

Youth law means changes

By LINDA KIRBY
The new Young Offender's Act, which took effect April 2, has resulted in some crucial changes affecting youngsters who break the law. But Halton Regional Police will not be treating teens much differently than at the present time, according to one officer who heads the youth section for north Halton.

The new law replaces the 76-year-old Juvenile Delinquents Act. It puts the onus on young people to be more responsible for their actions and to make restitution for their mistakes. In keeping with the new Charter of Rights, the act also recognizes that

young people must have the same rights as all Canadians and therefore are guaranteed the same legal rights as adults including the right to legal representation, bail, appeal and the right to be kept completely informed.

Sergeant Tom Johnson, a 16-year veteran of the Halton force and head of the youth section for north Halton, said he does not feel there will be a significantly greater number of youths in court, at least not this year.

Next year, the second phase of the Act will take effect. The dividing line between juvenile and adult of-

fenders will be the 18th birthday. (The line is now drawn at 16 years), resulting in a greater number of young offenders.

The uniform age for criminal responsibility is set at 12 years (it was seven years in Ontario) but this doesn't mean all young people in trouble with the law, will automatically go to court.

"I don't believe we are going to lay paper every time a kid breaks the law," said Sergeant Johnson, adding that each case will be treated on an individual basis.

"The officer will screen each one. Unless it is a serious offence, we

would not normally take the person to court on a first offence."

If, however, a young person commits a serious offence, he or she will be dealt with in a way that ensures the protection of society and in certain cases, the youngster could be transferred to adult court for trial.

"The new act is going to make it easier for the officers who will be using the same procedure as they would for adults," said Sergeant Johnson.

Last year a total of 60 charges were laid against juveniles (seven to 15 years) in north Halton.



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