

The City Clerk / Council Members
The Corporation of the City of Richmond Hill
225 East Beaver Creek Road
Richmond Hill, Ontario
L4B 3P4

January 30, 2023

Dear Council Members,

I am writing in support of an application for a centre for children with autism in Richmond Hill (City File: ZBLA-22-0021). As a member of the management team at a centre for children with autism in Richmond Hill for almost 10 years, I have witnessed the positive, enduring impact a centre for children with autism can have on staff, children and families (many of whom are residents of Richmond Hill or nearby cities).

My current role as a Family Services Supervisor started off as a part-time administrative job that I accepted as I looked for full-time, clinical work in the field of social services. What I didn't realise then was this part-time job would grow into full-time work and ignite a passion and level of fulfilment that I had yet to find in my career. As part of the Human Resources team, I have also come to learn that my experience in finding a rewarding career in the world of specialized services for children with autism wasn't unique to me but also shared by many individuals who either joined our team fresh out of post-secondary education or a few years afterwards as they too felt they found an unexpected profession that changed the direction of their career.

Over the years, I've also witnessed how the positive impact a centre like this isn't only reserved to its employees, it extends to the children receiving services and their families. I'll never forget the day I heard a child in our waiting area spontaneously start singing and doing the actions for a nursery rhyme with their grandmother – a song they learned in one of our classrooms. Or the time a child who began services with limited communication took out a little card to tell their mom "I love you" as they said goodbye and entered the main area of the centre. Or the day a mom shared her gratitude to our team and specialized skill building program for helping her child find and connect with peers their age. What are often taken as common childhood

experiences were big achievements for those little ones and felt even more by those who love them. They were also no doubt steppingstones in each of these children's journey towards greater success at school, connecting with loved ones, getting a job in the future, and integrating into their community.

Alongside these success stories, I also hear from countless parents of children with autism that they aren't able to access these specialized skills building places due to waitlists for services. Well Council Members, here's your opportunity to be a part of a lasting solution. Let's get this new centre off the ground and open its doors to children with autism who deserve an opportunity just like any other child in Richmond Hill.

Sincerely,
Piera Defina