

# Handicapped kids thrive on the love found in a family

From the Halton Children's Aid Society

Growing up as an only child in Holland, Arina Dunnink vowed that one day her own home would resound with the laughter and chatter of at least a dozen youngsters.

At the time, she assumed the children would all be her own - all in perfect health, achieving the usual developmental milestones around the time indicated in the baby book and going on to lead normal lives.

Never in her wildest dreams did the young Arina envision herself sharing a home in faraway Canada with three multi-handicapped children through government-sponsored foster parent programs. Yet today, Arina runs a loving household in Halton with not just three "special needs" kids, but two adopted daughters, who "normal" foster children and two adult children of her own. It's not quite "Cheaper By The Dozen," but when you consider Arina and husband, Herman, have fostered 56 children since they first linked up with the Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS) in 1972, most would agree this couple qualifies for citations in the extraordinary department!

Among those who wish there were more Dunninks in the world is Sharon Hatter, co-ordinator of the Halton Home Care and Halton Shared Care Programs for handicapped children. Ms. Hatter is searching for families within Halton Region who are willing to care for

physically, and/or mentally handicapped children on a full- or part-time basis.

Unfortunately, laments Ms. Hatter, many couples are hesitant to open their doors to these children because they fear the responsibilities will be too great. The alternative to finding homes for many of these children is to place them in institutional settings, something Ms. Hatter looks upon as a last resort. "Handicapped kids, like all kids, thrive on the kind of love and individual attention that is best provided in a family setting. The kids in the Halton Home Care and Halton Shared Care programs are kids who want to be part of a family, and who, in fact, can make a positive addition to the right household."

Indeed, if you talk to Arina Dunnink, she will tell you caring for han-

dicapped children is far more rewarding than caring for so-called normal or ordinary kids. "I realize looking after handicapped children isn't everybody's cup of tea, just as working in the bank isn't everybody's cup of tea. But it's been my experience that the rewards of this job are unequalled. The feelings of satisfaction and joy you get when one of these children makes some progress, reaching a goal that might be small by other people's standards, is very hard to describe..."

"...But my husband and our children will tell you how very special and wonderful it is each time one of these kids accomplishes something new. It's always a cause for celebration!"

Although only one of the three handicapped children residing with the

Dunninks is sponsored through the Halton Home Care program (the other two were placed with the family before HHC came into existence), Arina believes the challenges and rewards involved in their care to be typical of other children in Sharon Hatter's specialized foster care programs. The big difference, says Arina, is that the first two children were CAS wards while the Halton Home Care child's mother requested that the agency provide her with some relief from the stresses of parenting a multi-handicapped child. This mother still visits and retains legal guardianship of her youngster.

The first handicapped child to be placed with the Dunninks was a blind nine-month-old victim of cerebral palsy, whose chances of im-

proving were considered remote at the time of his placement nearly 20 years ago. "A specialist told us he would never be more than a 'vegetable,'" recalls Arina, proudly adding the young man is now mobile and able to perform many tasks, with assistance.

The second handicapped child to be taken in as family by Arina and Herman was a 10-year-old blind girl with slight physical handicaps. The girl is now a teen, who is learning how to become independent.

The Halton Home Care child arrived at the Dunnink residence three years ago at age three, exhibiting some minor physical disabilities and behavioral challenges. Because he doesn't yet have full bladder control and has difficulty feeding himself, Arina walks over to the school each

day at noon to assist with his special needs.

She is encouraged by the progress he's shown during the last three years. He feels very much a part of the Dunnink family and is becoming more and more eager to participate in activities with other children in the household.

Arina is the first to admit caring for handicapped children isn't always easy. "I'm only human and there are days I need time alone, too," she admits. "The agency does provide parental relief services for foster parents like me - but I'm not the type who wants a stranger coming in and taking over my house..."

"So if I feel the pressure starting to build, I just tell everyone 'You'll have to excuse me for a moment while I take some time out. I'll be in my room for a few minutes with a cup of coffee, and when I come out, we'll all feel better.' I'm very lucky that I get a lot of support from my husband and our grown children, who still live here at home."

How does Arina know her own children don't resent the attention and affection she showers upon the other youngsters in her care?

"I know because they have told me they want to be foster parents one day themselves. They can't imagine a family being any other way!"

## Sometimes parents just need a bit of a break

Many parents are at the end of their rope following a routine day with a "normal" child. Annoying little habits, boisterous play and sibling bickering have a way of fraying the nerves of even the most dedicated, loving caregivers.

Bearing this in mind, it's not really hard to understand why patience is wearing thin around the home of Lizzie, a young Halton girl with severe behavioral problems - including fits of kicking, screaming and biting. At other times, Lizzie withdraws and remains mute for lengthy periods. This is despite the fact she has a reasonable vocabulary and is capable of speaking in simple sentences.

"When Lizzie's behavior is under control, she is a very lovable girl," says her mother, who has appealed to the Halton Home Care fostering program for relief from the sometimes overwhelming task of caring for the eldest of her three children. The mother explains that Lizzie's two younger siblings frequently feel neglected and stressed because of the amount of time and energy family members must devote to Lizzie's special needs.

"We desperately need a rest after so many years," says Lizzie's mom, almost apologetically. The burden, she explains, becomes heavier and heavier as she and her husband grow older. "We need another family to open their doors to Lizzie and make her feel at home..."

Lizzie currently attends trainable mentally handicapped classes each weekday in Burlington, and obtains further assistance from a Special Needs Worker who visits her home regularly. The little girl thrives on a strict routine, loves music and enjoys romping in wide open spaces.

For further information, contact Sharon Hatter, Coordinator of Halton Home Care, at 844-8211, 878-2175 or 335-5757.

# Adoption benefits available through UIC

Maternity and paternity benefits are not the only benefits available to those whose families are growing. The unemployment insurance system also offers Adoption Benefits to those who are adopting a child. These benefits are similar to maternity benefits, but there are differences as well.

To begin with, there are two important points to remember when making a claim for adoption benefits. First, in order to be eligible, you must prove that the adoption is a legal one, adhering to provincial legislation. Secondly, you must show that it is reasonable for you to remain at home because of the adoption.

Adoption benefits are also unusual, in that either the adopting mother or father may claim benefits. But only one parent can

## UIC AND YOU

By COLLEEN ROBINSON

make a claim. Once the claim has begun, no changes can be made. And if you are adopting more than one child at the same time, it is only possible to make one claim for benefits.

When it has been decided which parent will remain at home with the child, certain eligibility criteria must be met in order to establish the claim. The parent involved must

have worked in insurable employment for at least 20 weeks in the last 52. As well, they must experience an interruption of earnings (that is, they have stopped working, and stopped receiving wages, or they have a reduction in their insurable earnings of more than 40 per cent).

When you make a claim, you will have to complete an application for benefits, a supplementary application for adoption benefits, and you will be required to supply a letter from the agency involved, to prove that a child has been placed in your home.

Again, it is important to emphasize that these benefits are not automatic. You must apply for them as soon as you finish working. If you are able to establish a claim, the benefits available are the same as for maternity and paternity. First, you must serve a two-week waiting period, for which no benefits are payable, and then you will receive 15 weeks of benefits, at a rate of 60 per cent of your normal insurable earnings.

Unlike maternity benefits, adoption benefits are not payable prior to the placement of the child in your home. The claim begins no earlier than the actual date of placement.

As we have pointed out before, there are always exceptional circumstances, so if you are planning to make a claim for adoption

benefits, get in touch with your local Canada Employment Centre. We'll be glad to answer your questions. Remember, we're here to help!

## Home care need increases

Citizens are turning to Halton Region's home care program now, more than ever before.

Demand for home care increased by just over 10 per cent between April and September this year over the same six months last year, a report by Halton's medical officer of health, Dr. Graham Pollett says.

More than 9,700 people benefitted from the Region's home care program in that six-month period.

The home care program, which is entirely funded by the Ministry of Health, provides nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech language therapy and a host of support services including homemaking, meals-on-

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Applications are available between Monday, Nov. 21st, and Monday, Dec. 5th, 1988.

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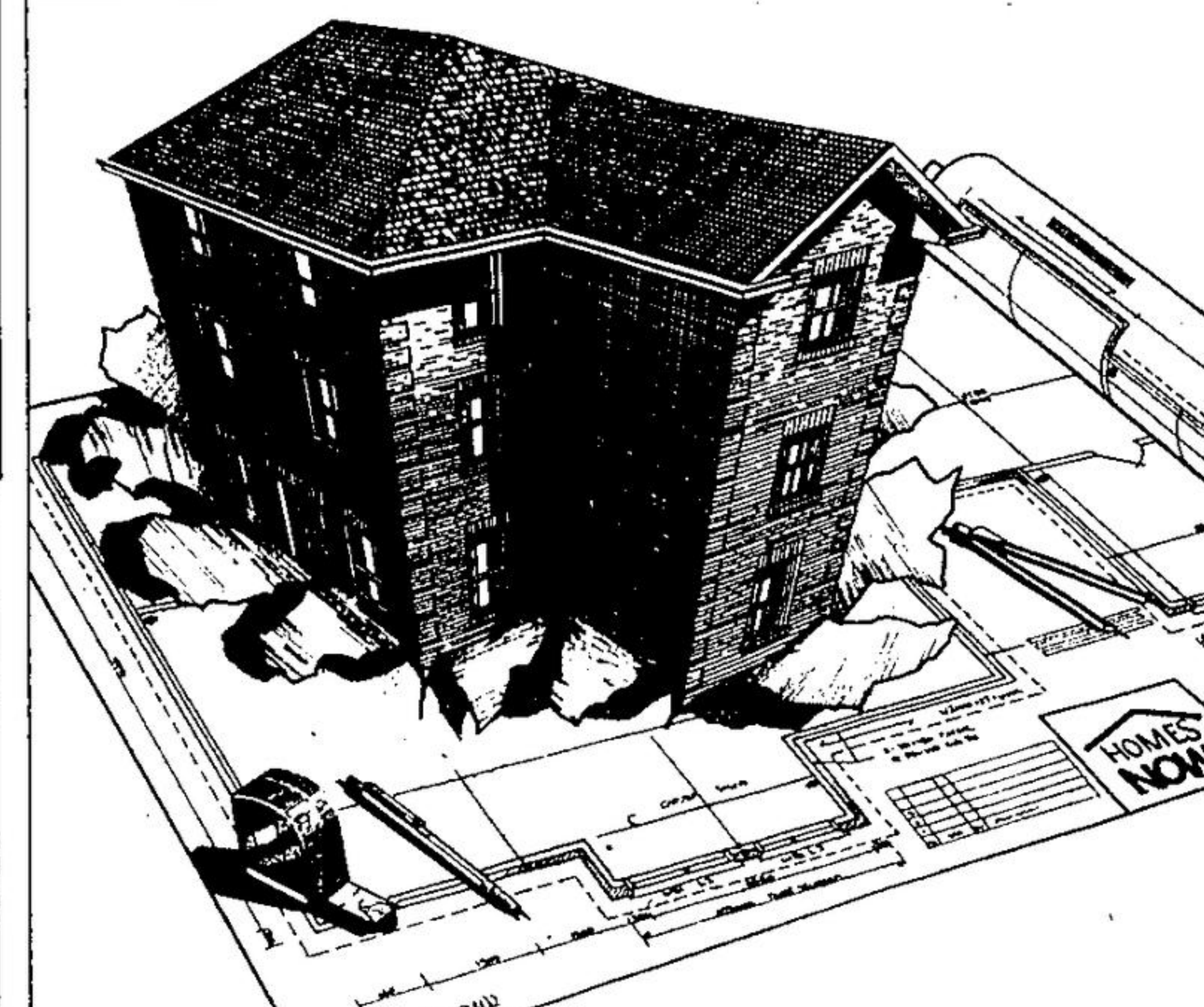
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Pat and Bob Craig moved to Georgetown recently from Toronto, with their children Stacey, 8, and Lindsay, 4. Mr. Craig is Fleet Administrator for Lease Master in Toronto, and Mrs. Craig works for Canada Packers Food Service in Brampton. A very warm welcome to Halton Hills.

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