

July 28, 2006

Hon. Michael Brown
Constituency: Algoma--Manitoulin
5 Elizabeth Walk
Elliot Lake, ON P5A 1Z2

Re: Kids Grow Up: Teens and Adults on the Autism Spectrum

Dear Hon. Brown,

Autism Ontario (formerly known as Autism Society Ontario) has been the voice for families of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders since 1973. We are a network of thousands of volunteer parents and professionals organized through 31 Chapters across Ontario. I am writing to you today because of the needs of older teens and adults with autism and Aspergers. Members of our local chapter will be contacting your office this summer to encourage you to learn more about the needs of this desperately underserved and under-supported population. Children with autism grow up to be adults with autism. Their needs are complex and require individualized responses that uniquely address the variable nature of this neurological disorder. These adults require tailor-made supports that are not addressed by organizations whose consumers have intellectual handicaps or developmental disorders. But there are ways that Ontario's leaders can help.

We have enclosed a copy of our magazine – *Autism Newslink* – which had as its focus the needs of adults on the autism spectrum. If you read any of the stories in its pages, you will quickly see the realities faced not only by the affected individuals, but also of their aging and weary parents. These parents need your support in forming policy that will help them to sleep at night, knowing that these vulnerable citizens are living meaningful lives with dignity in Ontario – long after they are gone from this world.

Comments from one of our parent leaders, Howard Weinroth, speak volumes about his hopes and realities for his son:

Picture a parent glancing lovingly at the photo of his son Jordan, aged 3 1/2 years old and wearing a hockey sweater. The face is one of beauty, tranquility and a smile that lit up his face and his demeanor would draw the attention of many, if he were in a crowd. I have looked at that picture over the years and his angelic smile and wondered what life will be like for him when he grows up into his teens and, lo and behold, like magic, grows into adulthood. Well, there is no magic. And guess what? Parents have also "grown up" and some, who might not admit it, do have some difficulty continuing to be the primary car giver. The "enlightened ones" are taking notice.

Fast forward that photo 31 years later and we have Jordan as he is today, a fine young man with that same animated smile and excitement when he often sees a friendly face or is engaged in his favourite activities. Gone is the poster child of 3 1/2 years. Jordan is an adult whose needs have changed over the years, and, hopefully, so have the services in the community to provide for his housing, recreational, "educational", and social requirements. Children do become adults, albeit too quickly. The needs of children are important and so government ministries and social service providers in the community have to answer the call, in order for the teens and later adults to have the quality of life we so desire for them.

Thank you for your attention to this population. Also enclosed for your reference is **Autism Ontario's Response to the MCSS Opportunities and Action Document**. You will be hearing from us very soon regarding the urgent needs of adults with autism and Aspergers.

Sincerely,



Margaret Spoelstra
Executive Director
marg@autismontario.com

Encl: Autism Newslink
Autism Ontario's Response to MCSS Opportunities and Action Document