



CUPE BC Community Social Services Committee Report to Convention – May 2019

The last year has been busy for the CUPE BC Community Social Services (CSS) Committee. The *Confidence and Supply Agreement* (CASA) between the BC NDP and the BC Green Parties permitted the NDP to form government. The resulting Provincial Government formed new ministries in response to the needs of British Columbian citizens. Two of the created ministries are the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, currently led by the Honourable Judy Darcy, and the Ministry of State for Childcare led by the Honourable Katrina Chen.

Childcare

The NDP Provincial Government made childcare a key campaign issue and upon forming government began immediate work on the *Childcare Plan of BC*. Components of this plan included an expansion of household threshold income in order to qualify for childcare subsidies, up from \$55,000.00 per year to \$110,000.00 per year. This means that 80,000 British Columbian families will benefit from the Affordable Child Care Benefit. In addition, the subsidy benefit for infant/toddler care has increased from \$750.00 per month to \$1,250.00 per month.

The province has also invested over \$60 million to create 53 prototype sites intended to explore funding and operational models to assist the government in realizing its goal of providing a universal child care system based on the \$10/day model.

Supporting childcare workers in BC is a crucial focus of the government's *Childcare Plan of BC*. In response to low wages earned by Early Childhood Educators (ECE's), the government introduced a \$1.00 per hour increase for ECE's implemented on January 1st, 2019 and retroactive to September 1st, 2018. A second \$1.00 per hour increase is set to occur April 1st, 2020. In an effort to address barriers to education in the early childhood sector, the availability and scope of bursaries and grants to assist applicants in obtaining or upgrading their ECE certification has increased.

In response to the provincial and federal initiatives regarding improvements and changes within childcare, the Community Social Services Committee recognized an opportunity to advise and dialogue with government and ECE representatives on behalf of ECE's. Committee representatives, along with CUPE Local 1936 members, met with Emily Gawlick, the Executive Director of Early Childhood Educators of BC, to discuss barriers to education as experienced by immigrant and refugee ECE's and request that these barriers be considered when creating a new education plan.

We also met with the Minister of State for Childcare, Honourable Katrina Chen and the Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Families, to request that barriers experienced by refugee and immigrant workers are addressed when developing a new education plan for Early Childhood Educators.

The Honourable Katrina Chen has been extraordinarily receptive to hearing the perspectives of Early Childhood Educators. She attended two roundtable discussions, organized by CSS representatives, with ECE's in the lower mainland in order to inform educators of changes to childcare in BC and receive input on how best to recruit and retain ECE's as part of the provincial government's plan to expand and improve access to universal childcare in British Columbia.

We were fortunate to receive a request to have a CSS member provide a multicultural lens with respect to newcomers to Canada in the Early Childhood Education Standards of Practice Project and Occupational Competencies Project Working Group on December 11th, 2018. This is a project managed by BCcampus with direction from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the project sponsor, Ministry of State for Childcare. Lee-Ann Lalli, a member of the CSS Committee and CUPE Local 1936 attended this working group meeting on our behalf.

We also received a request to speak as part of a panel at the Early Childhood Educators' National Conference in April 2019, on the topic of working with government in advancing the needs of the childcare sector.

At the request of the CSS Committee, a memo has been sent to locals, from CUPE BC, requesting that locals and their members sign the petition supporting the \$10/day Childcare Plan. The petition can be found by going to the following link. https://www.10aday.ca/add_your_name.

The goal of this action is to support the NDP in their efforts to implement the \$10/day Childcare Plan and to provide impetus to justify the government's investments in childcare.

Occupational Health and Safety Concerns in the CSS Sector

Our committee has grappled with a significant increase in challenges within the CSS sector. These challenges are due to 16 years of funding cuts during the Liberal reign, the move towards individualized funding instead of a global funding model that ensures secure and sustainable contracts and employment as opposed to small contracts that have increased precarity considerably within our sector, and increasingly complex client needs due to clients with mental health and addictions issues. Our sector has been extremely impacted by the fentanyl crisis with disturbing rates of post-traumatic stress disorder resulting in an increase in medical leaves. Many members are not able return to work due to the severity of the trauma they have experienced.

Funding cuts and low wages have resulted in recruitment and retention issues and staffing shortages. Staff are frequently required to work alone. Violence against our members has increased due to these staffing shortages, lack of staff support and growing complex needs of the persons provided care.

An Increase in Complex Needs of Persons Served

The increasingly complex needs of the people we serve leave employee's searching for education and community expertise. Many of our members are trying to gain an improved understanding of how trauma impacts decision making and behaviour in our clients and how best to serve them and where to access appropriate services. Often, this needed support is lacking in rural and remote areas of the province. Frequently, staff are forced to provide referrals and resources in other communities. Access to these resources is further frustrated

by transportation and funding barriers. This lack of support and education has had a direct impact on CSS workers, resulting in increased violence and unsafe working conditions, particularly when working alone. Structural changes have further frustrated access and wait times for valuable services because Service BC has merged with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. While online services exist, most people we support cannot afford access to the internet.

The Opioid Crisis

In response to the changing nature of CSS work as a result of the fentanyl crisis and the skyrocketing rate of overdose deaths, our committee has worked with CUPE Local 1004 President, Andrew Ledger, to achieve a first responder designation with respect to WorkSafeBC claims for our members. The Minister of Labour, Harry Bains, has demonstrated some openness to our request for first responder designation of our member's work, however, he is leery of expanding this designation too broadly. Andrew Ledger, along with other CUPE BC representatives, are continuing this work on our behalf.

Individualized Funding and the Impact on the Community Social Services Sector

Community Living BC is referring people with disabilities who require brief hours of weekly support to CSS agencies. This means many of the services we provide are broken up into small individualized contracts to support people with disabilities. These contracts do not include funding for health and welfare benefits, nor do they cover overtime provisions. Such contracts can be abruptly eliminated, creating increasingly precarious working conditions for our members.

We are finding that members are offered multiple contracts to support people with disabilities in which the hours of work are spread out throughout each day. Members consequently work split shifts resulting in extended work days that mean decreased family time and are not able to balance shifting schedules with childcare or needed health and welfare benefits for their families. Our members are being forced to choose between fulltime employment or providing care for their children.

The Struggle to Meet Basic Needs

Community Social Service workers are incredibly dedicated, providing a critical web of support in our communities. For example, during the Christmas season, many members worked hard helping organize hampers containing food and presents for impoverished families and youth. Some members attended Christmas concerts in lieu of family time and provided dinners to those who would otherwise go without, and ensured everyone had something under the tree on Christmas morning. In response to the cold weather, many members rallied to support the homeless by helping to provide shelter, food, and safety. Community Social Service workers really are the heart and soul of our communities.

The CSS Committee Website

With Dan Gawthrop's assistance, our committee has updated the CSS link on the CUPE BC website. The website now includes more information about the work CSS workers perform, the recent *Community Social Services Health and Safety Handbook*, a link to the Occupational Health & Safety Committee page, and information about the fentanyl crisis. We encourage you to check out our CSS committee page.

Our committee also sought and received approval to get the CSS poster/brochure bugged and distributed in order to educate our communities about the invaluable work performed by CSS workers.

Recommended Resolutions

In order to address the challenges experienced by the Community Social Services sector, our committee is recommending the following resolutions:

- Global Funding for Community Living
- Working Alone Legislation
- Universal Child Care
- Improved Program Funding
- WorkSafeBC Claim Education

Respectfully submitted:

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