



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders

O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER

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P.O. Box 63, Tillsonburg, Ontario N4G 4H3 Phone: 519-842-9506 Fax 519-6884889 Website: www.oafccd.com

Speech and Language Crisis growing

Over the past few months, OAFCCD has been hearing from parents and professionals across the province about threats to speech and language services. In most communities the service reductions may seem small with a few extra children on the wait list, or one less communication assistant to support the program, but taken together they represent a serious problem.

The crisis is more obvious in York Region where MPP Frank Klees held a public meeting and is raising the issue at Queen's Park (see article on page 2) but the situation is growing worse across the province.

One of the difficulties in assessing the scope of the issue is that speech and language services for children are fragmented and responsibility for services is divided between three Ministries. Each system operates independently and does not take into consideration how decisions about services will impact the other sectors.

Children receive speech and language services through three providers:

- Preschool Speech and Language Programs (Ministry of Children and Youth) for children under age 5
- School Boards (Ministry of Education) for students with a language disorder
- Community Care Access Centres (Ministry of Health and Long Term Care) for students with voice disorders are eligible for School Health Support Program
- Services for children with articulation problems, stuttering and non-speech communication are a shared responsibilities between school boards and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care

All three systems are under threat as the province faces fiscal challenges. The Preschool Speech and Language Program (PSLP) has not received annual increases since it was established in 1996 and increases in salary and operating costs are eroding services. In addition, some hospitals, that are part of the PSLP service system, have been considering eliminating or reducing services as they struggle to balance budgets.

School boards have been fortunate to receive increases in special education funding for the last 6 years, but the future is uncertain. Increasing costs, especially salary agreements, and declining

enrolment in many school boards, are reducing school board budgets. Speech and language services are threatened with hiring freezes or failure to fill maternity leaves, leaving less SLPs to deal with increasing caseloads.

The Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) also face budget challenges and with a mandate to provide acute care in the community as well as support for seniors, it seems like the School Health Support Services gets reduced. The CCAC manages limited resources by reducing amounts of service, or the number of students getting services.

As difficult budget decisions are made, it is the children who need speech and language services who suffer.

What are the Solutions?

OAFCCD believes that the provincial government needs to:

1. Recognize that speech and language services for children are critical, as without the ability to communicate students will struggle at school, in the community and to become employed and engaged citizens
2. Dedicate or protect funding for speech and language services so that funding can't be used for other purposes. The funding for the PSLP is the only dedicated funding and currently provides services to almost 60,000 children.
3. Provide annual increases to dedicated funding to make sure that increased expenses don't erode services.
4. Review how speech and language services are delivered to identify opportunities for efficiencies and to enhance services for children. Expand the current review of School Health Support Services to identify duplication and gaps, and opportunities to enhance services.

OAFCCD members can help bring awareness to the issue of inadequate speech and language services by:

- ✓ Talking to friends and family about the value of the services
- ✓ Writing or visiting with their local MPP or to the Premier's office
- ✓ Providing a positive story to the local media about the value of speech and language services.

Major Concerns in York Region

Frank Klees, Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for Newmarket-Aurora, recently hosted a Fact-Finding Meeting with parents, Speech Language Pathologists and teachers to address the growing wait list for Speech-Language Pathology services in York Region schools.

Mr. Klees became aware of the issue after hearing from parents, teachers and therapists about what was described to him as a "developing crisis" involving children who are struggling with speech and language disorders.

In his press release, Mr. Klees said *"Not only has the wait list (for CCAC services) grown from 449 to more than 1,000 over the past 12 months, there appears to be no plan to deal with the issue," said Klees. "Parents are being told that if they want timely treatment for their children, they should get private therapy. That out-of-pocket cost is beyond the ability of most parents, and that kind of pressure shouldn't be placed on the shoulders of parents."*

"On behalf of the parents of the more than 1,000 children, on behalf of their teachers and on behalf of those students, I'm asking why these children are being left without the essential support they so desperately need and what the government's plans are to address the issue."

At the May 11th public meeting in Aurora it became clear that the issue includes services for preschool aged children, when it was reported that 1300 children in York Region are waiting for Preschool Speech and Language Services.

At the end of the meeting Mr. Klees identified two key messages for the government:

- Speech and language services should be a government priority as without these services children and adults will struggle, and
- In the current climate of fiscal restraints, stakeholders need to work together to identify opportunities for improvement and efficiencies in the speech and language system.

Mr. Klees has also prepared a petition that can be downloaded from his website and should be submitted with original signatures to local MPPS. The petition is available at www.frank-klees.on.ca

Inserts

- 2010 Summer Camp Directory
- Invitation to OAFCCD Annual General Meeting, June 19th, 2010

Hooray for Aiden A Book for Kids who Stutter

Karen Hollett says "I'm a stutterer who, like many others, had a difficult time at school. I've always had it in mind to someday write some feel-good, encouraging books for young children who stutter...or really, for children dealing with any type of disability or adversity. So...I started to write this book (for 4-9 year olds)," *Hooray for Aiden*", last fall, and it was actually printed this week".

Here's a summary of the storyline:

When her family moves to a new town, the main character, Aiden, becomes worried about how her new second grade classmates will react to her stutter. At first, Aiden tries to hide her stutter from her classmates. This makes her very sad. But soon, with a little help from a caring teacher, Aiden learns that it's OK to be herself....it's OK to stutter!

Karen wrote the book:

- ✓ For young children who stutter (and children who have other disabilities), and their families to read & enjoy, and to be encouraged by the messages in the book....such as not letting a stutter/disability hold you back.
- ✓ As a tool that can be used by Speech-Language Pathologists, teachers, school counsellors and others who work with young children who stutter
- ✓ To help educate young non-stutterers about stuttering
- ✓ As a feel-good story that any young child would enjoy

Check out the Hooray Publishing website for information on ordering the book, reviews of the book, and lots of resources for families of children who stutter and for others who work with/assist children who stutter.

Karen Hollett, Owner/Author, Hooray Publishing
www.HoorayPublishing.com

OAFCCD Future Uncertain

OAFCCD is a recognized voice for children with speech and language disorders. OAFCCD is invited to government consultations and provides advice to school boards about speech and language services. However, OAFCCD struggles to fund activities and find volunteers.

Please consider renewing your membership, making a donation or volunteering with OAFCCD. For ideas on how to help, please call Alison Morse at 519-842-9506 or by e-mail at abmorse@kwic.com