



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

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## Community social services members set sights on 2010 bargaining

*Two-day conference reinforces unity and determination to improve recognition for workers and their clients*

HEU delegates attending the union's Community Social Services (CSS) bargaining conference in Victoria on June 3 and 4 headed home with a renewed sense of unity and determination, despite huge challenges facing their sector.

In the lead-up to 2010 bargaining, the sector faces a well-documented recruitment and retention crisis – where most agencies are suffering from acute staff shortages and an inability to attract trained workers. Wage increases are key to addressing this issue, and delegates made it their top bargaining priority.

Other priorities included restoring sick benefits and sick time, improving extended health benefits, as well as increasing transportation allowances and paid special leave.

Throughout the two-day event, members worked together in small groups and plenary sessions to identify the value of their work to individuals they support, and the wider community. Participants also created concrete strategies for involving more members in the bargaining process.

Many spoke out about the invisibility of the sector, the isolation they feel in their day-to-day jobs, the impact of expanding roles and responsibilities, and the vital role they play in advocating for their clients' needs.

In her opening remarks to the 35 delegates who came from all parts of the province, HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy congratulated and thanked members for the extraordinary commitment they bring to their work and the critical role they play in supporting people who are among the most vulnerable in our society.

“The recruitment and retention crisis in community social services is very real and was entirely predictable,” said Darcy. “Government was told repeatedly that if they didn't raise wages to competitive standards they would not be able to maintain a stable workforce.

“That prediction has now come to pass.”

Darcy said the result is a situation where many employers “are forced to hire workers who don't have appropriate training and who may not last a shift, let alone a week.”

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HEU president Ken Robinson emphasized the need for solidarity and unity across the union and the sector, to ensure CSS workers achieve the gains that will allow them to work with dignity and respect.

He reminded participants that they have the full support of HEU's 43,000 members behind them, as they head into 2010 negotiations.

HEU's financial secretary Donisa Bernardo thanked delegates for their passion and dedication. Bernardo told members how inspired she was to hear directly from front-line workers about the obstacles they face, and the work they do that has yet to receive the recognition it deserves.

The conference also welcomed representatives from sister unions in the sector – the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees B.C. and the Health Sciences Association.

Two guest speakers – Michael McCarthy Flynn from First Call, B.C.'s Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, and Jennifer Charlesworth from the Federation of Community Services – led an animated discussion about how members can reach out to the broader community and build support for increased resources in the sector. And they reflected on the need to create a truly collective movement for change among all stakeholders.

Participants also elected a bargaining committee to represent HEU members at the multi-union bargaining table. They are Marilyn Rust and David Huespe, with alternates Tracy Bruno, Jasumati (Jasu) Kotak and Sylvia Heiler.

HEU members who attended the conference included workers in residential care, vocational training, women's transition houses, and general community services.

*June 5, 2009*