

Legal clinic aids 400 gain their rights

Things looked very difficult for John. He had been out of work for 15 weeks, cut off unemployment benefits.

"I was desperate especially after having to go to the welfare office."

The young worker then came to Halton Hills Community Legal Clinic. "What they did tell me was I had some rights and I should go after them. That's the most important

thing."

With the help of the legal community worker, Bill Cumpsty, John got the Unemployment Insurance Commission (UIC) to reverse its decision and was granted \$1,100 in unemployment insurance payments.

John (not his real name) is just one of the more than 400 individuals helped in the past six months by Halton Hills Community Legal Clinic.

Operating out of a store front at 97 Main Street S. Georgetown, and 42 Mill St. E in Acton, the legal clinic offers free legal assistance for low income residents.

"Most of our service is to people who would otherwise not have any access to legal services. We serve a wider range of people than some realize. We do a lot of helping people with welfare, pensions,

W.C.B. (Workmen's Compensation Board) problems," Mr. Cumpsty says.

Legal services annual budget is paid for by the Ontario Legal Aid Plan and by Osgoode Hall Law School. Workers feel the store front clinic is one of the most economical ways to deliver law services. They believe taxpayers get very good value for their money because community legal workers are

paid much less than people in government or private law doing similar work.

Everyone who works at the clinic does so because of a commitment. The idea of legal services offers relief for people waiting in offices when dealing with government bureaucracies. A person who walks into the clinic can at least talk to someone about his problem almost immediately.

Abuse to women is one problem Bill Cumpsty encounters. He says "often women come in with another problem and begin talking about battering. We know abuse can take a lot of forms."

In these sort of cases legal services tells women how they can protect themselves legally. Clinic workers tell them what alternatives are open to them if they decide to leave home or wish to see a counselor. They are sometimes preferred to other agencies in the area.

Another major focus of legal service work is preventative law. It aims to solve the problems before they occur. "The philosophy of preventative law is very important because we handle so many cases that repeat themselves. We welcome efforts by people to deal with problems in their own way," says Mr. Cumpsty.

One aspect of preventative law involves working with tenants so that landlord-tenant disputes can be talked over and settled out of court. Community legal education work is very important and clinic workers speak to high

school students, service groups and union locals. They also deal with people who have problems with consumer and immigration matters, mother allowances and juvenile delinquency.

"In effect, what we are really doing is dealing with people first," Mr. Cumpsty says.

"... people who have traditionally been deprived of legal service due to a lack of ability to pay. A lot of their problems are serious but are not covered under the legal aid plan."

The clinic gets calls for assistance from all over the area, Georgetown, Acton, Milton, even Brampton. Often they are from people who have no one to turn to and they require help.

"It is a good learning experience, something I would not want to miss," he says. "I believe, we the staff, duty counsellors, members of the board are providing a real service in the community. The proof of this is in the many people who call and tell us just

how much the clinic has helped them and they are very appreciative."

Mr. Cumpsty says the clinic has more than doubled its case load since the Georgetown office moved into its quarters on Main Street in April. Originally the clinic operated out of a room in St. John's United Church on Guelph Street. Most of the clients find out about the clinic from other people, either by referrals from a lawyer or social agency, or through friends who know about the clinic.

Family and domestic problems bring in the biggest percentage of their clients, Mr. Cumpsty says. In these situations they have one advantage over lawyers in that they do family counselling or make referrals to counsellors if it seems necessary. The lawyers only handle the problem when it reaches a terminal nature like a divorce while the clinic can treat the problems and perhaps avert a final breakdown.

Many people come to the

clinic just to find out their rights and then proceed to discuss their problem with a lawyer of their choosing. There is no doubt that the clinic is doing local lawyers good, Mr. Cumpsty says.

Although there are only four

lawyers, two in each town, who are duty counsel for the clinic, they have all given excellent co-operation to the clinic staff, Mr. Cumpsty says.

"We are funded from year to year," he says, "but I've no doubts we're here to stay"



Marie McNulty, Carol Joynes, Heidi Cameron and Margaret Shaw are busy working on the report which will go to the steering committee for the proposed Women's hostel on Aug. 24.

Wife abuse report ready by Aug. 25

A preliminary report on the amount of wife abuse in Halton should be ready for the steering committee for the proposed women's hostel Aug. 25.

Four students hired by the steering committee to gather data which would prove whether a need for a hostel exists have finished their survey and are now waiting for statistics to come in from the people they have interviewed.

Margaret Shaw, chairman of the fact-finding group, says that getting the statistics they need isn't as straightforward as might be expected.

"In most cases there isn't a category for abuse," she says, "so statistics weren't kept in that way. Now various agencies are going back through their files getting the information we need."

The girls, Marie McNulty, Norval, Carol Joynes, Cheltenham; Heidi Cameron, Oakville; and Mrs. Shaw, Burling-

ton, have interviewed members of Halton regional police, the Children's Aid Society, the Salvation Army, the Red Cross family court and family counselling services, samplings of doctors, lawyers and clergymen, and contact centres in each area.

They have also talked to counsellors and the mayors of Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville and received a letter of support from Burlington May-

or Mary Munro.

Although they can make no guesses at what the statistics will prove when they get them, the girls say they have had co-operation from all the people they interviewed.

"Of course, we've only been asking for facts and figures," Mrs. Shaw says. "We aren't asking them for any money". The final report is due Sept. 8.

Coons knocks police secrecy

The Halton police commission is conducting too much business away from the public eye, commissioner David Coons told members of the commission Thursday.

Mr. Coons, a Burlington regional councillor, said too much of the commission's business is being conducted in camera, and more of the business should be conducted in the open portion of the meeting.

The only items Mr. Coons said should be discussed in camera are those dealing with personnel and legal matters such as land acquisition. He went on to list ten items on the confidential agenda by number, which he said he believed should be discussed in public. He said he would be willing to hear from police administrator Ray Munro or acting police chief Fred Oliver as to why certain items should be kept in camera.

"The public should be kept informed as much as possible," Mr. Coons said. "I guess what I'd like to see is as much business as possible conducted in the open."

The commission went over each of the ten items Mr. Coons listed, and decided which would be dealt with in the public part of the meeting. Five of the ten items listed were eventually discussed in the open part of the meeting.

"I think it would be in the interest of the public to know as much as possible of what happens here every Thursday," Mr. Coons said.

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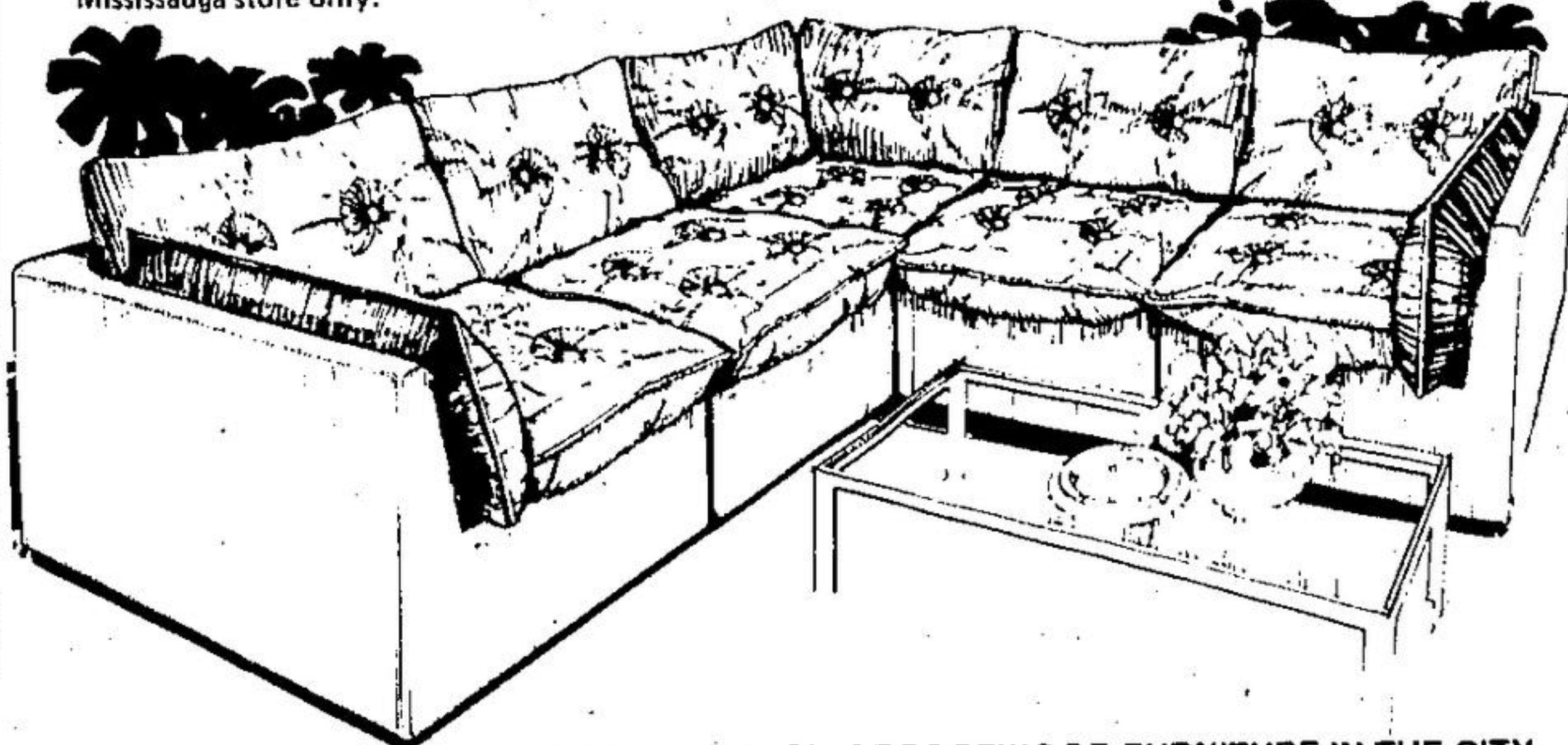
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