

continued from pg 3 {The following is an excerpt from *The Nanaimo Daily News* • December 14, 2007 • byline: Paul Walton}

"Margaret" said that when she was expected to do a job she had not done before, she asked to see a list of tasks.

"I asked what he wanted me to do, and he highlighted what he wanted," said Margaret. "I didn't have to do mopping anywhere."

As for the rest of the tasks, she said, there was no one else there to do them and, as far as she knows, they were never completed.

"I don't think it was done, I just did what he wanted me to do."

Another woman said that shortcuts are the only way that cleaners can complete their tasks in the time they are given.

"Chloe" said they have been told to mop floors only where it is obviously dirty and to leave the rest as long as it appears clean.

Chloe is bothered by that, knowing that cleanliness is imperative in certain areas.

"I always try to keep certain areas cleaner than clean because of the people treated there," she said.

"We balked at the idea that the entire floor doesn't need to be washed. You can't spot wash."

"Liz" also said they are expected to undertake tasks that even the managers know cannot be completed. All three women say the problem is a lack of staff.

"The cleaning's not being done properly, the workload is so big you're cutting corners all the time," she said.

Liz also said that when someone calls in sick the workload only gets bigger and less manageable, and staff are pulled off regular duties to cover more important ar-

reas, like emergency or operating rooms.

Chloe said they have been told that cleaning a bathroom means, "the sink, toilet, garbage and out." Similarly the order for bedrooms is the bed, the sink and the garbage before quickly moving on.

"If you're constantly pulling people to cover other areas, you are short on staff," she said. "There are areas being neglected to make other areas look good."

Brenda Brown, a spokeswoman for Compass/Crothall in Toronto, noted that the contract with the HEU expires in 2008, and that the union strongly opposes privatized cleaning. But she said the cleaners have a role in patient care that mean "no compromises" in cleaning.

"If it is not happening, if it is not protocol and when we find that is the case, we will deal with it," said Brown.

Audits are done regularly, and one on Monday - a joint audit with Crothall - was posted a week in advance.

"Please ensure that your area will pass the audit. Ensure that all high dusting, floors (corners and edges) bed frames, bedside tables and all other areas meet standards," stated the notice.

Hank Compeau, VIHA's corporate director of general support, said it is not VIHA's policy to post when joint audits will occur. Campeau said VIHA also does its own unannounced spot audits.

"We can only assume they (Crothall) probably put it up

for their staff," said Compeau.

Brown said Monday's audit was one of a number of joint quarterly audits with VIHA that are not meant to be a surprise. They are a check, she said, that includes encouraging and motivating staff. She said the greater focus is on random audits by VIHA.

"Those are the ones that really get the attention," said Brown.

NRGH passed Monday's audit with a score of 88.55%. Compeau said 75% to 80% indicates problems; 80% to 90% is standard; and above 90% is exceptional.

He also said that NRGH has been overcrowded for several weeks. He and Brown said that is putting additional strain on house-keeping staff.

"It's been really rough in the past few weeks," said Compeau.

But he expressed concern about the spot mopping and priority lists.

"That (the spot mopping) disturbs me greatly and that's something I will be following up on," he said.

About the priority lists he said, "we expect patient areas to be thoroughly cleaned and I'll be looking into that."

Margaret said the only solution is hiring and training more cleaners.

Hiring levels were set in a 2004 contract, and Compeau said staffing has been increased according to the contract.

**Another woman said that shortcuts are the only way that cleaners can complete their tasks in the time they are given.**

*The Nanaimo Daily News* • December 14, 2007 • byline: Paul Walton

# updates

NEWS FROM THE LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN

## a Living Wage Campaign

Because work should lift you out of poverty, not keep you there.

# Campaign update: HEU members speak out, endorsements on the rise

## PETITION EXCEEDS FIRST GOAL OF 5000 SIGNATURES

Over the past three months, activists and members of the community have been working hard to gather signatures on the living wage petition - which calls on health authorities to "fulfill their mandate to promote strong and healthy communities by ensuring that their cleaning and food service workers have living wages and safe working conditions."

They've collected names at parties, by tabling at events, through family and friends and much more. And their efforts are paying off. The campaign has reached the goal of 5000 signatures and is aiming for another 5000.

You can help the campaign achieve and exceed this goal by contacting Olive at 1-800-663-5813 ext. 7084 or <odempsey@heu.org>.

## BIG 3 BARGAINING CONFERENCE

On March 27 and 28, over 100 delegates from locals representing Sodexo, Aramark and Compass workers will meet in Vancouver to prepare for bargaining in the fall of 2008. Members will discuss and prioritize bargaining demands, elect bargaining committee members, and develop plans for building on Living Wage Campaign successes.

## LIVING WAGE OPEN HOUSES ACTIVATE MEMBERS

Lions Gate, Surrey Memorial and Royal Jubilee hospitals are just some of the places where members have learned about the campaign through open house drop-in sessions over the past few months. Thanks

to these events and follow up workshops, Living Wage Action Teams are now up and running in areas throughout the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island.

To find out how you can get involved with campaign activists in your area contact Priti Shah at 1-800-663-5813 ext. 7012 or at <pshah@heu.org>.

## T-SHIRTS AND BUTTONS ARE HERE!



"Work should lift you out of poverty, not keep you there." That's the message on the new Living Wage Campaign t-shirts and buttons, available to all campaign activists and supporters. To order materials call the campaign information number, 1-800-663-5813, ext. 7012.



## PRESENTATIONS AND ENDORSEMENTS GATHER MOMENTUM

From the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre to the Burnaby Teachers' Association, from the Nanaimo, Duncan and District Labour Council to the Unitarian Church and the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, campaign activists have been gathering support from many different communities.

With their heartfelt stories about the importance of living wages for families, communities and quality health care, members are making an impact and building powerful campaign allies.



MARCH 2008

[www.heu.org](http://www.heu.org)

# updates

## Members share their stories in new Living Wage Campaign video series.

Dignity. Security. Time for family. Hope. This is what a living wage means to HEU members who were interviewed for the recently released Living Wage Campaign video series.

In one video, Michelle describes the constant stress of juggling late bill payments and waiting for phone calls from collection agencies. And even though she works sometimes as many as 17 days in a row,

**Mandy sees her coworkers drag their feet as they go from their first job to the second and third jobs – trying to make a decent income**

Felinor just wants a better life for his daughter. He and his wife work such long hours, they don't have time together as a family, and cannot bring in enough money to enroll their daughter in extracurricular activities like art or ballet classes.

As a shop steward Mandy sees her coworkers drag their feet as they go from their first job to the second and third jobs – trying to make a decent income in a city that has one of the highest costs of living in the country.

That's why these workers and many others are taking action through the Living Wage Campaign, fighting for safe working conditions and a fair, family supporting wage.

Go to [www.bclivingwage.org](http://www.bclivingwage.org) to watch the videos and sign the campaign petition.

she just can't get ahead on the wages she earns.

Palmi worries about retirement. And she wonders how she'll live without a pension plan or money to put away in RRSPs.



Michelle



Palmi



Felinor



Mandy

## Sodexo worker speaks at press conference about child poverty.

Anyone who is working in a low-waged job while trying to raise children knows the impact that poverty has on families. From buying healthy food, to paying for school field trips and renting a decent home, low wages make it difficult for parents to provide not only the basics but also the kinds of extra opportunities they want for their children.

First Call – a non-profit coalition that advocates for the rights of children and youth – released their annual report on child poverty at a press conference last November. They focused on the issue of waged or working poverty – on those who are employed but still struggling to make ends meet.

HEU member and food services worker, Erna Calingasan, shared her story of *Bill 29* privatization and how the stress, low wages and long hours have impacted her son's emotional and mental health.

Before her job as a food services worker was contracted out under *Bill 29*, she had just achieved some financial stability and security at the facilities sector pay rate. But with her wages slashed and her seniority eliminated, Calingasan had to use all her savings and supplement her work for Sodexo with a second job in retail, along with occasional housecleaning.

"I do believe that I and my son and a lot of people out there who are in my situation deserve the dignity of living wages," she told reporters as she fought back tears.

"I do believe that I should not have to work long hours every day and still end up being poor."

According to First Call's report, B.C. has the highest child poverty rate in the country for the fourth year in a row. And the vast majority of children who live in poverty have parents in the workforce, with more than half living in homes with at least one parent employed full-time.

This means that any effort to tackle the province's shameful record of child poverty must also address the growing number of people struggling with low wages.

## Members in Nanaimo sound the alarm about working conditions and patient care

"Hospital cleaning worries staff; Cleaners say they were told to cut corners. Workers warn that NRGH's lack of employees is cause for concern." This newspaper headline greeted Nanaimo residents on December 14, 2007 after several Compass workers spoke out about the impacts of short staffing and unmanageable workloads at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital.

Although the news article did not expose their identities, the workers' revelations had an impact that rippled throughout the hospital and the Vancouver Island Health Authority. The article also led to several letters to the editor from Compass, HEU and concerned members of the public, in the week that followed.

**The original article from the December 14, 2007 edition of *The Nanaimo Daily News* follows below:**

byline: Paul Walton

➤ Three women working for a contractor responsible for keeping Nanaimo Regional General Hospital clean say they are being asked to cut corners and the cleanliness of the facility is being compromised.

The women say that understaffing has created pressures resulting in inadequate cleaning. The trio say they have been told to work faster by not mopping entire floors, not dusting everywhere, and in one case a woman said her supervisor gave her a "priority list" highlighting what had to be done and what could be left unfinished.

They also say that when cleaners are shifted to work in areas like operating rooms or the emergency department, they get no training or instruction about cleaning those areas.

The women work for Crothall Services, under the Compass Group, which took over cleaning at NRGH when Bill 29 privatized cleaning services in B.C. in 2002. Fearing they will be fired for speaking out, the women asked that their real names not be used. All are members of the Health Employees' Union.

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## Workplace safety gets a boost from new outreach worker

All workers not only have the right to a living wage, they also have the right to a safe and healthy workplace. And HEU's new Occupational Health and Safety outreach worker, Jennifer Efting, is organizing members to make sure that these health and safety rights are respected.

Heavy workload, lack of training, and improper equipment are especially big issues for HEU members employed by Sodexo, Aramark and Compass.

Efting is visiting private sector members in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island, encouraging them to stand up for their health and safety rights in the workplace.

"All workers have the right to speak out about health and safety issues," says Efting. "No worker should come home at the end of the day in pain or sick from their job."

Efting is encouraging workers to report unsafe conditions and incidents, and to help make sure that employers are meeting their health and safety responsibilities.

To improve health and safety in your workplace, call Jennifer Efting at 604-456-7035, toll free at 1-800-663-5813, extension 7035, or email [jefting@heu.org](mailto:jefting@heu.org).



a Living Wage Campaign