

New centre for traumatized families on the way: MPP

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

At least 1,000 Halton families traumatized by domestic violence or other conflicts can expect some relief by March, 2000, promised Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh.

Milton is one of 22 areas selected to receive a new Supervised Access Centre, according to a recent provincial announcement.

The new centre is expected to be up and running by early next spring.

Access sites provide a safe, non-threatening and fully supervised environment for families torn apart by violence or other traumas.

"They are designed around families that are under stress, such as there might be a violent background or a risk of abduction by one parent or another," explained Mr. Chudleigh.

The exact location of the new site has not been determined.

Milton was chosen to host the site after meeting certain criteria. The base population, for example, had to be at least 100,000, which Halton Region easily exceeds. And since virtually all referrals to the access centres are made through the court system, at least 1,000 troubled families had to be before the area's family courts.

The idea is that a family has a better chance of healing its wounds when its members maintain frequent contact with one another, said Mr. Chudleigh.

"The success rate of families and their ability to cope improves when they maintain as much of their family connection as possible," he said. "Supervised Access Centres help to reduce the emotional toll of family conflict on children and help them maintain healthy relationships with their parents."



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TED CHUDLEIGH

The procedure followed at the upcoming centre will vary according to individual circumstances.

In some cases, both parents may visit with the child at one time.

But in the case of violence, a staggered drop-off system will be enforced.

Then, the custodial parent will leave the premises before the other parent arrives, preventing any violent interaction.

Children need a strong sense of family and access centres can help provide that, said Mr. Chudleigh.

"Children want to know that they have two parents and that their two parents love and need them," he said. "It is family values, absolutely."

And supplying a safe place for families to meet may help avert future tragedies, he noted.

"There are 1,000 families in the courts in this catchment area," he said. "Those are 1,000 potentially huge problems. I think it is one of the things that are needed."

But Mr. Chudleigh denied that more than doubling the number of access centres in Ontario is a step toward a more compassionate government style. That's because compassion had been part of the Tory platform from the start. "I never accepted the criticism, quite frankly. I think the debate is quite silly."

Currently there are 14 access sites in the province.

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