

# B.C. government yet to endorse treatment

By Penticton Herald Staff

Autistic children are especially sensitive to everything around them.

What they touch, see, hear and smell can send them into a spiral at a moment's notice.

It's a neurological disorder with no known cure. But behaviour can be dramatically altered if diagnosed in the first three years.

To an autistic child, what people say and do make little sense. Much of their acting out is from frustration at being unable to communicate with or understand others.

They spin objects and do other repetitive actions to comfort themselves.

"Little kids usually point and gesture and explore things," Barbara Rodrigues, parent of an autistic child, explained. "They want to interact, and are curious. An autistic child does none of that."

Treatment generally means gradually re-introducing the child to objects and other people.

By doing so, the child builds a vocabulary and social skills. Expressing oneself tends to happen last.

What makes the Lovaas treatment unique is its intensity. The treatment is named for the work of Dr. O. Ivar Lovaas of the University of California, in the 1960s.

Every action is broken down into smaller steps and presented in a very specific manner. The problem is knowing just when and how to reinforce a child's efforts.

"It's a science of minor detail, this," explained Rodrigues.

The Rodrigues' are one of several families who have formed Families for Early Autism Treatment (FEAT).

Their goal is to have every B.C. toddler tested for autism. They also want the province to fund Lovaas as the most scientifically proven treatment for autism.

Spokesperson Dr. Sabrina Freeman, a social psychologist, says there is "no treatment for children who have autism in B.C."

She claims 63 licensed B.C. psychi-



Penticton Herald Photo

Barbara Rodrigues picketed the Kelowna Ministry for Children and Families office and walked the sidewalk in front of Penticton's Cherry Lane Shopping Centre, to try and raise awareness of her plight.

atrists have endorsed Lovaas as a treatment that should be paid for by the province. In the past, FEAT has presented 8,200 petition signatures to the B.C. legislature.

The organization has formed the Autism Education Society in an effort to raise \$1 million to start a training program at the University of British Columbia.

FEAT is also calling on pediatricians and other medical authorities to use a 10-minute Checklist for Autism and Toddlers they say identifies autism.