

SPIKE IN TORONTO CASELOADS COULD AFFECT YORK REGION FUNDING

Reserve funds will cover demand

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downward trend. In fact, the region has seen welfare dependency decline steadily since the Mike Harris government assumed power in 1995.

But August saw a 1.3-per-cent increase over the same month in 2000, up to 3,994 cases from 3,942 last August. And September saw a greater jump — up slightly less than 4 per cent from the same period last year, to 4,012 cases in 2001 from 3,857.

That's cause for concern — and a symptom of an economic downturn — but not indicative of a trend yet, according to Joann Simmons, commissioner of social services and housing.

'We want to talk to the people who make these social policies and draw their attention (to the issue) and let them know.'

"That's the first time we've had that kind of an increase in quite a while," Simmons said. "It's too early to say whether it's a trend."

If a serious spike in the demand for welfare occurs, the region is covered, Simmons said. York has \$26 million in a reserve fund dedicated to social services costs.

But York's welfare costs aren't the only factor that may affect funds here: social services are among the pooled GTA expenditures for which the region is responsible. That means a dramatic increase in claims in Toronto would have an effect here.

Meanwhile, the region has an effective infrastructure in place, including a successful Ontario Works program, to help people break the welfare cycle and find employment, Simmons said.

For Rodgers, the increased demand at food banks means individuals and families are not able to make ends meet,

whether they're on social assistance or working at low-paying jobs. That's an issue her organization is trying to address.

"We want to talk to the people who make these social policies and draw their attention (to the issue) and let them know," she said.

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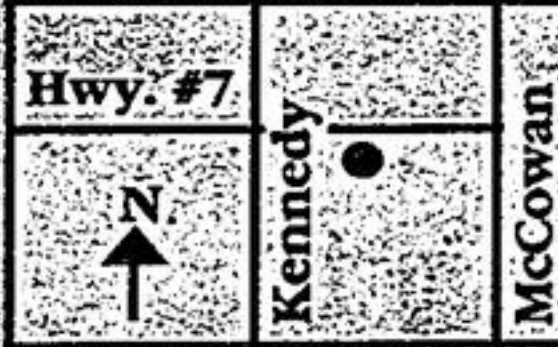
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