Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

**Striking HASS (Halton Adolescent Support Services) workers talk with Milton's Project 2000 resident Michael Lang, one of several local youths affected by the ongoing labour dispute.**

# Teens feel caught in middle

**By KAREN SMITH**
*The Champion*

Teenagers residing at a Milton facility for homeless youths say they don't like being caught in the middle of the Halton Adolescent Support Services labour dispute.

Four youths currently paying $225 per month rent to live at the Commercial Street group home have a strike going on right outside their door.

Residents say they're most uncomfortable with staff changes in the hiring of replacement workers since the 55 striking members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, local 262, walked off the job last week.

"This program means everything to me. It's a chance to start fresh," said Mike Lang, 18, who came to the group home eight months ago.

"This strike brings new struggles for the staff out there and me in here (the house) with staff I have never seen before."

Some of the residents have joined Milton's five workers on the picket line set up in front of the facility.

Many have developed close bonds with the workers, called mentors, and are feeling the effects of their absence, said resident Ron Dillabough, 17.

"We're caught in the middle," he said. "We're getting people in here we don't even know."

Ron admitted he hasn't gone out of his way to welcome the replacement workers.

Many of the 55 striking members work part-time offering counselling and support for teenagers and their families.

Management has said the strike boils down to its demand that the union reduce vacation time for six members. The union has maintained it will cut some of those vacation entitlements in exchange for increased time off for others and time-and-a-half on statutory holidays.

### Raises not an issue

No raises are being requested. Salaries range from $23,000 to $36,000 and the pay scale hasn't increased since 1993.

HASS executive director Ugo Filice has said the organization had no choice but to demand concessions from the membership, including what he called "excessive" vacation entitlements allowing several employees two months off.

He said HASS had a deficit of $42,000 last year, which depleted its reserves by half, and that no union jobs have been lost despite declining operating funds from the province.

HASS operates a 24-hour crisis line and group homes in Oakville, Burlington and Milton for young people unable to live at home.

The organization also runs the 24-hour treatment program Pilkey House in Burlington for youths aged 13 to 18 and a day treatment school program at Lord Elgin High School.

Some facilities have been closed due to the strike and young people in crisis are being returned to their families.


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