



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

## Buckets of generosity

Maple Hill Tree Services held another successful food for firewood fundraising swap Saturday. With armfuls of donated food are (from left) Brandy Underwood, Andrew Frederikse, David Kirkpatrick and Greg Hill. In the front end loader bucket is some of Mr. Hill's firewood.

# Numbers of poor children worrying for social council

By BRAD REAUME and MERLE REEDHEAD

Child poverty appears to be growing, despite a 1989 government resolution to eliminate it by 2000.

One in five children in Canada and one in 17 in Halton lives in poverty, according to a study released by the Halton Social Planning Council.

The report was prepared by Canada 2000, a coalition of 25 national partners and 37 community and provincial partners, including the Halton Social Planning Council.

Using 1991 Statistics Canada figures — the latest available — single individuals with an annual income of \$12,433 or less, and a family of four living on \$24,622 or less are considered poor in Halton.

There are approximately 3,335 single parent or two parent families in the region with 6,185 children that fall below this level.

### Numbers on rise

Despite the scarcity of more recent statistics, Halton social planner Lynne Calderbank believes other criteria clearly indicate the numbers in the region are on the rise.

"I'm sure Halton would be in line with those figures," said Ms Calderbank, referring to a 58 per cent increase since 1989 in the number of children living in poverty across the country.

"Other indicators seem to concur with that, including the use of food banks in the region and the increase in those claiming assistance."

The report states that the 11 regional food banks have experienced an average monthly increase from 1,208 families per month in 1994 to 1,426 in 1997.

There has also been a rise in short term social assistance cases from 1,091 in April 1989 to 1,846 in April of this year, while the number of long term family benefit allowance cases has jumped over 50 per cent since 1989 to 3,872.

Some of the increases can be attributed to a growing population, Ms Calderbank said.

But past reductions in federal payments to the provinces, a 22 per cent cut in provincial welfare payments and municipal takeovers of some social services have also taken their toll.

Further downloading from the province is scheduled for January and will only make matters worse, she added.

"There are going to be a lot of questions when the

region has to pay for more of these programs," Ms Calderbank said. "Halton will become responsible for housing and more of the social assistance cost and it seems the only way to pay for this will be through tax increases."

The council says 1.47 million children now live in poverty, compared to 934,000 in 1989 when the federal government set the goal of eliminating child poverty by 2000.

Ms Calderbank said more accurate figures will be available next year when information from the 1996 census will be included.

The council makes several recommendations for government including:

- Tax benefits for poor families
- Improved employment training
- A comprehensive child care plan
- Supports for the development of non-profit housing
- An increase in the minimum wage.

Poverty is most usually tied to poor economic conditions, however age, health and geographic factors also contribute.

According to the council 44 per cent of poor families had one parent in the labour force and a further 30 per cent of poor families had both parents working.

### Minimum wage too low

The council points to the inadequacy of minimum wages, the high cost of rent and food as contributors to poverty in Halton. They quote the average rent for a three bedroom apartment in Halton at \$947 per month and the cost of feeding a family of four at \$463 per month. In addition, a family of four on social assistance receives a maximum of \$14,568 per year, which is about \$10,000 less than the established poverty line, according to the council's report.

The council points to high infant death rates, low birth weight, high incidence of childhood disability and higher school dropout rates among those in poor circumstances.

The Halton Social Planning Council is a partner in Campaign 2000, a Canada wide coalition of community groups which "is committed to promoting and securing full implementation of the House of Commons resolution against child poverty."

Ms Calderbank said there were some things which private business or volunteers could do to help ease child poverty. She suggested a corporate sponsored breakfast program.

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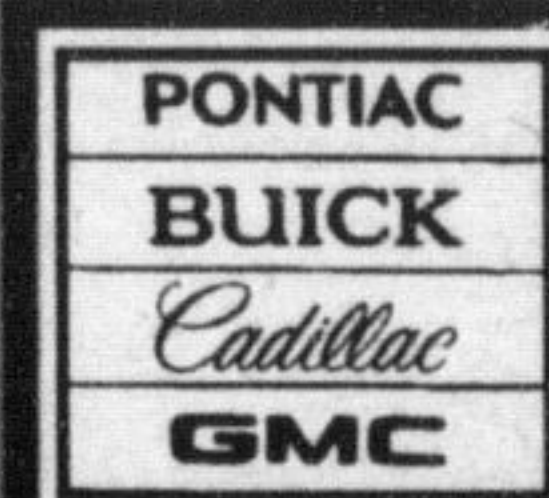
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