

Women's shelter apologizes for contentious ad

By ROB KELLY

Special to the Independent/Free Press

A classified ad worth at most a few hundred dollars may yet cost Halton Women's Place the opportunity of running a new \$500,000 shelter for abused women.

Thursday night representatives from the Halton Women's Place board met with Halton regional Rotary Club executives in order to explain, and apologize for, classified advertising in the help wanted section of various newspapers. The fear among the women's shelter directors is that Rotary may renege, wholly or in part, on a \$500,000 commitment to fund con-

struction of a new women's refuge in Burlington, or at least to fund it if Halton Women's Place runs the facility.

The ad, soliciting a child care worker, said in part that "applications are particularly encouraged from lesbians, racial minorities, aboriginal and francophone women."

Since then "there has been a rampant, growing groundswell of indignation and revolt," said Burlington regional councillor Doug Greenaway, himself a Rotarian, Monday.

Speaking at the regional health and social services committee meeting, to which Halton Women's

Place directors had in essence been summoned to explain themselves, Greenaway said, "the person or persons responsible for putting in this ad should resign."

Three Halton Women's Place executives were present to face Greenaway's displeasure — executive director Teresa Greer, board of directors co-chair JoAnn Miller-Reid and board member Susan Lawson. They refused to pressure the employee in question, whose name they would not divulge, to resign.

That was, however, the extent to which the three publicly disagreed with committee members. For the most part they apologized and

offered assurances that a similar episode would not occur again.

Currently Halton Women's Place operates out of a converted Victorian home in Milton. It is consistently overcrowded, and difficult for women in south Halton to reach.

Halton Region purchases social services for women in need from Halton Women's Place. Councillor Greenaway said he "had a lot of calls suggesting that we purchase services from an organization with a little more community consciousness," such as the Salvation Army.

Greenaway added that "the community is severely questioning (Halton Women's Place's) ability to understand the community perspective." There has been "major damage to the public perception of this agency."

Greenaway also said the shelter's board of directors is "out of touch" because it is comprised of 15 women and only one man. Lawson

said the board would welcome more men, but few apply.

Halton Hills Mayor Russ Miller asked what prompted such an ad in the first place.

Shelter staff "are under pressure from a lot of different groups," Lawson said. "Staff have to be sensitive to every group in the community." But the ad was "a regrettable mistake" and a "misguided attempt" to express that sensitivity.

In balking at Greenaway's request for a resignation, Miller-Reid said an "error in judgement does not provide just cause for dismissal." Employees are "very much aware of the fact that this is a major error in judgement," she added.

Miller stressed that, for 12 years, Halton Women's Place has provided help for abused women and their children in "a professional, non-judgemental manner, in a safe, caring, supportive environment."

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