

More in care, foster home shortage: CAS

By KAREN WARD
Herald staff writer

There are more teenagers in care of the Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS) than there were five years ago yet the CAS faces a shortage of foster homes for teenagers.

Most foster parents want younger children, Ann Lorraine Thiessen supervisor of alternate caring department said in an interview. There are 170 children in care of the Halton CAS, half of which are in foster homes, and 50 per cent of these children are 13 and up. There are 90 foster homes in Halton, 11 in Acton and three in Georgetown. The CAS needs more foster parents.

The problems facing teenagers have changed drastically in the past five years, Mrs. Thiessen said. The "drug problem" with children is not the "in thing" any more, teenagers seem to face more adult problems.

Suicides are a large risk problem in teenagers and cannot be ignored. Children seem much more depressed and on a deeper serious level than before.

"Children seem to more out of control of their emotional levels," she said.

Detinquency is a common problem and perhaps this is the "in thing" for teenagers these days. Hooliganism, car theft and threatening each other and strangers with guns used to be common in persons 18-25 years of age, but, now these occurrences are happening in a much younger age group, she said.

These facts account partly for the reluctance of foster parents taking in teenagers, she said. Another problem with placing teenagers in foster care is that the young adults had parental problems and giving them a new set of parents does not help the situation.

A lack of foster homes in Georgetown is a serious problem, Mrs. Thiessen said. Over the year, approximately 25

Permits

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to 30 children will enter the CAS from Georgetown and a slightly smaller percentage from Acton. These children may not stay in care, since the aim of the CAS is to work with the families and keep families together, but, if the children stay in care more than likely they will have to stay in a foster home in the south end of Halton.

"Halton region doesn't mean a thing to a person on the street," she said. The child feels alienated from family

and friends if transferred to Burlington, and since there is no bus transportation, the child faces a problem of not being able to go and talk to a friend or family member when they want to.

Mrs. Thiessen feels that some parents do not apply to be foster parents because they are afraid they have to be a certain type of person. "This isn't true," she said. "The CAS doesn't expect to find a perfect couple, just someone who cares enough to give their time

and money," she said. The CAS pays for the child's expenses, clothing and food and school supplies and foster parents do not receive a certain sum of money for being a foster parent. But the role of a foster parent is a vital one to the CAS, she said.

In many cases, foster parents can make contact with natural parents and can communicate with the parents in a way that the social worker cannot. Also, a social worker helps the child and the foster

parent, but a lot of the raising of children in care falls upon the shoulders of the foster parents.

Beside the foster homes in Halton there are three units for teenagers, two are family based and one is a staff-supervised group care unit, "for harder to place children."

There are about 15 children from Halton who have been placed in group homes across the province. Sometimes, Mrs. Thiessen said, it is better for a child to be severed from his

family and friends for awhile. "It is harder, but in some cases it works out better," she said.

But, the problem is that police, courts and schools in other communities are saying that Halton "should look after its own," she said.

However, this is not an easy solution, since there is a lack of funds available. The budget restraints has resulted in a few new projects that would benefit children being scrapped she said.

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