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**Issue of domestic abuse brought to forefront**

**MELANIE HENNESSEY**  
Special to The IFP

Last year, Halton Regional Police laid more than 600 domestic violence-related criminal charges. Of those charges, 84 per cent resulted from situations where a male assaulted a female.

With this kind of startling statistic in mind, the Halton Violence Prevention Council marked the beginning of Woman Abuse Prevention Month recently by raising its banner at the Halton Regional Centre in Oakville.

"Our goal is to raise awareness of the fact that domestic violence does take place," said Detective Brett Wilkinson, who's also the police service's domestic violence co-ordinator and a member of the Halton Violence Prevention Council. "We want the community as a whole to be comfortable with coming forward (to report domestic violence)."

The council was formed in 1991 by Halton's police chief in response to community distress over the vio-

lent deaths of two young women.

Its members include the Region, Halton Regional Police, Halton Women's Place, Nina's Place (Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital), Burlington Counselling and Family Services and more. The group's mission is to work toward ending violence to achieve an inclusive and healthy Halton community.

Regional Chair Gary Carr said that Woman Abuse Prevention Month heightens community awareness and helps let victims know about the kinds of supports and programs there are locally that can help them.

"We want to highlight the issue and begin the process of eradicating violence against women," he said.

Last year, police received 2,686 calls that involved situations between partners, said Wilkinson. Out of those calls, 636 criminal charges were laid for everything from assault to threatening to harassment.

Ten per cent of the charges were laid in Milton, 13 per cent in Halton Hills, 35 per cent in Burlington and

42 per cent in Oakville.

Wilkinson noted that by the time police are intervening in situations like these, there's often a history of violence that has gone unreported.

"The goal is to have women come forward before it gets to that point," he said.

Among local services available are: Burlington Counselling and Family Services, which can be reached at 905-637-5256, provides counselling for women in abusive relationships and their children, along with a Partner Abuse Response Program and a Caring Dads Program.

Halton Family Services offers counselling for female victims of violence and their children. Their number is 905-845-3811.

Halton Women's Place, which provides shelter for women and children, can be reached at 905-332-1200.

To learn more about reducing domestic violence in the community visit [www.neighboursfriendsandfamily.ca](http://www.neighboursfriendsandfamily.ca).

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