

# Premier broke promise to help, boy's mom says

By Kathy Tait  
Staff Reporter

James Cusek, 17, may be an adult before he ever gets the treatment for autism that he should have had since he was a toddler.

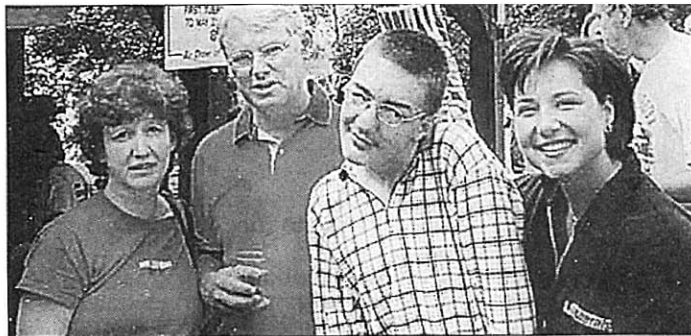
Then it may be way too late. His mother, Linda, says James' autism has worsened dramatically and that Premier Gordon Campbell has reneged on a promise he made before the last provincial election to obtain the specialized Lovaas treatment for her son.

Cusek said she met Campbell and Christy Clark, now B.C.'s education minister, at a picnic in 2000 and Campbell assured her that James, who was diagnosed at age 13, would get the treatment he needed if his party won the election.

Instead, Campbell's government is now fighting two major decisions upholding the rights and needs of autistic children to get treatment.

First, the B.C. government has told the Children's Commission that it disagrees with a recent commission decision that James should have the treatment and that the government should make it available not only to the Port Moody youth but to all other autistic children over the age of seven.

Treatment for the neurolog-



Linda Cusek (left), Gordon Campbell, James, and Christy Clark.

ical disorder has been available in B.C. only to children aged seven and under.

Second, on Feb. 20 the B.C. Court of Appeal will hear a provincial government appeal of a B.C. Supreme Court decision two years ago in which Justice Marion Allan ruled that the government discriminated against four children with autism who were denied funding for Lovaas treatment.

The judge found that the government's failure to provide effective treatment for autistic children violated their rights under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

She said autism "is a medical disability just as cancer is and . . . both require treatment."

Currently 24,000 special-needs children and youth are getting some treatment, while 7,000 remain on a waitlist.