

CATC — a future for kids with mental disorders

By KAREN SMITH

When Anne's four-year-old son was terrorizing the neighborhood, people, including doctors, said she and her husband were bad parents.

And for years, the Milton couple believed it. "They put it back on us saying it was our parenting," she says. "I went through a lot of guilt for a lot of years."

Finally after Anne, 39, took William (not their real names) to see doctors at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, the boy was diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder (A.D.D.).

The chemical imbalance explained William's wild behavior, lack of concentration, and why he would never listen to discipline.

William, now nine years old, is not alone. One in five children between the ages of four and 16 years in Ontario experience a serious psychiatric disorder.

Two years ago, Anne and her husband decided they could no longer handle William on their own. Medication controls the condition, but many problems still exist.

The pressure was coming between the couple. That is where the Children's Assessment and Treatment Centre (CATC) came in.

"Without CATC, our family probably would have fallen apart," recalls Anne.

Serving children (aged two to 17 years) suffering from emotional problems, CATC provided therapy to get the family back on track.

Established in 1974, the organization is based in Burlington, but also has offices in Milton, Oakville and Georgetown.

Anne and her husband also attend a parenting class offered by CATC, and William receives individual therapy.

William currently attends Grade 3 at Our Lady of Victory School, which also works closely with CATC to help children suffering from psychiatric disorders in the classroom.

Programs available to change or eliminate a child's problem include both group and family therapy.

Among group topics offered to children and parents are separation and adjustment, victims of sexual abuse, social skills, and single mothers.

When dealing with particularly difficult families, CATC con-



The Children's Assessment and Treatment Centre (CATC) was recently recognized for its excellent work in the community. The organization was honored by the Ontario Association of Children's Mental Health Centres (OACMHC) through the Accreditation Program. Celebrating from left, are M.

Douglas Brown, CATC executive director; Eric Balkind, chairman of the board for CATC; Alex Thomson; Shella Weinstock, OACMHC executive director; and Arnold Love, manager of the OACMHC Accreditation Program.

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ducts a technique where two or three senior family therapists observe the family through a one-way window while a fourth therapist conducts counselling with the family in the therapy room. Suggestions are telephoned into the room when necessary.

The Ontario Association of Children's Mental Health Centres (OACMHC) has recognized CATC's efforts as well.

Earlier this month CATC was honored by OACMHC during an accreditation ceremony.

The Accreditation Program was set up three years ago to encourage the development and implementation of high-quality services for children and their families.

The program is voluntary, independent of government agencies, and organized and administered by children's mental health professionals from across the province, says Fran Caron of CATC.

"The accreditation process

begins with an intensive self-study," she explains. "This usually takes one year to complete, and is followed by a site review carried out by a team of children's mental health experts."

CATC became the sixth children's mental health centre to receive the award.

As CATC expands to help more children and their families, the organization is outgrowing itself. About 900 children took advantage of programs last year.

CATC is currently seeking donations from the Halton community to construct a much-needed building for its central administration offices and clinical team.

The new facility will allow staff to operate specialized programs for groups of children sharing the same difficulties. Construction is slated to begin this fall.

Ron Coupland, executive director of the Halton Children's Aid Society, urges the community to support CATC.

"CATC is a vital service in meeting these needs and in reducing the suffering of children and ensuring that their future is mentally healthy," he adds. "Clearly, the community must get behind CATC."

For more information, or to make a donation, call Fran Caron at 634-2347.

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