

# Study finds helping the poor doesn't cost more

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

Offering additional help to those on social assistance wouldn't cost taxpayers an extra dime, Halton Region's health and social services committee has heard.

And it could help people get off assistance faster. That's the essence of When The Bough Breaks, a report presented by Dr. Gina Browne of the McMaster University research unit on health and social service use.

Its finding was that providing low-income and single parents with a wealth of assistance — such as subsidized visits by public health nurses, work retraining and recreational and child care services — was no more expensive than expecting them to go it alone.

The study also found that offering the juiced-up services would allow about 10 per cent of families to get off assistance and back on their feet faster.

Dr. Browne appeared before committee to give a two-year update on the study, which is funded by the Ministry of Health and is linked with 16 community health and social services agencies.

The report was before committee for information only.

In all, a random sampling of 700 social assistance recipients from Halton and Hamilton-Wentworth was undertaken.

It was found that 50 per cent were single parents, almost half of whom suffered from a depressive disorder.

On top of that, about one third of the children of these parents had behavioural disorders.

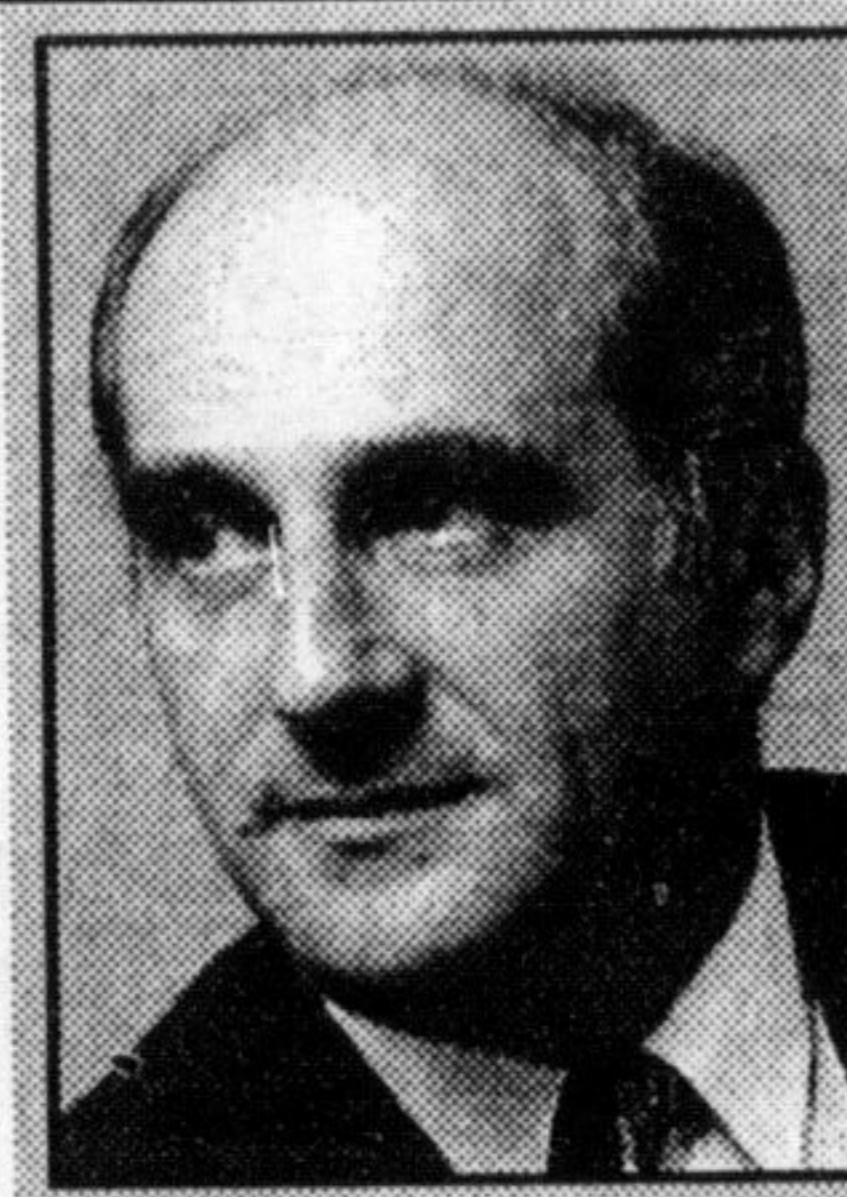
The study group was then randomly directed into five streams.

One group received social assistance only. The other groups received either public health nursing services, work retraining, or child care, and recreational services on top of their social assistance.

A final group received all these services as well as social assistance.

"This is the first study in the world that compared all treatments alone and together versus allowing the people to fend for themselves," said Dr. Browne.

Providing the families with multi-faceted support not only helped them feel better, but it didn't really



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— RICK MALBOEUF

cost taxpayers a cent, she said.

The reason is that the money that is put into the enhanced services would normally be spent elsewhere by families struggling to make it on their own, said Dr. Browne.

For example, the parents who received subsidized recreation found themselves having more money to pay for bills and other expenses.

By subsidizing visits from public health nurses, taxpayer money was saved through a decrease in more costly emergency room and practitioner visits.

"If you load this woman up with public health nurses, she doesn't have time to use the doctor," said Dr. Browne. "If she doesn't have to use her income maintenance for basketball shoes for Johnny, she won't have to go to the food bank."

Convincing all government levels that channeling more money into social assistance will save in other areas may be hard, said Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale.

"It does seem so obvious but it's very difficult to sell," she said. "The difficulty is trying to convince three levels of government."

Convincing taxpayers to fund sports activities for kids on social assistance while user fees go up for their own kids could be just as challenging a row to hoe, said Milton Councillor Rick Malboeuf.

"Kids who are involved in recreational activities have less troubles later," said Mr. Malboeuf. "Still, I'd have trouble selling this to taxpayers who are not on social assistance."

Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison said that as a businessman, he was having trouble buying the idea himself.

• see DEPRESSED on page 12

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## Halton Healthcare Services

# ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, June 23, 1999  
7:30 pm  
Rattlesnake Point Golf Club

5407 Regional Road 25  
Milton, Ontario

The new by-laws for Halton Healthcare Services will be brought forward for approval.

By-laws and audited Financial Statements will be available at the meeting or by calling the Hospital Administration offices at 338-4616.

Halton Healthcare Services was formed through the August 1, 1998 amalgamation of Milton District Hospital and Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital