

MINUTES

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON

THURSDAY 4 MAY 2000

CHAMPLAIN ROOM

1:30 P.M.

PRESENT

Chair: A. Munter

Members: D. Beamish, W. Byrne, L. Davis, C. Doucet, D. Holmes, H. Kreling, A. Loney,  
M. McGoldrick-Larsen

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

**That the Community Services Committee confirm the Minutes of the regular meeting of  
20 April 2000.**

CARRIED

PRESENTATION

1. SPECIALIZED CHILD CARE FOR FRANCOPHONE  
CHILDREN WITH AUTISM
  - Co-ordinator, Community Services report dated 25 April 00
  - Correspondence from H. Boisvert dated 15 April 00

Ms. Huguette Boisvert, President of the French Chapter for Ottawa-Carleton of the Autistic Society of  
Ontario, greeted Committee and advised of the extreme situation facing francophone parents of children  
with autism and pervasive developmental disorders.

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- Notes:
1. Underlining indicates new or amended recommendations approved by Committee.
  2. Items requiring Council approval will be presented on 24 May 2000 in Community Services Report No. 46.

Ms. Boisvert stated that she is the grandmother of Jean-Marc, who was diagnosed with autism 3 years ago, at the age of 2 years. She noted that there is very little information or resources available to help francophone parents and their children with this condition.

Mr. Gaston Boisvert, spokesperson for the Ottawa-Carleton Francophone Chapter of the Ontario Autism Society, advised Committee about the lack of awareness of the condition of autism, and the lack of assistance available to francophone parents and children. He noted that the Society has been lobbying various levels of government since 1997, to provide resources and funding for preschool facilities to serve these children. The Society was recently informed that the responsibility for these programs were delegated from the province to the Regional Municipality. He noted that the situation has become so extreme that some families have been forced to give up their children as they are no longer able to provide or care for them adequately. It is necessary to provide therapy services for the children, as well as support services for the families.

Mr. Boisvert stated that the situation for the francophone community is that there are no support services available for either families or children. Assistance and services are required to be provided to these children at an early age immediately after diagnosis. There are benefits to society and long-term health effects for the child if early intervention is provided.

Mr. Boisvert summarized a number of issues that the Society has undertaken to consistently lobby for, advocating the creation of a francophone preschool with programs specifically for autistic children and children with pervasive developmental disorders, as well as support services for families.

Mr. Boisvert drew on personal experience and explained to Committee that there are 5 adults in their family available to assist one child in this situation, but they are still struggling with daily activities and the financial burdens associated with his condition.

Mr. Boisvert provided Committee with a background of the development of the condition of autism where it has been documented that early intensive treatment makes a big difference in treatment and prognosis. The condition appears during the first 3 years, and affects 1 out of 500 children. He noted that autism only gets worse without intensive intervention in the first five years.

Ms. Helene Boisvert-Lang thanked Committee for their time. She noted that her son, Jean-Marc will soon be 6 years old, and was diagnosed with autism at the age of 2 years, 8 months. There are 2 specialized daycare facilities in the area for children with autism; one funded by Children at Risk, and one at the Royal Ottawa Hospital for autistic children with behavioral problems. The only problem is that neither program has services available in french.

Ms. Boisvert-Lang noted that there are a total of 2 hours per month of services, limited to 8 sessions per year, for speech and language and occupational therapies available for Jean-Marc. No other

services are available for francophone children with autism. Ms. Boisvert-Lang noted that her family did some research and attempted to implement a therapy entitled "TEACH" which assists autistic children to adjust to routines, but does not develop communication skills or intellect. This program was in place for 4-5 months for Jean-Marc, and then abandoned as it resulted in worsening behavior.

Ms. Boisvert-Lang then attempted to privately recruit a francophone psychologist and successfully retained one after 1.5 years of searching, as well as students to assist in implementing the program. She noted that Jean-Marc has shown some improvement, as the program is intensive and 30 hours per week. The program is taught at home, and there has been difficulty retaining trained personnel as they cannot be paid at market rate.

Ms. Boisvert-Lang showed Committee a video of Jean-Marc which focused on his early development, ranging from approximately one year to present day. She indicated that up until just before 2 years old, Jean-Marc developed normally, and was interactive and verbally and visually responsive, as well as developing communication skills.

Ms. Boisvert made the analogy of having a child and losing it at 2 years of age. She expressed sadness that autism causes all the light to go out of your child, and no matter what you do you cannot reach him any longer.

Ms. Boisvert-Lang stated that she has learned that adults must impose themselves on autistic children or they do not acknowledge others or interact with them. They must be forced to interact with the outside world or they concentrate on internalized rituals, behaviors and sensory stimulation acts. She noted that these children retreat without appropriate trained intervention to refocus their attention, and their communication skills and development fall farther and farther behind. She noted that after a certain point these behaviors become so ritualized, it is impossible to reach them, and this is why intervention is very important at an early age.

She noted that she contacted agencies in the area many times, and although she was put on waiting lists, there was no one to come help Jean-Marc with his condition, and no one to help her cope and provide support to the family. She informed Committee that at present Jean-Marc is progressing, but it is taking all of their time and financial resources, and that it is possible that some crucial years may have been missed, due to lack of services. She added that the majority of children are hyperactive, and this is very tiring and stressful for parents. She noted that Jean-Marc can become easily frustrated, as he has difficulty expressing his needs.

Mr. Boisvert urged Committee to do something to help these children and their families, adding that autism takes a child's personality away although they remain with you physically. He added that early intervention is necessary to help recover some of the child's personality.

Mr. Dick Stewart, Commissioner of Social Services, advised that in April 1999 the province delegated responsibility to the municipal level for service management of the child care system, which included Thursday's Child nursery, a specialized child care facility for children with disabilities. With that responsibility came a fixed package of services which the Department was not permitted to make service changes to in the first year, and are now in the process of developing a delivery plan for approval by the Ministry.

Commissioner Stewart stated that the service responsibility for children with disabilities primarily remains a provincial responsibility under the Development Services Act. Thursday's Child nursery is operated by Children At Risk, which is funded under the Developmental Services Act. A small portion of the funding Children at Risk receives is from the Day Nurseries Act, which is directed to Thursdays Child, which the Region now has the responsibility for.

Commissioner Stewart noted that there has been a lengthy restructuring process under the Development Services Act, and there has been a request for proposal issued by the province to select a coordinator for autism services in Eastern Ontario, with a decision expected by the end of the month. This information will be instructive for the Department in including any provision for autistic children in the service plan.

Commissioner Stewart noted that some of the information provided to the Department from the province has indicated that there is not a need for a segregated autism program for francophone children. He added that it has been instructive to hear the presentation as it presents a very different picture.

Commissioner Stewart advised that there is a controversy surrounding the merits of segregation versus integration for children with disabilities. He added that he is aware that there are francophone children who attend existing daycare programs with additional staff assistance. He noted that staff will look at all models when developing the new service plan.

Councillor Richard Cantin advised that he was the former Vice President of the Ottawa Valley Autistic Homes Society, which provides residential homes for autistic children. He noted that caring for a child with autism can be a heavy burden, and that families should be commended for their super-human efforts.

Councillor Cantin suggested that something must be done for these families, assistance must be provided before they are unable to cope, and these children must be helped before it is too late. He inquired whether an interim solution could be found for the Boisvert family until a longer term strategy is developed

Commissioner Stewart noted that the Department is prepared to accept direction to report back to Committee in a timely fashion with regard to both short and long-term strategies. He reiterated that these issues are intertwined with provincial services.

Chair Munter indicated that a motion has been submitted by Councillor Byrne, directing the Department to investigate the issue.

Councillor Cantin suggested that respite care should be made available to families as soon as possible, as a 7 day per week, 52 week per year responsibility is a heavy load to expect them to maintain year after year. Mr. Stewart responded that respite care is used in other circumstances, and for families of disabled children in particular, and the Department will investigate how they may be able to assist.

Mr. Boisvert noted that the Ministry has been stating that there is not a need for services for francophone families of autistic children, however there are 70 cases of autism diagnosed in the area each year, and approximately 20% of these, or 15-20 new cases, are francophone children. He noted that the need for services is clearly indicated. He quoted from a document by Mrs. Zelda Garrett, Program Coordinator, Children at Risk, which indicated that integration is not beneficial for autistic children, and may be adverse and result in an increase in tantrums and aggressive behavior.

Chair Munter inquired whether the family is eligible for respite care services from the Community Care Access Centre. Ms. Boisvert-Lang noted that the problem is that there is no one trained to care for francophone children with autism. Although there are trained people able to provide relief for english families, there is no one available to provide the service in the language of her child. Although her family has been provided with funding for a few hours per week of respite care, there are no qualified professionals to provide this care.

Councillor Davis inquired whether the Region is precluded from targeting a certain number of spots in existing francophone daycares for children with disabilities, and then proceeding to recruit the required staff with expertise for those daycare facilities. Commissioner Stewart responded that there are 2 parts to this issue: insufficient resources to meet the demand for service; and insufficient professional health care providers to provide the required care for francophone children.

Councillor Davis noted that the Jules-Leger Centre is in her ward, and although there are programs operated in the building, there is ample available space. She suggested this may be a good location to provide programming for francophone children with specialized needs. Commissioner Stewart commented that the province could be contacted to discuss whether this is a viable option.

Ms. Gayle Preston, Director, Child Care Directorate, stated that there is a block of subsidized spaces for preschool children with disabilities, and although a waiting list exists, approximately 65 spots are filled.

Councillor Davis suggested that part time programs could be developed to fill the need. She added that it is incumbent on the Region to find appropriately qualified professionals to meet these needs, even if the Department has to recruit out of the Ottawa area. Commissioner Stewart noted that these issues will be developed along with short and long term strategies in the report back to Committee.

In reply to a question from Councillor Davis, Ms. Boisvert-Lang noted that there was a position offered for her child in a francophone daycare, however except for an occasional visit by therapists or a psychologist, there were no qualified staff trained to deal with an autistic child, and he would be left to his own devices in a corner. Ms. Boisvert-Lang noted that she felt this was not an acceptable environment unless qualified staff are available, and kept her child at home. Councillor Davis suggested that spots should be identified in existing francophone daycares, and appropriate services for disabled children be provided in those locations.

Mr. Boisvert noted that there are no qualified francophone professionals in the area because there is presently no daycare facility to attract qualified candidates to the community.

Councillor Davis stated that the Boisvert family should be commended for their strength and the support they are providing to their child, as they are a tribute to others as they try to help those with similar needs.

Councillor Byrne tabled a motion directing the Social Services Department to investigate the lack of services available and identify strategies to assist. She stated that she feels that there is a definite need for services in this area, and a huge amount of support and attention is required to assist these children and their families. She noted that speech and occupational therapies are required in the child's own language, as communication must reach the child in order to provide the best opportunity for development. She added that it is imperative that the Department investigate services provided in both languages.

Councillor McGoldrick-Larsen expressed her support for the motion to investigate short and long term solutions. She noted that there are many health conditions where children and families require support, and where that support is currently unavailable. She inquired whether the hub model for providing child and family-centered services in a central location could be adapted to provide some of the requested services. Commissioner Stewart stated that the hub model is in place in a number of locations in Ottawa, with services like toy libraries, resource centres, play groups, and community programming, but has not evolved past this point. He noted that the model would need to be adapted to specifically address children with special needs, and the model would have to be expanded to accommodate that type of infrastructure. He added that the issue before Committee is more complex than simply adapting an existing service model, with a lack of funding and qualified professional people to provide the required services.

Councillor Holmes noted that it is frustrating to witness the lack of research into mental illness, and that a country pays for many years as a result of this lack of knowledge. She added that her niece teaches a class of autistic children and has indicated that integration has not been successful. Councillor Holmes urged that proper funding needs to be provided in order to ensure these children have an opportunity.

In reply to an inquiry from Councillor Loney, Commissioner Stewart confirmed that approval for funding will have to be sought from the Ministry for any new program. Commissioner Stewart confirmed that an inventory of the existing programs available in english and french will have to be conducted, adding that there are severe limitations under the Day Nurseries Act on what is eligible to be funded.

In reply to a question from Councillor Loney, Commissioner Stewart confirmed that the school boards are required by law to provide services for all children, including disabled children, after the age of preschool.

In response to comments from Councillor Loney, Chair Munter noted that there have been no new child care spaces provided since 1993.

Councillor Cantin stated that autism is a disorder where children can learn to function independently if they are taught the proper skills. He noted that the lack of resources available for francophone families is frustrating, and it is unacceptable that the Ministry refuses to recognize that these individuals exist and require assistance.

Chair Munter commented that there is an unfortunate lack of understanding on this issue, and it is a challenge for the Region to develop programs and support residents with an ever-decreasing amount of funding and commitment from the province.

Moved by W. Byrne

**That the Social Services Department be directed to investigate the lack of services for francophone children with autism and report back to Community Services Committee on how the Region can assist in addressing the gaps in service.**

CARRIED as amended

In response to a question from Councillor Cantin, Ms. Stephani Roy, Committee Co-ordinator, confirmed that she will arrange for the Boisvert's presentation to be translated and provided to members of Committee for their information.



## SOCIAL SERVICES

2. RECENT CHANGES TO THE ONTARIO WORKS PROGRAM  
- Social Services Commissioner report dated 10 April 00

Mr. Dick Stewart, Commissioner of Social Services, summarized the report for members of Committee, advising that the provincial government has proposed a policy of zero tolerance for welfare fraud, and upon conviction an offender will be ineligible for social assistance for the balance of their lives.

Commissioner Stewart noted that the province has developed a new funding formula for Ontario Works, which will be presented to Committee at the meeting of 18 May 2000. He noted that the formula is generally more flexible and gives the Department the ability to provide a broader range of services to clients. There are three levels of service offered: basic, intermediate and enhanced services.

Commissioner Stewart noted that the formula entitles 40% of clients to receive basic services, which include job searches, workshops, and meetings with employment counsellors. Intermediate services include community placements of 30 hours or less, and literacy or skills development, and that the Department is funded \$1000 per participant per year. The enhanced level of service involves community placements of more than 30 hours per month and advanced programs such as the leap program. The unit cost for the advanced program is \$2500 per participant. Commissioner Stewart noted that overall the new formula will not result in less funding, and potentially more funding for this Region.

Commissioner Stewart noted that there is an increased target with respect to the number of community placements, which has been 15% up until now, but will be changed to 22.5% in 2001, and 30% in 2002. He noted that the Department is not meeting the present targets, and has concerns about meeting the increased projections. These are targets above and beyond the 3 levels of service, and will be dealt with in more detail in a report at the next meeting.

Commissioner Stewart advised that the community placements have been very successful and have resulted in 36% of participants moving on to employment, showing a direct and viable connection between community placement activity and future jobs.

Commissioner Stewart advised Committee of a recent court decision to not permit Family Support Workers to represent clients, or have standing in court. As a result the Department must engage counsel on the client's behalf, which has added complication and cost to the process.

Reverend Bill Jay, representing Faith Partners, urged members of Committee to notify the province that they do not support the life ban for individuals convicted of welfare fraud. He noted that simple gifts or

false accusations against families could cause unwarranted grief and hardship. He noted it has been suggested that .5 of 1% of those people on social assistance are guilty of welfare fraud, and such an odious ban could have a significant impact on people already struggling to get by on subsistence payments.

Reverend Jay urged Committee to express their concern with the draconian measures proposed by the province, as they unfairly penalize one group of society over any other. He added that welfare recipients are surviving on payments that have not been increased since 1995.

Reverend Jay noted that the Faith Partners work in partnership with all groups, and spread the common message of "Do unto others as you would have done to you".

Ms. Sue Clark, resident of New Orchard Avenue, and anti-poverty activist, advised that she receives disability support payments from the province and makes use of a wide range of social services including soup kitchens, subsidized housing, and drug and dental benefit plans. She expressed concern about zero tolerance policies proposed by the provincial government, noting that she receives drug and dental benefits, and can barely afford to live. She provided the example that if she won at bingo and didn't report the winnings, she would lose all of her benefits for the rest of her life. She questioned where else in society people are penalized in such an extreme way, and stated that such extreme punishment is immoral.

Councillor Holmes pointed out that if a welfare recipient was convicted of theft they would likely get community service, but if they didn't report bingo earnings, they would lose everything they have.

In response to a question from Councillor Byrne, Commissioner Stewart confirmed that the new funding formula for employment programs will be brought forward for discussion at the Committee meeting of 18 May 2000. Commissioner Stewart noted that the provincial government views the change in funding formula as a cost savings measure and an incentive to get people off the program. He added that data will be collected and analyzed and brought back to Committee in October or November.

In reply to a query from Councillor Byrne, Commissioner Stewart explained that when a lien is placed against a welfare recipient's residence, the amount of social assistance payments received must be repaid upon sale of the home. Councillor Byrne expressed concern that often it is the case in a marital break-up that funds from the sale of the marital home are assumed to be used by the woman for spousal support or to return to school to enable her to become self-sufficient. She wondered whether this change in policy will be made clear to the courts so that they ensure that appropriate consideration is given to provision of spousal support.

Ms. Alexia Taschereau-Moncion, Solicitor, Regional Legal Services, advised that liens have not been registered to date against marital homes. Councillor Byrne commented that it may be difficult to obtain consent from both parties to register the lien.

In response to a question from Councillor Byrne, Ms. Taschereau-Moncion clarified that Family Support Workers are no longer permitted to represent clients in Court, and legal representation is required. Commissioner Stewart added that legal aid is not available, and that counsel has been engaged on a retainer basis to handle these cases.

Councillor Byrne made a comparison of zero tolerance for welfare fraud to a recent situation where Roger Gallaway, M.P., was convicted of fraud. She noted that he is a lawyer and was given the choice of being disbarred or resigning, so he can continue to earn a living. He has resigned his seat as an M.P. She noted that it provides an interesting comparison to individuals convicted of welfare fraud.

In reply to a query from Councillor Holmes, Commissioner Stewart noted that all of the agencies participating in the community placement program are not-for profit or non-governmental organizations. He added that at present there are more than 200 community partners and more will be needed to meet the increased targets. He noted that the majority of the placements are self-initiated.

Councillor Holmes suggested that Committee should encourage some groups to take the zero tolerance ban to the Human Rights Court, as it is unbelievable that one group of society would be treated so differently from others. Commissioner Stewart noted that a case is probably not yet underway as the regulations state that they affect offenders convicted after April 1, 2000. He confirmed that he will report back to Committee at the next meeting whether a case is being prepared to appeal the policy.

In reply to a question from Councillor Doucet, Commissioner Stewart clarified that if a client is no longer eligible for social assistance they lose those type of discretionary benefits that are cost shared by the province, including drug and dental coverage. The Region then assumes 100% of the costs involved to meet the emergency needs of those individuals who require the service. This has been in effect since 1998.

In response to an inquiry from Councillor Doucet, Commissioner Stewart noted that in 1995 there were approximately 1.3 million adults and dependent children receiving all types of benefits, but since then there has been a reduction of approximately 460,000 people who are no longer receiving payments from either the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works.

In response to comments from Councillor McGoldrick-Larsen, Commissioner Stewart noted that the community agencies that provide community placements provide an opportunity for clients to network and learn skills. He added that there is a period of at least 6 months that must pass before a community placement participant can replace a position vacated by a paid employee.

**That Community Services Committee and Council receive this report for information.**

RECEIVED

COUNCILLOR'S ITEM

3. RESOLUTIONS FROM NORTH BAY CITY COUNCIL  
AND WATERLOO REGIONAL COUNCIL  
- Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee report dated 26 April 00

Councillor Byrne suggested that the Association of Canadian Municipalities should be also be contacted concerning zero tolerance for welfare fraud.

Moved by D. Holmes

**That the Region of Ottawa-Carleton support the City of North Bay and Region of Waterloo Council resolutions regarding the lifetime ban for social assistance fraud, and notify the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, all Ottawa-Carleton M.P.P.'s, and all three political party leaders that we request the withdrawal of the policy for Zero Tolerance for Social Assistance Fraud.**

CARRIED as amended

OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Byrne inquired whether it would be possible to commence the meeting of 18 May 2000 at an earlier time due to the number of items scheduled for the next agenda, and another meeting scheduled for early evening on the same day. Ms. Stephani Roy, Committee Co-ordinator, confirmed that she would canvas members on their availability for an earlier start time.

Councillor Loney made reference to a letter received from Mr. John Baird, MPP, concerning the issue of locking in RRSPs through work. He requested that the facts in the letter be clarified. Commissioner Stewart noted that under the pension act the only type of RRSP locked in and unattainable until retirement age is one where money has been transferred directly from a pension into an RRSP. He noted that every other kind of RRSP is considered liquid. An official opinion was requested from Ernst & Young on this issue and is being provided to clients to clarify comments being provided by Mr. Baird's office. Councillor Loney requested that a brief memo outlining the facts be prepared for the information of Committee members.

Councillor Byrne noted that this correspondence should also be forwarded to Mr. Garry Guzzo's office as they have been advising clients that the change in policy was made by the Region.

NEXT MEETING

**18 May 2000**

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

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CHAIR

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CO-ORDINATOR