

# Job assistance program is putting people to work

By Melanie Hennessey  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The Region is celebrating the success of its Ontario Works employment assistance program, since more than 80 per cent of its participants are currently employed in the community.

The good news was presented at regional council Wednesday, when councillors learned details of the initiative that trains residents receiving Ontario Works financial assistance in the personal support worker field.

According to a staff report, 84 per cent of those who took part in the program remain employed part-time or full-time in the supportive health care field, with 79 per cent of them staying off Ontario Works assistance.

That means 53 of the 63 residents who participated are still working and 50 of them are doing it without financial help.

"For the Ontario Works program, these outcomes are con-

sidered exceptional," the report noted. "The outcome rate exceeds our other more traditional programs by over 65 per cent and has provided participants not only with the opportunity to receive training and gain employment but also to achieve long-term self sufficiency."

A few council members also applauded the figures, like Oakville Councillor Jeff Knoll, who called them "stunning."

"This is another made-in-Halton success story," he remarked.

Burlington Councillor Rick Craven shared similar sentiments.

"This is truly remarkable," he said. "It's a wonderful success story."

To put a human face on the impact the employment program has, Halton Employment Case Manager Marian Williamson told the story of Maria (not her real name).

Her journey started in 1998 when she and her four children arrived in Toronto as a refugee

from an African country.

As a single parent with one disabled child, times were tough for Maria. She moved to Burlington, found a subsidized housing unit and began working to improve life for her family.

But with a job at McDonald's, she realized she wouldn't be able to get off Ontario Works assistance very quickly.

Then she found out about the personal support worker program and applied, but didn't make the cut. While this may have discouraged some, Maria instead turned to a tutor and tried again, this time being accepted.

She accomplished great things in the program and was even offered a job two weeks before she graduated.

Today, Williamson said Maria no longer needs financial help from Ontario Works and holds two jobs in the supportive health care field.

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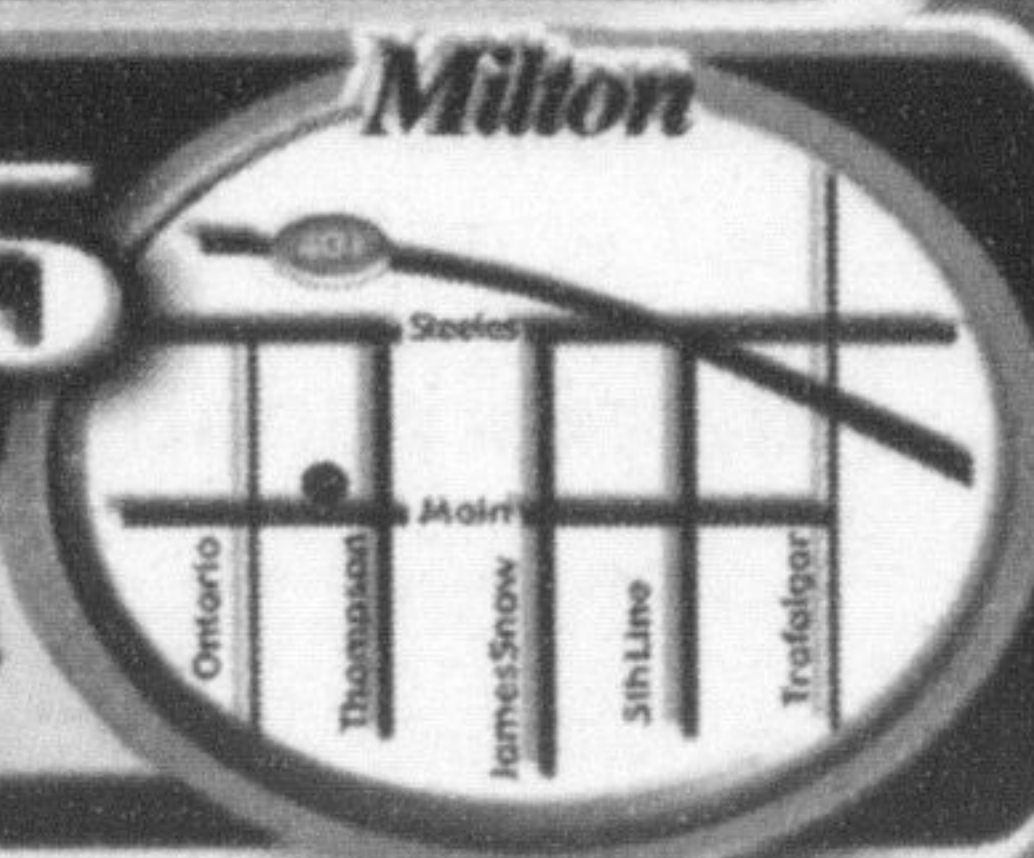
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