

Mississauga North MPP Jones named Youth Secretariat head

By JOHN STEWART

You don't have to tell Terry Jones about the staggering problems which young people often face.

The Mississauga North MPP was named head of the Ontario Youth Secretariat this week and will carry the strength of a startling personal experience into his work.

When Jones was still a teenager, he was in a serious traffic accident. "I owed a lot of money when I was still in my teens," he says after some prompting. (He owed "something like \$85,000" when he was earning \$45 a week.)

"I had no father to bail me out. But I went back to school," says the new parliamentary assistant to Margaret Birch, provincial secretary for social development. "I went to university and I worked. I took the hard way into a large firm and then later I managed to start my own insurance firm."

Jones "paid back every cotton pickin' cent of what I owed at a time when it might as well have been millions to me."

So the MPP comes to his new responsibilities with what he considers a heightened awareness of the problems of the young. He believes in a return to the basic premises of the work ethic combining the tools of education and hard work.

"We've never before had such challenging times," he relates. "But young people today have problems just like every generation has had them. These are challenging times sure, but they're exciting ones as well with new technology, new experiences and better education. Today you can do almost anything you want to do."

Among Jones' duties will be administration of the Experience summer work program; co-ordination of the Ontario Career Action Program under which the province has already hired over 1,000 young people; and expansion of the provincial Career Education plan which tries to match new graduates with jobs.

A program of prevention and diversion for young people in trouble with the law is high on his priority list. The idea is to prevent "head-on

collisions" of youth and law, he says. Part of the solution may be tightening up some of our laws notes the MPP who was elected for the first time last September. He relates with great concern a recent incident where a 16-year-old youth who had stolen a car, slashed up his employer's office and been apprehended with a gun and a knife was released within a day on bail.

The availability of alcohol and drugs "may lead the list" of problems the Youth Secretariat will tackle. Looking at the number of people in trouble because of this problem and reviewing Addiction Research Foundation statistics "you have to be alarmed," says Jones. "There's just no other word for it."

"There are kids at 13 getting together and going out to buy a bottle of Four Star," continued the MPP. "And it's happening right here in Mississauga."

Many citizens may not want to face that problem but it's still there, he says. "A lot off

youth will be candid with the Youth Secretariat," he claims. "They'll tell us things that they won't tell their educators, or their doctors or their parents."

The former lecturer for the Ontario Safety League has also been commissioned with the task of reporting on the possible lowering of the drinking age from 21. His recommendation will be ready by April 1 and before that Jones expects to have extensive input from the people who could be affected. He

feels they'll take a very responsible position.

"Youth and the province probably need the Youth Secretariat now as perhaps never before," says Jones of the program first instituted in 1972. The additional responsibilities young people are taking on are remarkable, he notes.

"The future of the province rests in their hands. The guidance they get and the input they have into government policies is going to be absolutely crucial."