



**INDEPENDENT MANAGER REVIEW
OF SAFETY AND SECURITY AT
OAKLANDS REGIONAL CENTRE**

January 13, 2005

**Submitted to:
Ministry of Community and Social Services**

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1.0 Mandate

On November 23, 2004, close to a month after a client's disappearance, a second man left the premises of the Oaklands Regional Centre without the awareness of staff. In response to this second incident, the Minister of Community and Social Services appointed a manager to provide support to Oaklands' Board of Directors and its Executive Director, as well as to focus on the following areas:

- safety and security of the residents;
- a training program for staff (related to safety and security);
- implementing any immediate recommendations tied to these areas; and
- implementing the recommendations that emerged from the independent review of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of this client.

This report provides an update on the activities and the implementation that has occurred to date since the appointment of the manager.

2.0 Overview

The staff and Board of Oaklands Regional Centre (ORC) have been very co-operative and helpful with the MCSS-appointed manager since his first arrival at ORC. Frank and open discussions about safety, security and the well being of clients have been held with staff and management. Visits have been made to each of the eight houses at the Centre, and staff and their work routines have been observed. During this observation, staff members have appeared to treat clients with respect and dignity. The manager has participated in numerous management discussions concerning a variety of issues and believes that management staff has the required acumen to run a facility like Oaklands. The recent incidents at ORC have attuned staff to the need to be vigilant in following proper procedures. It appears that incidents are reported to appropriate staff in an expeditious manner. The remainder of the report provides additional detail about each of the points presented in the overview section.

3.0 Security – Current Situation

The security features in the homes (outside door alarms, some bedroom door alarms) appear to function reliably, but are outdated and require updating and enhancement. The current security system requires the staff member, upon hearing an alarm, to head to the main office (located within the home) to find the location of the door that triggered the alarm, and then the staff member must make their way to the indicated door. This process seems roundabout and crucial time can be wasted moving from the staff member's original location, to the main office, to the indicated door.

The current security system – with the “tripped” doors indicated on the main panel in the house office – requires manual re-setting whenever an outside door is opened, even if a staff member enters or leaves the house. This leaves the system vulnerable to human error or forgetfulness. Staff can also by-pass the alarms (e.g. when they know a staff member is coming or going) to avoid the loud noise of the alarm, once again leaving the system vulnerable to human error or forgetfulness. The different types of chimes, bells and piercing sounds associated with the security system can be confusing.

The testing of alarms and the intercom for the BA system (i.e., calling for Behavioural Assistance) occurs on a regular monthly basis. The current system of security cameras does not cover the full grounds of the site and is not monitored regularly – it is an after-the-fact system (meaning that no staff is assigned to watch the monitors and therefore its most beneficial use comes after an incident when a tape can be re-wound and watched).

3.1 Security – Action Plan and Implementation

Two separate security firms were invited to Oaklands to discuss their findings and provide recommendations about what security system would work best in balancing the need for a safe, secure environment while enabling designated clients to utilize an agreed upon level of autonomy when appropriate. *Superior Lock* was selected and meetings were then held with the Town of Oakville and a Fire Prevention Officer to ensure that the recommended security solution met the required fire code.

On December 17, 2004, work began on upgrading and installing new security equipment that will include the following features:

- a system that automatically re-arms itself immediately after any entering or exiting occurs (thereby eliminating human error in having to remember to re-arm the system themselves);
- a system that can only be by-passed by using a key fob (i.e., a key-like device that is easier than a regular key to maintain and use) thereby preventing staff's ability to bypass the system;
- the by-pass will only be enforced for a brief period of time (i.e., 15 seconds) to allow for entering or exiting that particular door;

- new door closers will automatically return the door to the locked position, and re-arm the door alarm;
- a single, accessible door utilized in most homes that will enable certain clients to exit to go to the store, the pop machine, or for a walk on the grounds – a distinct alarm will sound as these clients exit the house, alerting staff, if they are not already aware, that a client has exited the house; and
- these accessible doors will be automatically locked and alarmed by a timer system that can be set for example from 8 p.m. in the evening until 6 a.m. in the morning.

In addition to these security features, each house was recently given an additional walkie-talkie (bringing the number in each house to two) for use when staff are accompanying residents on outings. The need to upgrade the fencing around all of the patio spaces connected to each house will also be examined.

The number of security cameras has been increased and the entire camera system upgraded to provide complete coverage of the entire Oaklands' grounds. The enhanced system also provides a clearer picture, includes features that are more-easily maneuvered to focus in on a particular part of the Oaklands' premises and enables re-winding the security tape to an exact time and location.

3.2 Security – Conclusions

The installation of a new security system in each house will provide the necessary protection for clients, maintain some degree of autonomy for clients who have shown that they can effectively manage this level of responsibility, and will eliminate staff intervention in either by-passing or re-arming the security system. As much as possible, human error (including forgetfulness) will be taken out of the proposed security system.

4.0 Training – Current Situation

The primary concerns held by management at Oaklands in relation to staff training focuses on a small segment of staff (i.e. the proverbial “20%” of staff who cause 80% of the staff performance problems). This refers to a certain segment of staff that creates concerns for management because of their reduced work ethic, taking advantage of certain situations and not contributing enough to the team effort as required to make client care and treatment effective. Management has shared these concerns with *The Frontier Group* (a training organization), who have developed a training package that responds directly to these identified issues. The Frontier Group held two meetings with management in November to better understand the current situation and to tailor its training package to Oaklands' staff. Oaklands' management felt comfortable that The Frontier Group listened well, understood the current challenges and could deliver a relevant, useful training package.

4.1 Training – Action Plan and Implementation

The Frontier Group’s proposal for training has been accepted, and their in-depth needs assessment has commenced. Part of the needs assessment includes interviews with management staff and group meetings with residential staff, along with an organization-wide organizational health survey that will be repeated twice during the provision of their training regimen, to gauge the progress that is being made throughout the Centre. In-depth training has begun focusing primarily on staff taking individual responsibility for their own actions within a team structure. The important link between accountability and personal leadership, and risk management and quality assurance will also be made.

In addition to this, Oaklands staff will undergo training in appropriate physical restraint and safe management training. A training regimen has been agreed to with a training firm specializing in this specific area (i.e., *Prior, Linden*).

4.2 Training – Conclusions

There is confidence in the ability of The Frontier Group and Prior, Linden to deliver on their proposed approach and to do so in a manner that will greatly benefit the staff throughout the Oaklands organization.

5.0 Management/Board of Directors

Much of the MCSS-appointed manager’s time has been spent at Oaklands with the Executive Director and the senior managers addressing a variety of management situations (e.g., incident reporting, discussing training needs, examining security, and meeting with MCSS). I believe that it is an effective and well-functioning management team that is well versed in the operations of the Centre. They appear to know the staff and clients well, and react appropriately to given situations.

The Board of Directors has recently looked at the formation of the risk management and quality assurance committee. They have asked the ministry appointed manager to support its effort. To this end, the manager convened a small working group, developed a terms of reference for this new board committee, and subsequently, had the terms of reference approved by the board.

The board then selected three members to sit on this committee which will hold its first meeting in mid-January. The purpose of this committee is to create a working and living environment at Oaklands that maintains high level of care and service, is dedicated to continuous quality improvement, and is driven by the need to attain quality outcomes for Oaklands’ residents.

6.0 Immediate Measures/Improvements (*late November-early December*)

One of the first steps that the MCSS-appointed manager took part in upon his arrival at Oaklands involved a “walkabout” with the Executive Director, the local president of OPSEU, and a union representative from its regional office. The purpose of this tour of all houses and day programs was twofold: 1) to present a picture of solidarity to all staff that both management and union were united in their support for staff through this difficult period; and 2) to present the message that the future of Oaklands has been threatened by recent events and staff had to maintain utmost vigilance to all policies and procedures that related to client’s safety and security. The union representatives took the lead in presenting these messages and informing staff about the gravity of the current situation.

The walkabout was also used as an opportunity to solicit ideas that could be implemented quickly. After this activity, a feedback form was circulated asking each house to meet as a group and to submit advice to the manager.

Based on the initial walkabout, and in discussion with management, a number of steps were implemented immediately:

- two walkie-talkies have been purchased and placed in each house; this allows greater flexibility to staff in each house to communicate more effectively with each other, particularly if one staff is outside with a client;
- cell phones are in place to take in the vans during client outings; and
- a new night manager’s position has been posted both internally and externally to ensure the best candidate emerges from either inside Oaklands or from an outside position.

7.0 An Ongoing Challenge

The Oaklands Regional Centre was de-listed as a Schedule 2 facility and became a community-based transfer payment agency (TPA) in the 1990’s. As part of 100’s of other TPA’s funded by MCSS throughout the province, Oaklands houses individuals who live there on a voluntary basis. It is not a locked facility. Many of the residents, with their parents’/families’ support and with the acknowledgement of the risks inherent in community living, are provided with some degree of autonomy. In many cases, greater autonomy is one of the explicit goals that are set by the agency to improve the life skills and quality of life of these individuals.

A number of individuals at Oaklands, prior to the recent disappearance, and with staff’s awareness, had enjoyed a series of autonomous outings. For example:

- One individual resident would frequently traverse much of the property (without leaving the grounds), and would exit and re-enter the house on his own. Since the disappearance, his activity has been curtailed, as he was directed by staff to stay in the

house. This reduction in outside activity and more-confined environment apparently lead to an escalation in behavioural issues of this resident. Most recently, a decision was made to allow this resident to go out of the house with staff accompaniment. This has helped reduce the behaviours somewhat.

- Other clients also enjoy going from their house to the pop machine (located in the main Oaklands office), or on walks around the property.
- One client who, on a daily basis, walks into town, buys a newspaper and reads it while drinking his coffee at the local coffee shop.
- Another client who has a paid job to collect sign-in sheets on a daily basis from all the Oaklands' houses. This job is seen as being vital to maintaining this person's self-esteem. His mother has recently requested that, despite recent events, that this job not be taken away from him, and that he be allowed to maintain his route walking throughout the grounds of Oaklands (unaccompanied) as they have seen a behavioral crisis in the past if he is not completing his job duties.

These vignettes point out the inherent challenge associated with supporting clients to live in community settings and assisting them to increase their autonomy and living skills, while still ensuring their safety.

Oaklands explicitly recognizes this dilemma and works hard to balance client autonomy and skill building while protecting the safety of those who are entrusted with their care. The same balancing act is carried out every day by numerous social service agencies in group homes, in Associations for Community Living and in other residential settings, where building clients' autonomy and skills is one their major mandates.

8.0 Recommendations

Having been on-site over the past six-week period, it is believed that some of the difficulties encountered by Oaklands in October and November can be attributed, in part, to the culmination of the effects of staffing levels over the past few years. Presently, Oaklands is operating at the minimum for residential staff coverage; all residential managers are responsible for two separate areas; as well as having each residential manager cover off the Designated-Manager-in-Charge (or DMIC) position; and the head of Human Resources is responsible for facilities and maintenance as well (all conducted without adequate clerical staff to support administrative functions). It appears that Oaklands has operated without adequate staff coverage in a number of different areas of operation for the past few years. For example:

- The HR Manager must complete all administrative functions related to the HR portfolio, while still overseeing and being responsible for the facility and its maintenance – this situation does not allow this staff person to address HR from a strategic point of view (i.e., conducting an “Attendance Management Program” targeted at chronic absenteeism; doing a concerted recruitment and hiring program to

increase the pool of available part-time and relief workers; or helping Residential Managers to deal with problem staff.)

- The DMIC position deals with so many administrative issues on any particular shift (e.g. retrieving the keys from the users of the pool, covering switchboard) that they have little time to problem-solve with staff about the issue they are calling about – to cope with the work demand, the DMIC generally gives direction and is off the phone quickly, thereby missing a valuable opportunity to further clarify the problem and/or provide training to staff on handling difficult situations; while the house manager is acting as the DMIC, they are not attending to the particular needs in the houses they are responsible for (since the DMIC is a rotating position among all Residential Managers).

Based on this experience to-date, it is recommended that the following positions be added immediately to Oakland's staffing complement to offset shortages in the most critical areas:

- **3 FTE Front-Line Staff** – (This is represented by 5 part-time positions, i.e., a 0.6 position or 24 hours of coverage per week to be distributed across all houses) – This amount of coverage would alleviate the minimal coverage that is now the norm in each house and could be used strategically to cover off the most vulnerable parts of the day.
- **1 Full-Time DMIC** – To alleviate the pressure on all Residential Managers so that they can better attend to the needs of staff and clients in their respective homes.
- **1 Full-Time HR position**– Particularly to free up the HR manager to work more strategically on an HR plan (recruitment, attendance management, and supervision and performance management of under-performing staff).

9.0 Overall Conclusions and Action Plan

The co-operation and openness shown by all levels of Oaklands (from Board, management and staff) and their willingness to accept advice and proceed with a variety of change initiatives, has enabled the Ministry-appointed Manager to move quickly and pro-actively on a number of important fronts. Whether the change or task has been related to security, training, staffing or improved procedures, the experience to-date has shown that Oaklands staff has recognized the gravity of the situation and reacted swiftly and responsively to a range of suggestions. The chart on the following page summarizes the key actions that have occurred or will be enacted shortly:

Key Area	Recommendation	Status	Time Frame
Security	Increase number and upgrade security cameras	Complete	Completed December 2004
	Upgrade security system, alarms in each residence	Ongoing	Dec. 17 to end-of January
	Secure two Walkie-talkies per residence	Complete	Completed early Dec. 2004
Training	Physical Restraint, safe management training	Ongoing	To begin in mid-January to Spring '05
	Frontier Group training re: personal responsibility	Ongoing	December to Fall '05
Staffing	Additional Night Manager	Conducting second interviews	To be completed soon
	Hiring additional House 4 staff	In-place	Completed
	Hiring of 3 FTE front line staff, 1 full time DMIC and 1 full time HR Assistant	Ongoing hiring process	Some front-line in place; DMIC & HR Assistant by Feb.

10.0 Next Steps

The report authored by an independent reviewer regarding the circumstances of the disappearance of a client from Oaklands Regional Centre has been reviewed. The recommendations contained in that report are aligned closely with many of the directions stated in this report. Therefore, over the next few weeks, the MCSS-appointed manager will develop an action plan based on the recommendations found in the independent reviewer's report and help the Board, management and staff at ORC to implement those recommendations.