

Flaws in system for dealing with developmentally disabled children

The following article was submitted by Caledon Area Families For Inclusion.

Ontario's developmental services system is in crisis.

The Ontario Ombudsman has received more than 800 complaints from frustrated families with developmentally disabled children. A local group of such parents, Caledon Area Families For Inclusion (CAFFI), met recently at Christ Church, Bolton to air their frustrations and seek hope for future solutions. Time is fast running out for families with young people soon to leave the inclusive environment of the school system and solutions are quickly needed in the areas of housing and employment, to name only two.

At the Sept 27 meeting, while their young people enjoyed supervised activities in another part of the building, the parents had the rare opportunity to meet, discuss their own personal situations and prepare questions.

Then Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones spoke to the group in her role as Social Services critic in the legislature at Queen's Park. As a member of the Select Committee on Developmental Services, Jones explained that the committee has recently published its report. This includes a comprehensive list of recommendations touching on every aspect of the complex developmental services sector which provides a wide range of services and supports delivered by 10 different ministries.

One of the recommendations involved redesigning the present Developmental Services Ontario sector to make it easier for families to ?navigate? the system and connect with the services they need. Some CAFFI members explained their own particular challenges within the family and asked how the recommendations might offer solutions. A high level of frustration was evident, particularly with respect to housing and employment, as their young people grow into adults. It is hoped that the recommendations will be speedily implemented.

Following the lively question and answer period with Jones, Clare Clout, of Brampton Community Living, gave an overview of the services offered. CAFFI members thought that services applied more to Brampton and suggested that there was a large enough critical mass of developmentally disabled people in Caledon to warrant local services. It was also noted by CAFFI that services offered by Peel tended to be focussed on Mississauga and Brampton.

Finally, Carlo Summaria spoke briefly on the White Birch Day Program, which is directed toward adults with special needs. Located in Palgrave, this is a full day program that runs five days a week with the possibility of expanding to evenings and weekends.

Meanwhile, CAFFI has an important role in the local community, not only as a support group but as an organization that potentially can advocate within their own community for solutions to the challenges they face. It is felt that if CAFFI became incorporated it would gain more credibility and future meetings of the group will seek help with a way to do this.