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placed faster than single, non-senior individuals and couples due to applicant volumes and available rental stock," he said. "One bedroom units for single individuals and couples under the age of 65 continue to be in high demand."

The lack of available, affordable rentals for adults living on their own is something that Milton resident Joanne (not her real name) can attest to firsthand.

The local woman, who was earning minimum wage and struggling to afford a roof over her head, entered the Milton Transitional Housing (MTH) program two years ago.

The organization has 10 subsidized units in Halton that are offered to individuals and families in crisis for a two-year period. MTH executive director Donna Danielli explained the housing is paired with concentrated case management support to ensure cli-

ents leave the program with the tools needed to succeed on their own.

And while Joanne's two years is up, with the program helping her secure a permanent subsidy that she can take with her, she's continuing to live in an MTH unit out of necessity.

"There's not a lot out there," she said. "I'm looking for something around \$1,800 that would include some utilities, but people are asking for \$1,900 to \$2,000 and that often includes nothing. It's just really a challenge."

When those rare affordable units do come up, Joanne said it's essentially a hopeless race for the many residents clamouring to secure it.

"People can't wait to get the affordable places, but I'm also busy working, and by the time I call, they're often gone."

The pandemic has only exacerbated the situation, with Halton reporting a steady uptick in applicants



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requesting rent-geared-to-income housing since COVID-19 emerged locally in March 2020.

At the same time, Balahura said fewer social housing residents are moving out of their units due to provincially mandated lockdowns.

Halton manages 3,902 community housing units, with rent-geared-to-income support provided for 3,110 of those households.

"Demand remains high, primarily due to unaffordability in the private marketplace in Halton broadly," said Balahura. "Halton Region saw a seven per cent average increase in rental costs in 2020 alone. In fact, Halton Region has now surpassed Toronto for the highest rents in Ontario."

While expensive rental



PART 2 EXAMINES

the rising cost of rental in throughout the region.

costs have always been a hurdle for those leaving MTH's program, Danielli said it's definitely been more challenging since the pandemic began.

"We're holding onto clients longer than we normally would have as we try to find the right placement for them going forward," she said. "We do have a 100 per cent success rate; all of our graduates have gone on to long-term, sustainable housing. But it hasn't been easy this past year and a half."

On a positive note, Danielli said Halton has been "moving heaven and earth" to find units to subsidize for people in need, with the municipality also bringing all relevant community agencies together in a leadership group to collectively address local residents'

housing needs.

Balahura said Halton is continuing to create new assisted housing, with 913 new units coming on board between 2014 and 2020 — a number that exceeded the Region's target and is projected to grow to 972 by the end of the year.

Halton has also established new programs to help those on the wait list, such as a rent supplement program that houses people in private market units, with funding flowed from the Region to landlords, and a portable housing benefit, where Halton provides a subsidy directly to qualified residents to help them afford rent in their current unit.

But more can and will be done to support local residents, emphasized Balahura.

"Housing is a shared responsibility. All levels of government must do their part," he said. "Halton Region continues to advocate to the provincial and feder-

al governments for targeted, multi-year funding to address our region's housing affordability challenges."

The team effort sentiment was echoed by Ted Hildebrandt, director of social planning for Community Development Halton, who also suggested a greater use of safe secondary suites could be encouraged to help address the issue.

"We're also not seeing much purpose-built rental housing happening in our community. That becomes a real challenge," he said, adding that as Halton's population ages, the need for accessible rental housing will grow as well.

At the root of the issue, Danielli said the very definition of affordable housing needs to be examined.

"Most people say affordable housing is 80 per cent of market rent. But if you're on Ontario Works and you're getting a \$500 shelter portion, you're not going to be able to rent anything."

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