

Changes to services for N.B. pre-schoolers with autism getting mixed reviews



By [Andrew Cromwell](#) Video Journalist Global News



WATCH ABOVE: Changes to services for preschool children with autism in New Brunswick are coming in mid February. As Global's Andrew Cromwell reports some are happy with the move, while others were not happy with the timing of the announcement.

Changes coming in just over a month to services provided to pre-schoolers with autism in New Brunswick are getting mixed reviews from parents in the province.

Right now, services for pre-school children with autism are handled by a number of agencies. But by the middle of February one company, Autism Intervention Services (AIS) in Fredericton, will be in charge of all the operations.

Company officials say the new approach will implement some key improvements.

“Working in their natural environment, more supervision for staff, more money to pay staff and equal training throughout the province,” said company director and owner Danielle Pelletier.

Michelle McCaffrey of Hampton, who has a 4-year-old daughter with autism, welcomes the changes and the ability to retain staff by way of better pay.

“They’ll be with the same person, so you won’t have that in and out,” McCaffrey said. “You’ll get the consistency in the program.”

Pelletier says parents in most areas of the province have been contacted and information is being made available, but says, so far that’s not been the situation in Saint John.

“I do feel that there has been a little bit more of anxiety in the Saint John-area simply because we have not been able to use the same collaborative approach,” she said.

Global News was unable to secure an interview with Stepping Stones, which provides services for pre-schoolers with autism in Saint John.

Pelletier says they have been spending a lot of time trying to make contact.

“On the phone trying to comfort parents, trying to help them understand that this is going to work,” she said.

Many people found out about the changes over the holiday period, which increased the stress of the situation.

“It made communication very difficult,” McCaffrey said. “I know that AIS was trying to get the information out to the parents, I know they’re having trouble getting that information out.”

As for concerns over jobs, Pelletier says anyone hired by a previous agency in the province will have a job with her company if they want one.