

# No talks set in strike at women's shelter

By MELANIE HENNESSEY  
The Champion

Halton Women's Place management has made no offers yet to settle the strike its unionized employees are staging, according to the union's president.

Some staff at the shelters for abused women in Burlington and Milton have been on strike for almost three weeks now. Initially, it was said this action was over wages, but now the union claims it's about dignity and respect for women workers.

The shelter's employees are part of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1.on.

SEIU Local 1.on president Sharleen Stewart said in an open letter to provincial government ministers that the only reason the strike is continuing is because the shelter's board of directors and management are intent on breaking the union.

"During negotiations and mediation Halton Women's Place has offered absolutely nothing to settle the strike," the letter stated.

Ms Stewart and the union are calling on the provincial government for help resolving issues that led to the strike. She requested that anti-scab legislation be re-enacted and community support agencies be required to share an increase in provincial funding with staff.

"If the Ontario Liberal government would re-enact anti-scab legislation, employers such as Halton Women's Place would have to negotiate with its employees rather than hiring replacement workers," she said.

John VanBeek of SEIU Local 1.on's public relations department, said Halton Women's Place employees essentially haven't had a raise in eight years.

He said adding to the burden of low wages is the \$450 annual health premium staff will have to start paying in July.

"We are again starting to subsidize our own wages," he said. "It's unfair, it's unjust, it's immoral."

But, not all staff at the shelter agree with the strike action. Halton Women's Place crisis intervention counsellor Jill Dowling told The Champion she's appalled the front line staff have chosen to walk out on the residents they serve.

"How selfish of these workers to think about themselves at a time when abused women and their dependent children need the services of emergency shelter?" she said.

Ms Dowling, one of the shelter's employees who's not on the picket line, said the striking employees are fighting for a 1 per cent raise.

Crisis intervention, community outreach and child and youth counsellors currently make anywhere from \$37,410 to \$42,247, while house keeping staff earn \$13.28 per hour.

The shelter employees have been working without a contract since December 31, 2003. Ms Stewart's letter stated it would cost Halton Women's Place about \$15,000 more per year to settle the strike.

"In previous collective agreements, staff settled for much less than the cost of living. These female workers, who support other abused women and their children, are themselves victims of economic injustice and unfairness."

Halton Women's Place executive director Cheryl Taylor said the shelter's lawyer is going to meet with a union representative soon to organize negotiation meetings.

"We're continuing to negotiate and attempt to reach a collective agreement," she said. "At this time, we haven't reached an agreement."

Despite the strike, the shelters remain open for residents who need its services.

# Vintage train here Saturday

Train enthusiasts of all ages will be in their element Saturday when a restored vintage steam locomotive pulls up at the Milton GO train station.

The 1930 CPR steam locomotive will be in Milton from about 11:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m., giving people a close-up look at a piece of history before it moves on to its next destination.

For residents who want a closer look at the train and want to make a day of it, tickets can be purchased to ride the GO trains

that will be linked to the locomotive.

The train will travel from Toronto's Union Station to the Milton station and then back to Union Station.

The train ride to Milton takes two hours. It will leave from Union Station at 10 a.m. After its stop at Milton, at about 1:45 p.m., a GO train will take passengers back to Union Station. It will arrive in Toronto at about 2:45 p.m.

The event is to celebrate GO

Transit's partnership with Canadian Pacific Railway to benefit Breakfast for Learning, Canada's only national, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting child nutrition programs.

Proceeds from ticket sales will go toward the organization.

Tickets for the ride cost \$30 each or \$100 for a family of four. They're available through Ticketmaster at [www.ticketmaster.ca](http://www.ticketmaster.ca).

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