

The Quality of Life in Halton – 2000

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THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN HALTON

INTRODUCTION

The quality of life in Halton, as measured by the Quality of Life Index (QLI), is improving and has reached 94.3 for 1999. This is an improvement on the 1998 QLI of 85.2; however, Halton has not fully recovered from the difficulties of the early 1990s. There has been progress in some areas – lower rates of bankruptcies, fewer toxic spills, fewer low birth weight babies and reduced unemployment. There also have been setbacks – poorer air quality, more elderly waiting for long term care placements and continuing high, yet declining, social assistance caseloads. While there is reason for celebrating our progress, we must also renew our efforts to address the areas in which we have setbacks.

The Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Centre is using the QLI to monitor and measure living conditions which have a significant effect on the quality of life in Halton. The Council is part of a province-wide project, co-sponsored by the Ontario Social Development Council and the Social Planning Network of Ontario, to use the QLI for reporting on how changes in public policies have affected our quality of life.

This report, *The Quality of Life in Halton 2000* is the third in this series. We published our first report in 1997, along with other partners across Ontario, the first local report of this kind in Ontario or Canada. ***The purpose of this report is to measure and monitor changes in living conditions which affect the quality of community life. It is a tool for community dialogue to contribute to the public discussion about important issues. It is not intended to be a definitive statement.***

Quality of Life

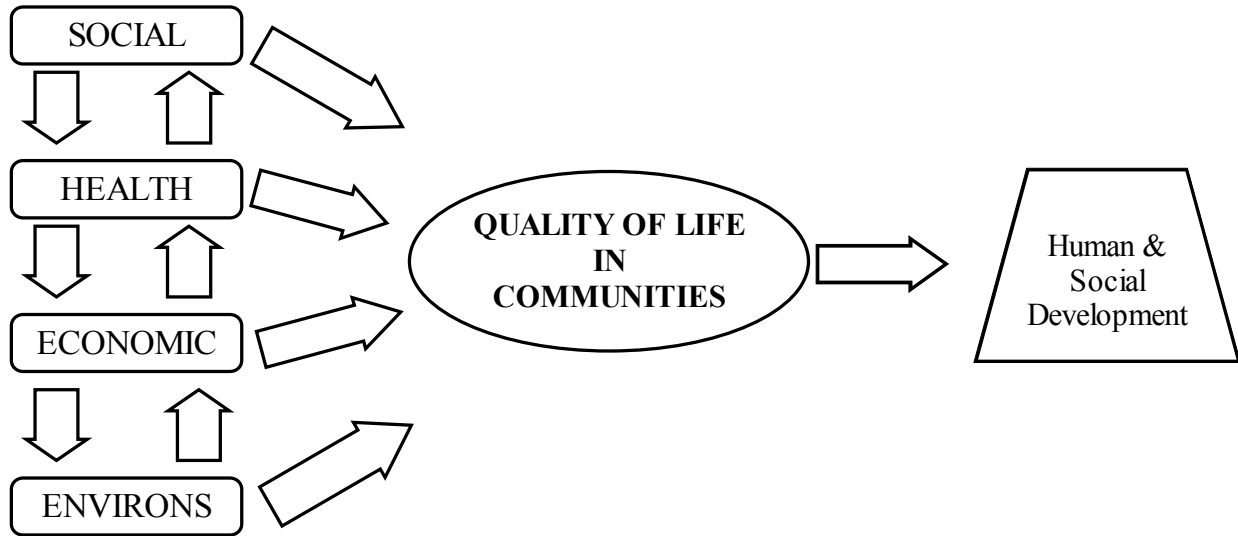
“The product of the interplay among social, health, economic, and environmental conditions which affect human and social development.”

Ontario Social Development Council and Social Planning Network of Ontario, 1997

Establishing a consensus on how best to manage sustainable growth and change is the purpose of defining and measuring local quality of life. Each community that seeks to define and measure quality of life will have to build a consensus on what is considered important to preserve, to enhance and to strive for. This should become a regular component of community planning processes. On the following page, Figure 1 illustrates the areas of concern as identified by the Ontario Social Development Council and Social Planning Network of Ontario.

As social development organizations, our goal is to improve the quality of life in our communities by promoting optimal conditions for human and social development and sustaining them for future generations.

Figure 1
QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX



Ontario Social Development Council and Social Planning Network of Ontario, 1997

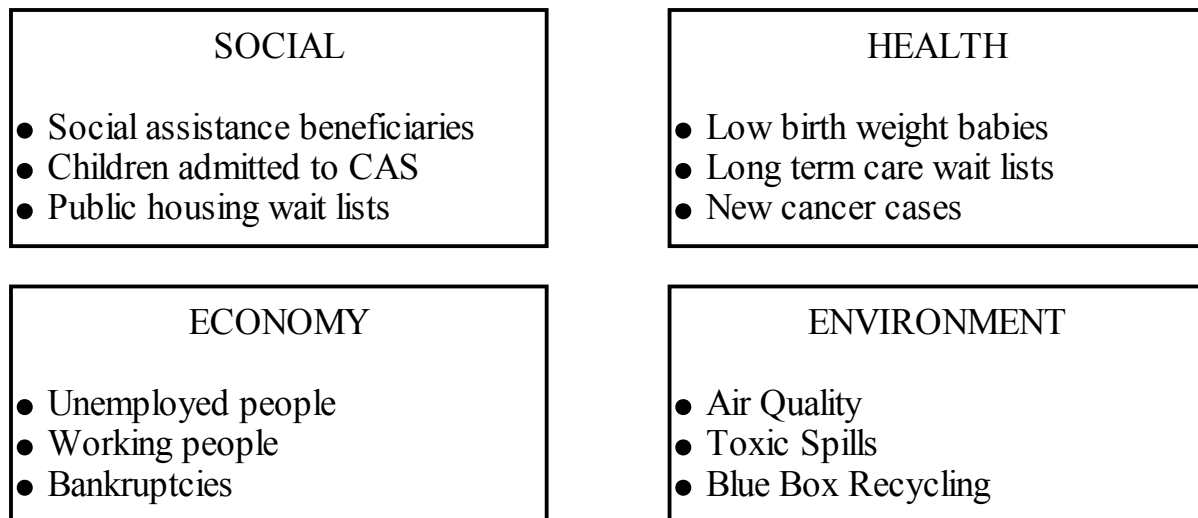
QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS

There are many indicators that could be used to measure quality of life. We are using twelve indicators which have been selected as part of a province-wide project for use in communities across Ontario. The criteria for choosing these twelve indicators are:

- ▶ relevance to quality of life;
- ▶ time sensitive, available on a regular basis;
- ▶ readily available;
- ▶ from credible sources.

Figure 2

QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS



Ontario Social Development Council and Social Planning Network of Ontario

Each of these indicators reflects one aspect of an important issue which affects our quality of life, as they hold meaning for people and as such, are intended to contribute to public debate. Definitions for the indicators can be found in Appendix 1.

Methodology

As part of the provincial QLI project, we are using the same data set for our local QLI in Halton. We have presented the data from disparate sources as an expression of rate per 10,000 population, to factor out population change as a variable. This also provides a common framework for measuring changes over time.

For some indicators, a more refined definition of the population is being used. For example, data for low birth weight babies is expressed as a rate per 100 live births. As well, air quality is reported as the number of hours of expressed moderate to poor air quality as a percentage of the total number of “valid hours” measured. Other indicators are being investigated in order to bring further refinement to the QLI.

For more information about the method of calculating the QLI, see the *QLI Methodology Report*, available from the Halton Social Planning Council.

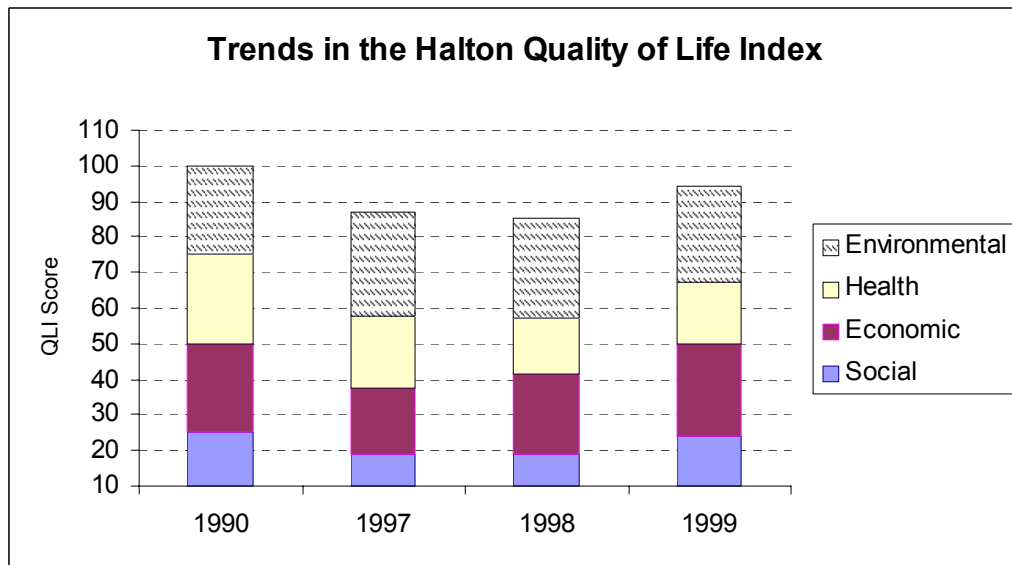
Features of the QLI

- The QLI is pegged at 100 in the base year.
- Each indicator is considered of equal value in the QLI. No weighting factors are used.
- We took into account the growth in population since 1990 by converting the data for each indicator into a rate per 10,000 population.
- Changes in the indicators are calculated based on the percentage increase or decrease from the rate in the base year to the current year.
- The results of the changes have either a positive or negative impact on the quality of life. This is factored into the calculation of the index.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN HALTON

We have collected the most current data for each of the twelve indicators and compared them with those of the period 1990-99. Figure 3 shows the trends over the three years we have produced a report for Halton for our overall quality of life. The chart indicates that, while our overall QLI has improved, it is the environmental and economic indicators that have been the largest contributors with the health indicators lagging behind (see Sectoral Trends and Progress and Setbacks, p. 6-11). Figure 4, on the following page, shows the changes in the twelve indicators over the three reporting periods. Appendix 2 contains the QLI spreadsheet comparing the 1990 base year and the 1999 data.

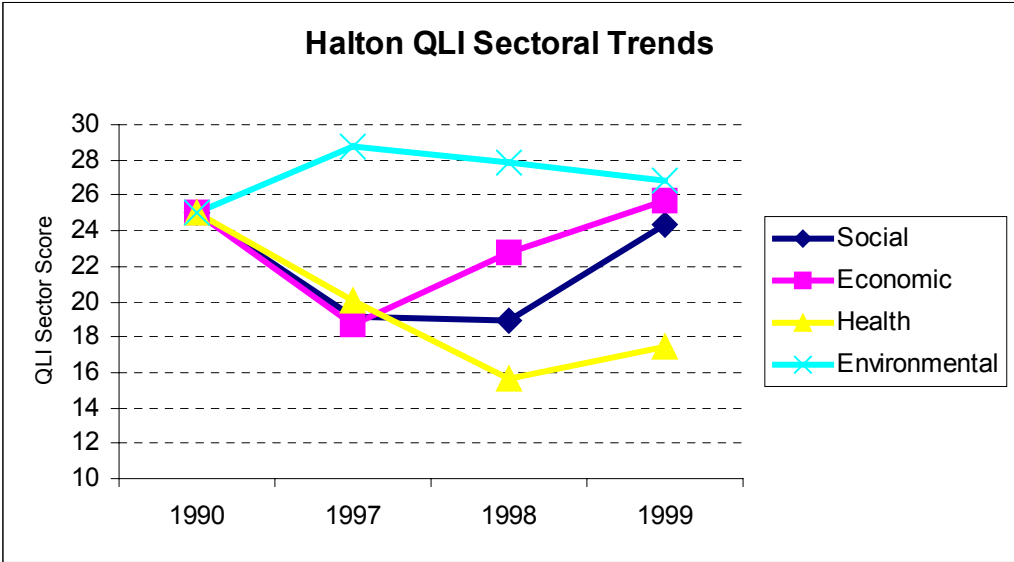
Figure 3



Sectoral Trends in the Quality of Life

Looking at the sectoral trends within the Quality of Life Index, we can see where we are making progress and where problems exist.

Figure 4



The **social** indicators have shown some significant improvements. This has been led by the decrease in the social assistance caseload in Halton, which has been decreasing steadily since the mid 1990s. The growing economy plays a role in this decrease, although there have also been changes to the eligibility criteria for social assistance that have disqualified many. The public housing wait lists have remained fairly steady, although this only measures part of the social housing picture in Halton. Affordable housing has been identified as an important social concern in this community and as such, requires further monitoring. The child welfare admissions have shown an improvement. However, changes in legislation have been introduced that will affect the definition of child abuse, the reporting criteria and the service requirements. These changes will likely start to show up in future reports.

The **economic** indicators continue to show improvement. The number of bankruptcies continues to decline after the peak in 1996, which is good news on the economic front. We have also seen continued decreases in the unemployment rates in Ontario and Southern Ontario, although we do not have current data for Halton (see Trend Analysis, p. 9). The continued economic growth may bring new job opportunities for those still looking for work.

The **health** indicators have shown the least improvement from the 1990 levels. There is a modest improvement in this area, although the health indicators in Halton continue to fall behind the other indicators. The low birth weight baby data continues to be fairly positive, although we are still slightly below the 1990 level. This may reflect, in part, the positive impact of pre-natal programs on

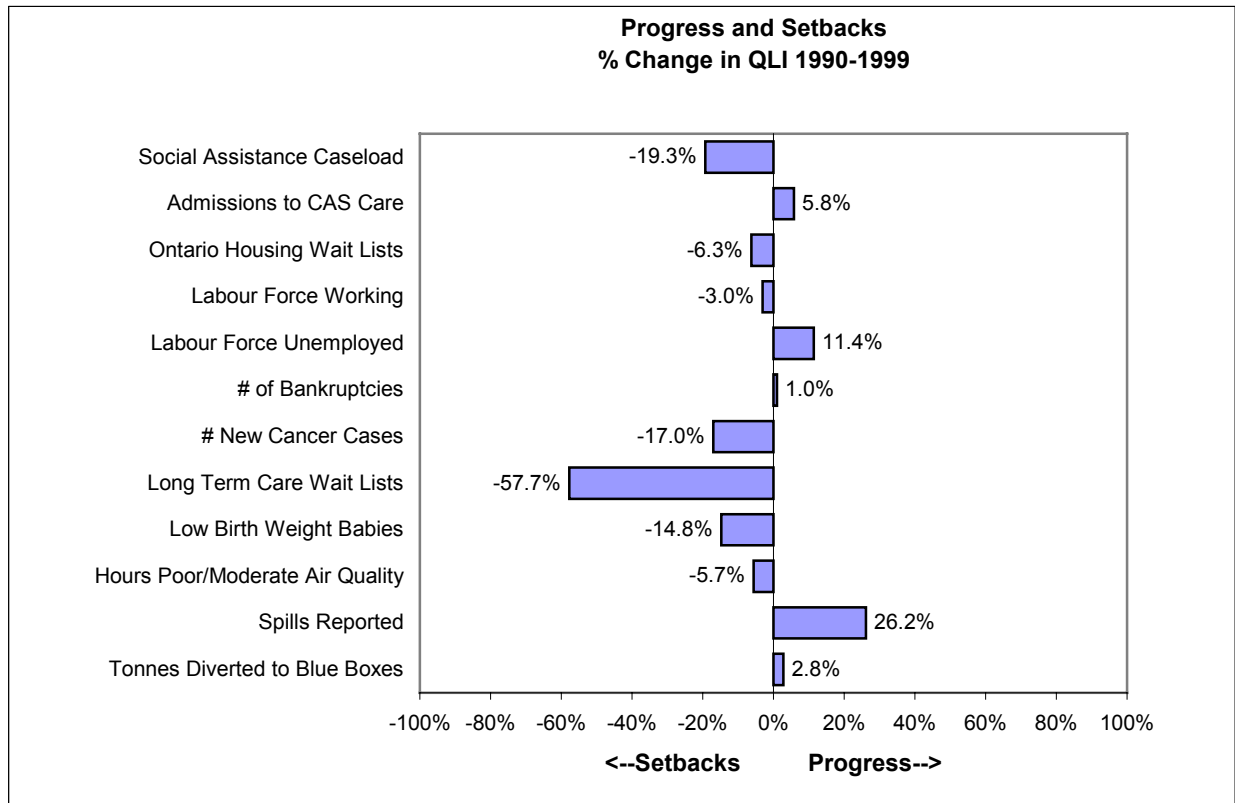
the health of pregnant women. Waiting lists for long-term care beds remain high, although there has been a slight improvement over last year. However, money provided by the provincial government for long term care beds has yet to take full effect in the Halton community (see Trend Analysis, p. 10).

The **environmental** indicators continue to be the positive area in the Halton QLI. The decline in spills reported continues in 1999, although this may be partly due to changes in provincial regulations (see Trend Analysis, p. 9). Blue box recycling continues to keep pace with population growth, but air quality numbers have declined, raising a red flag for analysis in future reports.

Progress and Setbacks

We analyze the results of changes in the quality of life by looking at which of the indicators are showing progress and which are showing setbacks over the time period from 1990 to 1999. Figure 5 shows the progress and setbacks between 1990 and 1999. We comment on the performance of each of the indicators below.

Figure 5



Progress

Children Admitted to CAS – This had been a negative trend during most of the 1990s. Families have found themselves unable to provide the basics for their children or have experienced breakdown under the stresses of life. However, the 1999 data improves by 22% from 1998. Child welfare authorities report that more of their admissions are due to problems associated with poverty. Amendments to the Child and Family Services Act, which were passed in the spring of 1999, changed the criteria for reporting child abuse and neglect and place a greater emphasis on the best interests of the child. The Council anticipates that this could result in an increase in admissions to care in the future. The question is whether child welfare agencies will have adequate resources to work with these children and their families.

Labour Force Unemployed – The number of people who are unemployed has declined to the point where it has become a positive trend. We are using data from the 1991 and 1996 Census to track labour force participation since the monthly labour force surveys conducted by Statistics Canada do not provide data specific to Halton. Halton falls into two Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), and as such, we cannot receive Halton-based information from the surveys. More current information about unemployment is needed. We know that unemployment is higher among youth. We also know that there are many discouraged workers who have given up looking for work and have left the labour force, but documentation is hard to find.

Bankruptcies – The bankruptcy data is showing marked improvement. Bankruptcies peaked in 1996 and have declined since. However, bankruptcies are still a measure of economic distress for individuals and businesses which, in turn, result in hardships for families dependent on market income.

Low Birth Weight Babies – Since our last report, we have obtained up-to-date data (1999) for low birth weight (LBW) babies from the Registrar General of Ontario.¹ It should be noted that the 1999 data is provisional at the moment, meaning further quality assurance testing is being carried out as a result of problems in previous years. This data indicates that Halton continues to have one of the lowest LBW rates in Ontario. This may be the result of greater public awareness about pre-natal and healthy child development given that Halton's population generally has higher incomes and higher education levels. However, growing rates of child poverty in Halton are undermining the conditions needed for healthy child and youth development in the long term.

In data received from the Regional Municipality of Halton Health Department, multiple births have nearly tripled as a percentage of all births from 1990 to 1997 (1.8% to 5.1%). Also, multiple births account for 36% of all low birth weight babies in 1997, an increase of 90% from 1990 when they accounted for 19%. This is most likely due to the increased use of fertility drugs by couples wishing to have children. The change in the low birth weight rate between 1990 and 1997 is 21%, with LBW singleton births decreasing 9.3% between 1990 and 1997, while LBW multiple births increased by 117.1%.

Spills Reported – We are using the standard definition of spills, defined by the Ministry of Environment and Energy, as part of the provincial QLI project for comparability with other communities (See Appendix 1). There is modest progress on this indicator, although we are still not at the 1992 base level (earliest available data). However, recent regulatory change is having an effect on what gets reported. This regulation (*Ontario Reg. 675/98*) provides exemption of certain classes of spills from notice requirements under the Environmental Protection Act. Some things exempt were not subject in the first place; the exemptions merely remove any basis for argument. The recent

¹ The Council received feedback on our first report about the use of this indicator because it ignored the factor of multiple births which account for a certain number of low birth weight babies. We checked this by removing the multiple births from the sample and recalculating the QLI. This changed the overall 1997 QLI score from 86.7 to 85.9, a difference of 0.8. For the purpose of compatibility with QLI scores from across the province, the Council continues to employ the total number of low birth weight babies.

water crisis in Walkerton has revealed serious lapses in reporting on environmental pollution, with disastrous consequences. The loss of public trust resulting from deregulation and privatization of environmental protection raises questions about other types of environmental reporting. We hope that the good news about fewer spills does not hide another environmental disaster waiting to happen.

Tonnes Diverted to Blue Box – This trend shows that the volume of Blue Box recycling is keeping up with population growth. The total tonnage will be affected by the introduction of lighter packaging materials, such as plastic containers and more lightweight glass products. More could be done to increase the participation of people recycling through the Blue Box program. The future of the program is uncertain due to the effects of funding cutbacks and downloading onto municipal governments. The costs of the program and the market for recyclable materials are also important factors which will influence the future of the program.

Setbacks

Social Assistance Caseloads – The number of caseloads has declined from its peak, but has not returned to the 1990 level. This trend is, in part, the result of more people working, as well as the stricter rules of eligibility that have excluded a significant number of people from receiving social assistance. The growth in poverty over this decade, especially among children, should be a warning signal that poverty is a growing phenomenon with long-term implications, even though more people are working and the number of social assistance recipients is declining.

Public Housing Waiting Lists – There is no significant change in the statistics regarding this indicator. The waiting list for public housing offered through the Halton Housing Authority (HHA) has declined slightly, but this does not include all social housing options in Halton. For consistency with other provincial partners, we are using statistics for Ontario Housing Corporation units, which the HHA administers locally. There are other social housing providers in Halton, such as municipal non-profits, private non-profits and co-ops. However, no new social housing has been built since 1995. A recent study on homelessness in Halton called affordable housing the ‘hidden issue’ (See Local Context, p. 15). In its study of housing needs in Ontario, *Where’s Home? A Picture of Housing Needs in Ontario*, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association indicates that the rental housing market in Ontario is getting much worse as tenants are squeezed between a dwindling supply of new rental housing, increasing rents and declining incomes. The crisis of homelessness has become an issue that is galvanizing the public debate about poverty and growing disparities. Municipalities are now totally responsible for public housing, as a result of federal and provincial downloading of responsibilities for housing. Also, funding to housing has been cut. The cost of maintenance of the current public housing stock is becoming prohibitive for cash-strapped local governments. Under these conditions, this indicator is likely to worsen in the future.

Labour Force Working – The number of jobs created in the current booming economy is not sufficient to keep up with population growth. Although unemployment rates continue to fall, a report in the Globe and Mail noted that “the economy has finally delivered almost enough jobs to wipe out

the higher unemployment created by a recession that officially ended more than six years ago” (May 3, 1999). It is important to take into consideration another Canadian trend which affects jobs in Ontario and in Halton. Of the jobs added to the Canadian labour market in this decade, over half come from self employment – accounting for 76% of the job growth in 1996 and 83% in 1997 (*The Growing Gap: A Report on Growing Inequality Between the Rich and Poor in Canada*, 1998).

Elderly Long Term Care Waiting Lists – This indicator shows a negative trend as the waiting list for long term care is growing quickly as the population ages. Recent provincial government announcements about investing funding in new beds have not yet translated into services and older people are suffering. Halton has the lowest number of Long Term Care beds to population ratio in the province, resulting in a severe shortage for a number of years. The funds for 1,579 new beds in Halton have been committed over a six-year period, which is not likely to keep up with the need or reduce the waiting list. The first allocation of 660 beds was announced in November 1998, with another announcement of 384 beds made in May 2000. However, those beds allocated in 1998 have yet to materialize, which places an added strain on the health care system in Halton.

New Cancer Cases – This new indicator shows a negative trend to 1996 (last available data). A more detailed analysis has been done by the Halton Regional Health Department in a study entitled *Cancer Incidence in Halton, 1984 to 1993*. This report identifies where progress is being made and where setbacks occur for certain types of cancer and among certain populations. Halton has an aging population and this increases the likelihood of increasing cancer rates, as the elderly are at a far greater risk of being diagnosed with cancer. The study finds that cancer incidence rate for those 65 years of age and over is 120 times that in children and teenagers, more than 20 times that in adults aged 20 to 44 and more than 3 times that in adults aged 45-64. The study concludes “cancer is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality, accounting for one-third of all deaths in Halton. In Ontario, over \$1 billion dollars is spent each year on cancer treatment alone. However, less than 1% of the provincial cancer budget is spent on prevention and less than 2% on early detection.” (p. ii)

Air Quality – We have seen an increase in the number of hours of moderate/poor air quality from the 1999 report. Also, while air quality is included in the QLI for compatibility with the provincial project, the air quality monitoring sites in Halton are in South Halton (Burlington and Oakville). This means they simply provide a snapshot of air quality conditions in the most urban part of Halton, home to one of Ontario’s major thoroughfares, the QEW. It does not necessarily reflect conditions in the northern part of the Region. Meanwhile there are disturbing reports (*Taking Stock 1997, 1997; Ontario’s Environment and the “Common Sense Revolution”: A Four-Year Report, 1999* and *An Environmental Agenda for Ontario, 1999*) that document the reduction in quality of life because of changes in environmental policies. This includes the negative effect on air quality and the decrease in the number of air quality reporting sites. All of these factors will affect this indicator in future reports.

Local Context

The Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Centre has done extensive work along with other organizations in Halton to document and report on social and economic conditions that affect local residents. Poverty in Halton is on the increase. Using the latest Statistics Canada data available for Halton (1996), these are the trends:

- ▶ The percentage of single persons that are poor in Halton has risen from 26.5% (6,610 persons) in 1991 to 30.8% (8,655 persons) in 1996, a 16% increase in the percentage of single persons that are poor. The percentage of single persons that are poor takes into account any change in the total population of single persons. When one looks at the actual number of single persons that are poor, it is an increase of 31% between 1991 and 1996.
- ▶ The percentage of families that are poor in Halton rose from 5.3% (4,700 families) in 1991 to 7.5% (7,140 families) in 1996, a 42% increase in the percentage of families that are poor. The percentage of families that are poor takes into account any change in the total population of families. When one looks at the actual number of families that are poor, it is an increase of 52% between 1991 and 1996.

Recent reports are highlighted which shed more light on the subject.

Child Poverty Report Card

The Council is a community partner in Campaign 2000, the national campaign that promotes the elimination of child poverty in Canada. As part of this campaign we produced an annual *Report Card on Child Poverty in Halton*. The 1999 report card documents that the number of poor families increased from 3,975 in 1986 to 7,140 in 1996, an 80% increase in the number of poor families. This is consistent with a national trend reported by Campaign 2000 that child poverty in Canada has increased by 100% since 1989.

It is clear that we have a major social problem on our hands, both now and for future generations. Poverty affects the life chances of children. According to research:

- ▶ the infant death rate in Canada is twice as high in poor families
- ▶ low birth weight is 1.4 times more common among babies born into poor families
- ▶ childhood disability is twice as high among children from poor families
- ▶ the school dropout rate for poor children is twice that of non-poor children
- ▶ hunger reduces children's ability to learn

This creates disadvantages which influence the life chances of poor children and, ultimately, their well being, productivity and social contribution as adults.

Child poverty is on the increase due to changes in public policy at both the federal and provincial levels which affect social and economic subsidies. Changes to standards and their impacts on children have been well documented by Campaign 2000 and others.

Halton Social Profile 1999

The *Halton Social Profile 1999* provides an extensive demographic description of Halton and its four municipalities. This information is essential to the strategic planning purposes of all agencies and groups throughout Halton. It is a tool that allows an agency to view demographic and socio-economic shifts through past decades, to the present and into the future. The shifts influence needs and demands. To be conscious of these changes allows for the development or evaluation of effective and appropriate programs and actions that will enhance human well being. The Profile is very useful to service providers, funders, planners, the not-for-profit sector and the private sector.

Some highlights from the report include:

- ▶ Halton's population grew 25% from 271,390 in 1986 to 339,880 in 1996. Compared with Ontario, which grew 18% over the same ten-year period, Halton's population expanded at a faster rate.
- ▶ The population of Halton Region is expected to grow to 538,000 persons by the year 2016. This is a 58% increase, 198,125 more persons than in 1996. Predicted new urban development on the fringe of existing areas is expected to cause a rapid increase in the population.
- ▶ Similar to the rest of the country, the population in Halton is aging. Over two decades between 1996 and 2016, the number of Halton residents who are 65 or older is expected to increase 125%. By 2016, it is expected that 16% of Halton's population will be within this age group compared to 11% in 1996.
- ▶ The average family income in Halton increased from \$51,321 in 1985 to \$79,930 in 1995. The average family income in Halton is significantly higher than that of Ontario, where the average family income in 1995 is \$59,830.
- ▶ The percentage of low-income families in Halton rose from 5.3% in 1990 to 7.5% in 1995. This figure is lower than the 14.8% of low-income families in the Province of Ontario in 1995. The number of low income families in Halton increased by 3,165 families over the ten-year period from 3,975 families in 1985 to 7,140 families in 1995 – an increase of 125.6%.
- ▶ The immigrant population increased from 62,320 persons in 1986 to 76,290 in 1996. This is an increase of 22.4%. However, the total population in Halton increased at a faster rate of 25.2%. Therefore, the proportion of immigrants within the total population decreased slightly over the ten years from 23.1% in 1986 to 22.6% in 1996.

Social Assistance Reform

Social assistance has been radically reformed by the provincial government with the Social Assistance Reform Act, which came into effect on June 1, 1998. The Council has prepared an extensive analysis of the changes in the programs, eligibility, benefit levels, and the impact of these changes on people living in Halton.² Highlights are presented here as they provide understanding of the social indicators in the Quality of Life Index.

The number of people receiving social assistance is used in the QLI as a marker for people living in poverty. It does not include the working poor. The QLI trend indicates a decline in the number of people receiving social assistance. This will be celebrated by some as a good sign. However, our analysis indicates that changes in eligibility, benefit levels, and the imposition of workfare have driven many people off welfare onto the streets and into low-paying jobs, moving from welfare poor to working poor.

Some of the ways that people in Halton will be affected are outlined below:

- ▶ All parents with school age children – including single parents previously receiving Family Benefits – will face mandatory workfare requirements.
- ▶ People of age 60-64 who were previously receiving Family Benefits, have been transferred to Ontario Works, where they will be considered employable and will have to comply with workfare requirements.
- ▶ Women may be forced to stay in abusive relationships, since living on social assistance will not be a viable option.
- ▶ Many people with disabilities do not fit into the new, more restrictive definition of disability. They have been transferred to Ontario Works, classified as employable, and must participate in all the mandatory requirements of Ontario Works, including job search and workfare.

We have a serious social problem with the growing number of poor people in our communities, for it creates divisions between those who have and those who do not. This divisiveness strains our caring institutions and affects the social cohesiveness of our community.

Food Bank Study

The *Halton Food Bank Study: Alternatives to Dependency* (1999) provides a profile of food bank recipients.

- ▶ 1,495 people used food banks monthly in 1997, an increase of 47% from 1994
- ▶ a high number of children in households using food banks
- ▶ a high number of the disabled in households using food banks
- ▶ a high number of single men in households using food banks
- ▶ a high number of single parent families headed by women using food banks

²Please see *The Social Assistance Reform Act: Information Package* for detailed information.

- ▶ more working poor families using the food bank

Food banks do not intend to encourage long-term use and dependency; nevertheless, they remain one of the few stable sources of food for people with low incomes.

The Food Bank Study discusses the root causes of poverty and food bank use. It recommends changes in policies and practices for the future which are needed to reduce dependency on food banks and to increase food security in the population. Such changes must include more jobs that provide adequate wages and more affordable housing.

Homelessness in Halton

A new report commissioned by the Regional Municipality, Department of Social and Community Services, entitled *Homelessness in Halton: A Hidden Issue*, has been prepared as a background document for a community consultation on homelessness. This report identifies the following major concerns: lack of affordable housing, lack of emergency shelters and people at risk of losing their housing. The special needs of particular populations, such as youth and people with mental health problems are documented. The reasons for homelessness are elaborated, including why the problems are “invisible.” Recommendations in the report include establishing a housing help centre/housing registry for Halton, increased access to emergency shelter beds and a rent bank. Homelessness is a serious problem that requires further attention by governments working together with communities to create and maintain adequate social housing stock to provide housing for those who cannot afford market rents.

Halton Poverty Project Report

A recent report from the Regional Municipality of Halton looked at the situation of poverty in Halton. The *Halton Poverty Project Report* is one local component of the Canadian Council on Social Development’s (CCSD) national study on the state of poverty in Canada. The Halton Poverty Project examines local statistics from the CCSD database and offers a preliminary description of the people who lived in poverty in Halton in 1996. It is hoped that this report and other research will be used to guide policy review, program planning, service delivery and community action in the Halton region.

Some of the key findings of the *Halton Poverty Project Report* include:

- ▶ 9.3% of all people in Halton live in poverty (31,300)
- ▶ Halton has the lowest poverty rates of all municipalities participating in the CCSD national study, but the numbers of people living in poverty increased between 1991 and 1996 (Burlington’s poverty rate increased from 7.9% to 10.4% and Oakville’s rate increased from 6.7% to 9.9%)
- ▶ 36.4% of lone parents with children 0-18 live in poverty
- ▶ 44.6% of single females over 65 years live in poverty

Of people living in poverty in Halton

- ▶ 42% are male
- ▶ 58% are female
- ▶ 1 in 10 children aged 0-14
- ▶ 1 in 5 seniors over 75 years

A staff report presented to Regional Council, *Working Poor Report* (SS-32-00) focuses on the plight of those persons with low incomes who are working and may not be eligible for social assistance programs. Despite the availability of a broad range of programs, delivery of these to working poor individuals is becoming more difficult because of legislative changes in various programs. This is particularly noticeable in the exclusion of working poor from receiving skills training and educational assistance that influence access to stable employment that pays better wages. Other specific barriers to services for the working poor identified include: the 5 year wait list for subsidized housing, long wait lists for subsidized child care, jobs that are temporary, low paying and provide no benefits, lack of transportation services outside Burlington and Oakville and lack of local, emergency dental health care facilities for adults.

The reports conclude that a community's human capital, indicated by its average levels of education and occupational skills, is linked to the poverty rate of that community. Governments, the private sector, community groups and citizens must work together to address poverty.

PROVINCIAL QLI: PROGRESS AT WHAT PRICE?

The quality of life in Ontario, as measured by the Quality of Life Index, is improving and has reached **97.7** in the Spring of 2000. However, Ontario remains below the benchmark of 100 for the Quality of Life Index established in 1990. The lagging social indicators - the “social deficit” - continue to undermine progress in other sectors. The environmental indicators have led the upward trend, though air quality has been declining since 1998. The growing gap between the economic and social indicators shows that the pursuit of economic growth does not yield the dividends it once did. A rising tide no longer lifts all boats.

This report, the sixth in the series on *The Quality of Life in Ontario* published by the Ontario Social Development Council (OSDC) and the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO), is the first report of the new millennium. It provides a ten-year look at progress we have made, setbacks we have endured, and a set of benchmarks for the beginning of the 21st century.

The main areas of progress in the provincial QLI have been in the recycling, spills reported, low birth weight babies and social assistance. There are setbacks in public housing, child welfare, long-term care, new cancer cases, air quality and bankruptcies.

The social indicators continue their decline, led by the growing crisis in housing, which is being tracked by the QLI through public housing waiting lists. The number of people receiving social assistance is declining, which appears to be good news, attributable to the growing economy. We also know that many others have been declared ineligible for welfare based on harsh new rules. Still others are joining the growing number of homeless people living in shelters. The child welfare admissions are stable at this time. Changes in legislation have been introduced that will affect the definition of child abuse, the reporting criteria, and the service requirements. This will probably start to show up in the QLI in 2001.

The health indicators are mixed. The number of low birth weight babies has declined in 1999, continuing a positive trend with long-term implications for healthy child development. This appears to reflect, in part, the positive impact of pre-natal programs on the health of pregnant women. Waiting lists for long term care remain high, but have declined from their peak in April 1999, as money promised by the provincial government for long term care beds begins to take effect in communities. The number of new cancer cases has been growing due to an aging population, but seems to be levelling off.

The economic indicators are slightly down from the fall of 1999. The number of bankruptcies continues to decline from its peak two years ago. This is good news on the economic front. The number of people working has declined from its peak in October 1999, but is increasing again in April 2000. The number of unemployed people has levelled off during the first three months of 2000. The Ontario Budget 2000 is projecting an economic growth rate of more than 4%. This may bring new job opportunities for those still looking for work.

The environmental indicators continue to lead the way in the QLI. The decline in spills reported continues through 1999, partly due to changes in provincial regulations (See *The Quality of Life in Ontario - Fall 1999*). Data for air quality and tonnes recycled to blue boxes in 1999 should be available for our Fall 2000 report on the quality of life in Ontario. Recent reports from various sources have highlighted the health problems associated with poorer air quality. For more information, see *The Quality of Life in Ontario - Spring 2000* (www.qli-ont.org).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The quality of life in Halton, as measured by the QLI, is progressing. We are seeing that the economic indicators are improving, which reflects similar trends in Ontario and Canada. This should point to better opportunities for Halton residents. However, since we do not have current labour force data, the real economic picture is somewhat speculative. Also, although we are seeing some improvements in the social indicators, we are still not to 1990 levels and income disparity continues to be an issue in Halton, as evidenced by the growing number of poor people.

In the area of health, we see the indicators lagging. Since health is an area that is of primary importance to many residents, this is of concern. With a growing older population, the need for greater expediency in resolving the issue of long term beds is imperative. As a community, we need to be more proactive in finding solutions. Low birth weight baby statistics are still fairly positive, although the dramatic increase in the number of multiple LBW babies is a trend that may require further investigation.

Environment issues have been on the front page of the news lately and given the concerns raised about air quality in this report, this bears further monitoring. Changes in our physical environment can affect our health and our social and economic environments, ultimately affecting our overall quality of life.

The quality of life in Ontario is attracting attention on the global scene. Ontario's Quality of Life Index was selected for presentation at the *Second International Conference on the Quality of Life in Cities: 21st Century Quality of Life*, held in Singapore in March 2000. It was a great opportunity to showcase the QLI and to learn about quality of life issues in other countries.

A number of issues were identified in the course of the conference deliberations about measuring and monitoring quality of life (QOL):

- ▶ Comprehensive, holistic frameworks for QOL are still in early stages of development.
- ▶ If one were to characterize all of the QOL indicators, including both positive and negative attributes, in two words or less, it would be “**income distribution.**”
- ▶ The most important objective of measuring QOL is informing policy-makers and bringing about positive change where indicators show a lack of progress.
- ▶ Measurements of the QOL are moving targets, with an extremely short shelf life.
- ▶ Monitoring the quality of life has become linked to regional development by reinforcing the relationship between economic prosperity and community well being.

- ▶ Recognizing that notions of liveability vary between different communities of people, but that they are grounded in places, there is scope for new studies of community QOL.
- ▶ Key Indicators of QOL should be regionally focussed and differentiated.
- ▶ Quality of life studies provide a critical starting point for mobilizing the capacity of regions, leaders, and local communities through self-assessment.

We will use this new knowledge as we work toward improving the quality of life in Ontario's communities.

There are many more questions that could and should be raised by the community about the issues which affect our quality of life. The Quality of Life Index contributes as a catalyst to discussion about our quality of life in Halton.

APPENDIX 1 – DEFINITIONS OF INDICATORS

SOCIAL INDICATORS

Social Assistance Caseload

The number of beneficiaries during a given month is used, rather than caseload size, as a more accurate method of measuring the dimensions of those who depend on government assistance. However, in Halton, we only have access to data based on caseload and have used this figure for all reports. The categories of assistance were changed in 1998. Prior to 1998, they were General Welfare Assistance (GWA) and Family Benefits Allowance (FBA). Since 1998, they are called Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program.

Sources – Ontario Ministry of Community & Social Services, Social Assistance and Programs Branch, collected through the area offices of the Ministry; municipal social services departments.

Children admitted to Care of Child Welfare Authorities

The number of children who are admitted to care by child welfare authorities (Children's Aid Societies) as mandated by the Child and Family Services Act.

Sources – The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS); Children's Services Branch, Ontario Ministry of Community & Social Services; local Children's Aid Societies or Family and Children's Services Agencies.

Waiting Lists for Public Housing

The average number of people on waiting lists for public housing (OHC) over a given year.

Sources – Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC); local housing authorities.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

People Working in the Labour Force

The number of people working during a specified month.

Source – Census Data, Statistics Canada. National and provincial data available on Statistic Canada's website: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/labour>

People Unemployed in the Labour Force

The number of people unemployed and looking for work during a specified month.

Source – Census Data, Statistics Canada. National and provincial data available on Statistic Canada's website: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/labour>

Bankruptcies

The number of individuals and companies declaring bankruptcy in a specified month, as reported to the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

Sources – Industry Canada, Bankruptcies Branch, Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy; Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Complete report for Ontario by postal code is provided to Ontario Social Development Council for distribution to community partners in the QLI Project. It is also available on the Internet through the QLI website: <http://www.qli-ont.org>

HEALTH INDICATORS

Elderly Waiting for Long Term Care Placements

The number of people over 65 years of age waiting for placement in long-term care facilities through Placement Coordination Services/Community Care Access Centres during a specified month. A small number of people under 65 years of age live in long-term care facilities and are counted in the statistics.

Sources – Placement Coordination Service Statistics: Long Term Care Facility, Section A1 and Long Term Care, Section A2, Ontario Ministry of Health; Local Placement Coordination Services; Community Care Access Centre.

Low Birth Weight Babies

The number of low birth weight babies born in a month or a year. Low birth weight is defined as less than 2500 grams or 5 pounds 8 ounces.

Sources – Vital Statistics Branch, Ontario Ministry of Health; Public Health Unit.

New Cancer Cases

The number of new cases of all types of cancer in a year.

Source – Ontario Cancer Registry. Provincial and local data provided to Ontario Social Development Council for community partners.

ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

Air Quality

The accumulated number of hours of moderate to poor air quality, reported daily by 27 sites around the province, when the amount of particulates in the air reaches a threshold which affects health, as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy. Air quality is measured as the number of hours of Moderate (32-49) or Poor (50-99) air quality per month.

Sources – Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Energy. Also available through the QLI website: <http://www.qli-ont.org>

Spills of Toxic Substances

The accumulated number of toxic spills reported during the year as reported to the Ministry of Environment and Energy under the Environmental Protection Act.

Sources – Spills Action Centre, Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Energy. Statistics can be found for most major municipalities on the Ministry's website: <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca>. Also available through the QLI website: <http://www.qli-ont.org>. The Ministry provides data directly to Ontario Social Development Council for distribution to community partners in the QLI Project.

Tonnes of Waste Diverted to Blue Boxes

Metric tonnes of waste diverted from landfills and recycled through Blue Boxes.

Source – Recycling Council of Ontario; Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy; local waste management offices; municipal recycling boards. Also available through the QLI website: <http://www.qli-ont.org>

APPENDIX 2 – 1999 HALTON QLI SPREADSHEET

QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX - HALTON 1999

INDICATORS	BASE YEAR	BASE RATE/10,000	BASE QLI VALUE	CURRENT YEAR	CURRENT RATE/10,000	% CHANGE	QLI IMPACT	SPRING 2000 QLI	
SOCIAL INDICATORS									
1: Social Assistance Caseload	1990	105.4	8.3	1999	125.8	19.4%	NEG	6.7	
2: Admissions to CAS Care	1993	6.9	8.3	1999	6.5	-5.8%	POS	8.8	
3: Ontario Housing W. Lists	1990	27.1	8.3	1999	25.4	-6.3%	POS	8.8	
SOCIAL COMPOSITE			25						24.3
ECONOMIC INDICATORS									
4: Labour Force Working	1991	5,495.9	8.3	1996	5,328.6	-3.0%	NEG	8.1	
5: Labour Force Unemployed	1991	353.5	8.3	1996	313.2	-11.4%	POS	9.2	
6: # of Bankruptcies	1990	15.7	8.3	1999	15.5	-1.3%	POS	8.4	
ECONOMIC COMPOSITE			25						25.7
HEALTH INDICATORS									
7: # New Cancer Cases	1993	34.1	8.3	1996	39.9	17.0%	NEG	6.9	
8: Long Term Care W. Lists	1990	10.1	8.3	1999	15.9	57.4%	NEG	3.5	
9: Low Birth Weight Babies	1990	4.2	8.3	1999	4.8	14.3%	NEG	7.1	
HEALTH COMPOSITE			25						17.5
ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS									
10: Hours Poor/Moderate Air Quality	1990	6.7	8.3	1998	7.1	6.0%	NEG	7.8	
11: Spills Reported	1992	4.2	8.3	1999	3.1	-26.2%	POS	10.5	
12: Tonnes Diverted to Blue Boxes	1992	783.4	8.3	1999	805.6	2.8%	POS	8.5	
ENVIRONMENTAL COMPOSITE			25						26.8
QLI COMPOSITE INDEX			100						94.3

APPENDIX 3 – REFERENCES

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