

Half of region's child care subsidy recipients living in poverty: says report

Average annual income of child subsidy clients is less than \$24,000

By **MELANIE HENNESSEY**

The Champion

Almost 50 per cent of the Region's child care subsidy clients are living in poverty, with many only earning one-third the money most Halton residents make.

This is one of the figures contained in a recent report from the Region's social and community services department profiling its low-income clients.

Halton Senior Policy Analyst Joan Kaczmarek presented the findings to the health and social services committee last Tuesday, calling it an "in-depth snapshot of socio-economic issues."

It states that the average annual gross income of households using the Region's child care services is \$23,820, compared to the average \$60,966 across Halton.

"The median family income for all Halton families is three times higher than that of child care subsidy clients," the report states.

Ms Kaczmarek described the typical child care subsidy client as female, 32 years old, single and a

mother of one child.

She lives in Burlington, is a high school graduate, owns a car and receives no child support payments.

She said 88 per cent of the main subsidy applicants work in support positions, such as retail and restaurant jobs.

"The average hourly wage for child care subsidy clients is not quite a third of the Halton average," the report said. "Unskilled work is often unstable work, and that means a greater risk of slipping back on to employment insurance or social assistance."

Ms Kaczmarek also presented several scenarios that showed if these low-income people were trained for a skilled job, like a legal secretary, they could bring in almost twice as much as what they make now.

The report states that beyond the money problems these people cope with, they have to deal with several other personal issues as well.

"In addition to the financial challenges faced by these child care

subsidy clients, 11 per cent indicated a history of spousal abuse and 15 per cent reported mental health issues."

The report will be circulated to the provincial government and various other organizations.

Regional staff are continuing to investigate ways to support low-income families, such as through funding from the provincial and federal governments and a possible reduction in child care fees.

Also, staff are looking to secure funding during the 2005 budget process for additional staff resources to help clients obtain child support.

The idea behind this is if more clients are receiving these payments, the less money the Region would have to spend on support services like rent subsidy.

"The report is laudable, especially because it's proactive," Regional Chair Joyce Savoline said. "We have to increase the support system for adults. I think we are making our community a better place to live."

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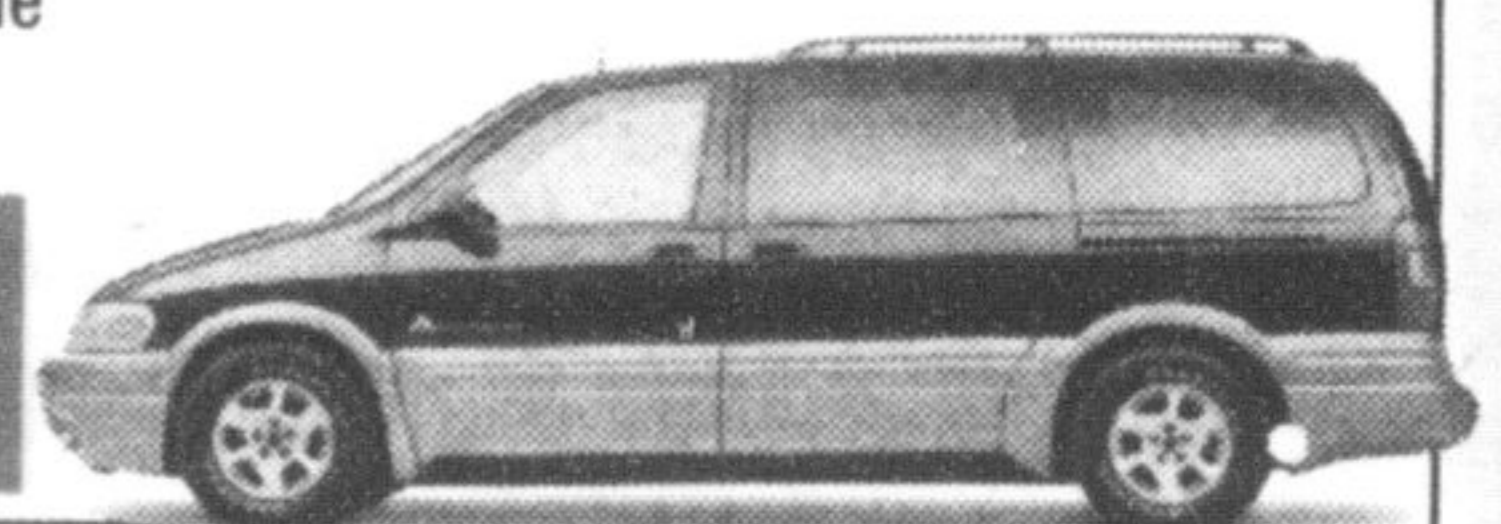
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