

NEWS

Port Moody mother of autistic son launches human-rights complaint

BY ANGELA MACKENZIE

STAFF REPORTER

A Port Moody mother says she will do whatever it takes to get medical treatment for her 15-year-old autistic son.

Linda Cucek launched a human-rights complaint against the Ministry for Children and Families last month. In the complaint, Cucek claims that her family has been discriminated against based on her son's disability.

Specifically, Cucek says the Ministry for Children and Families has provided inadequate services and funding and has placed her son James on long wait-lists for treatments he requires immediately.

James was diagnosed with autism in 1997, and has also been identified with schizophrenia and psychosis.

The Ministry for Children and Families began providing the Cuceks with limited services in late 1999.

Cucek claims the ministry wants to place James in a group home and is outraged at the idea. She believes it is possible to treat her son in the more familiar environment of home.

Most of all, Cucek said she wants the government to provide funding for her son to undergo Lovaas autism treatment, a highly intensive form of one-on-one behavioural therapy, which is usually administered for up to 40 hours a week for two to three years.

A psychiatrist recommended the Lovaas

treatment for James in late August.

However, Cucek cannot afford the treatment, which costs between \$45,000 to \$60,000 a year per child.

Cucek's complaint follows a July B.C. Supreme Court decision in which Justice Marion Allan found the provincial government discriminated against four children and violated their rights under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The children's parents argued that Medicare should cover the cost of the therapy because autistic children require early intervention.

"Unless their condition is successfully treated, almost all autistic children are doomed to a life of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual isolation and eventual institutionalization — a tragic outcome for the children, their families and society," the decision states.

Allan stated in her reasons for judgment that the "petitioners are the victims of the government's failure to accommodate them by failing to provide treatment to ameliorate their mental disability. That failure constitutes direct discrimination."

Since the decision, the province has not made any moves to establish government funding for Lovaas autism treatment.

"I'm very angry with that decision," said Cucek of Premier Ujjal Dosanjh's announcement to hold off government funding.

"He doesn't realize what the families have to go through with autistic children."