



— Mary Cook photo

Interval House in Carleton Place centre of neighborhood controversy

Neighbors up in arms

Residence taken over for 'battered women'

By Mary Cook

Citizen special correspondent

CARLETON PLACE — The takeover of a house in a residential area here as a temporary shelter for battered women has flared up in a controversy between organizers and residents of the area.

Interval House, the non-profit residential centre for women and children in crisis, met with residents of the Mary Street area where the home is located. The neighbors of the prospective tenants want no part of the project.

Many fear that violence could erupt at any time between those in residence and those from whom they are trying to escape.

Some residents also said that the real estate value of their property would take a drop when prospective buyers found out that "this kind of an institution is in their midst."

Right in the middle of the controversy is Councillor Trudi Dickie.

Not only is she an elected representative of the people of the area, she lives a couple of doors from the house in question.

"Frankly, if it meets all the requirements, and I understand one issue was the lack of a fire escape which is now being planned, there is little I can do to prevent it's locating on Mary Street."

"I sympathize with the organizers of the house, but I also can understand the residents of the area who are concerned about the unknown. However, I feel the place should be given a chance to prove itself."

"If it doesn't measure up at the end of a year, I will be screaming right along with the rest of them," she said.

The house in question, according to Susan Fisher, one of the Interval House organizers, meets all the requirements of such a facility. It is large enough to accommodate seven or eight women at a time. It is in a quiet neighborhood and the rent — which is not being released — is affordable.

Those opposing the location asked that their names not be published. Said one: "This is a small town, but I am totally opposed to the house being located on any residential street. Who is to say the street won't be overrun with irate husbands ready to fill people full of lead."

"Surely there are other commercial areas that could have been looked at for this purpose."

However, the organizers feel they are lucky to get the house on Mary Street.

Rentals are at a premium, and good houses to lease are virtually unheard of here.

The property is zoned R2, which means Interval House has a legal right to locate in the area.

However, whether or not it would still meet the bylaw requirements if it was classed as an institution, appears to be another question.

Keith Black, the town's building inspector, says the house will be classified as a boarding home.

"This is allowed in the R2 zoning and it matters not where the boarding money comes from, be it government or what-have-you."

"No bylaw is being broken and until it is, we can do nothing about the house locating on Mary Street," Black said.

The county will pay a per diem rate for those using Interval House.

Sandra Boyd said the women who can afford to help pay their own way will be asked to do so, "but no one will be turned away."

Since the Carleton Place house has been talked about, there have been many calls for help, Boyd said. And at the moment, there is no accommodation. The need for such a home became apparent when Boyd was commissioned under a Canada Works project to carry out a survey of the county on Women in Crisis.

The survey showed that 75 families were in need of help (this number was made available through the Lanark County Social Services and the Children's Aid Society).

There were 117 children involved in these 75 families, and 28 of those interviewed were experiencing physical violence, with nine children being physically abused by the spouse.

"The survey used only those women who sought help. There are many more not included in the survey who have had to move out of the county to get help," said Boyd.

"We know there are countless in the county who are trying to persevere on their own without help. We must reach them and give them support. Interval House can do this," she said.

The residents of the Mary Street area, which is just east of the Franktown Road, have the option of taking the issue to court if they feel a bylaw is being broken, said the building inspector.

However, Fisher said "I just wish they would give us a chance. I can understand their concerns; I know they are unfounded from talking with people from other Interval Houses in the province; but I just hope they will go along with us for a year, and give us a chance to prove that Interval House will be nothing more than a home for women who need temporary shelter from a crisis situation."