

Halton Work Programme looking for contracts

By Wendy Long

Business is slow at the Halton Work Programme in Acton.

For its 22 employees, that means a disruption in learned employment skills and life management.

The Halton Work Programme, with workshops in Acton, Burlington and Oakville, "assists in the rehabilitation of individuals suffering from a mental illness," said Anita Lloyd, manager of the Acton program.

But Lloyd is quick to point out that the program is a valid workplace that turns out a quality product and is interested in doing contract work for local companies.

"We do subcontract work including light assembly, labeling, packaging, tagging, collating and display assembling. We have excellent quality control and reasonable rates. We're very efficient."

Lloyd is saddened by the stigma that mental illness casts on people. "These people are wonderful," Lloyd said emphatically. "They're not dangerous. We assess their vocational potential, teach generic work habits and skills, provide employment for those requiring a sheltered setting and encourage further training and employment for those with greater capabilities."

Employees are paid on a piece rate basis to encourage motivation and work skills.

The headquarters of the Halton Work Programme opened in 1983 in Oakville, funded by the Ministry of Health as a registered charitable organization. The founding sponsor was the Canadian Mental Health Association. Employees are still referred to the program through a mental health professional, although many go on to work in the regular labor market.

"December and January were really dead," Lloyd said. "We had to lay people off."

Lloyd is hoping business will pick up and that companies will investigate the unique program. The organization is non-profit; "Ninety per cent of our profits go back into our employees," Lloyd said.

The Acton location has just acquired a van to pick up and drop off small loads.

Employee Fred Fortner, 62, said he'd be "sitting at home watching TV" if the work program didn't exist. "They're very good here and



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they treat you good," Fortner said. Fortner spent 20 years in the Navy and 15 years at Ontario Hydro before becoming ill.

Donna Sales, 25, is engaged to be married in July. Sales said she finds her workplace to be a "good

environment" and is seeking employment in the regular work force. She said she recommends the program highly.

To contact the Acton division of the Halton Work Programme, call 853-3770 during office hours.

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