

Castlegar News

Community Living workers pick up placards

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VANCOUVER--(Marketwire - Jan. 30, 2013) - Community Living workers who support people with developmental disabilities at agencies in Trail, Castlegar, Creston, and Salmon Arm will be on strike on Thursday, January 31. Workers in Cranbrook will take strike action on Friday, February 1.

The 231 striking workers - members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees - are employed by the Trail Association for Community Living, the Kootenay Society for Community Living (Castlegar), the Creston & District Society for Community Living, the Cranbrook Society for Community Living, and the Shuswap Association for Community Living (Salmon Arm).

"The time is long overdue for this government to show some commitment to community living and other community-based social services, and improve the funding," says CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill. "This includes a fair and reasonable wage increase for the people who support some of our most vulnerable citizens."

Community social services workers are among the lowest-paid workers in the public sector. Starting wages are \$15.54, which is a dollar less than it was ten years ago.

"Those low wages mean that many workers can no longer make ends meet and are

forced to take on second jobs, or leave the sector altogether," says O'Neill. "It has also created serious recruitment and retention problems for community social services employers."

Some employers are now voluntarily paying above collective agreement rates because of recruitment issues. Frontline staff at Community Living BC (CLBC) staff agree that additional funding is urgently needed to address the chronic program and support shortages in community living.

More than half of all respondents to a recent survey conducted by the BCGEU - which represents CLBC workers - expressed concerns about the budget-driven funding decisions they had been forced to make over the previous year with respect to their clients. And more than 40 per cent said they had been required to cut services or supports they considered necessary for their clients' health, safety or well-being.

Picket actions on Thursday will occur at the worksite in Trail from 8 a.m. - 4 p.m., in Castlegar from 8 - 4, in Creston from 9-3, and Salmon Arm from 8:30 - 3:30. The Cranbrook action on Friday, which will be joined by 30 members from the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU), will take place from 8-4. These strike actions are part of larger job action in the community living sector taking place this week at several locations throughout B.C.

In Victoria on Thursday, HEU will be taking strike action at ten different agencies representing more than 800 workers in the sector.

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