

Minister confirms autism treatment won't be funded

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Seven months after funding for treatment of her autistic son was cut off, Penticton mother Barbara Rodrigues received a letter from the minister of children and families reinforcing the fact that the ministry will not fund her treatment choice.

Rodrigues turned to the Lovaas autism treatment program last year after she watched the condition of her son, five-year-old Jeremy, deteriorate in the government-funded programs she considers little more than babysitting.

Initially, funding continued. The province funded 20 to 25 per cent of the

cost, or about \$1,000 per month. But after a Lower Mainland parent sued the government for full funding, the local office cut the Rodrigues family off.

Rodrigues and husband Joe have paid the full cost of treatment since.

In a recent letter from Minister Lois Boone, Rodrigues was told the ministry could only offer funding for government-approved programs. Rodrigues was also told the ministry could not comment on its policy regarding Lovaas due to the court action.

Now the Rodrigues' are hoping Nancy Bell of the Children's Commission, who is conducting an external review, will overturn the ministry's position. The family has re-

ceived no word on when that review might be completed.

This week, Barbara Rodrigues also marked her 100th day on the picket line in protest of the ministry's position. Rodrigues, who initially picketed various government offices primarily on her own, is now carrying a sign for an hour a day in front of the ministry office on Carmi Avenue.

Recently, she sent information packages to all MLAs. And this week, she forwarded the packages to every NDP constituency association in B.C.

Jeremy, meanwhile, continues to make progress after almost a year in the Lovaas program, which involves at least 40 hours a week of therapy in his home.

Before Lovaas, he lacked communication skills and empathy, had several tantrums a day and rarely slept through the night. In the government-funded child-care setting, he was oblivious to the children around him, Rodrigues said.

Now, he is communicating, beginning to notice other children and even interact, she said. "He is noticing little kids more. At the store, he looked at a little girl and there was a big smile. It's a major breakthrough.

"We are winning the battle with him," she added. "It's just the government where we are not making progress. That's why I stay out there every day. They are aware of my plight, but they are just ignoring me."