rate has also started to drop back and although it remains elevated, continues to be lower than the province. By the end of 2020 unemployment in Northeast Ontario was sitting at 6.9% but has since crept back up to 8.2% as of March 2021.

Turning to North Bay, and the wide data variability and suppression aside, the unemployment trend looks similar to that of the province and economic region described above. Heading into the pandemic, North Bay's average unemployment rate was 5.3% ($\pm 3.8\%$) which is similar to the region and province. However, the wide margin of error on North Bay's data (which is 72% of the estimate itself at a decent level of confidence) limits a direct comparison. With the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, North Bay's unemployment rate also reversed and then jumped, hitting a peak of 11.5% in May. This can be considered a real change in North Bay's unemployment rate (and not attributed to sampling error) given that the movement is consistent with the economic region and province, and is also just outside the upper margin of error.² Since that time the unemployment rate in North Bay has followed the other areas and decreased and then increased again, although the data shows more irregularity and sharper swings, which is likely more due to sampling variability and error. Of particular note, the sharp increase in the city's unemployment rate that started towards the end of 2020 has brought the rate up to 13.4% by March 2021, which is higher than the pandemic peak during the previous spring. While the true value of the estimate is hard to determine due to the large margin of error ($\pm 3.8\%$), the swing is significant and generally follows the regional and provincial movement towards higher unemployment during the same period.

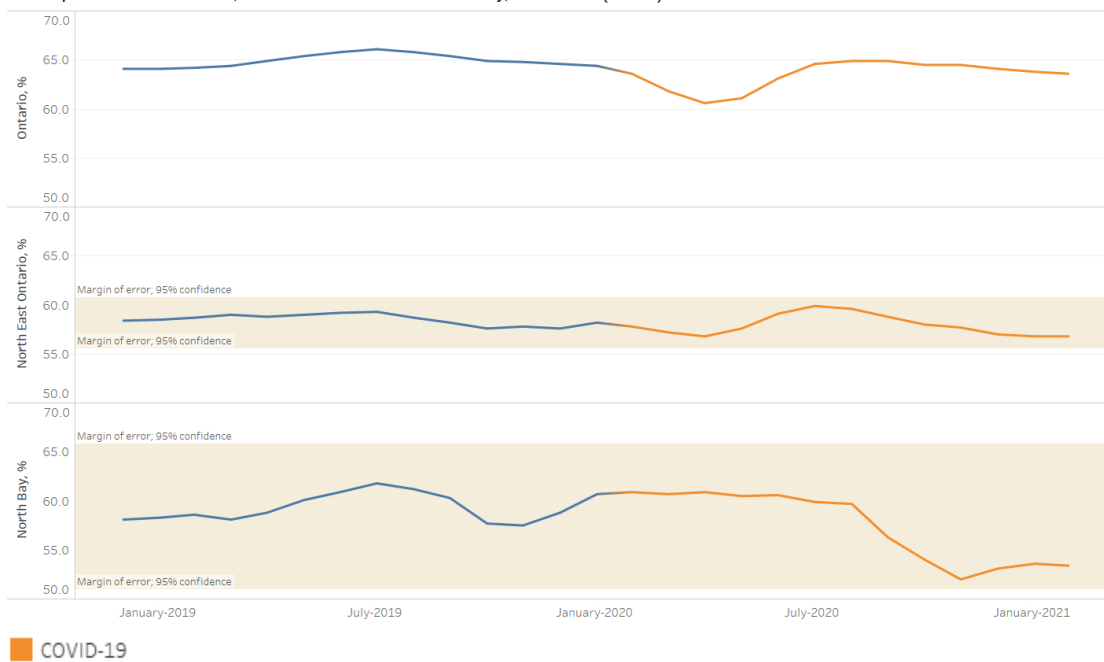
2.3.1.2 Labour Force Participation

The participation rate continues to be a key indicator and proxy for the local labour market in terms of the percentage of the population (15 years and older) that is in the workforce and either employed or unemployed. The chart below shows the labour force participation rate for Ontario, Northeast Ontario and North Bay during the previous planning period. As with the unemployment charts above, the line charts for Northeast Ontario and North Bay also show the margin of error for the participation rate estimate at a 95% confidence level (note: the chart axis has been truncated to emphasize the seasonal patterns).

² Generally, movements inside the margin of error are attributed more to statistical error but could be actual change in unemployment, or statistical/sampling variability, or both. Movements outside the margin of error tend to be statistically significant and thus more likely the result of real change or occurrence (in this case, an actual change in unemployment).

Participation Rate in Ontario, North East Ontario and North Bay, 2019-2021 (March)

Figure 24



As mentioned in previous plans the workforce has a seasonal pattern whereby participation is highest in the summer and lowest in the winter (this correlates negatively to the OW caseload that is generally the opposite). This pattern can be observed in all the charts from the beginning of the previous planning period up to the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The pandemic interrupted the pattern however, with a sharp drop in the participation rate between March and May when normally it would be starting to increase for the summer peak.

From the beginning of the previous OW planning period until the start of the pandemic in March 2020, Ontario’s average participation rate was about 65% and following the seasonal pattern. Within a couple of months of the initial pandemic wave, workforce participation took a sudden drop and was down to 60.6% by May. The drop is strongly correlated with the initial shutdown of the provincial economy to limit the spread of COVID-19 through restrictive health measures and non-essential business closures, and the subsequent jump in unemployment during the same period (Figure 16). Ontario’s participation rate then returned to the seasonal norm and started to rebound, and was back up to 64.6% by August, 2020 (although still down from 66% the previous August). This increase is also associated with the reopening of the economy in the summer with non-essential services and increased economic activity. Since then, the participation rate has returned to a seasonal pattern of decreasing through the fall and winter and is sitting at 63.6% in March 2021. This is down from the 64+% range often seen in March and is likely associated with the reduced economic activity brought on by the pandemic’s second wave.

Switching to Northeast Ontario, the local economic region has followed a similar trend to the province although the notable decreases and increases in the participation rate appear to vary considerably in magnitude compared to the province. However, as the Northeast participation rate has an average sampling margin of error of ± 2.6 during the period, the relative magnitude and change in the rate needs to be interpreted at that level of precision.

From the beginning of the period until March 2020, the Northeast's average participation rate was 58.5% (or between 55.9% - 61.1% with the error factored in). From the outset of the pandemic in March the participation rate then started to decrease and ended up at 56.8% by May (down from 58.8% the previous May). Similar to the province and following the regular seasonal pattern and reopening of the economy, participation in the Northeast climbed back to about 60% by the summer peak in August. Since then, workforce participation has decreased in concert with the seasonal norm and is sitting at 56.8% in March 2021, which is back where it was the previous March when the pandemic started. While the drop during this period is more pronounced when compared to the province or the same time the previous year, the change is within the average margin of error suggesting that it is more a function of sampling variability. This data would need to be analyzed further and alongside other economic data from the Northeast to try and determine if the workforce participation actually went that low.

Turning to North Bay, the participation rate trend becomes difficult to interpret given the large (± 7.4) sampling error and difficulty in distinguishing between real change and statistical change. While the city's trend is similar to the other areas, it has more variability in the data making direct comparisons less meaningful.

Heading into the pandemic, North Bay's average participation rate was 59.4% (± 7.4) which is slightly higher than the Northeast region over the same period, but with much less precision on the estimate. As an example of variability, the city's participation rate decreased from a seasonal high of 61.8% in August 2019 to a low of 57.7% in December, which was a much greater change relative to the region and province. At the start of the pandemic in March, 2020 North Bay's participation rate was about 60% but did not fall off like in the Northeast or the province. Rather, the rate held steady through to the summer before dropping off sharply and ending up at 52% in December. Since then, North Bay's workforce participation has increased slightly to 53.4% by March 2021.

2.3.2 Industry Structure and Post-Pandemic Employment

The previous OW Service Plan (2019-20) looked at Nipissing's labour force population by industry (NAICS) based on the 2016 census data. The local industry structure was also compared to Ontario for benchmarking purposes. This local industry structure information and analysis will be updated with the most recent 2021 census data in the next service plan.

The previous plan also described the OW 'job ready' clients in terms of their National Occupational Classification (NOC) categories and matching clients to local job postings. This information and data is available through the Nipissing Get Trained Workers employment database, which as mentioned previously, is being upgraded to a new platform and is undergoing data migration. The new database will have advanced job-matching capabilities to link OW clients with local jobs by matching client demographics and employment experience with job characteristics and requirements. This will also be updated and reported in the next service plan once the database is operational.

The emphasis during the 2021-22 service period and operations will clearly be on helping clients re-enter the workforce in the post-pandemic recovery stage while also trying to anticipate and plan for, the change that is coming through Ontario's employment transformation process. These two areas will require extensive focus and effort over the next couple of years and perhaps beyond.

In terms of recovery, it is also unknown what the industry and business environment will look like coming out of the pandemic as many businesses have closed down over the past 15 months - either temporarily or permanently – and many jobs have been lost. This has affected everyone, including the businesses and OW clients trying to find jobs, and navigating this uncharted territory during the service period could be challenging. For example, a recent report by the Northern Policy Institute examines the pandemic’s employment effects by industry in Northern Ontario, and breaks the data out for the Northeast and Northwest. Below is the chart for Northeast Ontario:

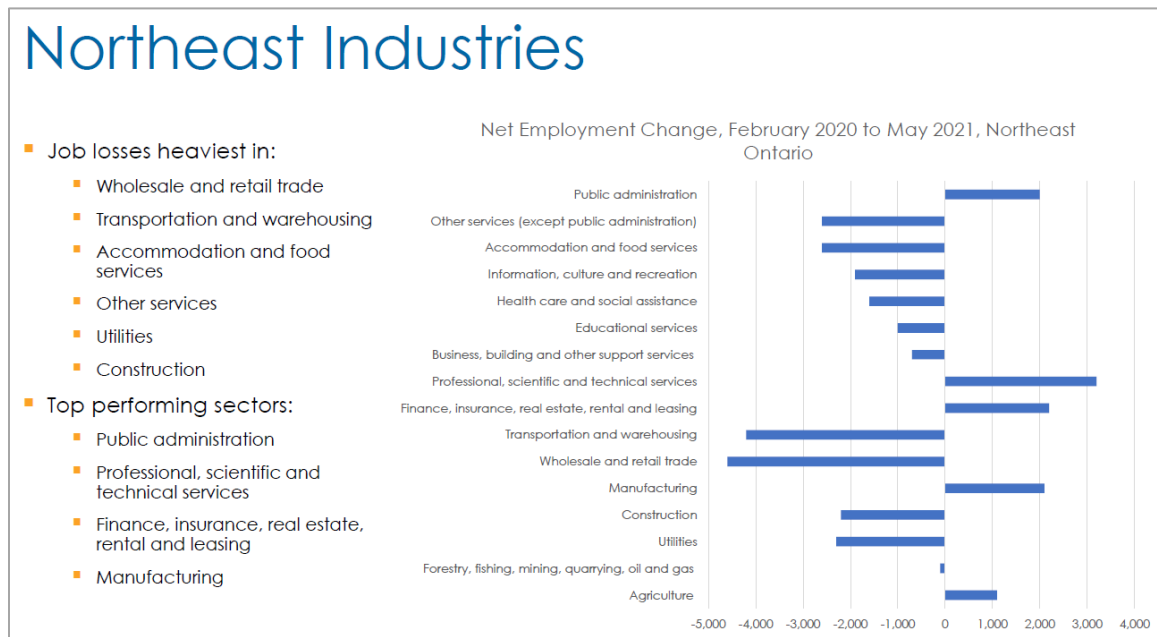


Figure 25

Source: Northern Policy Institute, June 2021 (screen shot from PDF slide deck).

While a few industries in the Northeast actually experienced employment growth during the pandemic, most have had significant loss. Businesses in the Wholesale/Retail Trade, Transportation and Warehousing, and Accommodations and Food Services industries have been hit particularly hard. These also happen to be the main industries that OW clients find work in as many of them have employment experience or backgrounds in sales and service occupations and the trades, transportation, and equipment operation. The pandemic effects on these industries is highly correlated with the weak OW employment outcomes described earlier.

On a more positive note, many are expecting a strong recovery and growth period as the economy reopens and this bodes well for OW employment. The operational focus and emphasis will be to help the job ready clients and those preparing for employment to find jobs as these industries rebuild and employment growth returns. Providing the necessary supports for the life stabilization clients to eventually enter this employment environment where they can, will also be a service priority.

2.4 COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

As mentioned earlier in this report in section 1.4 Develop and Maintain Community Partnerships, Nipissing OW takes community partnership development and the maintenance of these relationships very seriously. By nurturing existing relationships and recognizing areas in need of improvement, Nipissing OW continues to work on expanding its reach. For example: Nipissing OW has identified that increased coordination and collaboration with local Indigenous groups/organizations would enhance the current service delivery model.

Some work on this did occur during the previous cycle however there is far more to be done. An example of a small effort to increase cultural awareness was to introduce Indigenous art into all OW offices to make common areas more welcoming to Indigenous clients. Staff in-services by Indigenous partners and cultural sensitivity training have also been provided on numerous occasions through both formal training and invitations to Indigenous partners to be guest speakers at all staff meetings and events.

While Nipissing OW has long standing relationships with numerous human service providers the impact of community partnership development and maintenance with groups outside of the sector inclusive of the private sector cannot be underestimated. For example, in an effort to prevent evictions, Nipissing OW developed a working relationship and protocol with the local landlord association with respect to communication around pay direct agreements.

Figure 26 below illustrates some of the activities that Nipissing OW continues to utilize to develop, maintain and grow relationships to support social assistance recipients on their pathways to employment.

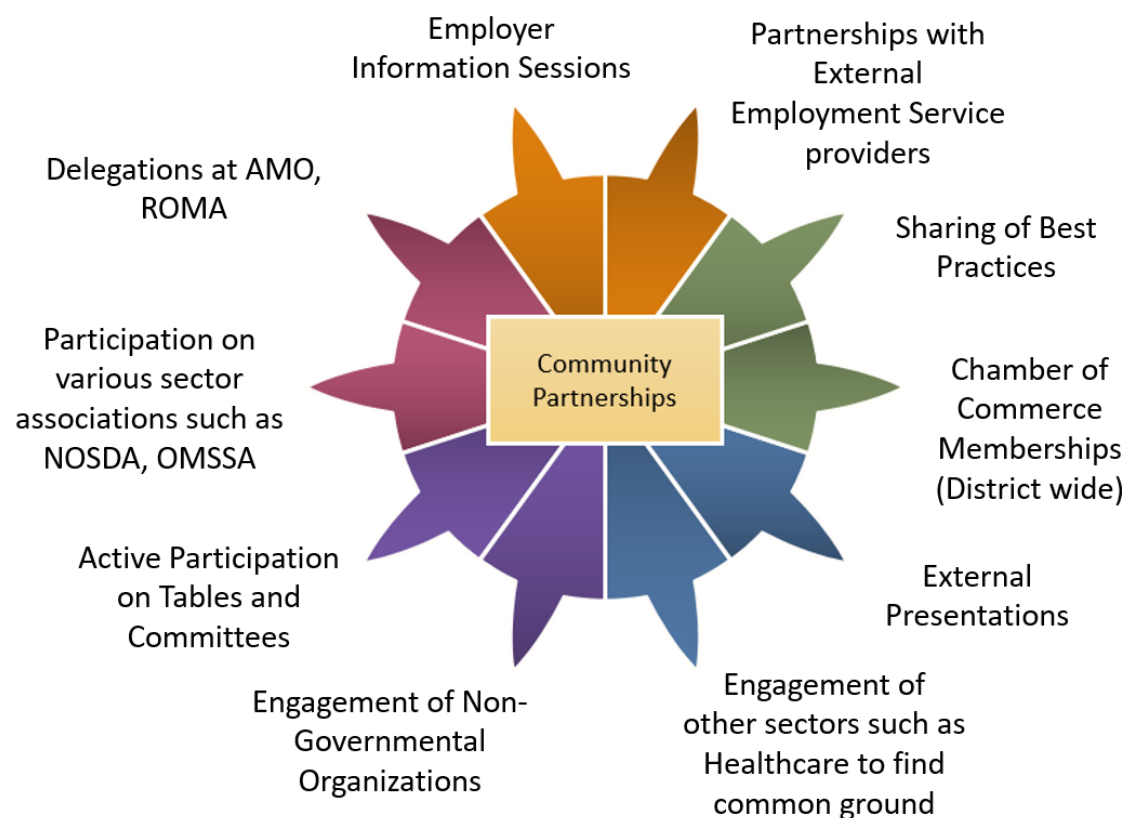


Figure 26

3.0 STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES

3.1 SERVICE STRATEGY

While social assistance reform and employment services transformation planning is underway, non-EST sites like Nipissing, will continue to use current employment outcomes for planning. Strategies that assist with improving upon existing achievements must also be responsive to the challenges of delivering employment services in the context of a pandemic. In order to facilitate successful outcomes for clients and develop

models of integrated streamlined and accessible services, Ontario Works must work to leverage partnerships through collaborative planning. Through referrals to the services offered by community partners, Nipissing OW is able to extend its reach and participants are able to benefit from the wealth of expertise that exists within the broader employment service network. Utilizing third parties as part of a strategy to improve employment outcomes can also help minimize some of the stigma associated with social assistance delivery.

The following section highlights strategies that are directly related to the achievement of outcomes and other strategies that influence outcomes indirectly. Many of the strategies are priorities that are expected to be multi-year projects or activities that will remain relevant for many years to come. **Unfortunately, at the present time MCCSS does not measure the work and associated outcomes related to assisting clients with multiple barriers such as mental health and addiction. It also does not measure the number of clients connected to post-secondary education or adult upgrading which has proven to be a successful strategy utilized by Nipissing OW.**

The table below provides an overview of the strategies that will be utilized during the current cycle that will influence outcomes and the rationale for the continued delivery of these initiatives.

Table 10

Strategy	Rationale
Third Party Service Agreements	<p>Collaboration and strategic partnerships provide social assistance recipients with opportunities that might not otherwise be available and are fundamental to improving employment outcomes. As such, Nipissing OW plans to continue to maintain positive collaborations funded through third party services agreements that provide pathways towards employment. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 Jobs Pilot and Get Trained Workers in Partnership with the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce • Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education initiative with Canadore College • Business Centre Nipissing Parry Sound for self-employment support • Nipissing Parry Sound District Health Unit initiative on preventative dental care
Employment Placement	<p>The Employment Marketing Specialist (EMS) continues to make connections with Employers throughout the District and offers financial incentives through the employment placement program. Employment placements help employers by offsetting the cost training and supervision of a new employee while providing clients with the opportunity to connect to supported employment opportunities.</p>
Community Placements	<p>Volunteer placements can increase a participant’s self-confidence, self-worth and social inclusion. They can also increase a client’s employability and provide them with references. Due to the risks associated with the pandemic, community placements have been placed on hold. When we are in a position to return to normal business practices, Community Placements are anticipated to resume.</p>

Internal Employment Supports	<p>Nipissing OW provides one to one coaching to participants in addition to a number of group employment workshops and training. The following represents some of the workshops currently being delivered: customer service training, employment ready program, cash register training, job search, interview skills, community placement information sessions, understanding your responsibilities which is a workshop designed for clients facing non-compliance, on-line WHIMIS, smart serve, computer training, safe food handling and health and safety. Employment supports are being delivered remotely in response to the pandemic. In-person services will resume when the office returns to normal business practices.</p>
Information Sessions	<p>We have used information sessions to promote a range of employment supports and services including employer engagements and post-secondary opportunities. Information sessions are also utilized to promote other activities as well for various target groups. In the context of the pandemic, information sessions have been held virtually.</p>
Leveraging technology	<p>Opportunities to leverage technology can increase efficiencies on the frontline and provide gainful insights from a business operations perspective. Examples of how Nipissing OW leverages technology include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to use and build enhancements to the Employment Database which is used to identify service needs and to match participants to employment and training opportunities • The use of Tableau dashboards to analyze data from Cognos reports, Operations Performance Report and the Employment Database <p>Update: The previous Service Plan highlighted that Ontario Works had consulted with the Labour Market Group to discuss the possible connection of Nipissing’s Get Trained Workers Employment Database with the Labour Market Groups “Ready Set Hired” job bank. This partnership would have digitized the job matching capability of the Get Trained Workers Employment Database. Due to the employment services transformation that is underway, no further action will be taken on this initiative due to the upcoming change in the Ontario Works mandate.</p>
Psycho-Vocational Assessments	<p>Nipissing OW purchases services from a local Psychologist who provides psycho-vocational testing on participants who are having difficulty connecting with the labour market. The outcome of the assessments is varied as many participants discover that they actually have a disability and are subsequently referred to the ODSP program. Many clients over the years have exited the OW program because of this partnership to either employment or to ODSP.</p>
External Referrals	<p>Nipissing OW will continue to refer to external programming when the participant presents a need that cannot be fulfilled through internal employment services, workshops or training. Examples include but are not limited to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nipissing OW sends referrals to the Business Centre Nipissing Parry

	<p>Sound for participants with entrepreneurship/self-employment goals. While the success of participants working through this process is limited, it continues to be a valuable program to help participants explore this career option.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nipissing OW refers OW participants to a variety of Employment Ontario service providers to participate in literacy programs, workshops and training opportunities, apprenticeship and other employment supports and services.
Sector Specific Training	Nipissing OW will continue to collaborate with partners to connect participants to training opportunities that are associated to employment vacancies in Nipissing District. Sector specific training opportunities like the PSW initiatives not only connect social assistance recipients to employment opportunities, they also fill a need within our community. As mentioned earlier in the service plan, OW is in the process of trying to establish an Entry Level Sales and Service training program and are in the process of assessing if there are additional labour gaps that could be filled by social assistance participants.
Continued partnerships with post-secondary institutions for short and long term programs	Post-secondary education is increasingly becoming important for participants to connect with the labour market and achieve self-sufficiency through sustainable employment. For this reason, Social Services will continue to collaborate with this sector on innovative solutions to alleviate poverty. An example includes the continuation of NPREP.
Continued Focus on Literacy and Life Skills	Participants without the basic skills and education necessary to connect to employment have great difficulty achieving financial independence in a labour market that is becoming increasingly competitive and knowledge based. Nipissing OW will continue to focus on attaching clients without a grade 12 education to adult literacy and life skills training.
Job Fairs/Get Job Ready Events	These collaborative events have been a successful strategy for Social Services to connect job seekers to employment. These events are held every year, are very well attended and reap positive results. Positive feedback from Employers is always received with many interviews being conducted on site at these events.
Continue to focus on employability	Determining a client's level of employability and connecting them to employment supports earlier in the process can often expedite the ability for service providers to engage clients in employment related activities. If successful, this change in time should have a positive impact on outcomes and length of time on assistance data. An example includes an employment workshop for new applicants that recently graduated and are job ready. Preparation activities are also underway to develop a workshop for job ready candidates who apply once the pandemic related federal benefits end.
Employment Resource Centers	Currently Nipissing OW operates three employment resource centres (North Bay, Mattawa and South Algonquin) that assist job seekers with employment

related needs. In the context of the pandemic our resource centres have been closed.

Update: The previous Service Plan highlighted that the Bancroft and District Chamber of Commerce was co-located with DNSSAB's South Algonquin (Whitney) satellite office and Resource Centre. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding to support the Chamber's physical presence in Whitney, this co-location ended in August 2020.

Please note that many of the strategies noted above will be discontinued upon the launch of the employment transformation in the District of Nipissing. Nipissing OW is hopeful that the successes reaped from this work will not be lost in the transformation and that some of these activities will somehow live on within the new system.

3.2 LINK STRATEGIES TO OUTCOME MEASURES

Setting and achieving performance targets is challenging at the best of times due to the unpredictability of the local labour market and/or broader regional economy. This reality combined with the significant impact of the pandemic has been devastating for both employers, employees and job seekers alike. While the pandemic did not impact the previous cycle in its entirety, its effect from March to the end of December 2020 certainly halted any progress made in the previous year. For this reason DNSSAB was pleased that the Ministry has taken the pandemic into consideration allowing administrators who experienced a negative increase in outcomes from 2019 to 2020 to set targets at 2020 achievements.

Table 11 below illustrates Nipissing OW's outcomes for 2019 and 2020 for both Nipissing and the Province, 2021 targets and the total points allocated to each measure for the current year. As you can see Nipissing OW's average achievements on measures 1B, 2A and 2B between 2019 and 2020 drastically decreased year over year. Measure 1A, Average Monthly Earnings per Case saw a nominal increase but not 3% above the previous year's achievement. For this reason and as per the Ministry's direction, the targets on all measures have been set at the 2020 performance level.

As shown below in Table 11, Nipissing has allocated more points to earnings measures 1A and 1B than what was allocated in the previous cycle. This is due to concerns related to the year-to-date 2021 achievements on termination measures 2A and 2B. Nipissing OW's achievements on these measures have historically been strong exceeding both local targets and the provincial average. However, the year-to-date achievements for 2021 are concerning and there may not be enough time in the last four months of the year to recover. Outcomes are expected to improve when federal benefits expire, the caseload increases and the caseload composition with respect to job readiness returns to pre-pandemic levels.

Table 11

	2019 Average Outcomes Nipissing	2019 Average Outcomes Province	2020 Average Outcomes Nipissing	2019 Average Outcomes Province	2021 Target	2021 Points Allocated
1A – Average Monthly Earnings Per Case	\$865	\$893	\$880	\$928	\$880	200
1B - % of Caseload with Employment Earnings	13.85%	13.20%	8.96%	8.86%	8.96%	200
2A - % of Terminations Exiting to Employment	29.83%	23%	24.89%	20.27%	24.89%	300
2B - % of Caseload Exiting to Employment	2.16%	1.29%	1.31%	0.95%	1.31%	300

Table 12 below now illustrates DNSSAB's year-to-date achievements for 2021. As you can see Nipissing OW's year-to-date average achievement on all measures is below the 2021 target. While this may or may not mean that outcomes will not be achieved by year end or over the two year cycle, there is a strong likelihood that Nipissing OW's achievements will fall short for the current year. This will leave Nipissing operating in a much riskier fiscal environment moving into the second year of the cycle. **For this reason and due to the continued impact of the pandemic on the labour market, Nipissing asks the Province to waive penalties for unmet targets for the current planning cycle.**

Table 12

Outcome Measure	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	YTD Avg	2021Target
1A - Average Monthly Earnings Per Case	\$936	\$873	\$796	\$802	\$846	\$748	\$860	\$949	\$851	\$880
1B - % of Caseload with Employment Earnings	9.18%	7.61%	7.80%	8.17%	7.68%	8.47%	8.42%	8.90%	8.28%	8.96%
2A - % of Terminations Exiting to Employment	21.11%	21.50%	14.29%	16.00%	16.05%	24.32%	17.07%	18.81%	18.64%	24.89%
2B - % of Caseload Exiting to Employment	1.14%	1.40%	0.74%	0.75%	0.82%	1.76%	0.93%	1.30%	1.1%	1.31%

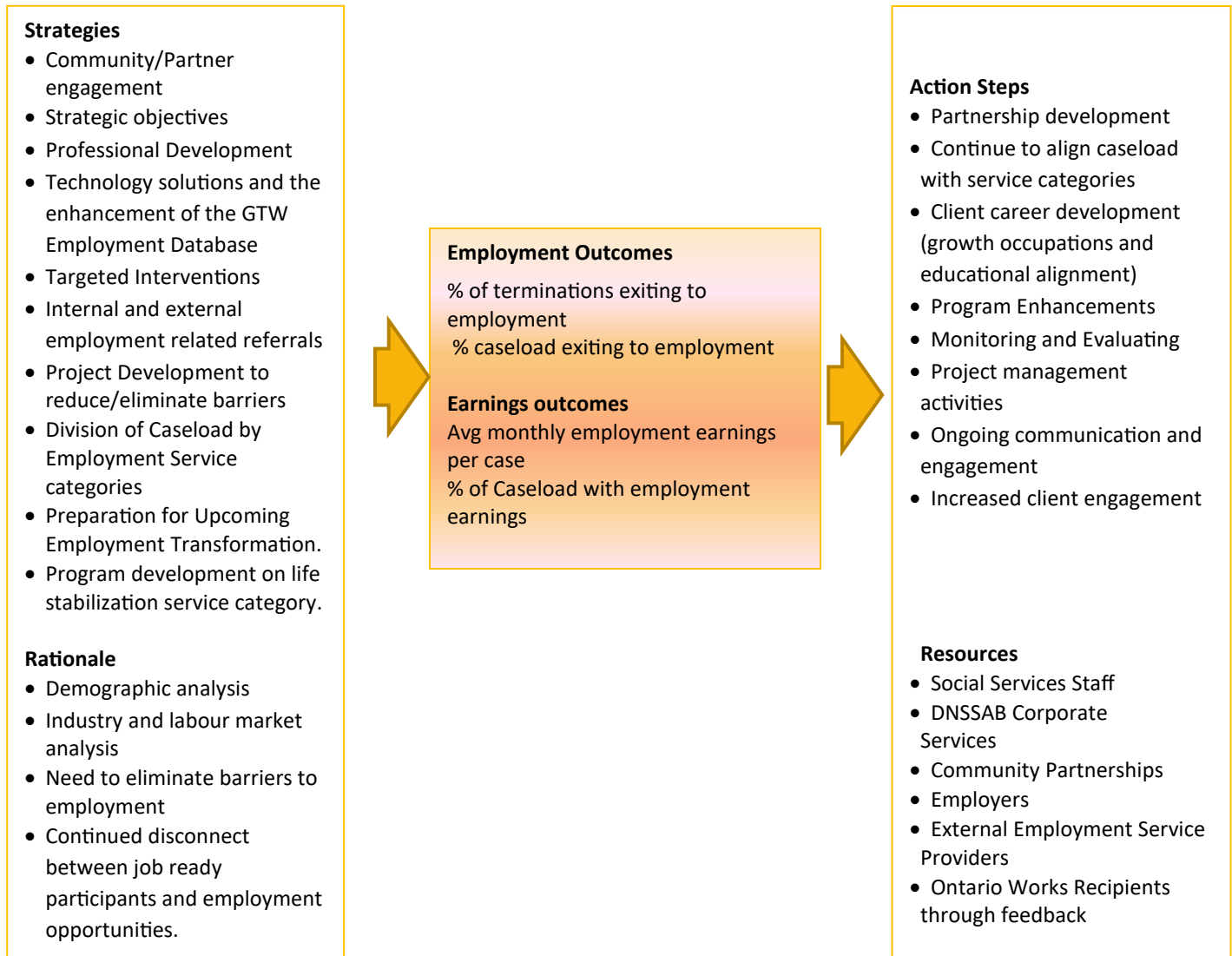
Table 10 above along with section 2.1.1, Analysis of the Previous Planning Cycle, highlights how individual strategies are used by Nipissing OW to influence the achievement of outcomes. All of the strategies listed have the potential to impact both exits to employment and earnings outcomes. Saying that, it is also important to recognize that not all measures are influenced equally and respond differently to changes in the labour market.

3.3 ACTION STEPS AND RESOURCES

The figure below summarizes the key strategies and action items described in this Plan that will help to achieve improved employment outcomes and self-reliance for clients. Key action items for the current planning cycle will include enhancing partnerships, staff development, development and implementation of

projects, re-alignment of the caseload based on service needs and individual career development. In order to be successful in the delivery of employment services to move clients in receipt of social assistance into sustainable employment, it is imperative that there is a solid understanding of the needs of the local labour market and broader regional economy. A broad view of current labour supply and demand, as well as the future needs of the labour market, is essential to effective planning in the area of employment services. To that end, staff will be concentrating more effort this planning cycle on business and market analysis, with the end goal of better preparing clients to meet the needs of business and the local labour market.

Figure 27



3.4 STAKEHOLDER LINKAGES

DNSSAB defines its stakeholders as any individual or group that can have either a positive or negative impact on its ability to realize the mission and vision. The Board has previously defined six stakeholder groups which include: our clients/citizens; employees; service delivery partners; governments/funders; Board of Directors; and the community.

As noted earlier in this Plan, DNSSAB is currently engaged in a strategic planning exercise with the Board's vision, mission and goals being under review. While this process is not complete it is anticipated that stakeholder linkages will remain part of the plans foundation. The return on investment with respect to community partnership development and maintenance is significant and cannot be underestimated. These relationships assist Nipissing OW and DNSSAB in general to leverage community resources to better meet the diverse needs of the clients served. The list below provides examples of how Nipissing leverages stakeholder partnerships to support employment and client-experience outcomes:

- Collaborates and participates in jointly delivered events with Economic Development Organizations and broader employment services sector.
- Developed a Purchase of Service Agreement with the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce to deliver employment placements/job development/employment supports through the 100 Jobs Pilot and Get Trained Workers Program. This approach has helped to remove the stigma associated with the delivery of social assistance.
- Ensures that OW is represented at various community tables and regular events such as "Business After Hours" with the local chamber of commerce.
- Maintains and leverages strong partnerships and protocols with the wide variety of services offered by Employment Ontario to compliment OW employment programming and avoids duplication of service.
- Strong partnerships/protocols/Service Agreements with the education sector both at the literacy and basic skills level up to post- secondary assist Social Services to promote these activities as being a pathway out of poverty.
- Partnership with the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit to deliver dental services to social assistance recipients helps to illustrate the inherent linkages between these two service sectors and increase the employability of clients struggling with dental related issues.
- Purchase of Service Agreement with the Business Centre assists Social Services with ensuring that the appropriate expertise required to help a client to pursue entrepreneurship is available.
- Partnerships/Protocols with local NGO's assist Social Services with ensuring that any gaps left by the system are met in the community.
- Partnership/protocols with local women's shelters assist Social Services to ensure that this target group receives the sensitive services required when dealing with issues related to violence against women.
- Partnership/protocols with local shelters that assist Social Services with homelessness related issues.
- Partnership with local food banks/soup kitchens that fill gaps left by low social assistance rates.
- Partnership/protocols with local addiction and mental health service providers assist Social Services with ensuring that the level of expertise required to assist participants with this barrier is available.
- Client engagement sessions and/or feedback processes will help to inform Social Services on whether or not the current service delivery model is meeting their needs.
- Engagement opportunities to meet with other OW Service Providers through various tables, NOSDA/OMSSA etc. allows Social Services to learn and benefit from the experiences of its peers on the delivery of effective employment strategies.

-
- Continued engagement with the Ministry/MCCSS on the Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Plan inclusive of the employment services transformation.
 - Joint implementation protocols with ODSP to ensure that services delivered by OW to the ODSP population are as seamless as possible.

In addition to the extensive work that Nipissing OW does to develop and maintain community partnerships, it also has direct linkages to other internal DNSSAB resources that exist within the Children's Services and Housing/Homelessness departments. For example: For childcare subsidy or housing related needs inclusive of CHPI benefits, OW has internal processes to manage this work.

3.5 ADDRESSING SERVICE GAPS

Identifying and addressing service gaps throughout the district continues to be a key priority for Nipissing OW. Due to the size of Nipissing District and the unique needs of our rural versus urban areas, Social Services must ensure that our service delivery model meets the needs of all clients and not only the clients residing in the larger urban centers. In order to enhance Nipissing OW's ability to identify and address service gaps, it has taken a leadership role in facilitating service provider networks that work collaboratively on ways to re-align existing resources to better meet the needs of our clients. This has proven to be an effective tool to promote holistic services through an integrated service model. Through various initiatives and participation on numerous planning tables, members of the OW management team and front line staff, along with other dedicated community partners have managed to close or reduce service gaps on a number of fronts. Continued collaboration and consultation will remain a priority as we move forward to ensure that an integrated approach to decision making is sustained over time.

DNSSAB's continued role in the administration of the municipal Nipissing Innovation Fund, which funds projects to support the needs of low income individuals and families, is a perfect example of how aligning resources with the needs of the community can reap positive rewards. By investing these dollars into innovative programs that seek to fill gaps through a focus on prevention, DNSSAB is able to optimize and allocate resources in a manner that can impact future generation's thus reducing potential future dependency on social assistance programs.

The following highlights a few of the on-going initiatives that demonstrate the commitment of Social Services to reduce service gaps in the community:

3.5.1 Access to Mental Health and Addiction Services

DNSSAB has been very active in their advocacy to highlight the linkage between poverty and poor health outcomes. Through active participation at the local Mental Health and Addiction Systems Table, along with various engagements led by the Ontario Health Team, DNSSAB continues to flag the need for increased access to these services. As Nipissing has been considered a hub for these services for many years due to the location of the previous North Bay Psychiatric hospital, the caseload has a significant representation of participants with these barriers. **Nipissing's also continues to have twice the number of people on ODSP per**

capita, than the Province³ which is another consideration when trying to determine the amount of pressure being placed on the service system.

Wait times along with a lack of psychiatrists and inpatient beds are resulting in frustration for both end users and service providers. Due to the high demand in the District of Nipissing, service providers are struggling to keep up with the ever increasing need. The previous Service Plan highlighted that this sector was under review by the Ontario Health Teams. At the local level, this work resulted in the merger of key agencies delivering mental health and addiction services. Time will tell if this merger will in fact result in streamlined services that are easier to navigate and improved outcomes. Further, as most of the services are located in the urban centre (North Bay) this can also present a significant barrier to those without access to public transportation. For this reason, MCCSS through OW and ODSP are forced to absorb the transportation costs under mandatory benefits to get participants to the services. The value of holistic service hubs throughout the District cannot be underestimated.

3.5.2 Protocols with Local Nurse Practitioner Clinic

Due to the shortage of family Doctors and Psychiatrists in the District, it has been essential to form partnerships with various healthcare providers. Effective referral protocols with Nurse Practitioner Clinics has been essential to connecting social assistance recipients to healthcare services. As information related to whether or not a client has a family doctor is collected at the time of application through the social determinants of health questions on the Get Trained Workers employment assessment, Nipissing OW is able to filter the database for these cases and target communications.

3.5.3 Other Systemic Gaps

Other systemic service gaps such as income and food insecurity, shortage of safe and affordable housing, lack of employment opportunities for participants with barriers, the absence of public transportation in all parts of the District and the shortage of 24 hour formal childcare and infant spaces also impact a clients' ability to connect to the labour market. As a few of these gaps are within the control of DNSSAB, work is currently underway in the areas of childcare and housing. However, due to funding limitations this work will not even come close to meeting the level of need. DNSSAB can also utilize its leadership to advocate for change in areas that do not fall within its mandated services as all of the gaps noted above are connected and impact the respective outcomes of all sectors.

3.6 INCREASED EMPLOYABILITY STRATEGIES

It is clear that in order to increase the employability of social assistance recipients they need to be empowered to see their own potential and self-worth. For many clients, living in poverty can result in feelings of hopelessness, isolation and marginalization. This can result in a client developing a real fear of leaving the only social safety net they know. Fear of failure and disappointment is real for this population. This in itself can act as a barrier to their success. By investing in strategies that work, identifying the client's currency and offering the supports that are needed, social assistance recipients can develop the self-

³ Social Assistance Extranet, ODSP Social Assistance Operational Performance Report

confidence they need to move forward. Further, providing clients with the knowledge they need to succeed on their own, along with encouraging words goes a long way to helping clients regain control of their lives.

For many this path isn't an easy one as many social assistance recipients have deeply rooted complex barriers that go beyond being unemployed. These barriers which may include but are not limited to addiction, mental health, physical health, criminal record, housing instability/homelessness, food insecurity, low levels of education, skills deficits, and lack of self-confidence all create road blocks that can result in a client feeling stuck in their current circumstance.

In order for the system to be effective, clients require a wide range of supports and services to meet their individual needs. **This means that a multi-ministerial and holistic approach is required in order to ensure that the full spectrum of a client's needs are met as they are interconnected on many levels. For many clients increased "hand holding" along with "warm referrals" whereby clients truly feel that everyone working with them across sectors are working on the same team is also essential.** It is clear that more work needs to be done to align programs and services within the broader human service network. Building these relationships and repairing disconnects is not only cost effective but will also enhance the quality within the service system as a whole.

Nipissing OW aims to offer the right mix of financial assistance, employment and life stabilization supports and external referrals for services not delivered by OW to help recipients move along the employment continuum. Given that holistic and wrap around approaches generate better client outcomes, it is essential to continue to collaborate with human service providers and to participate in cross sector collaborations and partnerships. Leveraging data across sectors whenever possible in order to gain a better understanding of the needs of communities is also a valuable strategy.

Helping clients to stabilize as many aspects of their lives as possible is essential so that they can shift their focus from food and shelter to employment related activities inclusive of mental health and addiction treatment. Clients who are unsure of whether or not they will have enough money to eat or pay the rent are less likely to succeed. Low social assistance rates makes this challenging. **For this reason, Nipissing OW asks the Province to consider raising social assistance rates as part of the Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Plan. Further, assisting clients with system navigation to connect them with external services and supports is also important, as anyone working in the sector knows that many social assistance recipients do not connect with external services simply because a referral is made. This is why the Ministry's future vision for OW to play an increased role in system navigation is encouraging and a step in the right direction.**

3.7 MONITORING SERVICE STRATEGIES

Outcomes are monitored on a monthly basis by the OW Management team and updates are shared with front line staff regularly. A detailed file review process is also in place for supervisors to oversee front line staffs work to ensure that all strategies/protocols/processes related to the delivery of employment services are followed. For example: One component of the file review process includes a review of whether or not a client's activities on their outcome plan matches their level of employability as determined by Nipissing OW's locally developed Get Trained Workers assessment tool. If the activities are not compatible with the level of

employability, follow up occurs to ensure that the Case Manager is providing all of the appropriate supports to the client to be successful on their employment pathways.

In addition to the monitoring activities noted above, the following list provides examples of other strategies utilized by Nipissing OW to determine progress towards the achievement of outcome targets.

- Get Trained Workers Employment Database data related to the number of participants matched to employment and/or changes in job readiness
- Number of referrals to internal workshops and training
- Number of referrals to external workshops and training (literacy, life skills, EO program etc.)
- Number of community placement sponsors and participants
- Number of employment placements
- Number of participants exiting to post-secondary education
- Amount of employment placement incentives approved
- Amount of community placement client incentives approved
- Number of students graduating from secondary or post-secondary education
- Quarterly reports from third party service providers with purchase of service agreements

4.0 PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

4.1 SERVICE DELIVERY

Continuous improvement and the delivery of quality customer service have always been program goals for Social Services. Over the years, aside from provincially legislated changes, Nipissing OW has gone through various transformations to improve its service delivery model.

In addition to the strategies outlined in Section 3.1, Table 13 below outlines key program management activities and approaches that:

- Support achievement of outcome targets;
- Provide a seamless client experience;
- Support Ministry’s modernization initiatives;
- Address any delivery issues identified in the environmental scan; and/or as part of the COVID-19 Recovery; and
- Respond to, and address, Ministry priorities

Table 13

Support the Achievement of Outcome Targets	
Enhanced Staff training and professional development. Increase focus on life stabilization.	Ensuring that front line staff have the tools required to deliver quality, client centered employment services that are targeted to meet the individual needs of clients is essential to the achievement of outcomes. SAIL training along with in-services and other training opportunities through OMSSA etc. are provided.

Increased focus on job retention strategies.	Recidivism continues to be a challenge for service providers. While all outcomes are beneficial, long term sustainable outcomes are the goal. For this reason, Social Services built this function into the job description of the OW Employment Marketing Specialist. Retention services are also built into the Get Trained Workers Coordinator job description through a Purchase of Service Agreement.
Marketing Strategies	In order to ensure that Employers are aware of the services available through the Ontario Works Program marketing is required. Various mediums have been used from pamphlets to billboards over the years. These efforts will continue providing there is funding to support it.
Service Delivery Model	Ensuring that our service delivery model reflects the needs of the changes in our caseload in an effort to maintain in improve outcomes is critical. Examples include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to the continued pressure on OW to support clients with complex barriers, OW positions were re-profiled in 2020 and 2021 to order to create 5 TSCM positions. • In an effort to streamline services and improve outcomes for social assistance recipients being released from incarceration, two Case Managers have been designated to manage these cases.
Performance Management	In Nipissing, a performance review process has been established to measure and evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness and excellence or employees. The process includes setting individualized objectives based on areas of growth that are linked to departmental and organizational goals.
Labour Market Data	Monthly labour market data compiled by the Labour Market Group is reviewed to inform planning. This information is also disseminated to all Ontario Works staff to increase understanding of local labour market needs.
Provide a Seamless Client Experience	
Life Stabilization Supports for Non-OW Recipients	In an effort to introduce life stabilization supports and services to non-OW recipients, a referral process to link clients working with DNSSAB's Children's Services and Housing departments to OW staff is being explored. By introducing this work slowly into the service delivery model before the full launch of the provincial model, the OW management team will be better prepared to support staff through this transition.
Recruitment	Nipissing OW includes interview questions that gauge candidates ability to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the needs of social assistance recipients and the impacts of living in poverty • Demonstrate client centric thinking

Client Advisory Committee	During the pandemic client engagement has been low. Work is underway to resume these activities as feedback from end users on their experience is essential to understanding if the existing service delivery model is in fact seamless from their perspective.
Client-Centered Approach	Nipissing OW promotes a client-centered approach to service delivery which is reflected in local policies, processes and business practices.
Supports Ministry's Modernization Initiatives	
Staff Engagement on Modernization	Nipissing OW has completed 3 staff engagement sessions using the information provided by the Ministry to obtain feedback from staff. Ensuring that staff are up-to-date on all communications will be key to helping staff transition into the new service delivery model as different components are rolled out.
Community Engagement	As mentioned earlier, Nipissing has reached out to the local Ontario Disability Support Program office to partner on delivering the community partner engagement information package received from the province on September 16 th , 2021. A plan will be developed to deliver this material to community partners sometime in October with feedback rolled up for the province by October 29, 2021.
Engagement in Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Activities	Nipissing OW will continue to be actively engaged at all levels with respect to the Ministry's modernization initiatives as consultation and collaborative planning will be key to the successful implementation of all initiatives.
Client Advisory Group	During the pandemic client engagement has been low. Work is underway to resume these activities as feedback from end users on the Ministry's Recovery and Renewal Plan will be essential to ensuring that changes will not have a negative impact on the most vulnerable.
Delivery issues identified in the environmental scan; and/or as part of the COVID-19 Recovery	
Gaps in Mental Health and Addiction Services	In an effort to address gaps in mental health and addiction services, Nipissing OW will continue to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate to increase access to mental health and addiction services • Participate in related committees and working groups • Build and enhance partnerships and opportunities to collaborate with partners who have expertise in the field • Ensure that our service delivery model reflects the needs of the caseload which includes specialized supports offered through the TSCM team to connect social assistance recipients to appropriate resources.

Influx in Applications	Federal benefits to help Canadians facing hardship as a result of the pandemic have resulted in a reduction in the caseload size as well as a decrease in the number of incoming applications in Nipissing District and across the province. Given that these federal benefits are temporary, preparations are underway to ensure that we are able to respond to the anticipated influx of applications. Preparation activities include the implementation of a soft phone solution.
Long Term Impact of Pandemic on Outcomes	The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our economy, business operations and education systems as well as taken away jobs. In the aftermath of the pandemic, work, education and society will continue to undergo change especially in the area of digital transformation. As we enter into the recovery phase and move towards a full reopening in Ontario, it will be essential to keep informed about labour market trends and labour gaps to ensure that we have a range of supports and services in place to connect job seekers to employment.
Lessons Learned	There are a number of lessons learned from the pandemic that can be incorporated to improve services and increase efficiencies. Recognizing that services need to be flexible to meet the needs of social assistance recipients, there are opportunities to continue to use risk based approaches in addition to virtual and phone interviews and meetings.
Length of Time on Assistance	Given the parallels between length of time on assistance and level of employability it makes sense to provide a range of service pathways to ensure that job ready participants are able to connect to the labour market quickly, participants who are preparing for employment have a variety of employment enhancing activities available and that mutli-barriered participants are connected to life stabilization supports and services. Specialized supports, including those offered through the TSCM team and Social Justice Pilot to address barriers can assist recipients who have barriers to employment to move along the employment continuum.
Address and Respond to Ministry priorities	
Introduction of a Program Compliance Specialist Position and plan to develop a Program Integrity Unit	As noted in the previous Service Plan, OW was rethinking how to improve upon existing processes in the area of program compliance and integrity. While OW did not create a “program integrity unit” one OW Case Manager position was re-profiled into a Program Compliance Specialist position to support this work. Future vision is to re-centralize all roles supporting program oversight into one unit. Further consideration is being given to how to best make additional changes in this area without compromising customer service standards.

<p>Continue to engage and participate in activities with the health care sector</p>	<p>Social Services will continue to take every opportunity to make the necessary linkages with the healthcare sector to promote collaborative planning on common issues. Holistic services that meet the complete needs of participants are the key to creating healthy communities. This relationship between poverty, health and wellbeing is empirically well known. Efforts to address one without considering the other are simply destined to fail resulting in poor outcomes for clients, Band-Aid solutions and an increased strain on the tax payer</p>
<p>Participation on both OW tables and committees inclusive of OMSSA/NOSDA and community tables and committees where OW mandate aligns.</p>	<p>As illustrated in section 1.4, the Nipissing OW team heavily engaged in developing and maintaining community partnerships and is represented on a variety of committees and working groups. Through this participation OW can both provide and receive program updates resulting in greater consultation and collaboration.</p>
<p>Public Education</p>	<p>The pandemic has impacted this work however efforts will continue post pandemic. OW will continue to enhance opportunities to educate the public to increase awareness of the Ontario Works Program and decrease stigma. Over time these efforts should assist with re-profiling the Ontario Works program as an employment program with a skilled labour force versus a “welfare” program plagued by stereotypes and misconceptions. This strategy will need to be modified to meet the new service delivery model when employment is transitioned over to Employment Ontario. .</p>
<p>Continued Advocacy Efforts on Various Social Assistance Issues</p>	<p>Continued advocacy will be an important strategy moving forward as the province continues with its social reform agenda. It will be imperative that Administrators of social assistance programming be active participants in the change process and not bystanders. This will help to ensure that the voices of those living on Ontario Works assistance are heard so that informed decisions are made.</p>
<p>Leverage Technology and Data Collection</p>	<p>Social Services relies heavily on whatever data is available to evaluate the effectiveness of its service strategies in order to ensure that there is an ample return on investment. Social Services monitors and reports on targeted outcomes and program expenditures monthly to the DNSSAB Board. Ad hoc reports and presentations on various other topics related to data and social assistance delivery are also utilized to further educate and inform. During the previous cycle Nipissing OW has also expanded its use of Tableau (business intelligence software) by creating dashboards to assist with data analysis. Further, due to slippage in the OW budget, OW was able to create a temporary Data Coordinator position to support this work.</p>

<p>Use of Ministry Reports and other Digital Monitoring and Measurement Software</p>	<p>Social Services continues to utilize various Cognos reports along with the Social Assistance Operations Performance Report to inform its planning. Various other peripheral tracking mechanisms developed locally inclusive of the Get Trained Workers Employment Database are also used extensively to ensure that program delivery remains on track. This monitoring is key to ensuring that variances are identified early in order to investigate the cause of the variance and develop a solution. This analysis enables Social Services to adjust service delivery strategies and/or modify local policies or procedures as required to ensure that the work of Staff is aligned with the achievement of outcomes.</p>
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4.2 ANALYSIS OF RESOURCES

While the pandemic has impacted the conversation around the adequacy of resources due to the decrease in the caseload, it continues to be important to highlight that OW expenditures have been frozen since 2019. The caseload will likely increase when federal benefits expire as will expenditures and while most client related benefits are now fully uploaded, there continues to be a municipal impact with respect to program delivery and employment costs. The cap on discretionary benefits also remains an area of risk for CMSM’s and DSSAB’s. Further, as the current employment funding model continues to be driven by the achievement of employment and earnings outcomes, concern remains that this model remains flawed especially in light of the pandemic’s impact on achievements and the high percentage of recipients falling into the life stabilization category.

As always and in order to manage in this fiscal environment, every opportunity to optimize resources, allocate and align policies and funding to the needs of clients while minimizing administrative costs wherever possible is critical. Full utilization of available funding to support clients continues to be the goal for Nipissing OW. However, full utilization is not always possible when access to funding is only available when dollars are matched by an already strained municipal levy.

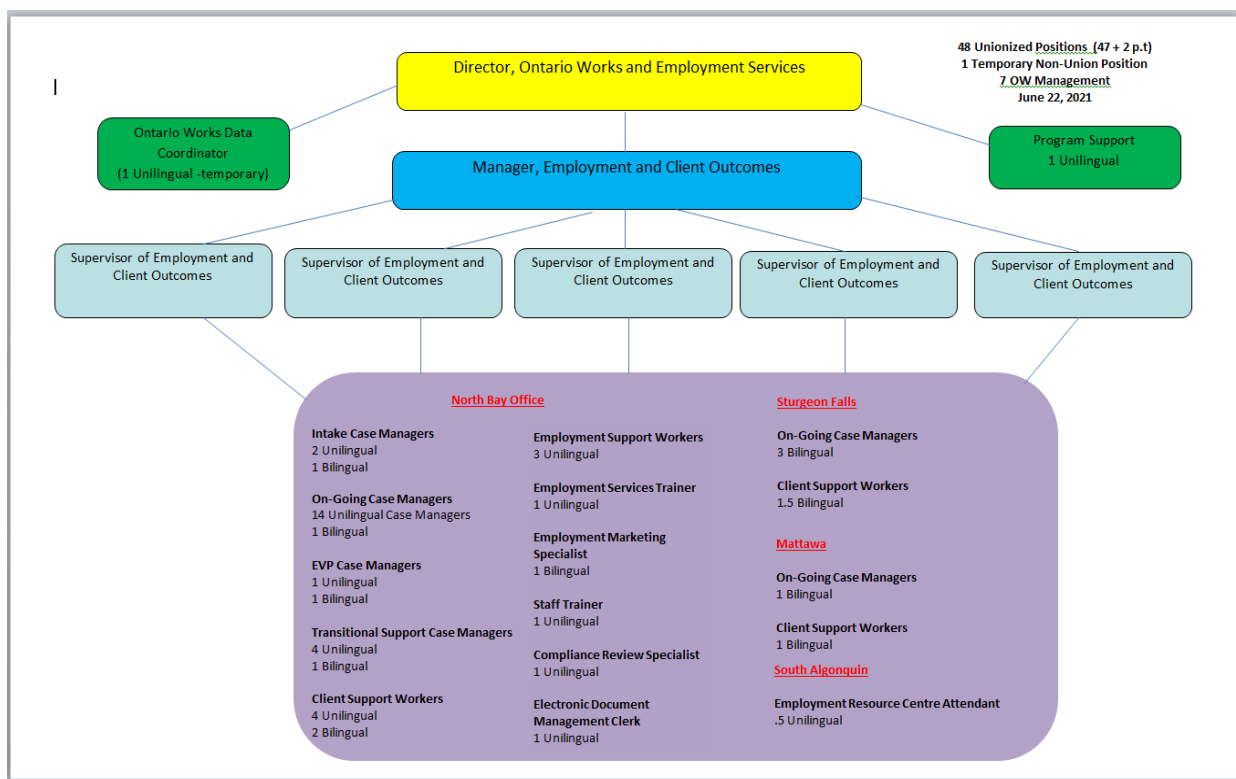
For the current year, it is anticipated that OW will be under budget overall under program delivery and employment due to the reduction in the caseload. However, as it has been difficult to plan during this period not knowing when the pandemic will end staffing levels have been maintained. This will ensure that Nipissing is in a better position operationally to support the influx of applications that are anticipated when the federal benefits expire. During this period a greater focus was placed on increased contact with clients and other program priorities.

Looking forward to 2023 there is significant concern that there will be a shortfall when the OW budget is reduced in response to the province’s Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Plan and Employment Transformation. As the Ontario Works mandate is changing with respect to the transfer of employment services to Employment Ontario and the centralization of intake, the workload associated with the delivery of life stabilization supports for both OW and non-OW recipients is expected to fill any time saved from these changes.

Section 2.2.8 on length of time on assistance explains that the percentage of OW recipients staying on the caseload for 19 months and longer is increasing while those leaving the caseload within one year or less is decreasing. This is important as clients with complex barriers who fall into the life stabilization category require more staff time than those who are closer to the labour market thus requiring fewer supports.

The Figure below represents Nipissing OW’s organization chart as of September 2021. As you can see, Nipissing currently has a total of 55 FTE’s (7 management, 48 unionized) plus one new temporary non-union OW Data Coordinator. The average staff to supervisor ratio is about ten to one. Due to the significant drop in the caseload, as of August 2021 the average caseload size per “regular” Case Manager District wide was about 71 cases. Case Managers carrying specialized functions such as transitional support, funerals, ODSP participating non-disabled spouses and dependent adults and self-employment have reduced caseloads which have generally be kept between 65-75 but currently range between 51-62 cases.

Figure 28



4.3 KEY PROGRAM MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

4.3.1 Overview of Service Delivery Model

DNSSAB Social Services uses a software program, Prairie Fyre to manage its intake calls. To date, this system has been effective. However, with the onset of the pandemic and the introduction of remote work, a soft phone solution has been explored and is in the final stages of approval. This system will replace Prairie Fyre but will not impact the benefits reaped to date from this intake solution. The majority of intake applications continue to be completed by phone as shown below in Table 14. According to the OW Social Assistance Operations Performance Report, the uptake on on-line applications has been consistent and remains low

despite the on-going promotion of this application stream. It is clear that applicants prefer a more personal approach from the first point of contact.

	On-Line Applications Average Per Month	Applications Through Other Methods Average Per Month
2019	34	96
2020	30	66
Y-T-D 2021	29	60

Table 14

Following on-line applications, applicants are contacted by an Intake Case Manager to schedule their verification appointment with an “on-going” Case Manager. At the time of writing the previous Service Plan, Nipissing’s intake model was under review. This review resulted in Nipissing OW returning to the intake model used many years ago whereby only basic information was captured by intake staff. This alleviated the need for a client to tell their full story twice. At this time the intake team was reduced by 1 transitioning this role into a caseload.

Intake Case Managers are no longer responsible for completing the complete application or verifying documentation and determining eligibility. Intake Case Managers now only capture prescribed basic information prior to the file being transferred to an on-going Case Manager. However, emergency applications are completed in their entirety by the Intake Case Manager. Intake Case Managers also manage the Temporary Care cases and all incoming ODSP discretionary benefit requests for the District.

Following the intake process, the on-going Case Manager carries the responsibility for completing the full application inclusive of the outcome plan, the Get Trained Workers employability assessment, verifying information, completion of all mandatory forms inclusive of assignments of benefits and determining eligibility. Monitoring compliance, fraud allegations and all other duties associated with Case Management fall under the scope of the on-going Case Manager.

Transitional Support Case Managers (TSCM’s) do not complete applications unless there is an influx that cannot be managed through the Intake/On-Going Teams. TSCM caseloads are formed through a review process whereby clients with the most significant barriers and needs are transferred to this dedicated team. The TSCM’s are then responsible for the full scope of managing their caseloads as described above.

The employment team is comprised of Employment Support Workers (ESW’S), an Employment Marketing Specialist (EMS) and a Client Trainer. The ESW’s support Case Managers with respect to the delivery of employment related workshops, 1-1 appointments on employability needs, resume writing, interview skill etc. The EMS is primarily responsible for community and employment placement and the marketing of these programs. This position also assists with workshop development and delivery. The Client Trainer supports all the work of the employment team including the delivery of job specific skills training. This position also acts as a primary point of contact on several key employment initiatives including NPREP and PSW Sector Specific training programs.

Clients with issues related to child support can be voluntarily referred to the Program Compliance Specialist (PCS) who will assist the recipient with basic information and then refer to other available community

resources such as legal aid or duty counsel. With respect to recipients who are required to pursue spousal support, Case Managers complete the Declaration for Support and Maintenance (2212) at the time of application and refer to the PCS. The PCS will then review the 2212 for accuracy and will determine next steps in consultation with the recipient.

Applications for formal childcare subsidy have been integrated at the OW intake level only for many years. OW Intake Case Managers captured the required information and transferred the case to a Children's Services Representative (CSR) who works for the Children's Services department. The CSR's carried the responsibility to make the eligibility decision and carried the caseload. With the onset of the pandemic this process changed and the Children's Services Department resumed this function. A final decision regarding whether childcare subsidy applications will return to OW has not yet been made. Informal childcare requests are processed by OW Case Managers.

4.3.2 Outline of Business Practices

4.3.2.1 Modernizing and Improving the Effectiveness and Efficiency of Program Delivery

Building program effectiveness and efficiencies through improvements and modernization of program delivery mechanisms is key to improving the client experience, achieving employment outcomes and enabling staff to spend more time with clients. Related business practices in Nipissing include;

- **Aligning Resources:** The alignment of existing resources to the future vision of social assistance delivery is important so that Nipissing OW is prepared to adapt to the changes ahead. Nipissing has already implemented a number of modernization initiatives including EDM and RPC. Preparation activities are also underway to onboard into Centralized Intake and ensure that we can transition from employment to life stabilization services when EST is rolled out in the North.
- **Data Analysis:** Nipissing OW uses data to better understand the needs of social assistance recipients and to inform local decision making. Data from various ministry reports and the employment database are monitored. The use of Tableau dashboards provides further insights. For example, through a Tableau dashboard developed using data from the Integrated Case Summary report each month, Nipissing OW monitors the number of social assistance recipients that have declared no fixed address. This data has been used for various planning purposes and has been particularly useful when implementing COVID-19 response strategies during lockdowns to ensure there were no delays or disruptions to assistance.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Remote work and restrictions to in-person contact necessitated the leveraging of technology as part of the pandemic response in Nipissing. Regular meetings with staff began to occur virtually, a soft phone solution is in the process of being implemented and a new scheduling tool is currently being explored.
- **General Oversight:** Nipissing OW has implemented a number of oversight measures to monitor program compliance and quality of service. For instance, OW Supervisors complete file reviews each month to ensure that recently granted and ongoing files meet legislative and policy requirements. When common errors are identified, additional training and updates to local policies and processes can be made through the staff trainer.

4.3.2.2 Third Party Checks

Requests for third party information are made at various times during the lifecycle of a client’s file including the initial application, when a financial reassessment is completed (file update every 24 months), as part of the EVP, when adding a spouse, before transferring a file to ODSP, and when addressing allegations of fraud. Third party checks are used to verify eligibility related information provided by a recipient as outlined in figure 29.

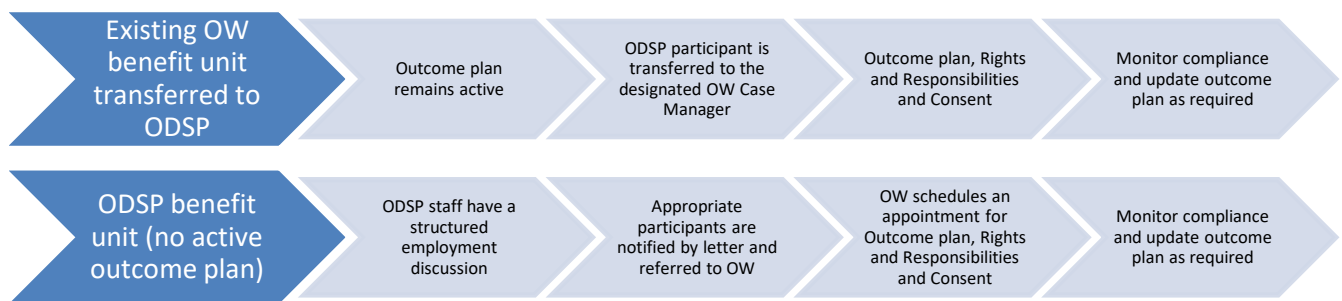
Figure 29

Equifax	Ministry of Transportation (MTO)	Family Responsibility Office	Canada Revenue Agency	Employment Insurance (EI)	Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP)	National Child Benefit Supplement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asset verification mandatory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> history of vehicle ownership change of address 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> spousal support payment information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> income verification mandatory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> history of employment potential eligibility for EI benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> member of benefit unit is attending or has a history of attending post-secondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> where children are added to a benefit unit Child tax benefit is not in pay

4.3.2.3 Addressing expectations related to employment supports for non-disabled adults.

Participation in Ontario Works employment assistance is a requirement of eligibility for social assistance for non-disabled dependent adults and spouses connected to ODSP benefit units. OW and ODSP have collaborated to develop and maintain joint protocols that outline business practices to streamline services as illustrated in Figure 30 below.

Figure 30



4.3.2.4 Monitoring and Correcting Instances of Non-Compliance with Non-Disabled Adults.

In situations where compliance concerns arise with ODSP participating adults, OW and ODSP staff will work collaboratively with the participant to address compliance issues and promote active participation in negotiated activities. Every effort should be made to work with a client but in situations where compliance issues persist, OW will make a recommendation to ODSP regarding non-compliance. ODSP will take the necessary steps to review for non-compliance. ODSP participating adults placed in non-compliance for one to three months are notified by letter by ODSP who is also responsible for completing any associated requests for an internal review and SBT appeals.

4.3.2.5 Financial Reassessments in Conjunction with Third Party Checks

Financial eligibility is reviewed when a change in client circumstances has been identified, at time of EVP review and at application updates. Third party checks are used to verify eligibility related information as outlined in section 4.3.2.2. In addition a number of local business practices are in place to ensure eligibility is reviewed in accordance with provincial standards including:

-
- Standardized note templates to ensure that tasks are created to complete file updates a minimum of every 24 months and prior to transferring a file to ODSP if an update did not occur within three months of the DAU referral date
 - SAMS tasks to monitor when a file update is required
 - Scheduling tool is used to book, track and monitor file update appointments
 - Random file reviews are complete to ensure that program compliance standards are met

4.3.2.6 Mandatory and Discretionary Benefit Documentation, Notation and Compliance

Nipissing OW has a number of business practices in place to ensure that mandatory and discretionary benefits are issued in compliance with requirements and standards established in Ministry Directives and local standards.

- Local Policies, processes and job aids that;
 - provide guidance when determining the type and amount of benefits to be issued
 - promote consistency while allowing for flexibility in exceptional circumstances
 - differentiate mandatory and discretionary benefits
- Approval process when seeking to issue discretionary benefits over \$500
- Case Managers are required to provide direction for all daily and monthly payments generated
- Standardized note templates
- Monitoring of Ministry Reports including;
 - Detailed Exceptions Report
 - Discretionary Benefits Report
 - Employment Assistance Expenses Report

4.3.2.7 Employment Deferral Documentation, Notation and Follow-Up

OW applicants, spouses and dependent adults along with non-disabled ODSP spouses and dependent adults must negotiate an outcome plan as a condition of eligibility for social assistance. Outcome plans are living documents that must be updated regularly and activities need to reflect the level of employability and be individualized to meet the needs of the participant. Under prescribed circumstances and with adequate documentation, participants can be temporarily deferred from participating in employment assistance activities. Nipissing OW has developed a number of business practices around outcome planning which include policies, processes, job aids and forms to ensure provincial standards are met in a timely manner.

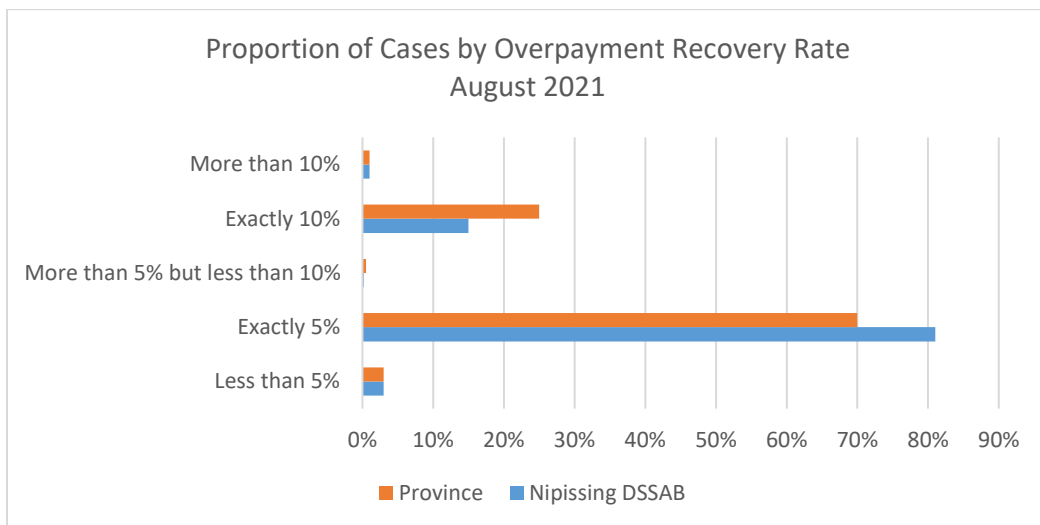
- Supplementary Medical Form: Nipissing OW uses a locally developed supplementary medical form in conjunction with the Ministry Consent to Release Medical Information form. The supplementary medical verifies the length of time a participant is unable to participate in activities, as well as referral recommendations to the DAU, addiction treatment, physiotherapy etc.
- Note Templates: standardized note templates have been developed to ensure that appropriate details regarding deferrals, restrictions and limitations to participation are documented in SAMS.
- SAMS Tasks: Tasks in SAMS are created to trigger follow up to ensure that documentation regarding deferrals has been provided to the office within established timelines.
- Voluntary Participation: Participants eligible for a deferral from employment activities are encouraged to voluntarily participate in employment enhancing activities.

- File Reviews: OW Supervisors complete monthly file reviews which include a review of the outcome plan to ensure that deferrals are adequately documented and participation activities reflect the participant’s level of employability
- Reports: A number of Employment and Participation reports available through the Ministry, the employment database and the local scheduling tool are monitored monthly.

4.3.2.8 Implementation of the 10% Recovery Rate for all Overpayments

In an effort to strengthen program accountability and enhance the collection of overpayments, the Ministry increased the overpayment recovery rate for overpayments deemed within the control of a client to 10%. Figure 31 below, compares the proportion of cases by overpayment recovery rate for the month of August 2021 between the province and Nipissing.

Figure 31



Nipissing OW business practices are in place ensure the criteria outlined in directive 9.3 around the recovery rate are applied. Despite these efforts the proportion of cases that have a recovery rate of 10% remains lower than the provincial average. To address this issue, local business practices have been put in place to ensure that Nipissing OW is meeting program expectations and include;

- Overpayment note template that documents validation details as well as what the recovery rate was set at and the reasons for this decision.
- File reviews completed by OW Supervisors ensure that overpayments have been validated and that the appropriate recovery rate has been applied.
- Detailed Exceptions Report is monitored for adjustments to the overpayment recovery rate each month.

4.3.2.9 Listing of all OW benefits managed outside of SAMS and identify supporting documentation that will be provided with adjustments to subsidy claims.

All Ontario Works benefits are managed within SAMS with the exception of funding expensed to third parties through purchase of service agreements primarily for employment services. The following list represents the initiatives either funded outside of SAMS during the previous cycle or anticipated to be funded during the current cycle:

-
- North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce - 100 Jobs Pilot
 - North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce - Get Trained Workers
 - Clark Communications – Get Trained Workers Employment Database
 - North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit – Dental Pilot
 - Canadore College – Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program (NPREP)

Copies of signed and executed Service Agreements will be forwarded to the Ministry as supporting documentation with subsidy claims reflecting transactions completed outside of SAMS. Third party reports could also be made available upon request.

4.3.2.10 Business Practices for OW benefits managed outside of SAMS.

As noted in Section 1.5.4 and again in Section 4.3.2.9 above, Nipissing OW does not manage direct client benefits outside of SAMS. However DNSSAB does purchase services through Service Agreements from third parties in the area of employment service delivery. DNSSAB has strict internal controls over payments associated with Service Agreements to maximize accountability and transparency, while protecting the financial interests of the DNSSAB and its funders. DNSSAB also has strict segregation of duties controls in place to ensure the integrity of the process by reducing the exposure to inappropriate, unauthorized or unlawful expenditures. The segregation of duties is to prevent one person from having access to all steps in a process that involves assets and/or usage of budget dollars as no one employee or group should ever be in the position to perpetuate and/or conceal errors or fraud. Directors/Managers are involved in the development of Service Agreements however do not control the whole process. The Contract Management Specialist is responsible for the creation and vetting of all Service Agreements. Directors/Managers must consult with the Manager of Finance to ensure that there is funding available to support the project and the CAO and DNSSAB Board Chair must sign all Agreements. Finance is responsible for creating the subsidy claims with the OW Director reviewing the claim and submitting it to the Ministry.

4.3.2.11 Performance standards are met, and risks and areas for improvement are identified and addressed in a timely manner.

DNSSAB has very robust policies around risk management, therefore, any situation that appears to not be covered by a policy is remedied quickly. Social Services meets the performance standards of the Ministry however is always looking for opportunities to improve and work smarter. Various reports are reviewed monthly to monitor performance standards. As mentioned, Social Services shares updates on performance standards through monthly reports to the Board. Social Services has also developed internal performance standards for all positions in order to ensure consistency in the delivery of services, efficiency and effectiveness.

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4.4 OVERVIEW OF LEARNING SUPPORTS

4.4.1 Supportive Approaches through Innovative Learning (SAIL)

Nipissing OW remains committed to ensuring that SAIL competencies are deeply embedded into all service delivery approaches. However, the pandemic interrupted the momentum that had been achieved. The onboarding of new staff also continues to challenge Nipissing OW in this area as staff are rarely all at the same level at the same time. Nipissing OW continues to utilize its internal staff trainer along with a SAIL committee comprised of both OW management and front line staff to keep SAIL alive. Most staff in Nipissing have received all three modules however more work is required to get the remaining staff trained. We are engaged in the provincial SAIL network and we plan to deliver the SAIL curriculum to all staff who have not received it as soon as pressures related to the pandemic end.

SAIL competencies have been incorporated into some ongoing training, supervisor communications, staff meetings and the onboarding/interview process for new hires. Fun activities with or without prizes have also been used to ensure that SAIL competencies remain at the forefront. All of these efforts help to normalize SAIL so that it remains a part of Nipissing OW's service delivery language and culture.

In addition to SAIL, staff are also provided with a variety of training opportunities to enhance their learning and ability to deliver client centered services. During the previous and current cycle an increased focus has been placed on human trafficking and mental health and addiction training. Staff and OW management also participate in various training delivered by OMSSA. In-services are also utilized to bring community partners who deliver relevant services to OW clients in to speak with front line staff to build a greater awareness of the supports and services available. Additionally, Nipissing OW also has an annual performance appraisal process whereby all staff with the support of their supervisor have the opportunity to discuss their professional development goals and learning needs.

4.5 STRATEGY TO DELIVER FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES

As a designated transfer payment agency under the French Languages Services Act, DNSSAB is required to undertake a review every three years to ensure that it remains in compliance with the designation criteria. DNSSAB takes this designation seriously and while there is still work to be done in the area of translation, it strives to ensure that services and communications are consistent with the following guiding principles:

- French Language Services are a right according to the French Language Services Act;
- The District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board advocates for the pro-active delivery of French Language Services as means to communicate effectively to and optimally used by French-speaking clients and the public;

- The Board is committed to the provision of high quality French Language Services in a culturally sensitive manner;
- The Board promotes equivalency/specificity of services provided;
- Services and corresponding supports (advertisements, documents, brochures, etc.) are preferably produced in both official languages or can be made available in both official languages upon request;
- Signage is in both official languages;
- The District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board equally offers educational incentives to Staff with respect to French Language upgrading courses.

The DNSSAB management team is responsible to ensure that the guiding principles outlined above are implemented, monitored and maintained throughout all business activities. In order to achieve these requirements, DNSSAB has developed a partnership with College Boreal to complete mandatory testing on all candidates applying to bilingual job bulletins to ensure that the candidates level of proficiency meets the needs of the program areas ranging from a level 1 to a Superior level 4. In addition, this year a French Language Committee comprised of members of the senior management team was formed to increase “ownership” with respect to the monitoring of DNSSAB’s compliance with the Act.

The table below illustrates what has proven to be an acceptable representation of bilingually designated front line direct delivery Ontario Works staff in all District offices. Positions without front line client service responsibilities are not included in the numbers. It is also important to note that currently both the Mattawa and Sturgeon Falls sites have bilingual compliments of 100% due to the high numbers of French speaking residents in these areas. In addition, while only the positions noted below are “designated” bilingual, a much higher proportion of front line staff with client service responsibilities are fluent in both official languages as bilingualism is taken into consideration as being an asset through the recruitment process.

Total Front Line Direct Delivery Counts	Unilingual	Bilingual	Percentage of Compliment
Case Managers (24)	16	8	33%
Transitional Support Case Managers (5)	4	1	20%
Client Support Worker (8.5)	3	5.5	65%
Staff Trainers (1)	1	0	0%
Program Compliance Specialist (1)	0	1	100%
Employment Marketing Specialist (1)	0	1	100%
Employment Services Trainer (1)	1	0	0%
Employment Support Workers (4)	3	1	25%

Table 21

4.6 BUSINESS PRACTICES

Overall, Nipissing OW is satisfied with current business practices however looking through the lens of continuous improvement, there are a few key areas that have been identified where more work is required to increase quality and optimize resources. Further, it is important to note that due to the pandemic we are not operating in a “business as usual” environment. For example, in response to the pandemic, forms are not being signed and far broader risk based approaches are being utilized. As information related to whether or not this practice will continue is not known at this time it is difficult to develop a service delivery response on how to best transition back to pre-pandemic practices. Below is a list of the three key areas identified where change is anticipated either in the current cycle or sometime thereafter depending upon the implementation dates of the various initiatives.

1. Re-introduction of a “Program Integrity Unit”

Several years ago and in response to the ministry priorities at the time, many CMSM’s and DSSAB’s eliminated Eligibility Review Officers as it was felt that focusing more resources on employment and less on fraud and overpayment recovery would reap a more positive return on investment. While there was merit to this approach, from Nipissing’s perspective this decision resulted in a more fragmented model. Many CMSM’s and DSSAB’s shifted the responsibility for this work to regular case management. As activities such as overseeing fraud allegations, overpayment recovery and aging of overpayments often require uninterrupted attention, these tasks were often not the priority for Case Managers carrying caseloads. For this reason, Nipissing is hoping to return to a previous model with modifications through the re-allocation of existing resources. It is believed that re-developing a dedicated team to complete this work will be a more effective approach to overseeing these functions and increasing quality.

2. Continue to Leverage Technology

Nipissing OW/DNSSAB has been at the forefront of leveraging technology to support business practices for some time. The introduction of a locally developed employment assessment tool is a good example of this work. However, a few others areas under this category have been identified that require attention.

- Nipissing OW is advocating that DNSSAB explore a new and integrated scheduling tool whereby all programs can view appointments for clients who are receiving internal services cross program. For example: Post pandemic when in person meetings resume, if OW is scheduling an appointment with a client who is also scheduled to meet with a Children’s Services Representative on their childcare subsidy application, this appointment can be coordinated to ensure that the client does not need to attend the office twice.
- With the emergence of remote work DNSSAB quickly discovered that a soft phone solution was needed as staff have been using their personal phones to conduct DNSSAB business. This work is well underway and implementation may occur before year end.

3. Recovery and Renewal Plan and Employment Transformation

As noted in this Plan, Nipissing was not a pilot site on the employment transformation or centralized intake. However, as the implementation of these strategies is just around the corner, planning around what will need to change in the current service delivery model to accommodate this shift is underway. For example, Nipissing OW currently manages employment resource centres at three locations. As the OW mandate will be changing and funding decreased the future of the resource centres is unknown at this time. However, preliminary thinking around how some or all of these spaces could be transformed to support work associated with life stabilization is underway. Further, when OW is no longer mandated to deliver employment services to the job ready, the focus of the current model will need to shift to support services rooted in life stabilization activities versus resume writing, job ready workshops and interview skills. Staff have already been engaged to seek feedback from the front line on what will need to change from their perspective with respect to their work. Future engagements with staff on this item is planned.

As always and despite not meeting performance targets for the previous cycle due to the pandemic, Nipissing OW continues to set the bar high with respect to the achievement of outcomes. While Social Services has gone to great lengths to anticipate what challenges social assistance reform will bring during the current cycle, it is recognized that changes in business practices and local policies will be required as the program evolves. It will be important as we move forward to recognize the negative and positive impacts on both staff and clients to ensure that this transformation is in fact resulting in a better system for the vulnerable people we collectively serve.