



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

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Walk for Community Social Services builds sector-wide support

By all counts, the first annual Walk for Community Social Services was a huge success. About 250 clients, self advocates, family members, workers and employers braved the Victoria rain on March 28 to show their support for a sector that is largely invisible to many members of the public.

The ongoing Community Social Services Matter campaign was first launched in 2008 as a joint effort by unions in the Community Social Services Bargaining association including the Hospital Employees' Union, the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees-B.C., and the Health Sciences Association of B.C.

Its goal is to raise awareness about the important role these services play in B.C. communities.

Walk speakers included organizer Marilyn Rust, parent and service provider Karen Van Rheenan, and HEU residential support worker Lora Church.

"The problems in community social services are often highlighted," Van Rheenan told the crowd, "but we don't often hear about the valuable work that is going on and how it is making such a huge difference in the lives of people and in the fabric of our society.

"It is skilled people, devoted people, people that project dignity and respect to people with disabilities, people that bring heart to their jobs that are making this possible."

Rust underscored the importance of a united voice across the sector to protect and improve services particularly at a time of fiscal uncertainty.

"It is time for those of us who use these services now, and those who may need them in the future, to say in a united voice that community social services are essential for a healthier, stronger and more stable society," said Rust.

Church reminded Walk participants that there are close to 4,000 children with special needs on waitlists for early intervention and school based therapies, and that over 2,000 adults with developmental disabilities are also languishing on waitlists.

"I have seen first-hand how a lack of supports can negatively affect a family. No parent should have to wait until their family is in crisis before they receive services," she said.

The Walk was one of several awareness building activities held throughout March as part of Community Social Services Awareness Month.

March 30, 2009

