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Some diverse groups don't feel accepted in Halton: research

By **MELANIE HENNESSEY**
The Champion

Some of Halton's diverse communities feel left out and unaccepted in the region.

That was one of the preliminary findings of diversity consultant Dr. Ingrid Waldron, who recently conducted a series of focus groups throughout the region on barriers members of Halton's diverse communities face when accessing Regional services and programs.

Dr. Waldron's research results were presented at an open house in Milton April 27 hosted by the Halton Diversity Advisory Committee (HDAC).

She told the small crowd at the Grand Chalet that her research began last summer and is ongoing.

"I conducted focus groups with community members," she said, noting she ended up consulting with 174 different people from all four municipalities in Halton.

She said an important starting point in her work was to discuss diversity and find out how the community feels about diverse people.

Her presentation noted several communities feel left out in Halton. She also said after 9/11, Muslim groups didn't feel accepted in the region anymore.

She added the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community wants more "safe spaces" in Halton.

"They feel intimidated to come to the Region," she said, noting it was suggested the Region post rainbow flags, which traditionally represent that community, at its buildings.

When it comes to Regional services, she said most people simply aren't aware of what's available to them.

Dr. Waldron also found some people feel the Region's public health programs don't accept their unique concepts of caring for the ill.

"There was a desire to be more sensitive," she said.

She added language barriers was one of the most important issues raised during the focus group sessions and it was suggested

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Secret garden

Five-year-old Brittany Spriggs looks over some wildflowers while surrounded by perennials under the 'Key to the Secret Garden' sign that was part of the Deer Ridge Farm booth at the Milton Farm Craft Show over the weekend at Country Heritage Park.

Photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

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