Features

Lack of foster parents in Georgetown a mystery

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT The Herald

For some unexplicable reason, Georgetown has traditionally provided few foster homes for needy children, said Halton Children's Aid Society Foster Care Worker, Kim Elliott.

"Traditionally, Georgetown has always been a difficult area to recruit foster parents and that hasn't seemed to change," said Ms. Elliott. "We do a lot of advertising here but we just don't get the response."

She doesn't have any idea why, but she's becoming more and more concerned that children in need of foster care in Georgetown have no safe place to go in their

In the playground at Cedarvale

Park in Georgetown, the kids

playfully splash each other and

chase after the frogs in the water.

It's this idyllic scene Hazel Ling

rarely sees in her dealings with

children as a front-line worker

with the Halton Children's Aid

Many of the children she sees

don't tease each other, they

brutalize each other, and they

don't play with animals, they tor-

"Our cases are getting more

and more complex," she said. "I

'only deal with kids 11-years and

under but they seem to be ex-

periencing the problems and dif-

ficulties we used to see only in

Along with children who exhibit

bizarre behavior like hurting

animals, hurting themselves and

eating their own feces, she also

sees young children who are men-

It's her job to investigate why

these children exhibit such

behavior and determine if they

should be removed from their

family home as a safety measure

"Our mandate is to protect the

child," said Ms. Ling. "So the

first person I talk to is the child

and I explain that my job is to go

around and talk to people who

The person who reported the

alleged abuse, relatives, parents

and siblings of the child are also

interviewed and if all the

evidence indicates the child may

be being abused within the fami-

ly, she'll take the case to a family

court judge and explain why,

under the provincial Child, and

Family Services Act, the child

tally depressed and suicidal.

for all involved.

have been hurt."

ture them, said Ms. Ling.

Society (CAS).

teenagers."

own community.

"When a child has to leave their own family, that's very difficult," said Ms. Elliott. "When they have to leave their own community, it makes it even harder for the foster child."

Unfortunately, most foster children from Georgetown are taken away from everything familiar to them and moved to foster homes in Milton, Oakville and Burlington because there are only three foster homes in Georgetown, she explained.

All three of the homes are either for babies or young children so when an adolescent needs a home, the person has no chance of staying in Georgetown.

Acton, which is a significantly smaller community than Georgetown has four foster homes which will take any aged child. In all of Halton there are 81 foster homes.

Despite the difficulty she faces recruiting new foster parents in Georgetown, Ms. Elliott keeps trying.

"I believe the foster care system can benefit both the kids and their foster parents," she said. "By looking after these kids, foster parents are con-

tributing to their community." She doesn't deny there are easier ways people can benefit their community.

"When you decide to be a foster parent, your own needs have to

be secondary to the childs needs," she said. As well, being a foster parent can often be emotionally trying, especially when after years of giving to the child, the child returns to its natural parents, said Ms. Elliott.

That's why separation and loss. training is a big part of the orientation C.A.S. workers give new foster parents, she said.

"If you've put your heart and soul into a child, it's very hard for many people to see them go," she said. "Sometimes, the foster parents will never get a chance to see the child again if the child's legal guardians refuse to allow visitation."

It helps, she said, if parents

remember foster care is a temporary arrangement.

"We aim to try and keep the family together," said Ms. Elliott. "We see foster care as a temporary arrangement while the family works out their problems. We don't advise people to become foster parents if they hope to keep a child permanently because that rarely happens. Everything is done to get the child back with its biological parents."

Before a couple can become foster parents, they must take a six-night training course where C.A.S. workers interview parents and question their parenting and discipline techniques.

Parents are asked to provide a medical and financial statement, references and are given a police check.

When a couple is approved, they can decide if they want a boy or girl, how many children (between one and four) they can handle, the age range of the child(ren) and the types of behavior they feel they can deal with.

When a child is placed with the couple, they are told how long to expect the child to stay at their home, whether it be a few days or a year, said Ms. Elliott.

While taking care of a child, the foster parents receive \$18.05 per day and are reimbursed medical and dental expenses.

"People shouldn't become foster parents for money. Hopefully, the perdiem rate pays for things like extra food and laundry expenses," said Ms. Elliott.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Halton Children's Aid Society and how to become a foster parent can contact Kim Elliott at 878-2375 or 844-8211.

Simon Fraser

CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT



A young boy looks forward to the future when he can safely return home while in care of foster parents. (Photo submitted)

Abused children need help AID

As a family service worker who's job it is to conduct investigations into reports of "Our main goal is to keep the physical and sexual abuse child with the family because it against children for the Halton can be a lot more traumatic to CAS, she's seen the results of move the child from the home in what abuse can do to these some circumstances," she said. children and admits they present "But if I've investigated, I'm the a greater challenge to the CAS one who gets in trouble if that than in the past.

child is abused again." Most of the children in CAS care are put into foster homes and Ms. Ling admits that when prospective foster parents hear how some children behave, they have second thoughts.

But Ms. Ling said many of these disturbed children turn right around when in the care of a stable family.

"Not all these children are horrible monsters," she said. "Many just need the stability, structure and consistency of a loving family and then they'll begin to behave like other children."

She also stressed that foster parents aren't required to accept children with behavior problems if they feel they couldn't cope. As well, the CAS offers extra training courses for parents who decide to accept a disturbed child into their home.

The few children who have severe problems are placed in a group home, the closest one to North-Halton being Burlington's Woodview.

The number of children coming linto care has drastically increas-'ed over last year.

Shockingly, over ten times

more children were removed from unsafe homes this year over last, from four to 56. By the end of May this year, the CAS had 142 children in care compared to only 124 in all of 1990.

Why are some children's problems so severe?

Why the incredible increase in CAS caseload?

"It could be a number of things," said Ms. Ling. "They could be emulating violence on television, they (children) could be more aware of their rights, or it could be that children are no longer disciplined."

Personally, Ms. Ling things some parents are ill-prepared to cope with their kids, and that's why some kids get out of control.

"Some people don't give much thought to having kids and how to discipline them," she said.

Ms. Ling's co-worker at the Halton CAS, Kim Elliott, a Foster Care Worker, believes the lack of family togetherness plays a role in creating family problems.



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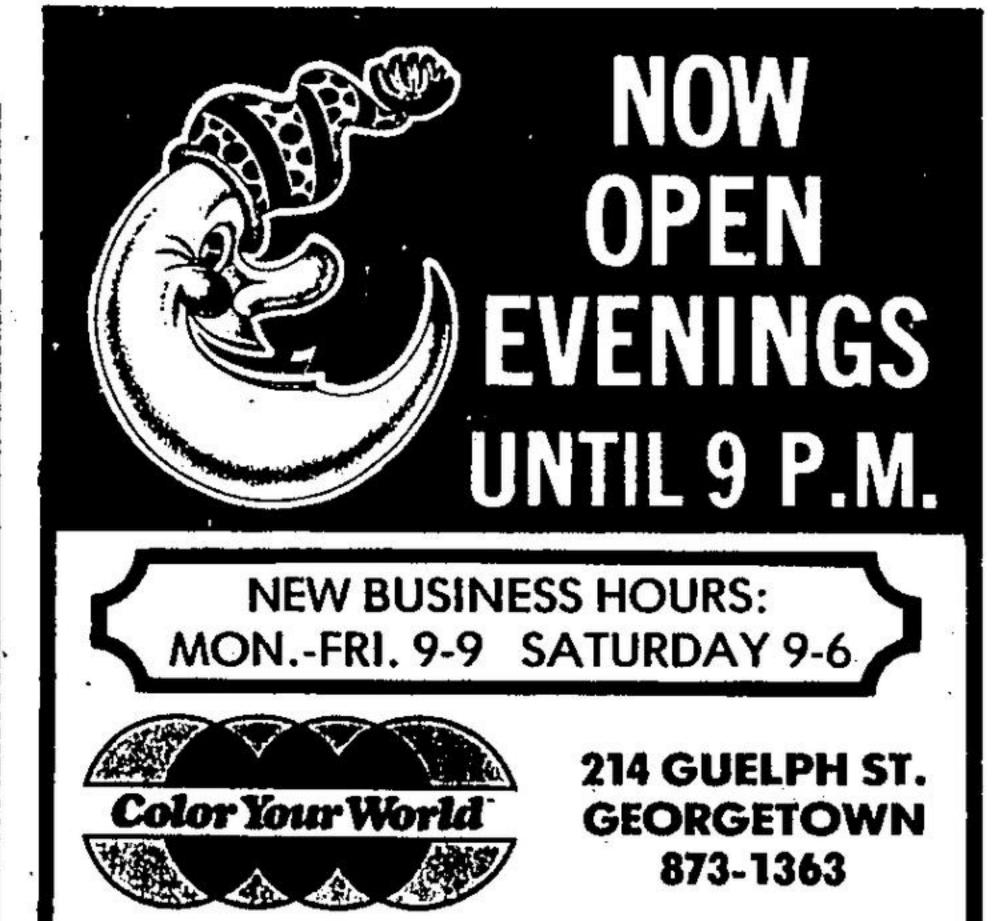
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