

Moms on the Move (MOMs) - BC families supporting people with special needs

PRESS RELEASE:

Moms urge Premier to honour promises to BC's kids

18 communities join provincial day of action against children's cuts

OCT 28, 2009:—In 2001, Gordon Campbell promised to stand up for BC's vulnerable children as a priority. Months later, he ordered 23% cuts to children's programs. In 2005, the Premier outlined five Great Goals – #3 was to **"build the best system of support in Canada"** for children with special needs and those at risk.

But Mr. Campbell has again forgotten his promise to create a legacy of strong, safe and well-supported children. So on **Wednesday, Oct. 28**, we've invited British Columbians to help us remind Premier Campbell of his promise to BC's vulnerable children. So far, 18 BC communities have joined the Provincial Day of Action coordinated by **MOMs**, a volunteer support network for families of people with special needs.

While BC enjoyed record budget surpluses, waitlists for critical services that support vulnerable children in and out of school grew longer. Now the Premier is cutting millions from core programs, including autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), mental health, infant development, supported child development and Aboriginal programs. Specialized staff are being lost, with one program given just a month to wrap up. Front-line children's agencies were forced to cut \$3.6 million more. A further \$32 million is being cut from essential Ministry roles for monitoring, oversight and support to assure children's welfare and safety. And yet another Ministry re-structuring will further strain the capacity to support vulnerable children.

There was no risk assessment or advance public discussion of these cuts. Apart from a token increase for one small sub-group (700 children with autism under age 6), savings will not reduce waitlists or improve access for the vast majority – i.e. for tens of thousands of children with special needs who are still waiting.

Provincial organizations for people with disabilities, children with special needs and families have protested the cuts. Professionals represented by the Health Sciences Association of BC strongly denounced funding cuts and the loss of autism programs. Desperate parents have pleaded to save these programs, noting the huge strides their children have made and the strong evidence base for efficacy and long-term savings.

"The Infant Development Program is what saved me," says Cyndi Gerlach, the mom coordinating a North Vancouver action on Oct. 28. "I want other parents to benefit just as I did."

Premier Campbell's cuts to children's programs are just a matter of priorities. His revised budget commits \$14 billion to capital projects. Alberta spends twice as much on autism despite fewer children and is not cutting programs despite a deficit twice as large as BC's.

"Our children can't speak out or fight back against these cuts," says Cher Sherwood, the mom who helped organize several groups in Greater Victoria. "It is our job as parents and citizens to speak up for them."

And it is Premier Campbell's job to honour his promises to BC's kids by protected and rebuilding vitally important supports and services.

"We know that British Columbians don't want to see BC's budget balanced on the back of our most vulnerable children," says Vancouver mom Dawn Steele, who will be leading another group on the Burrard Bridge. "We're urging him to join us by standing up and doing what he knows is the right thing to do."

Details of local actions, local contacts, background info & updates: MOMs: <http://MomsNetwork.ca>

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