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Halton Women's Place optimistic fundraising goal will be reached

By **WILMA BLOKUIS**

Special to The Champion

In addition to providing safe refuge to hundreds of abused women and their children, Halton Women's Place (HWP) must also fundraise \$420,000 just to keep the door open.

"We receive 75 per cent of our funding from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the remaining 25 per cent has to come from our own fundraising," said HWP executive director Cheryl Taylor.

"Last year we fell short of our goal, for no reason other than there's strong competition for fundraised dollars in Halton. This year we're fairly strong."

Ms Taylor is hopeful this year's goal will be met.

HWP provides 50 beds at two sites in Halton — 20 at its new north facility that opened in town two years ago, and 30 at its south shelter in Burlington, which was built in 1994.

"Cribs and cots can add 10 to 15 occupants when you include small children and infants on a daily basis," said Ms Taylor.

"We have newborns to 16-year-olds. We've had women give birth at the shelter. We see all sectors of society, everybody from women without money to those with no access to money."

Both shelters have handicapped

facilities.

Although HWP doesn't have a shelter in Oakville, core services are offered there.

"A large number of women who access our services in Burlington and Milton come from Oakville."

HWP is usually full, said Ms Taylor, and peak periods include early summer when women make a move to leave the family home without having to disrupt their kids' school.

This creates another problem, as Halton is "lacking in affordable, social housing that is subsidized, creating a big vicious circle around the needs of the community around social housing," said Ms Taylor.

"There is no second-stage housing in Halton unfortunately," she lamented.

Playroom for children

HWP prides itself in not only providing a playroom that's open 24 hours a day, but it also provides an interactive children's program resembling summer camp — everything from crafts to day trips for those for whom it's safe to venture away, under supervision, from the shelter. The shelters have large secured fenced yards and video surveillance.

"We are strongly safety oriented when it comes to the kids," said Ms Taylor, emphasizing "they're still kids and we need to fill their need for summer fun — and family fun —

despite the family being in crisis."

Ms Taylor said children staying at HWP are counseled on understanding abuse, how to face the future should they return to an abusive situation, and that the abuse isn't their fault.

The shelter's summer program relies on community support, such as donated tickets to pools and for day trips to the African Lions Safari or Canada's Wonderland.

"We leave the choice of whether the kids go out of the shelter for swimming or day trips with the moms," said Ms Taylor.

"Some men will go out looking for their kids, and some don't."

Mothers and children can stay at the shelter for a maximum of six weeks.

"The greater number stay the maximum six weeks because they feel they have no place to go. Because there's no housing for them, they do the 'shelter shuffle.' They move from shelter to shelter while looking for a social safety net," said Ms Taylor.

The average length of stay has increased to 25 to 28 days from 17 to 21 days. Some women only stay for a couple of days.

HWP will celebrate its 25th anniversary next year.

Its first shelter was an old farmhouse in Milton.

"We've been providing shelter for abused women since 1980," said Ms Taylor.

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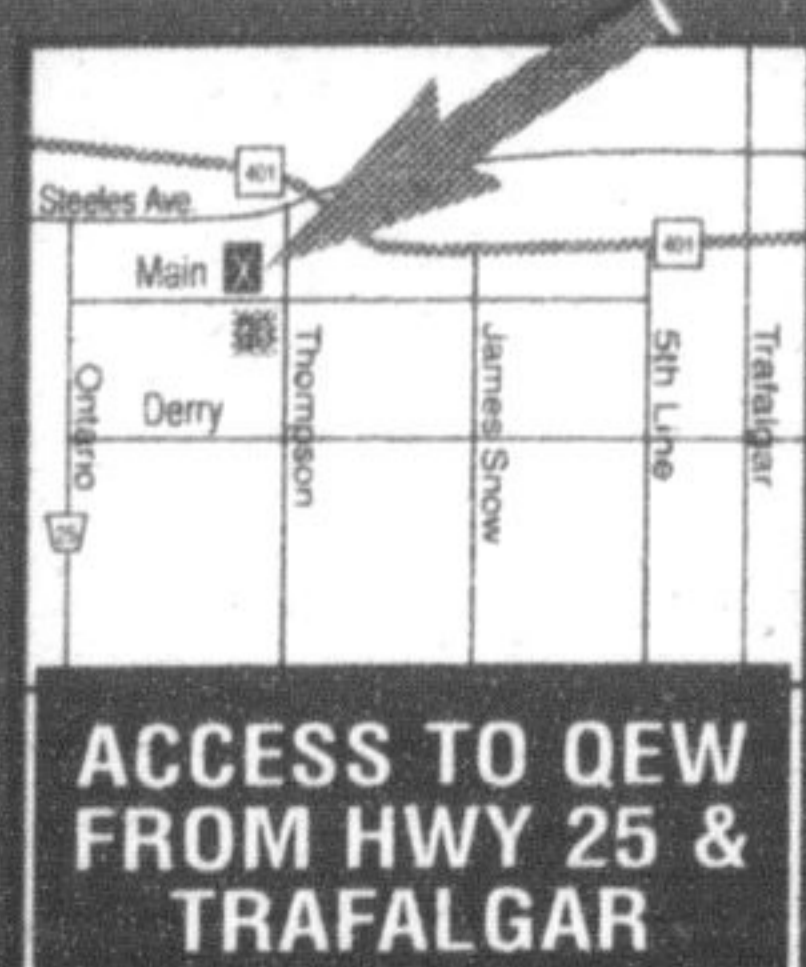
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