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Community Page

Local family on W Network Thursday

Building 'special room' for youngest daughter focus of Save Us From Our House episode

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Many people consider reality shows their guilty pleasure, particularly those with a maximum tear jerk factor.

What viewer can resist a show that, within 30 to 60 minutes, takes a disastrous situation and completely turns it around? Particularly within the home/family renovation realm, the conclusion's always happy and the ends neatly tied.

But what really goes on behind the scenes? And is the camera-ready sincerity of the hosts genuine?

One Milton family recently got an up-close look at what it's like to be the actors — not the viewers — in a drama all their own.

The four-member Barnes clan was recently featured on W Network's *Save Us From Our House*, set to air Thursday at 9:30 p.m.

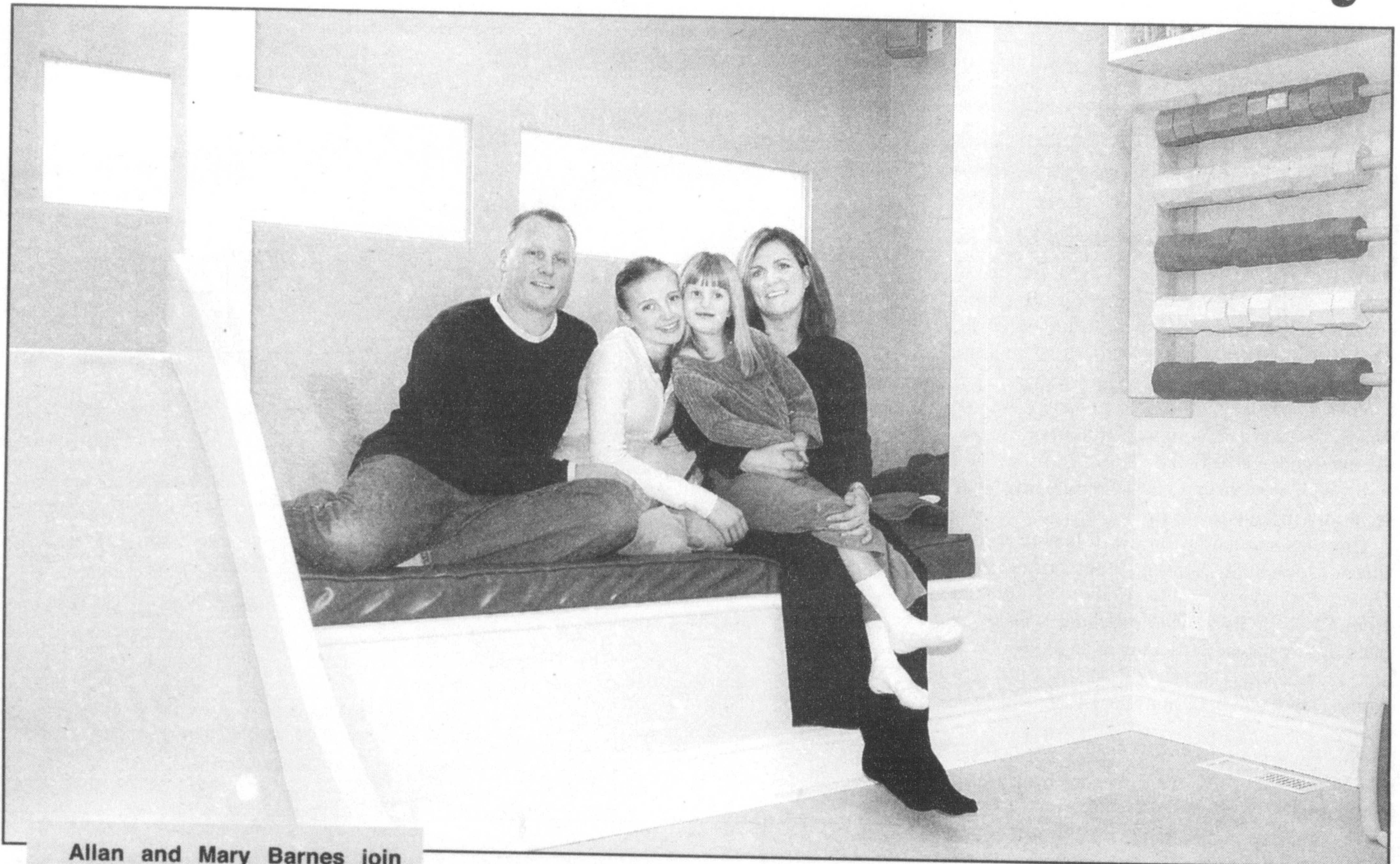
The show takes a two-fold approach to improving families' lives, with the involvement of two experts — a home contractor and a relationship strategist.

In the episode, viewers are introduced to Mary and Allan Barnes and their two daughters, 11-year-old Sarah and six-year-old Laura, who has a rare genetic disorder called Wolf-Hirschhorn Syndrome. The family is desperate for a "safe room" in which Laura can do her various therapies, but doesn't have the finances.

For two weeks in late autumn last year, cameras followed the local family's every move to get footage for the half-hour episode. At the same time, hammers and saws could be constantly heard working their magic on a special room for Laura the Barneses couldn't see until its grand unveiling. "You see all these reality shows and get all emotional watching the people... Being on the other side you go, 'The tears are real,'" Ms Barnes said.

The adventure began one day last summer when Ms Barnes spotted an ad while reading a newspaper on the GO train. It was seeking frantic families who were suffering — for whatever reason — in their homes.

Ms Barnes didn't pay attention to the first ad, but when she saw it twice more, her curiosity was piqued. Her family had certainly experi-



Allan and Mary Barnes join daughters Sarah, 11, and Laura, 6, in Laura's recently-built therapy room.

Photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

enced its share of hardships over the years, and a lack of space was making their situation worse.

Laura, Ms Barnes explained, is like a two-year-old in a six-year-old's body. She has trouble controlling her impulses and requires constant attention. This has left the family completely frazzled. "I wake up tired," Ms Barnes said. "There's no downtime. Until the room (was built), I literally took her to the bathroom with me because she couldn't be left alone."

When her various therapists would come in and work with her, she was constantly distracted by the rest of the family who would tiptoe around her, trying to be quiet, Ms Barnes said. Nobody could move about the house freely.

A room for Laura and her therapists — with a door that could be closed so the family could go about their business — seemed like a dream come true, she said.

While contractor Scott Puddicombe led the building initiative, relationship expert Hina Khan did what she could to help ease some of the family's stress.

"When I first met the family, I was really

struck by how connected they were in light of what they've been through," Ms Khan said in an interview with *The Champion*.

One of the things Ms Khan said she enjoyed the most was spending time with Sarah, who's used to yielding attention to Laura.

Ms Khan said Sarah went shopping with one of the designers to help pick out things for the new room. Although the room is primarily for Laura and her therapy, the designers also wanted it to be a place where Sarah could hang out with her friends or do homework.

During the two weeks, Ms Khan arranged for the Barnes family to go horseback riding together at an equestrian centre for people with special needs. There are few activities the family can all do together, since an eye always has to be kept on Laura.

This seemed like the perfect solution, particularly since Sarah's an avid fan of horses.

"I thought it would be great bringing Laura into Sarah's world, because Sarah has to go a lot into Laura's world," Ms Khan said.

The hosts and the crew built up a special bond with the Barneses, she added.

"The family is just incredible. I think everyone will fall in love with them," she said. "I felt very lucky to be able to be part of the family. We were all so impacted by (them)."

Mr. Puddicombe said the crew didn't seem

to mind putting in extra hours to get the job done on time.

"We knew it was going to make such a difference in their lives," he said in a phone interview.

In addition to offering all the necessary stations for Laura's occupational, physical, language, speech and music therapy, the room also provides a safe place for Mr. and Ms Barnes to leave Laura unattended for short periods of time, Mr. Puddicombe said. This makes for a less hectic day.

The unveiling was quite emotional, Ms Barnes said. From the ground up, the construction crew built a room that would serve Laura's — and the family's — needs.

There's a comfy bench on which the whole family can cuddle and read, and a slide built right into the wall. A desk, chairs and a blackboard make for an ideal learning space, and an iPod with speakers is set up for music therapy. Gym mats are laid on the floor for exercising.

The atmosphere is fun and fresh, with a kite stretching across the ceiling and bean bag chairs.

"When I finally saw the finished product, I was overwhelmed," Ms Barnes recalled. "These people put their hearts into it. We fell in love with them over the two weeks."

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Cogeco Cable Channel 14

Programming Schedule — Tuesday, January 17 - Monday, January 23, 2006

Tuesday, January 17	Wednesday, January 18	Thursday, January 19	Friday, January 20	Saturday, January 21	Sunday, January 22	Monday, January 23
1:00pm SportsZONE Live (Replay)	1:00pm Halton Hills Council Jan 9 2006	12:00pm Swap Talk (Replay)	1:00pm Halton Region Council Jan 18	1:00pm TV Cogeco's Halton Candidate Forum (Replay)	10:30am TVC Sports: JrA Hockey - Georgetown vs Burlington	1:00pm Halton Region Council Jan 18
2:00pm The Election Candidates: Liberal	5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm The Election Candidates: Liberal	5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm TVC Sports: JrA Hockey - Georgetown vs Burlington	3:00pm TVC Sports: Sr. Men's & Women's Curling Championship (Live)	3:00pm Plugged In! Extra
2:30pm The Election Candidates: Conservative	5:30pm Meet The Candidates: Halton (Milton JCs)	1:30pm The Election Candidates: Conservative	6:00pm The Election Candidates: Liberal	6:00pm The Election Candidates: Liberal	5:00pm TVC Sports: Sr. Men's & Women's Curling Championship (Live)	8:00pm SportsZONE Live
3:00pm The Election Candidates: NDP	8:00pm Swap Talk (Live)	2:00pm The Election Candidates: NDP	6:30pm The Election Candidates: Conservative	6:30pm The Election Candidates: Conservative	11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
3:30pm The Election Candidates: Green Party	9:00pm The Election Candidates: Liberal	2:30pm The Election Candidates: Green Party	7:00pm The Election Candidates: NDP	7:00pm The Election Candidates: NDP		9:30pm - Midnight Federal Election Results (Live)
4:00pm The Election Candidates: Christian Heritage & Ind.	9:30pm The Election Candidates: Conservative	3:00pm The Election Candidates: Christian Heritage & Ind.	7:30pm The Election Candidates: Green Party	7:30pm The Election Candidates: NDP		
5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	10:00pm The Election Candidates: NDP	4:30pm Meet The Candidates: Wellington-Halton Hills (Geo. OWC)	8:00pm The Election Candidates: Christian Heritage & Ind.	8:00pm TVCogeco's Halton Candidate Forum		
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	10:30pm The Election Candidates: Green Party	6:30pm Meet The Candidates: Halton (Milton JCs)	8:30pm TVCogeco's Halton Candidate Forum (Live)	8:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA		
7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	11:00pm The Election Candidates: Christian Heritage & Ind.	9:00pm Halton Region Council Jan 18	10:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA			
9:00pm Halton Hills Council Jan 9 2006	11:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA				

Federal Election Results • Monday, January 23 - 9:30pm - Midnight