



Integration

At the last Board meeting, a very brief discussion was held regarding 'integration' and what that means to the RRDSSAB and its clients. Although this topic has been addressed in other *CAO Reports* over the years, I will use this as an opportunity to generate further discussion and interest, and training of new members. Having been involved with integration of services for over twenty years, I have seen its benefits and am a strong proponent of this service delivery method. I will address particular aspects of integration over the next several months.

'Integration' takes many forms and has many benefits, the most obvious being improved service for the client, a form of 'one-stop shopping' or 'single point of access' for the consumer – some see it as a shopping mall approach, we think it goes much further than that. Our clients, many who are vulnerable and hurting in some way, can now tell their story once and not be subject to repeated interviews, as was the case pre- and early-DSSAB.

We have experienced and celebrated integration at many levels. The following list, although not exhaustive by any means, represents examples of integration activities to date:

- a) physical integration: Ontario Works, Child Care and Social Housing under one roof;
- b) administrative integration: senior management, finance, payroll, budget, audit, & data and statistical systems;
- c) integration of staff functions: human resources, benefit administration, labor/management, health & safety, reception & clerical;
- d) governance integration: integration of District Welfare board, Local Housing Corporation board, and specific Non-Profit Housing Boards; and
- e) service integration: intake, client service, referral, eligibility review and family support functions, eligibility determination, and case management.

As time moves on, we continue to identify more ways to integrate in these and new forms.

Identifying and eliminating duplication not only is much more sensitive to client needs but is also more cost efficient. This was most evident in the loss of paid positions in the various provincial Ministries post-DSSAB. For example, once Social Housing was devolved, only one position remained in the Ministry's Housing Portfolio, that of Municipal Services Officer for Municipal Affairs & Housing. Those DSSAB Board members who were present during the housing transfer will recall the large contingency of staff who worked on that project with us – they are no longer employed by that provincial ministry.

Integrated Eligibility Determination: Intake

This month's Report will put in writing the various discussions related to the integration of the eligibility determination process across the three distinct social service programs within the jurisdiction of the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board (RRDSSAB). (For obvious reasons, this does not apply to Land Ambulance.)

History

In January, 1997, the province announced the 'Who does What' decisions – those decisions became subsequently known *as Local Services Realignment (LSR)*. Many of those decisions impacted on individual municipalities, while others ultimately impacted on Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs). The CMSMs were created at the regional, county and, in the north, at the DSSAB level. The stated purpose of CMSM/DSSABs was not simply to operate the Programs as is, but instead to arrive at new efficiencies by the integration of service delivery at the local level.

Several of the LSR decisions were subject to intense criticism, as they appeared to fragment rather than improve service delivery. With some other decisions, there came recognition that some programs could be better delivered locally in an integrated manner with like programs. Specifically, there was a positive response to the inclusion of the Family Benefits caseload into the Ontario Works caseload. This recognized the need to ensure that the employment and case management functions of OW were available to this significant group of clients as well. With the support of local management of the child care system, the opportunity to coordinate OW child care needs with the needs of low-income earners accessing local child care services became apparent.

Despite initial concerns, CMSM/DSSABs are demonstrating the benefit of local management and delivery of Social Housing. We remain concerned about the under-funded capital reserves and increased pressure on municipal coffers, but nevertheless are seeing the change generally positive. Integrating the delivery of DSSAB Housing (formerly Local Housing Authority housing) with delivery of independently-managed Non-Profit Housing Corporations becomes more obvious as we move along.

Eligibility

All three social service programs, i.e. OW, Child Care and Social Housing, have many similarities – all are targeted to low income persons and families. They have similar but not identical rules related to income, assets and spousal responsibilities.

OW has a detailed application process including needs and assets tests. If the OW applicant is eligible, the result will be the issuance of a social assistance cheque. A process is followed to identify and secure support from any other potential source. Continuing assistance is based on meeting strict criteria for the following of an individual Case Plan leading to employment or longer term disability allowances.

Child Care has a new detailed application process, moving from a needs-based assessment to income testing. The income test determines the amount of the cost of child care that the parent is obliged to pay. If the parent(s) are eligible for subsidy, payment is made directly to the child care provider. Again, a process is followed to identify and secure support from other potential sources to reduce the need for subsidy. Emphasis remains on the need to support parents while they seek employment, continue employment or attend school/training. Continuing eligibility is monitored to ensure that parents remain financially eligible.

The Social Housing Program is somewhat different in that the test is primarily financial, as there are no social circumstance restrictions on moving into a housing unit (e.g. employed). With the passing of the *Social Housing Reform Act* in 2000, a new obligation was imposed on the applicant to pursue other sources of income. This was a significant change, as it required an active review process related to potential income sources. This process became as extensive as that found in the OW and CC Programs.

In Social Housing, the rent-geared-to-income (RGI) process determines the rent to be paid by the tenant. The shortfall between that rent and the actual cost of housing is the subsidy, which is no different than a Child Care fee subsidy payment or OW allowance cheque.

In the late 1990's, the province saw the opportunity to consolidate and potentially simplify these eligibility tests. It convened a group of provincial & municipal staff with detailed program expertise in OW, CC and Housing to review the system. Although there had been some discussion of including other

financially-tested programs, the review was limited to the three programs delivered at the DSSAB/CMSM level.

In 1999, the group delivered their Reports which were well researched and served as valuable tools in our local implementation. The Reports (*Financial Testing & Access to OW, CC & Social Housing* and the companion report *Description of Business Processes*) supported the feasibility of the integration of eligibility and income testing. Although the program differences were numerous, the similarities were even more significant.

Opportunities

In January 2000, Child Care management was transferred to the RRDSSAB. At that time, child care needs testing was transferred from the Fort Frances Day Care Centre, the only centre with subsidized spaces at that time, to the RRDSSAB. By then, the RRDSSAB had already assumed eligibility determination for both Family Benefits and General Welfare Assistance – three different programs with three different intakes.

Concurrently, the RRDSSAB's *Joint Local Transfer Plan for Social Housing* indicated that the RRDSSAB would pursue the integration of the eligibility determination function for housing with the other two programs. The concept of integrating the RGI calculations with OW eligibility determination and CC fee subsidy was clearly articulated in the *Transfer Plan for Social Housing* which was approved by both the Board and Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing (MMAH).

Over the past several years, the RRDSSAB has continued to work toward a fully integrated eligibility determination system to access all social service programs delivered within our organization. Drawing on the expertise of in-house staff and other service system managers, the focus is on the rapid completion of a variety of access and eligibility tasks across the three programs. The need to develop a more formalized case management system remains unknown and will be part of our program evaluation process.

In 2006, the Province moved toward an employment funding formula for OW which served as the impetus for us to formalize the integrated intake process – something occurring right across the province, where possible. At this point in time, an Integrated Intake Worker, funded across the three Social Service Programs, has been hired to coordinate the process with the assistance of the DSSAB Receptionist and various program workers. Fortunately, this allows front-

Managing the delivery of services in our communities & making effective use of available resources

line personnel, such as Income Maintenance Caseworkers, to concentrate on our employment program which directly relates to our provincial funding.

An integrated Receptionist and integration of the Eligibility Review Officer (ERO)/Family Support Worker (FSW) functions also frees up program staff for actual case management and the attainment of budget-related service targets.

With the transfer of Non-Profit Housing, the DSSAB assumed responsibility for RGI applications, a coordinated access system and consolidated wait list system, and ongoing income and formal annual reviews. (Since that time, we have included property management and custodial duties in our integrated approach to social housing delivery.) The Non-Profit side of housing has been easily integrated into our intake system.

Unfortunately, various legislated and technology matters remain which interfere with our abilities to integrate to the preferred point. Until such time as the province creates a mechanism to overcome those issues, the RRDSSAB will continue to integrate functions within the established parameters as a means to provide more efficient, cost effective services in the District.

We are very proud of our efforts and accomplishments to integrate services to date, often serving as leaders in our service community and province. With the continued cooperation of staff and board, we will proceed with a new way of doing business that will be sustainable and maintain primary focus on our clients.

I have invited Shelley Shute, OW Manager and Tracy McClain, Integrated Intake Worker, to introduce the board to the new intake system at the April Board meeting.

/d