

Transcript from opening remarks – PAFCF Ground Breaking Ceremony

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Shirley Bond:

I'm Shirley Bond, I'm Minister of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training (inaudible) to be here this afternoon with a significant number of our colleagues and I want to take a moment just to recognize them. But, before we do that, we want to recognize that we're gathered here on the traditional territory of the Coast Salish First Nation and we're most grateful for that.

It's a real pleasure to be joined by a number of my colleagues and I think it speaks very much to the importance and to the history and legacy of the work on this particular project. So I do want to recognize the honorable Rich Coleman, the honorable Stephanie Cadieux. We have the honorable Andrew Wilkinson, honorable Peter Fassbender, MLA Jane Thornthwaite, MLA Ralph Sultan, and MLA Linda Reimer have joined us today. So thank you all for making the effort to be here, we very much appreciate that. We're very honored to be with you today to celebrate what is a momentous day for BC, to share more about a very special vision for this project.

Please join me in welcoming two people who have worked tirelessly, Wendy Lisogar-Cocchia and Sergio Cocchia, co-founders of the Pacific Autism Centre Society. A warm welcome for them.

Sergio Cocchia:

Thank you Minister Bond. I cannot begin to describe the emotions on a day like today. Today isn't a beginning because we started this project six years ago at least and, certainly, not an end. As you can see, we've got a fair ways still to go. But it is an amazing milestone.

Today, we enter a new phase, a phase of building; building not just this structure but programs and plans. Building like our new research imitative, which will help inform researchers in this province but also ensure our programs are informed by that research. Building like a new navigator satellite program, linking eight communities around BC to this new hub and giving families a first connection to our resources here. Building a new IT network, which will ensure that families in the remotest of locations will know they are not alone in dealing with autism spectrum disorder. Building capacity, not only in service but in knowledge and support.

Today, we celebrate and acknowledge the leadership that brought us to this point.

Firstly, to our board, who have donated so graciously of their time, some for over six years with Wendy and I. Jack McGee, Dennis Skulsky, Graydon Hayward, Sue Doi, Peter Webster, Art Willms, we are so grateful for your guidance.

Our project team. Let me begin first with BC Housing and Minister Coleman. Our project at the beginning needed a champion and we found no one better in government than BC Housing and of course our friend Deputy Premier Coleman. Thank you so much for the leadership on this file for the last six years.

And some of our team at (inaudible). Project director Terry MacKay, our amazing building committee under the leadership of Sarah Clark (sp), our very effective fundraising committee co-chaired by Lara Daphne (sp). This is a great group of people that have brought us to this stage. Our consultant and building team, led by City Spaces Consulting and NSD Architects who have been part of this journey for six years, thank you very much.

And to our newest partner, Ventana Construction, we're so excited and happy to be working with you. And the huge consultant team that we've had on this project all along, thank you.

Of course, we've gotten to this point through our advisory group and our steering operations and governance groups. These are the people who help create this project, the collaborative that have build the PAFC. I wish we had time to name them all but they are the champions of today. While there might have been some difference in opinions in the group, consensus and collaboration have helped us create the plans that you see. These people are the voice of autism in BC. They have been and continue to be the organizations which represent our population incredibly well. We're very fortunate in BC to have these amazing organizations and individuals, service providers, and family groups, who all have given so selflessly to build upon our strengths and to recognize areas of weaknesses and work to fill those gaps.

To them, we're very, very, thankful. This is a beautiful site. We've got, as I said, a bit of work to do but we want to thank all those people that helped play a role in securing this site, to the City of Richmond for welcoming us and working with us, and to all of you, thank you.

We can create a better tomorrow for our kids and their families affected by autism spectrum disorder throughout our province and across the lifespan. Thank you.

Wendy Lisogar-Cocchia:

Good afternoon. Thank you Minister Bond for the very kind introduction, you have been there for us since day one. We know that it's important and we want to share with everyone here today that it's important for all of you to know that this project would have not moved forward without you and your colleagues.

Today is a monumental day for autism and related disorders in BC and Canada. When we created this charity, we were committed to bring this project of a hub and spoke model to fruition. We are a charity by families for families. Family members are desperate to help. One of the groups at the forefront are siblings. For example, our daughter is creating a sibling support network called Growing Together, which will support initiatives out of the centre and many other support groups will also be created. We are all determined to make a significant difference in the quality of lives for those affected with autism and related disorders, especially, across their lifespan. What we kickoff and celebrate here today is a family centre, the hub of the hub and spoke model, and this is just the beginning.

Outstanding leadership is fundamental for a project of this scope. Sergio highlighted our deep gratitude for the leadership and tireless devotion from our collaborative team. I am also proud to share with you some of the tremendous leadership shown by our donors. Early, our project garnered national interest. Autism Speaks Canada was the first national donor with a generous gift of \$500,000. Recently, Variety, the children's charity, announced an amazing \$1m. So now we're really off to the races. Now, today, you'll hear from our lead naming donor, David Patchell-Evans, a dedicated father, who has a wonderful daughter with autism. Patch is like a brother to me now. He is admired by many and for many reasons. He is the founder of Canada's largest fitness chain, Goodlife Fitness, which has over 1m members. He has won many awards and, most obvious today, he is admired for his generosity. But the most impressive quality about Patch is his daily, relentless, efforts to help his daughter lead the best quality of life possible. We have become very close with Patch and his wife Silken, the incomparable Silken Laumann. We have shared many conversations (inaudible) our children, from our frustrations and our tears, to our hopes and our dreams, and we will pursue those efforts for everyone always. We are grateful to have found a lead donor who is dedicated to the creation of this hub and so much more for BC and Canada. Today, I am very privileged to be able to announce an amazing unbelievable gift of \$5m and to unveil the new name....

Let me turn your attention over here.... To announce the new name of our autism family hub, the Goodlife Fitness Autism Family Hub.

Now, it is an honor and a privilege to introduce next the Deputy Premier of our province, the honorable Rich Coleman. Deputy Premier, your outstanding leadership and unwavering commitment not

only gave us the impetus to move this project forward but it was the catalyst required to support a successful capital fundraising campaign. Seventeen years ago, we were at a doctor's appointment with our son and the physician said to us families need one phone number, one website, a place to start. Because of you, minister, your leadership, your government's support, and, most importantly, with the involvement and support of so many families, donors, and volunteers, now this dream has become a reality. Ladies and gentleman, Minister Coleman.

Rich Coleman:

Well, good afternoon everybody and it is indeed a pleasure for me to be here today on behalf of Premier Christy Clark and our entire team in Victoria. And that team actually goes back over about seven years so it's about four Finance ministers I've had to hide \$20m from, don't tell them that, and two premiers, Premier Clark and Premier Campbell both supported this project right from the very beginning. I remember the call I got from Gordon Campbell one day. He said, your job is to find \$20m for the autism centre. I said, okay, do you care where? He said, no, just find the \$20m for the autism centre. So we went to work within government and we did it because we believed in something and my actual support for this project, personally, came from my own sister. My sister was in charge of actually posting all the kids with autism in the Catholic school system in Toronto. In addition to being an autism expert, she also worked in children's hospital, both in Edmonton and in Toronto over the years.

And one thing that came through this.... In the last days before I was really trying to understand this project in 2010, as I was walking down the streets of Vancouver, I realized my sister wasn't communicating that well.... And it wasn't very long after that we found out my sister, only 52 years of age, had Alzheimer's. And so she was the last person to actually give me her.... Last thing she gave me her expertise on was on the autism centre because she had actually taken me for a tour of this (inaudible) project in Toronto and Ontario and actually convinced me how important it was to have this type of facility in BC. It's not just about here and it's not just about this building, it's about the children and the families across BC who are faced with having children with autism spectrum disorder. It's about having the ability to do something and help them. Now, government has actually a rather minimal role in this. We actually take your tax dollars and we find a project that makes some sense and we make sure it gets to the right society to do the right project. The rest of it's up to you. You're going to build a building, it's going to have tentacles across the province. It's going to be like spoke and hub. People will be able to come here for respite, be able to come here for help to better education and the rest of it.

At the same time, those tentacles in this building are going to go out across this entire province to helped children with autism, whether they're in Vanderhoof or McBride or up in the areas like Prince Rupert or Terrace or Port Edward. Because that's what's needed is that expertise and ability for people to get online or call and get the help they need and the advice they need at the time they need it. So what you do as individuals and volunteers, and my heart goes out to all the volunteers who've been on this board and kept this vision alive, is that you're actually going to get the building built. When it's built, you're the people, your staff, your volunteers, the families and their children are who are going to put the heart in this building. No government can do that, only people can do that. People that care and understand the stresses that can come with having a child with autism like my cousin, like my one nephew has, and you see the strain and stress on a family and how important it is if you can find the supports for them when they need it. That's what this is about. That's why you're all here today.

You're here today because you care about people, you care about their children, you care about what we can do for them and do better at any time. And on this particular time in our history, we are actually stepping forward and we're doing something that's important for children with autism in this 58,000 square foot centre I'm asking you to put the heart in. And I know Wendy and Sergio and your team at the

Pacific Autism Centre Foundation, the parents and the families, the government partners, federal and municipal and provincial, have all been here as part of this journey. But as the journey comes to its fruition, be proud when you walk out of here today that once again you're doing something special for British Columbians. A man once said that the rent you pay for the space you occupy on this earth is service to your fellow men. All of you today are giving service to your children and your other friend's children with autism and families in BC and you should be congratulated. Thank you for coming today.