

# ADVOCATE WELCOMES PROVINCE'S REVERSAL ON AUTISM PROGRAM

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Melanie Fox is grateful for the latest changes made by the provincial government to its autism program.

In an about-face, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services announced their plan to work with the Autism Advisory Panel to develop a needs-based and sustainable autism program by April 2020.

The program funding has been set at \$600 million per year, an increase of \$278 million.

But Fox says she was saddened that she - along with other families - had to "go through this roller coaster."

"It takes a toll on family," the autism advocate with Project Autism Milton said. "You got a lot of

## THE ISSUE: AUTISM PROGRAM FUNDING CHANGES

### LOCAL IMPACT: PROVINCE IS CRAFTING A NEEDS-BASED PROGRAM WITH THE AUTISM ADVISORY PANEL WHILE INCREASING FUNDING FOR EXISTING THERAPY SERVICES FOR FAMILIES IN ONTARIO AND THE REGION

mental health issues, anxiety... you get angry, frustrated, upset, because you want your child to thrive."

The community outcry began back in February when the Ontario government tweaked its autism program with the goal of clearing the waitlist of over 23,000 children for autism therapy.

Among the changes, the province provided funding directly to families instead of service care providers. Children under the age of

six were eligible to receive \$20,000 per year; and \$5,000 annually for those over six up to 18.

"That was not going to be enough," she said, especially for children who are on the lower spectrum of autism that require more support.

Similar concerns were echoed by Coun. Mike Cluett, who put forward a successful motion at council last week urging gov-

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Nikki Wesley/Torstar

Melanie Fox is an autism advocate with Project Autism Milton, as well as the Ontario Autism Coalition who recently spoke in Town Council.

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