



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

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HEU's Summer School builds solidarity, friendships and leadership skills

More than 200 HEU members and facilitators gathered last week for the union's in-residence Summer School program at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Under the theme *Building Leadership: Organizing for Power*, members pre-registered for workshops which included Taking Back the Work Floor, Uniting for Health and Safety, Transforming Conflict into Union Activism, and the Power of Storytelling. This allowed members to identify and focus on skills-building areas that best suited their individual needs as activists and local leaders.

Summer School is one of the union's most popular biennial events. It aims to create greater understanding about where workers' collective power and strength come from and how to build inclusive, solidarity-based relationships, as well as confidence and knowledge to defend our collective agreements and workplace rights. In exploring these areas, members also learn best practices that foster sustainable and inclusive activism.

It's also an opportunity to raise awareness about the internal and external forces that devalue and divide workers, and ultimately, to develop leaders who can confidently and inclusively organize successful workplace campaigns.

HEU members who attended from across the province also took part in large plenary sessions that featured guest speakers and panelists.

They heard from Shannon Daub, director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' B.C. office, who talked about economic inequity and the importance of protecting unionized jobs and public services; and Tracey Maynard, lead organizer of the Metro Vancouver Alliance, who spoke on how unions, faith and community groups can work together to improve the lives of all British Columbians.

One of the most informative panels – *Paving the Road for an Equitable Future* – moderated by the CBC's Erica Johnson, brought together equity-seeking leaders who are making a difference in their communities.



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They included CUPE BC's Sheryl Burns, a long-time women's, labour and disability rights activist; Myrna Cranmer whose grassroots work in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside led to two inquiries for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, including the national inquiry; former refugee Sharmarke Dubow, a Victoria city councillor who became the first Somali-Canadian elected to city council in Canada; Megan Lau, co-founder of a free community mentorship program for young women of colour and Indigenous women in the arts, and Morgane Oger, an organizer and educator, who has successfully led the movement to strengthen human rights laws for trans people.



Participants were especially energized by an exciting *Grassroots Leadership* panel, where they heard firsthand stories from HEU activists, who organized successful workplace campaigns.

Sarah Thom, a care aide at Fort St. John Hospital, spoke about leading a fightback campaign against the employer's proposed scheduling changes, which violated the collective agreement.

Bethany Whelan, a cook at 100 Mile District Hospital, shared stories of how she and co-worker Monica Keogh started a Pink Pledge Campaign to address workplace bullying.

And Erna Mendoza, care aide at the New Horizons local in Campbell River, discussed a creative and effective bargaining initiative – #Reality – that united workers who wore the slogan on black T-shirts and organized an action, March on the Boss, where they delivered a huge banner containing petition signatures from workers demanding a fair contract.

Labor Notes staff organizer Bianca Cunningham delivered a motivational address. She spoke about experiencing racism and sexism as she organized several Verizon Wireless workers in Brooklyn to unionize. She later got fired for her activism. Cunningham spoke out against anti-union legislation in the States and the obstacles for racialized workers. "Now is the time to be bold," she said. "Pick a side and stay there."

Members were also offered workshops on equity and inclusion, poverty, organizing, staying calm under pressure, how to participate in election campaigns, and delivering messages through creativity such as video and song.

Greetings were brought by Debra Sparrow of the Musqueam nation, as well as remarks from HEU president Barbara Nederpel and financial secretary Betty Valenzuela, and entertainment from Indigenous women's ensemble M'Girl and energetic African performer Jacky Arrah Yanga.