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For Immediate Release

KidsAbility Forced to Issue Layoff Notices as a Result of Changes to the Ontario Autism Program

Waterloo, ON, July 25, 2019 – The Ontario government’s reforms to the Ontario Autism Program has forced KidsAbility to layoff 50% of our autism staff—impacting approximately 20-25 staff across our teams effective January 2020. These notices are in addition to the nine staff reductions announced by KidsAbility in March.

“News like this is not good for anyone—for our community and for the staff, families and children directly impacted. However, given our current fiscal reality, our Board determined that we have no choice but to layoff professional, highly-trained, regarded and passionate individuals,” says KidsAbility chief executive officer, Linda Kenny. “Since the Ontario Government announced changes to the Ontario Autism Program in February 2019, KidsAbility has been engaged in determining how we can continue to deliver high quality services to children, youth and families in our community in a new fee-for-service model.”

Government funding for KidsAbility’s autism services was cut by 25% in March 2019 resulting in nine staff reductions. By April 1, 2020, direct government funding to KidsAbility for autism services will cease. The government has introduced Childhood Budgets for families to purchase services. Children under the age of six are eligible to receive \$20,000 annually in direct funding while those six and over are eligible to receive \$5,000 annually up to a lifetime maximum of \$140,000. In response to the changes announced in February, KidsAbility has launched a new fee-for-service model to provide families with a trusted option to purchase a range of therapy and services.

“The government believes that by issuing Childhood Budgets that it gives families choices. Direct Service (DSO) organizations like KidsAbility have long supported families that cannot or do not want to manage their child’s services on their own. We will always support a family’s right to choose which option is best for them. However, we believe these changes have had the effect of limiting options for families,” says Ms. Kenny. “The changes to the Ontario Autism Program have destabilized a system that was built with the unique needs of children and families at the centre. Nevertheless, we are committed to providing high quality services to families and that commitment has not changed,” says Ms. Kenny.

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KidsAbility launched its fee-for-service program in April working with families and staff to develop a menu of options based on the needs of children. In order to support this new model funded solely by fees, KidsAbility notified staff earlier today that the organization is moving into a layoff position and must reduce staffing due to the uncertainty of the market. Layoffs will be effective January 2020 but it is the organization's intent and hope to build a program that will be sustainable, viable and will allow KidsAbility to be able to bring back staff impacted by the layoffs.

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Background Information:

Across our community, 11,338 children and youth with special needs receive the help that they need to realize goals important to them. It could be overcoming a stutter, strengthening muscles to take that first step or learning the social skills to make a friend—together, we make these firsts possible. With over 60 years of experience, KidsAbility helps children and youth with special needs and their families to achieve goals important to them at home, at school and in the community. Our goal is to get the right support to the right child at the right time and donations help to make that possible.

KidsAbility Foundation inspires and engages community partners, individuals and groups to help make a difference in children's lives. Demand for KidsAbility's services continues to exceed the resources provided by the provincial government. Through the annual Kids Can't Wait campaign, donations raised through our generous community fund new programs, innovation and equipment, and allow KidsAbility to serve an additional 1,000 children and youth with special needs each year. Without this generous support, more children would be waiting even longer to receive the care that they deserve and so desperately need. Presently, there are over 1,482 children waiting for services at KidsAbility.

With your help, we can help more children to live richer and fuller lives. Together, we can ensure that every child and youth has access to the services that they need where they live, learn and play to realize their full potential.