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PAGE B1

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UPDATE: TRANSIT STRIKE

REGION CALLS ON SIDES TO NEGOTIATE



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Michael and Christine Way Skinner celebrate the different cultures of their adopted children.

Unions picket for first time since strike began

BY DAVID FLEISCHER
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For the first time in the four-week old strike, York Region Transit workers are walking the picket lines, while regional council is indicating a willingness to engage the players.

While the region's politicians and staff maintain they have no direct role to play in bringing together the two striking unions and their three private contractors, they have clearly heard the growing swell of voices using social media to call them on the carpet for perceived inaction.

Regional chairperson Bill Fisch sent a letter to the various players yesterday, urging them to come back to the table after weeks of making life difficult for riders, transit workers, students, the elderly and businesses.

"It is astonishing, given this hardship, the parties have not negotiated meaningfully for weeks," he wrote. "I am sending an open letter to all parties, reminding you of your obligation to bargain in good faith and end this service disruption."

Since the strike began Oct. 24, only one meeting has taken place between workers and management. It yielded no results.

Mr. Fisch urged the two sides to take advantage of mediators the province has said are willing to help them bridge the gaps.

The striking drivers and maintenance workers are employed by Miller Transit, First Transit and Veolia, all of whom were awarded contracts by regional council.

Mr. Fisch highlighted details of recent offers from two of the three private contractors.

Veolia offered Viva workers a 5-per-cent wage increase over two years.

Miller Transit offered 13.5 per cent over five years, but Mr. Fisch said the union seeks 20 per cent over three years.

"To my knowledge, there are no public or private employers capable of meeting such demands in this economic climate," he said.

"The Miller proposal is, in all respects, financial and otherwise, a significant improvement on our previous agreement with this union," company vice-president Dan Squigna wrote in a letter to Mr. Fisch.

The unions have highlighted the

Family embraces diversity through adoption

BY AMANDA PERSICO
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If you are thinking about adoption somewhere down the line, it's best to get the paperwork done now.

Those are the words from the wise from Newmarket's Michael and Christine Way Skinner.

While they don't have any biological children, their home is filled with the laughter and arguments of five children ranging in age from eight to 17.

Every child deserves love, York Region Chil-

'Adoption has always been part of the story and language in this house.'

Christine Way Skinner on speaking to her children about their roots

dren's Aid Society executive director Pat Lake said, and the Way Skinners provide it.

"They are an inspiration," Mr. Lake said. "They show their kids every child deserves to be a permanent member of the family and

every child deserves a warm place to call home."

November is Adoption Awareness Month and the theme is adoption is an option.

To keep the option of adoption available, you need to do the leg work in advance.

The Way Skinners started the adoption process almost 20 years ago. They were put on a wait list for about two years prior to completing a home study, creating a family profile and being assigned a social worker through the

See TRUST, page A9.

See UNIONS, page A10.

In this week's... It's you

Look inside for this pullout community section



▲ THE TOP 5: Places to watch Santa Claus parade

- Children get say in future of tree planting
- YRAA champions decided this week

We want to hear from you:
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Community groups speak out against bullying

BY CHRIS TRABER
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There's a long list of tragic stories involving bullying.

Mitchell Wilson's doctors encouraged him to take regular walks to help with the symptoms of muscular dystrophy.

In 2010, while on one of those walks in Pickering, the 11-year-old was mugged by an older boy who attended his school.

Chris Howell had Tourette's syndrome, obsessive-compulsive and attention-deficit disorders, all of which made him a target at school.

Some of his Hamilton schoolmates threatened him last summer and during his

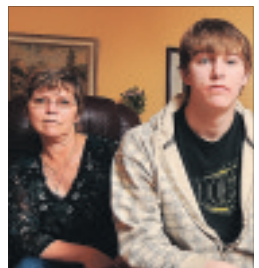
first week of Grade 12. Jamie Hubbley's life became increasingly difficult after he acknowledged he was gay.

The 15-year-old Ottawa student was no stranger to danger. In Grade 7, a group of kids tried to shove batteries down his throat, but high school took things to a different and sinister level.

These three young people were victims of bullying. No longer. Each committed suicide within the past 12 weeks.

In the midst of the ninth annual Bullying Awareness Week, the three boys silently remind us how important it is to speak up.

See ADULTS, page A7.



FILE PHOTO

Daniel Sebben and his mother, Karen, started the York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition.



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Trust adoption process: parents

From page A1.

Children's Aid Society.

"If you've thought about it, get the ball rolling now," said Mr. Way Skinner, who is the religion, family life and equity co-ordinator at York Catholic District School Board. "Get the wait period over with. You won't get those wasted years back."

It was a matter of waiting because finding the perfect family for a child can take time.

"It was a roller coaster ride of possibilities," said Mrs. Way Skinner, who is the cat-echist at Newmarket's St. John Chrysostom Church. "At one point, I felt like I had 15 miscarriages, but (adoption) was a dream come true."

The Way Skinners' first child came to their household as a newborn. About two years later, they decided to adopt for a second time, this time a toddler.

Several years later, they adopted another infant.

The Way Skinners also took in two kin care children, where they act similar to foster parents to a close friend's children.

Another piece of advice is to use the Children's Aid Society as a resource and not think of it as a threat, Mrs. Way Skinner said.

"You need to trust the social worker," she said. "You are here for the children, not for your ego. Having a biological child is like a lottery. It is the same with adoption. You have to trust the process."

The Way Skinners don't shy away from sharing their adoption story with their children.

"Adoption has always been part of the story and language in this house," Mrs. Way Skinner said. "Our kids are mixed race and we're white. It is obvious they are not our biological children. We've invited that level of openness."

It's all about feeling secure about the term adoption. It is never said with a negative reaction, Mr. Way Skinner said.

"(The children) will hear it enough through their lives as something strange," he said. "A lot of people don't understand it. When we say it, it is dripping with love."

BY THE NUMBERS

8,000 – children in Ontario are up for adoption this year.

971 – children were adopted in 2010-11.

5,000 – children found permanent homes through legal custody or kinship options.

61 – per cent of children need permanent homes who are between the ages of 13 and 18. Of those, 3.6 per cent were adopted last year.

► For more information on the adoption process, visit yorkcas.org

While the members of the Way Skinner family each have their own culture, the tie that binds the family is celebrating those cultures through art, music and food.

The couple contacted the birth families to find traditional and favourite family recipes for each child.

During family trips, music from each culture and personal taste is loaded on an iPod and listened to alphabetically – including rap, nursery songs, rock, Irish jigs and folk songs from Newfoundland.

The Way Skinners even join their children's cultural dance lessons.

Through this, the children have a deep sense of connection to their parents' culture and their own.

"Our family value is diversity," Mr. Way Skinner said. "I'm not going to drop them off and pick them up. It is not important that they do it; it is important for me to learn the culture. Culture is who we are."

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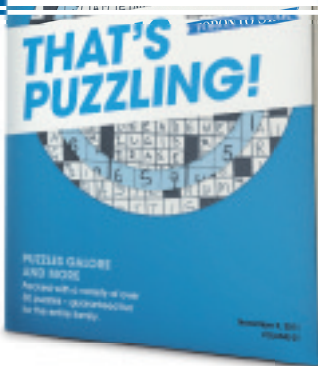
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