



Report To:	Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB Board
From:	Donna Moroso, Director of Integrated Social Services and Gilles Plouffe, Ontario Works Supervisor
Date:	February 26, 2015
Re:	Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) – Issue Report

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide the DSB Board Members with an update on the new Ontario Works provincial database system called 'Social Assistance Management System' (SAMS). Most importantly, the report will highlight how staff are experiencing extreme challenges during this time of transition.

Background:

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB's Integrated Social Services department has been heavily involved in SAMS implementation from inception. The original go-live date was spring of 2013. Go-live occurred 18 months later than originally anticipated. Our DSB was selected as a pilot site in 2013, followed by extensive staff training for managers and front-line staff. The training for the pilot and the training for actual go-live lasted 18 months. Most of the training was provided via Webinar as well as a 2-day face-to-face training prior to go-live.

Implementation:

The province went 'live' with SAMS on November 11, 2014. For three months now, staff have been involved in a poorly implemented new technology for the management of financial assistance and case management of Ontario Works. The system was implemented across all Ontario Disability Support Programs (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) programs, replacing the former computer system called Service Delivery Model Technology (SDMT). The result has been disastrous for staff. The number of daily malfunctions and errors have been too numerous to list.

As you were made aware at the last Board meeting, the past 3 months have been very challenging for staff. They have been more than understanding and professional when trying to deal with these trying times.

Staff are doing the best they can with the current system. Many levels of our organization are engaged in many different capacities to ensure that support is provided. Management continues to review and take steps to ensure that they address issues as they arise.

Everyone across the entire province has been expressing their real concerns with SAMS. Our staff have been experiencing the same challenges which are common themes across the province.

Our DSB is a member of the Northern Ontario Service Delivery Association (NOSDA) and the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) and staff provided input for the letters below to the Ministry, to the Minister and the Premier.

On **December 15, 2014**, a [letter](#) was sent by the Northern Ontario Services Delivers Association (NOSDA) to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Richard Steele indicating that NOSDA members were dealing with a variety of difficulties in the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). Along with this letter was a list of key issues identified by the NOSDA members.

On **December 17, 2014**, a [press release](#) was issued to the media on behalf of NOSDA highlighting that the NOSDA group is proud of the staff's work in dealing with this problematic, province-wide computer program implementation.

On **January 19, 2015**, the Ministry of Community and Social Services [replied](#) to the letter from NOSDA highlighting the fact that a SAMS Technical Working Group met to work on understanding the key issues with SAMS and associated business processes, as well as to inform the prioritization of changes going forward. The Ministry also highlighted in this letter that they have provided delivery partners with 100% provincial one-time funding as administrative relief measures to help address some of the additional costs associated with the implementation of SAMS.

On **January 19, 2015**, NOSDA wrote a [letter](#) to the Premier indicating that its members are having significant concerns with the implementation of SAMS. The members are presently dealing with a variety of difficulties that are directly impacting their ability to properly serve the citizens of Northern Ontario in a timely and professional manner. The letter indicated that some of the more prominent issues include the frustration of clients, lengthy delays in processing, less time available for case management due to time required for SAMS implementation which is creating a backlog of work, and the high direct and indirect human and financial costs related to staff overtime necessitated by SAMS' implementation.

On **January 29, 2015**, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) wrote a [letter](#) to the Assistant Deputy Minister highlighting the fact that the provincially mandated database system (SAMS) has created a crisis for Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs).

OMSSA indicated in this letter that they are ready to work with the Ministry on a remediation plan that in both the near and over the long term will alleviate growing capacity constraints.

On **February 5, 2015**, the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) wrote a [letter](#) to the Minister of Community and Social Services indicating that there are deep concerns with SAMS. The letter urged the Minister to consider a number of suggestions and are seeking further assurances from the Ministry that a resolution to the immediate crisis is in sight.

On **February 10, 2015**, the Ontario Works Administrators received a [letter](#) from the Minister of Community and Social Services thanking staff for their dedication and excellence in serving recipients as well as providing details on ministry plans to address immediate issues. The Minister indicates that our voices have been heard. That the implementation of SAMS must be improved. In the coming weeks and months, the Ministry of Community and Social Services will be taking specific actions to deal with immediate issues and improve the implementation of SAMS which includes an independent review of the problem. In addition, the government is also delaying the rollout of a special benefit to help social assistance recipients' transition to employment.

Conclusion:

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB staff are currently feeling very frustrated and fail to see the light at the end of the tunnel. They question how they can do their work more diligently and provide good customer service all while dealing with the multitude of issues presented due to SAMS. The staff recognize the struggles of our clients. Staff are doing everything they possibly can to ensure clients receive the assistance they require when they need it. Managers are proud of the hard work and dedication of front-line staff in dealing with this problematic, province-wide computer program implementation. We are continually working with the Ministry to correct deficiencies and identify solutions while supporting the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB staff as they continue their day-to-day work in providing good customer service.