



Newsletter

Wages, benefits, successorship rights top Community Social Services bargaining priorities

About 30 delegates attending the union's Community Social Services Conference in Victoria on October 19 and 20 say they are determined to restore the collective bargaining rights they lost in 2004.

In that round of bargaining, the Memorandum of Agreement on Equity Adjustment for Parity was eliminated; workers lost their successorship rights; a four-step increment was applied to the wage grid; and wage rates for new hires were rolled back by nearly 18 per cent.

The result, say delegates, is a full-blown retention and recruitment crisis across the sector where the casual workforce has been decimated, new staff are not receiving sufficient job orientation, and many agencies are working short-staffed.

Workers in community social services provide a range of supports to people with physical, mental and developmental disabilities, children who witness and experience abuse, young offenders, women experiencing domestic violence, and people with drug and alcohol addictions.

In preparation for bargaining, one delegate stressed that, "We need to hit the ground running right now. It's our job to let the public and politicians know who we are and what we do."

Bargaining priorities developed during the conference included wages, health and welfare benefits, sick time, RRSP contributions, and successorship rights.

Throughout the two-day forum, delegates expressed their frustration with government cutbacks - a whopping \$383 million was chopped from the sector over the last four years - and government's lack of commitment to residents and clients who are not able to advocate for the levels of care and support they need.

Delegates pointed out that without proper resources in the sector, the goal of promoting independent and community-based living is increasingly challenged and under funding threatens to turn back the clock to institutional care.

Without enough staff, they say, residents can't get the level of attention or care they need. Group home programs, for example, are subject to last-minute changes and cancelled outings, which curtail residents' recreation and social activities. This in turn creates an atmosphere in a home where residents become agitated and their quality of care is unnecessarily compromised.

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HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy told delegates, "The whole notion of continuity of care to residents and clients is in a shambles." She said continuity of care could only work with increased funding for community support services and a stable, respected workforce, with a solid employment security contract.

Many delegates also raised concerns about increased safety issues and escalating violence in the workplace - a result of inappropriate client and resident placements as well as insufficient staff to support people with behavioural challenges.

Other issues cited during the forum included ever-expanding job descriptions without corresponding compensation; insufficient resources, equipment and supplies; ongoing systems change; more paperwork, and pressure to come to work when sick.

Those in attendance elected a bargaining committee to represent HEU members at the negotiating table. They are Al Reford, Sheila Brenton and Don Sather; Annika Lund and Margaret Cavin were elected as alternates.

Attending delegates included workers in residential care, child counseling, day programs, vocational training, program support, community support and home services.

Bargaining priorities developed during the conferences will go back to union locals, who will bring recommendations forward to HEU's Wage Policy Conference on January 9 and 10, 2006. Deadline for locals to submit their bargaining demands to the Provincial Office is November 10, 2005.

October 24, 2005