

# York residents push for disability law

BY DAWN LIERSCH  
Staff Writer

Marty Shultz often fears for her life when crossing the road. And she's not alone.

Shultz, who has Multiple Sclerosis and is confined to a wheelchair, recalls crossing a street, only to find there was no access from the road back on to the sidewalk on the other side. As she struggled to find a way on to the sidewalk, a car veered backwards toward her, without its lights on, almost running her over.

"There's always a fear you never do something you've haven't done before if you're going by yourself. You don't know what you'll bump into. It's so frustrating," the Thornhill resident said.

"I have travelled all across the United States and our situation (in Ontario) is as bad as it gets."

Shultz is one of numerous Ontario residents pushing for government legislation to break down barriers for people with disabilities.

Shultz is a member of the Ontarians with Disabilities Committee pushing the provincial government to fulfill a 1995 campaign promise to enact an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The Act would remove existing barriers to people with disabilities and prevent new ones from being erected.

During a meeting with members of York Region community groups which deal with the disabled, David Lepofsky, committee chairperson, urged York residents to join in the fight.

"People with physical, mental and sensory disabilities face barriers to education, employment, goods and services," he said, adding there are 1.5 million people with disabilities in Ontario alone.

Although politicians have promised the legislation will be enacted by next November, Lepofsky worries the plan will be abandoned unless residents push for action.

Through a campaign entitled Just Call Mike, the group is urging residents

to call Premier Mike Harris and ask him when he's going to enact the legislation.

"We have a government that clearly does not want to do this. They just want you to go away," Lepofsky said.

Although he pointed out concerns regarding the disabled are dealt with in the Human Rights Code, Charter of Rights and through public education, he stressed the only way to create a completely barrier-free society is to enact laws against barriers.

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After consulting with people with disabilities from across Ontario for more than two years, the committee has prepared a blueprint for an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Other countries, including the U.S., India, England, Australia and Israel already have similar legislation, Lepofsky said.

"Those with the barriers will only remove the barriers if it's law," he said.

Lepofsky urged residents to lobby York Region council and smaller municipal councils to endorse the legislation and to hang Just Call Mike campaign posters in the community.

Lepofsky's message hit home with Cullen Perry, project co-ordinator with Future Abilities and Creative Employment (FACE), a non-profit agency that supports employment of people with disabilities in York Region and Bradford. Perry says there are about 40,000 people with disabilities in York.

For more information on the Ontarians with Disabilities Committee, contact its website at [www.indie.ca/oda](http://www.indie.ca/oda)

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