

Helping people to cope

During the best of times, community support worker Lin's job is a challenge; during today's times it is closer to being a vocation. She is an integral part of the team at Acton Social Services and Information Centre (ASSIC) and, together with her co-workers, she has seen a major increase in her workload. People out there are hurting and Lin's job is to help them cope by pointing them towards help; "In a way," she says, "we fill in when clients don't have a support system. Who else could they turn to?"

Last month, Lin worked with upwards of 70 individuals and families and, as the holiday season draws ever closer, she expects the numbers to grow. "This time last year we were involved with 43 families but this time round we expect to assist at least 50 families with Christmas needs," she reports. "We generally have lots of toys available but we always need good bedding and clothing; as well, we share out any financial donations."

An aspect of Lin's job is needs-coordination—the apparently simple job of bringing together those in need with what they need. "Furniture, clothing, or a baby crib, there's always something that someone needs," says Lin.

A typical case facing Lin and her ASSIC comrades might read as follows: Mr. X lost his job in March and had to file for UIC. Mrs. X has not worked since May 91 due to recurring illnesses; recently she underwent surgery and is still unable to return to the work force; currently, she does receive welfare.

The family has two youngsters—aged six and eight and they are both good kids and steady students.

Altogether, Family X has trouble making ends meet because although their combined income is roughly \$1,200 they must pay over \$700 for rent plus some \$200 for utilities. In order to stretch their few dollars, the family generally uses the food bank at least twice monthly.

Through the transportation program Mrs. X has been able to travel to out-of-town medical appointments; Mr. X received a small amount of cash to allow him to

attend a job interview.

A month ago, the family received a much-needed, secondhand fridge to replace their old one when it finally quit.

Lin or another of her fellow-workers tries to be available just to listen for a few minutes, when either Mr. or Mrs. X drops by. A little time is surely not too much to give to folk who are trying to make it through.

The family, in turn, has helped ASSIC by donating articles which they themselves no longer need; recently they gave a pair of lamps which they thought someone else might be able to use.

As a community support worker, Lin is also involved in assisting people to deal effectively with a variety of paperwork including, for example, disability pensions, family benefits, housing applications, welfare and much, much more.

Lin also helps to bring to Acton other special services needed by clients. The Halton Sexual Abuse program is now offering group support for adult female survivors and there could be other groups formed as people come forward. Adult offenders and teen survivors of abuse are two possibilities. "I know they're out there," says Lin, "but where are they? It's a hard job to get them to come forward."

TEAM stands for Teen Education And Mentorhood—a group which offers support to young mothers so they can cope with the demanding fact of being a young parent while at the same time continuing their education. As a support worker to these young moms, Lin seeks to provide assistance and advice as needed. She notes that sometimes, just being there to listen is the difference between winning and losing.

These are hard times; the bills are piling up and the pressures are getting to be too much to handle. I don't think I can take it much more, where do I go for help? Well, you could drop into the Acton Social Services and Information Centre and speak with Lin; she doesn't promise miracles but she will do her best and—her best is pretty good.



WOOLLY WONDERS: ASSIC community support worker Lin shows off some of the lovingly knitted hats, mitts and colourful throws that will warm some lucky Acton residents this Christmas. (Eric Balkind photo)

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