

## HASTINGS COUNTY INCOME SUPPORT ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

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**Hours of Operation: Monday to Friday 8:30 – 5:00**

### Introduction

The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is an Ontario government program designed to meet the unique needs of people with disabilities and their families who are in financial need.

The program has two parts: Income Support and Employment Supports.

#### 1. INCOME SUPPORT

To qualify for Income support you must have a verified physical or mental disability that is expected to last a year or more, be financially eligible and be a resident of Ontario who is 18 years of age or older.

#### 2. EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

To qualify for Employment Supports, you must be a resident of Ontario, 16 years of age or older and have a disability that is expected to last a year or more, and your disability makes it hard for you to find or keep a job. You do not have to be receiving ODSP Income Support to be eligible for Employment Supports

The Ontario Disability Support Program is committed to providing fair and consistent response to women currently receiving ODSP who are attempting to leave, or are currently in an abusive situation. Personnel are committed to creating a welcoming environment for clients; they will not show any bias or preference in relation to clients and will excuse themselves from any service relationship where there is a real or perceived conflict of interest as identified by the staff person or client. A goal of service is to provide options while supporting choices.

All staff maintains strict confidentiality; they will not disclose any information about clients unless required to do so by law or with written permission from involved parties.

ODSP will:

- Refer persons in need to the local Ontario Works office for emergency financial assistance, if they do not otherwise qualify for ODSP
- provide emotional support, information, and referrals to appropriate crisis services and community-based agencies
- assist clients in their efforts to learn about various options available in relation to employment, support, temporary shelter, long term housing, etc., and
- Liaise with other agencies on behalf of clients as needed.

## **Overview of Specific Procedures and Services**

### **1. WHEN ODSP RECIPIENTS ARE VICTIMS OF PARTNER ABUSE**

If the ODSP benefits are in the spouse's name the victim of abuse can be removed from the ODSP budget. If both the spouse and victim have been determined to be disabled by the Disability Adjudication Unit the file can be split at the request of either person. The other person does not have to give consent to have the file split. Each person would then receive assistance in their own right. They would be entitled to all benefits including Community Start up and Maintenance if they were establishing a new permanent residence.

If the victim has not been found to be disabled by the Disability Adjudication Unit they would be referred to Ontario Works for immediate assistance.

#### **Emergency Assistance**

ODSP only provides assistance to recipients of ODSP. Non ODSP clients are referred to Ontario Works for Discretionary and/or Mandatory Benefits (for a crib, bed and/or approved medical items) and a Drug Benefit Card. Ontario Works will provide Emergency Assistance and benefits related to relocation costs may be available to the applicant who has not yet left the abuser's address, providing she has demonstrated plans to move and has verification of the new address.

#### **Continuing Financial Assistance**

When a woman indicates that she needs ongoing financial assistance, she must go through the regular financial and medical eligibility determination for all applicants. If the victim is in immediate financial need they will be referred to Ontario Works

### **2. WHEN CLIENTS DISCLOSE ABUSE**

When a client of ODSP discloses that she is currently experiencing violence in her intimate relationship, the Client Services Representative or Income Support Specialist will offer support, information, and referrals to suitable community agencies, such as Three Oaks Foundation and Victims Services.

## **Women Temporarily Residing in Women's Shelters**

Women temporarily residing in women's shelters are eligible to receive full basic allowance and full shelter benefits for the first three months they are living in the shelter in order to maintain the community residence from which they have fled. The full basic allowance and shelter benefit may also be issued, upon review, for an additional period if necessary to continue to maintain their residence.

Women who are temporarily residing in a woman shelter and are not maintaining their community accommodation will be provided with \$122 for each member of the benefit unit in the shelter.

ODSP personnel recognize that the amount and type of assistance available through ODSP may not be sufficient to meet the needs of abused women who are either living in a shelter or who are trying to build a violence-free life for themselves and their child/ren. For example, when a woman leaves Three Oaks Foundation to set up her independent home, she may require first and last month's rent or she may need monies to purchase a refrigerator or stove. The staff will make every effort to provide the woman with referrals and information about other options for donations or support that will not compromise her eligibility for assistance.

**When moving from a shelter to a permanent residence**, the client may be eligible for the Community Start Up Maintenance Benefit to assist with her transition to a violence-free home.

## **Children at Risk**

In response to reports of woman abuse where the woman is a mother of one or more children under the age of 16, the Children's Aid Society may become involved to assess if any child has been physically or emotionally harmed, or is at substantial risk of physical or emotional harm as per the Child and Family Services Act. The CAS may be contacted directly to discuss feasibility of a referral based on the circumstances presented.

If a woman is fearful that their abuser may try and take her child/ren she will be given the phone number for the Lawyer Referral Crisis Line 1-800-268-8326. There is no charge associated with this line. The woman should advise the operator that they are in a partner abuse situation and they will be dealt with immediately.

## **3. DOCUMENTATION**

When a Woman discloses violence and abuse, either during their initial interview or at any time during their involvement with ODSP special documentary and communication procedures are implemented by the staff to promote her safety. The Restricted Access Flag is used to alert staff that a member of the benefit unit is a victim of violence.

All clients of ODSP are required to inform their Client Services Representative of any change of information, such as change of address and/or change in financial situation.

### **Accessibility**

The local ODSP office is accessible for persons with physical disabilities. All exterior doors are automatic. The interview rooms can accommodate wheelchair users. The office has a TTY that is always answered.

Clients can arrange to have a CHS Interpreter or request that ODSP contact the Interpreters. The cost of Sign Language Interpreters is covered by ODSP.

All clients have the right to have a support person, family member, Interpreter/Intervener present at any time. Written material and ODSP documents can be provided in large print.

### **Accountability**

A representative from ODSP participates on the QCCAV. Complaints or concerns about the quality or nature of services received or not received through ODSP can be directed to any Manager. Comment cards are available at the front desk. All comment cards are reviewed by the local office Managers.

Individuals who are not satisfied with a program decision made by ODSP staff may ask for an internal appeal of the decision. If they remain unsatisfied with the decision of the internal appeal they may present their case to the social benefits tribunal.