

[Changes to preschool autism services upsetting parents](#)

Sole service provider says transition will be smooth

By Gail Harding, [CBC News](#) Posted: Jan 09, 2017



Families and Children Minister, Stephen Horsman; Danielle Pelletier, owner of Danielle Pelletier Speech-language Pathologist Corp. DBA Autism Intervention Services; Lisa Crimmins, parent of two children in the program; and Education and Early Childhood Development Minister, Brian Kenny took part in the announcement of the new program for preschool children with autism. (Government of New Brunswick)



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When she first heard there was going to be additional funding for a provincial program to provide autism services to preschool children, Sloan Rees was pleased.

But when the Woodstock resident heard there would only be one service provider for the whole province, instead of the six that were offering services, she was shocked.

"Why fix something that isn't broken?" said Rees, who runs the Autism Family Friendship Group and had a son who accessed the services offered until he went to school.

"Our program, the early intervention, has really been renowned for being effective. I mean I know four families, myself included, that have uprooted their whole family, that come from Ontario and different places to just receive the early intervention that we have here."

Surprising changes

Rees was surprised to hear these changes were being made by the province, considering those who used the services were very happy.

"The majority of the families are surprised," she said.

An announcement regarding these changes, was made on Dec. 20 and Autism Intervention Services of Fredericton was awarded the contract to provide the preschool service province-wide.

Funding per child increased from \$27,500 to \$33,000. Parents will receive training to increase involvement.

Other changes include working with the school districts to improve transition to school.

Rees said while at first glance the changes looked good, she is concerned the children and parents will lose the individuality they had with the companies in their area and some of the services they offered.

"Autism is a very complex disorder. You have kids that are high functioning and kids that are low functioning, they have different abilities and to lose that individuality, even though it may not sound very important, for some families it's a really big deal."

Rees said only offering in-home therapy might be what is considered best, but it is not always practical for families that go to work.

"It's good in theory but again, I'm a little apprehensive...not to mention the fact that you're going to have the transition."

Rees said she is also worried children will be losing out during that time.

"It's a big change."

Smooth transition

But Autism Intervention Services CEO Danielle Pelletier, said she is confident the transition will go well and there won't be any gaps in the service.

"Our goal is that services will just continue without interruptions," she said.

Pelletier expects to have all staffing in place by mid-February. She said a lot of people working for the companies offering the service, have applied for positions with her company.

The CEO said she will do what she can to ensure children and parents have the same person they worked with prior to the change.

In response to concerns of losing individuality because the company is larger, Pelletier said with one company there will now be consistency in the New Brunswick program.

"A team is responsible for 25 clients - every team will be managed exactly the same way around the province. The main strength of our program is that it is individualized for each child."

Pelletier said the service will be offered both in home, child care facilities and autism centres. The first offer of service will be made in the home, the child's natural environment.

"If we cannot find a way to work in the child's natural environment, which is the home or a daycare, then there will be an option of the centre. But the centre is going to be the last resort, not the first."

While Pelletier agreed the change was happening fast, she said it was the government's decision and she is ready to meet the deadline.