

Twenty-five attend talk on Toronto group homes

"Give us a chance to grow, that's all we're asking for," said Jim Montagnes, director of residential services for the Toronto Association for the Mentally Retarded, making an appeal to Midlanders to let the Huronia Association go ahead with a proposed group home.

On Thursday night at the ARC workshop four members of the Toronto association met with members of the Huronia

Association for the Mentally Retarded as well as the public. The purpose of their visit was to explain what group homes for trainable mentally retarded people in Toronto are like and what they have accomplished. A slide show was used to back them up. "Group homes give people an opportunity with some support in which to grow. They are hard schools with hard learning experiences," Mr. Montagnes told the 25

people present. "The problems stem from a general lack of understanding from the public," he added referring to hold-ups in getting a zoning change in Midland to allow a group home to locate at 438 Hugel Avenue. The slides which Mr. Montagnes showed, illustrated the different types of group homes in Toronto. People doing day to day living activities were depicted as well as the schools which

the residents attend. Some of the group homes were semi-detached and all of them were in residential neighbourhoods. Mr. Montagnes said they have had more support than opposition to the group homes in Toronto. He said the fear that property values on homes near group homes would drop, is a misnomer. "We will keep our house as good or as bad as the rest of the homes in the neighbourhood," he said. In Midland there is already about 30 trainable mentally retarded people living in the community, according to Mr. Montagnes. He said in Toronto the people in the homes come mainly from large



Platt



Ogilvie

institutions like the Ontario Hospital in Orillia.

Using the slides Mr. Montagnes pointed out that residents living in a home environment in a community with help and support, rapidly improve. He gave the example of an extremely retarded person who came from an institution home. When he arrived in the group

home, he wasn't toilet trained, was self abusive and non verbal. He couldn't sit up. Now he stands erect, walks and he goes to a training centre. He is toilet trained and hasn't been self abusive since he came. On the average, according to Mr. Montagnes, the residents are only staying in the group home for six months. Slower residents might be there for a year. After the group home they move in to apartments with another ex-resident and begin life caring for themselves. A councillor watches over them to make sure they eat properly and are making out okay. "Group homes are not uncontrolled. We welcome controls but we need access," Mr. Montagnes said. After the slide

presentation one of the other members of the Toronto Association

explained a training program for a resident. The level of service in

each of the homes in Toronto was also explained in detail.

Council members absent

Two members of Midland council and no members of Midland's Planning Board attended a slide show and talk on group homes put on by four members of the Toronto Association for the Mentally Retarded last Thursday at the ARC workshop.

Deputy Reeve Bill Ogilvie and Alderman Richard Platt, who represent council on the Planning Board and is a member of the Huronia Association for the Mentally Retarded, showed up at the ARC building to hear the discussion.

In a letter dated April 14, John Gignac a member of the HAMR invited all members of council and the Planning Board to the presentation. For four months the Planning Board has been dealing with the problem of spot zoning 438 Hugel Avenue to allow a group home to locate there. When they make their extensive recommendations on group homes, council have to review them and vote on the issue.

At Thursday's meeting, Mr. Gignac explained to the Toronto association that Midland's Planning Board is setting down a list of criteria under which homes that are being converted to group homes must fall. These criteria include lot size, square footage of floor

space per resident, staffing, the number of allowable residents and parking.

Jim Montagnes, director of residential services for the Toronto Association, pointed out that the provincial government has stringent regulations with the best interests of the residents at heart. All of the Toronto group homes meet these requirements.

"I don't know too many group homes with a large back yard," he said answering a question from Mr. Gignac on the size of the yards. One of the problems with 438 Hugel Avenue is that its lot size does not meet the criteria suggested by members of the Planning Board.

Mr. Montagnes said that many of the Toronto homes are semi-detached with no yard space and no parking. He said this has not been a problem since the residents attend school during the day and don't drive cars. He added that Toronto's group homes have from eight to 10 residents in them. One home which was built to accommodate 24 residents, he said, doesn't have much more yard than the home on Hugel Avenue.

Deputy Reeve Bill Ogilvie told the gathering that he was in favour of

the group home on Hugel Avenue. He called some of the Planning Board's proposed criteria "artificial roadblocks."

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