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Parents' perseverance pushes project; Province hands over another grant as crews prepare to build \$15.5-M One Kids Place

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A group of local parents was credited Thursday as the driving force behind a much-needed regional children's treatment centre that will begin taking shape in a matter of weeks.

Officials announced during a news conference at One Kids Place on Stockdale Road that construction of a new facility will begin soon after a contract was recently awarded to a Timmins-based company.

Nipissing MPP Monique Smith, the province's revenue minister, and Minister of Children and Youth Services Deb Matthews, were also on hand during the event, announcing an additional \$1 million grant from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund for the project to help kick off a campaign aimed at raising the \$3.5 million still needed to complete the community's share.

"I'm sure the community is going to step up to the plate," said Smith, noting the province has already provided more than \$10 million toward the project, including a 2.4-hectare parcel of land worth \$1.5 million off Highway 17 and McKeown Avenue, near the North Bay Regional Health Centre.

Dr. Joseph Madden, who shares the chairman position for the fundraising campaign with Scott Clark, said the \$15.5-million project has been in the works since 1998, when the facility was first recommended by Ontario's Health Services Restructuring Commission. It was that recommendation, he said, that "lit a fire" among local parents with special needs children to make the project a reality.

"A parent's love for their child knows no bounds," said Madden, who has spent most of his 32 years as a medical professional working in North Bay as a pediatrician.

Madden said he's learned from parents during his career to never lose hope, especially after encountering a number of cases in which children with special needs have defied the odds because their families have never given up.

"It's the parents that keep people like me on track," he said, suggesting the treatment centre project has moved forward for the same reasons.

He said the children of some parents who helped start the movement to establish the facility may have outgrown the services and programs that will be offered at the new 3,780-square-metre building. But he said those parents have helped to ensure therapy and support services will be in place under one roof for other children with physical, communication and developmental needs.

As a pediatrician and a parent with a special needs child, Mary Grise knows first-hand the need for such a facility.

"I'll be able to access services for her in an easier way," said Grise of her three-year-old daughter, Lily Mogan.

With new and existing services and programs - including a pediatric clinic where Grise, Madden and three other doctors will work - under one roof, she said parents and children will be better served in terms of quality and efficiency.

A confusing array of services at different locations, many of which were duplicated by more than one agency, was a common complaint among parents and doctors before One Kids Place was established several years ago. The current facility has moved from a small office on McIntyre Street to the existing site on Stockdale Road over the past two years and has grown to more than 50 staff members. Construction of the new facility is expected to be completed in 2009.

Executive director Judy Sharpe said as many as 20 new staff members will be hired over the next five or six

years as the centre's programs and services expand.

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one kids place

One Kids Place is a children's treatment centre offering co-ordinated health

services for children and youths with

special needs and their families.

- It provides services to kids as old

as 19 who have communication,

developmental and physical disabilities

and serves a geographic area which

includes 47,495 children and youths.

- The facility treated more than 1,500 kids in 2007.

- The facility at Stockdale Road is too small to deliver programs and services.

- The new One Kids Place will be home to staff as well as pediatricians, residents and students from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, and a number of community agencies, including Nipissing Association for Disabled Youth, Best Start and Ontario Early Years learning programs and school readiness programs in partnership with the Near North District School Board.

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