

Family Partners

January 2003

Dear family member,

Family Partners is a new network of family groups and individual family members of adults with developmental disabilities and children with special needs. We came together due to concerns over 23% budget cuts and a major restructuring being implemented in the coming two years at the Ministry for Child and Family Development (MCFD).

Important changes are taking place. We strongly believe that all BC families should be informed and given a chance to help shape this process before final decisions are made. We therefore prepared this information kit, summing up key facts in a straightforward, concise and “user-friendly” form. More details are available from local MCFD offices, libraries or the Internet. (Internet reports can also be accessed through local libraries.)

Context:

In October, Minister Gordon Hogg received a restructuring plan developed by his Community Living Transition Steering Committee (CL TSC). Subsequently, an Evaluation Committee of senior ministry staff and consultants rejected key aspects of the TSC proposals and raised questions about the feasibility and impact of some other aspects. The minister is currently accepting written comments from the public on the TSC proposals, and has promised to consult with families across BC before making a final decision at the end of January 2003.

Meanwhile, the minister has moved into the second phase of transformation, establishing an Interim Authority led by the former Chair and members of the TSC. The minister and the Interim Authority appointed an Executive Committee that is now co-managing ministry services during the transition. The Interim Authority is also developing the TSC proposals to transfer responsibility for some ministry services to a new Provincial Authority in Spring of 2003. These include services for adults with developmental disabilities, children with special needs and autism.

Concerned family members met last month with Minister Hogg, asking him to reconsider the budget cuts and to guarantee that essential services would be protected under the proposed changes. The families noted warnings from international experts, who advised that implementing restructuring together with budget cuts would likely result in failure and harm to ministry clients. Families also asked the Minister to pause the restructuring process pending a clearer understanding by both the ministry and families of the impact of the proposed changes. They also noted concerns about inequitable family access in the change process to date and stressed the need for broader and more equitable family representation and consultation. In response to the above, Minister Hogg was only able to commit to consulting broadly with BC families before making decisions at the end of January.

Getting informed:

Through individual initiative and group action, families have shown in the past that when it comes to protecting our loved ones, we are a force to be reckoned with. The first step is to get informed. Time is short, so families need to start by ensuring that they understand key aspects of the process and the proposed changes. In the attached Information Kit, you will find several documents:

- **Who We Are:** describes our group and our goals.
- **MCFD Background:** brief recap of the change process to date, highlighting families' concerns.

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- **Key messages:** summary of key concerns that Family Partners expressed to Minister Hogg
- **Executive Summary of Evaluation Committee's report:** BC Family Partners does not endorse or reject this report, but it confirms several key concerns that our families have raised.

More details are available at local MCFD offices, libraries or at these Internet sites:

- MCFD Change: TSC report, Evaluation report & more: <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/change/cla.htm>
- Public Comments on TSC report: http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/change/cltsc_comments.htm
- Expert Comments on TSC proposals: http://www.cltsc.bc.ca/expert_commentary.htm
- Interim Authority Web site: <http://www.communitylivingbc.org/introduction.htm>

Voicing questions and concerns:

Families who have questions and concerns need to convey those by late January to Minister Hogg and to their MLAs. Key questions include: How will this impact my family and loved ones? What guarantees can be given about the long-term safety and well-being of current ministry clients? What recourse will families have to address problems that arise during and after the proposed transition?

So far, according to the MCFD Web site, only seven individuals have submitted written comments on the TSC proposals. The Minister, the TSC and the Interim Authority all suggest that the proposed changes are broadly supported by BC families. It is therefore urgent that families make their views known through the ministry consultation process or by other channels. Here's what you can do:

1. Submit written comments to the ministry and ask that they be posted on the MCFD Web site. If you've already written the minister, ask that your comments be posted on the Web site. You can e-mail comments to Frank.VanZandwijk@gems8.gov.bc.ca or mail them to:

Ministry of Children and Family Development, Community Living Transition
PO BOX 9771 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, B.C. V8W 9S5
2. Ask your MCFD office to notify you of consultation sessions for your area in January 2003.
3. Contact your MLA and request an appointment to discuss your questions and concerns. Write or fax your MLA outlining those questions and concerns.
4. Send copies to local media, the Interim Authority and other organizations that you belong to and enlist their support.

If you wish to support Family Partners or receive further information updates, please contact us via the Family Partner distributing this information at the address provided.

For Family Partners,

Judy Carter Smith
Coordinator