

COMMUNITY

On a journey of recovery

*Hope Place
treatment centre
transforming lives*

By **Stephanie Hounsell**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

On the pillow of a bed at the treatment centre is a letter from a stranger. A stranger who knows exactly how the woman soon to be assigned to that bed will feel when she checks in tomorrow.

Frightened. Alone. Isolated. And without the one thing that simultaneously brought comfort and destruction — alcohol or drugs.

It was only a month ago that the letter-writer — who just graduated from the program at Hope Place Women's Treatment Centre — was in that very situation.

"I want you to know you're in a safe place now," the paper reads.

This bed isn't the only one with a letter. Each of the 12 beds, carefully made and waiting for the next group of clients, has one.

Some are short, some are long, some basic and some eloquent, but each one conveys a deep, sincere belief that by the time the recipient is ready to leave the treatment centre, she'll be much better off.

Dawn Nichol, an addiction counsellor at Hope Place in Milton, explains each woman is asked to write a letter to her replacement before she leaves the 24-day program.

"They're all afraid," Nichol says of arriving clients.

She should know.

It was 17 years ago that she was assigned to bed number three. As she stands at the foot of the bed, the memories return.

At the tender age of 12, Nichol began stealing her mother's marijuana, throwing her into a life of drinking, drugs and addic-

tion.

When she was 31, her workplace required that she attend rehab, and so began her journey to recovery thanks to Hope Place.

"This place is full of love, it really is," she says, explaining when the women arrive, they're scared, judgmental and full of trauma. When they leave, they look happy and as though a burden has been lifted.

Hope Place Women's Treatment Centre has been around for 19 years. It currently treats 12 women at a time, but will soon increase to 15, with three beds for paying clients.

Every month, it takes in a new round of women who range from teens to seniors.

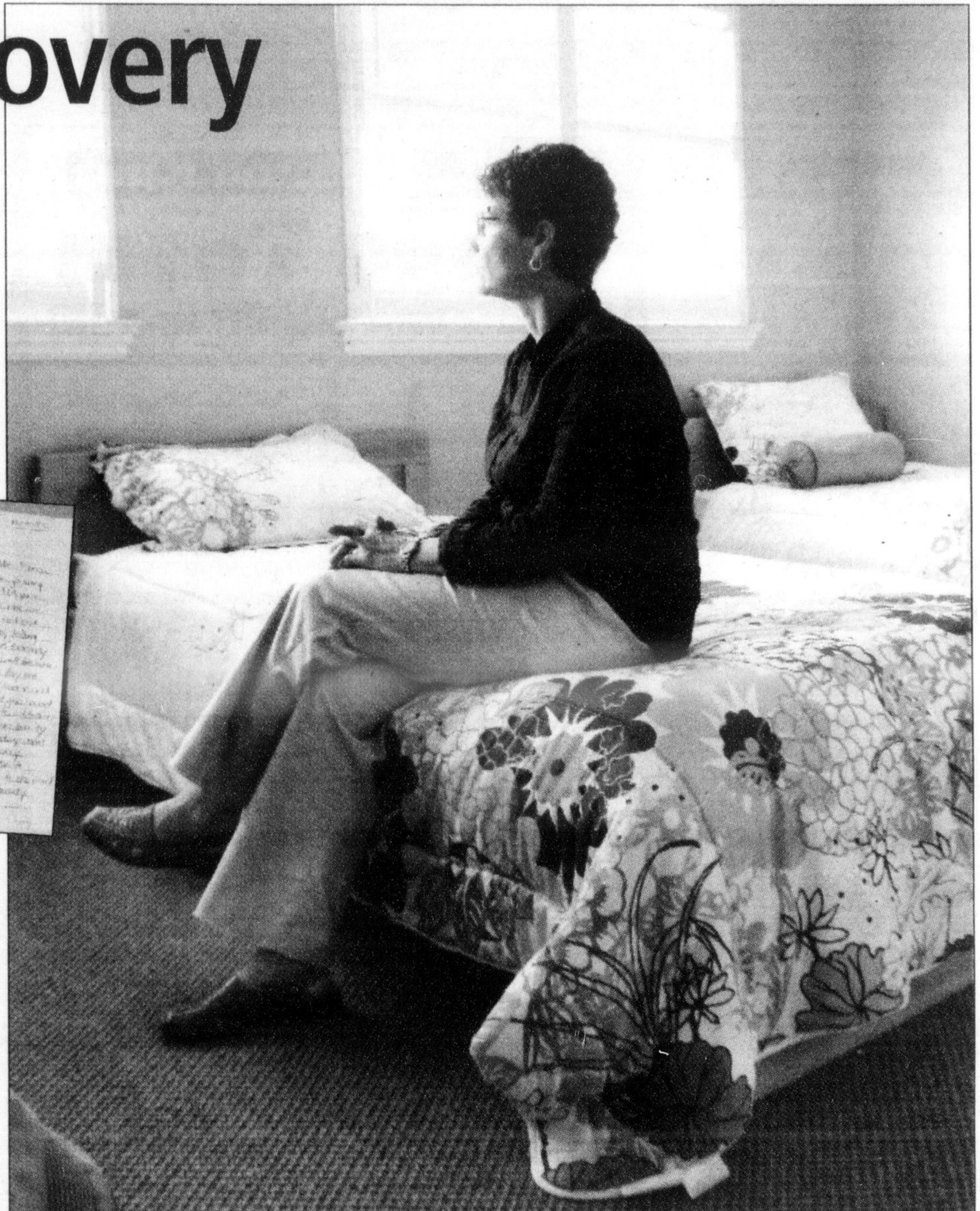
Hope Place Centres is a non-profit, umbrella organization that, in addition to the women's treatment centre, includes Halton Recovery House (for men) and Hope Place Outpatient Centre.

It receives funding from the United Ways of both Milton and Oakville, as well as the Mississauga Halton Local Health Integration Network.

A recent open house showcased its new wing, which includes three additional beds — two for pregnant women — plus a new kitchen and dining room and a spacious workspace for staff. It cost more than \$500,000, with some funds from the Ministry of Health and some from vigorous fundraising.

The facility — which looks from the outside and inside like a large family home — is tucked away at the end of a long, wooded driveway off Regional Road 25, surrounded by nature.

"When I first came here for an interview, I drove up the road and thought, 'Wow,'



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

A RAY OF HOPE: Counsellor Dawn Nichol reflects on her troubled past while looking out the window from one of Hope Place's new bedrooms. Inset left, a letter — which each woman is asked to write — offers hope to the next client.

There's something about this land," Nichol says at the open house as she shows visitors around.

The bedrooms — which contain a few beds each — have a cottagey feel.

The women are allowed to choose their 12-step program, Nichol says, and learn to follow a strict routine that includes a 7 a.m. wake-up, chores and learning to get along

• see **SUPPORT** on page A12

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