



Sheila Meers has been Peel's director of children's services since 1977. She will retire tomorrow.

Children's services director closing out 20-year career to do more volunteer work

By SANDY MCLEAN
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It's not time for the rocking chair, but after 20 years of service it's time to pack it in, says Peel Region's director of children's services.

March 25 will mark Sheila Meers' last day as an employee of the Region, and the first day of the rest of her life — her first day doing exactly what she wants to do.

"Nobody will be looking for me to turn up in the office at 8 a.m. It will be different," says Meers, 65. "I'm ready to go. For the last year I've been working toward leaving. I've reached that age when you have no choice."

She's seen a lot of changes over the years. There were 349 children in regional daycare in 1977 when Meers became director — today there are 2,231.

"We've had a large expansion. One year it jumped by 500 spaces. Everyone says it's not enough, and we know that, but it's been cost effective for the taxpayers," she says.

When Meers started in 1973, she was supervisor of the Chinguacousy Township daycare centre. Two years later the Region of Peel was formed and she became regional supervisor of daycare for a few years, before being promoted to director.

No typical days

What kept Meers interested in her work was the variety of things that crossed her desk over the years and the flexibility she had to do work with community agencies.

In her business, there was no typical day.

"I found many, many days I planned to have a typical day and I would schedule a day of meetings, but things always came up that needed my immediate attention," Meers says. "With 146 people under me and 2,231 children in care it's been a busy life, but it's been enjoyable."

Meers is particularly proud of the screening and resource programming she and her staff put in place to meet the needs of children with physical and intellectual handicaps. Each daycare centre has a resource teacher to work on an individual basis with children with special needs.

Not one to sleep in mornings, Meers will be up early each day. But instead of heading to the office, she will be busy putting in volunteer hours with various organizations.

The Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse, the Community Relations Committee of Peel Memorial Hospital and the Parenting In Peel Association will benefit from her volunteer efforts.

There have been other groups vying for her time, but Meers has turned them down for now, feeling she will be kept busy enough.

"I don't think they're going to let me sit down for long," she says with a chuckle. "It's nice to feel I have some value to the groups that are out there."

As chair of the Parenting In Peel Association — a position she is stepping down from — Meers helped organize Parenting In Peel Week, March 22-26.

It's a week to celebrate parents, she says. The child care centres and schools are encouraged to do something for the parents this week, whether it's bringing in a speaker for them to listen to or handing out flowers.

And as the hours of the week tick by, Meers finds there just aren't enough minutes to tie up all the loose ends and say her goodbyes.