

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Elimination of Provincial Infant and Child Development Offices a Shocking Blow to Child Development in B.C.

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New Westminster, B.C., October 1, 2009 – The BC Association for Community Living is outraged at the BC Government’s recent decision to eliminate the Provincial Advisor Offices of the Infant Development Program, Aboriginal Infant Development Program and the Supported Child Development Program.

The provincial offices promote and provide best practices, research, training, leadership and vision in the area of early childhood development, connecting families with each other and providing them with the best information available. The loss of the provincial offices is a shocking blow to families, consultants and children with special needs.

“This cut is devastating,” says Melinda Heidsma, Executive Director with AiMHi - Prince George Association for Community Living which provides Infant Development Program services in the North Region. “In rural communities in this region, we often visit with parents whose children have isolated diagnoses. No other parents around them are experiencing similar challenges. For many families - taking away the Provincial Coordinator essentially means taking away that family’s connection to other families who are working hard to support all of their children to live good lives. For the Minister to say that it’s an unneeded bureaucracy does not make sense. The Provincial IDP Office is a lifeline not only for families, but also for IDP Consultants all over the province; to share the most up to date information, and gather new skills, while providing the best services and supports to families. This decision by government simply does not make sense.”

The provincial offices are the reason B.C. has such high standards in early childhood development. When research shows that every \$1 invested today in quality early intervention saves us approximately \$6 in the long-run, a \$300,000 cut to early intervention is false economy.

“The Government is not making an administrative cut,” says Janice Barr, Chair of the Supported Child Development Provincial Steering Committee and Executive Director of the Richmond Society for Community Living. “They are severing a key link for support, training, and best practices for practitioners and consultants. This will have a direct impact on the lives of children and youth with special needs.”

At a time when the Ministry of Children and Family Development is poised to take on the added responsibility of children's services from Community Living BC, BCACL is deeply concerned with their capacity to deliver quality supports and services to children and youth in the absence of a provincial coordinator.

Earlier today BCACL issued a press release celebrating the launch of Community Living Month. "This is a time when we should be celebrating," says Faith Bodnar, BCACL Executive Director. "Instead, we're reeling from cuts to programs and services that help our most vulnerable citizens."