

# Mom wants provincial action on autism

## ■ Court tells B.C. to fund new treatment

By Okanagan Saturday Staff

The Penticton mother of an autistic child is calling on the province to act immediately on a court decision directing the province to fund a costly autism treatment program.

Barbara Rodrigues launched her own battle for funding two years ago.

Though she was not associated with the recent court case, she said the decision will benefit all those who seek the Lovaas treatment program, one many say is the only treatment that benefits their children.

In a decision released Thursday, B.C. Supreme Court Justice Mary Ann Allan ruled the government discriminated against the four parents who sued by refusing to fund the program.

She directed that the province examine ways to remedy the situation.

"Obviously, we are thrilled with the decision," Rodrigues said Friday. "It impacts all children with autism whose doctors have prescribed the Lovaas treatment. It will make a huge difference for all the kids whose parents absolutely cannot afford it. They now have a chance to have a fulfilling life too.

"(Justice Allan) really understood the science, and that autism sufferers really need this, really deserve it. They have every right to get the same medical treatment as anyone else. Finally, someone in authority is saying 'Yes, this is a medically necessary treatment.'"

Ironically, it was the same court case that resulted in the province cutting off all assistance to many parents who chose Lovaas. Prior to the lawsuit the province turned a blind eye to those who used funding for government-approved programs, which many parents considered little more than babysitting, to fund a portion of the more costly Lovaas program.

Her son Jeremy, 6, lacked communication skills, rarely slept through the night and had several tantrums a day before he enrolled in Lovaas two years ago. Rodrigues said he only regressed under government-sponsored programs.

Canadian governments have been slow to recognize the Lovaas program, which was developed by Ivar Lovaas at UCLA. It is only taught in the U.S. and costs \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year.

The Lovaas program involves at least 40 hours a week of therapy in which activities are broken down to their smallest tasks and taught as a foundation for more advanced learning.

"I credit all of Jeremy's improvement to the Lovaas program," Rodrigues said.

"It wasn't for that, the road he was going down was definitely institutionalization. He was engaging in self-injurious behaviour and having longer and longer tantrums."

Studies have shown up to half those treated with Lovaas go on to lead relatively normal lives, while many others show some level of improvement.

With successful treatment, she hopes he will lead a normal, productive life. That, in the long run, could save the government hundreds of thousands of dollars, Rodrigues said.

"We have every hope now that he will hold down a job like the rest of us and pay taxes. The taxpayer is going to be a winner too."