

Casbet - Nov. 26/97

County Woman's 'Special Needs' Not Met

by Dawn Currie

Antigonish County councillors were presented with food for thought at the regular council session on November 18 when they heard an account of a single mother's recent experience that illustrated the consequences resulting from the county's current practice of withholding funding for special needs.

Isabelle Steele, mother of a five-year-old and a seven-year-old, and a

recipient of provincial assistance, related what happened to her family earlier this fall when her two sons came down with chicken pox and related illnesses (strep throat and pneumonia). She told councillors that because the illnesses and related symptoms did not require prescription drugs (that would be covered by special needs), but did require over-the-counter medication (that would not be paid for), she

incurred over \$240 unexpected medical expenses (medication, travel back and forth to the hospital, extra laundry, etc.).

Steele was one of some 10 representatives from the Antigonish Coalition for Economic Justice attending the council meeting. Together with the group's spokesperson Katherine Reed, she posed several questions to council

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MEMBERS OF THE ANTIGONISH Coalition for Economic Justice Katherine Reed (front, left and clockwise) Darlene Cameron, Joan Stockley, Ed Miller, Ann MacLellan csm, Marijon MacDonald Marie Weingartshofer, Sara avMaat, Connie Langille and Isabelle Steele attended the recent Antigonish county council meeting to present their concerns to council.

Needs.

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concerning the policy on special needs.

Warden Herbert Delorey responded, noting that he (and other councillors) was sympathetic to the problem. He pointed out that because Ms. Steele is receiving provincial assistance, that specific situation would be out of council's jurisdiction. At the same time, he explained the rationale behind council's decision that the only special needs to be covered would be prescription drugs. This decision was made at the time when council faced a social services deficit of \$300,000. He advised the group that council would take seriously the comments made by the ACEJ.

Noting that Antigonish County has the lowest cost-sharing per capita in the province, the warden advised that council had already agreed to send a proposal to the province, suggesting a cost sharing for special needs at 65-35 until

the end of March when the province takes over complete responsibility for social assistance.