

Northumberland County hears concerns over cuts to child care funding^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Holding back tears, parents of children receiving care at the Northumberland Child Development Centre pleaded with Northumberland County to not eliminate their home visits.

With about 100 parents, children, board members and centre representatives in the audience on June 19, County councillors heard the impact a reduction, and ultimate elimination, of home visits would have on families.

The funding cuts are the result of a new child care funding formula handed down by the Ministry of Education. This new evidence based model is more responsive to changing demographic information, the ministry said.

Under these guidelines, home visits will be phased out, with funding geared only towards children with special needs who are enrolled in licensed child care centres.

For Kristen Ellison the change would result in a loss of a service she desperately needs for her two-year-old son, Carter Pierrard, who has Autism.

"We look forward to these sessions the most, they are the least stressful on Carter, the most productive - and most importantly for me - the most educational," she told council.

She said the loss of weekly home visits from a NCDC worker could mean a loss of years of function for Carter in the future.

Holding back tears, Michelle Higginson shared the story of her adopted son, whose brain development was affected by an illness.

"Because of his childhood illness, the Northumberland Child Development Centre became part of his life when he was an infant," she said. "My son was truly blessed to have them with him."

In response, Warden Hector Macmillan stressed that the funding cuts were handed down from the province and were not introduced by the County.

"We want to speak to the entire board because there is a lot of things going on back and forth between NCDC staff and Northumberland County staff, that probably the public is not aware of," he said, calling for the creation of an advocacy group. "Coming out of this meeting today that's one of the things that I would like to see achieved, so that we can go to the province and ask them those questions."

Faced with the new guidelines, County staff said they have discretion with how to proceed - but only within new guidelines.

"Right now as a County we're not meeting our mandate, we're not within the guidelines, so our discretion is limited," said Lesley Patterson, the manager of children's services for Northumberland County, adding that there are presently 104 children on their child care fee subsidy waiting list.

Asked about the concerns, Ministry of Education spokesman Gary Wheeler said that \$945,743 in one-time mitigation funding was provided to Northumberland County as a transition to the new funding formula.

"Municipalities including Northumberland County will not see a decrease to their funding in 2013," he said. "As service system manager, the municipality has the flexibility and authority to determine how best to determine their priorities within the child care system, including the use of mitigation funding provided they comply with provincial policies and guidelines."

-reprinted from Northumberland News

Region: Ontario^[2]

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