

A 'time out'

Shelter gives break to women

EDITOR'S NOTE: Milton's police station is projected to become Halton Women's Place later this year. To investigate what a shelter for abused women is, News Editor Rod Lamb went to Etobicoke to interview Kathy Laszlo, director of Women's Habitat.

On a quiet residential street, divorced from the hustle-bustle of the urban area it serves, is Women's Habitat.

Nestled between a bungalow and a small apartment, the converted fourplex is a shelter for abused women.

The peaceful location is suitable for working women seeking to take stock of their lives.

Kathy Laszlo, the director, says Women's Habitat allows women a "time out" from life.

Women who come here with their children, seek it as a sanctuary where they can straighten out their lives with the assistance of professional staff.

Mrs. Laszlo describes herself and her staff as

"people who are able to help women work through the bureaucratic system."

The average length of stay of the 191 women who have entered Habitat since it opened its door November, 1978, is about three and a half weeks.

Mrs. Laszlo said roughly 40 per cent return to their homes. The balance have chosen to lead new lives on their own.

"The longer a woman stays away from her home, the more likely she is to make a greater change," she said.

Even if she returns to her home, she will likely insist on counselling for her and her husband to correct the situation which resulted in her fleeing to the shelter.

Perhaps 12 of the 191 women who have turned to Habitat for help, are repeaters.

Mrs. Laszlo said Habitat is more than a shelter and an agency to help women.

It is an ongoing contact which women can phone

for help, assistance and "someone they can talk to."

Habitat has capacity for 25 women and their children.

The former apartment complex has three floors. The basement is devoted to offices, children's playroom and utilities.

The main floor has the dining room, kitchen and bedrooms and the third floor has bedrooms occupied by bunks.

There are four washrooms.

The facility is staffed and open 24 hours a day.

Mrs. Laszlo said the shelter runs at 98 per cent capacity. Frequently, she has to turn down women because all the beds are taken.

"I frequently receive five calls a day I can't answer that I have to refer or to put on a waiting list or manage over the telephone."

"Sometimes that is adequate," she said of the telephone conversations, "but frequently it isn't."

The shelter cannot handle the number of

women wanting help.

"Every borough should have one," she said. "Everywhere, there are women needing help."

In the eight-week feasibility study which Women's Habitat carried out to justify the need, 55 women and 125 children were found to be in need of emergency shelter.

The study was done by contacting police departments, hospitals and social agencies.

Incorporated in 1975, it took four years for Women's Habitat to get from the planning stage to being reality.

The group bought the fourplex at 149 Stanley Ave. with a mortgage from Central Mortgage and Housing.

Eighty per cent of the annual operating budget of approximately \$180,000 is paid by Metro Toronto and Peel at the daily rate of \$15 per diem.

The balance is covered by grants and funding which Mrs. Laszlo said has successfully applied.

They include Community Works Grants, Young

Canada Works Grant, United Way Special Project Funding and United Way Membership Status.

In addition, money is received as a result of appeals to service clubs and Habitat memberships.

Mrs. Laszlo said the shelter was launched with considerable fanfare.

"It was a regular publicity campaign," she said.

All service agencies were notified as well as the police, hospitals and the press.

Neighbours to the shelter on Stanley Ave. were not enthusiastic about having it Mrs. Laszlo said.

To ease their fears, an open house was held and "all the neighbours were invited."

Mrs. Laszlo said she feels the neighbours have grown accustomed to the shelter.

"Women who come here, come here for a reason," she said.

"This is a serious business."

The door is locked. Only by a staff member opening it, can a person gain access.

A husband has to make an appointment if he wants to see his wife, Mrs. Laszlo said.

A backyard for children is fenced and locked from within.

Mrs. Laszlo said she has not had any real trouble with enraged husbands.

"A quasi-governmental building full of women can be an intimidating place," she said.

Shelters for abused women are society's response to a problem it realizes is its responsibility. That is Mrs. Laszlo's opinion.

She said the situation stems from the pressures on today's family.

"Given today's family, the necessity for women to work, to put bread on the table, the problem of unemployment, the problem of housing, these contribute pressure on the family and the expectations that people have."

"Forever and forever," she said, "it has been okay for men to beat women."

"Women have accepted this and stayed at home and endured it. Society accepted it. The law offered little protection."

Now she said, there is a growing awareness on the part of society, that many problems and expenses it has to pay for and handle, are the result of family breakdowns.

"The public is recognizing that what happens in the home, affects them."

Mrs. Laszlo said the climbing rates of divorce, vandalism, and juvenile delinquents are the result of the breakdown in the family.

She said women are beginning to realize that the tension and pressure in their lives are "killing" them, their children and "the husbands are probably not satisfied either."

"It all comes back to what is acceptable behaviour."



LOOKING UP FROM HER JOB as director of Women's Habitat in Etobicoke is Kathy Laszlo. After less than a year of operation, she said the shelter for abused women is almost always at capacity.



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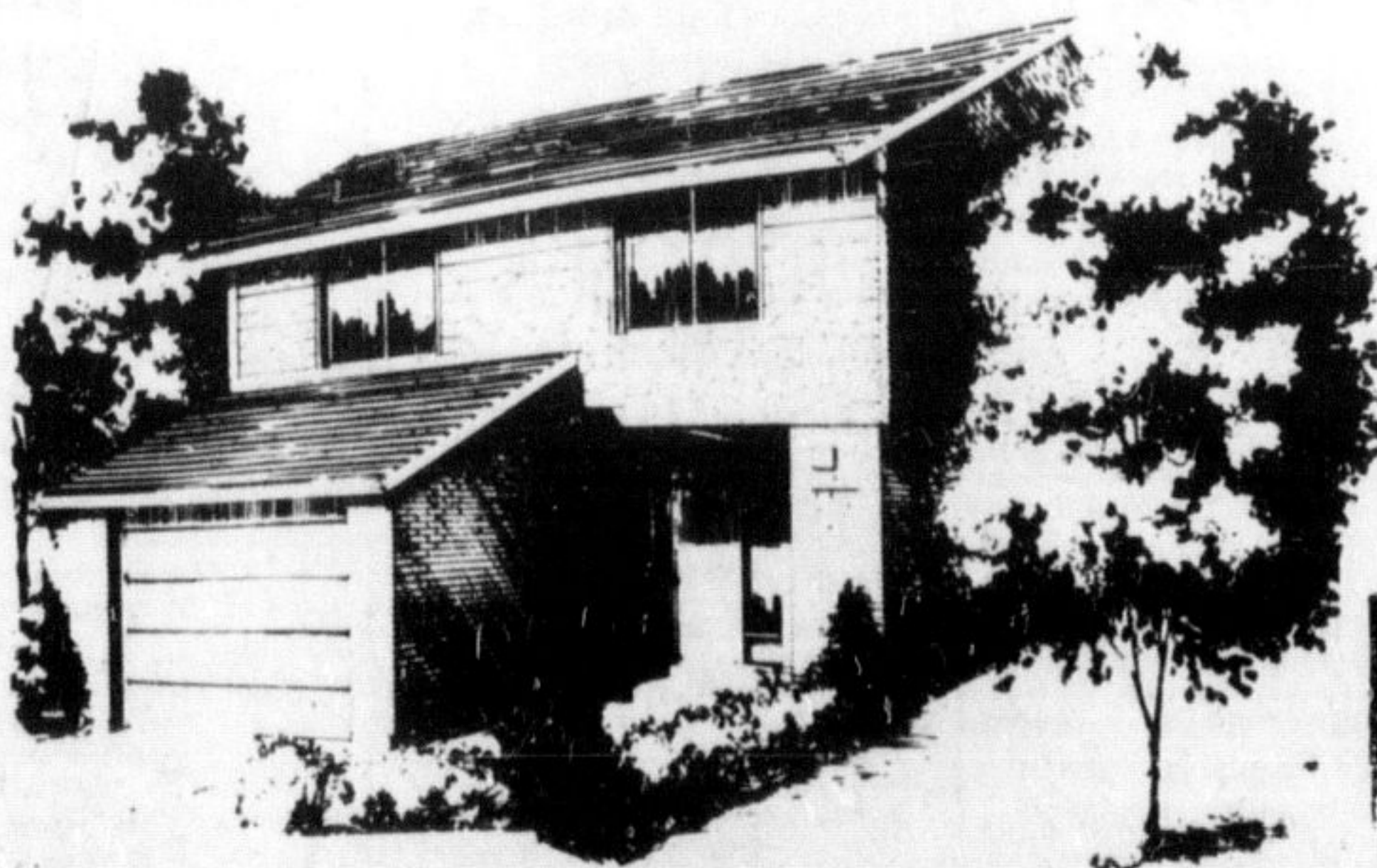
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Jehovah's Witnesses hold Montreal rally

Many families from the Milton area were among 25,011 delegates who attended the district convention of Jehovah's Witnesses at Montreal's Olympic Stadium.

Local spokesman Raymond Cooke said L.K. Greenlees of New York delivered the principal address of the meeting, speaking on the subject "Mankind's Only Hope—God's Unshakable Kingdom".

Greenlees told the vast audience at the Olympic Stadium that viewing the present world situation has caused an increasing number of people to despair of ever seeing an end to crime and violence.

Quoting a HARRIS survey, Greenlees said the vast majority of people want to see a decline in violence but 67 per cent interviewed indicated they do not expect to see it in their lifetime.

"Man's inability to provide a satisfactory administration of earth's affairs in this century has become more painfully obvious than ever before," he said.

Citing human failures taking on "new proportions of seriousness," Greenlees said the events since 1914 have led the word to the brink of disaster.

"It is high time for mankind to stop listening

to the empty philosophies and promises of imperfect men and start listening to the One who knows," Greenlees continued.

Solution to World Distress
Greenlees said the solution to the problems facing mankind is God's kingdom by Jesus Christ. The Witnesses believe this to be a real government that will soon administer the affairs of earth.

He continued by saying the Kingdom government is authorized by God to rule over the earth for 1,000 years.

"The kingdom is God's instrument to destroy all wickedness from the universe and to vindicate completely God's name and sovereignty," he said.

Greenlees told the convention that God's kingdom government will not only enforce worldwide peace, it will do more. "It will educate its subjects in the ways of peace."

Highlight of the convention were the baptism of 331 new witnesses at Montreal's Olympic Pool.

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