



Champion COMMUNITY Page

✓ New Milton supervised access centre provides support for families struggling with divorce

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

When a couple makes the traumatic decision to call it quits, the children shouldn't be the ones to suffer.

To help ensure they don't, two supervised access centres are running in Halton, one in Milton and one in Burlington.

The purpose is to provide a safe and neutral place for families in conflict to meet during the initial stages of marital disintegration.

"If it's a new situation where they're just separating, the issues are very hot," said Mary Anne Duncan, program coordinator with Burlington Counselling and Family Services (BCFS), which runs both sites.

Parents can also use the centre to exchange their children without having to physically meet.

The two-hour visits take place in an airy room bursting with toys and activities. Staff and volunteers discreetly monitor the meeting, jotting down factual observations.

But there are no cameras recording the visit, and staff will only interfere if set rules — such as denigrating the other parent — are broken.

"Staff are very warm and welcoming. They don't participate and they don't intervene unless they have to," said Ms Duncan. "The parents have been surprised at how uninvolved the staff are."

If they do step in, it's done with tact. "They'd take care of it as surreptitiously as possible," she said.

In many cases the disputes die down, and parents begin making their own arrangements.

For others, the centre may become a permanent fixture in their lives.

But there are no walk-ins permitted. Families must meet initially with Ms Duncan, who can be reached at 637-5256.

The Burlington site is located at St. Christopher's Anglican Church, 662 Guelph Line.

The Milton site, located at the Milton Community Resource Centre at 917 Nipissing Rd., recently held a grand opening and open house, though it has been operating since June.

"It's unfortunate when children are in this situation," said Milton Councillor Cindy Lunau, who cut a ribbon celebrating the centre's opening along with Halton Chair Joyce Savoline. "If you can make a child feel a little more comfort-



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Families in conflict have a better shot at staying in contact thanks to family workers Traci Wright (left), Maggie Ford (centre) and program coordinator Mary Anne Duncan (right) at Milton's newly-opened supervised access centre. It's located at the Milton Community Resource Centre on Nipissing Road.

able, they'll feel less victimized."

The access centre provides outside support for families struggling with a very private turmoil, said Ms Savoline.

"It's such a confusing time for adults when separations occur," she said. "You can't imagine what goes on in a child's mind."

Some families arrive at the supervised access centres via a court order, and there may be issues of domestic violence, mental illness or drug and alcohol abuse to cope with.

But families with problems are still families, and they need to stay in touch, said Bill Bond, a board member with the BCFS.

"Children who continue to have contact with

both parents are better off," he said. "This is as good a place as there could be for children."

The Halton sites operate through an ongoing \$75,000 funding commitment from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Currently, there are similar centres in 36 court areas in Ontario.

The goal is to expand to all court catchment areas in the province, said the ministry's Judy Newman.

"The service has been very successful in providing for the safety of the children involved in separations and divorces," said Ms Newman.

"It's so that kids can maintain a relationship with both parents. And they do it for grandpar-

ents as well."

Strict rules can help foster child-conscious parenting even outside of the centre.

"There's no whispering. They're not allowed to say negative things about the other parent," said Ms Newman. "It helps parents establish positive patterns of interaction."

The Milton centre currently opens every second weekend.

Opening more frequently will rely on volunteers, and Ms Duncan is hopeful many will come out to lend a helping hand.

"We really, desperately need a lot of them," she said. "They're going to be essential to us to run the program, and especially expand it."



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COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — October 3rd, 2000 - October 9th, 2000

Tuesday, October 3rd

9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In! Seniors Showcase
5:30pm	War Amps
6:30pm	Halton Hills Council, Oct. 2
8:00pm	

Wednesday, October 4th

9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In! Cable in the Classroom
5:30pm	Swap Talk
6:30pm	Miss Acton Pageant
8:00pm	

Thursday, October 5th

9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In! With Good Taste
5:30pm	The Local Scene
6:30pm	Money Week
7:00pm	Georgetown Fair
8:00pm	Ambassador Competition

Sunday, October 8th

5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In!-Week In Review
5:30pm	The Local Scene
6:30pm	Seniors Showcase
7:00pm	With Good Taste

Monday, October 9th

9am, 10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm	Plugged In!
5:30pm	Living on the Edge
6:30pm	With Good Taste
7:00pm	The Issue Is...
8:00pm	SportsZone Live

Cogeco 14's New Season Started Monday, October 2nd!