

Society has come a long way in fifty years

Community Living North Halton makes life better for the disabled

BY ANN KORNUA

Fifty years ago marked a change in attitude towards people with developmental disabilities in Halton. Before then, disabled people were shut out by their communities and routinely shipped out to large, cold institutions. In Milton in 1955, a Mrs. Howard, along with a group of concerned parents, decided these people needed a better life and began what is known today as 'Community Living North Halton'. "In the past," John Bedell, Executive Director for Community Living North Halton explained, "dentist's did not use any anaesthetic on these children because it was believed that they couldn't feel anything. Our society has come a long way since then."

Community Living North Halton came together for the purpose of providing education for "trainable mentally handicapped" children from 6 to 18 years of age. The Sunshine School, as it was called, was first built in Hornby and then moved into in the old town hall on Main Street in the firefighter's room. The association has grown and moved since those early years across Halton. Today, the program assists disabled people of all ages through education, social activities, and in basic living situations.

The program helps these disabled persons feel more confident in their abilities within the community. Their mission is to provide support to these disabled people so that they are included in the community. Through assistance and education, they can help these individuals by finding them jobs, social activities and confidence. "Over the fifty years we have made progress," John said. "We have come a long way in terms of respect and dignity for these disabled people in the community."

By organizing programs geared to help integrate the mentally disabled back into the community, Community Living offers support with every day activities. Their programs are designed to help coach individuals so they can feel a sense of belonging to their community. Community Living also offers a work program in their own head office where they can work without the stress of a busy work place. Some of these individuals can live on their own, where some require live in assistance and support.

Community Living helps bring these individuals a sense of belonging and joy in their lives through social programs where other disabled persons can meet up, go out to the movies and create valued friendships. "These people have more opportunities now than they had fifty years ago," John explained. "Instead of being shut up in big institutions, these

people can be integrated into society in a positive way and it gives them hope."

"Growing is a challenge, but we can do it with good neighbours," John said. "With the increased population in Halton, there will be demands for services for the mentally disabled and our ability to meet those will be dependant in government funding and volunteer work." John and his team hopes in the future there will be opportunities for the disabled to live lives that are more fruitful and benefit in the community. In their work for the past fifty years, they have helped the community grow into a brighter future for the mentally disabled.

To learn more about the many programs Community Living North Halton offers or to help volunteer, visit their website at www.clnh.on.ca or call 905-878-2337.



PHOTO BY ANN KORNUA

The members and coordinators of Community Living North Halton celebrate their 50th year in the Halton Community with a stunning hand made quilt. Pictured from left are Janice Brawley, finance coordinator of Community Living North Halton and member Kim Sullivan and volunteer coordinator Heather Thompson.

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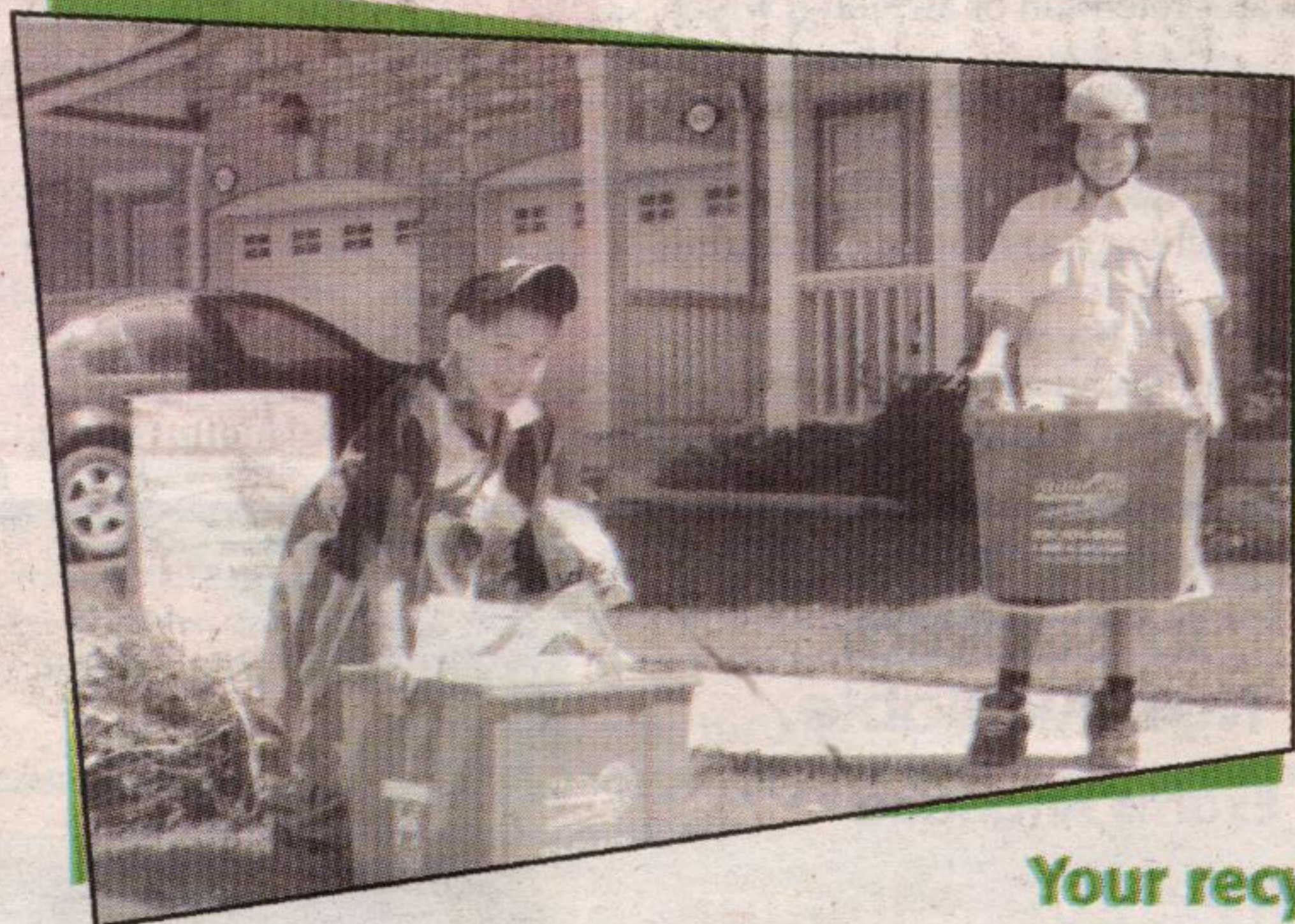


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