

Orangeville Council follows Shelburne's lead on fighting Autism Cuts

By Marni Walsh

Area resident Kelly McDowell continues to advocate for the rights of Ontario children over the age of five years of age to receive crucial and life changing Intensive Behavioural Intervention therapy (IBI).

This month, her request for Orangeville Council to add their voice to the growing concern over Provincial autism cuts was met with approval and gratitude by Orangeville Councillors, who followed Shelburne's lead in the Province, on the issue which affects thousands of children.

The recently announced cuts to IBI services mean many children, like McDowell's five year old daughter Emily, will no longer receive the intensive therapy that brings many autistic children out of a non-verbal to an interactive state, allowing them to function and find happiness in a world that overloads their senses.

Ms. McDowell told Councillors that Orangeville is the 'hub of IBI treatment' for Dufferin County. She explained that the treatment decreases the frequency of challenging behaviours, builds social skills, promotes language development, and prepares children for school.

'It is my understanding that all children receiving IBI treatment in Orangeville are over five years of age,' said Ms. McDowell. 'This means every single child who is receiving therapy in Orangeville is being removed and no longer qualifies (for treatment).'

Orangeville's Mayor, Jeremy Williams, said the Province was making the changes 'for money, plain and simple.'

He gave 'kudos' to Ms. McDowell and thanked her for 'pushing' the issue.

It was the City of Oakville which initiated the resolution that Ms. McDowell and other parents are taking to Municipal Councils throughout the province, but the Town of Shelburne was the first to pass it.

Oakville Councillors eventually voted, for what Ms. McDowell describes as 'a watered down version' of the motion.

'From my understanding,' she says, 'it was only one councillor who was against it 'and he felt the changes were necessary as Councillors are not experts in autism.'

The concerned mother says had she been at Oakville Council, she would have told Councillors they were not being asked to be experts.

'We are asking them to ask the Ontario government to reconsider their changes, as they are discriminating against children over five.' She added, 'Parents are the experts.'

Orangeville Councillor Gail Campbell called the cuts 'something our government needs to reconsider,' and said she would be 'very proud to put the motion forward for Council's consideration.'

The motion passed quickly and unanimously.