

# Tragedy could prompt interest in Block Parents

By JANE MULLER  
The Champion

It shouldn't take a tragedy like a child abduction or murder to keep residents interested in the Block Parent program, says local coordinator Sue Robertson.

Interest in the neighbourhood safety initiative is waning, even though the commitment amounts to receiving an annual telephone call and putting up the Block Parent sign at the participant's convenience.

"It's a shame. It's a sign of the times," Ms Robertson explains.

To become a Block Parent, everyone living in the prospective home is screened by police. Once the police give the okay, a red-and-white Block Parent sign is issued. The sign is to be displayed in a front window only when someone is home and willing to respond to a knock at the door.

Children are taught to consider homes with signs as "safe". They can expect to be helped if they are lost, being bullied or followed. According to Ms Robertson, the program also extends to seniors citizens who suffer memory impairment and may become lost or disoriented even in their own neighbourhood.

"We are trying to get seniors and

teens involved," she explains.

Teenagers shouldn't forget the lessons they learned about Block Parents as youngsters, she suggests. The safe houses can be used by this age group as well.

Wandering seniors could benefit from the Block Parent telephone network, says the program coordinator.

There is a great need for more Block Parents in Milton. With only about 10 new signs handed out each year, the program is slowly dying.

The Campbellville group folded recently when no coordinator could be found. There had been 60 signs in the village, now there are none.

"It's happening in all kinds of communities," says Ms Robertson.

She's a member of the Ontario Block Parent Association. Its members have concluded that people are more worried about break-ins than the safety of kids.

The lack of interest is frustrating for people like Ms Robertson especially considering this type of volunteer work allows the participant to take part only when he or she wants to — after work, a couple of hours on the weekend, after school.

"You might be at home when a kid needs you," she says.



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