

York workfare off to slow start

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

After three months, York Region's workfare program is still at the crawling stage.

The three local companies running it placed nine welfare recipients into paying jobs during the first quarter of 1998. Their target for this entire year was 300 job placements.

And the program, which is

also supposed to put recipients into volunteer positions at local agencies, hasn't done any such placements so far, Vaughan Regional Councillor Joyce Frustaglio confirmed last week.

That's mainly because the screening process for the volunteer jobs is taking longer than anticipated, said Frustaglio, a member of the region's social services committee.

"There's a lot of wrinkles in

the program that need to be ironed out," she said, adding people continue to look for work and many volunteer on their own.

More than 4,000 have signed "participation agreements" to enter the program, run by a consortium combining social services agencies COSTI-ILAS and Georgina Job Skills with the private First Interactive Computer College.

The region expects to pay

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an average \$1,200 for each placement, with the province picking up four-fifths of the cost.

Other workfare clients will get job-seeking training or similar activities.

Regional staff had to be trained for the program, and the assessment of welfare recipients for possible placements requires a lot of one-on-one work, said the region's Social Services Commissioner Joann Simmons.

"This is a whole permanent

change of program, not a project," Simmons added.

"We all have to try to work together, and that takes quite a while."

Volunteer positions for people on welfare have to be compatible and in their local area, since many don't have a car to get to work, Frustaglio added.

But Frustaglio said she's confident York Region's program will meet the government's expectations, and even that it will be cited as a "benchmark" for other programs.

Workfare is getting good responses from people here on welfare, she said. "People are happy with the intent of the program."



HIGHER AND HIGHER: Kelly Timewell keeps twins Connor and Meghan, both 4, happy on the swings at the pool playground.

Photo by SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Town bans all outdoor burning after rash of fires

JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Reporter

A rash of grass fires in Whitchurch-Stouffville has resulted in a complete ban on outdoor burning.

No burning permits will be issued in the municipality until the dry spell is over, a fire official has announced.

There were so many grass fires out of control on the weekend that local firefighters "were run ragged," said Deputy Fire Chief Murray Emmerson.

People don't seem to realize just how dry it is," said Emmerson.

"We can't issue permits until we get some moisture," he said.

One of the reasons burning permits are used is to let the fire department know where burning is taking place.

"When people see smoke in the distance our switchboard lights up like a Christmas tree. If we know where it is, we don't waste time or money calling in the volunteers," said Emmerson.

Chair wants gallery space for programs

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program, first aid, drama, art classes, seniors programs, halloween party, a Remembrance Day program, an alternative health fair, and a Christmas program.

"This library is really taking off," said Scala. "Look at these uses. This is what a library is all about. It is so exciting."

Latcham Gallery space will also accommodate art exhibits. This includes a May 14 show by art students from Stouffville District Secondary School.

"Anyone wanting to use the space can send us a letter. The request will be considered," said Williams.

Appealing to the library board for permission to hold individual exhibits is not the way to run a serious art gallery, said Giles.

"We're not running a piece-meal operation," argued Giles. "We're to run like a business. We had so hoped for interim use."

Library programs held in the Latcham space will generate \$2,000 a year. "To let Latcham Gallery go for \$2,000 makes no sense, considering the value of the gallery to the community," said Giles.

The option of letting Latcham Gallery remain where it is until the end of 1998 is not dead, stressed Ward 6 Councillor Sue Sherban.

"Discussion needs to be re-opened," said Sherban, a council appointee on the library board.

Sherban said she'll lobby fellow board members to make them realize how important the gallery is to the downtown.

Business Improvement Area president Eric Button has emphasized that the gallery is a positive element to the downtown core. Button said he'd hoped the library would have let the gallery remain where it is on an interim basis.

When, a month ago, the library board closed Latcham Gallery without notice or public consultation, gallery supporters launched a campaign to save the facility — meetings attracted standing-room-only crowds, a gallery rebirth plan was put in place and an appeal for \$37,000 in start-up money was made to local council.

"We had a very positive meeting with council," said Giles. On April 20, council will make a final decision regarding its support, including authoring seed money.



HE REALLY DOUBTS IT: Hudson Hayden, as Doubting Thomas, has no more doubt in *No Doubt About It*, a play by The King's Kids of the Bethel Assembly of God on Hwy. 48 in Stouffville, staged on Easter Sunday and photographed in rehearsal last Thursday. The rest of the cast behind Hayden are from left: Stephanie Geehan as Phoebe, Brandy Hall as Esther, Rebekah Shank as Rebecca, Jordan Morrison as Peter, Jah-nee Venus as Mary, Nicole Eastman as Rachel, Chelsea Morrison as Lydia, and Grace Chong-Wong as Johanna.

Photo by SJOERD WITTEVEEN