

# Need foster care — "These kids are our future"

by Diana Waltmann  
The Children's Aid Society (CAS) had their problems with the media. There are stories cropping up in the news such as dying mother denied access to child and child killed after CAS returned her to abusive parents.

There are also the commercials on the foster care program. Who needs it?, we are asked. The television commercial has caused a stir inside and out of the agency.

"I asked my kids what they thought of it," says Valerie Casey, a local foster parent, "and one says, 'I'm going to be like them, ma'."

"And I think this kid is going to make it," says Barry Heath. Heath is with the alternate care department of the Halton Children's Aid and a foster parent.

Mrs. Casey, along with husband Roger, is a foster parent and housewife, mother and part-time university student.

Despite the problems so far with media coverage Heath says, the Halton CAS is taking the plunge into a massive recruitment campaign next month.

There are 100 foster parents in Halton, a surprisingly low number for one of the most heavily populated areas in Canada. Yet 15 of those live in or near Acton, a town with a population of only about 7,000.

Best response  
"It's peculiar," says Heath. "There aren't as

many services or recreation facilities here, yet this area has the best response."

But he added there is always a need for more. Hence the campaign.

"It's one thing to recruit foster parents," he says. "It's another to hang on to them."

"Why does anyone become a foster parent?" shrugs Mrs. Casey. "You can't put the feelings into words. We all take kids for granted. But they are the future of the world."

"Our decision to become foster parents evolved. We talked about it, talked to other foster parents, talked to the agency. It was an intelligent decision. Has to be. You have to realize it's not all fun."

The Caseys run a group home for teenagers in Ospringe. They have cared for eight or nine children over the four years they've been foster parents. They take in what is called long term children; crown wards that could stay as long as, well, forever. The longest term so far has been four years. The Caseys have taken in mostly girls.

"These kids have emotional problems," she says. "Some suffer from culture shock. Most of them have spent 10 or 12 or 14 years in a non-structured life."

Learn to cope  
"A parent has to cope with their own feelings. That is something I've recently learned to do. You have to realize you can't teach a child in six months what's right. You can't attach your feelings of success or failure with the kids. If a child does

something stupid and you know he or she can do better, you can't feel like a failure."

"Once a foster parent, always a foster parent," states Heath. He said even if a couple doesn't have a child at the moment, they are still foster parents. In Acton most foster parents are older couples, with older children. And they last.

One family, Ann and Horace Blyth have been involved in foster care for 30 years, taking care of about 50 children.

Children placed in Acton homes, Heath continues, can be from anywhere in the region. He said a placement of a child depends on his or her problems, age, and the special qualities of the parents.

Foster parents have different personalities, Heath says, and different values. Some become totally involved with the agency while others care only about the children.

"We'd love to be absolutely choosy; we are anyway, but we have the best group of parents here."

Feels isolated  
But adds Mrs. Casey, parents in Acton, small rural areas and Georgetown often feel isolated because Halton CAS is a centralized administration—in Oakville.

"We have the feeling of neglect," she said. "You might want to call, but it's long distance and you're hesitant about the money."

So Halton CAS and foster parents in Acton and area set up an extended family group. They meet bi-

weekly along with their social worker, to discuss problems, give each other moral and emotional support and add insight. "We let off steam," says Mrs. Casey. The extended family has taken a hold up here, she adds for survival reasons. They don't have the same access to the agency or social workers involved as parents closer to Oakville.

CAS has other programs besides extended family. Heath says social workers are going into homes to teach families how to cope, so children don't need to be removed.

He said for every child taken out of a home, there are three left with their families.

But always, says Heath, the child comes first. "We attempt to invest in the child and not in the house."

Foster parents do not make money on the deal. The agency pays them room and board, depending on the age of the child and for certain medical reasons.

"It makes you reset all your priorities," says Mrs. Casey, "but it doesn't have to be expensive. You can get by on what the agency gives you. But you go around asking yourself if you really need that new car."

The agency, she says, is in a tight position for money. "I feel the government is unfair to youth. All the money that goes towards unemployment insurance and welfare might be better channelled into kid's future."

Besides monetary problems, foster kids, foster parents and the entire program is facing prejudices. What the gravel-sounding bigot in the television commercial says is exactly what the children must face. "I always find myself defending the kids," says Mrs. Casey. "I'm always called down to the school. If there is a group of kids involved, the foster child is the one singled out because he or she is a foster child."

"The agency is terrific," she continued. "Probably the best Children's Aid group in the country. It's about time they got some good publicity."

"You know the agency is behind you and will support you. If you feel there is something really important, they will somehow come up with the money. And if you disagree with the agency, you can work it out."

Roger Casey is a volunteer director on Halton CAS board. Valerie Casey is working towards her Masters in social work. Besides foster parents, the Caseys have three children of their own.

"I do a lot of driving," she says.

She says her children have learned a lot from foster care experience. Her daughters have become tolerant and giving. They appreciate what they have, because they have been exposed to the other side. They learn to share their feelings and possessions.

"My kids are less materialistic," Mrs. Casey says. "It's made them better people."

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## School funding case to province

Vince Whelan, head of the St. Joseph's Parents' Association, Halton-Burlington MPP Julian Reed and a delegation of Halton Separate School Board officials hope to meet next month with Ontario Education Minister Bette Stephenson to plead the case for funding of a new Catholic school in Acton.

This plan of action was approved by the board at a special meeting last Tuesday night, but trustees rejected the parents call for the board to go to the province and ask that money allocated for a new separate school in Oakville be spent in Acton instead.

Friday parents, who have been fighting for several weeks now to have the province's funding decision reversed, received a letter from the board announcing the plan to go see Stephenson, hopefully in early September to request additional funding so a new school can be built here.

Board meet here  
The letter from the board, which was something of a letter of intent to build a new school here, also revealed the next board meeting will be held at Robert Little School in Acton, beside St. Joseph's, on August 27.

If the meeting with Stephenson isn't successful then the minister will be invited to come to Acton and see the condition of St. Joseph's first hand.

McMahon described the board's letter as "encouraging."

The board decided not to ask the province to switch its funding to Acton, McMahon said, because if Acton was the only priority then Halton wouldn't get any money this year. The province has severe restraints on capital projects and Acton doesn't meet its criteria so for the board it is a case of getting funding for the new Oakville school or getting nothing.

However, McMahon noted, the board hasn't discounted the need for new separate school in Acton and Acton remains a priority project.

Some changes in school  
Parents will see few changes in the school a board official said in a letter which Whelan received.

John Birett, the board's plant manager, says some minor changes recommended in a report by Halton Hills Fire Prevention Officer Larry Brassard can be met but most of the changes he commented on can't be done because it would require tearing down the building and starting over.

He noted the separate board can't make many

changes because they only rent it from the public school board.

Impossible to update  
Birett said it wouldn't be practical to update the old building to meet the present building code standards. It would be extremely expensive and the money would be better spent on a new school. Most improvements are impossible with the existing building.

He is going to ask Ontario Hydro to come in and do an inspection of the wiring in St. Joseph's, though he expects they will report there are no problems.

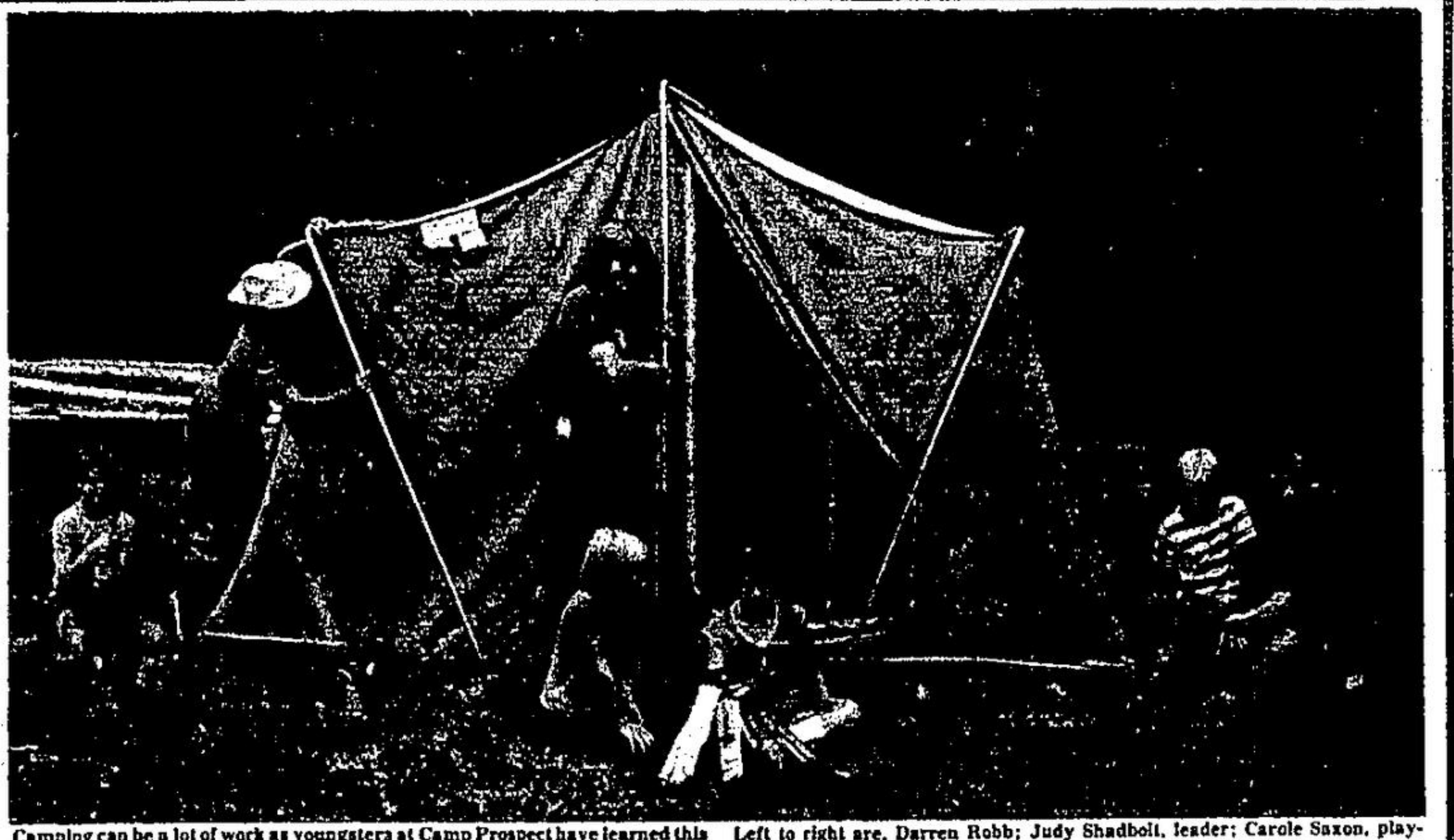
Birett also says he can see no reason why the refuse container can't be moved to another location and thermal detectors would be "worthwhile" in the single storage room and in the storage closet.

The board official is upset that Brassard said in his report the fire alarm system may have been improperly installed. Birett says the system must either be proper or not proper. The total system was "checked out" less than two years ago, has been tested during fire drills and was operational when the school closed for the summer in June. He wonders why Brassard didn't test the system himself.

All that can be done with the system and smoke detectors is to check the batteries, he said.

Halton Board of Education, the landlord for St. Joseph's school, has a preventative maintenance program for heating systems and regularly has fire extinguishers checked. He has contacted the public board and been told St. Joseph's heating system and fire extinguishers are checked.

Many of Brassard's comments relate to the building not meeting the Ontario Building Code, Birett said. He agrees the building doesn't meet the building code standards but notes few built before 1978 do.



Camping can be a lot of work as youngsters at Camp Prospect have learned this summer on their overnight stays at Blue Springs Scout Reserve. Here leaders and campers from Acton are busy setting up a tent and building a campfire. Left to right are, Darren Robb; Judy Shadboit, leader; Carole Saxon, play-ground supervisor; Kerry Butler; Kim Gilles; Brian Flindall and leader-in-training Kim Heaps. Photo by GORD MURRAY

## Halton's reserve funds may trim region deficit 60%

Department heads throughout Halton are going to have to go through their budgets with a fine tooth comb as the region scrambles to cover its unexpected 1980 deficit.

The region's Administration and Finance committee agreed last week to take \$440,826 out of reserve funds to cover part of the now \$600,000 deficit.

The two reserve funds that provided money to offset part of the deficit were for working funds and road construction. The balance of the shortfall will have to come from the 1980 operating budgets of the various regional departments.

"I think council should move now to tighten up on expenditures even before they know the entire picture," said the region's Chief Administrative Officer Ernie Reid.

At last week's Administration committee meeting Burlington mayor Roy Bird said regional department heads should start analyzing their budgets immediately, looking for spending that can be delayed until next year.

"If enough money can't be found that way," he added, "then council will have to start making cuts."

Deputy-treasurer Jim Stewart said it would take about four weeks for the department heads to examine their budgets and make firm recommendations about possible savings.

According to a report presented to the committee by Reid, slightly less than half of the region's total 1980 operating budget has been spent to date. A total of \$33.7 million was budgeted and \$14.5 million has been spent.

The Halton Regional Police, the report revealed, have the greatest current surplus in their budget, largely because they have not hired as many new policemen as they had planned to.

The force currently has an unspent balance of \$167,300. The Halton Health Unit has an unspent balance of \$116,600 and the regionally operated home for the aged in Milton is currently \$88,000 under budget.

As committee members scanned the report outlining the current shape of accounts, Coun. Carol Gooding warned that they should not expect all the figures they saw to be firm to the end of the year.

Regional chairman Jack Rafis also suggested that the financial systems of the region should be changed to give councillors better information about the progress of the budget.

"There should be some kind of ongoing procedure, so that this doesn't happen again," he said.

Steward suggested that each of the departments should report on the status of its budget on a monthly basis to its standing committee.

Quarterly reports should then be made to the Administration and Finance Committee.

He also suggested that from September to the end of the year the monthly reports should include projections to the end of the year.

### Tentative pact made

A tentative one-year contract agreement between Halton's Elementary Teachers Association and the Halton Board of Education was announced by the board yesterday.

Details of the 1980-81 pact will be made public after September 12 when both parties are expected to ratify the agreement.

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You'll find Profiles on page 2, editorials, columns and Our Readers Write on page 4, News Digest is on page 5, page 9 has Chamber Happenings and Rockwood Digest is on page 10.



Acton Free Press Publisher Don McDonald left, was in Edmonton last week to receive four awards this newspaper won in the Canadian Community Newspaper Association's Better Newspapers' Competition for 1979 issues. The Free Press won first place in its front page, third place for editorial page, third for sports and third best overall. Joining Don here are publishers of two Free Press sister papers, Ken Bellamy of The Georgetown Independent and Milton Canadian Champion's Herb Crowther.