

Local autistic adult offered ABA treatment

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When the Human Rights Tribunal last month dismissed the Cucek family's case to seek support for adults with autism from the provincial government, Linda Cucek was devastated.

But now, she is full of hope.

Cucek is delighted the provincial government has offered the Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) treatment program to her son James, who is now 21.

ABA was offered to the Cuceks a couple of years ago, but the family wanted James to get the Lovaas treatment and decided to wait for the Human Rights Tribunal ruling.

ABA is available to children under the age of 19 in B.C.

Linda led her family's charge for seven years to get Lovaas. The case was postponed a number of times for years before it was dismissed recently.

After that, Linda received a "nasty" letter from her family's social worker.

"I cried that night," said Linda. "I was beside myself."

But Linda, who is an ex-U.S. Marine, wasn't giving up her fight to help adults with autism, and she certainly wasn't going to simply accept such a letter from the social worker with the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Linda showed the letter to local

MLA Randy Hawes and he took action. The Cuceks, who were impressed with Hawes' quick response, say James is finally getting help because of him.

"[Linda] got an e-mail which I thought was appalling," said Hawes, who forwarded the letter to Stan Hagen, minister of children and family development, and Linda Reid, minister of state for children.

The e-mail showed a lot of frustration from the social worker, added Hawes, who noted a new social worker has been assigned to the Cuceks.

"I know about the treatment of human beings, and the e-mail Linda got is appalling," said the MLA, who has been working with Linda since

her family moved to Mission from Port Moody three years ago.

The Cuceks have been dealing with an autistic child day after day for the past 20 years, said Hawes.

"As a parent, I can't imagine what it's been like with that constant battle. These parents have a tough road and should get all the help they can."

Linda received a phone call from Hawes last week informing her the provincially funded ABA program would be extended to James even though he is over 19.

It has taken the Cuceks a couple of years to accept the treatment program, said Hawes. "Autism is a broad spectrum disorder, not one size fits all. There are a broad spec-

trum of therapies ... Linda wanted the therapy she thought was best, but in fighting for what was best, she got nothing."

"ABA is a watered down version of Lovaas," according to Linda, who is happy her son will remain at home during his treatments. "But at least this is something for James."

James was diagnosed with autism at age 13 and did not receive any treatments when he was young.

"Autism doesn't go away," said Linda. "They will need ABA therapy when they're adults."

Besides advocating for her son, Linda also wants adults with autism to benefit from government funded programs. "Hopefully this will set a precedent," she said.