

# Workfare gets positive feedback

By BRAD REAUME  
The Champion

Workfare is getting positive feedback from participants, agencies and staff despite continuing work on bugs associated with change.

Adelina Urbanski, the acting commissioner of social services for Halton, acknowledges that there is room for improvement in client follow-up, labour market knowledge and administration.

Currently about 47 per cent of workfare participants have secured employment or have returned to school, according to a report by Ms Urbanski.

Halton took on the Ontario Works program as a pilot project to help the provincial government set policy. Months ago councillors heard the program was not living up to expectations and several of the private human resources companies were unhappy with Halton's administration of it. Efforts to correct the situation appear to have paid off.

Recently regional staff completed a survey of Ontario Works participants.

Surveys were completed by 200 of the 450 people involved in the program. They were targeted at clients, placement agencies and staffers.

They revealed about two-thirds of participants in Ontario Works had previously received social assistance and about 70 per cent had been working before their current application for welfare, though usually in jobs under one year in duration.

In addition, transportation was cited by 46 per cent of respondents as a barrier to work while 12 per cent cited a lack of affordable child care as a problem.

While 70 per cent of respondents felt positive about their employment goals only 50 per cent were confident with their interview skills, networking, and job search abilities.

Suggestions for improved services included better telephone access to staff, tailoring sessions to specific groups such as older clients, and providing job search information.

Surveys of placement agencies suggest most clients make a significant contribution where they work and gain valuable

experience.

However, about one third of the placement agencies said they needed more than the six month time limit to find work for their clients.

"It seems to offer a win-win situation," was one of the comments from a placement agency. "We benefited from having additional resources to complete our requirements and the placements benefit from acquiring skills and experience to support their job search."

Caseworkers felt in 70 per cent of responses that Ontario Works expanded the options for clients while 73 per cent felt clients are satisfied with services provided under workfare.

However those clients with multiple barriers to employment were considered by caseworkers to not be getting as much benefit.

About 87 per cent of staff feel that workfare is providing effective experiences for clients which contribute to job readiness.

# Victim punched in face by thieves

A simple theft turned into a robbery case after a Halton Hills man confronted two men on his property.

At 4:10 p.m., Tuesday, June 30, the 35-year-old victim saw two men next to his home on No. 22 Sideroad loading his generator into a pick-up truck.

When he approached them to ask what they thought they were doing, he was punched in the face.

The suspects then drove off, and were last seen heading east on No. 22 Sideroad toward Hwy. 25. The red and black Honda 3500 generator was valued at \$1,000.

The suspects' truck was described as a brown or black half-ton pick-up with a deflector on the front.

The passenger was described to police as

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male, white, in his late twenties to early thirties, five-foot-10 with a medium build. He had medium-length brown hair and a day or two's growth of beard. The driver was described only as male and white.

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