

March 28, 2020

Dear Deaf Children's Society of BC Families and Alumni,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with another update regarding upcoming funding changes to Early Intervention services for young Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and their families province-wide.

The number of families accessing Early Intervention services has more than doubled in the past ten years, however the Ministry of Children and Family Development's budget for these programs and services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children has remained the same. BC Family Hearing Resource Society, Children's Hearing and Speech Centre of BC, and Deaf Children's Society of BC have all done their best to make the most of the funding available to them, but as the number of families accessing Early Intervention services continues to grow, the existing funds have become even more inadequate and all three agencies have faced substantial deficits.

To continue to support as many families as possible, the allocation of existing funds will once again change, resulting in significant impacts to current programs and services. Each and every area of service delivery will be affected. For the past five years, Ministry of Children and Family Development funding has come to DCS through a contract with BC Family Hearing Resource Society. The contract in place from 2015-2019 allowed DCS to access **targeted** (restricted) funds to be able to meet the following service deliverables:

- **targeted** funding for individual Speech and Language services (*up to \$7,800 annually per child*)
- **targeted** funding for individual ASL Instruction (*up to \$5,200 annually per child*)
- **targeted** funding for Outreach travel expenses (*up to \$4,800 annually per child*)
- **targeted** funding for Group services such as Early Literacy Foundations (ELF), DCS Preschool, and Group ASL Instruction for families (*up to \$200,000 annually per agency, \$100,000 for Speech and Language Group programs and \$100,000 for ASL Group programs*)

Beginning April 1, 2020, all **targeted** (restricted) funding as outlined above has been eliminated. The Early Intervention agencies will now only be able to access a small fraction of the total funding that was available under the **targeted** (restricted) funding model. Per child funding will also not be differentiated among families that require Speech and Language services only and families that require both Speech and Language services and ASL Instruction. Funding will now include the following:

- **\$2,857** generated annually per child to cover all individual services (Speech and Language, ASL Instruction, and travel to Outreach families)
- **no funding** for the provision of any Group services (ELF, DCS Preschool, Group ASL Instruction)

DCS was in the midst of restructuring its program and service delivery options for families when the current public health crisis arose. We are now focusing our energies on providing unique online service delivery options to families and the community. We will be announcing our permanent changes very soon, but

please note that there will be a significant reduction in services to families and children, including potential closures to programs.

Please note that all three Early Intervention agencies are experiencing similar funding constraints. Funding from the Early Hearing Program remains the same and will continue to cover individual family services for the first two years after identification, provided that families have registered with an Early Intervention agency prior to their child's second birthday. However, we will no longer be able to provide in-home services as the travel costs associated with this kind of service delivery are beyond our financial capabilities. We have already met with Provincial Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, as well as various other Government officials, and we are committed to continuing to work together to advocate for appropriate funding.

Here is where you come in. As families accessing these life-changing programs and services, you know first-hand how crucial Early Intervention is for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. We would like you to share that knowledge directly with those who are responsible for making these funding decisions, as soon as possible. Budget decisions are being finalized at the Ministry. In the midst of the COVID-19 public health crisis, funding is even more restricted. The message we need the Government to understand is that the severe lack of funding to Early Intervention services is also a public health crisis for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. The effects of limited access to appropriate and consistent Early Intervention services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will be life-long. We continue to share this information and evidenced-based research with the Government.

Attached to this email you will find a template letter which you may use to help advocate for appropriate funding for current and future Early Intervention services. We ask that you also share this template letter with extended family and friends, DCS Alumni, and encourage them to express their concerns directly to Government as well.

On Monday March 9, DCS hosted an online Q & A for families. We plan on hosting an additional online meeting, which would be open to the public, in the near future. We will provide the details as soon as they become available. We greatly appreciate your support as we work to advocate for all Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in the province.

Sincerely,



Lisa Meneian, Executive Director

and

The Deaf Children's Society of B.C. Board of Directors