

Abuse program helps victims cope with anger

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Correspondent

You're in a fast food restaurant enjoying your milkshake. You look up to see a child in a high chair, repeatedly being hit. The louder the child cries, the harder the adult hits. You bring your friend's attention to this. You both feel horrified and angry. Your gut reaction is to walk over

to the adult and stop the hitting, but you remain glued to your seat. You ask one another: "What should we do?" In November 1985, Ontario's Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) was proclaimed. Included in the Act is the message that each one of us has the responsibility for the welfare of children.

In 1986, an Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services booklet entitled Reporting Child Abuse, said that "the Act places special reporting responsibility on professionals whose work involves children. However, it states clearly that members of the public also have an obligation to report promptly to a Children's Aid Society if they believe that a child is or may be in need of protection."

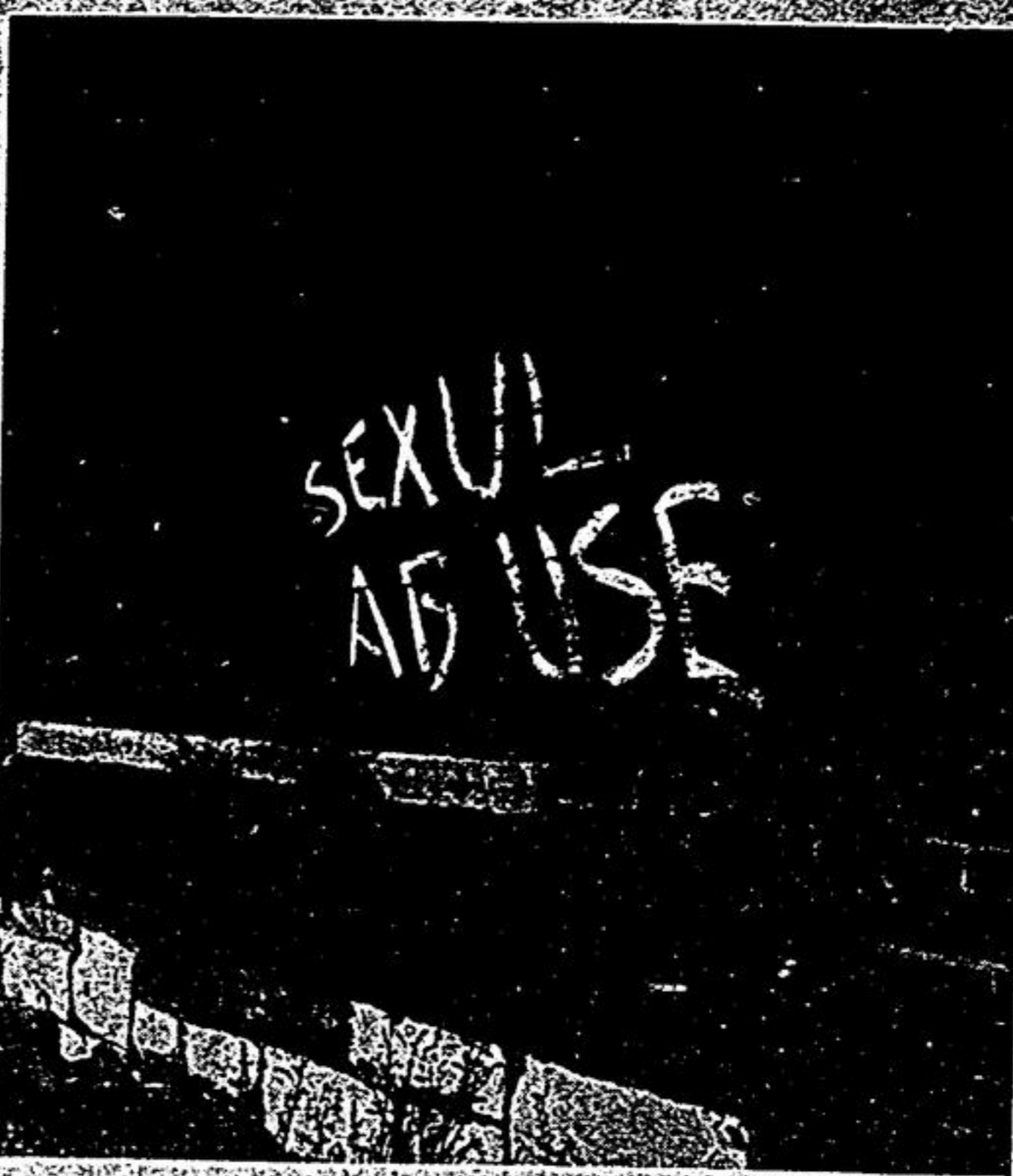
In 1980, the Children's Aid Society received 16 reports of child sexual abuse in York Region. In 1988, that number jumped to 244. Why the increase? Barbara Zapf, co-ordinator of child abuse resources at the Children's Aid Society for York Region, is not sure that there is an actual increase in abuse.

She assumes that the increased number of reports may be due to the public (professionals included) becoming more tuned into it and streetproofing, is helping young children come forward to disclose.

Kim Harper, executive director of the York Region Abuse Program, and chairperson of the York Region Committee on Abuse and Assault, agrees with this assumption. She says "Studies have recently shown that abuse has been going on forever, but the reports are steadily increasing." The community seems to be taking a stand.

Zapf is not sure that she would advocate a person witnessing child abuse to personally become involved. For instance, if the abusive adult seems much stronger than the witness, the intervenor stands a chance of getting hurt herself. She also runs the risk of increasing the abusive adult's anger towards the child.

Instead, she feels more comfortable in recommending that the onlooker immediately notify the police. One way of identifying the



MANY CHILDREN EXPERIENCE IT BEFORE THEY CAN SPELL IT.

A poster published by the York Region Abuse Program makes a graphic statement about the young age of some sexually abused children.

adult and child would be to discreetly follow them out to their car, for example, in order to record their license plate.

If the onlooker feels quite sure that there is no imminent danger in approaching the abusive adult, they should do so in "some way that is not immediately laying blame."

According to Valerie Reiser, a counsellor at Youth in Transition in Markham, with a special interest in family violence, a supportive approach is probably the best. "I see you're having a really hard time managing. It must be tough trying to get your child

looked after while you're on your own. Is there anything I can do to help?"

Reiser has usually found adults receptive to her approach. By validating their feelings instead of laying blame, a caring stranger may be more welcomed than admonished by a harried parent.

Prior to coming to Markham, Reiser spent four years as the children's counsellor at Interim Place, a women's shelter in Mississauga. As well as being responsible for the children of the women housed at the shelter, she became very aware of the emo-

tional anguish and turmoil experienced by the adult victims of abuse.

Yellow Brick House, in Aurora, is similar to Interim Place. It is the only emergency shelter for women and their children in York Region. Although there are only 21 bed spaces, "if a woman is in danger, we never turn her away," says Monica Gallagher, public education co-ordinator. In several years ago, statistics indicated that one in 10 women were physically abused during their lifetime. More recent research has revealed an increase — it is now believed that one in seven is a more accurate account.

Wife assault is responsible for 60 per cent of women who are murdered in Canada. In 1988, Yellow Brick House served 398 women and their children. Gallagher says that "not only do we provide safe, emergency shelter 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for up to six weeks, but we also have a 24-hour crisis telephone line (1-800-263-3247)."

If a woman needs to escape a dangerous situation but has no car or means of transportation to Aurora, they are encouraged to take a taxi which will be paid for by Yellow Brick House. Counsellors also offer assistance and support around finding housing, legal matters and parenting.

Many women arrive at this and other shelters after a long history of partner abuse. They most often have low self-esteem, suffer from guilt, deny the terror and anger they feel, are often experiencing severe stress reactions and believe that they are responsible for being abused.

A battered woman often accepts the imposed notion that her place is in the home and is willing to give up any pursuit in order to keep her partner happy. If she does work outside the home, she often hands her money over to her partner in an attempt to "keep the peace."

Outsiders may suggest that the woman is bringing problems onto herself. Comments such as "she made her bed, now she has to lie in it," are not uncommon. It is very difficult, however, for an uninvolved person who has never experienced the cycle of violence to truly understand its wrath.

Phase 1 of a violent cycle is often referred to as the tension-building phase. During this stage, minor battering, such as verbal criticism, occurs. The battered woman usually tries to remain calm, knowing that anger will only exacerbate the situation. She usually attempts to calm the batterer down. As tension inevitably escalates and each of her moves is subject to appraisal, phase 2 begins. The acute battering incident.

This triggers the release of uncontrollable emotions and tensions. Usually, the phase lasts from two to 24 hours, but is often lengthier. When the battering eventually stops, the woman starts feeling less terrorized and slowly makes her way out into her partner's space again.

The reason that many women do not break the cycle of violence is because they know that eventually, the kindness and loving behaviour (phase 3) will return. The batterer generally overcompensates during this phase in trying to make up to his partner.

The York Region Abuse and Assault Committee's message is that Markham is not excluded from abuse and assault and that it is time to raise people's awareness of its occurrence in their community. The education sub-committee which was formed in June 1989 includes Kim Harper (Chairperson and Executive Director of the York Region Abuse Program), Monica Gallagher (Yellow Brick House), P.C. Paul Torrens (Victims Services, York Regional Police), Barbara Zapf (Children's Aid Society) and Brenda Greenberg (Director, Youth in Transition). The goals of this sub-committee include planning and implementing educational events in York Region.

The York Region Abuse Program (YRAP) was conceived in 1984, but it took three years before it received funding. Now it's primarily funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, by a 1989 grant from the Region of York and through fundraising.

YRAP developed in response to a perceived lack of sexual abuse services in York Region. Until its inception, Children's Aid Society was the only agency available for formal service. Harper felt that they were initially responding to the idea that "sexual abuse is a community responsibility."

"Incredible demand" Now, due to a marked increase in those served, the committee realizes that there is definitely an incredible demand for help in this area. YRAP established itself in May, 1987, and based on an inter-agency model, trained (Cont'd on Page A-12)

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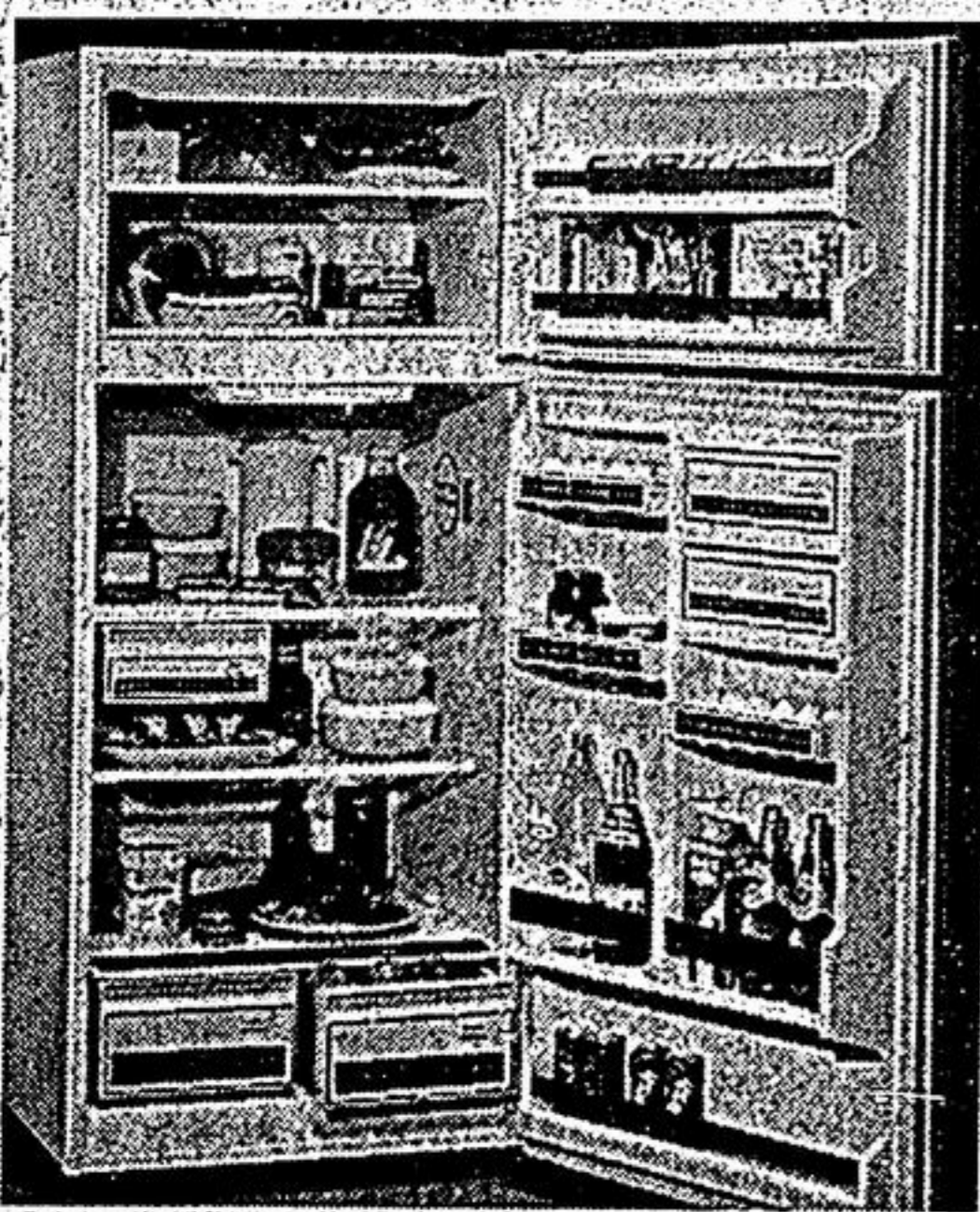
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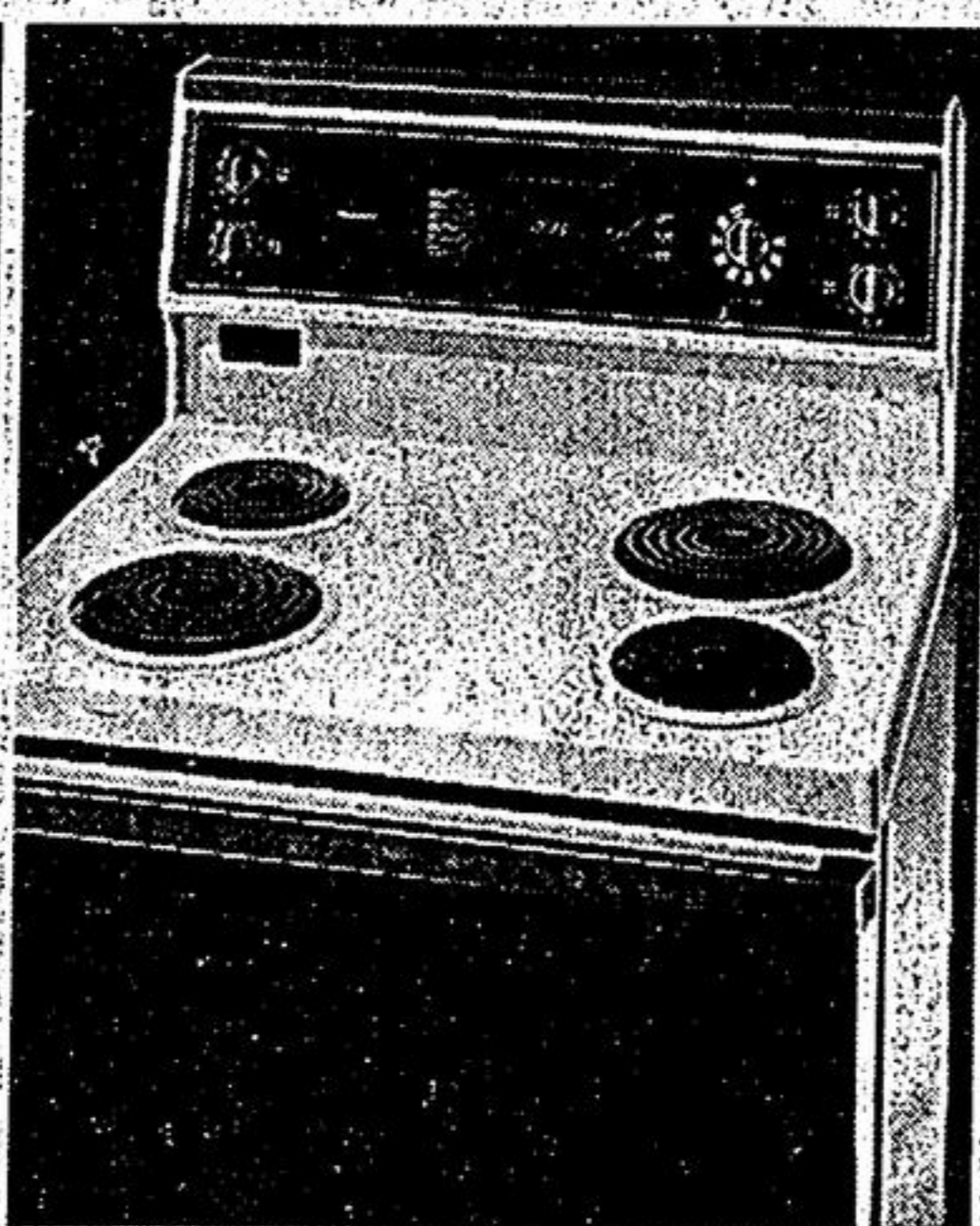
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