

Government not addressing special-needs kids

Our children are precious to us all. Unfortunately some of our children and families are facing very difficult times.

As the MLA for Okanagan-Penticton, I have had the opportunity to meet families with special needs children — many of our families and children receive some assistance, but I am becoming increasingly concerned that more and more of our children and families are facing severe difficulties.

One such group are children with autism. Autism is a complex behavioral disorder; most of its symptoms appear before a child turns three.

Researchers and medical professionals continue to wrestle with its causes.

While there is no known cure today, we all

MLA Report



RICK THORPE

live in the hope that a cure will be found. However, we do know that the effects of autism can be substantially mitigated through very early substantive intervention.

Early intervention is the key to providing the children with autism with a better quality of life.

The current provincial government has not adequately addressed the needs of children with autism, or those of their

families. In fact, many would say the government has failed.

Throughout B.C. and in the South Okanagan, wait lists continue to grow at an alarming rate, and resources are inadequate to deal with the timely care for families with an autistic child.

The families I have had the pleasure to work with, do not have unreasonable expectations. In most cases they simply want some help with caring for their child.

Some families who currently receive minor assistance, only want the option to use their dollars to provide Lovaas therapy for their child, yet the province refuses to allow these families that option. Who knows best about how to care for their child — parents or big government?

Many of our families

are incurring excessive debt providing care for their autistic child. Surely it's time for elected officials to get their spending priorities right.

In B.C., we have a government that has not allocated funds for families to provide for their child, or sufficient funding for regular, timely family respite. The NDP clearly has its spending priorities wrong.

Families and children of autism can have a better quality of life. They deserve the opportunities to have a better life. We can make progress by providing early intervention, and if we have adequate resources dedicated to organizations such as the Okanagan-

Similkameen Neurological Society Child Development Center, the parents will be provided with a range of options while working with caring professionals.

It is time for all elected officials to place our children at the top of our priority list for early intervention and care. Our children deserve no less.

■ **RICK THORPE IS THE LIBERAL MLA FOR THE RIDING OF OKANAGAN-PENTICTON**