

BULLETIN

Bring back early intervention for autism

October 20, 2010

The Daily Courier (Kelowna)

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Page: A11

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Re: More being spent on autism, not less.

In her letter to the editor of Sept. 27, Children and Family Development Minister Mary Polak argued that she improved services for autistic children by eliminating a proven, highly-successful early-intensive treatment program at the Queen Alexandra Centre for Child Health.

Cumulatively, she has cut more than \$3 million province-wide from autism services for

children under six.

In her announcement last September - and in her recent letter - Polak is still trying to disguise this cut as an improvement in service.

She claims that "redirecting" the \$5 million she cut from the intensive therapy program allows the government to increase funding for 900 autistic children under six.

However, increasing funding for 900 children from \$20,000 to \$22,000 only accounts for \$1.8 million.

Where is the other \$3.2 million going? It is certainly not being spent on the autism outreach program Polak has promised, but not delivered.

More sadly, that extra \$2,000 per child barely covers the new HST charged on service costs that families must now pay.

Parents and autism specialists know that intensive intervention is the most effective and enriching treatment option, and saves the system money in the long run.

Last year, the London School of Economics found the lifetime costs for a person with autism can be more than \$2 million. The same report said intensive behavioural intervention is the leading treatment for children diagnosed with autism.

Children treated with behavioural therapy are less likely to need an education assistant in school, and more likely to grow into a productive, independent adult.

Funding early autism intervention programs saves money. I join parents of autistic children in calling for Polak to reverse her short-sighted decision, and reallocate funding for early intervention.

Reid Johnson,

president,

Health Sciences Association of B.C.

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