



Getting in on the act

The small children weren't the only ones who dressed up for Hallowe'en. At St. Joseph's School, the senior students donned costumes last Friday afternoon for a dance in the school gym. These students were the winners of the best costume contest. The winning costumes represented different aspects of our culture, past and present. In the front,

representing entertainment, is Lise Beausoleil as a clown, and representing modern culture is Claude Beausoleil as the well-known Pillsbury "Doughboy". In the rear, in period costumes, are Michel Belcourt and Gilles Marchildon. Dressed as Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy are Bruce Light and Patti Murphy. **Staff photo**

Agencies must work cooperatively to deter child abuse

Child abuse is a serious problem facing society—a fact that everyone readily accepts.

That effective measures for preventing child abuse are required is also something on which everyone agrees.

What most people don't realize, however, are the frustrations and difficulties experienced by those in the business of preventing cruelty to children.

Those people met in Midland last Thursday to discuss various aspects of child abuse, the problems encountered in dealing with it, and possible solutions to these difficulties.

The discussions were all part of a child abuse seminar held at St. Paul's United Church. Sponsored by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the seminar featured a series of

speakers, films, small discussion groups, and a panel discussion involving representatives from various sectors involved with child abuse.

The panel discussion provided a forum at which each of these representatives had an opportunity to express the difficulties experienced in their respective areas of endeavour.

Increased cooperation

The conclusion reached by the discussion was that only with increased cooperation between various sectors and agencies can the problem of child abuse be effectively dealt with.

The panel consisted of Midland O.P.P. Constable Chuck Coulson, Community Services Representative Dr. Alan McLeod, Public Health Nurse Sheila Beausoleil, Lawyer Robert

MacKinnon, Sacred Heart School principal William McInerney, and Children's Aid Society worker Ken Heron.

The moderator of the panel was Dr. Elliot Barker, the chairman of The Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The most forcefully presented case was that of Constable Coulson's. Noting that last year in the Midland area five cases of confirmed child abuse were reported, along with eleven other instances of suspected child neglect, Constable Coulson explained the difficult position police officers find themselves in when dealing with child cruelty calls. The officer, he explained, has the initial contact with the incident, and besides fulfilling his duties as an enforcer of the law, is also called upon to deal with

the trauma of the situation. Although police officers have an intuitive sense of the mechanics of tense situations, they simply don't have the training nor the time to deal with the psychological forces involved in a suspected child abuse incident, Constable Coulson argued.

Quick response

"What we need is a quick response from other agencies if we are to deal properly with child abuse—even to the extent of having social workers available to come to the scene of the incident."

This could only be facilitated, commented Coulson, by establishing closer relations with other agencies, such as the Children's Aid Society.

William McInerney expressed concern similar to that of Coulson's. He described the schools as a potential "front line" in the war on child abuse, because abused or neglected children can be easily recognized by teachers. He lamented, however, that teachers receive no direct instruction in their

training as to what steps they can take to help the victimized child.

What is required is a closer liaison with people whose vocation it is to handle such cases. "Teachers are frustrated and worried when it comes to this. I don't think they're afraid—they just don't know what to do", he said.

Teachers aren't the only group who feel frustrated in their attempt to deal with the maltreated child, the discussion revealed. Lawyer Robert MacKinnon explained that once a particular case reaches the courts, lawyers often find themselves faced with difficult moral dilemmas. "It is not easy to defend some parent who has obviously beaten his child", he admitted.

Convictions difficult

MacKinnon also noted that the legal proceedings necessary to convict a parent of cruelty can be almost as traumatic for the child as the actual crime. "In many ways a child abuse case is similar to a rape case. The victim is forced to undergo questioning—

much of it very specific—by police and defence lawyers, the result of which is more tension and pressure being placed on the child", said MacKinnon.

Mr. MacKinnon feels that in most instances it would be better if child abuse cases could be dealt with outside of the courts. As an alternative to courtroom decisions, he suggested that the law could be changed so that in a cruelty case, the Children's Aid Society would take the abused child into its custody for a period after the incident, perhaps two weeks.

During that time the parents would be subject to a series of tests and interviews to determine their psychological capabilities as parents. Children's Aid worker Ken Heron admitted that the Society has received much criticism in the past, and even a certain amount at the Midland seminar. However he pointedly declined to defend the Society, opting instead to make critics aware of the problems and restrictions the Society has to work with.

Convincing in his

presentation, Heron pointed out that financial restrictions affect the Society's level of operation, by limiting the number of workers in its employment. And it is when there are not enough workers to effectively deal with all potential or actual child abuse situations that isolated cases become publicized and the Society draws criticism from the community.

Also, Heron pointed out, in many instances it is impossible to point a finger of guilt at a parent who has obviously beaten his child, because the parent can develop a perfectly consistent explanation for the nature of his child's injuries. The Society in cases like this can take no legal action, and the child will be abused again, but with worse consequences.

The solution? Heron concurred with the rest of the panel.

"What we need more than anything is a working together of various agencies—once you know what other people are up to, it becomes much easier to do your own work".

Legislation planned for next session of provincial parliament

New court could save time, and expense

Judge Nadeau, who presides over Midland's provincial court, is chairman of a provincial committee looking into, in his own words, "a new code of procedure" to deal with provincial offences.

The committee is in the process of developing a new act which is to be known as the Provincial Offences Act. It will be brought before the house in the next session. Under this act there will be a new court created called the Provincial Offences Court. This court will handle provincial matters as well as traffic charges, according to Nadeau, but will differ from the present set up of provincial court.

While Attorney General Roy McMurtry gave the public a glimpse of what the act will include, Nadeau is reluctant to comment on the legislation that the committee has spent the last three years dealing with. He says the act has not yet been drawn up and the legislation is yet to be presented to the house. McMurtry's statement last week, outlined the objectives of the legislation. He said that up to 80 per cent of minor court cases that now go to formal trial before a judge could be done away with under the new legislation. The basic aim of the legislation is to stop clogging the courts and

Dancing needles bazaar

The annual Dancing Needles Bazaar will be put on this Friday by the First Presbyterian Church of Penetanguishene.

A "Souper Lunch" will be available at a cost of \$1.50, but reservations must be made in advance. Those interested in making reservations can call 526-7780 or 549-8563.

taking up police time. The savings in dollars and cents, according to McMurtry could be phenomenal. Up to \$2 million a year could be saved in fees to justices and \$13 million in fees to police.

Pay in advance Under the new legislation an accused

that does not specifically request a formal hearing does not have to have one. He could pay his fine out of court in advance. However, McMurtry says, that the legislation singles out only the minor offenders for the new treatment. According to Nadeau this means it could help keep the

parking ticket offenders out of the courts. He says about 100,000 unpaid parking fines go to court annually in Ontario.

Nadeau describes the Act as a "decriminalization" legislation. He says there is no reason why "if you go through a stop sign you should have to go to

court." He says the same goes for bylaw offenses.

Nadeau says there are a lot of things in the Act that are "going to be really interesting". He says there are a lot of new and innovative ideas.

The new legislation will cut out the "many, many steps in the present system that are un-

necessary and expensive and do not contribute to the rights of the individual," according to Nadeau. He says "people will have options that they do not have now."

Nadeau says once the legislation has gone to the House he will let the public know the full extent of the new Act.

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