

CUPE BC Community Social Services Committee
Report to Convention – April 2018

The Community Social Services Committee would like to begin their report in remembrance of Michael Lanier, former Regional Vice-President of CUPE BC, former President of CUPE Local 1936 and former Chair of the Community Social Services Committee.

Michael dedicated much of his CUPE career to the pursuit of a universal, accessible and publicly funded childcare plan in British Columbia. As the CUPE BC President, Paul Faoro expressed so eloquently in the last CUPE BC Executive Board Meeting, *Michael would have been so pleased by the promised injection of over one million dollars towards a universal and accessible childcare plan with improved compensation rates for workers as made by Minister of Finance Carole James on February 20th's Provincial budget day.*

The Community Social Services Committee has made lobbying for a universal, accessible and public childcare plan one of their key action plans. To this end, Chair Sheryl Burns addressed the need for such a childcare plan at the BC NDP Convention, and childcare representatives from our sector attended a Briefing on Implementation of the \$10/day Childcare plan on September 29th, 2017.

In addition, representatives of our committee attended the “Towards Universal Early Care and Learning in BC” forum on November 15th and 16th, 2017 as organized by the Provincial Government where significant input on the need for a publicly funded, fully accessible and universal childcare plan was reinforced.

Representatives of the Community Social Services Committee and Local 1936 also met with the Executive Director of Early Childhood Education BC, Emily Gawlick, formerly Emily Mliczko, where we discussed barriers to ECE education and the proposed Early Childhood Educator’s Bachelor Program from a refugee and immigrant perspective.

CUPE BC President Paul Faoro, CUPE BC Legislative Coordinator, Justin Schmid and representatives of the Community Social Services Committee and CUPE Local 1936 met with the Minister of Child and Family Development, Katrine Conroy and Minister of State for Childcare, Katrina Chen to share concerns related to barriers to Early Childhood Education as experienced by refugee and immigrant women. Many childcare workers on the lower mainland are refugees and/or immigrants and are often women of colour for whom English is a second language.

In order to build increased support for the \$10/day Childcare Plan, the Community Social Services Committee has requested that CUPE BC send out a letter to all CUPE BC locals requesting that they endorse the \$10/day Childcare Plan. To endorse the \$10/day Childcare Plan, search the following link and sign the petition:

<https://www.10aday.ca/>

Community social service workers are an integral part of our communities. They live in and provide invaluable services that improve the quality of life in our communities. Despite providing such critical services in our communities, the issues that members in our sector experience remain unaddressed. There is a chronic and ongoing underfunding of our sector that leaves members struggling to do more with less. Chronic underfunding results in a low-waged, precarious work force predominantly occupied by women, including women from equity-seeking groups. Increasingly, employers within the sector are being asked to sign onto small contracts that do not factor in the costs of health and welfare benefits and overtime provisions as negotiated in the sectoral collective agreements. This means members are being employed in increasingly precarious part-time and contract positions in which they often work in isolation and do not receive health and welfare benefits and do not have access to a pension plan. They remain a devalued sector earning less than those who perform the same type of work in the community health, facilities and education sectors. The community social service sector struggles with profound recruitment and retention issues which has a significant impact on workload issues, the ability of our members to take vacation time and requires

significant time and resources due to retraining needs. Many of our members work two to three jobs in an effort to support themselves, with approximately 13% of our members working more than 60 hours per week on a regular basis. The Community Social Services Sector experiences extraordinarily high rates of WorkSafeBC claims due to workload issues, an increase in violence in the workplace and other safety concerns.

There is an increasing rate of psychological hazards in the workplace, with members in the community social services sector experiencing mental health challenges due to the changing nature of the work and the impact of the opioid crisis on our members. In some workplaces, members are forced to witness and address up to two overdose deaths per week. Ours is a caring sector, and members, who for the best of reasons, end up putting the care of their clients before their very own well being, thus becoming chronic caregivers.

Community social service members distributed and participated in a Community Social Services Precarious Work Survey as organized by the CSS Joint Union and Employer Precarious Work Committee. Findings of the survey confirmed committee member's suspicions. A full 26% of respondents considered themselves to be precarious workers and even full-time workers identified themselves as precarious. Over a third of all CSS workers did not feel their jobs were secure, with 38% identifying insecurity in employment. More than 40% of the respondents said they worked more than 40 hours per week.

Due to the undervaluation of community social service workers and the unique challenges experienced by members within the sector, members of our committee elected to engage in a video project in which CUPE community social service members are interviewed. The goal of this video project is to highlight the work of our community social service members, to educate our union about the nature of the work we do; the value, both social and economic, that this work provides our communities; and the contrast between this added value to our communities with the lack of financial

compensation our members experience. Community social service workers are among the working poor. It is hoped this video will be ready for display at the Community Social Services booth at the CUPE BC Convention and that clips of it can be used on social media and Youtube to raise awareness about our sector and to mobilize and inspire other community social service workers. The Committee would like to thank Communications Representatives Dan Gawthrop and Katherine Davies for their support on this project.

The Committee has also decided to create and distribute a poster/fact sheet to be used to educate others about the unique needs, challenges and contributions of community social service workers and to debunk myths surrounding the community social service sector.

The Community Social Service Committee identified the need for resolutions on the following issues:

- The Workers Compensation Act-Amending Bill 14 to remove the Predominant Clause section.
- Psychological hazards in the workplace.
- Increasing eligibility for WorkSafeBC from the age of 65 to 71 years of age.
- The restoration and increase of funding to home support.
- The creation of a CUPE BC Childcare Committee.
- Researching the Portugese Model of addressing additions issues to explore the possibility of advocating for use of this model here.
- Collective agreement language to strengthen the rights and job security of precarious workers.
- Scholarship provisions for precarious workers who would like to attend the week-long schools.
- Violence in the workplace.

- A recommendation that the reduction in MSP premiums is realized by members at the bargaining table.

To conclude, the members of the Community Social Services Committee are pleased to see that the current Provincial Government is putting resources into some of the issues that are of concern to members in our sector. This includes additional funds for the \$10/day Childcare Plan, affordable housing and addressing the opioid crisis.

Still, there are many people waiting to receive the services we provide and we will continue to be advocates for them, lobbying the Provincial Government to fund community social services so the needs of our most vulnerable citizens are being met. Our members need the support of Government to provide those services in a dignified and healthy setting.

Respectfully submitted:

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