

Off the Wall open house...

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plan, it could afford to help the youth centre and invest in the youth of Acton.

"Can you pull \$10,000 from Communities in Bloom and are you proceeding with the bridge thing, because there's two sources of funding right off the bat," Slater asked.

Local parent Sue Walker said it wasn't fair of HHCSI to call it a funding "crisis" because it admits accumulating debt from the program over three years, comments echoed by Mayor Gastle who questioned HHCSI's strategic plan for youth services.

"If your board isn't going to continue managing these facilities, even if we do a stop gap, what's going to be the next step after June?" Gastle asked.

When asked again if the

Town would provide money, Gastle suggested if the community wants to keep the centre it should come to Council with a "long term business plan in place," and there's no "quick fix."

In its first year, Off The Wall had 2,000 visits from kids aged 12 to 19. Last year, that jumped to 4,700 visits.

The weekly junior program draws up to 60 kids and at approximately \$6,000 per month to operate.

Gastle noted it costs \$500 a night to keep the doors open and suggested HHCSI look for cheaper rent, noting the Open Door centre in Georgetown is located in a church basement.

Ward Two Councillor Bryan Lewis pointed to the \$40,000 deficit for youth programming and asked why HHCSI appeared to be "pick-

ing on" the kids, leading Barham to explain that aside from \$19,000 each year from the United Way, they get no on-going funding for youth services.

Lewis asked about community and youth fundraising and the president of the Kinette Club of Acton, Heather Sampson, stepped forward to give Barham a cheque for \$300 to help save the Acton centre.

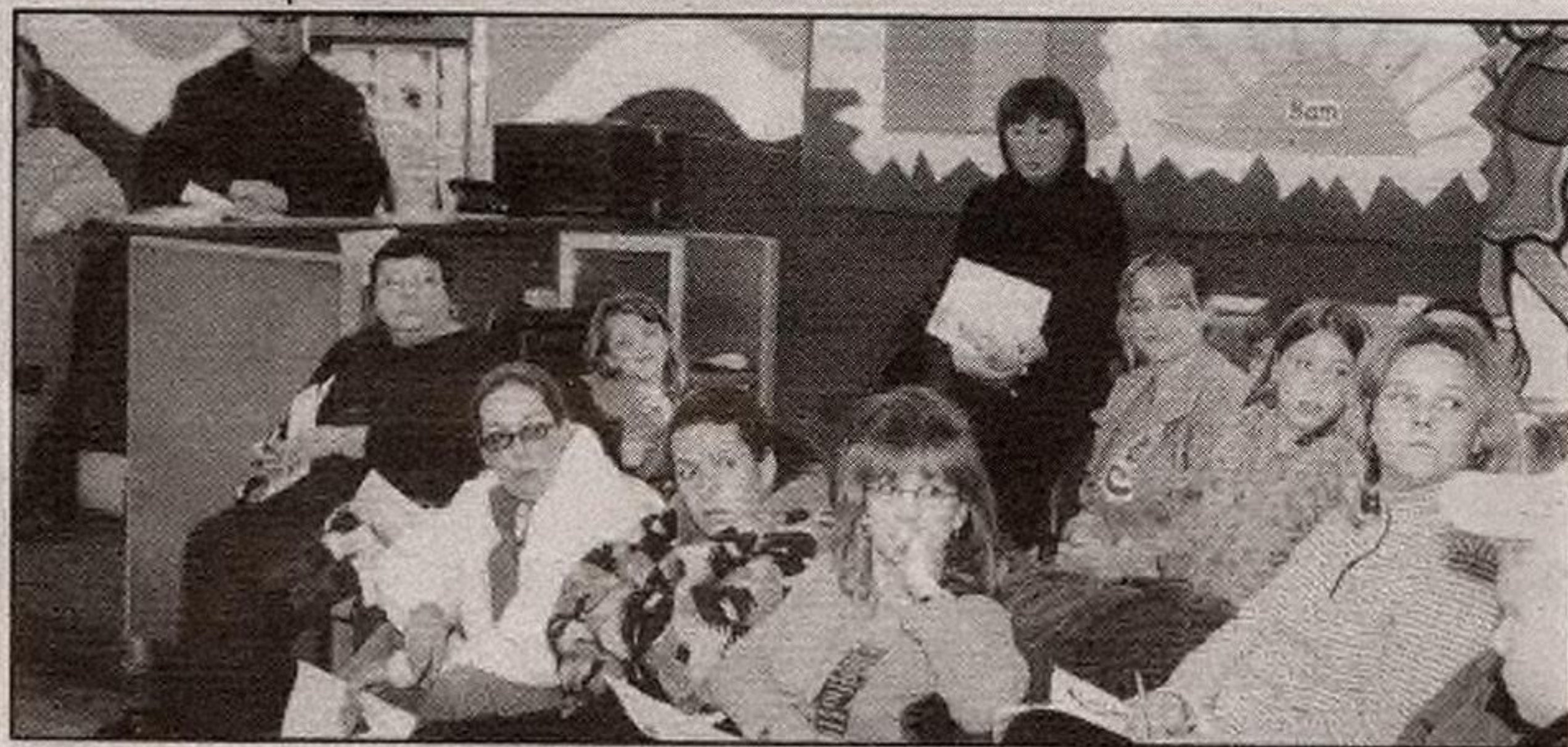
The thought of Off The Wall closing brought youth worker Vanessa Box-Jones to tears as she pointed out youth involvement in the downtown has increased since Off The Wall opened and crime has decreased - a fact confirmed by Acton Village Constable Gary George who called the centre a "good alternative" for kids loitering on the street.

Georgetown Councillor John Day, acting as a volunteer to raise \$10,000 to keep the centres open until the end of June when HHCSI will learn if requested grant money is coming, parents and those interested in helping must "sort out the crisis."

Barham said the decision to close if sustainable funding is not found - the annual operating costs for its centres is \$130,000 - is seemingly "cruel and heartless," but is fiscally responsible.

She's cautiously optimistic they will receive a Trillium grant - HHCSI requested \$75,000 for five years - and at the end of the meeting said she felt more confident and optimistic the money will come together.

People were asked to make written comments about possible ways to save the centre and other options and the steering committee attempting to raise \$10,000 to stave off the impending June 1 closing, will collect those comments to make a request to Town Council for help.



DISGRUNTLED PARENTS: Angry parents attended an open house at the Off the Wall youth centre on Mill Street Monday night, asking Town officials for cash to help keep the centre open. - Frances Niblock photos

TOWN DIGEST

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stop the internal decay that they believe caused the bad tasting water.

The open house is at the Legion, beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Green growth support

Town Council has added its support to calls for a stronger environmental component in the Province's Smart Growth policies to manage growth and development.

Council recently endorsed Conservation Halton's response to the Smart Growth plan, a response also adopted by Conservation Ontario and other Halton municipalities.

Conservation Halton chair Jean Williams told Council recently conservation authorities must be critical partners in the planning process because planning for healthy watersheds is key to Smart Growth.

"We want to warn Ontario about the dangers of not considering the natural environment... We must all speak loudly and collectively for environment protection," Williams said, adding Conservation Ontario also wants representation on the Smart Growth panels.



YOUTH SUPPORT: Heather Sampson (right) president of the Kinette Club of Acton presented a \$300 cheque to Joan Barham, executive director of Halton Hills Community Support and Information to help save the cash-strapped Off The Wall youth centre.

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