

Probation program thrives

YORK REGION — Since its inception in 1980, the number of participants in York Region's Community Service Order (CSO) Program has tripled.

Established in 1976 by the Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services, the program is a condition of probation and an alternative to imprisonment for some offenders.

Barbara Mustard, a CSO coordinator with the Family Services for Southwest York Region, said the program was first looked at because of the exorbitant costs of keeping offenders incarcerated.

"Because of these tremendous costs — an average of \$15,000 per inmate per annum — it was decided to test the viability of a sentencing alternative," she said. "A deliberate policy was established at that time to increase the extent of community involvement in the criminal justice system."

In York Region, the CSO Program was initiated in Sept. 1980 through Helpmate Information and Referral Services. It has since been taken over by the Family Services for Southwest York Region (formerly Richmond Hill and Thornhill Area Family Services). Funding is received from the Ministry of Correctional Services.

The local program started with approximately 40 participants. By the end of July, 1983, there were 122 participants and 84 placement agencies involved. Community Service Order is one condition of a probation order, where a judge orders an offender to perform a specified number of hours of volunteer work in the community. Participants are usually first offenders who have been assessed as non-violent and low risk.

Food for thought...



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