

Editorial..... 6  
 Sports ..... 12  
 Calendar ..... 13  
 Classified..... 14, 15  
 Directory... Health 6



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**PAGE 5**



**HEALTH CARE**

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**8-PAGE SECTION**

# THE INDEPENDENT

Halton Hills' award-winning newspaper

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*Pad opens with a splash*

Sean Wells, 11, of Acton was one of the first into the fray as the water was turned on at the official opening of the Acton Splash Pad in Prospect Park Monday. The splash pad, constructed with major donations from Superior Glove and Dufferin Aggregates, was built on the site of the old Acton wading pool.

Photo by Ted Brown

## Health committee told of poverty's hardships

By **DENNIS SMITH**  
*Special to the IFP*

Halton residents are Canada's third-highest income earners, but that's cold comfort for those struggling to make ends meet.

"Poverty affects more and more people every day. No one is above it and no one is immune to it," Chrystal Orvis told Halton's Health and Social Services Committee recently.

Orvis was among 15 local witnesses whose poverty experiences were recorded recently at Halton Social Audit hearings in Georgetown and Oakville.

Choking up occasionally, she recapped some experiences before the committee, which received a staff information report about poverty in Halton and initiatives to combat it. The report noted 6.5 per cent of Halton households are considered low income.

"My family and I live in poverty and there was a desire and need to be heard," said the Halton Hills resident. "It was a unique and tremendous experience."

Orvis said many people ignore poverty, but they could be next to experience it.

"It's not exactly the life I imagined for my children, but every day we learn never to take anything for granted," she said.

Orvis has experienced unemployment for a couple of years and feels socially excluded from the community in many aspects.

"Transportation is a constant issue. A 'quick trip to the grocery store' can take days," she said.

Orvis said since her children switched to middle school they could not participate in

the extracurricular activities.

"New clothes and day trips are not happening," she said, adding her family remains hopeful.

The audit day was not just about poverty rates, said Colleen Sym, executive director of Halton Community Legal Service.

"There's a gap between social assistance and what's needed to survive," she said. "The day was about how Halton can do better."

The legal service organization led organizing of the social audit on behalf of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC).

The audit provides social assessment of government policy's impact on groups, and aims to find trends, themes and opportunities for intervention.

Poverty witnesses told stories of facing eviction, living in substandard accommodation, being ill and unable to work and facing a system that turned away from them, said Sym.

"We heard of a need for streamlining of administration," she said. "There was the complaint that they had to tell their story too often. We need to enhance services region-wide."

Milton Councillor Colin Best said social agencies often operate separately.

"There are a host of organizations and most people are not aware how to access them," said the Milton councillor. "There are conflicting goals and targets and they just hear part of the problem."

Rick Goldring noted the poverty issue has been going on forever.

"It seems to me we're not making real

**See PAIN, pg. 3**

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