

Low cost, high quality counselling

Marital problems, family strife, and teenage depression are more common in York Region today than ever before. These, and other social problems, according to Robert Murcar, Executive Director of Family Services for South-West York Region, threaten our communities' growth and development.

Says Murcar, "Stable family life is really the foundation of a prosperous community. Unless we actively support family life, help keep families together, and nurture the development of our youth, we cannot hope to have a problem free society."

Family Services for south-west York Region, located in Richmond Hill, is just one of the five United Way sponsored Family Life Centres in York Region dedicated to providing low cost, high quality social counselling. F.S.S.W.Y.R. offers individual, marital, and family counselling to community members regardless of their ability to pay for weekly counselling sessions.

Murcar adds, "We work on a sliding scale. The maximum we charge for a one and a half hour session is \$35. You might have to pay \$65 an hour to a private counsellor, or as much as \$100 an hour for a psychiatrist. After our first session, based on an effective budgeting plan, we determine how much each client can afford to pay in the future."

Murcar stresses that his agency's role in marital counselling is not to act as Judge and Jury. "We are here to resolve problems. We offer the opportunity for families and couples to work together in a neutral territory, and come up with their own decisions and solutions for the problems they face. Family service agencies and counsellors from our point of view, should only act as mirrors for troubled individuals to reflect themselves. We facilitate communication and problem-solving. We try to encourage families to take an introspective look at themselves as a single unit. We hope they'll evaluate their problems together."

Murcar and his staff are struggling to keep up with the demand for their help. Says Murcar, "We just don't have enough staff to service everyone. We always have a waiting list of clients, and recently, the general rule has been a three to four week wait for an initial appointment. Of course, crisis situations must be dealt with immediately, and we try to shuffle things around to accommodate special cases."

Without increased financial support Family Services agencies and Family Life Centres throughout York Region will not be able to cope with the expanded need for their services. Murcar adds, "It's quite simple, we need more money now!"

LEGAL ADVICE
The extensive role F.S.S.W.Y.R. plays in our community is not completely understood until all aspects of its programmes are examined. Weekly Legal Advice sessions are held for citizens who want to discuss legal problems with a lawyer, free of charge.

Other programmes include Positive Parenting (directed at young couples), Living With Teens (for pa-

rents with hard to handle teenagers) and Couples Communication Groups for couples of all ages. Volunteer, Joyce Mark of Richmond Hill heads up Parent Concern, an invaluable weekly self-help session for parents who feel overwhelmed by the pressures that build up in parent/child relationships.

Mark specifies, "The group is for parents who feel their attitudes, words, and at times their physical behaviour might be detrimental to the development of their children." This United Way version of "parent's anonymous" enables its members to discuss family problems, and help each other face the realities of raising children. Parent Concern is preventative medicine for child abuse and other major child rearing problems so prevalent in our society today. Weekly group meetings are free to all participants.

F.S.S.W.Y.R. is also responsible for supervising one of the most important social programmes in York Region. Under the community Service Order Programme, F.S.S.W.Y.R. places and supervises probationers who have been directed by the Courts to do volunteer work to repay their crime, rather than time in prison.

Since 1977, Ontario Judges have been able to issue terms of community work as sentencing for minor crimes. F.S.S.W.Y.R. reports that of 130 probationers, 92% have successfully completed their volunteer duties. Murcar sums up the Community Services Programme saying, "It not only helps rehabilitate petty criminals, it helps repay society for the crimes, saves enormous penal costs, and directly involves citizens."



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