An illustration showing the lower legs and feet of several people walking. The style is graphic and stylized, with dark blue and black outlines for the clothing and legs, and a light pinkish-red background. The people are walking from left to right.

FROM PEOPLE WHO KNOW: AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO ONTARIO WORKS

TORONTO EDITION

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Between January and November 2017, a remarkable group of people came together to share their experiences with being on Ontario Works. From clients to caseworkers, peer navigators to community leaders, this handbook is a product of their collective wisdom.

Drawing upon the personal journeys of people who've been through it, this handbook humanizes the experience of being on social assistance. It is packed with practical tips, tools and strategies to help you navigate the system with confidence. Think of it as an insider's guide to Ontario Works.

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“In my experience, being on assistance was necessary. I really needed help finding myself. Social assistance led me in a direction where I could start. I went back to school and took upgrading courses. I started volunteering. I want people to know you don't have to feel ashamed or worried. Things happen, and there are people here to help.”

– Ontario Works Client

About This Book

Asking for assistance is not easy. On top of that, the rules of Ontario Works appear to be always changing, while life seems to just get harder.

Between January and November 2017, a remarkable group of people came together to share their experiences with Ontario Works. From clients to caseworkers, peer navigators to community leaders, this handbook is a product of their collective wisdom.

Drawing upon the personal journeys of people who've been through it, this handbook humanizes the experience of being on social assistance. It is packed with practical tips, tools and strategies to help you navigate the system with confidence. Think of it as an insider's guide to Ontario Works.

This handbook was created by people in Toronto, for a Toronto audience. Things might be different if you live elsewhere. The information in this handbook is accurate as of December 2018. Given the ongoing changes to the Ontario Works program that are being made by the provincial government, the accuracy of this handbook cannot be guaranteed beyond this time period.

We would like to acknowledge the spirited contribution of the following people: Adnana, Adriana, Amanda, Annamaria, Anton, Bernice, Dahlia, David, Dayan, Dorthy, Ekrema, Elsie, Farry, Fazal, Gladis, Homida, Jed, Jen, Jessica, Joyce, Justin, Justine, Kendra, Kevin, Kimberley, Kirk, Krista, Louise, Lubna, Mariam, Marie, Marley, Matthew, Mike, Pat, Rahel, Rana, Rasha, Reaz, Rob, Sandra, Safiah, Sharon, Sophia, Tai, Tasha, Tatyana, Tricia, Velvet and Zully.

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What to Expect

Basic Benefits

When you have little income and assets, and have status or are pursuing status in Canada, you may be eligible for Ontario Works. If you are eligible, there are 3 types of benefits that you may be able to receive: Basic Benefits, Mandatory Benefits, and Discretionary Benefits.

The idea with Basic Benefits is for people to have enough income to help pay for basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. The amount you get each month depends mostly on whether you're single or a couple, whether you rent or own your home, or live with your parents or in a boarding house, and whether you have children or adult dependants.

Here are the Basic Benefits for common family situations. For all other family situations, refer to the City of Toronto's Toronto Employment and Social Services' website.

Note that the rates are accurate as of December 2018, but they might change over time. Check with your Ontario Works office or online for the most up-to-date information.

Single:



Single with no kids:

People who rent or own:
around \$733 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$604



Single with 1 kid:

People who rent or own:
around \$1002 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$735



Single with 2 kids:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,057 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$808



Single with 1 dependant over 18:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,265 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$823



Single with 1 kid & 1 dependant over 18:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,320 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$896



Single with 2 dependants over 18:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,478 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$944

Couple:



Couple with no kids:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,136 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$759



Couple with 1 kid:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,191 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$823



Couple with 2 kids:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,250 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$884



Couple with 1 dependant over 18:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,349 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$861



Couple with 1 kid & 1 dependant over 18:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,408 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$922



Couple with 2 dependants over 18:

People who rent or own:
around \$1,582 or
People living in boarding
homes: around \$958

Mandatory Benefits

In addition to getting money to help you pay for basic needs, you might also qualify for the following Mandatory Benefits. Mandatory Benefits must be provided if you meet the eligibility criteria. A portion or all of it may be covered depending on the item in question and may require an assessment.

Health benefits:

- Prescription drugs
- Eye care for children
- Dental care for children
- Medical transportation costs \$15 and over
- Assistive devices (e.g. hearing aids, prosthetics covered by Assistive Devices Program)
- Batteries and necessary repairs for mobility devices (e.g. wheelchairs)
- Routine eye examinations once every 24 months (ages 20-64)



Discretionary Benefits

Non-health benefits:

- Guide dog benefit, to assist with the costs for the routine care of the dog (around \$80 per month)
- Full-time employment benefit, to help with expenses associated with beginning full-time employment (up to \$500 in a 12-month period)
- Other employment and employment assistance activities benefit, to cover costs associated with starting or changing your job or training program (up to \$500 if full time, up to \$253 if part time, in a 12-month period)
- Advance (up front) child care payment, to pay in advance for child care that is necessary to permit employment or employment training
- Transition Child Benefit, to assist with kids who are not receiving or not receiving the maximum Ontario Child Benefit

You may also qualify for other provincial and federal benefits. This might all sound very complicated. But don't worry, because your Ontario Works caseworker can help assess all the benefits you might be eligible for.

In addition to the Basic Benefits and Mandatory Benefits, you might also qualify for Discretionary Benefits depending on your individual situation.

These are called Discretionary Benefits because each municipality in Ontario determines which benefits will be available. To see if you are eligible, look at the information below and then talk to your caseworker. Note that some of these benefits are courtesy of the Ministry of Community, Children, and Social Services, whereas others are from Toronto Employment and Social Services.

Health benefits:

- Some dental care for adults, such as emergency extraction
- Eye care for adults
- Prosthetic devices for costs that are more than what is covered by Assistive Devices Program
- Funeral and a burial or cremation

Other benefits:

- Energy and water conservation measures (e.g. caulking, sealing, weather stripping, insulating)
- Moving expenses (through Housing Stabilization Fund)
- Vocational training, to pay for courses and training programs related to your occupation

Toronto Employment and Social Services may also help cover the cost of a range of "special services, items or payments." For example, baby supplies for newborns (Newborn Allowance) or transportation for employment related purposes. There are too many special circumstances to list here. It's best that you speak with your Ontario Works caseworker about things in your life that are giving you problems so that they can find ways to help. There are other benefits available for low income residents, such as the Welcome Policy to pay for recreation programs or the Ontario Electricity Support Program to help with your electricity bill.

Asset Limits

Your assets (what you own and how much it's worth) affect your eligibility for Ontario Works.

Assets may include money in your bank account, stocks, bonds, property and Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP). Some assets are exempt, and don't affect your eligibility. Exempt assets include the home you own and live in, your primary vehicle, necessary household and personal items (e.g. furniture and clothing) and Registered Education Savings Plans (RESP).

To be eligible for Ontario Works, you must not exceed the following asset limits:



Single:
\$10,000



Single with one dependant:
\$10,500 plus \$500 for each additional dependant



Couple:
\$15,000



Couple with one dependant:
\$15,500 plus \$500 for each additional dependant



Kid in temporary care or dependant of a dependant:
\$500 for each dependant

*Note that the asset limits on this page are accurate as of December 2018, but they might change over time.

Is Ontario Works the Right Kind of Social Assistance for You?

Ontario Works helps people who are in temporary financial need. But it might not be the right kind of social assistance for your needs.

- If you have a disability, you might be eligible for the **Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)**.
- If you are caring for a child who has a severe disability, you might be eligible for **Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities**.
- If you are looking after a child in financial need and you are not the child's birth or adoptive parent, you might be eligible for **Temporary Care Assistance**.

When you apply for social assistance, your Ontario Works caseworker will automatically determine which kind of social assistance you're eligible for.

ONTARIO WORKS CLIENT STORY

My experience with social assistance definitely has changed over time. It was very unnerving in the beginning. I didn't know how things worked or if I was even going to qualify, and I wasn't able to work. There was no one telling me, "this is what you are supposed to do." I was anxious and nervous – for me it was total chaos. But now I have the help of a really great caseworker and we have built a good relationship.

Communication is important. You have to be honest with your caseworker. You also have to tell them what you want. You can't just sit there and let things happen. I did that at first, and do you know how many employment workshops I was sent to that didn't even match my field?

It's been a lot of me asking questions. I kept thinking they were silly questions, but my caseworker would tell me that there are no stupid questions and to ask whatever I need, which really calmed me down. She took away that confusion.

It's not a bad thing that I am on assistance, but it's just not enough to live on. And I want to get off. I miss working.

– Ontario Works Client



Getting Started



Applying for Ontario Works

The first step in the process is to apply. This can happen over the phone or online, but if you are in crisis, you can go into the Ontario Works office. You might have to wait a little bit, because caseworkers only have a few spots for unscheduled meetings each day.

For most people, the online application is the most convenient, because you can fill it out at anytime, not just during business hours. It will tell you right away if you might be eligible, and if so, it will help you schedule an appointment with a caseworker at an Ontario Works office near you.

Having said that, many people find applying by phone to be the best way. When you apply by phone, they connect you to a caseworker right away. Here's the phone number: 416-338-8888.

Whether you want to apply online or by phone, here's where you can find the information to do it:

www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/social/apply_online.aspx

Meeting Your Caseworker

After you apply, a meeting with your caseworker will be scheduled.

The goal of this meeting is to get to know your caseworker and to make a plan. You will go over your financials, talk about where you're at in your life, and if all goes well, you'll get set up to receive benefits.

This is really where your relationship with your caseworker begins, so try to get to know them. It is also helpful to be as open as possible – it will help you in the end!

If you have friends who have been on Ontario Works, try to talk to them and get their advice before your first meeting. But be aware that everyone's situation is different – you might not be eligible for the same benefits.

Another way to get prepared for your first meeting is to know about all the benefits that you might be eligible for. The City of Toronto's Benefits Finder can be helpful for that:

www.toronto.ca/community-people/employment-social-support/benefit-finder-tool

Checklist Of Things To Bring To Your First Appointment

- ID (e.g. birth certificate or driver's license)
- Social Insurance Number
- Health card
- Rent receipt
- Lease or rental agreement
- Promise of rent note
- Status in Canada document
- 3 months worth of bank statements
- Proof of income
- A list of questions
- List of assets and documentation (e.g. vehicle ownership)
- _____



“A lot of us walk in for the first meeting scared out of our minds. Insecure. Anxious. If you let that make you demanding, you’re going to have a harder time getting your benefits.

It’s displaced anger. It’s better to talk to them. They respond better to you. They can be an extra shoulder to lean on.”

– Ontario Works Client

Tips for Your First Meeting

1. Get all your papers and information ready, and bring them to the meeting
2. Think about what you will say before the meeting
3. Make a list of questions you might have
4. Talk about all the things you need, like clothes for volunteering or trying to find work
5. Be patient.

Things to Write Down in Your First Appointment

Caseworker Name:

Caseworker Phone Number:

Caseworker I.D. Number:

Caseworker Fax Number:

Your Ontario Works ID Number
(SAMS reference number):

Next Appointment:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Notes:

ID

Without identification (ID)—such as a birth certificate, health card or social insurance number—it is impossible to access basic services and benefits, or find employment.

If you don't have ID, here are places in Toronto that can help you get it.

Free ID Clinics:

**PAID Project
(Partners for Access and Identification)** Operated by Neighbourhood Link Support Services with over 40 locations:

- Birth Registration
- Canadian Birth Certificate – wallet size
- Verification of Status – replacements (formerly known as Record of Landing)
- Ontario Health Card, if person does not have an address and ID

**Call to find the location nearest you:
416-691-7407**

Street Health Runs a schedule of free ID clinics to help replace or obtain legal identifications:

- Birth certificate
- Health card
- Landed paper for landed immigrants

Street Health also provides safe storage of important ID for homeless or under-housed people. Individuals can retrieve their ID when they need to access services.

**338 Dundas Street East
Toronto, On M5A 2A1
Tel: 416-921-8668**

Community Health Centres Several Community Health Centres in Toronto offer free ID replacement clinics:

Tuesdays:
All Saints Church - 315 Dundas St East, 12-1:30 pm

2nd Wednesday of the month:
Queen West Community Health Centre
168 Bathurst St, 10am-12:30pm

3rd Wednesday of the month:
Parkdale Community Centre
1229 Queen Street West, 10am-12pm

Community Health Centres

4th Wednesday of the month:
Regent Park Community Health Centre
465 Dundas St East, 10am- 12:30pm

1st & 3rd Thursday of each month;
The Massey Centre for Women
1102 Broadview Ave., 2pm - 4pm
**for women only

Government:

Service Canada Getting or replacing a passport, Social Insurance Number or Permanent Resident Card. Many kiosks are in Canadian Tire and retail locations.

**Call to find the location nearest you:
1-800-622-6232**

Service Ontario Update or replace Driver's Licence, Health Card or an Ontario Photo Card

**Call to find the location nearest you:
416-326-1234**

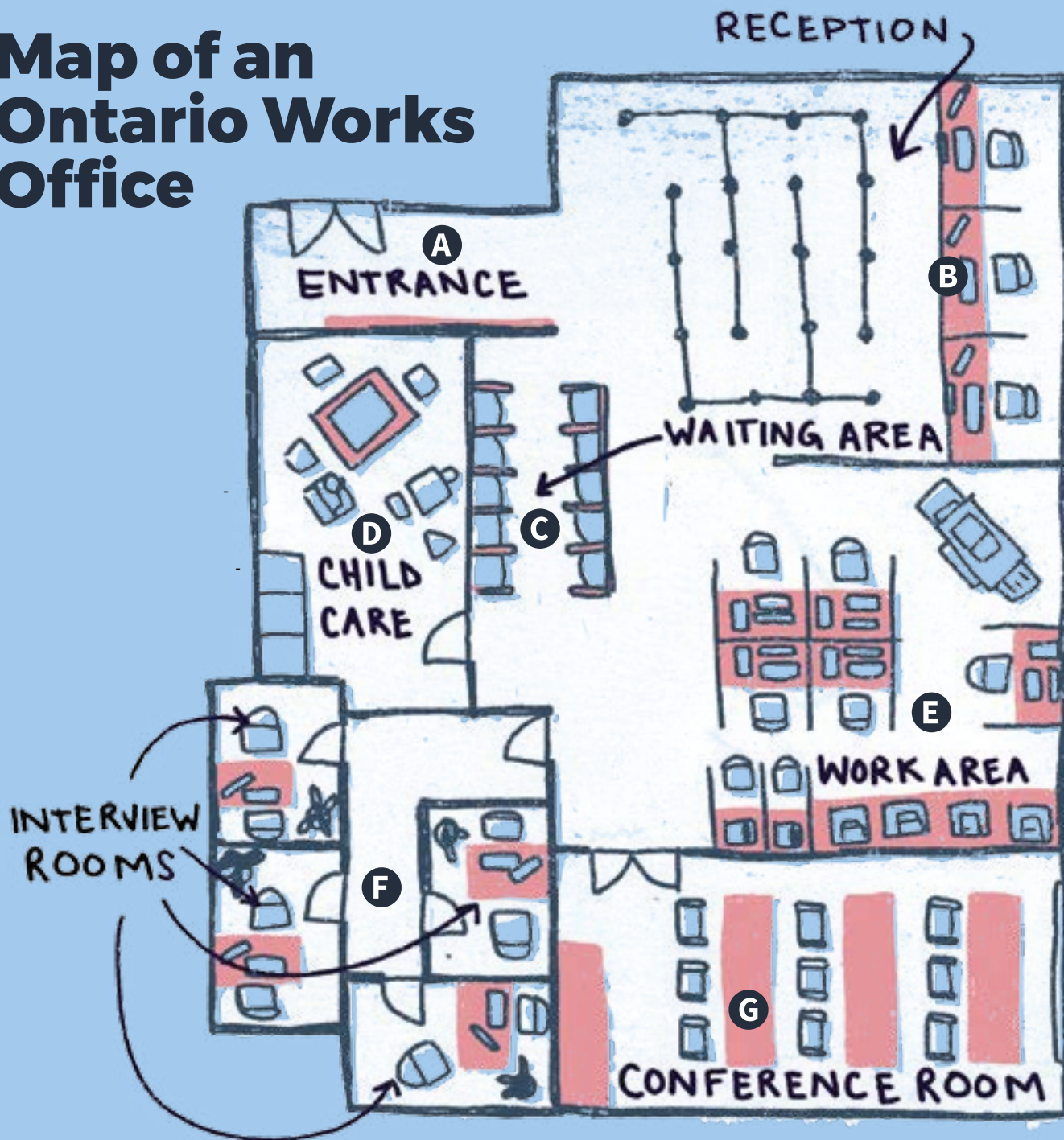
211 211 is a telephone helpline that provides information and referrals to Ontario's services.

Call 2-1-1 to get help finding an ID clinic near you.

311 311 is a telephone helpline that provides information and referrals to Toronto services.

Call 3-1-1 to get help finding an ID clinic near you.

Map of an Ontario Works Office



If you've never been to an Ontario Works office before, this map can help put your mind at ease before the first meeting.

Each office is different, but we've included some common features and tips to help you find your way.

- A Entrance** All OW offices are wheelchair accessible.
- B Reception** Check in with the front desk staff when you arrive. Be friendly.
- C Waiting Area** You should not have to wait for more than 15 minutes (it's a service standard).
- D Child Care** Kids are welcome! Some offices have an area for kids to play, but others don't, so it's best to bring a few toys.
- E Work Area** There are computer stations for you to use. Be sure to read about your rights and responsibilities (available on the computers). You can look at job postings, use the phone print and fax.
- F Interview Booths** This is where you will be meeting your caseworker on your first visit.
- G Conference Room** This is the training area for things like getting your General Educational Development (GED) or doing first aid training. Ask your caseworker for upcoming programs.

The People You Will Meet

There are many people working at Ontario Works, doing many different things. As a client you will probably interact with many of them during your journey. Here are some of the people you might meet at an Ontario Works office.

Caseworker

Your caseworker is your main contact at Ontario Works. He/she will help you make a plan for moving forward, as well as help you access Ontario Works programs.

Manager

The manager oversees the Ontario Works office, and is in charge of making sure everything runs smoothly. If you have a compliment or a complaint about your experience, you can address it with him/her.

Supervisor

The supervisor oversees a team of caseworkers.

Support Assistants

They help with the front desk and carry out many administrative duties. They will be the first people you meet when you enter an Ontario Works office.

Family Support Workers

They help with getting child and spousal support, provide information and referrals to legal aid, and assist with money coaching, such as budgeting, tax clinics, etc.

Educators/Trainers

While on Ontario Works, you can enroll in training and education programs. These programs may take place at the Ontario Works office or other community locations. They are taught by skilled educators/trainers who are often on contract by the City, and can help you gain new employment skills and certifications.

Itinerant (Travelling) Service Providers

Ontario Works offices also sometimes have staff from other organizations in them. This can include community librarians and settlement services.

Security Guard

You may or may not see a security guard at the Ontario Works office you visit. Their role is to make sure both clients and staff are safe.



Receiving Your Benefits

Getting Your Payment/Benefits

It should take about 3-4 days to process your first cheque, provided that your caseworker has all your information.

Once you start receiving benefits, you will get them once a month – not every two weeks, so you need to plan ahead. You can get benefits through direct deposit into your bank account, or if you don't have a bank account, you can ask to get them on a pre-loaded debit card.

On top of your monthly benefits, you might also qualify for one-time benefits. For example, when you start to work, you might ask your caseworker for benefits to help pay for work clothes, bus fare, etc.

TIPS:

- *You don't have to take "no" as the final answer. Ask your caseworker what you need to do to become eligible. Being persistent pays off sometimes.*
- *Ask your caseworker what you may be eligible for and use the benefits finder to empower yourself with info:*
www.toronto.ca/community-people/employment-social-support/benefit-finder-tool

“Ontario Works has many hidden gems that the public does not know about. If you are lost, homeless, hungry, and do not speak English as a first language, Ontario Works does have resources for you. You just need to ask for the help.”

– Ontario Works Client

Your Rights and Responsibilities

As an Ontario Works client, you have certain rights and responsibilities, which are set by the Province of Ontario. If you're unclear about what they are, watch the City of Toronto's Rights and Responsibilities video. You can also find them on the computers at the Ontario Works office.

Here are a few examples:

You have the right to:

- Bring someone with you any time that you meet with your caseworker
- Be notified in writing about any eligibility or financial decisions
- Request a review if you disagree with a decision that is made

You are responsible for:

- Reporting all money you or your family receives, as well as changes to your financial situation
- Attending regularly scheduled appointments with your caseworker
- Participating in employment-related activities, such as job search, training and education

“I’m going to ask you personal questions that may not seem necessary. But the more you tell me about what’s going on, the better off I am to help you. We can figure it out together.”

– Caseworker

Appealing a Decision

If you disagree with a decision about your benefits, you can appeal.

Main steps in the appeal process for mandatory benefits (anything that is not discretionary).

- Step 1:** Speak with your caseworker
- Step 2:** Ask for an internal review, preferably in writing
- Step 3:** Wait for the results of the internal review. This may take up to 30 days but you can contact the supervisor and manager of the office to check in
- Step 4:** If you disagree with the internal review, start your appeal to either the Social Benefits Tribunal or the Decision Review Committee for discretionary benefits
- Step 5:** Apply for interim assistance, if you need it
- Step 6:** Get a Notice of Hearing from the Social Benefits Tribunal or Decision Review Committee
- Step 7:** Get ready for the hearing
- Step 8:** Go to the hearing
- Step 9:** Receive results of the hearing

If you are still unsatisfied, you may contact the ombudsman.

You can find more information on how to appeal an Ontario Works decision by visiting Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) at www.cleo.on.ca

It is a good idea to contact a community legal clinic for help if you disagree with a decision about your benefits from Ontario Works.

If you feel a situation is a crisis and you need immediate support, ask to speak to the manager.

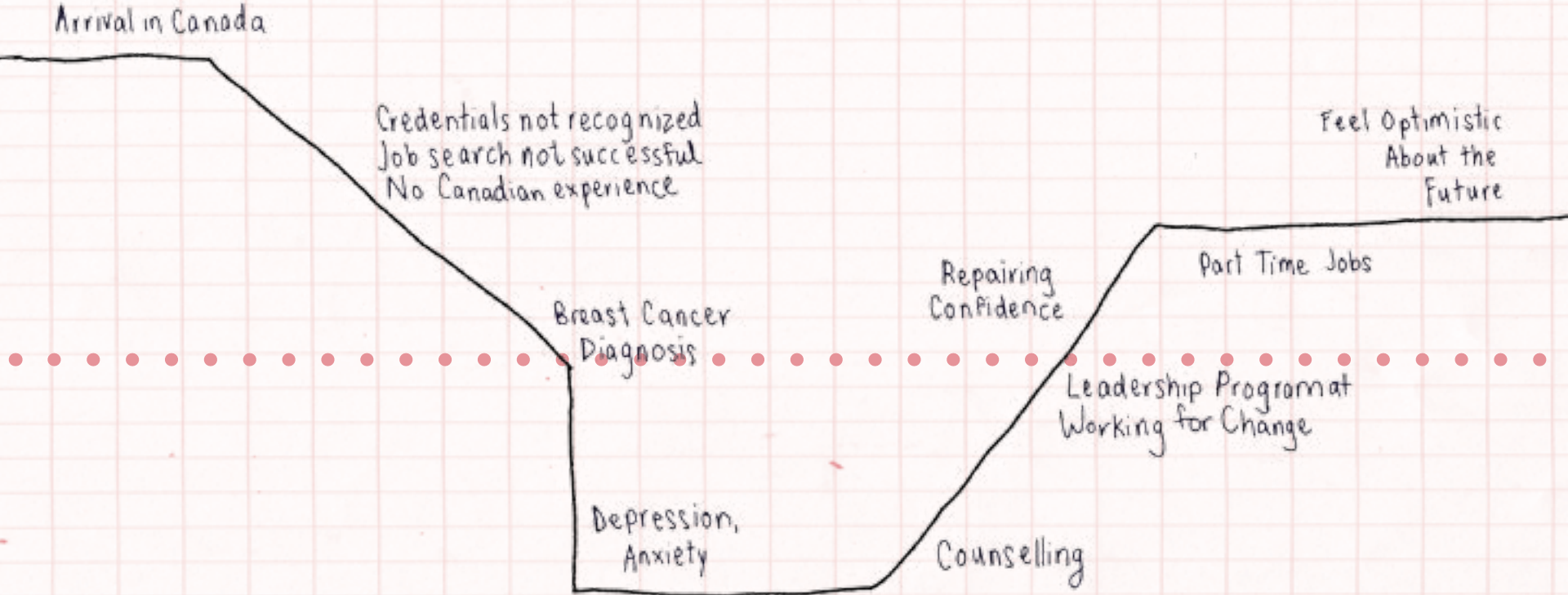
Life Never Goes in a Straight Line

If your life feels a bit out of control these days, you're not alone. Most people don't expect to be in a situation where they need to rely on social assistance. But life never goes in a straight line - there are highs and lows, ups and downs.

Marianne's Journey

Below, you'll find a map of the life journey of one of the people who helped put this book together. You'll also find a blank template for you to document your own life journey.

HIGH



LOW

My Life Journey

Map your own life journey, and consider sharing it with your caseworker so that she/he can better relate to your circumstances.

HIGH

LOW

Surviving on Ontario Works



Checking In

The schedule for regular meetings depends on the plan you make with your caseworker. It could be next month, in 3 months or something different, depending on your situation. These meetings may happen over the phone, at the Ontario Works office, or in the community.

Here are some tips:

- You need to make appointments; don't just show up because your caseworker might not be available to see you
- If you need to rebook your appointment, do it as soon as you can; the caseworker should not give you a hard time if you need to reschedule, but try to give advance notice
- Your file may be suspended if you are not in regular contact with your caseworker
- You can use the computers at the Ontario Works office to do research, print and photocopy
- Keep records of all your files
- There are mandatory forms to fill out every 2 years and you need to go in person to do this
- Update the caseworker about any changes in your life, e.g. pregnancy, job, death of a family member, changes to your address or phone number

And remember, it is your responsibility to update your caseworker if you start getting income from a job, a training program or other sources (e.g. employment insurance, pensions, etc.). You are required to report your income each month by filling out the "Statement of Income" and/or "Changes Report" that you receive in the mail, and sending it to your caseworker.

“After meeting with my caseworker, I usually have more confidence and sense of direction. It is a slow process for me to see the path off Ontario Works, but I do believe I will find my calling in life. Most caseworkers do a great job of making me feel like I can do more.”

– Ontario Works Client

Practical Tips for Making it Work on a Small Budget

Ontario Works gives you just enough money to get by. Below are some suggestions from people on Ontario Works who are making it work on a small budget. If you need help saving money, the City of Toronto offers financial planning as well. Ask your caseworker about it!



- Cook at home
- Use the free services at the library (e.g. internet, borrow DVDs)
- Go to drop-in centres for meals and social activities
- Put away a bit of money each day
- Go to garage sales and local thrift stores
- Sell stuff that you don't need anymore
- Look through the 'free' section in the classifieds (newspaper and online) for household items
- Look for coupons in newspapers and flyers, and online
- Go to your local Community Health Centre to access programs
- Check out your local food bank
- Ask your caseworker about Toronto's "Welcome Policy", which helps pay for city-operated recreation programs
- Apply for the TTC Fair Pass Discount Program to save \$1 per ride, and \$30 off the monthly pass



ONTARIO WORKS CLIENT STORY

It's amazing to me how much my experience on social assistance depends on the individuals. People can have a good attitude or a bad attitude. One time I was in an office and met a caseworker. She wasn't my caseworker, but we started talking and I told her about something that was going on with me. She was able to give me some great information and advice. I met her again the next week and she told me a little bit about a situation she was having – so we shared our stories. It was like I met a friend. That to me was a great experience.

But there can be bad experiences too. You might need money for transportation or some other type of support, and the caseworker may take their time giving it to you. Sometimes they don't seem to respect you. They can make you feel low, but they can also help you feel high.

– Ontario Works Client

Advocating for Yourself

Here are some tips on how to advocate for yourself, which other people on Ontario Works recommend:

1. Stay positive

If you hold your head high, people will treat you differently.

2. Be respectful

Don't take out your frustration on other people. It's a chain reaction. If you go in with your bad day, you're going to give everyone your bad day.

3. Meet them half way

Sometimes you have to make compromises in order to get what you want.

4. Be prepared

Do your research. You can't advocate for yourself if you don't now the facts.

5. Be specific about facts and figures

Come to the meeting prepared with specific information to support what you are saying. For example, tell them how much you paid for rent, the exact date you received a notice, or the exact time periods for which you were laid off. Instead of saying you were given "a bit of money," say "I was given \$100 for working on Monday, July 20th."

6. Ask questions

If you don't understand something, ask for clarification. Don't just assume things.

7. Meet in person if it's a complicated issue

Some things are better dealt with face-to-face. If it's hard to explain something on the phone, schedule an in-person meeting with your caseworker.

8. Be honest and don't keep secrets

People like dealing with people who are open and genuine. It's key to a trusting relationship with your caseworker.

9. Have an interpreter present

If your English is not that good, bring someone who can interpret for you. You can also ask the Ontario Works office if they have an interpreter, which they do not often provide, but make sure to arrange this ahead of time.

10. Be objective when advocating for others

If you're advocating for someone else, try to remain objective and avoid mixing in your own opinions.

What should I do if...?

You might encounter challenging social situations or dilemmas while on Ontario Works. Here are some common situations and dilemmas, and the different ways people respond to them. You'll have to decide for yourself how you want to respond.

Should I tell my family/kids I am on social assistance?

"You'll need the support from them"

"Lack of funds may stop you from doing extra things, let them know things are tight."

"It's really nothing to be embarrassed about. The assistance is there to help. Everyone has their own issues."

What should I do if someone refers to me as "a welfare case"?

"Be calm and tell them you don't like what they have said."

"Don't take it to heart, everybody needs help sometimes."

"Don't let it discourage your plans."

"Take it with a grin. It's not worth an argument and a fight."

Should I be honest about everything I own?

"You tell unnecessary lies, it causes unnecessary problems!"

"Just tell the truth so you're not faced with any unexpected situations."

Should I bring my kids to the Ontario Works office?

"It really depends on your situation. What if you have no sitter? What if your child is home sick from school? What if you have no choice? It all depends."

"Kids may get in the way. You need to focus and be present."

"If you need to bring them, make sure you bring something for them to read or watch to stay entertained."

What should I do if I see someone I know at the Ontario Works office?

"Wave! Smile! Greet them! Or say nothing at all."

"Just say hello."

"Check the other person's response, if there's eye contact, then a smile of acknowledgment is enough."

"Be polite. Everyone needs help sometimes. You're both in the same situation."

The Language of Ontario Works

Here are some terms you might encounter and what they mean.

Asset Limit

noun
as-set lim-it

You might think it means:
The amount of money you have.

What it actually means:
The allowable amount of what you own and how much its worth. This includes cash, money in the bank, property (land or house), stocks and bonds.

“The \$200 gift you received last month puts you over the asset limit.”

CHC

abbreviation

Short for:
Community Health Centre.

What it actually means:
They provide primary care, plus community and social programs.

“Some CHCs offer free ID replacement.”

Changes Report

noun
chang-es re-port

You might think it means:
Report a change of address.

What it actually means:
A form to note any changes to income from Benefits such as Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, etc. as well as changes to family composition, living arrangements, etc.

“Let’s review your Changes Report.”

DBD

abbreviation

Short for:
Direct Bank Deposit.

What it actually means:
When the Ontario Works funds are deposited directly into your bank account. DBD is by far the most efficient way to get your funds.

“You’ll be getting those funds through DBD.”

Dependant

noun
De-pend-ant

You might think it means:
Your child.

What it actually means:
A person who relies on another person for financial support, especially a family member. A dependant could be a child or adult.

“She listed two dependants on her application form.”

EC

abbreviation

Short for:
Employment Centre.

What it actually means:
Part of the Toronto Employment & Social Services office where they provide employment services.

“The EC can help you with your job search.”

ERE

abbreviation

Short for:

Employment Related Expenses.

What it actually means:

Additional benefits you may be eligible for (e.g. transportation allowance) if you participate in certain programs.

"That's an ERE you qualify for."

ISP

abbreviation

Short for:

Initial Service Plan.

What it actually means:

It's something you create during the first meeting with your caseworker to identify resources and supports needed.

"Your ISP meeting is tomorrow."

ROE

abbreviation

Short for:

Record of Employment.

What it actually means:

Provides information on employment history and is issued by the employer when an employee stops working.

"We can't process your employment insurance claim without an ROE."

SAMS

abbreviation

Short for:

Social Assistance Management System.

What it actually means:

Stores personal and financial information of Ontario Works clients. When you're registered to receive Ontario Works, you will be given a unique SAMS number.

"Remember to bring your SAMS number when you go to the Ontario Works office."

SOI

abbreviation

Short for:

Statement of Income.

What it actually means:

Monthly reporting of earnings, business and training income, and childcare expenses.

"Please send in your SOI next week."

SPR

abbreviation

Short for:

Service Plan Review.

What it actually means:

Follow up meeting with your caseworker to review progress on your service plan and make any changes.

"Let's do an SPR and see how you're doing."

Moving Forward



What Lies Ahead

Moving forward looks different for everyone. Some people are ready to get back into the workforce and just need help connecting with an employment agency or updating a resume. Others need training or retraining. And for others, moving forward might just be taking it one day at a time, finding stable housing and getting back on their feet.

Caseworkers at Ontario Works see all kinds of people and they are familiar with many different life situations. Your caseworker can help you put together a realistic plan and help you access important services that help you get on with your life.

“Ontario Works is a system that really works if you work it. If you are honest about where you’re at and where you want to be, they do really help. Do the research, ask lots of questions, and participate as much as possible, and they will support you. Believe it or not, they do want you to be able to get off assistance and prosper on your own.”

– Ontario Works Client

Getting a Job

Nothing gets you back on your feet and builds confidence more than getting a job.

Getting a job is more than putting together a resume and sending it out to potential employers. To be competitive in today's job market takes a bit of work. For example, if you haven't worked in 5 years, just updating your resume might not be enough. You should consider getting some recent experience - even if it's volunteering.

The first step in getting a job is to let your caseworker know that you want to get back into the workforce. Ontario Works has a variety of supports that can help you become more employable, including:

- Working with you to determine what you need to become employed
- Helping you develop a plan based on your skills, experience and circumstances
- Helping you get a record suspension, if you have a criminal record
- Helping you get the supports you need, if you have an addiction

When you're ready to find a job, Ontario Works offers:

- Access to employment assistance
- Workshops on looking for work, resume writing, and preparing for an interview
- Referrals to job counselling or training programs
- Information on who's hiring
- Access to basic education
- Access to telephones, faxes, computers and job banks
- Benefits to help transition into employment, such as a Full Time Employment Benefit of up to \$500, or Upfront Child Benefit (approximately \$600), as well as Extended Health Benefits.

Can You Work and Still Get Ontario Works?

Yes, as long as you tell Ontario Works about any money you make. The new rule announced in November 2018 says that you can earn \$300 take-home pay in a month before it affects your Ontario Works payment amount.

What happens if you make more than \$300 in a month?

Ontario Works will reduce the amount you get in income support in a month by 75% of the take-home pay you make above \$300. For example, if you make \$500 in a month:

$$\begin{array}{r} \$500 \quad (\text{take-home pay}) \\ -\$300 \\ \hline \$200 \\ \times .75 \\ \hline \$150 \end{array}$$

(how much Ontario Works subtracts from your regular monthly payment.)

What happens to your extended health benefits?

Even if you're no longer eligible to receive Ontario Works payment due to the income from your job, you might still be eligible to receive extended health benefits. Speak to your caseworker for more information.

“It’s better to be off welfare. If you’re working and getting paid every two weeks, you can uplift yourself.”

– Ontario Works Client

Building Your Skills

To increase your chances of success in finding a job, look for opportunities to improve your skills and knowledge. Ontario Works can link you up with the following opportunities:

Education Programs – to help you finish high school, improve your language skills, upgrade your reading, writing or math skills.

Job-Specific Skills Training – to help you get special training or skills to do a job.

Literacy Screening and Training – to assess your reading, writing or math skills and help you get the education you need.

Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) - if you’re a young parent between the ages of 16 and 25, the LEAP program can help you finish high school, improve your parenting skills, and prepare for and find work.

Employment Placements - to connect you with employers who are hiring, and help you prepare for the interview and training for the job.

Volunteer Placements – to help you gain valuable experience, practice your skills, improve your confidence and get up-to-date job references and contacts.

Tips:

- Ontario Works has agreements with many agencies. A list of these agencies is available on the computers at the Ontario Works office
- Sometimes if you find a training program that isn’t on the approved list, the caseworker might approve it
- Plan ahead by finding and registering for courses well in advance, e.g. some only run twice a year

“I like working with people. I want to see people succeed. Succeeding doesn’t necessarily mean getting a job or going to school. Sometimes it means living your life. Sometimes that is a success. Because yesterday maybe you didn’t want to live your life.”

– Ontario Works Caseworker

Life Skills

In addition to building your professional skills, don’t forget about your life skills and getting into good habits. For example, getting up on time, brushing your teeth, going to appointments or giving advance notice if you need to rebook. These are important things that help you come across as being professional and improve your chances of getting and keeping a job.

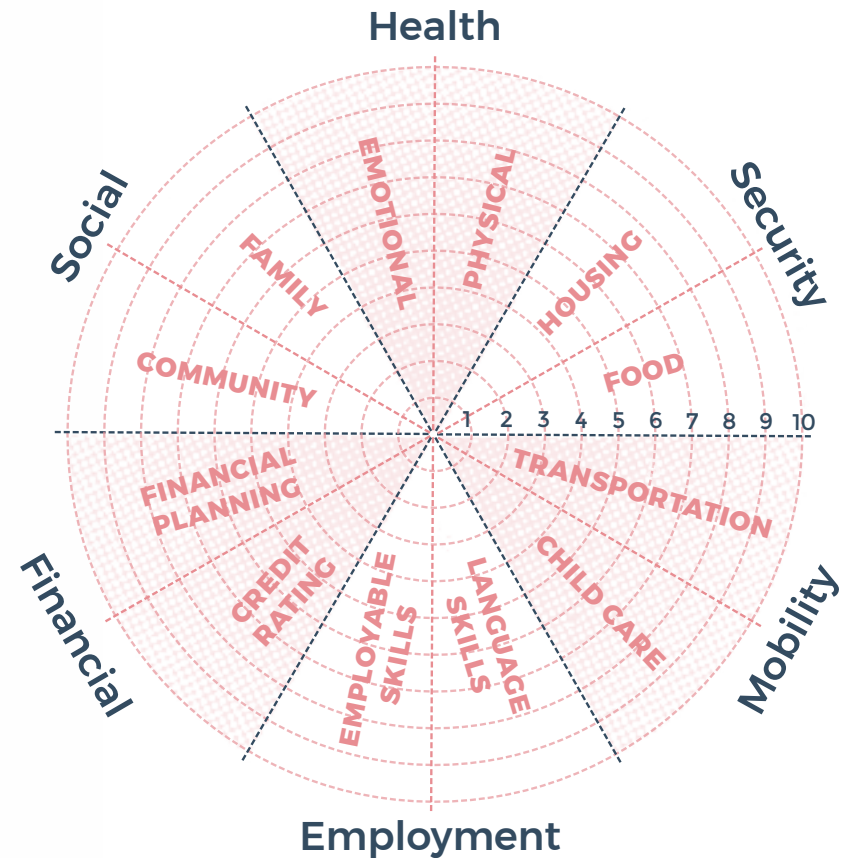
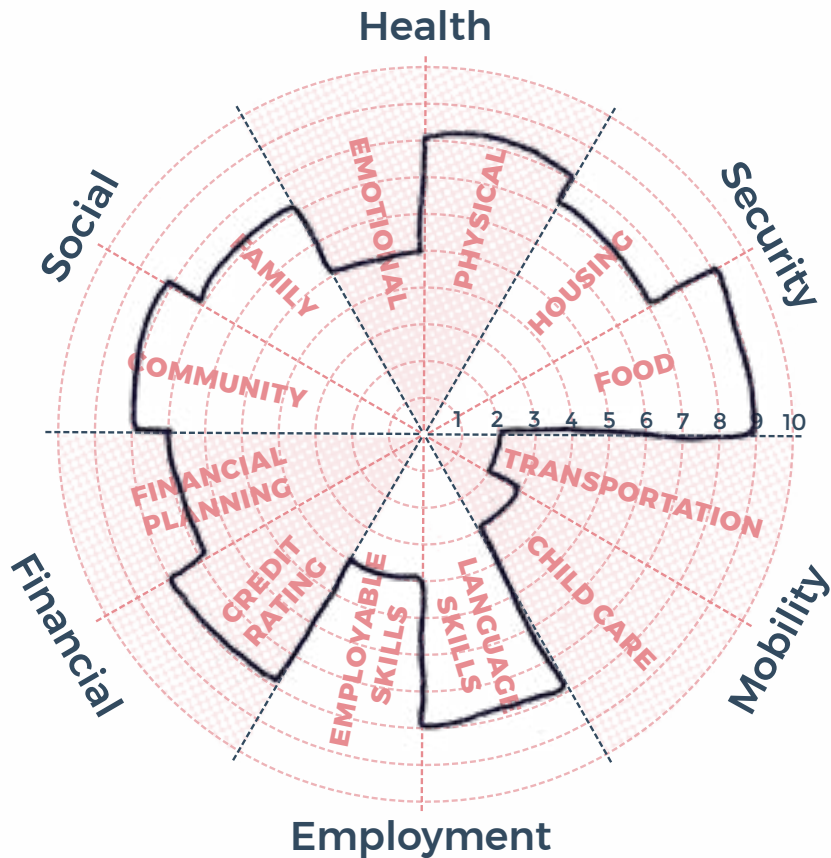
Here’s a simple exercise to help you figure out what you need to work on in your life. It’s called the Asset Wheel. It is based on the premise that everyone has assets on which to build, and that strengthening these asset areas can enable people to not just get by, but to thrive.

Rank how well you think you’re doing in each of the asset areas to see where you need to focus:

Step 1: Draw a circle on each of the dotted lines - the closer you place your circle to the middle, the worse you feel you are doing.

Step 2: Connect the dots to see what your Asset Wheel looks like.

See example and blank sheet on following pages.



Top 3 Areas I Would Like to Work On

1. Transportation
2. Employable Skills
3. Childcare

To help me get to my goal of taking job training classes

My first step will be talking to Ontario Works about getting a TTC pass so I can travel more easily

Top 3 Areas I Would Like to Work On

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

To help me get to my goal of _____

My first step will be

Rate Your Experience

Improving the client experience is an important goal for most Ontario Works offices. But there's no way of doing this without hearing from actual clients, so we've designed a simple feedback card for you to fill out and leave behind. You can drop it off with the receptionist at your local Ontario Works office after your next visit.

Instructions:

1. Tear
2. Write
3. Leave behind

Feedback Card

To Ontario Works office:

I visited your office today and thought I'd let you know how it went. I hope you find my comments below helpful, and that you consider them in your quest to improve the client experience at your office.

How helpful was Ontario Works today?



Definitely Not Helpful



Not Helpful



Somewhat Helpful



Very Helpful

Here are my reasons:

Feedback Card

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Definitely Not
Helpful



Not Helpful



Somewhat
Helpful



Very
Helpful

Here are my reasons:



All the best.