



# Champion COMMUNITY Page

## XCape Youth Centre safe haven for teens

By LISA CARTWRIGHT  
The Champion

It's been four years since the XCape Youth Centre opened its doors to Milton's teenagers.

Since that time, hundreds of youths have walked through the door for a safe place to hang out with their friends or talk with the volunteers.

To celebrate their success, and to show their sponsors why they should continue to support the drop-in centre, XCape will host an information evening Saturday at 7:30.

The event is open to anyone who wants to find out what XCape is about, said Sheena McGuigan, special events director for the centre. The evening will begin with a tour of the facility.

Some organizations "support us financially, but they've never been in the building before," Ms McGuigan said.

After the tour, there will be a short formal presentation during which XCape volunteers will speak about the variety of programs offered at the centre and answer any questions. Cake and refreshments will follow the presentation.

XCape, which opened its doors February 29, 1996, gives youths aged 12 to 19 years a safe place to hang out.

### Organized activities

The centre also offers organized activities such as pool and basketball to help build relationships with youths, said Gus Scaiano, program director.

"We want to invest in the kid's lives. We want to show them that they can achieve whatever they want."

The drop-in centre, formerly a grocery store, is decorated with movie posters and donated furniture.

Couches, chairs and tables are set up so kids can talk, draw or play cards. There are also pool tables, ping pong tables and more.

A graffiti wall is repainted every year, and the youths are encouraged to paint on it.

"It gives them ownership," said Mr. Scaiano.

A snack bar is available, as is a phone for making quick calls home. There is also a fenced-in patio at the back — the only place youths can smoke.

There are strict rules at XCape, most having to do with respect, Mr. Scaiano said.

Drugs and alcohol are not allowed at the centre and youths must respect the staff and each other. Horse play, swearing and putting people down are also prohibited.

For the most part, youths police themselves, Mr. Scaiano said. When the rules are broken, the person is kicked out for the evening. When they come back, nothing is mentioned.

It's only when the drugs or alcohol rule is broken that the person is kicked out for good.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Local teen Emily McGuffie adds to the painted graffiti wall inside the XCape Youth Centre, which celebrates its fourth anniversary.

On average, about 60 to 70 youths stroll through XCape every Friday night, with the number going up to 100 to 110 on summer evenings. Groups of friends usually meet for an evening of socializing.

Mr. Scaiano said they see generations of youths come into the drop-in centre.

Right now, the average age is about 15. The age changes as younger ones come in and the older ones leave — either because they don't want to hang out with younger kids, or they get their licence.

Most of the youths who go to the drop-in centre now have been coming for about a year.

XCape is completely run by volunteers. Each volunteer has to undergo criminal and reference checks as well as an interview that includes buddying up with another volunteer. The volunteers, as well as the youths themselves, have to feel comfortable with the new person before he is allowed to work at the centre, Mr. Scaiano said.

"XCape is a safe haven. A comfortable place to relax and feel safe, and I think that is good," said Milton resident Andrew Dundass who has been volunteering at the centre for the last year-and-a-half.

"I hope what happens is that this place expands or another centre comes up when the

town grows. This (troubled youths) is not just a city thing, it is happening everywhere."

Mr. Dundass said there isn't much for kids to do in Milton, and they are at an age where there are a variety of paths to choose.

"We try our best to be positive role models for kids. You do what little you can (to help them) have a good life."

### Fun hang out spot

Both Mr. Dundass and Mr. Scaiano agreed that is hard to judge whether XCape has helped. He said you have to do the best you can and hope the youths choose the right path.

"Everyone (here) has a good heart," Mr. Dundass said. "All these kids have potential to do great things."

The youths, too, said they enjoy the centre. Each come for a different reason, but all say it's a fun place to hang out.

Darryl Moore, 19, has been going to XCape since it opened to keep him "out of trouble."

Brandon Gwillam, 14, comes to the centre every Friday night that he isn't playing hockey "because it's fun. It's a good place where everyone comes."

Right now, the centre has 10 volunteers who spend their Friday nights at XCape.

"I just love it," said Elles DeWolf, who has

volunteered for the last two years. "I like to be here, to make sure the place stays open so that kids have a place to go."

At the end of each night, the volunteers get together to discuss the problems they had, and what they can do to get better.

"Most volunteers love being here," Mr. Scaiano said. "They leave feeling energized."

In addition to the drop-in centre, XCape offers a Wednesday night bible study group, a weight program and, coming soon, a drama program. They also offer a camping trip in the summer.

Each year, XCape takes the youths on a four-day camping trip to Camp Madawska, just outside Algonquin Park.

"For some of the kids it's probably the first time they have been in a canoe," said Mr. Scaiano. "It's the first time they've experienced Canada's outdoors."

He said it's also a way to build better relationships.

"There is a lot more role-modelling you can do when someone has the opportunity to see (youths) 24 hours a day, rather than three or four."

XCape Youth Centre is located at 174 Mill St. For details call 878-3519.

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### COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — March 21st, 2000 - March 27th, 2000

Tuesday, March 21st	Wednesday, March 22nd	Thursday, March 23rd	Sunday, March 26th	Monday, March 27th
10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore	4pm, 5pm, 6pm Plugged In! Week In Review	10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	4:30pm The Local Scene	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!
6:00pm Seniors Showcase	6:00pm Cable in the Classroom	6:00pm The Local Scene	5:30pm Seniors Showcase	6:00pm Living on the Edge
7:00pm The Local Scene	7:00pm Swap Talk - Live!	7:00pm The Issue is..		7:00pm Money Week
8:00pm Cogeco Sports: The Beaumont Cup, Toronto Maple Leafs Alumni vs Georgetown '67 Bantams	8:00pm Georgetown Hockey Heritage Awards	8:00pm Cable In The Classroom		8:00pm SportsZONE Live

Feature this week: Your source for local news & information: Plugged In! Mon-Thurs, 5:30, 6:30 & 7:30pm