

ON MY PLANET

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## Spiralling growth triggers multiple problems in 905 regions

**As population explodes in Brampton and Mississauga, so, too, are incarceration rates**

July 19, 2008

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Brampton's population continues to explode, perhaps too fast for its own good. The most recent census showed the number of residents ballooned by 33 per cent in five years. It's a similar story in west Mississauga.

In fact, throughout the 905, developers are digging so fast that city planners and commercial developers are struggling to keep up. The result may be causing a rise in incarceration.

A *Star* investigation into the costs of jailing based on last-known addresses for inmates in provincial jail shows that several pockets in the 905 are sending an unusually large number of people to lock-ups. The problem, say local activists, is a lack of basic social infrastructure.

"Supports like stores, pizza shops, recreation centres, even schools – these things come last," says Kathryn Lynch, managing director of Peel Region's John Howard Society. "(There are) young people with no activities; nowhere to go. In Springdale (L6R), they didn't have the schools for them. You have 2,000 kids in a place for 1,200. If you've got schools packed to the rafters with students, how are you going to control them and give them quality education?"

The majority of families moving into these areas are newcomers, she adds, struggling with employment, culture shock and intergenerational tension. People can feel detached from their communities.

And that's only part of the problem. Scarce affordable housing is creating suburban communities where people are turning to crime, advocates say.

"The big problem is low-income jobs and Mississauga's high rent," said Sharron Millard, whose Salvation Army location at Cawthra Rd. and Dundas St. helps about 200 families a month with services that include a food bank.

As the Conservative government toughens laws to keep some offenders in jail longer,

Lynch, Millard and others in the 905 wonder if that money could be better spent fixing social issues in high-risk communities.

"Removing a person (to jail) for a period of time doesn't fix the issue," said Lynch.

Through a freedom of information request, the *Star* was able to map the last known address for provincial inmates serving time on a given day last summer. In almost all cases, the identified neighbourhoods correlate with social need. Downtown Brampton, parts of southeast Mississauga, the Meadowvale region and downtown Oshawa show up as high-incarceration-cost neighbourhoods.

"There's one men's shelter in Oshawa, which covers all of Durham Region. And there's one short-term women's shelter in Whitby which covers all of Durham Region," said Ivan Downey, Durham's director of community and family services for the Salvation Army.

It's a similar situation in Peel, where the Wilkinson Road Shelter appears to be the only men's shelter in the region.

Some of the suburban postal areas with a high number of inmates are geographically large, encompassing wealthy neighbourhoods as well as at-risk ones. And the data does not suggest that crime is rampant in any of the identified communities; only that an unusually large number of people in jail identified these areas as their homes.

For instance, Mississauga west boasts one of the lowest crime rates in the city, said Ward 9 councillor Pat Saito. Yet the area is producing one of the highest rates of inmates.

One explanation comes from Toronto police Chief Bill Blair. He said in an interview that 27 per cent of people involved in violent criminal acts come from outside the City of Toronto.

Peel District school board chair Janet McDougald says the board is keeping up with the rapid development, but other social supports are not. In fact, the Peel board has "carved out" education money from their budget to set up support services for parents and children in about a dozen key "pathway" schools. These include parenting classes and nutrition workshops.

"If you drive through those communities, the schools are about the only infrastructure," said McDougald. "It's clear that they need more facilities and services: community centres, daycare, commercial centres for people."

Recognizing that need, the Peel Youth Violence Prevention Network recommended in May that the region's schools remain open after hours.

"We need the community facilities...", said Saito, the network's vice chair. "Even if we just looked at the high schools for example – that would expand the available infrastructure significantly."

McDougald said the schools are already fully booked.

In the end, it comes to down to money.

"The evidence is clear," said Lynch. "If supports are put in place for individuals, by and large people would prefer not to go to jail."

*With files from Betsy Powell*