

# CONFERENCE PRESENTERS AND SPEAKERS

## Stephanie Smith

An early childhood educator by profession and fierce social justice advocate by nature, Stephanie Smith became the first woman elected president of the BCGEU and the first president from a component outside the public service in 2014. Acclaimed to a third term in 2021, Stephanie represents more than 82,000 members who work in virtually every community and economic sector in the province. Stephanie's election as president was the culmination of decades of frontline activism and visionary leadership focused on expanding workers' rights and promoting unionization, equity and inclusion to create a society where working people have the power to lift each other up. From the beginning of her career as a labour activist in 1980s New Zealand, Stephanie is now a renowned and respected voice for working people in the media and a sought-after participant on government task forces and working groups to represent the perspective of organized labour.

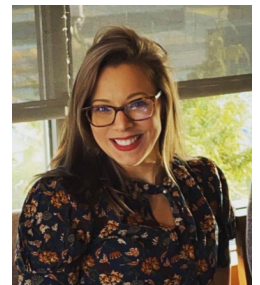


University. Upon transferring her qualifications to British Columbia, Raji further studied at Douglas College. At a young age, Raji devoured information about workers' rights and regularly participated as a member of the Labour Party. In Canada, Raji immediately felt a deep connection to the New Democratic Party. She put her teaching career on hold as she became an active NDP member.

Currently, Raji is a teacher in Surrey and has worked at the elementary level for many years. She recently spearheaded a union movement within an independent school. Raji successfully advocated for teachers' rights and supported the numerous employees in becoming members of the BCGEU. The movement has garnered much appreciation from her local community.

## Jennifer White

My name is Jennifer White, I am a Social Worker at Xyolhemeylh, a delegated aboriginal agency. I graduated in 2009 from UFV with a Degree in Child and Youth Care with a Specialization in Child Welfare.



I am a mother, wife, Metis artist, family knowledge keeper and Shop steward. I have been a delegated Social Worker for 12 years, representing an indigenous population. This population I represent and identify with is riddled with generational trauma, loss of culture, lack of funding and traditional supports.

I advocate for fairness, cultural awareness as well as ensuring equality in the work place. From 2015 – 2019 along with an incredible group of people helped bring the union to our Agency. This is one of my proudest accomplishments within my career that I continue to build off of today. When I started my role as a Social Worker an elder, Herb Joe shared with me this "When you choose to be a helper this happens in many ways so be prepared to be needed as it comes in many forms"; with solidarity I agreed.

## Claire Mamala

Claire is a BCGEU member at two workplaces. She is an awake night support worker and union steward at the Lower Mainland Society for Community Living, where she has worked since 2017. She is also a part-time residential care worker at Developmental Disability Association where she has worked since October 2020. Claire graduated from Discovery Community College as a community support worker, mental support worker and an educational assistant.



## Raji Toor

Raji Toor was born in London, England and immigrated to British Columbia, Canada in 2006. She has been living in Surrey for 10 years. Raji is proud to live in a unique and progressive community, and has made Surrey her home.



After completing her bachelor's degree in social sciences at the University of East London, Raji pursued her teaching certification at Canterbury Christ Church

## Adrienne Smith

Adrienne Smith is a transgender human rights activist and social justice lawyer. They recently argued a BC human rights case which clarified employers' obligations to recognize correct pronouns for transgender and non-binary workers. Adrienne appeared at the BC Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada where they argued about the deleterious effects of mandatory minimum sentences for women, indigenous people, and drug users. As a trade union activist, they advocate for transgender inclusion in our unions and workplaces. Adrienne volunteers at the Catherine White Holman Wellness Clinic where they give free legal advice, take on human rights cases, and notarize name change documents for trans people.



They hold a double honours BA in English Literature and Geography (2000), a Masters in Human Geography (2005) and a Juris Doctor (2013) all from the University of British Columbia. They held a UBC undergraduate entrance scholarship for 4 years, and the Geography Alumni Award during their undergraduate degree. They received a University Graduate Fellowship and were named the Green College Scholar. They were called to the bar in British Columbia in 2014.

Adrienne is the recipient of the Canadian Bar Association BC Diversity Award; the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Branch Nancy Hall Public Policy Leadership Award; the Allard Law Alumni Achievement Award; and the Vancouver and District Labour Council Syd Thompson award for Award for Community Service.

## Gary J Hutton

Gary J. Hutton (he/him) is a Nehiyaw (Cree) man from Edmonton, Alberta. So far his journey has taken him from Indigenous sovereignty and environmental activism to working directly on the water and the land through farming and fishing, and to building virtual worlds through video game art and design, among other things. He has also been studying Zen Buddhism with the Venerable Anzan Hoshin roshi at Dainen-Ji in Ottawa and worked with various First Nations in BC on developing and delivering mindfulness programs for youth. Gary has spent his life studying both scientific and spiritual areas of knowledge, attempting to synthesize these vital systems to embody a greater understanding of human experience and



expression, as well as conceive of a vision for a more sustainable way of life for human beings and society that preserves our global ecosystems and human flourishing.

## Anastasia Gaisenok

Anastasia Gaisenok (she/her) was born and raised in Belarus and immigrated to Canada with her family in 2003. She has been living on unceded Coast Salish territory as a settler ever since, exploring the ways to bring about a more just and sustainable world through education, organizing and movement-building. Anastasia currently manages programs at Pacific Immigrant Resources Society and offers independent consulting and leadership coaching services through Green Amber Consulting. Over the years she has worked on many different change initiatives and issues, engaging with teachers, students, governments, community groups, social service agencies, labour unions and others in various leadership roles held with non-profit organizations, coalitions, and advisory groups.



## Paul Finch

Paul Finch was elected treasurer of the B.C. General Employees' Union (BCGEU) at the BCGEU's 49th Constitutional Convention in May 2014, and was re-elected to serve his third term in June 2021. As the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer of the union, the treasurer is the second highest office next to that of president. Prior to 2014, Paul served as an Executive Vice President of the union, being first elected in 2011. Throughout his tenure as treasurer, he has overseen broad financial and technological modernization efforts, spearheading the union's divestment from fossil fuels, overseeing and designing the overall investment strategy, and creating a shareholder engagement program. Pauls serves on numerous boards, including the Public Service Pension Plan, BC Investment Management Corporation, Autism Canada, BC Federation of Labour and the National Union of Public and General Employees'. Prior to becoming a member of the BCGEU in 2005, Paul was a leader provincially and nationally in the student movement. He currently speaks regularly on land economics, affordable housing, pensions and investment management.



## Sheryl Burns

Sheryl Burns is a long-time women's, labour, disability and child-care activist and is the President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 1936, Community Social Services-Greater Vancouver and General Vice-President of CUPE BC.



She is co-chair of the CUPE BC Community Social Services and Women's Committees, the Persons with Disabilities Representative on the CUPE National Women's Committee, the Workers with Disabilities representative on the BC Federation of Labour Executive Council and previous board member of the Disability Alliance British Columbia. Sheryl was fortunate to represent CUPE and the Public Service Alliance at the ILO Experts Meeting on Decent Work for Persons with Disabilities held in Geneva, Switzerland in May, 2017.

Sheryl is co-author of the Mothers with Disabilities and the BC Child Protection System: Final Report for the Ad Hoc Committee for Research Regarding Mothers with Disabilities and the BC Child Protection System and author of Mothers Without Legal Status in Canada- A Research Project.

## Matthew DiMera

Matthew DiMera (he/they) is an award-winning editor and journalist. They are the founder and publisher of The Resolve, a new independent media outlet in Canada centring, elevating and celebrating Indigenous, Black, and people of colour voices and stories.



Previously they were the managing editor at Xtra, and the acting editor-in-chief at rabble.ca. They are a long-time advocate for the importance and power of social justice and community journalism.

Raised in Vancouver, they studied at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, and currently live in Tkaronto, located on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.



**EQUITY  
CONFERENCE  
2021**

**BY US, FOR US,  
FOR ALL!**

**BC GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION**