

Clause 19 in Report No. 10 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on June 23, 2016.

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## Family Strengthening Programs – Updates/Changes

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated May 26, 2016 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services be authorized to execute agreements for the provision of services in the Family Strengthening Programs, subject to review by Legal Services.
2. Staff report back to Council by fall of 2017 on the 2018 implementation of the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres initiative which is contingent on provincial funding and any potential impact on the current Family Strengthening Programs.

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Report dated May 26, 2016 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services now follows:

### 1. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services be authorized to execute agreements for the provision of services in the Family Strengthening Programs, subject to review by Legal Services.
2. Staff report back to Council by fall of 2017 on the 2018 implementation of the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres initiative which is contingent on provincial funding and any potential impact on the current Family Strengthening Programs.

## 2. Purpose

This report updates Committee and Council on the Family Strengthening Programs and seeks approval for the Region to extend its contracts to provide funding for the Family Strengthening Programs. Council approval is required under the Purchasing Bylaw 2014-53, Section 16.1a because the term of the proposed contracts, including extensions, may be greater than five years. This report also provides information on the recently announced provincial initiative, “Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres” and identifies next steps.

## 3. Background

Family Strengthening Programs offer a variety of programs and services for low income families in York Region

Family Strengthening Programs, administered by the Community and Health Services Department, offer a range of programs that help encourage social integration of low income families in their local communities. The Family Strengthening Programs are:

- All Our Kids Early Child Development and Parenting Programs (AOK)
- Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY)
- Ontario Works/Social Housing Summer Day Camp
- Youth Leadership Camp

Family Strengthening Programs provide a range of benefits for children, parents and communities

Family Strengthening Programs are designed to support and strengthen families and support positive child development. These programs are inclusive and respond to the needs of low income families by removing barriers such as user fees and transportation costs. Family Strengthening Programs also offer low income families parenting supports, services and resources through access to community based programs.

These Programs also recognize the importance of the family structure to the economic and social well-being of the parent, the positive impact on the

development of the child and the positive impact on the family as a whole and promote:

- Increased employment supports and opportunities for parents
- Improved social, emotional and educational outcomes for children
- Stable healthy lifestyles for families and increased opportunities for families to engage in their communities

York Region works with local municipalities and agencies to deliver Family Strengthening Programs to children and their families at no cost

The Community and Health Services Department works in collaboration with and provides funding to municipal recreation departments and community based service agencies to provide free programs to low income families. Funding for Family Strengthening Programs is administered and monitored through Purchase of Service Agreements. Young people who participate in these programs are better able to avoid negative outcomes such as poor school performance and anti-social behaviors. These high quality programs provide critical stimulation in a nurturing environment, support positive, healthy brain development and provide a strong foundation for future success in life.

#### 4. Analysis and Options

Research shows that investing in Family Strengthening Programs can be cost effective in reducing dependency on social assistance, health and other social services

Research has demonstrated that investing in the early years, and specifically through initiatives like Family Strengthening Programs, can reduce the dependency of families on services such as social assistance, health and other social services in the future. Parents gain knowledge and coping skills and are able to pursue employment and/or education to enable them to contribute to the economy. Children learn valuable life skills that promote improved social, emotional and educational outcomes.

McMaster University's Offord Centre recently released research results supporting the positive rate of return for investment in the early years. The Offord Centre has indicated that for every \$1 invested in the early years, there is a \$4 to \$8 return. This research supports the concept that if we provide support to children and families early on, we can minimize the impact of long-term

## Family Strengthening Program – Updates/Changes

investments in other social services such as social assistance and health services.

In 2015, York Region invested \$1,012,637 in Family Strengthening Programs serving 9,826 residents

In 2015, York Region's Family Strengthening Programs provided access to community based programs and services for 9,826 residents from low income families. Service levels for each of the program components are broken down in Table 1 below:

**Table 1**  
**Family Strengthening Programs**

Program	Services	Number Served
All Our Kids Early Child Development and Parenting Programs (AOK)	25 drop-in sites for parents and caregivers to come with children to join in family strengthening activities and workshops	3,316 children served 3,538 parents/ caregivers served
Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY)	Collaboration with nine local municipal recreation departments to provide access to recreation for children and youth 4 – 18 years of age and adults	1,978 children served 227 youth served 184 adults served
Ontario Works/Social Housing Summer Day Camp	Collaboration with nine local municipal recreation departments to provide access to summer camp for children 6 – 12 years of age from families in receipt of social services	505 children served
Youth Leadership Camp	Youth age 11 - 16 receive a one week overnight camp experience to learn life skills, problem solving and social skill development	78 youth services

The Ministry of Education has announced the creation of Ontario Early Years Centres to improve access to services for young children and their families

On February 19, 2016, the Ministry of Education announced a provincial plan for moving forward with the integration and transformation of provincially funded

child and family programs. This plan is the next step in the modernization of the early years system, which has already implemented Full Day Kindergarten, the release of the new child care funding formula and new legislation, *Child Care and Early Years Act 2014*.

The Ministry of Education has announced that all Ministry of Education funded child and family programs will become part of an integrated, cohesive system of services and supports for children 0 – 6 to be known as Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres. The current programs are:

- Ontario Early Years Centres
- Parenting and Family Literacy Centres
- Family Resource Centre
- Better Beginnings, Better Future Programs

The Ministry of Education has identified that municipalities, in their role as the Child Care Service System Manager, will have key responsibilities and a leadership role for planning and implementing the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres

The Ministry of Education has identified that municipalities, like York Region, will have the leadership role for planning and implementing the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres. The Ministry of Education will release additional information such as provincial service guidelines, a funding framework for Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres and funding allocations in late 2016 and into 2017. At this time, there is not sufficient information to provide potential impacts on the current Family Strengthening Program. Staff will report back to Council in fall 2017 on the 2018 Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres initiative and the impacts for York Region.

Link to key Council-approved plans

Family Strengthening Programs contribute to the key economic and healthy community goals outlined in Vision 2051 and the Region's 2015 to 2019 Strategic Plan. Specifically, Family Strengthening Programs support the strategic priority area of Healthy Communities, and the strategic plan objective, protecting public health, by supporting the delivery of programs and services that protect and promote health and prevent disease and injury.

## 5. Financial Implications

In 2015, the Family Strengthening Programs totaled \$1,012,637 in gross expenditures. These costs were managed within the Department's approved budget. In 2016, \$1,210,959 in gross expenditures was approved in the Regional budget, funded 100% through Regional Tax Levy. There are no additional financial implications associated with this report.

## 6. Local Municipal Impact

Family Strengthening Programs provide for a collaborative working relationship between York Region and local municipal recreation departments. Family Strengthening Programs provide families and their children with access to quality programs that are in their local communities. These programs support healthy child and family development, social inclusion, community engagement and attachment to the workforce.

## 7. Conclusion

The Family Strengthening Programs provides opportunities with collaboration between the Community and Health Services Department, local municipalities and community based agencies, to provide innovative and responsive programs and services to low income families, in their local communities. Research indicates that this investment early on, results in saving from long-term investment later in life. Access to Family Strengthening Programs increase positive impacts for families and support better economic outcomes.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa, General Manager, Social Services at ext. 72150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

May 26, 2016

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