

# Gov't acts first, then asks for comments

By Dave Chmara

In an act now, think later move, the provincial government is holding hearings concerning services provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

There are two purposes of the hearings - to have talks regarding a discussion paper about services provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and to discuss the Integrated Services for Northern Children program.

Although comments made during the Dec. 6 meeting in Terrace Bay could refer to both purposes, most of the 18 people in attendance were concerned with the Integrated Services for Northern Children program.

The government will be forming a team of about 12 professionals in the psychiatry, psychology, speech pathology and occupational therapist fields and will be basing the team in Thunder Bay. The meeting was to discuss how communities in Northwestern Ontario feel about this move and to hear possible improvements to the way the program is set-up.

It was the consensus of the group that the team of professionals should not be based in Thunder Bay. Most felt a rural setting would be more appropriate as the team will be strictly providing its services for those in rural communities and not for urban residents.

Sreeni Keshava, program supervisor, was on hand representing the Ministry of Community and Social Services to listen to various proposals put forward by those in attendance.

Representatives from North of Superior Programs, Terrace Bay/Schreiber Futures Committee, the educational field, Disability Action Group, Chamber of Commerce, North of Superior Business Development Centre, Terrace Bay Council, Child Development, and parents of children with special needs were on hand to comment on the proposed program.

It was suggested that, along with the team being located in a rural community, the team could possibly be split into three and located in three separate communities. Many felt this would elimi-

nate much of the travel that would otherwise be needed to service the area between Upsala and Manitowadge.

Keshava said submissions have been received from six communities so far requesting the team of professionals be located in their communities, and he expected more proposals along this line to be received from other communities.

The Ministry provides funding and services in the area for North of Superior Mental Health program, Child Development workers, children's aid, senior's snow removal programs, meals on wheels, emergency income supplements, rehabilitation services (i.e. for recovering alcoholics), and probation service for young offenders.

In some cases, the ministry itself provides the services, and in others it transfers funds to the organizations that in turn provide the services.

The Integrated Services for Northern Children is a project involving the Ministry of Community and Social Services,

the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. All four ministries will provide funding with the Ministry of Community and Social Services implementing the program.

During the meeting the majority felt there is a definite shortage of staff to provide services, and a few felt coordination of services was lacking.

One idea which was mentioned that most agreed with was that the Ministry should put together a directory of what services and resources are available in the area, where to go and who to contact to receive these services.

Another suggestion was for schooling in the needed fields to be at least partially paid for or subsidized with the requirement that the student must work in a rural community. It was also felt that the ministry should try to hire people who live in the north instead of hiring people from Southern Ontario. Many agreed southerners are not aware of what

life is like in Northern Ontario and only practise here for short periods of time.

They felt if people from the north are trained and hired, they will have a commitment to the communities they would be serving.

It was learned at the meeting that the funds for the Integrated Services for Northern Children have been available for over one year but the Ministry has had some difficulty in hiring people willing to locate in Northwestern Ontario.

Many felt better incentives will be needed to attract the pro-

fessionals. Some believe they won't be willing to either locate here, or go to school for the required training if they'll make \$30,000 a year when the same people can go to work at a mine or mill and make almost twice as much.

The team of professionals will be located at the Lakehead Regional Family Resource Centre and Keshava said the program should begin in three to four months time.

He said the way the program is operated may or may not change as a result of the hearings now taking place.

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