



Critical Time for Services to Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

Key decisions being made over the next few months are likely to have a major impact on the quality, scope and viability of services for adults with intellectual disabilities in Manitoba. We are requesting your help to ensure that these decisions result in a better and more sustainable future.

As is well known, the Province of Manitoba is working toward a balanced budget. As part of this, senior staff at Manitoba Family Services have advised us that the department is under extreme pressure to reduce expenditures. We have been told that the department is working within strict parameters and is required to find ways to provide services differently and more cost effectively. In short, we have been told that the “envelope of funding is overspent”.

This is very concerning. The safety, quality of life and very well-being of thousands of Manitobans with intellectual disabilities currently depend on these services. Indeed, the service system developed over the past decade has become a fundamental part of our basic social safety net. Service delivery is contracted to over 100 non-profit community agencies across Manitoba, all under separate agreements negotiated by Manitoba Family Services.

While all Manitobans can be proud of the progress achieved to date, this essential service system has become increasingly complex and remains all too fragile.

- There are substantial inequities in funding arrangements among agencies and even differences in funding to provide similar services to participants being served by the same agency.
- Several of these agencies are under extreme financial stress and are struggling to remain solvent.
- Disability support workers among all agencies remain one of the lowest paid human services workforces in Manitoba making it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff.

We understand that the Province of Manitoba needs to be an effective steward of public resources. We also understand that spending on these services has increased substantially over recent years to meet increasing needs and demand. In short, we understand that sustainability is a key issue.

But we also believe that true sustainability can only responsibly be achieved through a comprehensive and inclusive process. Effective planning also needs to be evidenced-based with accurate information made accessible to all affected stakeholder groups.

Without a strong sustainability plan, we believe substantial short-term changes have the potential to create unnecessary risk, destabilize the already fragile service system and result in reductions to the quality, scope and viability of services currently available to Manitobans with intellectual disabilities.

We also believe that Manitoba Family Services wants to do what is right and responsible. We believe that this can be most reasonably accomplished by committing to the following five steps:

- Establish an inclusive planning process to ensure the long-term sustainability of services upon which so many now depend.
- Ensure that planning fully incorporates the voices and views of persons with intellectual disabilities, their families, as well as service agencies, their employees and the public.
- Provide immediate support to those agencies already facing serious financial challenges in maintaining basic services.
- Take measures needed to provide reasonable wages for agency employees.
- Ensure that other funding decisions made in the short term do not diminish the quality, scope and viability of current services.

With so much at stake, we firmly believe that these five steps represent the right, responsible and reasonable course of action.

How You Can Help

Here are two ways you can help:

1. Send an “action card “ to the Honourable Kerri Irvin-Ross, Minister of Family Services in support of Abilities Manitoba’s call for these five steps.
 - Complete and mail in an “action post card” or
 - Complete the online version of the “action card” at:
<http://tinyurl.com/nrl8b1t>
2. Follow developments on this issue over the next few months by:
 - Keeping in contact with any of Abilities Manitoba member agencies
 - Signing up for Abilities Manitoba’s new email update subscribers service at:
<http://tinyurl.com/l5o36tk>

We are very concerned. But we are also very hopeful that a better and more sustainable future can and will be achieved. Please help us make this a reality.