Zonta Club saves day with huge gift to desperate women's centre

By WILMA BLOKHUIS

Special to The Champion

The Women's Centre has received a \$10,000 boost from the Oakville Zonta Club.

That's enough money to keep the doors open until the end of March, 2001.

The centre, which lost its Ontario Women's Directorate core funding of \$45,000 — mostly to cover rent — at the end of September, has been scrambling to find enough funding to continue operating.

"We're desperate for money," says Melvina Walter, co-director.

"But I'm optimistic that money will be found. I hope people will think about us at Christmas time. The Ontario Women's Directorate cut our funding on only nine days notice."

In its quest for funding, the Women's Centre is circulating letters to be signed and sent to local MPs and MPPs, and also has a petition that can be signed at its Hopedale Shopping Centre location in suite 210.

To date, between 200 and 300 people have signed the petition.

"We've had quite a good response from the community," said Ms Walter, adding copies of the petitions and letters can also be found in Oakville MPP Gary Carr's and Oakville MP Bonnie Brown's offices.

The 12 year-old centre serves approximately 250 women monthly, who are dealing with everything from abuse, separation and divorce to budgeting, career decisions and re-entering the workforce - all at no charge.

Ms Walter said the centre was established 12 years ago to help women coming

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MELVINA WALTER

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of ethnic women, who because of their background, won't go into a shelter, and women with a high profile in the community who won't go into a shelter. According to statistics, only 13 per cent of all abused women ever go to a shelter.

"And, we're seeing women with depression, who are coping with the loss of loved ones, and women who are going through separation and divorce, plus runaway teens," said Ms Walter.

"We're helping a wide range of women."

After hearing of the Women's Centre's plight, the Oakville Zonta Club decided to give \$10,000 to the centre.

"They do such a good job," said Jean Haynes of the Zonta Club, "yet they seem to be always short of money. They're always struggling, and now their major funding has been cut.

"Their work fits in with Zonta's mission statement to help the well being of women,

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with legal matters.

"The Women's Centre falls under the umbrella of the groups we've tried to help, and they need it badly."

The Zonta Club has always supported the Women's Centre, "but we've never given them this much money at once."

The club has given the proceeds from its gift wrapping centre at Hopedale to the Women's Centre for the past several years.

This year's gift wrapping will start Thursday and continue until December 24 during shopping centre hours. The gift wrapping will be done in a vacant storefront beside the elevator.

The Zonta Club donation came as the seven older members of the group decided to pass the gavel on to its younger members, said Ms Haynes.

"Only two or three of us have been able to do the work. All of us are getting older and we felt it was time to move on (and let the younger members take over)."

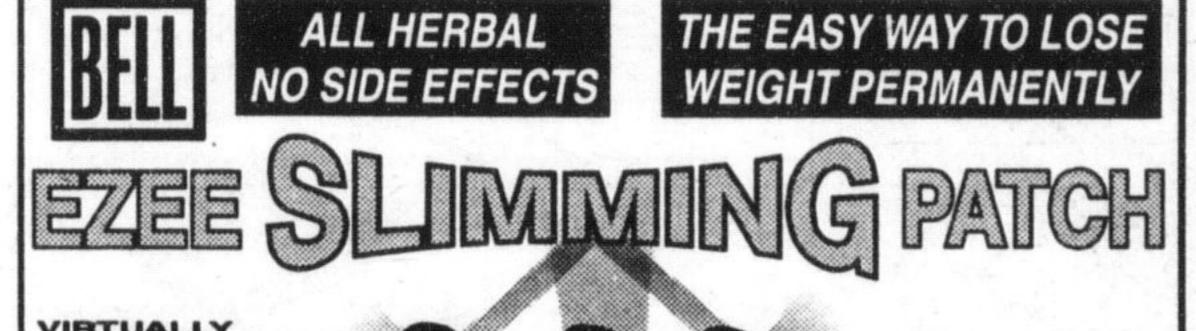
The club, for business and professional women, is looking for more gift wrapping volunteers and new members. Call Denise Ertsinian at 844-2355.

The Women's Centre can be reached at 847-9104 or 847-5520 for more informa-

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