

# Focus Newsletter Summer 2000

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## Baird Announces New Funding at OASIS Conference in Kingston

MCSS Minister John Baird used the occasion of the Third Annual OASIS Conference in Kingston in May to announce \$50M of new funding for the Developmental Services sector. It was a tribute to the growing strength of OASIS that Baird chose this forum to make his announcement. The details of the new funding are by now well known within our sector. The news was exceedingly welcome at a time when the entire service system was becoming increasingly stagnant due to nine years of restraint. Long waiting lists and little in the way of new funding has become the norm.

As this funding makes its way across the province, it will be obvious that it is insufficient to substantially reduce waiting lists, but it is a step in the right direction. OASIS and its allies will need to continue to impress upon government the fact that their political priorities need to address: long standing inequities to families, waiting lists, compensation issues, and transfer payment funding generally.

### The details of the funding announcement are as follows:

First, we will provide \$30 million annualized in new services and supports to benefit over 2,800 individuals and their families. This includes:

\$18 million to provide accommodation for more than 300 individuals with developmental disabilities, including adults living at home with aging parents, adults whose needs change as they age, and young adults moving from the child welfare system;

\$6 million to create innovative day program options for approximately 500 people who are over 21 years old, including those who are leaving the education system; and

\$6 million to provide special services at home, including respite support for about 2,000 families with one or more children with a developmental disability, living at home.

Second, we are increasing Ministry base funding by \$8 million for the developmental services sector. This will ensure that services that have been managed on a year-to-year basis, can continue.

Third, we will provide \$6 million in one-time funding to help Ministry-funded agencies that operate group homes, complete the retrofitting required under the revised regulations of the Ontario Fire Code.

Fourth, we will provide the developmental services sector with an additional \$6.1 million this year, growing to \$15.2 million annually, to give agencies more flexibility to deal with the management of human resources, including wages."

## OASIS Vision Discussed at Workshop

As OASIS officially enters its third operational year following a three year developmental phase, the Board felt it was time for a renewed look at future directions. It is particularly important that the organization remain focused and relevant to member agencies. Continued growth has catapulted OASIS to a membership of 73 agencies. The founding agencies are gratified to see the current provincial wide reach of the Association and very pleased with the many initiatives which benefited participants. A lot of people are contributing significant time and energy to make it work. It is therefore imperative that OASIS adapt to changing pressures as it moves into the future.

The vision workshop was hosted by the Brantford Association on June 10, 2000. The workshop was facilitated by Mike Balkwell and Dr. Jim Rice.

There were discussions on strategies for Board renewal and the Board member selection process. Ideas were put forward on how to improve communications with agency members. And some considerable discussion took place around the OASIS mandate and the need to focus on agency business (trader) issues as set apart from pure advocacy. It was noted that member agencies need to make contributions of time and energy to keep OASIS moving forward. The organization was founded on the belief that it would remain more dynamic through active member participation rather than hiring staff. As the volume of work increases it becomes more of a challenge to sustain the level of activity through a volunteer base. All of these areas and others will be explored more fully in the months to come as OASIS moves to a more mature and vital presence within the developmental

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service sector.

From its humble beginnings as a small CORE group of agencies seeking better ways to be represented in 1995 to the present day, OASIS has been a refreshing and significant support mechanism for member agencies. The current Board is acutely aware of the need to periodically review its focus, purpose and relevance. Your input is very welcome!

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### Wage Enhancement?

MCSS Minister John Baird recently announced the following in relation to wage enhancement for the developmental services sector:

"we will provide the developmental services sector with an additional \$6.1 million this year, growing to \$15.2 million annually, to give agencies more flexibility to deal with the management of human resources, including wages."

As this announcement filters through the system it has become clear that the increases for individual staff are inadequate after nine years of restraint. Agencies are getting .8% of their MCSS subsidy in the first year of this initiative which if passed on to staff after benefits and payroll deductions will amount in many cases to a less than \$4.00 increase per pay period for salaries in the vicinity of \$24,000 - \$26,000 per annum.

In a sector where employees have been historically underpaid (substantiated by proxy pay equity comparisons) and where it is increasingly difficult to hire and retain qualified staff, it seems nothing short of patronizing for government to make such an announcement. This is exacerbated by the fact that agencies have been told they will need to find ongoing Pay Equity funds from internal sources in order to meet their legislative obligations. It is a well known fact that this can only be done by cutting more staff since 80% of agency spending is on compensation. And it is increasingly clear that these cuts can no longer be sustained through cuts in central admin budgets since most have undergone huge restructuring in recent years to cope with rising costs for which there have been no annualized cost of living adjustments.

Contrast this example of government generosity with the recent statement by Mike Harris supporting a 32% MPP pay hike. To put this in perspective, we are talking about a 4,000% difference. These numbers tell a compelling story about this government's sense of equity and their political priorities.

Tens of thousands of developmental services staff have paid a significant price to assist the Harris government balance it's books over a number of years. These staff are also deserving of some tangible recognition of that contribution. The argument that the well is dry, is no longer credible.

The government's current strategy will be penny wise and pound foolish if there is no recognition that service quality is suffering and agency discretionary resources have been depleted. This recent announcement as it relates can only serve to enhance the need for agencies to work even harder to inform government that spending priorities need a significant realignment.

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### Kingston OASIS Conference Informative and Humorous

Kingston staff showed their imagination and flair for the dramatic with their introduction of the "Time Capsule" idea and the "Greetings from the Queen". Attendees were entertained by a comic Master of Ceremony in a session where agencies submitted their predictions for the future in the 10 year capsule.

It was a remarkable coup for conference organizers to get the Mayor of Kingston, MCSS Minister John Baird and Dr. Frank Collom to highlight the special guest entourage.

The following day, the remarks from the "Queen of England" drew a lot of laughs as she mimicked her Royal counterpart with a performance which was well rehearsed and aptly delivered. Her accent was appropriately royal British and her style was sarcastic and a delightful mockery of the real thing.

In addition to the fun times which every good conference needs a sprinkling of, there was plenty of solid content in sessions and the Best Practices Fair, which has now become a staple of the OASIS gatherings. A special thank you from OASIS participants to the Kingston Association staff and guest participants.

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### Member Agency Highlights

Congratulations to the [Guelph Wellington Association for Community Living](#). Congratulations to the as they celebrate 45 years of providing service in Guelph and Wellington County to people with a developmental disability and their families.

[The Barrie and District Association for People with Special Needs](#) has been offering monthly Pet Therapy visits at the Consumer Resource Centre, since March 1999. Jester is the official Consumer Resource Centre Pet Therapy dog. Jester also visits other sites. Jester and his owner are also participants in the "Bite Free" program offered through the Saint John Ambulance Pet Therapy

Program, which teaches and encourages safe interacting between people and dogs.

[The Ottawa-Carleton Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities](#), also offers a Dog Therapy program through Therapy Dogs International, working with the staff from the Community Transition Centre. Volunteers and their dogs have developed a program that is already showing positive results for their clients.

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#### **OASIS Welcomes New Members**

Welcome:

[Lennox and Addington Association for Community Living](#)

P.O. Box 303, 99 Richmond Blvd.,

Napanee, ON K7R 3M4

Phone: (613) 354-2184 Fax: (613) 354-0815

[Newmarket & District Association for Community Living](#)

77 Bogart Avenue

Newmarket, ON L3Y 2A7

Phone: (905) 357-5606 Fax: (905) 898-6441

[webmaster](#) | OASIS copyright 2005