

# More startling stats released on teens and suicide

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

About 30 per cent of local youths that Transitions for Youth (TFY) recently worked with were found to be at high risk of suicide.

That was one of the startling statistics presented to the Region's health and social services committee last Tuesday by TFY Executive Director Ellis Katsof, who appeared at the meeting as

part of a joint presentation on the need for improvements to children's mental health services. TFY provides services and programs to at-risk children, youth and their families, including youth involved with the criminal justice system.

Mr. Katsof detailed data collected from April 1, 2004 to March 31 this year on youth in various TFY programs, which illustrated the strain on local mental health services. He said in its residential custody and detention programs, 100 per cent of the 164 youths — aged 12 to 17 — had mental health challenges and 52 per cent had been diagnosed with serious mental health disorders.

Of those, he said 71 per cent were at high risk of violence, 47 per cent were at high risk of substance abuse and 15 per cent were at high risk of setting fires. Also, 100 per cent of females in the program had suffered abuse, many sexual abuse.

And of the 171 youth in TFY's Bridging the Gap program for those ages 16 to 21 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, he said 90 per cent had been in the mental health system, 85 per cent had been in the youth justice system, 30 per cent were at high risk of violence and 90 per cent used or abused drugs and/or alcohol.

In both the residential custody and detention and Bridging the Gap programs, 30 per cent of youth were found to be at high risk of suicide — a number that Mr. Katsof said is "very concerning."

"What (all of) these numbers are showing are the results of the cracks in our over stressed children's mental health system," he said. "Mental health funding to support these youth is seriously lacking in Halton and further compounds the situation."

## Changes called for

Mr. Katsof told the committee when service providers and elected officials are responding to provincial policy consultations, both need to ensure changes to the mental health system are responsive to all mental health needs of Halton children, youth and families.

Halton Children's Mental Health Advisory Committee Chair Ron Rodgers also appealed to the Region for help in promoting several concepts to the Province, such as:

- Children, youth and their families should have the same right and access to mental health services as to any other health service.
- Sufficient capacity should be built to deal with wait lists and program-related development needs such as an adequate level of child and adolescent psychiatry.


The issue came up earlier this year and Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline subsequently wrote to the minister for children and youth services and met with her to discuss mental health services for children and youth. The minister was then informed of Halton's concerns, which include a lack of funding for children's mental health services, lack of psychiatric services and the need for a comprehensive strategy to address children's mental health.

"I have every confidence the minister is someone who's committed to the concerns that have been raised — committed to fixing them," Ms Savoline told the committee.

A report from Dr. Nosal and Social and Community Services Commissioner Adelina Urbanski said staff will come forward during the 2006 budget process to request an increase to the health department's resources to address children's mental health needs.

The committee endorsed a lengthy recommendation calling for Ms Savoline to once again write to the minister of children and youth services re-emphasizing the need for increased funding for children's and youth mental health services, amongst other things. The issue will go before regional council tomorrow.

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