

DAIRY PRINCESS

.flalton Dairy Princess Marie Murray attended last week's Georgetown Chamber of Commerce meeting. Above, she is welcomed by chamber president George Gray. (Herald photo)

Will reconsider purchase of family services

Serious financial and personnel problems anticipated by Halton region's private family counselling services have prompted the regional health and social services committee to reconsider its recent decision to reduce its own counselling staff.

Regional council, last Wednesday, heard the first of three scheduled presentations by officials of the Oakville and Burlington private agencies before conceding that the matter warranted review and referring it back to the health committee.

Judge James Fuller delivered "a most earnest plea" to council asking members to have the committee reconsider its decisions of last month whereby regional counselling staff will be reduced from three social workers to one and the region's ultimate decision as to the purchasing of counselling services from the private agencies was postponed for one year.

INCREASED WORK

Officials of Burlington's Council on Human Relations (COHR) and the Oakville Family Service Bureau had been critical of the committee's decisions, claiming that the recommended action may force the private agencies to turn away some applicants for counselling because of the increased workload spilling over from the region's partial withdrawal of services. The committee's decision to delay further consideration of a proposal to purchase the services of private agencies for at least a year, they added, will leave the agencies to cover additional costs stemming from the extra caseload.

Both the Burlington and Oakville agencies are already in financial trouble because of cutbacks in government funding, a factor that has forced them to lay off some staff members.

Karen Hill and Judy Barrett of the two agencies were on hand at last week's council meeting to elaborate on some of the points made in a brief submitted by the Burlington Social Planning Council, Their presentations were not heard, however, since council decided to have the issue reviewed following Judge Fuller's ap-

The brief states that the planning council was "shocked to learn" of the health committee's recommendation, which, it says, would have "devastating consequences for those in need of the services." The brief predicted an increase in regional expenditures if the long-standing "tradition" of county and regional government providing the service is to be abandoned.

LISTS REASONS

Listing reasons why the region should maintain its involvement in family services, the brief points out that "neurosis" is the fourth most frequent reason for hospitalization in Halton, compared to its 12th place ranking on a provincewide scale; the divorce rate has jumped 250 per cent between 1961 and 1971; six per cent of all Halton families in 1975 - a total of 4,000 families were led by a single parent; the preliminary results of an

ongoing survey of Halton medical people indicates that 600 clients a year are being referred to the private and regional counselling services.

If the region's service is discontinued, the brief noted. the additional instances of family breakdown will create an increase in the welfare assistance caseload, an increase in costs to the Children's Aid Society, an increase in applications for day care and an increase in hospitalization rates to members of the commun-

Judge Fuller focused his presentation on the problems that may be created by the region's withdrawal of a parttime conciliator who attends twice-weekly sessions of family court. Halton, he said, is one of several region's that have begun applying the conciliation process, a successful remedy in many labor disputes to the legal aspects of domestic

"Everyone involved agrees it's a good thing," Judge Fuller told council. "It's an invaluable service."

The family court judge explained that conciliated negotiations provide a worthwhite alternative to the person who the court decides to blame, The terms of a settlement are thus not dictated by the court, but open to discussion between the conflicting parties.

BREAKING DOWN

Judge Fuller reported that 70 per cent of Halton couples whose marriages are breaking down are amendable to the conciliation process. The other 30 per cent, he added, are simply intent upon "getting their day in court." The trauma faced by children caught up in such court confrontations however, is responsible for many of them returning to court some day facing criminal charges of their own, he

Judge Fuller estimated that "several hours of court time each week" are saved by the presence and participation of the region's conciliator. The conciliator "more than pays for himself," he said.

The motion to have the question of the region's involvement in family counselling reviewed by the health committee came from committee chairman Waller Mulkewich.

Regional officials estimated that Halton's family counsellors would be taking on some 373 new cases this year, while COHR is anticipating 345 new cases and the Oakville bureau another 300.

OAKVILLE'S BID

COHR has offered to provide counselling services to the residents of south Halton for a maximum of \$38,000, whereas Oakville's bid is \$24,000. The provision of the same service to north Halton would increase costs but are open, as are the offers, to negotiation.

The region currently plans to make its remaining full-time counsellor responsible for providing the service in Georgetown and Acton.

The Oakville Family Services Bureau is funded primarily by the Oakville United Way, with the balance coming from client fees. COHR obtains its fund from the city of Burlinglon and last year successfully appealed to the Hamilton United Church Block Grant Fund for \$3,000 to cover increased

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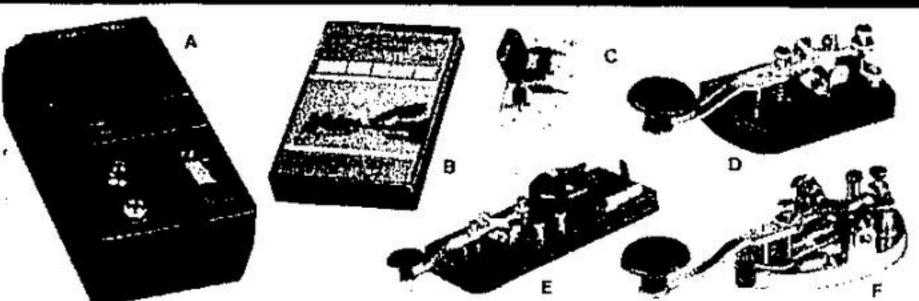
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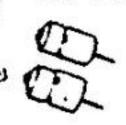
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