

Impact of the Ontario Works Program on the Quality of Life of Aboriginal People Living on

Reserve in Northern Ontario

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Abstract

An important goal for many First Nations communities is to increase the economic health and development of their community by assisting community members to become employable through education and training programs as well as providing opportunities for employment. The present study was undertaken to evaluate the impact of the Ontario Works program, a provincially funded income and employment assistance program, on the quality of life of Aboriginal people living on reserve in Northern Ontario. The study also looked at those who have experienced the shift from social assistance to employment to assess the extent to which participation in the program affected economic status and overall sense of health and well-being.

Fifty-nine Ontario Works clients from Wikwemikong were interviewed on quality of service and impact of the program. Eleven employers were also interviewed on the challenges facing Ontario Works clients and opportunities to address the challenges. The interviews revealed six major themes: 1) social assistance is used primarily by females and single parent families, 2) income assistance is not enough to support a family with children, 3) Ontario Works has increased the overall health and well-being of participants, 4) participation in employment support programs has increased employability, 5) higher education increased the opportunity to secure long term employment, and 6) employment stabilizes families and increases quality of life. A focus group session was held in the community to validate the data and provide feedback on the results of the study. The findings identified several positive aspects of the program that were presented as 'best practices'. There were also a number of limitations in the services that were identified and suggestions for improvement are proposed. The information in this report provides a framework for planning improvements in the delivery of services in Wikwemikong. The report also provides information on lessons learned and best practices for other First Nations communities planning to implement full delivery of the Ontario Works program.

It is increasingly recognized by economic and social development policy makers that a skilled workforce is one of the fundamental building blocks to a community's overall economic health and development. According to the Northern Ontario Training and Adjustment Boards (2004), there are overwhelming economic and social differences between Native and non-Native communities in Northern Ontario. These differences have resulted in higher rates of unemployment and chronic use of social assistance programs in First Nations communities. In this same vein, according to a study conducted by Human Resources Development Canada (2000) education and skilled upgrading are important components of social assistance programs in supporting clients in securing employment. It was also reported in this study that clients prefer work to being on assistance and that some clients will continue to upgrade if long-term education and training is offered which can lead to "higher-wage occupations and sustainable employment" (p. 31).

Generally speaking, reductions in the number of Ontario citizens accessing social assistance programs have been viewed by policy makers as a success. However, quality of life for those leaving social assistance programs is less certain. A review of the literature suggests there is limited research with respect to the benefits of implementing employment support programs in First Nations communities. The present study was undertaken to evaluate the impact of the Ontario Works program, a provincially funded income and employment assistance program, on the quality of life of Aboriginal people living on reserve in Northern Ontario. The study also looked at those who have experienced the shift from social assistance to employment in order to assess the extent to which participation in the program affected economic status and overall sense of health and well-being of Aboriginal people.

Employment Assistance Programs:

Considerable research has been committed to investigating the tangible and intangible benefits of providing employment assistance programs for social assistance recipients (Hatala, 2003; Salyers, Becker, Drake, Torrey and Wyzik, 2004; Anderson, Halter and Gryzlak, 2004).

Results from recent studies report that many social assistance recipients who participated in training and education programs feel hopeful and encouraged to work toward employment (Hatala, 2003) suggesting a marked increase in the level of motivation among these recipients. Even a small group of social assistance recipients with mental health disorders experienced positive effects after participating in supportive employment programs. For example, they reported an increase in self-worth, self-confidence and self-esteem, including improvements in personal relationships, decrease in substance use and a feeling of hopefulness about the future (Salyers et al., 2004). Anderson et al. (2004) reported similar findings in a study conducted in five high poverty neighbourhoods in Chicago. Working gave these participants a sense of pride and accomplishment and sent a positive message to their children, even in situations where the jobs were considered quite marginal. An unexpected finding in this research also revealed that access to physical and emotional supports from family and informal networks was a critical component for success.

Impact of Social Skills and Social Networks:

Many studies have found a positive relationship between social skills and social networks, and enhanced employability (Wiseman, 1986; Hatala, 2007; Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2001). Wiseman (1986) reported that individuals who have been on social assistance for a longer period of time are more likely to experience difficulty in finding and holding a job. This was due to lack of social skills as a result of social isolation. Social isolation has been found to be a major barrier to securing meaningful employment (Hatala, 2007). Over 40% of Ontario Works clients that participated in a study reported finding a job through formal or informal social networks (Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2001). This study also found that individuals with limited or no social networks lacked the skills and resources to find and secure employment. These results suggest that social networks play a vital role in finding employment and therefore employment support programs should not only offer education and skill-based training but also provide clients with opportunities to develop social

skills and informal and formal social networks (Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2001).

Transitional Employment Support Programs:

Transitional employment support programs have been designed to meet the needs of social assistance recipients with multiple barriers to employment and to provide a bridge to unsubsidized employment. They are described as time-limited employment opportunities offering comprehensive services to assist social assistance recipients in practicing appropriate job related skills and behaviours in a structured environment so they can overcome barriers such as a lack of child care, transportation or impending homelessness while building work-related skills (Baider and Frank, 2006; Dion, Derr, Anderson and Pavetti, 1999). Moore (2001) researched transitional employment support programs internationally and found that a combination of the following strategies provide the best results: 1) providing education and opportunities to develop social and interpersonal skills, 2) combining elements of training or education with work experience, 3) intensive case management combined with group placements that are jointly monitored and supervised by program staff and employers of temporary employment placements, 4) building strong partnerships between program staff and employers, 5) developing placements that are similar to real jobs in the community and providing ongoing support to ensure a smoother transition into unsubsidized jobs, 6) creating job opportunities that have a strong linkage with community needs and benefits, 7) using flexible work scheduling i.e., part-time work and job sharing, and 8) linking pre and post program employment activities combined with employer support. According to Baider and Frank (2006) "a number of non-experimental studies have found that transitional job programs can have positive effects on employment for social assistance recipients with barriers..." (p. 5) and "...they can also have a positive personal, professional and financial impact..." (p. 6).

History of Welfare in Canada and First Nations Communities:

The history of relations between First Nations people and Europeans has been well documented; see for example: Coates (2008); Dickason (1992); Dixon and Scheurell (1995); Gough, Blackstock and Bala (2005); and Rude and Deiter (2004). The following summary of this history is based on those sources.

According to Rude and Deiter (2004) "the earliest traders in America were First Nations people trading first among themselves and then extensively with Europeans" (p.3) during the sixteenth century (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995). The transition from trade to settlement began in the late eighteenth century marking the beginning of European colonialism (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995). "When the Dominion of Canada was created in 1867, [Aboriginal people] were declared a federal responsibility" (Dickason, 1992, p. 257) including the lands reserved for them (Gough et al., 2005). In 1876 the Indian Act was passed by the Federal Government which "consolidated and revamped pre-Confederation legislation" (Dickason, 1992, p. 283) resulting in "governing almost all aspects of Aboriginal life, from the nature of band governance and land tenure systems to restrictions on Aboriginal cultural practices" (Coates, 2008, p. 1). Thus, the fundamental purpose was to encourage assimilation of Aboriginal people into the social and economic life of the non-native population (Dickason, 1992). Through this process of assimilation Aboriginal children were placed in residential schools and "were forbidden to speak the languages of their parents and to practice their spiritual and cultural traditions" (Gough et al., 2005, p. 2).

Prior to 1945 "the only welfare expenditure of any significance was for basic relief.....in the form of rations to destitute Indians" (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995, p.22). After the Second World War welfare services became more "integral to the rights of citizenship" including the extension of these services onto reserves (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995, p. 22). However, during the 1950's Indian welfare receipts increased dramatically forcing the introduction of 'needs tested' programs. All the provinces except for Ontario refused to extend these services onto

reserves forcing “the federal government to develop a comprehensive policy for social assistance” (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995, p. 23). In 1965, Canada and Ontario signed the “Memorandum of Agreement on the full extension of welfare services onto the reserves requiring the agreement of each participating band” (Shewell, 2004, p. 319). The welfare services included general welfare, child welfare, homemaker’s and nurse’s services, and day nurseries. The federal government covered the social services and cost shared on a 50/50 basis the remaining services with the province (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2007a). A more detailed description of these services are outlined in the “1965 Canada-Ontario Indian Welfare Services Agreement” (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995, p.23).

In 1966 the federal government introduced the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) which provided federal cost sharing with the provinces. CAP was a ‘needs tested’ program and eligibility was based on total family income and assets. Work for welfare programs were not eligible for funding under this agreement. However, recipients were expected to look for work and accept any job they were capable of doing (Herd, Mitchell and Lightman, 2003; Human Resources Development Canada, 2000). In 1995 the federal government replaced CAP with the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST) which ended unconditional entitlements and opened the doors for the provinces to experiment with work for welfare programs. During this time, Ontario was at the forefront of developing work for welfare programs (Herd et al., 2003).

In 1995 the Ontario Government embarked on a new welfare reform agenda which brought about significant changes to the social assistance program. In 1998 the Ontario Works Act was passed and the new Ontario Works program was launched. The new program was more restrictive than the previous program and focused on assisting participants in obtaining employment as quickly as possible (Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2001). According to Human Resources Development Canada (2000) “welfare shifted from being an entitlement program designed to fight poverty to a temporary support intended to promote individual self-sufficiency” (p. 2).

“In 1999, the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council a non profit organization representing seven First Nations communities in the Mushkegowuk territory, initiated a court action challenging the constitutional validity of the Ontario Works Act” (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2007a, p. 37) stating that “First Nations have a direct relationship with the federal government and that the administration of provincial government programs requires negotiated agreements and no such agreements were made prior to the imposition of workfare legislation within First Nations communities” it was further stated that “the legislation was inappropriate for First Nations communities especially communities that lacked infrastructure” (McShane, 1999, p. 1). “This resulted in a deadline for First Nations to either opt out of Ontario Works delivery, or to deliver Ontario Works in compliance with provincial legislation” (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2007a, p. 37). Since then, the Ontario Government has not forced First Nations communities to act as a delivery agent of Ontario Works and has left the decision to deliver partial or full Ontario Works with individual First Nations. Wikwemikong was one of the Reserves that opted to continue to deliver the full Ontario Works program (Wikwemikong Chief and Council, 2009).

Ontario Works Program:

The Ontario Works Program provided employment assistance and temporary financial assistance for basic living expenses to individuals that met specific requirements to help them find and maintain paid employment. The program is needs tested, therefore individuals are required to provide evidence that their income does not exceed specific amounts. Most participants are also required to sign a participant agreement confirming they will participate in a range of employment assistance programs. The employment assistance programs are outlined below (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2007).

- Employment-Support Program: Helps participants become job ready through educational upgrading, practical skills job training and literacy programs

- Learning, Earning and Parenting Program: Provides supports for young parents to help them finish high school and enter the job market
- Community Participation Program: Provides unpaid placements in the community specifically designed to enhance the community and help participants gain practical work experience
- Employment Placement and Supports to Self-employment Programs: Secures places for employment-ready participants in open market positions or assists them in creating self-employment opportunities.

The Ontario Works program has been delivered by forty-seven Consolidated Municipal Services Managers, District Social Services Administration Boards and First Nations communities since April 1999. The ministry provides Ontario Works funding to 79 First Nations communities in Northern Ontario. Currently only Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve with a population of 6,649 (Aboriginal Canada Portal, 2009), and M'Chigeeng First Nation with a population of 725 (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2009) deliver the full Ontario Works program although the program is being piloted with the North Shore Tribal Council and in the Treaty 3 area. The remaining First Nations communities in Northern Ontario deliver only the income assistance component of the program (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2007).

Potential Challenges Facing Recipients:

Some studies suggest that the level of income assistance provided by social assistance programs is insufficient to meet basic needs and secure affordable housing. For example, a study conducted by Lightman, Mitchell and Herd (2002) revealed that despite best efforts by social assistance recipients to budget the monthly allowance it was impossible to find suitable shelter, or afford to purchase nutritious food and clothing for their family members. The Social Planning Council of Ottawa (2003) also reported similar findings including the risk of possible eviction when faced with unexpected medical expenses. Both studies reported that many social

assistance recipients occasionally had to access food banks and shelters because they were unable to make ends meet. In addition, Lightman et al. (2002) found no evidence to support claims made by policy makers that low social assistance rates motivate recipients to look for work and leave welfare sooner. In fact, Lightman et al. (2002) found strong evidence indicating that low rates created more barriers for social assistance recipients, resulting in poor health and the inability to afford the cost of transportation and clothing to pursue and secure permanent employment.

In 2003 the Minister of Community and Social Services conducted a review of the Ontario Works program. The Minister met with social assistance recipients, community agencies, other levels of government, and Ontario Works staff to identify issues and concerns, and recommendations for improvement to the program. The major concerns outlined in the report focused on improving the standard of living for children, acknowledging the impact of low rates on employability, and improving the employment assistance component of the program. Some of the recommendations included: 1) conducting job readiness assessments, 2) adopting evidenced based employment support programs, 3) enhancing pre and post-employment supports, and 4) strengthening relationships with community employers (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2004).

In July 2007 the Ontario Government introduced a new non-taxable Ontario Child Benefit to support more low income families in providing for their children. The benefit provided up to \$50 per month per child. These changes had an impact on the structure of the Ontario Works program for families with children under the age of 18. More specifically, the National Child Benefit Supplement was no longer deducted from social assistance and the portion of basic needs for children was removed from social assistance including the back to school and winter clothing allowance. Families continued to receive shelter allowances and health benefits for their children and claim some of their child care costs if they were working (Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2007).

First Nations Communities in Northern Ontario:

According to a study conducted by the Northern Ontario Local Training and Adjustment Boards (2004) there are 145 First Nations reserves in Ontario with 121 of them located in Northern Ontario and the majority of them are located “north of the 50th parallel” (p. 6). In 2001 the Aboriginal population was approximately 10 to 11.5% of the overall population in Northern Ontario and the unemployment rate was 302% higher than the province and 160% higher than the region. The study also found that the Aboriginal communities in Northern Ontario “have a higher percentage of youth” (p. 7) and “...a lower percentage of elderly” (p. 7); and the educational levels “...are lower than the averages for the Region” (p. 12) and for the Province of Ontario. Thus, the economic opportunities in these communities are quite bleak, with high rates of unemployment and chronic use of social assistance. Human Resources Development Canada (2000) has reported that “social assistance exists along a continuum” (p. 32); some clients will leave social assistance permanently whereas others will “cycle on and off” (p. 32) and yet others will combine part-time work with assistance. They have also agreed that some clients “will never be free of the social assistance system... especially in remote areas with few jobs” (p. 32). It is generally understood and respected that in cases where social assistance recipients are unable to secure full-time employment they can still participate in society in a meaningful way by combining part-time work with community service or volunteerism. According to the Northern Ontario Local Training and Adjustment Boards (2004) some Aboriginal communities are just too remote and too poor to become totally self-reliant. They have also commented that “most First Nation communities were developed by outside forces” (p. 6) which has resulted in scarce opportunities for employment. According to Human Resources Development Canada (2000) these remote communities will need to focus on “community development and other local development projects to build self-confidence and social cohesion” (p. 32). Aboriginal leaders are aware of the depressed state of their communities and the chronic use of social assistance and some First Nations communities are willing to work with

government agencies to improve the economic conditions. However, government funded non-aboriginal programs have not been very successful in First Nations communities. Also, there has been limited research in determining what would be most effective in the design of employment support programs for Aboriginal populations (Human Resources Development Canada, 1999).

History of Social Welfare Programs in First Nations Communities:

The literature reveals that social welfare programs in First Nations communities have not been very successful. The primary social services provided by the "Department of Indian Affairs through its Social Development program included: child welfare, individual and family care, adult care, and social assistance" (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995, p. 22). This section focuses on the impact of these programs on First Nations people as it relates to employability and employment.

Until the 1960s child welfare programs had minimal impact on First Nations communities because of the existence of residential schools (Dixon and Scheurell, 1995). Gough et al. (2005) reported that prior to the 1950's in most cases Indian agents [federal government representatives] placed Aboriginal children in residential schools rather than providing families with support services in the home. As a result, many of the children who attended residential schools graduated with substandard education (Kenny, 2002). For example, in 1930 three-quarters of Aboriginal children across Canada "were in grades one to three and only three in 100 went past grade six" and "as late as 1951, eight out of every twenty Indians over the age of five were reported to be without formal schooling" (Dickason, 1992, p. 335). Also, generations of these children who grew up in the residential school system were conditioned by institutional care and as a result lacked the skills to raise children and "were often ignorant of their own cultures' indigenous nurturing patterns" (Dickason, 1992, p.25). From 1960 to 1990 many aboriginal children were "placed for fostering and adoption" into non-Aboriginal homes with the belief that they "could benefit from European childrearing values" (Gough et al., 2005; Shewell, 2004, p. 212). "Many of these children experienced significant erosion of their cultural identity,

and suffered profound, long-term negative psychological consequences that continue today” (Gough et al., 2005, p.2). Thus the “multiple disadvantages and challenges faced by some Aboriginal families today, are a result of intergenerational dysfunction” caused by child welfare services and the residential school system (Gough et al., 2005, p. 2). Eventually the residential schools closed, “with the last of them closing in 1988” (Dickason, 1992, p. 337), and then Aboriginal children were integrated into the provincial school system (Wotherson and Butler, 1999). However, this resulted in high rates of failure with the “majority of First Nations youth leaving school well before high school completion” (Wotherson and Butler, 1999, p. 4). Recent studies have demonstrated that the mainstream [non-Aboriginal] education system is unprepared to address the high drop-out rates of Aboriginal youth due to the lack of culturally sensitive teaching practices; leaving them unprepared for the work force (Wotherspoon and Butler, 1999; Kenny, 2002). Although the development of government funded social-welfare programs in the 1960’s reduce the “inequality of income and education levels it deepened Aboriginal peoples’ feelings of exclusion, self-rejection and powerlessness” (Barsh, 2008, p.2). Dixon and Scheurell (1995) reported that in the 1980’s and early 1990’s the social assistance dependency rates for First Nations people was “4 times greater than the national rate of 7.25 percent” (p. 39) and the on-reserve rate was “6 times greater” (p.40); attributing these results to the “history of the fur trade, dispossession and the policies of assimilation and integration” (p.41). They have also reported that the social assistance program has undermined “the collective and traditional patterns of helping and sharing” (p. 41) in First Nations cultures. According to Dixon and Scheurell (1995) First Nations communities will need to “develop their own economies and relationship with the outside labour markets” (p. 42) to reduce the dependency rates on social assistance. According to the Northern Ontario Local Training and Adjustment Boards (2004), in 2004 the unemployment rate in First Nation communities in Northern Ontario was 24%. Levesque, Trudeau, Bacon, Montpetit, Cheezo, Lamontagne and Wawanoloath (2001) suggests tailoring employability programs to aboriginal culture and

learning methods can facilitate the movement of Aboriginal people into the labour market and off social assistance; however, information is deeply “lacking on the structure, content and ultimate thrusts of these programs” (p. 82). This would suggest that there needs to be a delicate balance between the two cultures and two worlds to facilitate successful entry into the work force on and off reserve.

The Ontario Works program has been identified by the Researcher as a program that could be very effective in transitioning Aboriginal people from social assistance to employment. The Ontario Works program works in conjunction with the federally funded Social Assistance Transfer Fund (SATF) to create more opportunities for skills development and to generate employment opportunities for Aboriginal people who are on social assistance. The SATF funding is equal to the basic social assistance entitlement of each Ontario Works client (INAC, 2009a).

The Present Study:

The present study was undertaken to evaluate the impact of the Ontario Works program, a provincially funded income and employment assistance program, on the quality of life of Aboriginal people living on reserve in Northern Ontario. The study also looked at those who have experienced the shift from social assistance to employment to assess the extent to which participation in the program affected economic status and overall sense of health and well-being.

Wkwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve was selected as the site for this study. The community is located on the eastern end of Manitoulin Island in north eastern Ontario and is the third largest Aboriginal community in Ontario with a population of 6,649 (Aboriginal Canada Portal, 2009). “The population is spread across the reserve into several satellite communities including Kaboni, Buzwah, South Bay, Rabbit Island, Murray Hill and Wkwemikongsing (Odjig, 2009). The reserve has road access connecting to Highway 6 and is 171 kilometres from Sudbury. The Wkwemikong Band is an amalgamation of three bands including Wkwemikong,

South Bay, and Point Grondine (Odjig, 2009). The community members are “originally Odawa with arrivals of Pottawatomie’s in 1836 and Ojibway after 1950” (Odjig, 2009, p.1). The central focus of the community is the main village where most of the services are located. Some of these services include gas and service station, grocery store, restaurant, deli shop, clothing store, hardware store, and pharmacy. The main source of employment is within the public sector however there are opportunities in the education, health, natural resources and forestry industry. In 2006 the working age population in Wikwemikong was 1,981 and only 45% of this population was employed (Odjig, 2009). However, “55% of the unemployed population included students attending high school or post secondary education” (Odjig, 2009, p.6). Wikwemikong has over ten years of experience in the full delivery of Ontario Works. Approximately 50% of the individuals in Wikwemikong who are unemployed participate in the Ontario Works program and approximately 50% of the Ontario Works clients in Wikwemikong have participated in the employment component of the Ontario Works program (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2007). Several education and employment assistance programs are offered in the community including the federally funded SATF program.

The present study was structured to include three separate components: 1) Ontario Works Client Questionnaire, 2) Employer Questionnaire, and 3) Focus Group session on the results of the study. The Ontario Works Client questionnaire contained fifty-four questions that focused on the profile of the research participants, impact of the program on participant, participant evaluation of the Ontario Works program and client aspirations. The Employer questionnaire contained four open ended qualitative questions that focused on challenges faced by Ontario Works clients and employers in developing successful career paths for clients to secure sustainable employment, and options for addressing these challenges. The focus group session provided an opportunity for Band Councillors, Program Managers, local employers as well as research participants to review summaries of the collected data to validate the data and

determine themes, patterns and relationships as well as to discuss issues, opportunities, lessons learned, and best practices.

The Tri Council: Medical Research Council, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (2008) recommendations for research involving Aboriginal Peoples were included in the design of the methodology. Some of the 'best practices' adopted by the Researcher included: 1) demonstrating respect for the culture, traditions and knowledge of the Aboriginal group, 2) developing a partnership with the Chief and Council, 3) consulting members of the group who had relevant expertise, 4) employing members of the community on the research team, 5) involving the Aboriginal group in the design of the project, 6) affording the community an opportunity to react and respond to the research findings before the completion of the final report, 7) including the various viewpoints of the community in the final report, and 8) providing a preliminary report to Chief and Council for comment.

Method

Participants:

A total of 59 randomly selected Aboriginal clients who had or were participating in the Ontario Works program in Wikwemikong participated in the in-depth interviews and were asked 54 questions. Eleven employers from Wikwemikong were also interviewed and asked four open ended questions. A focus group session was also held in the community to discuss the findings from the research project. A total of 20 individuals attended the focus group session including Band Councillors, Program Managers, local employers, as well as research participants.

Apparatus:

Ontario Works Client Questionnaire

In order to explore the impact of the Ontario Works program on the quality of life of Aboriginal people living on reserve a 54-item questionnaire was designed. The interview questions were based on the Community University Institute for Social Research Tool used in

Saskatchewan (Dyck, 2005) and were modified with input from the Community Steering Committee. Respondents were asked to provide their age, education and income. As well, a number of specific questions about social assistance and employment assistance utilization, quality of service, personal experiences and impact of the program were asked. They were asked questions about their household situation and work history; including questions assessing their health and well-being using a 5-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with each statement, as it related to their health and well-being, grouped under four separate categories: 1) Mental Health, 2) Physical, 3) Emotional/Social, and 4) Spiritual. They were also asked several open ended questions regarding improvements in quality of life, increase in self sufficiency and future aspirations (see Appendix A: Ontario Works Client Questionnaire).

Employer Questionnaire

A questionnaire with four open ended questions was designed by the Community Steering Committee to gain insight into the perspective of employers relating to challenges facing clients and opportunities to address these challenges. With respect to challenges, employers were asked “What do you believe is the greatest challenge in assisting our youth and clients on social assistance in developing successful career paths and achieving self-sufficiency?” In response to the challenges employers were also asked the following three questions: 1) What more do you think can be done by the Ontario Works program to address the challenge of developing appropriate career paths for youth and clients on social assistance? 2) What more do you think can be done by employers to assist with improving opportunities for youth and clients on social assistance? 3) What can the Band Council do to assist in improving opportunities for youth and clients on social assistance?

Focus Group Questions:

A focus group session was held in Wikwemikong to discuss the findings from the research project. A member from a nearby First Nations community was recruited to facilitate

the focus group session and prepare a report on the results of the session. Summaries of the responses for each question in the Ontario Works Client Questionnaire and Employer Questionnaire were presented at the focus group session. Several questions were designed to guide the process and stimulate open discussions. The small group discussion questions included: 1) Do you think this summary reflects the situation in Wikwemikong? Why or why not? 2) What lessons can be learned from these participants' experiences? 3) How can these issues be addressed by the Ontario Work's program? 4) Are there any comments, suggestions or questions? The larger group discussion questions included: 1) What are the common themes in this section? 2) What are some of the positive impacts of the Ontario Works program? 3) What issues should be emphasized in the final report? 4) What are some of the approaches taken by the Ontario Works staff that have worked well and should be adopted as 'best practices'? 5) Are there any comments, suggestions or questions?

Procedure:

A letter of agreement between the Researcher and the Chief and Council of Wikwemikong was signed by the Chief on March 4, 2008, including a Band Council Resolution approving the project (see Appendix B). A Community Steering Committee was formed early on in the process, consisting of key community members, to provide advice and feedback to the research team throughout the project lifecycle. A Terms of Reference document was developed by the Community Steering Committee to guide the process (see Appendix C: Community Steering Committee Terms of Reference). Two Aboriginal students with social work background and interviewing skills were recruited from the community to conduct the face-to-face interviews. The interviewers attended a one-day interactive training session on interviewing techniques and received feedback on their skills. The interviewers were also required to sign an agreement confirming that ethical procedures were discussed thoroughly with them by the Researcher and that they understood all procedures associated with the research involving human subjects (see Appendix D).

The detailed Ontario Works Client Questionnaire, Employer Questionnaire and Interview Protocol Guide were developed to guide the interviews. Both the Ontario Works Client Questionnaire and the Employer Questionnaire were vetted through the Community Steering Committee. The Ontario Works Client Questionnaire was also pre-tested with a small sample of First Nations people in the community. The study employed a methodology that selected every 8th client on the active caseload (approximately 480 clients) including a random selection of 20 participants who had left the program; to achieve a total of 80 randomly selected potential participants. Letters of invitation introducing the research study were distributed with follow-up phone calls to confirm participation in the research study. The first sixty participants who agreed to participate were assigned a code and were placed on the active list with the balance placed on a reserve list. The final sample included a greater number of participants enrolled in the program (40) compared to participants who had left the program (19) because the researcher found it difficult to reach those who moved and for whom a new telephone number could not be found. Participants were asked to commit approximately two hours for the interview and to sign a consent form (see Appendix E: Consent Form). Interviews took place at the participant's home, place of employment or Ontario Works office. Provided the participants consented, the interviews were tape recorded to strengthen reliability. The research team also recruited eleven employers from the community. The employer questionnaire consisted of four open ended questions designed to gain an understanding of the challenges facing Ontario Works participants and to identify opportunities to address these challenges. A focus group session was conducted in the community to review summaries of the collected data to determine themes, patterns and relationships in the data as well as to discuss issues, opportunities, lessons learned, and best practices. This was done through facilitated discussions of the research question summaries. The responses for each question in the Ontario Works Client Questionnaire were summarized and grouped under three headings: Impact of the Ontario Works Program on Clients, Client Evaluation of the Ontario Works program, and Client

Aspirations. A summary of eleven employer interviews was also presented and discussed during the focus group session. The Steering Committee members, Band Councillors, Program Managers, local employers, as well as research participants were invited to participate in the focus group session to validate the data that had been collected. Individuals who agreed to participate in the focus group session were provided with a document that summarized the responses to each of the survey questions as well as a summary of the employer interviews. During the focus group session, each question and the summarized responses were reviewed followed by a discussion period. The results of the focus group session were documented in a report and shared with the participants.

Data Analysis:

Ontario Works 'client interviews' were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and sent to the Researcher in confidential sealed packages on a weekly basis. The Researcher reviewed the packages weekly and summarized the responses for each interview in a data collection spreadsheet along with a summary profile for each participant. The quantitative data were entered into SPSS. Statistics were generated for the frequencies and percentages and where appropriate the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum were also generated. The qualitative questions were grouped into similar topics and the answers to each question were examined to identify themes and relationships. Items under each topic that were linked in some way were integrated to form major themes.

Results

The data focused on a profile of the research participants, impact of the Ontario Works program on participants; participant's evaluation of the Ontario Works program, and client aspirations. The sample consisted of 40 females (67.8%) and 19 males (32.2%) for a total of 59 First Nations people residing in Wikwemikong. The mean age was 34.73 years (standard deviation = 9.29); the minimum age was 20 years and the maximum age was 60 years. Participants were asked their highest grade level of education completed and current total

annual income. Secondary education was measured from grade level 1 to 12. Post-secondary College education was measured from grade level 13 to 14 and post-secondary University education was measured from 15 or higher. The mean education was 11.94 years (standard deviation = 2.45); the minimum grade was level 9 and the maximum was 5 years of University. Eight respondents did not specify their grade level of education. Income was measured using the Canada Census ranges. The mean income range was \$10,000 to \$11,999; the minimum income range was under \$2,000 and the maximum income range was \$50,000 to \$54,999. Participants were also asked, "Please describe what your present household situation is? (i.e., relationships, children, extended family, etc.)." The responses were grouped in similar themes indicating 47.5% of the participants were single parents, 32.2% were living with extended family, 11% were renting and only 2% owned their own home.

Social Assistance Utilization:

Participants were asked if they were currently on social assistance. The majority of respondents 39 (66.1%) reported they were currently on social assistance. Participants were also asked how long they had been on social assistance, both as a direct applicant and as a dependent (while living with a parent or a spouse). The majority of the participants 46 (77.9%) had been on Ontario Works as a direct applicant for two years or more; and the majority of the participants 48 (81.4%) were either unsure or not on Ontario Works as a dependent (see Table 1).

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages reporting length of time on Ontario Works

RESPONSE	As a Direct Applicant		As a Dependent	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Less than 12 months	9	15.3	2	3.4
13 months – 23 months	4	6.8	2	3.4
24 months – 35 months	8	13.6	3	5.1
At least 3 years	7	11.9		
At least 4 years	2	3.4		
At least 5 years	5	8.5	1	1.7
6 – 9 years	8	13.6	2	3.4
10 – 14 years	4	6.8		

15 – 19 years	6	10.2		
More than 20 years	5	8.5	1	1.7
Missing response	1	1.7	48	81.4
TOTAL	59	100.3	59	100.3

The mean years on Ontario Works as a direct applicant was 6.74 (standard deviation = 6.85); minimum was .08 years; and maximum was 30 years. The mean years on Ontario Works as a dependent was 4.62 (standard deviation = 5.9); minimum was .16 years; and maximum was 20 years.

Work History:

The participants were asked “Can you tell me about your work history (i.e. volunteer, paid, and unpaid)?” The responses were grouped into 29 job categories. The majority of the participants had previous work experience in several job categories. The most frequently mentioned categories were administration, food services, program delivery, and education. In most cases the positions were either contract, seasonal, or short term placements in Wikwemikong through the Social Assistance Transfer Fund (SATF) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Frequencies and percentages reporting Employment Experiences

Employment Experiences	Freq	%
Administrative Support	22	37.3
Food services	16	27.1
Program Delivery	12	20.3
Education assistants	11	18.6
Forestry/lumber	7	11.9
Firefighting	6	10.2
Landscape	6	10.2
Labourer	5	8.5
Janitorial	4	6.8
Cashier	4	6.8
Gas Attendant	3	5.1
Heavy Equipment Operator	3	5.1
Meat plant/retail	3	5.1
Bus driver	2	3.4
Researcher	2	3.4
Bingo Runner	2	3.4
Arena Attendant	2	3.4
Crafts	1	1.7
Laboratory work	1	1.7
Stocking shelves	1	1.7

Crossing Guard	1	1.7
Baby Sitting	1	1.7
Fisheries	1	1.7
Tourism	1	1.7
Recycling	1	1.7
Mechanic	1	1.7
Welder	1	1.7
Commercial Fishing	1	1.7
Personal Support Worker	1	1.7
Social Assistance Transfer Fund (SATF)	15	25.4
Volunteer	7	11.9
Self-employed	5	8.5
Maternity leave	3	5.1

Utilization of Employment Support Programs:

Participants had been provided the opportunity to participate in a full range of employment assistance programs. The employment assistance programs were delivered either directly by the Ontario Works staff or through a third party that offered approved educational programs in the community. Enrolment in the employment assistance programs was based on an assessment of the participant's skills in relation to their career and employment goals negotiated between the participant and the Ontario Works Case Worker and further documented in the participant's 'participation agreement'.

Participants in this research study were presented with a list of employment assistance programs offered through the Ontario Works program or through a third party and were asked to identify which employment assistance programs they had attended. The employment assistance programs were grouped into eight categories for a total of 53 employment assistance programs. The categories included: Formal Training, Accredited Training, Adult Education, Essential Skills/Job Readiness, Pre-Employment Training, General Interest, Employment placement – Paid Employment, and Community Participation. The number (and percentage) of participants that attended each program are presented in Table 3. The most popular programs for each category were: Formal Training – Carpentry (30.5%); Accredited Training – Chef's Training (6.8%); Adult Education – Regular High School Program (78.8%); Essential Skills/Job

Readiness – Working With Others (33.9%); Pre-Employment Training – First Aid (59.3%); General Interest – Arts and Crafts (32.2%); Employment Placement (Paid) - SATF (78%); Community Participation Volunteer – Community Event (71.2%). The least attended in each category were: Formal Training – Electronics (1.7%); Accredited Training – Pre-Health (1.7%); Adult Education – Access to High School through LEAP (6.8%); Essential Skills/Job Readiness – Numeracy (5.1); Pre-Employment Training – Job Information Session (3.4%); General Interest – Ice Fishing (5.1%); Employment Placement – Apprenticeship (8.5%); Community Participation Volunteer - Workplace (59.3%). The most popular programs overall were Regular High School Program, SATF and Community Events.

Table 3 Frequency and Percentages reporting utilization of Employment Programs

<i>Employment Assistant Programs</i>	<i>Utilization</i>	
	Freq	%
<i>Formal Training:</i>		
Carpentry	18	30.5
Smart Serve	17	23.8
Computers	14	23.7
Woodworking	7	11.9
Bookkeeping	4	6.8
Home Décor	4	6.8
Cement Masonry	2	3.4
Small Engine Repair	2	3.4
Stone Masonry	2	3.4
Electronics	1	1.7
<i>Accredited Training:</i>		
Chef's Training	4	6.8
Carpentry Techniques	3	5.1
Carpentry Technician	3	5.1
Pre Health	1	1.7
<i>Adult Education:</i>		
Regular High School Program	46	78.8
Independent Learning	18	30.5
Access to High School Through LEAP	4	6.8
<i>Essential Skills/Job Readiness:</i>		
Working with Others	20	33.9
Continuous Learning	13	22.0
Oral Communication	13	22.0
Computer Use	10	16.9
Reading	8	13.6

Thinking	8	13.6
Writing	7	11.9
Document Use	5	8.5
Numeracy	3	5.1
<i>Pre-Employment Training:</i>		
First Aid	35	59.3
CPR	30	50.8
Resume Writing	25	42.4
Cover Letters	22	37.3
WIMIS	19	32.2
Career Fairs	13	22.0
Budgeting	11	18.6
Casino Rama	11	18.6
Job Fairs	10	16.9
Mock Interviews	10	16.9
Customer Service	5	8.5
Self-marketing	5	8.5
John Howard Society (Pardons)	3	5.1
Job Information Session	2	3.4
<i>General Interest:</i>		
Arts/Crafts	19	32.2
Cultural Workshops	18	30.5
Self-Esteem Workshops	15	25.4
Sewing	14	23.7
Ice Fishing	3	5.1
<i>Employment Placement (Paid):</i>		
SATF	46	78.0
On the Job Training	28	47.5
Job Connect	8	13.6
Hire-Up	8	13.6
Apprenticeship	5	8.5
<i>Community Participation (Volunteer):</i>		
Community Event	42	71.2
Work Placement	35	59.3

The data revealed that some participants participated in only two programs whereas others participated in as many as 34 programs. A more in depth analysis revealed that respondents attending a greater number of employment assistance programs did not necessarily secure employment. For example, one participant with an employment goal of working in the food preparation industry attended 34 programs ranging from formal training in

carpentry and woodworking to chef's training, but did not secure any form of employment. The data also revealed that participants who attended programs that were more narrowly focused on their career and employment goals, and also participated in the Social Assistance Transfer Fund (SATF) program were more successful in securing employment. For example, one participant, with an employment goal of working in office administration attended five programs ranging from computer training to on the job training, including SATF, and secured employment in her chosen career. Further analysis revealed that all the participants who secured employment (18) participated in the SATF program. As illustrated by one participant, "SATF is pretty amazing.... if there was no SATF some people would not be employable ... through the SATF program they gain the training, even if you are not educated you still have the training through SATF ...it still helps to get employment." A similar comment was mentioned by another participant, "If I were to go into SATF I would gain more experience... and if you do a good job in the placement I understand they will hire you." According to the data the SATF program has been very successful for many participants. However, one participant had a very negative experience while participating in the SATF program - related to the conditions of the work environment as illustrated in the following, "...other people working there would yell at me and give me a hard time if I made a mistake at anything. After I made the complaint [reported the difficulties to the supervisor] I was told they [the employer] didn't want me back after the six months. I was kind of traumatized after I worked for the first time – it made me not want to work anywhere after that." During the interview this participant also indicated she did not receive adequate orientation on the job and had to learn on her own. Several participants who were successful in the SATF program also acknowledged the need for counselling and support services during SATF placement. As illustrated by one participant who was successful in securing full time employment, "Ontario Works should provide counselling and support services for SATF participants to help them succeed in their SATF placement."

Several open-ended qualitative questions were asked to draw out the personal experiences of the participants while participating in the employment assistance programs. The questions focused on the benefits of participating in the employment assistance programs, including suitability of the placement, based on skills and abilities, who arranged the placement, any barriers, problems or challenges they may have experienced while participating in the programs, and if they received any financial support to assist them during placement.

Participants were asked, "If you took part in any of the training and employment placement programs, can you tell me what benefits you experienced from these training programs?" Most of the participants indicated they learned new skills, good work ethics and they developed people skills which gave them confidence in working with others (see Table 4). One participant commented, "I guess the development of more skills; it opened doors for me and gave me confidence. Now that I learned the skills for the job I am currently in, I guess I see being employed is better than being on assistance, money wise. I don't want to go back on social assistance now that I've experienced work." A second participant commented, "It teaches you work ethics, if you know you have to be somewhere at a certain time you try and get there for that time. The training was beneficial – like my CPR. I don't see me using that in this environment right now, it is like life skills; makes me more employable with extra training, gives you more qualifications." According to another participant, attending employment assistance programs gave him a purpose and increased his self esteem, "It filled the gap – gave me something to do and sometimes get paid for it too and I was able to provide for my family. Also the training and the knowledge that I got on the job – I will always have it – experience. It gave me self esteem – that would be the personal benefits – self esteem – it helped me not to look down on myself." A small percentage of participants reported they received no benefits from the experience.

Table 4: Frequencies and percentages reporting benefits of EA Programs

Response	Freq	%
Skills development and training	19	32.2
Learning/knowledge	12	20.3
Employment experience	11	18.6
Getting along with others	9	15.3
Self-confidence	7	11.9
Employment	6	10.2
Interacting more with others	5	8.5
Work ethics (punctuality, attendance)	4	6.8
Job search skills (resumes, interviews)	4	6.8
Financial	3	5.1
Workplace safety	3	5.1
Benefit of working vs social assistance	1	1.7
Life skills	1	1.7
Contributing to society	1	1.7
Increased support from family	1	1.7
No benefits	4	6.8
No response	3	5.1

On the topic of barriers, problems and challenges, participants were asked, "Can you tell me about the challenges you were faced with while participating in any of these employment support programs." The majority of the participants reported they faced some challenges. The most frequently reported challenges were access to child care services, transportation to and from work, learning new skills, and dealing with difficult people (see Table 5). One participant shared her challenges with respect to child care and transportation, "I had no vehicle or child care so transportation was a challenge to get to the places. I hitchhiked to those training courses..." According to another participant, "The challenge was to keep it cool when all the other people working there would yell at me and give me a hard time if I made a mistake at anything. So it was kind of hard to keep it professional and not argue or yell back. It really hurt my feelings when they would make rude comments about the way I was working."

Table 5: Frequencies and percentages reporting Challenges

Response	Freq	%
No challenges	13	22.0
Transportation	10	16.9
Childcare	9	15.3
Learning new skills	8	13.5

Dealing with difficult people	6	10.2
Working Independently	4	6.7
Working with other staff	4	6.7
Getting used to being in a workplace	4	6.7
Financial	4	6.7
Health	1	1.7
Fast-paced environment	1	1.7
Sitting/inactivity	1	1.7
Negative treatment by other staff	1	1.7
Learning disability	1	1.7
Family issues	1	1.7
Lack of funding to attend programming	1	1.7
Insufficient training/skills	1	1.7
Balancing work and home life	1	1.7
No response	2	3.4

Participants were also asked “Can you please tell me about any barriers, problems, or issues that affected or came about due to your involvement with the employment support program with Ontario Works?” 44.1% reported experiencing some barriers and problems that again included transportation and child care as well as health issues (see Table 6).

Table 6: Frequencies and percentages reporting barriers/problems

Barriers/Problems/Issues	Freq	%
Transportation	4	14.3
Health problems	4	14.3
Childcare	2	7.1
Stress	2	7.1
Time with family	2	7.1
Staff are unavailable	2	7.1
Assistance was denied	2	7.1
Weather	1	3.6
Getting rent paid on time through OW office	1	3.6
Stigmatized by coworkers	1	3.6
Dirty work environment	1	3.6
Punctuality	1	3.6
Income problems	1	3.6
No raise	1	3.6
Placement didn't work out	1	3.6
Communication problems	1	3.6
Family issues	1	3.6

With respect to work suitability, participants were asked, "Do you feel that your placement was appropriate to your situation?" 88.1% reported that their placement was appropriate because it built on previous knowledge and work experience. One participant illustrated this point by stating, "Yes, because with the volunteering I did through high school I knew I wanted to work in a school setting." Another participant stated, "Yes, it is what I studied in University and all my jobs have been in this field." 8.5% indicated their placement was not appropriate, however many of them were motivated to work and were willing to be placed in a position until the best match became available. As illustrated by one participant, "It wasn't appropriate but it was the only job available and I wanted to do something instead of just sitting around at home so I took the job." Another participant with a similar attitude commented, "I probably would have preferred the landscaping or cooking. Where I am right now is okay until I finish my schooling in the cooking course I'm taking."

To the question, "Was your placement or employment arranged by Ontario Work or through yourself?" 47.5% reported that they learned of their placement through Ontario Works, 33.9% were self-initiated, and 13.6% were initiated by the participant with assistance from the Ontario Works staff. Several participants used existing networks to secure a placement, as illustrated by one participant, "I approached my old boss and asked if it would be possible to get a job placement ...he said OK." Another participant with a similar experience commented, "Myself – I worked there before and was advised I could get a placement through SATF." Some participants were instructed by the Ontario Works staff to find their own job, as illustrated by one participant, "Through myself – I asked Ontario Works if I can get a job somewhere – I was told to go out and look for a job placement so that is what I did – Rainbow Lodge called me back and hired me." Another participant stated, "Myself, I sent in a resume and followed up with a call. My boss contacted Ontario Works to set it up." 3% didn't know or didn't respond to the question.

Participants were also asked, "Were you provided with a clear understanding of your community and/or employment placement responsibilities?" 84.7% confirmed they were provided with a clear understanding of their job responsibilities. The most common responses included reviewing the job description, reviewing the policies or receiving verbal explanation of the job responsibilities, as illustrated in the following, "Yes, they gave me an orientation day and provided some training on goal setting, planning, how to defuse angry clients and team work." A small percentage of participants were left to figure it out on their own. One participant illustrated this point by stating, "No, not really... I was told the basics the first day there." The participant continued, stating, "I had to learn how to type a memo and letters on my own. I had to figure out on my own how to fix the photocopy machine when it was broken."

In response to some of the challenges, participants were asked, "Were you provided with any financial assistance related to your employment activities?" 84.7% of the participants reported they received some form of financial assistance that relieved some of the pressures they were experiencing. The most frequently reported supports included: clothing allowance (50.8%), transportation (27.1%), child care (25.4%), work equipment/safety gear (20.3%), and Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) check (20.3%).

An overarching open ended question was also asked to capture any other positive aspects of the Ontario Works program. Participants were asked, "Can you please tell me about any positive aspect of being involved in the Ontario Works program?" 83.1% reported positive aspects such as education, training, workshops, help/assistance, and job search assistance to find employment. One participant illustrated this point by stating, "The program is designed to help find employment and get off of Ontario Works... if you want to do community placement there is incentives for people that are willing to go out and work and show initiative by trying to seek employment." According to another participant, "They always encourage you to find a job, to be responsible for yourself, and don't become dependent. They helped me pay for my training and with my start-up." A small percentage of participants living on the outskirts of the

community had a very different opinion of the program. They reported a range of problems relating to lack of connectedness to the Ontario Works program and the inability to access employment opportunities. As one participant stated, “No, I can’t report any positive aspects because I don’t know what programs are coming upI live on the outskirts of the community and I have no phone or means of transportation.”

Evaluation of Customer Service:

The Ontario Works caseworker provides case management services for Ontario Works clients. Case management services include an introduction to the Ontario Works program, determination of eligibility, and linking clients to employment assistance services and activities. The expectation is that these linkages will help the individual overcome barriers to employment, develop job-related skills, and find work including self-employment. The Ontario Works caseworker is also expected to work with the Ontario Works client to develop a personalized, progressive, step-by-step plan to help them overcome barriers to employment as they work towards financial independence.

Participants in this study were asked to rate the level of customer service for five service indicators using a scale from one to ten: one being the worst service and ten being excellent service. The five service indicators included: 1) friendliness, 2) ability to help you understand Ontario Works rules, regulations, rights/responsibilities, and compliance policies, 3) ability to assist you in getting your basic needs met, 4) ability to ensure that your children are getting their basic needs met, and 5) was the staff person you deal/dealt with helpful. The results for the five indicators were fairly consistent with the mean ranging from 8.1 to 8.6 (see Table 7). These means were close to the maximum of 10 (excellent), although there was at least one rating in the negative direction for each question. Nine respondents did not rate the “ability to ensure your children are getting their basic needs met” as they did not have children while participating in the program.

Table 7 - Mean Minimum and Maximum ratings for Level of Customer Service

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Friendliness	8.50	3	10
Ability to understand OW rules, regulations etc.	8.36	2	10
Ability to assist in getting basic needs met	8.36	5	10
Ability to ensure your children are getting their basic needs met	8.16	2	10
Was staff person helpful	8.66	3	10

Participants were also asked, “How would you describe the level of customer service given to you by the Social Services employees or please explain how you were treated by the Ontario Works staff?” The majority of the participants indicated they were pleased with the customer service (see Table 8). One participant stated, “They treated me really good; made me understand the options that I have and helped me with my resume.” According to another participant, “They were polite and kind and treated me as if I was working with them to find a job.” A few participants were not completely satisfied with the customer services. As one participant reported, “The customer service was okay except once in a while they have their off days... sometimes they can be a little hard to get a hold of.” A second participant commented, “I noticed if you say something wrong they will ignore you later or give you a hard time.” Four participants remained neutral or stated the services were okay.

Table 8 Frequencies and Percentages reporting Description of Customer Service

	Freq	%
<i>Positive Responses:</i>		
Great, really good, excellent, awesome	19	26.4
Good	14	19.4
Helpful	8	11.1
Treat people fairly	5	6.9
Friendly	3	4.2
Courteous	2	2.8
Caring	2	2.8
Respectful	2	2.8
Very nice	1	1.4
Decent	1	1.4
Kind	1	1.4
Approachable	1	1.4
Understanding	1	1.4

Satisfactory	1	1.4
<i>Negative Responses:</i>		
Not helpful	3	4.2
Difficult to contact/long waits	2	2.8
Need customer service and people skills	1	1.4
Difficult to get information	1	1.4

To the question, “Were the support services you received from Ontario Works positive and reaffirming or did it have a negative impact on you, your family, and your experience applying for assistance?” The majority 44 (74.6%) answered ‘yes’ the experience was positive and reaffirming and in some cases elaborated on the experience (see Table 9.) One participant stated, “It is reassuring to me that Ontario Works is there to help me out when I need it.” Another participant summed up the experience by commenting, “Yes, it was positive being around people...it makes you feel stronger... you bring that home with you....you make the best of what you have instead of buying things.” In contrast, a few participants indicated it was difficult because they did not receive enough money as illustrated in the following, “The social assistance wasn't enough for food.”

Table 9 Frequencies and Percentages Reporting Positive Comments

Positive Comments	Freq	%
Provided advice/support	3	5.1
Staff were positive	2	3.4
Provided training	2	3.4
Gained employment	1	1.7
Provided wage subsidy	1	1.7
Provided medical assistance	1	1.7
Safety gear	1	1.7
Assisted with childcare	1	1.7
Motivated to participate in more workshops	1	1.7
Improved self-esteem	1	1.7
Better decision-making	1	1.7

An overarching question, “Can you tell me about your overall experience with income assistance services on-reserve?” was asked to capture a sense of the overall experience of the Ontario Works program. The most frequently noted concern was ‘insufficient financial

assistance' to make ends meet especially if you have children (see Table 10). One participant commented, "The financial assistance is not enough especially when you have kids." Another participant illustrated this point by stating, "I know it is not enough. I go without a lot to provide for my son. For example, I don't drink the milk or eat the fruit I buy so that my son can grow properly. He is walking around with the bottom of his shoes broken out. It is very depressing when I feel helpless." According to other participants, they recognize the limitations however they were grateful to receive an income and training opportunities including securing a job. As illustrated by one participant, "My experience was good. When I finished high school I continued my education and went to college. I had summer employment and the only time I went on social assistance is when I wasn't working or I wasn't in school. Other than that, I really don't want to be on social assistance."

Table 10 Frequencies and Percentages reported on Overall Experience of the OW Program

Response	Freq	%
Insufficient financial assistance	14	23.7
Satisfied with the program	9	15.3
Happy to get some income assistance	5	8.5
Inability to afford healthy food	4	6.8
OW manages some bills – prefer to be independent	3	5.1
Provided start-up funds for new job	3	5.1
Helpful but limited	3	5.1
Insufficient to support child/children	2	3.4
Liked the training	2	3.4
Different level of service compared to off-reserve	2	3.4
Not getting same services as others	1	1.7
Usually need assistance in the winter	1	1.7
Not enough promotion of the programs	1	1.7
Need more employers to participate	1	1.7
Like that OW program can be accessed on-reserve	1	1.7
Provided moving allowance	1	1.7
OW program is improving	1	1.7
Helped participant find a job	1	1.7
Both positive and negative	1	1.7
Able to get help quickly	1	1.7
Need for a literacy program	1	1.7
Provided income subsidy for person earning minimum wage	1	1.7
No response	1	1.7
Don't know	2	3.4

Impact on Health, Well-being and Quality of Life:

Several open ended questions were asked to determine the impact of the Ontario Works program on health, well-being and quality of life. To the question, "Do you think that the employment assistance programs that you were involved with help to improve your lifestyle?" 89.8% answered 'yes'. The most frequently reported comments were that the program provided financial assistance, assisted in developing new skills and work experience, increased self-esteem and confidence, and improved communication skills (see Table 11). As illustrated by one participant, "I am more secure and confident now that I have an income every two weeks.... it gave my family a routine... and it is teaching my children work ethics because they see me getting up in the morning to get ready for work and trying to manage the home at the same time too....it helped me get a vehicle and financial security." A second participant commented, "It helped me get motivated and helped me meet new people and raised my self-esteem." According to one participant she learned budgeting skills and was more able to provide food for her family, "Yes, more budgeting. I don't have to go to any more food banks. I became more responsible."

Table 11: Frequencies and percentages reporting ways lifestyle improved

Ways Lifestyle Improved	Freq	%
Financial	17	32.1
New skills/work experience	13	24.5
Increased self-esteem/confidence	8	15.1
Improved communication skills	8	15.1
Connection with community	7	13.2
Disposable income	6	11.3
Motivation to work	4	7.5
Improved mental health	4	7.5
Budgeting skills	4	7.5
Improved physical health	3	5.7
Independence	3	5.7
Chance to work	2	3.8
Led to employment/off the system	2	3.8
Positive example to children	2	3.8
Help others	2	3.8
Addictions awareness	1	1.9
Improved eating habits	1	1.9

Empathy from others in similar situation	1	1.9
Responsibility	1	1.9
Self-care	1	1.9
Spiritual	1	1.9

To the question, “Do you or did you feel better working than just being on social assistance?” 96.6% answered yes. The majority of participants reported they preferred to work rather than be on social assistance. As illustrated by several participants: working helped them gain their financial independence and they found it a good way to keep occupied. Most participants acknowledged receiving a regular pay cheque every two weeks rather than monthly enabled them to buy food and clothing for their family. Working was also something they look forward to and it helped them feel better mentally and physically (see Table 12). For example, one participant stated, “I feel better working – self-esteem wise. I wasn’t ashamed while I was working but when I wasn’t I didn’t like people knowing I was on social assistance. Working is better.” Another participant illustrated this with the following comment, “I just prefer to work, not just sit around and do nothing. Better to work – you feel better when you work. When you’re on assistance your motivation gets a little low sometimes, and your drive. You think, ‘I don’t have to do anything.’ So you don’t do anything. You just basically lay around but when you’re working you have something. You do it and it becomes routine.” According to one participant it set a good example for her family, “It gets me socializing with others....it is a good example for the kids to see their parents working...it makes me feel more valuable.... it gives you a lot of self-esteem and confidence.”

Table 12: Frequencies and percentages reporting why working is better

Reasons why working is better than Social Assistance	Freq	%
Financial	26	45.6
Good way to keep occupied	12	21.1
Improved self-esteem	8	14.0
Independence	6	10.5
Social interaction	5	8.8
Improves mental health	5	8.8
Provided motivation	4	7.0
Improves physical health	3	5.3

Financial control	3	5.3
Disposable income	3	5.3
Want to help others	2	3.5
Better lifestyle	1	1.8
Responsible	1	1.8
Positive example for children	1	1.8
Work is rewarding	1	1.8

To the question, “Do you think the Ontario Works program was beneficial to you and your family?” 89.8% answered yes. The majority of the participants reported the program helped pay the rent and buy food for their family and bring stability to the family. One participant illustrated this point by stating, “I believe so. It has more or less given me another start in my life right from the beginning. My life has improved dramatically, like financially and stability of family.” Another participant stated, “Yes, without it I don’t know what I would have done. I would have been penniless and I wouldn’t have been able to brush up my resume, attend job fairs. Maybe I wouldn’t have my Smart Serve today. They were there to help me get started with my new job.” Several participants acknowledged they received work experience which gave them more confidence and motivation to look for and secure full time employment. As illustrated by one participant, “Yes, it encouraged me to get out more and apply myself – to actually get up and look for a job.” A second participant stated, “Yes, they were able to get me off the system anyways and helped me gain experience in the field I wanted to be in.”

To the question, “Do you feel the Ontario Works program has helped you become more self-sufficient?” 76.3% answered ‘yes’. The most frequently reported comments included: provided education/training and work experience (13.3%), assistance with getting employment (13.3%), fostered independence (11.1%), and provided budgeting skills (8.9%). One participant stated, “Yes, because they helped me go to school, helped me finish my education and they are helping me learn. There is more of a bigger world out there than just living on Ontario Works.” Another participant stated, “Yes, I learned the importance of regular attendance and be punctual and the regular work ethics.” A different participant felt that the Ontario Works program created

a dependence on welfare. Those who reported they were not afforded the same opportunities as other participants were found to live on the outskirts of the community and had limited access to information and supports.

To the question, "Do you think the employment part of the Ontario Works program has helped you or members of your family avoid problems with the law?" 23.7% answered yes. Several participants reported they didn't know or they never had trouble with the law. One participant stated, "I think so, in general it gives some people some sort of stability and interaction in their life compared to someone without a job not doing anything constructive." A second participant stated, "Yes, working in this environment you have to live a clean life and that helped me in my own recovery." The participant continued to state, "My children don't have to live in an abusive environment or with an addictive mother anymore ... their lives improved too." 42.4% did not respond to the question.

To the question, "Do you think the employment part of the Ontario Works program has helped you or members of your family avoid problems with Child Welfare Agencies?" 22% answered 'yes'. Several participants reported they never had problems with Child Welfare Agencies but at the same time acknowledged the program did help them take care of their children's basic needs. One participant stated, "Yes, because my children's basic needs are being met... I have a good relationship with my worker...if Children's Aid were ever to intervene with me and my family my Ontario Works worker would be there to support us." Another participant stated, "I believe it does help...I had addiction problems and I had to make changes in my life." 44.1% did not respond to the question.

Participants were also asked if the Ontario Works program increased their well-being in relation to several health and well-being indicators. The indicators were grouped into four main categories using a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The four main categories included: Mental Health, Physical, Emotional/Social, and Spiritual.

The six indicators under 'Mental Health' included: access to education and learning, stimulation in job or workplace, using skills and abilities, interests and capabilities match with work being performed, confidence in self, and livelihood. Under 'Mental Health' most of the participants agreed or strongly agreed their well-being had increased (see Table 13).

The six indicators under 'Physical' included: health, sleep, proper nutrition, exercise and recreation, access to medical services, and healthy and safe environment in which to work. Most of the participants agreed or strongly agreed their well-being increased for four of the indicators with the exception of sleep and proper nutrition. More than half disagreed or strongly disagreed that their well-being increased for sleep and proper nutrition (see Table 13).

The four indicators under 'Emotional/Social' included: relationship stability, isolation, access to family and support networks, and addictions/rehabilitation. More than half of the participants agreed or strongly agreed their well-being increased for three of the indicators with the exception of Addictions/rehabilitation where more than half disagreed or strongly disagreed that their well-being increased and a few participants remained neutral (see Table 13).

The four indicators under 'Spiritual' included: contributing to society, access to community and culture, meaning in life, and social connectedness. More than half of the participants agreed or strongly agreed their well-being increased in each of these four areas (see Table 13).

Overall, the highest rated indicators of well-being were use of skills and abilities, confidence in self, stimulation in job or workplace, and livelihood. The lowest rated indicators of well-being were health, sleep, and proper nutrition. According to one participant, poor health was attributed to insufficient social assistance, as illustrated in the following, "The allowance was low...you can't eat healthy....like fruits and vegetables...it wasn't enough money." A second participant with a similar point of view stated, "Financial assistance was not enough....especially when you have kids."

Table 13: Percentages reporting increase in Well-being

<i>The OW Program increased my well-being in relation to:</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
	%	%	%	%	%
<i>Mental Health:</i>					
Access to education and learning	0	3.4	30.5	45.8	20.3
Stimulation in job or workplace	0	5.1	15.3	55.9	23.7
Using skills & abilities	1.7	1.7	13.6	55.9	27.1
Interests & capabilities match with work being performed	1.7	0	20.3	54.2	23.7
Confidence in self	1.7	3.4	15.3	42.4	37.3
Livelihood	3.4	6.8	11.9	49.2	28.8
<i>Physical:</i>					
Health	3.4	10.2	22.0	47.5	16.9
Sleep	1.7	11.9	35.6	40.7	10.2
Proper nutrition	8.5	10.2	27.1	35.6	18.6
Exercise and recreation	3.4	6.8	30.5	44.1	15.3
Access to medical services	3.4	8.5	20.3	45.8	22.0
Healthy and safe environment in which to work	0	6.8	11.9	59.3	22.0
<i>Emotional/Social:</i>					
Relationship stability	0	8.5	23.7	54.2	13.6
Isolation	3.4	3.4	27.1	40.7	25.4
Access to family and support networks	1.7	3.4	18.6	55.9	20.3
Addictions/rehabilitation	3.4	3.4	40.7	33.9	18.6
<i>Spiritual:</i>					
Contributing to society	0	5.1	23.7	44.1	27.1
Access to community and culture	0	5.1	25.4	39.0	30.5
Meaning in life	3.4	3.4	28.8	33.9	30.5
Social connectedness	1.7	5.1	20.3	54.2	18.6

Client Aspirations:

Participants were asked, "What kind of work do you want to do and how have you determined this?" The majority of participants had clear goals in mind for a career. Some participants selected more than one career interest. A few of the participants were not sure which direction they wanted to pursue and felt that they needed to do more exploration work to arrive at a decision. The most frequent selections were trades in general, working with children and youth, and Chef (see Table 14).

Table 14: Frequencies and Percentages Reporting Career Goals

Response	Freq	%
Trade	7	10.6
Working with children/youth	7	10.6
Chef	5	7.6
Gardening/landscaping	4	6.1
Office administration	4	6.1
Teaching/classroom assistant	4	6.1
Work that accommodates health conditions	4	6.1
Outdoors work	3	4.5
Construction	3	4.5
Helping people	3	4.5
Own business	3	4.5
Interior design/decorating	2	3.0
Social worker	2	3.0
Health sciences	1	1.5
Manufacturing (auto industry)	1	1.5
Service industry (food)	1	1.5
Heavy equipment operator	1	1.5
Computers	1	1.5
Native language teacher	1	1.5
Certified ice technician	1	1.5
Film production	1	1.5
Environmental	1	1.5
Cultural tourism	1	1.5
Happy with current position	1	1.5
Don't know	2	3.0
Anything	1	1.5
Finish college	1	1.5
TOTAL	66	99.7%

Participants were also asked, "What do you hope to accomplish in life with respect to family, career, education, community, skills development?" Providing for their family and giving their children a good life as well as pursuing post-secondary education ranked high on the list of future goals for most participants (see Table 15).

Table 15 Frequencies and Percentages Reporting Future Goals

Response	Freq	%
Provide for family/good life for children	19	32.2
Post-secondary education	16	27.1
More education (in general)	9	15.3
Graduate from high school	9	15.3
Career	8	13.6

Find employment	7	11.9
Help others	6	10.2
Have own home	5	8.5
Healthy lifestyle/good health	4	6.8
Own business	4	6.8
Other	3	5.1
More training/skills	2	3.4
Independence	1	1.7
Financial stability	1	1.7

Most of the participants had a good sense of their chosen career goal through past work experience and participation in the employment assistance programs. Several participants reported they wanted to continue with their education and secure their current full time job. As illustrated by one participant, "I am going to further my education and keep upgrading so that I can keep my permanent employment with the..." Other participants indicated they wanted to own their own home and be a good role model for their children and community.

At the end of the interview participants were asked, "What more can the Ontario Works program do to better assist you in leaving the program?" The most frequently mentioned included the need for more education, training and work experience as well as assistance in finding a job (see Table 16). One participant stated, "Help me find a job. I know I can find a job myself but if I were to go into a community placement or SATF they could give you more experience where you can get a job...I like that it will help you enter the work force." In the opinion of a couple of other participants Ontario Works should provide counselling and support services for SATF participants. As illustrated in the following comment, "I am no longer on the system but for others the Ontario Works program should provide counselling and support services for SATF participants to help them succeed in their SATF placement." In another participant's opinion, Ontario Works provides the tools necessary to be successful however individuals must be actively involved and demonstrate initiative, "I think it has done its part. It helped me in so many ways that it gave me the confidence to venture out to look into other

avenues of employment. I've learned from the program a great deal and I would suggest it to anybody else. It has worked for me. It's what you put into it that's what you get out of it."

Table 16 Frequencies and Percentages Reporting Options for Leaving the Program

Response	Freq	%
More education/training/work experience	10	15.9
Assistance with job search	9	14.3
Financial assistance/assistance is too low	6	9.5
Advertising of available programs/jobs	4	6.3
Good paying job	2	3.2
Transportation assistance	2	3.2
Change age requirements	1	1.6
Job creation for older workers	1	1.6
Counselling and support services for SATF participants (while in program)	1	1.6
Mandatory education to continue receiving benefits	1	1.6
Better match between person and job	1	1.6
Start-up funds to attend school in Sudbury	1	1.6
No longer in program	8	12.7
No response	7	11.1
Program can do nothing more	6	9.5
Other	2	3.2
Don't know	1	1.6

Profile of Participants Who Left the Program:

Participants who leave the program do not necessarily stay in contact with their caseworker. As a result detailed information on client experiences after Ontario Works is usually not known. Nevertheless, the research team was able to recruit 19 participants who had left the program. Of the 19 participants 11 were females and 8 were males. The mean age was 36.8 years; the minimum age was 21 and the maximum age was 50. The mean years on social assistance were 5.7; the minimum years on social assistance was .08 and the maximum years on social assistance was 19. The mean education was grade 12. Ten of these participants had post-secondary education. Participation in the employment assistance programs ranged from 3 to 18 programs and, all 19 participants participated in the SATF program and volunteered in a community event and/or workplace. Eighteen of the 19 participants had prior work experience, left social assistance for employment and were currently employed in the community (see Table

17). The mean income range for these participants was \$20,000 to \$24,999; the minimum income range was \$7,000 to \$9,999 and the maximum income range was \$50,000 to \$54,999.

Table 17: Frequencies reporting type of current employment

Response	Freq
Wiki Band Office – Office Administration	1
Office Administration	1
Wiki Health and Wellness Centre – Administrative Assistant	1
Part-time waitress	1
Stocking shelves	1
Wiki Band Office – office duties for 5 years	1
Wiki Development Centre	1
Wiki Community Gardens	1
Wiki Arena as an attendant - working towards a certified ice attendant	1
Data process at Tribal Council	1
Teacher	1
Rainbow Lodge as Health and Wellness Facilitator	1
Attendant at Wiki Community Living	1
Wiki Public Works in recycling department	1
Wiki Health and Wellness Centre – working towards Social Work degree	1
Self employed commercial fisherman – wanting to move into the construction field	1
Part-time Janitor and going to school in the security program	1
Working in Wiki	1
Not working – living with common law husband	1

To the question, “Do you think the Ontario Works program was beneficial to you and your family?” 100% of the participants who left the program responded in the affirmative. One participant commented, “Yes, they were able to get me off the system ... helped me gain experience in the field I wanted to be in.” A second participant illustrated this point by stating, “It has more or less given me another start in my life right from the beginning... my life has improved...dramatically like financially and stability of the family.”

To the question, “Do you feel the Ontario Works program has helped you become more self sufficient?” 90% of the participants who left the program responded in the affirmative. One participant commented, “Yes, it helped me gain full time employment and I am able to provide for myself and my family.” A second participant commented, “Yes, I learned the importance of regular attendance and be punctual and the regular work ethics.”

To the question, "What more can the Ontario Works program do to better assist *others* in leaving the program?" One participant commented, "I am no longer on the system but for others the Ontario Works program should provide counselling and support services for SATF participants to help them succeed in their SATF placement." Another participant commented, "I am no longer on social assistance but for others Ontario Works should provide programs that are geared to their personality – where their skills match up – and place people in SATF with another reserve or municipality not just in Wikwemikong."

Challenges and Opportunities from the Employer's Perspective:

Eleven employers were interviewed to identify challenges and opportunities. Four open ended qualitative questions were asked to gain insight into the challenges facing clients and employers and how the employers, Chief and Council and the Ontario Works program can address these challenges.

At the start of the interview employers were asked, "What do you believe is the greatest challenge in assisting our youth and clients on social assistance in developing successful career paths and achieving self-sufficiency?" Employers reported that they recognized that some clients had poor life skills such as budgeting and time management. They also reported that some clients lacked motivation and had poor work ethics such as regular attendance and punctuality as well as understanding how their position contributes to the whole organization. They also mentioned that some clients had not completed high school and had low self-esteem and trouble believing in self. Employers also found it difficult to get clients interested in committing to training and apprenticeship programs. Also, clients that did attend training programs did not pursue employment with other employers within or outside the community.

In response to the challenges employers were asked, "What more do you think can be done by employers to assist with improving opportunities for youth and clients on social assistance?" Employers did acknowledge they should have conducted formal interviews to ensure that the client is really interested in the position rather than slotting clients into positions

with no forethought. It was also recognized that once the client is hired more time should be taken to show the client what needs to be done and how to do it and to show more interest in developing the client's skills by being more flexible and open to education opportunities. The employers also recognized how important it is for them to understand the challenges that clients face and help them find the support they need so they can be successful in the position. One employer commented, "Employers need to be aware of that...not just bring them in or they're not doing their job or they have some kind of social problem... we're not going to help them out... they give the boot and not the chance."

Employers were also asked, "What can the Band Council do to assist in improving opportunities for youth and clients on social assistance?" The employers had a wide range of suggestions for Band Council to consider such as developing partnerships with other First Nations to create opportunities for clients or hosting an open forum to find out from the community members what they need to become more self-sufficient. Employers also stressed the need for diversity in education including more investment in training and education programs such as adult education, literacy and numeracy. One employer stressed there needs to be changes in the education system, as illustrated in the following comment, "Diversify our education base because we're going to be continuing this cyclical effect of people working for housing...seasonally [rather than securing a stable job to pay for rent year round]." Another employer expanded on the same point with the following comment, "You know the Board of Education cannot dictate what someone's career field is going to be but as a group we can find ways to promote and influence what career paths people take." It was also noted there is a need to build an infrastructure that supports business development such as banking, road and transportation. Supports such as child care services for children three years and under was recognized as a gap in the community and a barrier to employment. Employers also stressed the need for change in social policy so that it is more difficult for youth to access social assistance if they drop out of school.

Employers were also asked, "What more do you think can be done by the Ontario Works program to address the challenge of developing appropriate career paths for youth and clients on social assistance?" Employers acknowledged the good work performed by the Ontario Works staff however they also identified several areas that required improvement. These improvements included focusing on training programs that reflect local industry or skills needed in the community so that at the end of the training the client is connected with a job. Policy changes to the program were also suggested by the employers such as: making training or volunteerism mandatory while on welfare, streamlining the paperwork involved in training a client, permitting a client to own their own vehicle while on welfare, increasing the amount of financial assistance so that clients can make ends meet, and providing more employment supports, for example, lunch money. One employer illustrated this point by stating, "Ontario Works has to bend their rules. Before we were able to give them an allowance for them to come and then Ontario Works started deducting that off their check, like their lunch money, their transportation money, and maybe a little bit of child care and that was considered income so of course they quit, like it wasn't worth it for them to go." Some of the employers saw a 'client centred' approach to delivering services as a good option in supporting clients. As illustrated by several employers, the Ontario Works program should hold case conferences with other agencies to assess the client's interests to determine appropriate education and career goals and at the time of placement ensure the client is a suitable match with the employer so that the client has a positive experience. One employer commented, "You see a lot of people – they'll come in for training for carpentry then next year they're here to do training for office administration. So they're just going in circles but eventually they'll probably figure out what they like. It's good too, but it is taking too long." Another employer summed up these concerns by stating, "Somebody needs to sit down and help them to decide rather than just jumping into something without weighing the pro's and con's to guess what field they want to go into." The same employer continued to state, "We've had some here...he just decided at the second week

that this isn't what he wanted to do." Better advertising of the employment programs was also suggested so that local businesses and organizations are more aware of the programs offered.

Focus Group Session Findings:

A focus group session was held in the community to discuss the findings from the research. The purpose of the focus group session was to review summaries of the collected data to determine themes, patterns and relationships in the data as well as to discuss issues opportunities, lessons learned, and best practices. It was also an opportunity for the community to validate the data that had been collected. The session was conducted through facilitated discussions of the research questions summaries.

Seven of the 20 individuals that participated in the focus group session were research participants. Representatives from the public and private sector as well as Band Council members also attended. Two days prior to the focus group session, participants were provided with a document that summarized the responses to each of the survey questions as well as a summary of the employer interviews. The responses for each question in the Ontario Works Client Questionnaire were summarized and grouped under three headings: impact of the Ontario Works program on clients, client evaluation of the Ontario Works program, and client aspirations.

During the focus group session, each question and the summarized responses were reviewed followed by a discussion period. The focus group session began with an overview of the research project and a presentation on the profile of the research participants followed by summarized responses on: 1) impact of the program on participants, 2) participant evaluation of the program, and 3) client aspirations. Several discussion questions were asked following the presentations to generate open discussions (See Appendix F – Focus Group Session Discussion Questions).

There was consensus in the group that the results of the research reflected the situation in Wikwemikong. To the question "Can you please tell me about any positive aspects of being

involved in the Ontario Works Program?” One participant stated, “The responses do reflect the situation in Wikwemikong.” A second participant stated, “The response does reflect the situation in Wikwemikong – people don’t feel empowered.”

Common themes drawn from the session included: 1) clients benefit from employment experience, 2) financial benefits of the program particularly when Ontario Works clients were on a placement and were paid every two weeks rather than once per month, 3) two of the main barriers to employment were transportation and child care for children under the age of 2 ½, 4) training supports were beneficial, (5) Ontario Works participants preferred not to be on social assistance, and 6) positive evaluation of the Ontario Works program by those who were surveyed.

Participants identified the following positive impacts on clients from the Ontario Works program: 1) placements are a good way for clients to get work experience and to develop positive work ethics, 2) placements also motivated Ontario Works clients to continue with training and gave them self-confidence in being employable, and 3) Ontario Works clients who were on placements were being positive role models to their children. One participant who was an Ontario Works client commented while she was employed it influenced her son to stay out of trouble. Similarly, another participant commented, “...the message of independence ... when you see it modeled you know it’s expected of you.” According to another participant who noticed positive changes in Ontario Works clients over time commented, “I’ve observed positive transformation in SATF participants; they become quite involved – more vocal, provided positive environment, new ideas; people wanted to continue their education.”

During the session participants also raised the following issues and concerns: 1) social assistance is seen as a ‘norm’ rather than as emergency assistance, especially with the youth - one participant commented, “My son doesn’t take his education seriously because he knows Ontario Works is there to help.” Another participant commented, “Some parents don’t want to show their kids what it’s like to be on social assistance; it’s the parent’s responsibility to keep

kids in school... don't support or encourage them to be on Ontario Works..", 2) some Ontario Works clients take whatever training or placement is available without clear direction to their career path, 3) Ontario Works clients may not be aware of all the community supports available to them, 4) the financial assistance provided through the Ontario Works program barely covers the basic needs, especially for families with children, 5) employers might go through three workers (because they quit) which gets time consuming for the employer who has to retrain the new worker, and 6) work ethics such as punctuality and attendance were ranked lower by Ontario Works clients while employers ranked work ethics as very important. One participant stated, "It is interesting that work ethics were ranked low but that is what employers are looking for." The participant continued to state, "Maybe participants aren't aware of employer expectations.....need to work more on 'work ethics' because some are not committed to their placement." One participant felt very strongly that correlations between being on Ontario Work and either avoiding problems with the law or Child Welfare Agencies should not be made – and further pointed out that most participants did not respond to these questions.

In response to the issues and concerns, participants offered the following recommendations: 1) similar to the delivery of the Ontario Works program off-reserve, it should be mandatory for Ontario Works clients to participate in employment support activities, community participation activities, and employment placements, 2) more advertising of the programs and services available to Ontario Works clients needs to occur particularly among the satellite communities of Wikwemikong, 3) career goals of all Ontario Works clients should be assessed in a systematic way, 4) more pre-employment training and job preparation should be provided for clients especially for those who have been on the social assistance system for many years, 5) employment counselling is needed to provide on-going support for Ontario Works clients who are on placement, 6) sensitivity training for employers is needed, 7) ongoing support is needed for employers beginning with an orientation on the Ontario Works program, 8) employers and Ontario Works workers need to monitor how the placement is going and provide

encouragement and volunteer evaluations for employees, 9) affordable child care services are needed for children under the age of 2 ½ and for extended hours i.e., early mornings and evenings, and 10) there is a need for adult education, offered at night and summer school, for people in their 20's to complete Grade 12. One participant suggested information on the history of welfare in First Nation communities should be included in the final report so that the reader can gain a better understand of the need for social assistance in First Nations communities.

The group also identified 'best practices' that added value to the Ontario Works program: 1) the provision of outreach to satellite communities, 2) networking with other community agencies to support clients, 3) provision of programs to assist and support those who need addictions counselling, 4) provision of assessments and guidance on career paths, 5) ongoing encouragement and positive reinforcement for clients, 6) on-going employment counselling to support clients while on placement, and 7) implementation of an interview process for SATF placements, in partnership with employers, to confirm the client really wants the position and are a good match for the position.

At the end of the session, participants were asked to complete an evaluation form. A summary of the responses were included in the focus group session report. Participants were asked, "What did you like about today's workshop?" Overall, participants were pleased to be part of the data validation process. One participant commented, "I think that it is a great way to ensure that your data is accurate and reflective of the community." A second participant commented, "I liked that it gave everyone an opportunity to voice their opinion and share ideas that could supplement the collected data." To the question, "Do you think this research will benefit Wikwemikong?" One participant stated, "I think this research has the potential to create a positive social change in the community and build capacity." Another participant stated, "Yes, the recommendations should become a living document and can become an integral part and support to our comprehensive community plan." Participants were also asked, "What do you think about being involved in reviewing and commenting on the results before they are included

in a final report?" There was general agreement that it was very important for the community to have an opportunity to comment on the data. One participant illustrated the importance of community participation in the following comment, "It was very rewarding; especially when you feel involved in it further in a workshop like today." Another participant stated, "I am honoured to get to voice my opinions." The session ended with a closing Prayer and community Feast hosted by the research team and community Elders, to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of the research participants and community members.

Discussion

The Ontario Works program provides social assistance and employment assistance services to assist individuals in securing long-term meaningful employment. Individuals who qualify for Ontario Works are perceived to have the potential to move to employment with appropriate training and supports. This is achieved through a continuum of services that range from individual assessments, education and training opportunities, employment counselling, pre-employment placement and ongoing supports. The present study was designed to evaluate the impact of the Ontario Works program on the quality of life of Aboriginal people living on reserve in Northern Ontario. The study also looked at those who have experienced the shift from social assistance to employment in order to assess the extent to which participation in the program affected economic status and overall sense of health and well-being of Aboriginal people. Through an analysis of quantitative and qualitative research approaches the personal experiences and opinions of Wikwemikong Ontario Works participants have been explored in this report. Such an analysis allowed the Researcher to examine unique experiences and challenges facing Aboriginal people living on reserve as they move along the continuum from social assistance to employment. A focus group session was also held in the community to validate the data, identify best practices and recommendations to enhance the program at the community level.

The results showed the Ontario Works program was successful in developing the employability skills of participants and transitioning many of them to employment placement opportunities. Through these opportunities several of the participants were also able to exit the program to permanent employment and are now self-sufficient. The majority of the participants also reported an increase in health and well-being in the following areas: 1) self-esteem, 2) confidence, 3) motivation, 4) disposable income, 5) relationship stability, 6) connectedness to the community, 7) improved eating habits, 8) improved mental and physical health, and 9) being a positive role model for children.

Six major themes were revealed in the study: 1) social assistance is used primarily by females and single parent families, 2) income assistance is not enough to support a family with children, 3) Ontario Works has increased the overall health and well-being of participants, 4) participation in Ontario Works employment assistance programs has increased the employability of community members, 5) higher education increased the opportunity for community members to secure long term employment, and 6) employment has stabilized families and increases quality of life.

Of the 52 employment assistance programs offered by the Wikwemikong Ontario Works program only 8.7% of the programs were used 50% or more of the time by the Ontario Works participants. Available resources can be better utilized if the employment assistance programs are reviewed to determine which programs are most relevant based on an evaluation of the client's skills and abilities and on local industries or skills that are needed in the community. Several Ontario Works participants commented that they were not aware of the programs and supports offered by Ontario Works. Employers also commented that better advertising of the employment programs was needed so that local businesses and organizations are more aware of the programs offered. Developing detailed descriptions of the employment assistance programs (distinguishing workshops from long term programs) can assist the Ontario Works staff in evaluating the programs and promoting/advertising the programs in the community.

As one of the major themes illustrates, the employment assistance programs have proven to be excellent pre-training tools to help participants prepare for full time employment. The employment assistance programs have helped many participants determine their skills and career aspirations and increased self-esteem and self-confidence. However, based on comments shared by employers, greater benefits can be achieved in a shorter period of time if structured learning and employment plans are developed for each participant based on personal assessments, and counselling and case management services are provided. As one employer articulated, "You see a lot of people – they'll come in for training for carpentry then next year they're here to do training for office administration. So they're just going in circles but eventually they'll probably figure out what they like. It's good too, but it is taking too long." This issue was also raised during the focus group session, "Ontario Works clients take whatever training or placement is available without clear direction to their career path. As a result, employers might go through three workers because they've quit, which gets time-consuming for the employer who has to retrain the new worker."

A more in-depth analysis of the data revealed that participants who attended a greater number of employment assistance programs did not necessarily secure employment. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Hatala (2003a) where participants that attended multiple training programs became trapped in the system and were less likely to benefit from the programs and become job ready. Again, this would suggest that a more structured and focused approach would be more effective and less expensive to the system.

The data also revealed the federally funded SATF program demonstrated huge success, when applied in conjunction with the Ontario Works program in transitioning clients into full time employment. Of the 46 participants (78%) that participated in the SATF program, the majority reported added benefits such as increase in skill set and confidence to secure full time employment. However, not all of the participants were successful with SATF, for various reasons. Lack of basic education and prior work experience, poor match to position, and

inadequate on the job orientation/training were identified as the major stumbling blocks for some participants. The SATF placements are a critical resource for the Ontario Works program requiring prudent management of these resources. The results revealed that a poor employer/employee match in the SATF program can result in a failed placement and lost opportunity for other participants. As illustrated by one employer, "Somebody needs to sit down and help them to decide rather than just jumping into something.....we've had some herehe just decided at the second week that this isn't what he wanted to do." Wilson and Stewart (2000) reported that employers want employees who are dependable and have a stable work history since high risk individuals can lead to employee turnover and increased recruitment costs for the employer. This study is consistent with these findings and suggests the Ontario Works program should develop the client's employability skills and interview the client prior to employment placement to demonstrate to the employer that the participant really wants the position. Education was also stressed by focus group participants as a critical factor for success in SATF placements and the need for more adult education, literacy and numeracy programs offered in the evening. One participant commented, "Trades training involves both theory and practical which is why Grade 12 is mandatory." Another participant commented, "Grade 12 is mandatory to get a job with the Band – it's there [the requirements] to encourage people to finish high school." It was also recognized that employers need to take an active role in supporting Ontario Works clients while in placement by providing on-the-job training and monitor the participant's activity and provide encouragement during the placement.

Lack of child care services and transportation services were mentioned repeatedly throughout the study as important barriers to successful employment for Ontario Works clients. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Wilson et al. (2000) where lack of affordable child care and transportation were cited as barriers to employment and in some cases mothers on social assistance may be discouraged from accepting a job if appropriate child care is not available. Similar concerns were raised in a study conducted by Fuller, Kagan,

Caspary and Gauthier (2002) where mothers on social assistance may initially access informal child care but expect more formal and stable child care as they move to employment.

Addressing these barriers to employment is of paramount importance. The community should work with employers to look for opportunities to provide transportation and affordable on-site child care services for Ontario Works clients entering the workforce.

Ontario Works clients living on the outskirts of the community, with no means of transportation or communication, expressed huge frustration and a strong feeling of disconnectedness to the Ontario Works program. As illustrated by one participant, "No, I can't report any positive aspects [of the Ontario Works program] because I don't know what programs are coming up... I live on the outskirts of the community and I have no phone or means of transportation." This problem can easily be alleviated as suggested by focus group participants, "get staff out in the community doing outreach ...to get an understanding of clients through home visits."

Many of the Ontario Works participants felt the income assistance was insufficient and barely covered the basic needs, especially for families with children. As illustrated by one participant, "Financial assistance was not enough...especially when you have kids." Some participants commented that they were accessing food banks. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Lightman et al. (2002) where, despite best efforts by social assistance participants to budget the monthly allowance it was impossible to find suitable shelter or afford to purchase nutritious food and clothing for their family members. However, Ontario Works participants that did find employment reported they were more motivated to continue to work because they had more disposable income to buy food and clothing for their family. In contrast, the Lightman et al (2002) study found little evidence to support this finding.

On a more positive note, the majority of participants felt the Ontario Works program had a positive impact on their health, well-being and quality of life. It helped them feel better mentally and physically. As illustrated by one participant, "... it helped me get motivated and

helped me meet new people and raised my self-esteem.” Similar findings were reported by Anderson et al. (2004) where working gave these participants a sense of pride and accomplishment even in situations where the jobs were considered quite marginal.

Several Ontario Works participants (47.5%) reported using informal networks and self-initiated contacts to secure a job placement. The Hatala (2003a) study reported similar results, “there was a statistically significant relationship between re-employment and the strength of social networks... this data can be interpreted as meaning that network strength increased the probability of finding job-related information” (p.19). The Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services (2001) study also reported that social networks are an important component to finding employment. The opportunity to cultivate social networks for social assistance recipients can occur in many different settings and can result in a wide range of positive outcomes. Hatala (2003a) reported that attending employment assistance programs can provide an excellent opportunity for participants to network with other participants. As illustrated by one participant in this study, “Yes, [attending Ontario Works employment assistance programs] helped me to open up more...I learnt from other people around me different ways to do things...their thoughts and ideas make you think...they are like role models around you.” Over 78% of the Ontario Works participants reported they had access to family and support networks that provided emotional support. According to Anderson et al. (2004) family and other informal supports are critical to the ongoing success of clients after leaving social assistance. Hatala (2003a) suggests, “it could be useful to have a program that encourages participants to expand their networks with contacts that could provide relevant job-related information” (p. 20). In cases where social networks are lacking the Ontario Works staff should consider focusing on ways to support social assistance clients in developing and broadening their personal and professional networks. One approach which has proven to be an effective means for expanding and maintaining social networks is encouraging clients to get involved in community events and extra-curricular activities (Hatala, 2007).

An important finding revealed that the majority of participants who experienced paid employment prefer to work rather than be on social assistance. As illustrated by one participant, "I don't want to go back on social assistance now that I've experienced work." In fact, some participants were embarrassed and didn't want community members to know they were on social assistance. One participant commented, "I feel better working – self-esteem wise. I wasn't ashamed while I was working but when I wasn't I didn't like people knowing I was on social assistance. Working is better." Some expressed a strong aversion towards becoming dependant on social assistance, as illustrated by another participant, "I feel better working... I was sick and tired of being on welfare... I didn't feel good... I felt ill." These findings are significant considering that the central goal of welfare reform was to increase self-sufficiency and reduce dependency on social assistance (Fuller et al., 2002).

The findings also revealed several intangible benefits experienced by participants while in paid employment. These include increased self-esteem and confidence, finding work rewarding, being a positive role model for children and sending a positive message to family members. As one participant illustrated, "... I am more secure and confident now that I have an income every two weeks...it gave my family a routine...and it is teaching my children work ethics." Another participant who left the program for employment commented, "...because of my upbringing I was taught to be working supporting yourself...my father was a good role model. He taught us work ethics and he taught us that being on welfare is not the way to go. It is a temporary thing...you don't stay on welfare if you can work or go to school...getting your education is important to providing for your family." These findings are also significant because they suggest that the Ontario Works program has the potential to strengthen families and break the cycle of 'intergenerational welfare dependency' which is one of the most difficult challenges facing society. According to Pech and McCoull (1998) studies reveal "that the children of welfare recipients are more likely to receive welfare as adults than are the children of non-

recipients” (p. 3). They also reported that, “daughters of welfare recipients were more than twice as likely to receive welfare themselves, than the daughters of non-recipients” (p. 3).

Further analysis of the data revealed 19 of the 59 participants were no longer enrolled in the program and all but one participant left the program for employment. At the time of the interview they were all still employed and some of them had plans to further their career and education. A more in depth analysis of this subgroup revealed key factors that contributed to their success: 1) qualifications, 2) education and training, 3) employability skills, 4) past work experience, 5) participation in the SATF program and volunteering in the community, 6) social networks and family support, and 7) demonstrating a positive attitude, initiative, and resourcefulness. Members of this subgroup also shared their views on key strategies that would be helpful for other participants to move to permanent employment: 1) place participants in jobs that match their skill-set, 2) expand opportunities for employment by offering placements on other reserves or municipalities, and 3) provide sufficient support and counselling while clients are in placement.

The findings from this study can help Ontario Works prepare clients for the workforce. The data suggests that employability skills and characteristics such as interpersonal skills, attendance, work ethics, attitude and behaviour are all critical to the entry of Ontario Works clients into the workforce. Nevertheless, in order for Ontario Works clients to be successful in employment placement programs, it will require the participation and cooperation of community agencies, employers and educators. Employers acknowledged the importance for them to understand the challenges that clients face and help them find the support they need so they can be successful in their employment placement. Several focus group participants commented that some employers may benefit from ‘sensitivity training’ to help them understand the challenges that Ontario Works clients are facing. The group also suggested that a support system or monitoring plan should be implemented to follow up with participants once they are on the job. A key requirement expressed by employers was employees who are committed to

work to the extent that they not only come to work, but also report on time. Similar findings and suggestions were also reported in the Wilson et al. (2000) study.

Limitations:

Although this research project was unique in that this was the first time First Nations people living on reserve had an opportunity to comment on their personal experiences while participating in the Ontario Works program, there were some limitations to this study: 1) the focus of this research study was on the personal experiences of Ontario Works clients, therefore comments from program staff were limited to participation in the focus group session, 2) information available on the employment assistance programs offered by the Ontario Works program in Wikwemikong was limited, therefore feedback on the content and delivery of these programs was not included in the research, 3) since only eleven employers participated in this study their comments should not necessarily be generalized to other employers, and 4) it is also strongly recommended that caution be taken when applying these findings to other First Nations communities that do not have similar demographics and economic opportunities. This is particularly important since Wikwemikong could be viewed as “very much an exceptional community as opposed to a typical community” (Robson, 2009). Robson goes on to point out that “Not all Aboriginal leaders are willing to work with government agencies to improve economic conditions through government intervention. Indeed many Aboriginal leaders refuse to work with government agencies and in fact view government intervention as part and parcel of the ongoing legacy of colonization.”

Implications for Further Research:

Within this research, developing a partnership through ongoing collaborative efforts between the Researcher, Chief and Council and community members was instrumental in capturing a holistic view of the community's experiences with the Ontario Works program. As such, the Researcher proposes the following recommendations for applied researchers interested in working with First Nations people in the evaluation of employment assistance

programs: 1) develop partnerships early on in the process with community leaders, 2) employ holistic approaches that are culturally sensitive and approved by community leaders, 3) recruit individuals from the community on the research team, 4) consult with community leaders throughout the project lifecycle i.e., form a community steering committee, 5) be flexible and make adjustments as needed, 6) develop data gathering tools that are meaningful to the participants and culturally sensitive, 7) have mechanisms in place to support participants in cases of emergency e.g., mental health crisis team, 8) provide an opportunity for community members to validate the data and provide feedback i.e., focus group sessions, 9) provide Chief and Council the opportunity to comment on the final report, and 10) celebrate and respect current program delivery achievements identified in the research and provide support and guidance in implementing the recommendations.

Future research on the Wikwemikong Ontario Works program should build on the findings and recommendations outlined in this report including comments shared during the focus group session. Possible questions include: 1) Why aren't more Ontario Works clients participating in the formal training programs? 2) How many of the Ontario Works clients completed their placements? 3) What assessment tools should be used by Ontario Works staff to determine career paths/goals? 4) What happens during the transition phase from the Ontario Works program to independent work? 5) What are the impacts of Ontario Works on Aboriginal children? 6) How do changes in parental welfare use and employment affect Aboriginal children's outcomes over time?

Conclusion:

This study is the first step towards developing improvements in the Wikwemikong Ontario Works program and in creating opportunities for long-term and meaningful employment. The recommendations outlined in this report should be seriously considered by community leaders since community members are expecting 'change'. Introducing positive change in a community requires active involvement of the whole community. It starts by sharing information

with community members and engaging them in the process. It will take the vision, creativity, support and persistence of all community members to strengthen families and break the cycle of 'intergenerational welfare dependency'. It is important to disseminate these findings to inform and engage community members in the community planning process.

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Appendix A – Ontario Works Client Questionnaire

The interview procedure will follow an open-ended, conversational format. The interviewer will ensure that proper interview techniques are utilized to ensure that the participants are comfortable and understand their rights, roles, and responsibilities in this interview process.

(Source: Modified version of the CUISR (Community University Institute for Social Research) Research Tool. "Off Welfare...Now What?" A literature Review on the Impact of Provincial Welfare to Work Training Program in Saskatchewan. Retrieved September 26, 2007 from www.usask.ca/cuisr

Participant ID #:	Date of Interview:	Start time:
1. (a) What is your age?		
(b) What was the highest grade level of education you completed and what year did you complete it?		
2. Are you currently on Social Assistance? Yes__ No__		
3. How long were you on or have been on Social Assistance?		
(a) As a direct applicant ___years ___months		
(b) As a dependent ___years ___months		
4. Please describe what your present household situation is? (i.e. relationships, children, extended family, etc.)		
5. Can you tell me about your work history? (i.e. volunteer, paid, and unpaid)		
6. What is your total annual income? (using Canada Census ranges)		
Under \$2,000 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$2,000 to \$4,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$5,000 to \$6,999 <input type="checkbox"/>
\$7,000 to \$9,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$10,000 to \$11,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$12,000 to \$14,999 <input type="checkbox"/>
\$15,000 to 16,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$17,000 to \$19,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$20,000 to \$24,999 <input type="checkbox"/>
\$25,000 to \$29,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$30,000 to \$34,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$35,000 to \$39,999 <input type="checkbox"/>
\$40,000 to \$44,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$45,000 to \$49,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$50,000 to \$54,999 <input type="checkbox"/>
\$55,000 to \$59,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$60,000 to \$64,999 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$65,000 to \$69,999 <input type="checkbox"/>
over \$70,000 <input type="checkbox"/>		
7. Can you tell me about your overall experience with income assistance services on-reserve?		

8. (a) Which employment support programs did you participate in?

Formal Training:

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Stone Masonry | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cement Masonry | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Carpentry | <input type="checkbox"/> | Woodworking | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Electronics | <input type="checkbox"/> | Small Engine Repair | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Home Décor | <input type="checkbox"/> | Computers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> | Smart Serve | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Accredited Training:

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Chef's Training | <input type="checkbox"/> | Carpentry Techniques | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Carpentry Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> | Electrical Techniques | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pre-Health | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Adult Education:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ILC (Independent Learning) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Access to High School through LEAP | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Regular High School Program | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Essential Skills/Job Readiness:

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Reading | <input type="checkbox"/> | Document Use | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Numeracy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Writing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Oral Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> | Working with Others | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thinking | <input type="checkbox"/> | Computer Use | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Continuous Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Pre-Employment Training:

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Resume Writing | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cover Letters | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| WIMIS | <input type="checkbox"/> | Budgeting | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Self-marketing | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mock Interviews | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Job Fairs | <input type="checkbox"/> | Casino Rama | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Customer Service | <input type="checkbox"/> | Career Fairs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| First Aid | <input type="checkbox"/> | CPR | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| John Howard Society (Pardons) | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Job Information Session (i.e., Pioneer Construction) | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

General Interest:

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Sewing | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cultural Workshops | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Arts/Crafts | <input type="checkbox"/> | Self-esteem Workshops | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ice Fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Employment Placement (Paid Employment):

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------|
| On the Job Training | <input type="checkbox"/> | SATF | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Apprenticeship | <input type="checkbox"/> | Hire-Up | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Job Connect | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Community Participation:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Volunteer (Workplace) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Volunteer (Community Event) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (Please describe):

8. (b) If you took part in any training and employment placement program, can you tell me what benefits you experienced from this/these training program(s)? Please explain.
8. (c) Can you tell me what challenges you were faced with while participating in any of these employment support programs? Please explain.
8. (d) Do you feel that your placement was appropriate to your situation? (i.e. skills, knowledge, personal) Please explain.
8. (e) Was your placement or employment arranged by Ontario Works or through yourself? Please explain.
8. (f) Were you provided with a clear understanding of your Community and/or Employment placement responsibilities? Please explain.
9. Have you been provided with any financial assistance related to employment activity? (i.e. CPIC, work boots, informal childcare, transportation etc.) Please explain.
10. Did you ever accept paid employment off reserve?
11. Did you or your dependant children participate in children and youth programming? (i.e. Summer Youth Challenge – gardening, self-esteem workshops, addictions, career exploration; Science summer camp; Incentive trips – Canada’s Wonderland)

<p>12. How would you describe the level of customer service given to you by the Social Services employees or please explain how you were treated by the Ontario Works staff?</p>
<p>13. How would you rate the services of the staff from 1 to 10? (#1 being the worst of service, and #10 being excellent service). Please indicate rating number within the block brackets.</p> <p>(a) Friendliness []</p> <p>(b) Ability to help you understand Ontario Works rules, regulations, rights/responsibilities, and compliance policies. []</p> <p>(c) Ability to assist you in getting your basic needs met. []</p> <p>(d) Ability to ensure that your children are getting their basic needs met. []</p> <p>(e) Was the Social Services staff person you deal/dealt with helpful? []</p>
<p>14. Can you please tell me about any positive aspects of being involved in the Ontario Works Program?</p>
<p>15. Can you please tell me about any barriers/problems/issues that affected or came about due to your involvement with the employment support program with Ontario Works?</p>
<p>16. Do you think that the employment assistance program that you were involved with helped you to improve your lifestyle? Please explain.</p>
<p>17. Do you or did you feel better working than just being on social assistance? Please explain.</p>
<p>18. Please rate the following statements.</p> <p><u>Mental Health:</u></p> <p>(a) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to “access to education and learning”.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()</p> <p>(b) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to “stimulation in job or workplace”.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()</p> <p>(c) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to “using skills and abilities”.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()</p>

(d) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**interests and capabilities match with work being performed**".

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(e) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**confidence in self**".

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(f) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**livelihood security**" (i.e. money to cover basic needs).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

Physical:

(g) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**health**" (i.e. improved health).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(h) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**sleep**" (i.e. more restful sleep).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(i) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**proper nutrition**" (i.e. balanced diet).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(j) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**exercise and recreation**" (i.e. balanced lifestyle).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(k) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "**access to medical services**" (i.e. dental).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

- (l) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“healthy and safe environment in which to work”**.

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

Emotional/Social:

- (m) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“relationship stability”** (i.e. positive relationships).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

- (n) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“isolation”** (i.e. interacting more with others).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

- (o) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“access to family and support networks”**.

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

- (p) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“addictions/rehabilitation”** (i.e. access to addiction services; decrease in use of drugs and/or alcohol).

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

Spiritual:

- (q) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“contributing to society”**.

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

- (r) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“access to community and culture”**.

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

- (s) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to **“meaning in life”**.

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(t) The Ontario Works Program has increased my well-being in relation to "social connectedness".

Strongly Disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly Agree ()

(u) Is there any other area under mental health, physical, emotional/social or spiritual that the Ontario Works Program has increased your wellbeing? Please explain.

19. Do you think the Ontario Works program was beneficial to you and your family? Please explain.

20. (a) Were the support services you received from Ontario Works positive and reaffirming? Or did they have a negative impact on you, your family, and your experience applying for assistance? Please explain.

b) If not positive, were you at any point given an opportunity for an appeal and/or re-course?

21. What kind of work do you want to do? How have you determined this?

22. What do you hope to accomplish in life? (i.e. family, career, education, community, skills development)

23. Do you think the employment part of the Ontario Works program has helped you or members of your family avoid problems with the law? Please explain why or why not.

24. Do you think the employment part of the Ontario Works program has helped you or members of your family avoid problems with Child Welfare Agencies? Please explain why or why not.

25. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience in the Ontario Works Program, or about the type of work you do/want to do?

26. Do you feel the Ontario Works program has helped you become more self sufficient? Please explain why.

27. What more can the Ontario Works program do to better assist you in leaving the program?

End time of Interview: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Appendix B – Consent Form for Chief and Council

Dear Chief:

Members of your community are invited to participate in a study entitled *“The Impact of the Ontario Works Program on the Quality of Life of Aboriginal People Living on Reserve in Northern Ontario.”*

This research is being conducted by Janis Yahn, and funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. You can reach Janis Yahn at 807-475-1225 (work) or 807-683-9469 (home). Janis Yahn’s academic credentials can be established by telephoning Dr. John Jamieson, Professor of Psychology, Lakehead University, at 807-343-8738.

This research is being done to determine the impact of the full Ontario Works program (income and employment assistance) on the quality of life. Individuals who have participated in the full Ontario Works program will be asked questions in an interview to see if this program is helpful for them. An interview will take up a maximum of two hours each. Provided the participants consent, the interview will be tape recorded.

Participants in the study will receive a small honorarium (\$5.00 gift card) and assistance in travel and daycare costs.

The research will be made up of a number of questions in individual interviews. The questions will be about the change in quality of life for people who participated in the full Ontario Works program.

Answers to the questions will be recorded and transcribed into reports. Where appropriate, the information will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual. This means that no one will be able to know the identity of anyone who has participated in this research.

The final report will be the property of Lakehead University and the Ministry of Community and Social Services. A copy of the draft report will be shared with the participants and Chief and Council to provide feedback to the researcher. The final report will be publicly accessible. The transcripts and audiotapes will remain stored at Lakehead University for seven years.

Participants and society may benefit from the study if the results of the study identify lessons learned that can be applied to the Ontario Works program.

Prospective research subjects are not compelled to take part in this research project. If an individual does elect to take part, he or she is free to withdraw at any time with no prejudice and will have no negative consequences. Similarly, if individuals elect not to take part in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. Participants can also refuse to answer individual questions and may decide to withdraw from the research project at any time.

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to contact the researcher at the number provided above. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by Lakehead University's Ethics Board on _____.

This letter is an agreement between Janis Yahn and [*Chief and Council*], to approve this research project, and gives free and informed consent to recruit participants in [*First Nation Community*] to participate in this project. I understand the contents of this consent form, and have received a copy of this form.

Signature

Date

Contact Information:

Lakehead University
Research Ethics Board
807-343-8283

Dr. John Jamieson
Research Advisor
807-343-8738

Appendix C - Terms of Reference

Community Steering Committee Terms of Reference Joint Research Project

Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Child and Youth Services, Lakehead University and Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve

Background:

The Ministry of Community and Social Services/Ministry of Child and Youth Services, Lakehead University and Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve have developed a partnership to conduct a joint research study that will assess the overall health and social benefits of the Ontario Works full delivery program in Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve which has been supported by Chief Robert Corbiere and Band Council through Band Council Resolution.

The study will be a cross-sectional, descriptive survey design using both quantitative and qualitative methods lead by the Researcher. Two (2) research assistants (resident students) will conduct in-depth face-to-face interviews using a survey with approximately 40 multiple choice and open-ended questions guided by an interview protocol and questionnaire template.

An independent facilitator will conduct a one-day focus group session to analyze the data. The qualitative data will be analyzed for major themes, patterns and relationships between the data and descriptive statistics will be used to describe the quantitative data.

A preliminary report will be submitted to the Research Steering Committee and Chief and Council for comments. The final report will be submitted to Lakehead University Ethics Board for approval.

Purpose:

The purpose of this committee is to provide expertise; guidance and support to the project team and to ensure the rights and interests of the community as a whole are respected.

Values:

We believe that:

1. The culture, traditions and knowledge of the Aboriginal People should be respected.
2. Community members with relevant expertise should be consulted on the design and throughout the life cycle of the project.
3. Community members should be given an opportunity to react and respond to the research findings before the completion of the final report.
4. Any disagreement about the interpretation of the data should be accurately reported in the final report.

Objectives:

1. To provide advice and feedback to the project team throughout the life cycle of the project.
2. To review and provide feedback on the tools (i.e. questionnaire, interview protocol).

3. To review and provide comments on the Focus Group Session TOR, proposed methodology/tools etc.
4. To participate in the one-day Focus Group Session and identify potential participants.
5. To comment on the materials for distribution prior to the Focus Group Session (i.e. literature review, selected readings and interview data).
6. To review and provide comments on the content of the Focus Group Session Report.
7. To review and provide comments on the preliminary Thesis Report.
8. To provide feedback on the planning of the celebration.

Membership:

The membership is comprised of the Lead Researcher, MCSS/MCYS Program Analyst, MCSS Program Supervisor, two research assistants (resident students), Ontario Works Administrator, Employment and Training Development Officer and five (5) community members of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve.

Members:

Janis Yahn, Lead Researcher
 Lise Laforest, MCSS Program Supervisor
 David Stone, MCSS Program Analyst
 Derek Fisher, Administrator, Wikwemikong Ontario Works
 Hazel Fox-Recollet, Employment and Training Development Officer, Wikwemikong
 Mary Jo Wabano, Manager, Wassa Naabin Youth Centre
 Dominic Beaudry, Director, Wikwemikong Board of Education
 Colleen Wassegijig-Migwans, Wii ni n'guch-tood LDM
 Darrel Manitowabi
 Mary Lynn Odjig, General Manager/EDO, Wikwemikong Development Commission
 Ann Aiabens, Research Assistant
 Christine Aiabens, Research Assistant

Procedures:

1. The committee will meet on a monthly basis, or as required.
2. Location of meetings will be in Wikwemikong Community.
3. A disclosure of conflict of interest will be observed at all meetings.
4. Meetings will be co-chaired by the Lead Researcher and the Employment and Training Development Officer.
5. Minutes will be taken by the research assistants and distributed within 10 working days by e-mail.

Decision Making:

Wherever possible, decisions shall be made on a consensus basis, with members present.

Consensus Defined:

A consensus will be achieved when all voting members present either support or "can live with" the decisions. The latter group may choose to have their name removed from the list as those supporting the decision. A consensus is not achieved when one or more participants "cannot live with" a decision and can clearly articulate their rationale.

Date Prepared: April 28, 2008
Date Approved: May 6, 2008

Appendix D – Agreement with the Interviewer:

Ethical procedures have been discussed thoroughly with me by the researcher Janis Yahn. I understand all procedures associated with thesis research involving human subjects as outlined in this protocol and will act in accordance with them.

Signature

Date

Contact Information:

Lakehead University
Research Ethics Board
807-343-8283

Dr. John Jamieson
Research Advisor
807-343-8738

Appendix E – Consent Form for Participant

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "*The Impact of the Ontario Works Program on the Quality of Life of Aboriginal People Living on Reserve in Northern Ontario.*" Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

This research is being conducted by Janis Yahn, and funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. You can reach Janis Yahn at 807-475-1225 (work) or 807-683-9469 (home). Janis Yahn's academic credentials can be established by telephoning Dr. John Jamieson, Professor of Psychology, Lakehead University, at 807-343-8738.

This research is being done to determine the impact of the full Ontario Works program (income and employment assistance) on the quality of life. Individuals who have participated in the full Ontario Works program will be asked questions in an interview to see if this program is helpful for them. An interview will take up a maximum of two hours each. Provided the participants consent, the interview will be tape recorded.

Participants in the study will receive a small honorarium (\$5.00 gift card) and assistance in travel and daycare costs.

The research will be made up of a number of questions in individual interviews. The questions will be about the change in quality of life for people who participated in the full Ontario Works program.

Answers to the questions will be recorded and transcribed into reports. Where appropriate, the information will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual. This means that no one will be able to know the identity of anyone who has participated in this research.

The final report will be the property of Lakehead University and the Ministry of Community and Social Services. A copy of the draft report will be shared with the participants and Chief and Council to provide feedback to the researcher. The final report will be publicly accessible. The transcripts and audiotapes will remain stored at Lakehead University for seven years.

Participants and society may benefit from the study if the results of the study identify lessons learned that can be applied to the Ontario Works program.

Prospective research subjects are not compelled to take part in this research project. If an individual does elect to take part, he or she is free to withdraw at any time with no prejudice and will have no negative consequences. Similarly, if individuals elect not to take part in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. Participants can also refuse to answer individual questions and may decide to withdraw from the research project at any time.

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researcher at the number provided above if you have questions at a later date. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by Lakehead University's Ethics Board on _____.

This letter is an agreement between Janis Yahn and _____, to take part in this research project, and gives free and informed consent to participate in this project. I understand the contents of this consent form, and have received a copy of this form for my own personal records.

Signature

Date

Contact Information:

Lakehead University
Research Ethics Board
807-343-8283

Dr. John Jamieson
Research Advisor
807-343-8738

Appendix F – Focus Group Session Discussion Questions

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think this summary reflects the situation in Wikwemikong? Why or why not?
2. What lessons can be learned from these participant's experiences?
3. How can these issues be addressed by the Ontario Work's Program?
4. Are there any comments, suggestions or questions?

Larger Group Discussion Questions:

1. What are the common themes in this section?
2. What are some of the positive impacts of the Ontario Works Program?
3. What issues should be emphasized in the final report?
4. What are some of the approaches taken by the Ontario works staff that have worked well and should be adopted as 'best practices'?
5. Are there any comments, suggestions or questions?