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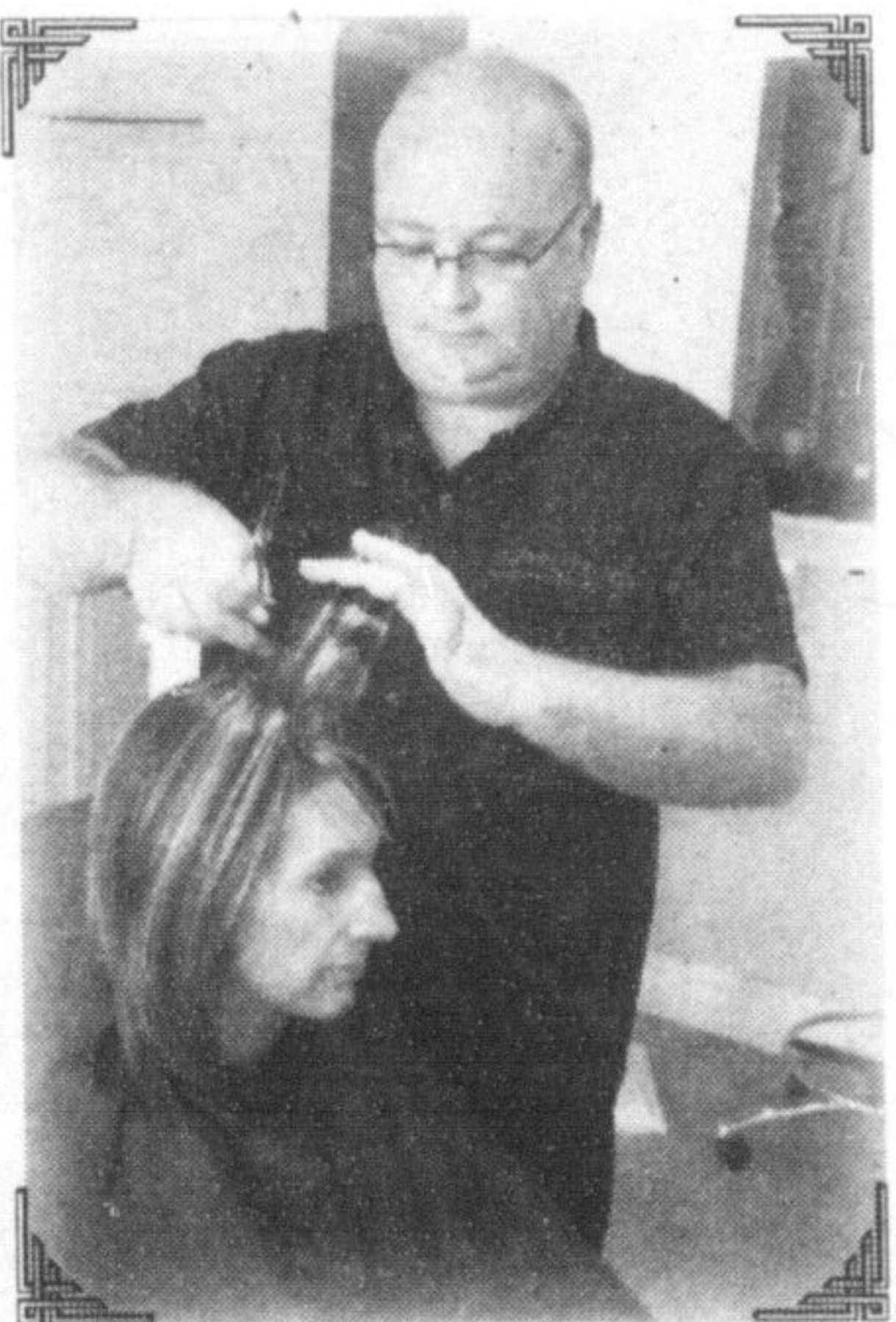
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# More than 1,000 homeless ask for help

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 economy was slowing down," she said. "What's been particularly disturbing or upsetting is that the numbers of homeless families have really been increasing."

The region has had more than 1,000 homeless assistance requests since January. In 2007, 1,355 requests were made.

Urbanski said she believes the numbers are under representations because "people may not necessarily call us, even if they are homeless."

An Ipsos-Reid Survey in 2005 found there's an "extremely low awareness" on issues regarding affordable housing in Halton and that 23 per cent of the population faces problems or know someone facing problems finding the type of housing they require in Halton.

Many are oblivious to the fact homelessness does exist in the largely-affluent region of Halton, according to Sawatzsky.

"There are still a lot of people who don't know there are homeless people in Halton," she said. "I think it's a concern the whole community needs to be aware of and get involved in."

Urbanski said she believes that since homelessness in Halton isn't as saturat-

ed and visually apparent as it is in Hamilton or Toronto, it's assumed to not exist.

In a report on the best practices for homeless youth, entitled 'More Than A Roof,' which was published in January 2007, the authors found that "there is much work to be done and the Salvation Army (Lighthouse Shelter) believes that they are just scratching the surface of existing need."

The report also concluded that "north Halton remains seriously underserved with minimal resources available to homeless families in the north. As a matter of fact, three families have been displaced from the north as a result."

That's something that Urbanski finds troubling. She knows of the definite under-funding, noting that while some changes have been implemented in the region's services, especially with transitional housing, it's still not enough.

"The dilemma is that we do not have enough services (for the homeless) in this region. There is absolutely no question about it," said Urbanski. "Everyone is being stretched. I guess that's the problem."

According to Halton's

Comprehensive Housing Strategy, the lack of affordable housing and supply of low-rent units is making it too expensive for low-income people to live in Halton, which is increasing the risk of homelessness.

In December 2007, Halton regional council allocated \$3.02 million in funding for seven community initiatives to address homelessness and eviction prevention. The funds are being implemented but, according to local organizations, it isn't enough with the mounting number of homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.

According to Paul Johnson, executive director of Wesley Urban Ministries, one of Hamilton's largest emergency shelters, many people are experiencing tough times.

"What we are seeing now is for low-income families, the pressure on their budget is becoming increasingly tight, and so I hope we are not on the verge of having more people become homeless because of that," he said.

"We are finding increasing amounts of people accessing food banks, increasing amounts of people needing emergency homes for utilities and renters and that's an indication that people are in pretty difficult circumstances."

Last year, Burlington-based Transitions for Youth worked with 128 homeless youth in Halton and supported 170 youths at-risk of homelessness in Halton.

"They're homeless for many reasons and it's not a simple reason," said Ellis Katsof, executive director of Transitions for Youth.

Although the goal is to get the youth support services in Halton, they do refer them to Hamilton, notably Notre Dame House for youth 16 to 21 years of age. Transitions for Youth tries to refer some homeless youths to the Lighthouse Shelter, which has "some beds for young people, but it's really for adults," noted Katsof.

The More Than A Roof report further noted that Halton youth "clearly indicated that having options that allow youths to stay in their own community is desirable, but that there are currently few programs that allow for this."

To battle youth homelessness, Transitions for Youth has set up Bridging the Gap program, which aims at assisting homeless or at-risk youths between the ages of 16 to 24.

The Transitional Housing Project has also been implemented to help homeless youth gain life skills by living together with others in a house.

"These are individuals that just don't have the skills to do that on their own. That's one of the reasons why they are homeless," said Katsof.

Links2Care, another Halton-based multi-service organization, offers transitional housing for families that would otherwise be homeless. Annually, the Transitional Housing program provides temporary accommodation for at least six adults and 12 children.

Urbanski maintained that although Halton Region is generally well-off, more attention and resources need to be made available to a growing population that isn't as fortunate.

"While this community may be one of the better ones and luckier ones... we certainly can't pretend that it (homelessness) doesn't exist, because it does," she said.

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The Mississauga Halton LHIN is one of 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) established by the Government of Ontario in order to plan, fund, and monitor health care services at the local level.



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