

Adults Molested as Children new Halton group

AMAC stands for Adults Molested as Children, and a new self-help group in Halton deals specifically with incest, defined as any form of sexual activity between an adult parent, step-parent, surrogate parent, or extended family member, and a child.

The primary idea of the group is to provide an environment to facilitate looking at feelings and working them through to come to a new self-understanding.

Co-therapists Joan Lee and Ross Plant say adults who have been sexually abused as children often experience severe coping difficulties. Abused children see themselves as bad and worthless, and grow to adulthood with the same self-image.

This, in turn, can affect all their adult relationships, including those with spouses and children.

One important benefit of the group, Plant said, is the immediate identification with other people with similar experiences.

"All through the sessions, there was a realization, maybe for the first time, that they weren't alone," Plant said. "Their experience wasn't unique, and it certainly didn't make them 'bad' people."

Focus of anger

Another purpose of the group and the therapists' role is to provide a focus of anger and a vehicle for realizing the victim's own power.

"The power of a parent or older person over a child is absolutely immense," Lee said. "The continued feeling throughout the life of someone abused as a child is one of powerlessness, the inability to control one's life. This continued victimization is in many cases self-inflicted. That's an important part of the realization the group members have had to make here—that they do have power and can control their own lives now."

In looking back at the work of the group over the past five months, Lee and Plant give honors to the members.

"This has been a knockout group of people," Lee said of the five members of the Wednesday night group. "Their sensitivity toward each other has been overwhelming, at times, awesome."

Plant agreed, saying it had been his and Lee's "privilege" to work with the group.

In terms of success? Well, the goal Plant and Lee set was to help adults who had lived, some for many years, with feelings of being 'bad', 'worthless' and 'not as good as others', because they'd been abused as children. The task was to break the destructive cycle, feelings of self-loathing and powerlessness which too often are a self-fulfilling prophecy, the therapists said.

"Everyone has experienced change and growth—some in quite significant ways," Plant said.

"Some have resolved destructive feelings completely," Lee said, "and others have lessened those feelings drastically."

"The members of the group have a

whole new feeling about themselves," he said. "The self-damnation is gone and they are experiencing a new feel for life."

The AMAC concept was actually a hybrid of two programs, one from Henry and Anna Giarretto who presented a May workshop on child sexual abuse in Halton, and the other was one adopted by the Peel Family Services from a Tacoma, Washington treatment centre. Additional elements were added by Plant and Lee, making the Halton AMAC group unique.

The group was small (five members) for several reasons, Plant and Lee said. One is that the size must be controlled to ensure enough time for all (the sessions are two hours once a week). The other is that many people who were abused as children either don't yet know about the existence of the group, or are afraid to come forward and attempt to work through the fears.

Often adults who have been abused children feel a tremendous responsibility to protect the family and maintain the

secret, Lee said. Adults who have experienced childhood molestation may view themselves as bad and unlovable, often in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, she said.

The group was not small because there aren't people who were abused as children, however.

It may be difficult to accept, but statistics from five major surveys between 1940 and 1978 show one in four girls, and one in 10 boys will be molested by the age of 18.

As the first session comes to a close, Plant and Lee say they welcome other therapists who wish to start more groups in the region and the province. They plan another group to start in September.

This kind of encouragement is necessary, Lee said, because of the nature of working with incest victims.

"It (incest) is one of the last great taboos in our society," Lee and Plant said, "and there is not only a fear on the part of people

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TOWN OF HALTON HILLS RECREATION REPORT

LACROSSE ANYONE?
There will be a children's lacrosse program offered at the Acton Memorial Arena on Monday evenings. Children are asked to wear helmets, gloves and soft soled shoes. Sticks will be provided. For more information please call 863-3218.

BICENTENNIAL WALKING AND JOGGING CLINIC
On Thursday, June 7th there will be a clinic for amateur as well as expert walkers and joggers. This clinic is FREE so take advantage of this excellent opportunity. The Clinic runs from 7-10 p.m. at the Cedarvale Community Centre. Councillor John MacDonald will be leading the group on a historical walk and jog through downtown Georgetown. For more information please call your Recreation and Parks Department 877-5186, ext. 260.

EXERCISE A WHILE... THEN DIAL!
Today is ParticipACTION Challenge Day! Exercise for 15 minutes doing the activity of your choice—then register by calling the NEILSON'S Challenge Hotline, 873-1681. We are waiting to hear from you. Don't let your fellow residents down—together with everyone's participation, we can prove that Halton Hills is most active community in Canada.

DAY TIME SWIMMING
Get in shape and stay that way! The Georgetown Pool will be open for lunch time swimming on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays until June 11. The swim is from 11:45-12:45, and regular admission rates apply.

ROLLER SKATING
There are still openings left in the Roller Skating classes being offered in Acton and Georgetown this Spring. Acton lessons begin Thursday, May 16, 1984. Georgetown classes start Wednesday, June 4, 1984. Register now.

PROJECT P.A.W.S.
The Halton Hills Recreation and Parks Department are pleased to announce that Project P.A.W.S. (Public Awareness of Water Safety) has returned to Halton Hills. Three University students are at work preparing informative skits about different aspects of water safety. These skits will be presented to students from kindergarten to grade 8. Watch for them!

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