

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee
From: Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health
Development
Subject: 2022 Ontario Works Participant and Service Delivery Profile
Date: September 12, 2023

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development, the following report on the 2022 Ontario Works Participant and Service Delivery Profile **BE RECEIVED** for information purposes.

Executive Summary

The City of London is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) responsible for administering the Ontario Works program for London and Middlesex on behalf of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS).

Ontario Works is a social assistance program designed to provide temporary financial and employment assistance to individuals and families in financial need and that have limited or no means to support themselves. The program aims to assist recipients in achieving self-reliance and independence by providing essential supports and services. Key features of the Ontario Works program include financial assistance to cover basic living expenses; employment supports such as job search assistance, training programs, workshops, and support to develop job-related skills; caseworker support to help develop a personalized action plan and ongoing support and guidance; employment incentives to assist with costs related to seeking employment, and health benefits including, but not limited to, coverage for prescription drugs, dental care, and vision care.

In February 2021, the Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services (MCCSS) introduced a Working Vision for Social Assistance roadmap, outlining a phased approach for working towards an integrated human services model and commitment to co-designing the new system with Municipal service delivery partners. MCCSS has reinforced the importance of effectively connecting people to supports and increasing capacity for Caseworkers to spend more time working directly with clients as key foundational goals of service delivery model changes. Application of continuous improvement practices throughout 2022, and introduction of provincial service delivery adjustments, led to enhanced internal approaches and positive impacts to the client experience.

Services in 2022 continued to be delivered predominantly by telephone and virtual platforms, however, in-person supports remained available as needed and were provided across five Life Stabilization office locations. Client needs and access to services and stability supports remained a priority, with a continued focus on response times at intake, referrals to employment and community partners, access to benefits, and exits to employment and greater financial stability.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

Wellbeing and Safety

- London is an affordable and supportive community for individuals and families.

Economic Growth, Culture and Prosperity

- London encourages equitable economic growth and diversification.

Well-Run City

- The City of London is trusted, open, and accountable in service of the community.

- Londoners experience good stewardship, exceptional and valued service.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- 2021 Ontario Works Participant and Service Delivery Profile (CPSC December)
- 2020 Ontario Works Participant and Service Delivery Profile (CPSC May 11, 2021)
- 2019 Ontario Works Participant and Service Delivery Profile (CPSC December 1, 2020)
- 2018 Ontario Works Participant and Service Delivery Profile (CPSC May 28, 2019)
- 2016 Participant Profile Report-City of London Social Services/Ontario Works Program Delivery (CPSC July 18, 2017)
- Purchase of Service Agreements-Ontario Works Employment Assistance Services (CPSC December 10, 2018)
- Ontario Works Employment Innovations Bridges Out of Poverty & Circles Evaluation #2 (CPSC November 13, 2018)

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

Aligning with the strategic area of focus of Well-Run City, specifically under the strategy of measure and regularly report to Council and the community on the City's performance, as attached as Schedule 1 to this report is intended to provide an overview of Ontario Works service delivery outcomes and employment supports information for 2022. Included are key highlights related to caseload size, demographics, time on assistance, employment and community referrals, employment outcomes, and Discretionary Benefits provided.

Data and information provided in the report is extracted from MCCSS Operation Performance Reports, the provincial Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) database, in-house data management systems (Client Management System (CMS), EA Referral System and Purchase Voucher System), and City of London Financial Business Supports monitoring reports. Data referenced from MCCSS is reflective of the London CMSM which includes the City of London and County of Middlesex.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

There are two transfer payment funding envelopes that support the delivery of Ontario Works:

- Basic Financial Assistance is fully funded by the province. This includes benefits such as basic needs, shelter, emergency assistance, mandatory benefits, and transition child benefits.
- Program Delivery funding supports program administration and the provision of employment assistance activities to eligible Ontario Works recipients. Cost sharing of Program Delivery funding is split 50/50 between the ministry and the City of London.

Discretionary Benefits for social assistance recipients is funded at \$10 per case per month with caseload equaling the sum of the average monthly Ontario Works caseload and the average monthly ODSP caseload within the delivery partner's geographic area.

Conclusion

Throughout 2022, client access to appropriate services and supports continued to be prioritized. City of London – Life Stabilization remained committed to advancing service delivery modernization by embracing provincial opportunities to expand communication channels and partnering with local service providers to offer access to technology as well

as training. Ontario Works employment exit targets for both MCCSS and the City of London Strategic Priorities were exceeded.

Combined local context and MCCSS program updates were fundamental elements for service delivery and systems planning to guide approaches related to Life Stabilization and employment supports. Partnership with internal and external stakeholders continue to be important priorities as the provincial vision for Social Assistance evolves.

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Submitted by: Shirley Glover, Director, Life Stabilization
Recommended by: Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health
Development

Schedule 1

Ontario Works 2022 Participant & Service Delivery Profile

The Ontario Works Program

Ontario Works is an employment assistance and financial support program under the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), with a priority of helping individuals and families gain and maintain sustainable employment through training, education, skill development and individualized supports.

The City of London is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) responsible for administering the Ontario Works program for the London & Middlesex region on behalf of the Government of Ontario. Services for Middlesex are delivered by the County of Middlesex through an apportionment agreement with the City of London. Source data from the ministry informing this report represents the London CMSM, which includes data for Middlesex County. For context, Middlesex County's average Ontario Works caseload in 2022 was 332 and the average Temporary Care Caseload was 32.

In February 2021, the MCCSS announced the "Recovery & Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation"¹, and outlined a Working Vision for Social Assistance in Ontario (Figure 1). Key elements of the vision include maintaining person-centred services, a shift in services provided, identification of responsibilities at the provincial and municipal levels, working towards an integrated human services model and commitments to co-designing the new system with municipal service delivery partners. Associated timelines include work that began in 2020 up until 2024 for full implementation of the vision as outlined in Table 1 below. The plan aims to realign functions and service delivery responsibilities of the program in order to streamline social services systems and create an effective integrated human services model.

Figure 1



Working Vision for Social Assistance

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/recovery-renewal-ontarios-vision-social-assistance-transformation>

Aligning with MCCSS priorities to achieve improved employment outcomes for Ontario Works participants, the delivery of Ontario Works is administered using a local context that provides services and supports in partnership with internal and external shareholders to appropriately respond to the stability needs of our mutual clients.

Financial assistance provided through Ontario Works can include basic needs, shelter, board & lodging, special diet, pregnancy/breast-feeding nutritional allowance, transition child benefit allowance, employment and discretionary supports, and drug coverage. Table 1 below gives an outline of maximum monthly entitlements for individuals and families in receipt of Ontario Works. Basic Needs is calculated based on family size and family composition, and Shelter Allowance is calculated based on family size and actual shelter costs. Eligibility for additional benefits noted above is dependent on circumstance.

Note: Ontario Works rates have not increased since 2018.

Table 1 – Maximum Social Assistance Rates: Basic Needs and Shelter Allowance^{2 3}

Family Size	Basic Needs	Shelter Allowance	Monthly Entitlement
1	\$343	\$390	\$733
2	\$623	\$642	\$1,265
3	\$781	\$697	\$1,433
4	\$956	\$756	\$1,712
5	\$1,131	\$815	\$1,946
6+	\$1,306	\$844	\$2,150

Ontario Works Caseload

In 2020 and 2021, Ontario Works caseloads across the province experienced a decline due to eligibility for federally funded benefits such as CERB. As these benefits transitioned to an end in 2022, London experienced caseload growth of 8.5% over 2021. While this increase was large, the rate of growth was lower than ministry’s social assistance caseload forecasted increase of 14.1%⁴ for 2022-23, and caseload remained lower than pre-pandemic sizes.

Table 2 – Average Caseload Size by Benefit Units and Beneficiaries⁵

Type	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Benefit Units	9,350	8,616	10,354	11,418	11,927
Beneficiaries	17,818	17,162	20,455	22,121	22,769

² Ontario Works Policy Directive 6.2 Basic Needs

³ Ontario Works Policy Directive 6.3 Shelter

⁴ Ontario MCCSS September 2021 Provincial Social Assistance Caseload Forecast

⁵ MCCSS OW Social Assistance Operations Performance Report – January 2018-December 2022

As noted in Table 3 below, caseload composition in 2022 continued to reflect a greater proportion of singles without children. The greatest fluctuations in composition occurred during the period of 2020-2021 between “Single” and “Single with Children” caseloads, which aligns with the availability of federal pandemic benefits for those with recent attachment to the workforce.

Table 3 – Family Composition as Percentage of Caseload (Benefit Units)⁶

Family Composition	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Single	63%	61%	59%	60%	61%
Single with children	26%	28%	29%	28%	27%
Couple	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Couple with children	9%	9%	10%	10%	10%

Table 4 below provides a summary of family size as a percentage of caseload. Proportions have remained relatively consistent over the past five years with the greatest fluctuations experienced by 1-member and 2-member families in 2022 over 2020. Table 5 provides a summary of education level as a percentage of all adults on caseload with increases to adults with high school and post secondary over 2021.

Table 4 – Family Size as Percentage of Caseload (Benefit Units)⁷

Family Size	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
1 member	63%	61%	59%	60%	61%
2 members	13%	14%	15%	14%	14%
3 members	10%	11%	11%	11%	11%
4 members	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%
5 members	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%
6+ members	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%

Table 5 – Education Level as Percentage of All Adults on Caseload⁸

Education Level	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Grade 1-8	8%	9%	9%	8%	8%
Grade 9-11	31%	33%	33%	32%	34%
Grade 12-13	37%	36%	35%	35%	35%
Post Secondary	24%	23%	23%	25%	24%

Time on Assistance

The Provincial vision for the Ontario Works program is “to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a

⁶ MCCSS Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance – Month of December for years of 2018-2022

⁷ MCCSS Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance – Month of December for years of 2018-2022

⁸ MCCSS Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance – Month of December for years of 2018-2022

range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they can move towards employment and independence”⁹. For many clients, significant barriers exist along the employment continuum which may impact the ability to acquire skills and training, successfully gain employment or sustain and maintain employment. Length of time on assistance is one of many indicators used to align clients to appropriate life stabilization supports and employment opportunities.

During 2020, there was a marked decline in new applications to Ontario Works and an increase in exits, due to eligibility for federal benefits such as CERB. As a result, the proportion of caseload on assistance greater than 12 months increased by 10% in 2020 over 2019. With the ending of federal benefits in 2021-2022, London saw an increase in new Ontario Works applications which resulted in the proportion of caseload on assistance for 0-12 months growing by 14% in 2022 over 2020 and a decrease in 19+ months by 15% in 2022 over 2020.

Table 6 – Time on Assistance¹⁰

Duration	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
0-4 months	16%	21%	11%	15%	14%
5-12 months	22%	13%	13%	19%	19%
13-18 months	12%	7%	12%	10%	11%
19+ months	49%	59%	64%	56%	55%

Deferrals from Participation

Individuals may experience circumstances limiting their capacity to fully participate in employment assistance activities. This can be the result of physical limitations, medical conditions, personal circumstances (i.e., family emergency, caregiving responsibilities) or any other circumstance the Administrator considers reasonable.

Individuals who are deferred from participating in employment activities continue to be supported in connection to other stability supports such as ODSP, Disability Services of Ontario, childcare subsidy, and other community resources. In 2022, there were a total of 1,202¹¹ referrals made to ODSP and 837¹² Ontario Works cases terminating to ODSP.

Table 7 – Deferrals from Participation as Percentage of Adults¹³

Reason	2022	2021	2020	2019
Medical	16%	17%	14%	17%
Other	12%	15%	12%	12%

⁹ MCCSS 2021-2022 Service Plan

¹⁰ MCCSS Ontario Works Caseload at a Glance – Month of December for years of 2018-2022

¹¹ MCCSS OW Social Assistance Operations Performance Report – January – December 2022

¹² MCCSS - CRS120 Case Closure Report for the City of London – January – December 2022

¹³ MCCSS CRS550 Employment Assistance Deferrals and Restrictions Report – 2019-2022

Temporary Care Assistance Caseload

Temporary Care Assistance provides income assistance and benefits to an adult on behalf of a child where the child is in their temporary care, the child is in financial need and the adult providing care does not have a legal obligation to support the child. A child may require temporary care for a variety of reasons. For example, the parent(s) may be temporarily unable to support the child because of financial reasons or other special circumstances, such as health-related issues.

London's Temporary Care caseload remained relatively consistent between 2018-2020 but saw an increase in 2021 and 2022. Between 2020 and 2022, the number of benefit units increased by 25%, with the number of children in Temporary Care increasing by 32%. The criteria to qualify for Temporary Care Assistance has not changed, so one could hypothesize the increase to children in the care of others during this period may have been related to the impacts of the pandemic (financial, mental / physical health, etc.).

Table 8 – Temporary Care Caseload¹⁴

Type	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Benefit Units	189	175	151	147	154
Children	277	254	209	202	213

Employment Outcomes

The intent of the Ontario Works program is to support individuals to increased financial stability and employment. Caseload “Earnings” and “Exits to Employment” are key performance indicators with the ministry. With the exception of 2020 and the impacts of the pandemic, London has consistently exceeded its ministry targets. While percentage of caseload remaining on assistance with earnings in 2022 is lower than pre-pandemic, the percentage of caseload fully exiting from social assistance as a result of employment earnings has exceeded pre-pandemic rates.

London has a unique operating model where contracted third-party employment service providers deliver employment supports tailored to meet the needs of Ontario Works clients. Information about Employment Supports is included further in this document.

Table 9 – Cases with Earnings and Exits to Employment¹⁵

Metric	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
# of cases with earnings	957	807	1,024	1,617	1,649

¹⁴ MCCSS OW Social Assistance Operations Performance Report – January 2018-December 2022

¹⁵ MCCSS OW Social Assistance Operations Performance Report – January 2018-December 2022

% of caseload with earnings	10.24%	9.36%	9.77%	14.17%	13.83%
Average monthly earnings	\$871	\$894	\$899	\$871	\$853
# of exits to employment	1,446	1,236	1,373	2,070	1,615
% of all terminations exiting to employment	29.16%	27.37%	24.77%	28.01%	22.57%
% of caseload exiting to employment	1.29%	1.20%	1.13%	1.52%	1.13%

Service Delivery Model

Decentralized Offices

Life Stabilization delivers the Ontario Works program through a decentralized service delivery model. Service delivery design and resourcing decisions are informed by data, local context, and community needs. Continual evaluation and review of service delivery approaches and objectives ensures that planning, design, and implementation best support the City of London’s most vulnerable, as well as effectively equip frontline staff delivering the services.

Five community-based offices and one satellite office are situated across the city providing easy access to employment services and financial supports close to neighbourhoods in which our clients live. All offices are AODA compliant and on London Transit Commission (LTC) bus routes.

Life Stabilization office locations:

- Citi Plaza, 355 Wellington Street, Suite 246
- London East, 1-1835 Dundas Street
- Northland Mall, 107-1275 Highbury Avenue
- Westmount Shopping Centre, 785 Wonderland Road S.
- South London Community Centre, 1119 Jalna Blvd.
- Glen Cairn Community Resource Centre (satellite), 244 Adelaide Street S.

Service Delivery

In response to the pandemic, the ministry removed the requirement for original signatures on Ontario Works applications, as well as expectations of in-person appointments. In 2022, Life Stabilization continued to provide service predominantly via telephone and online channels with front counter access available across all offices (other than the satellite office) for anyone seeking services in person. The requirement for a signature was reintroduced by the ministry in late in 2022, which also included the option of a digital ‘e-signature’ as part of the ministry’s modernization initiatives.

Aligning with the MCCSS “Recovery & Renewal: Ontario’s Vision for Social Assistance Transformation”¹⁶, Life Stabilization continued to prioritize digital delivery solutions throughout 2022.

The MyBenefits platform is an online service available to social assistance recipients. It allows individuals 24/7 access to online services where they can view payments and letters, report changes in their circumstances, and communicate with their Caseworker through two-way messaging. The MyBenefits platform reduces time spent on manually inputting information, processing changes, opening/sorting mail and handling incoming phone calls, which allows staff more time for high-impact client interactions. MyBenefits is promoted on the City of London website in four languages (English, French, Spanish & Arabic) and incorporated into internal email & voicemail messaging. Uptick in registrations for MyBenefits continued to increase throughout 2022 with approximately 40% of the caseload subscribed by year-end, an increase of 8% over 2021.

The Reloadable Payment Card (RPC) is an alternative payment option for clients unable to receive payments through direct bank deposit (DBD). By the end of 2022, electronic payments (DBD & RPC combined) accounted for 96% of all payments issued – an increase of 5% over 2021 – with the remainder issued by cheque. London is exceeding the provincial target of 95% for electronic payment but recognizes there remains a need for cheques when special circumstances exist.

Applications for Ontario Works

In 2020 and 2021, the number of new applications for Ontario Works declined by 35.4% and 29.5% respectively in comparison to 2019. This decrease in applications aligned with eligibility for federal benefits (i.e., CERB). In 2022, as federal benefits came to an end, the number of new Ontario Works applications increased and were much more reflective of pre-pandemic levels. With individuals accessing virtual services more readily, online applications increased by 7% in 2022 over 2021. With a priority of timely and responsive customer service, applications were processed within 3 days on average, and with 74% of applications being processed within 4 days.

Table 10 – Applications for Ontario Works¹⁷

Metric	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
# of applications processed	5,624	4,248	3,897	6,028	5,791
% of online applications	34%	27%	28%	27%	29%
Average # of days from intake screening to eligibility decision	3	1	3	3	5
% of applications processed within 4 business days	74%	87%	75%	76%	68%

¹⁶ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/recovery-renewal-ontarios-vision-social-assistance-transformation>

¹⁷ MCCSS OW Social Assistance Operations Performance Report – January 2018-December 2022

The ministry’s “Recovery & Renewal: Ontario’s Vision for Social Assistance Transformation” includes the introduction of a centralized intake model with the ministry responsible for completing new applications, other than in emergency cases. The purpose of this centralized model is to give local staff more time to focus on supporting clients by reducing the time spent on administrative tasks and paperwork, and to apply a streamlined and standardized approach across the province. This new intake process puts a greater emphasis on clients completing applications independently on-line.

This initiative was rolled out across the province through a phased approach, with the City of London participating in the final phase in November 2022. Due to the timing of the roll-out, efficiencies had yet to be identified by the end of 2022.

Interpreter Services

In 2022, interpreter services continued to be offered primarily via telephone and virtual formats. A total of 4,438¹⁸ client appointments (across all appointment types) were booked with an interpreter. Table 11 below illustrates the top five languages requiring interpreter services from 2018-2022. Additionally, Life Stabilization maintained compliance with the provincial French Language Services requirements by providing bilingual services through the Client Services Representative and Caseworker roles.

Table 11 – Interpreter Services Top 5 Languages

2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Arabic	Arabic	Arabic	Arabic	Arabic
Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish
Kurdish	Kurdish	Kurdish	Nepal	Nepal
Ukrainian	Nepal	Nepal	Kurdish	Kurdish
Turkish	Assyrian	Farsi	Urdu	Assyrian

Employment Supports

Ontario Works clients need access to information about monthly financial assistance, community resources, and available employment and training opportunities, in a timely manner. In the absence of regular in-person services, it has become increasingly important to find effective channels to communicate updates to clients. Several strategies for direct client communications were implemented to meet this need.

Weekly email newsletters, which began in 2020 as a pandemic response, continued to be distributed to over 7,000 individual email addresses in 2022. The communication strategy evolved over the year to focus on delivering weekly email blast reminders of upcoming training sessions, new programs, and job fairs. By focusing on one topic per email, the messaging was more consumable and easier for clients to act on. Clients used

¹⁸ Life Stabilization CMS Appointment Booking System – 2022 Report

this outreach as an opportunity to request services, engage in problem solving, and update their Caseworker on changes in their circumstances and progress in reaching their goals.

In addition to the newsletters and email reminders, virtual Labour Market Information sessions continued to be provided to both clients and staff. These sessions highlighted various industry sectors such as construction, healthcare, landscaping, food, hospitality and were led by community partners and subject matter experts. The information sessions emphasize many available opportunities for employment and training in the local labour market. Additionally, virtual information sessions were held for clients and Caseworkers about other support services including Better Jobs Ontario and Developmental Services Ontario. In total 18 information sessions were held in 2022.

Over 48 weekly virtual Employment Information Sessions continued through an online platform allowing more than 850 Ontario Works clients an opportunity to learn about employment benefits, local services, and available training opportunities. Client feedback was generally positive and highlighted appreciation for the opportunity to ask questions, as well as speak about unique experiences with an Employment Support Specialist.

These communication channels were leveraged to advertise events such as virtual job fairs and training programs to all participants on Ontario Works, along with offering words of encouragement meant to promote optimism and momentum throughout the year. Additionally, purchase-of-service agencies, Employment Ontario service providers and community services appreciated the opportunity to market their supports and services in a widely distributed and positively framed way.

Job fairs shifted from virtual to in-person events over the year and included the semi-annual London and Area Works job fair (largest job fair in London held in partnership between the City of London, London Economic Development Corporation, Employment Sector Council and Workforce Planning & Development Board), labour market sector specific fairs such as health care offered in partnership with Goodwill Industries, and numerous smaller fairs held with other employment services agencies.

Employment Referrals

Within Life Stabilization, the Employment Supports Team responded to changing participant needs in 2022 and shifted how service was provided. Services became more focused on direct client engagement and encouraging clients to re-engage with employment services agencies and the labour market. The Kickstart program was a short-term, unique initiative focused on identifying and addressing common barriers to attending employment services agencies and promoting attendance as an opportunity to rejoin the labour market. Kickstart accounted for more than 250 referrals early in 2022 and based on feedback from service providers, increased the “show rate” at intake appointments.

Referrals to employment service providers began to increase in 2022 as many Ontario Works clients began to re-engage with employment services and the labour market, post-pandemic. In terms of overall employment referrals, 7,674¹⁹ individual referrals were made to service providers in 2022. This represents an increase of 21% over 2021. It should be noted that referral numbers may not fully reflect employment participation as clients also have the ability to self-refer to programs (education, Employment Ontario, etc.).

As reflected in Table 12, Fundamental Employment Services accounted for the greatest percentage of overall referrals. This category of support includes common assessments, resume workshops, interview skills and career exploration. Employment Search Placement and Retention services focuses on assisting employment-ready individuals to take that final step in securing and retaining employment and represented 13% of referrals made. Specialized Individual Supports examines unique challenges, barriers, and solutions for clients including counselling, in-depth assessments, and evaluations. This accounted for 12% of referrals. Skills Training for job-specific training made up 8% of referrals in 2022.

Table 12 – Employment Assistance Referrals²⁰

Referral Type	Amount	Percentage
Fundamental Employment Services	4,362	57%
Employment Search Placement Retention	984	13%
Specialized Individual Supports	890	12%
Skills Training	609	8%
Other (Employment Ontario, self-employment, etc.)	560	6%
Education	269	4%

To address the number of clients on Ontario Works longer than 24 months, Employment Support Specialists and Caseworkers engaged with clients who have been on assistance for a longer period of time. The goal was to support and assist participants in identifying and removing obstacles affecting life stabilization and the path to employment. Some of the strategies implemented include:

- Psycho-vocational assessments to provide insight into barriers to employment and/or learning success.
- Linking clients to additional professional and specialized services and supports, person directed planning and employment supports through Developmental Supports Ontario (DSO) including assistance in moving toward ODSP supports.
- “Getting Ahead” workshops designed to help participants set personal goals and establishing a plan to attain the goals. Graduates of Getting Ahead were eligible

¹⁹ City of London – EA Referral Report 2022 “All Referral Types”

²⁰ City of London – EA Referral Report 2022 “All Referral Types”

to participate in Circles London, a program developed to help participants build confidence, self-efficacy, and social capital.

In 2022, 179 individuals had a psycho-vocational assessment completed by a qualified Psychologist. As outlined in Table 13, 155 individuals (87%) were successfully granted eligibility for the Ontario Disability Assistance Program (ODSP) as a result of the assessment findings. Of those granted ODSP, 149 were eligible for Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) supports including professional and specialized services and supports, person directed planning and employment supports. The average length of time these individuals were in receipt of Ontario Works prior to grant was 14.88 years.

Table 13 – Psycho-Vocational Assessment Outcomes²¹

Total Assessments Completed	179
ODSP Granted	155
Average # of years on OW prior to ODSP grant	14.88 years
DSO Eligible	149
In Appeal / Pending Decision	6
Denied / Withdrawn	16
OW File Closed / Lost Contact	2

Circles London

Circles London in 2022 continued to be a key partner of the City of London in response to long-term poverty. The primary intervention approach is to increase social capital and sense of community, with a focus on support and referrals for life stabilization. Ultimately, the goal is for every Circles Leader (the client) to move forward into economic self-sufficiency.

In 2022, the delivery of ReThink Poverty, Getting Ahead and Circles returned to in person meetings as pandemic restrictions eased. ReThink Poverty training workshops were provided to 800 participants. Getting Ahead programs produced 27 new graduates, with 19 of those joining a Circle in the role of 'Leader'. Monthly Big View meetings engaged community leaders and continued as a forum for discussions around systemic barriers specific to escaping poverty and strategies required to remove them. Discussions included the following topics:

- Mobility Master Plan
- Navigating Health & Wellness
- Municipal Elections
- Subsidized and Low-Cost Recreation

²¹ Social Services Portal: Employment Assistance Referrals Summary 2022

Families worked towards re-engaging after a period of COVID-related restrictions and returned to make connections with education and employment. The Circles team continued to see many Leaders gain traction in working towards their individual goals and objectives. 19 new leaders joined Circles in 2022.

- 21 Leaders exited Circles with 12 of them having met their goals or graduating.
- Regular connections between Coaches, Leaders and Allies ensured all participants were connected with food resources and housing stability services as well as community mental health supports.
- Circles Leaders were connected with employment and educational opportunities, through local labour market information, resume building workshops, job fairs, and connection with employment agencies.
- The Circles partnership with ‘Purple Hands’, a Western University student club, provided child minding for in-person meetings.
- The partnership at White Oaks Family Centre provided child minding for families belonging to the South London Circle.

Table 14 – 2022 Circles Outcomes²²

Outcome	Amount
Ontario Works – Life Stabilization	58%
Employed Receiving OW Top-Up	14%
Sustained Employment	11%
ODSP	8%
Unknown	6%
In School – OSAP	3%

Access to Technology

Ontario Works service provision in a post-pandemic environment continued to be delivered mainly through online, virtual and telephone methods in 2022. To support the increased need for access to technologically, the Employment Related Expense (ERE) benefit continued to be utilized as a tool to address accessibility barriers with technology. As well, the City’s Life Stabilization division and Information Technology Services (ITS) division partnered to explore the opportunity of providing ‘end of life cycle’ corporate laptops to Ontario Works clients free-of-charge to support their participation in employment-related activities in a digitally driven world.

Discretionary Benefits

The Discretionary Benefits program helps with items and services related to health, safety, and physical well-being to those in receipt of Ontario Works, ODSP and low-

²² City of London Circles Evaluation 2022

income Londoners who meet established income eligibility criteria. Services include emergency dental, dentures, eyeglasses, beds, appliances, moving costs, baby needs (cribs/car set/stroller) and utility assistance for those who have exhausted the Housing Stability Bank or other programs. Discretionary Benefits also aids with the cost of funerals, ensuring individuals without financial means receive quality end-of-life services. Tables 15-17 highlight summaries of Discretionary Benefits assistance provided in 2022.

Table 15 – Emergency Dental Program^{23 24}

Emergency Dental Program	2022
# of individual client dental services	2,151
# of procedures completed	8,970
# of full dentures	673
# of partial dentures	607

The Purchase Voucher system allows an individual to obtain a product from a vendor without a financial exchange. Once the individual has received their item(s), the vendor submits the signed purchase voucher to the City for payment. The top categories for purchase vouchers include dentures (1,280), eyeglasses (1,521), appliances/beds (1,028) and prosthetics (595).

Table 16 – Purchase Vouchers by Income Stream²⁵

Income Stream	2022
Non-Social Assistance Recipients (LICO after tax)	1,745
ODSP Clients	3,486
Ontario Works Clients	5,516

Funeral coverage includes funeral service, burial or cremation and interment as chosen by the next of kin.

Table 17 – Funerals by Income Stream²⁶

Income Stream	2022
Non-Social Assistance Recipients (LICO after tax)	198
Ontario Works and ODSP Clients	208
Warrants to Bury (provincially legislated) – included in above counts	39

²³ Social Services Portal: Purchase Voucher Report 2022

²⁴ Accerta Annual Summary Report 2022

²⁵ City of London - Financial & Business Supports DB Monitoring Report 2022

²⁶ City of London - Financial & Business Supports DB Monitoring Report 2022

Customer Service

Client feedback is collected to ensure services meet the needs of customers. To allow greater opportunity for clients to provide feedback about their experience, a customer service survey link has been incorporated into the Life Stabilization staff email signature block in both English and French. In 2022, 261 responses were received with the following feedback provided:

How would you rate the quality of service you received today?	Exceptional – 57.4% Great – 26.3% Good – 4.8% Okay – 1.8% Not Good – 9.7%
Did you receive the information or services you were looking for today?	Yes – 89.3% No – 9.9% No response – 0.8%
Was the service provided in a friendly, respectful way?	Yes – 91.9% No – 8.1%

Comments included:

“My caseworker was great. Very informative about options I didn't know I had and supportive of my process to get my life back on track. Thank you!”
“My caseworker does an excellent job. She offers very helpful advice, compassion and is not judgmental. Truly wants to help me succeed.”
“My caseworker was absolutely lovely and gave me so much hope for my situation.”
“My caseworker has been VERY helpful for me, as I struggle during this time. She is always very professional and empathetic. She is prompt to answer my emails and extremely helpful.”

Conclusion

In 2022, City of London – Life Stabilization continued to take an effective and responsive approach that ensured individualized supports and services for clients were delivered in a timely, relevant, and meaningful way.

In a post-pandemic environment, services continued to be delivered through mainly virtual methods. Clients were supported in connecting to digital platforms with an increase in MyBenefits registrations of 8% in 2022 over 2021. Employment Related Expenses funding was used to assist client in obtaining digital devices to allow connection to services in a highly digital climate. Preliminary discussions between the City’s Life Stabilization and ITS divisions took place at the end of the year to explore opportunities to utilize end-of-lifecycle corporate technology for ongoing Ontario Works clients.

Referrals to community partners connected individuals to necessary employment supports, skills training, education, and psycho-vocational assessments to reduce barriers and increase access to stability supports. Life Stabilization exceeded employment targets set by the ministry for 2022 with 1,446 individuals and/or families exiting Ontario Works to employment. Life Stabilization also supported 837 individuals and/or families in obtaining an increased level of financial stability through ODSP.

Looking ahead, Life Stabilization is committed to ensuring basic needs and connections to community and health supports is maintained through the evolution of the social assistance program and MCCSS Recovery and Renewal priorities. Local context remains a crucial element for service delivery and systems planning, in partnership with both internal and external interest holders, to effectively meet the needs of Ontario Works clients.