



**BC Association
for Community Living**
Supporting people with developmental disabilities and their families

January 12, 2011

The Hon. Kevin Krueger
Minister of Social Development
British Columbia Liberal Party
Room 124
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Krueger,

The BC Association for Community Living (BCACL) is a federation working with partners to build community and to enhance the lives of children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities and their families by supporting abilities, promoting action and advancing rights, responsibilities and social justice.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Social Development. We would like to request an urgent meeting with you to discuss critical issues affecting people with developmental disabilities in B.C.; in particular, issues that fall within your capacity as Minister responsible for the delivery of employment programs for people with developmental disabilities and for Community Living BC.

Funding for Community Living BC

The impact of Community Living BC's (CLBC) budget constraints is being felt by more and more families and individuals across the province. In February 2009 the province invested \$73 million into supports and services for adults with developmental disabilities. While this was a welcome and much appreciated investment, it only temporarily eased the burden of waitlists. At the time of the budget announcement we made it clear that further investments were necessary to address the increasing caseload of adults with developmental disabilities needing services. Those investments were not made and CLBC is instead faced with a \$22 million budget shortfall that has forced vulnerable individuals and their families back on to waitlists.

In an attempt to recover its deficit, CLBC has embarked on a "service redesign" that is resulting in the rapid closure of group homes across the province and funding cuts to organizations that provide vital community inclusion services to adults with developmental disabilities. While we support the assessment, evaluation and improvement of supports and services for people with disabilities, restructuring must be guided by the individual needs of persons with disabilities – not by the need to balance a budget. BCACL will be participating in Service Redesign and Quality Assurance Committee to collaboratively support and

inform the process of Service Redesign across British Columbia and to ensure that it is implemented based on the principles of person centered planning and community inclusion.

We are encouraged by CLBC's willingness to work with the community to ensure that the process of service redesign provides options that are person-centred and appropriate to the individual's disability-related needs. However, we are looking to you for leadership in making sure that CLBC has the funds it needs to provide the supports and services individuals and families need to live a full life in community. After hearing from numerous groups and individuals across B.C., the Select Standing Committee on Finance recently recommended that the provincial government "ensure sufficient resources are available to provide supports for adults with developmental disabilities and their families." We ask that you heed this recommendation.

Employment Programs for People with Developmental Disabilities

We have been following the proposed New Employment Program of British Columbia and we have some concerns about this new model of service delivery, particularly its impact on people with developmental disabilities and the ongoing advances in current projects.

There are 300,000 British Columbians with disabilities, including 50,000 with developmental disabilities who are of working age. Unfortunately, real employment opportunities remain unavailable to most. Policy and program factors often create systemic barriers to employment which are then compounded by negative attitudes and stereotypes. It is not surprising then that people with disabilities experience lifelong poverty at far higher rates than others. We also know that the best way out of poverty is employment.

The good news is that this is slowly changing; a small but growing number of people with developmental disabilities are receiving the training and support they need to find and keep jobs through the Customized Employment Demonstration Project contracts which began in 2008 and the subsequent contracts for specialized employment services in 2009. We appreciate the leadership that this Ministry has taken in this area. These projects have proven that when appropriate and adequate supports are in place, people with developmental disabilities are at least four times more likely to maintain employment. However, we still have a long way to go and your ongoing leadership and that of your colleagues has never been more important.

BCACL and our members across the province have a long history of success in supporting the community, employers and businesses in BC to recognize that employing people with developmental disabilities enhances their business outcomes. Hiring people with disabilities is good for business and the communities in which they live. We also know that the employment projects funded by your Ministry within Community Living BC's Community Inclusion budget have been successful in finding employment for people with developmental disabilities. We encourage your Ministry to continue funding this initiative through Community Living BC as well as providing extra funding from the Labour Market Development Agreement and Labour Market Agreements for CLBC to continue supporting this population. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can partner

with the Ministry in furthering the goal of employment for people with developmental disabilities.

As you may know, on March 11, 2010 Canada (with the support of all the provinces) ratified the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, marking an historic time in our country's history. We would like to discuss with you what actions your government plans on taking to help make the rights in the Convention real for people with disabilities here in B.C.

Please contact Sheila Hallam, Executive Assistant to arrange a meeting. 604-777-9100 ext. 503 shallam@bcacl.org

Sincerely,



p.p.

Annette Delaplace, President
BC Association for Community Living