

Support & Advocacy TBFN & OPSEU re: OAP changes - April 1st, 2019

Dear Families and Partners,

As you may be aware, Thunder Bay Family Network has been engaged in support and advocacy related to the government's planned changes to the Ontario Autism Program. To date we have not received a reply from our letter to Minister MacLeod asking several pointed questions regarding the changes and, most concerning, the lack of consultation with families in the North.

We are concerned about the entire developmental services sector and what further changes we may see going forward. We also remain steadfast in our support of all families and the need for those in positions of power to engage in truly province wide consultations which has so far not been the case.

I am happy to announce that our local Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) has engaged TBFN in their advocacy efforts and we have partnered for an exciting endeavour. In April, OPSEU will be doing a road show to constituency offices in the Northwest to raise awareness of family's concerns regarding changes to autism services as well as raise funds for TBFN. Events are planned in Thunder Bay, Fort Frances, Kenora, Sioux Lookout, and Dryden

So to all our autism families we seek your help! On April 6 a planning meeting will be held in Thunder Bay to discuss the campaign and we welcome you to attend (please email sharon@tbfn.ca for details). We are also asking you to book meetings with local MPPs to share your stories and concerns during the campaign's time frame (April 23-26). We are looking to find families in all the communities where events will be held.

Stories are extremely powerful and we hope that you will consider sharing yours. This campaign must be led by families and we want to support you in doing so. Our hope is to create a written booklet of stories that highlights not just your concerns but the hopes and dreams of your loved ones.

I want to be very clear that TBFN remains committed to ALL families who have loved ones with a developmental disability. And we want you to share your stories as well. We would love to collect many stories to profile on our website and social media pages.

The example provided by the changes to autism services, and the process the government took to get here, raises many red flags for what may happen in future, not just in developmental services but also in health care and education. The lack of consultation with northern families is one of our primary concerns and collectively we must continue to raise this issue.

Our loved ones deserve the best life possible. Their strengths, dreams, and gifts must be nurtured in a system that allows for choice, is based on needs, and rooted in community. We hope you will support our endeavour and please feel free to forward this information to your contacts.

We want to extend a huge thanks to OPSEU and MPP Judith Monteith Farrell for engaging with us on this issue.

Please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for more info as we go forward.

Sharon Bak, President
Thunder Bay Family Network