

Milton gets CAS home for troubled kids

By NORMAN NELSON

A six-bed treatment facility opened by Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS) in Milton Wednesday night is already operating at full capacity.

"I'm really thoroughly excited," said CAS assistant director of services Margaret Morrison. "We've been providing service of insufficient quality to the residents of north Halton because we had to move children out of the community."

Children from Milton and Halton Hills were previously taken by bus to Burlington.

Location secret

The facility location is being kept under wraps for the present, as are details of the private sector financing that made its opening possible.

"We have had a goal in this agency for a long time — ever since I've been here, and that's 12 years — of being able to one day receive children from north Halton into a facility in north Halton," Ms Morrison said.

She explained that during the initial assessment it's "important that the family and child are close to each other for visiting and maintaining a relationship."

It's also less of an impact, she said, when a child who's been temporarily removed from his family is not also pulled out of his school and community.

Previously operated

The facility acquired by the CAS, she said, had previously been operated as a group home for children by Ausable Springs Family Services, so the required zoning by-laws were already in place.

Besides the newly opened six-bed facility, the CAS operates five-bed receiving and assessment centres in both Burlington and Oakville. "It gives us 10 beds in the south and six beds in the north."

Timely opening

Despite the 12 year wait, she said the north Halton opening couldn't have been more timely. "We've never been busier."

The 34 admissions in the first three months of this year are "double any other first quarter."

She's at a loss for a reason. "I wish we knew, and if we did we would try hard to reverse the flow... perhaps the times are more difficult for people."

The assessment centres are for children, 12 years of age and older, who have been separated from their families by the CAS for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, said Ms Morrison, it's because of abandonment and abuse, but the "majority are admitted by agreement between the parent, child and social worker."

Short term stays

The length of stay is short term — between six to 12 weeks — while the CAS assesses the child, family and the situation.

She said at least 50 per cent are returned to their families "fairly quickly". Other children, for various reasons, require different forms of help which could include their being placed in a group home, foster home, or children's mental health program.

Ms Morrison reiterated that it's not a new program, but simply a transfer of the north Halton one "lock, stock and barrel" from Burlington to Milton.

North Halton separate

Although it had previously been run out of Burlington, she said the north Halton program had always operated separately, partly because it was more efficient financially, but also because it provided a better atmosphere for the young people.

Keeping streetwise kids from the north away from streetwise kids in the south, she said, ensured that they didn't learn "further streets."

'I'll be back,' exchange student vows

By KAREN SMITH

Yes, no, please, thank you and a few other words were the extent of Caroline Mir's English vocabulary when she arrived here eight months ago.

The exchange student from France now speaks the language with little difficulty. She also has had few problems making friends at Bishop Reding Roman Catholic Secondary School.

Caroline, 18, came to town through the good will of the Milton Rotary Club — an annual endeavor by the organization. She is the school's first exchange student sponsored by the club.

By the time she returns to France in June, her 10-month stay will have included billets with four different Milton families arranged by Rotarians.

Although Caroline has in the past visited the United States, this is her first trip to Canada.

"I wanted to come to Canada because I didn't like America," she adds.

She says among her sight-seeing tours, Montreal impressed her the most. "Montreal is very much like a European city."

Caroline put her mother tongue to full use during her visit to the city. The accents and some vocabulary were slightly different than the French she is accustomed to, but overall she communicated well with Quebecers.

It took Caroline about two months to feel comfortable here. She says Canadians are shy compared to the French.

One of the most noticeable differ-



Caroline Mir, an exchange student from France, feels right at home attending Bishop Reding Roman Catholic Secondary School. Sponsored by the Milton Rotary Club, the 18-year-old has been in Milton since August and will return home in June.

Photo by JON BLACKER

ences between the two countries is in the educational system, she says. The schools here are more modern and the teachers less strict.

"A big difference is friendship with the teachers. They made me feel really welcome and they do a lot for you."

Back home, Caroline recently com-

pleted her stay at a boarding school. The school was too far away from home to commute. She lives near the beach at Nantes. It's a four-hour drive from Paris.

When she returns, she plans to attend a school to either become a travel agent or get involved in the hotel in-

dustry.

With only two months left in Canada, Caroline now must deal with leaving the people she has become close to over the past eight months.

"I could stay another year. But," she says, "I'll be back."

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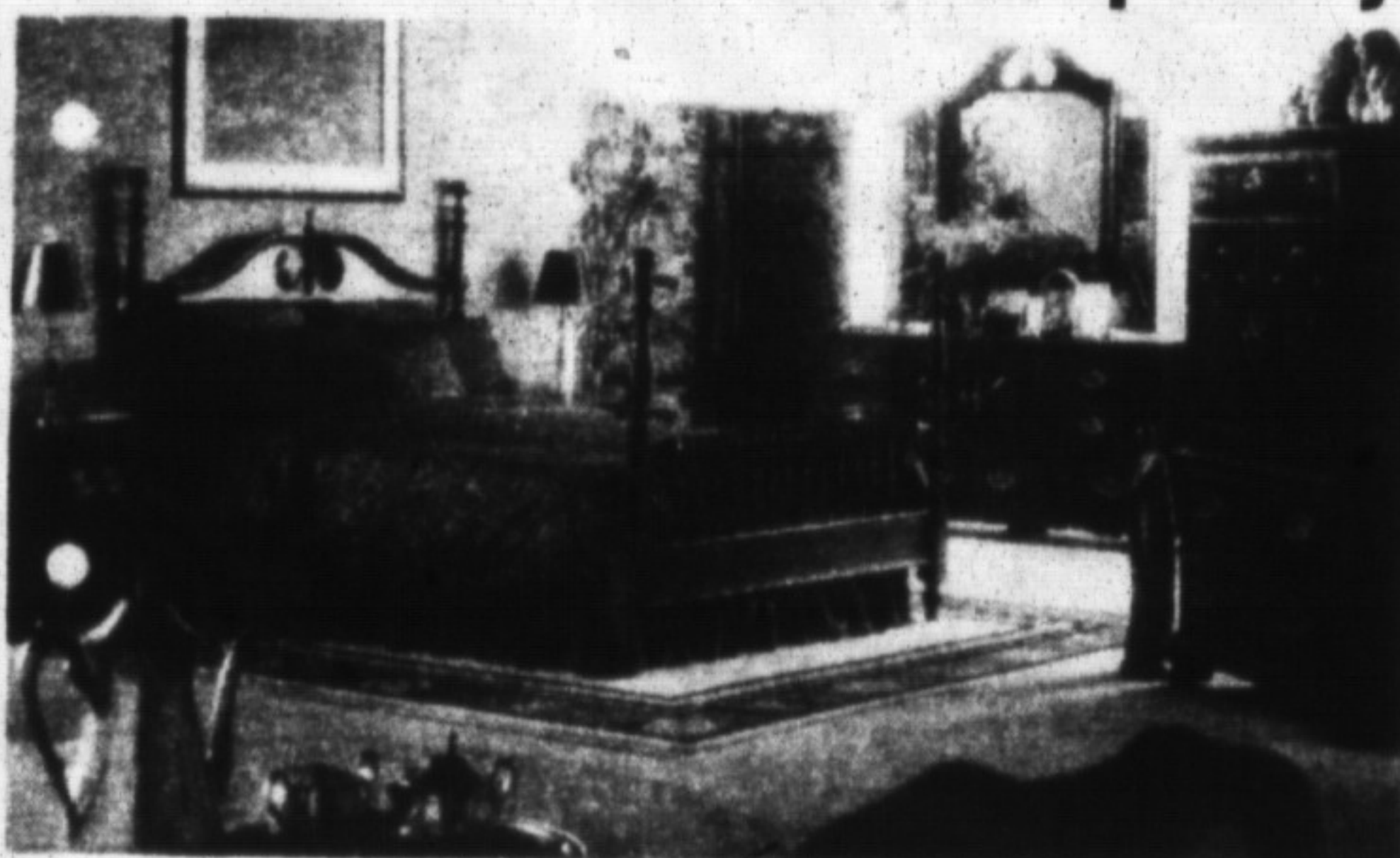
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