

They worry deaf face double standard

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

When 22-year-old Dale Sharp returned from college this spring, he began to search for a summer job. The raft of resumes he sent out all showed that he was employable, eager — and deaf.

When the weeks dragged on with no response, the young Mr. Sharp tried a new tactic. He sent out all the same resumes, this time taking out any reference to deafness.

"He got three calls for interviews in one day," reported his mother, Carole Sharp. "We almost fell off our chairs."

Mr. Sharp succeeded in gaining a job from one of those interviews. Now, the Milton Deaf Action Group (MDAG) is hoping to make the process easier for other deaf job-seekers with an upcoming information session.

ing information session.

The session will be held May 27 at the Milton Seniors Activity Centre, 500 Childs Drive, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. The goal of the meeting is to help local businesses understand the needs of Halton's approximately 3,000 deaf and hard of hearing residents.

"We're hoping a lot of people will come out to this," said Ms Sharp, a MDAG member. "They (the deaf) are physically capable of doing any job."

To drum up interest, 500 invitations have been sent out to local businesses and service clubs. Ms Sharp said she would be happy if even 100 took the time to come out.

Despite the work of MDAG, many barriers still exist to prevent the deaf from becoming fully integrated in the community. Even the simple act of joining a ball league is usually out of the question. The up to \$50 an hour cost for an interpreter is too steep for most clubs to absorb. Until recently, interpreters and TTY phones

for the deaf were considered a deaf problem only.

"That's like saying you're in a wheelchair, so you have to provide your own ramp," said Ms Sharp.

The group was formed two years ago after the Milton Youth Advisory Committee made a series of visits to local schools with Mayor Gord Krantz.

The committee wondered what the kids hoped for in the future.

At the E.C. Drury School for the Deaf, students had an easy one-word answer — inclusion. Since that time, the town has gone through a few changes. TTY phones — at a cost of about \$700 — have been installed at the police station, the public library, Zak's Pharmacy and Town Hall. Milton District Hospital has brought in TTY phones, interpreters and closed captioning for televisions.

At times, effective communication can be an issue between the hearing and the deaf, said Ms Sharp. Since language is often impaired by the hearing disorder, a majority of deaf students graduate high school with a grade four or five reading ability.

A reliance on the American sign language — instead of an old Canadian version — hasn't helped matters. The reason is that while the Canadian version encouraged the signing of entire sentences, American signing favours a shorter style, said Ms Sharp.

"Before, you used to sign a whole sentence, like 'I'm going to the store,'" she related. "Now, it's just 'store going.'"

The result has been a further hampering of communication, she said. "If they don't know how to say it, how do they know how to write it? It's a problem."

Despite that, increased awareness will help open doors for the deaf, said Ms Sharp. "We've put a lot of work into this. We've made a lot of headway."

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