



## **CUPE BC Women's Committee Report to Convention – May 2019**

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This past year, the CUPE BC Women's Committee members dedicated their time in promoting leadership, education and discussing safety concerns that affect women in our communities. Our committee members encourage and support women to be leaders in the workplace and in the community at large. We worked cohesively to raise issues that pertain to this committee. Issues such as education, violence against women, pay equity, employment equity, sexual harassment and discrimination are at the forefront of this committee. Over this past year, we worked diligently on coming up with resolutions to present at this very convention.

The CUPE BC Women's Committee met at the BCRO on October 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and again on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019. These meetings provide our committee members' invaluable resources to bring back to their locals and communities, they provide updated education and a safe place to discuss issues. These meetings foster the opportunities and advancements for women within our union and workplace. Throughout the year, we communicated with one another by email, by phone and at other events. We continue to use our Facebook page to share resources, ask questions and to provide overall support to each other.

Below you will find some of the activities our committee members have taken part in since the last Convention.

### **Education**

Sisters and members of the CUPE BC's Women's Committee, Patricia Skalozub, Debby Cowan and Amber Leonard, attended the Canadian Labour Council Harrison Winter School's Women in Leadership course. This course had the participants understanding myths, obstacles and challenges that women leaders face as well as exploring their own leadership style. The participants made action plans and went through the 5 Union Building Processes that included:

- Listening – be open to learning from the experiences of others.
- Believing – support survivors and those affected by violence.
- Speaking out – add your voice to call out violence.
- Intervening – find a safe way to help when you see acts of GBV.
- Acting – give your time to organizations working to end violence and be the change you want to see.

### **November 25<sup>th</sup> – 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence**

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1989, 13 female students and a female administrator at l'École Polytechnique de Montréal were murdered because they were women. The shocking impact of their deaths led Parliament to designate December 6<sup>th</sup> as a national day of remembrance. The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women is not only about remembering victims; it is also a time to act. We each have the opportunity and the responsibility to stand up against violence, sexism, and hate — and it starts with creating a culture of respect.

In addition to the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6<sup>th</sup>, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women takes place on November 25<sup>th</sup> and marks the first day of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which ends on December 10<sup>th</sup>, with International Human Rights Day.

### **Women's March**

Two years ago, on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, people of all backgrounds--women and men and gender nonconforming people, young and old, of diverse faiths, differently abled, immigrants and indigenous--came together, 5 million strong, on all seven continents of the world. Our sisters and members of the committee proudly walked in the Women's March throughout British Columbia, including Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, Comox Valley and Victoria.

## **March 8<sup>th</sup> – International Women's Day**

International Women's Day is celebrated globally and focuses on the social, cultural and political achievements of women. This day also focuses on raising awareness against bias and creating gender parity. The International Women's Day 2019 campaign theme of **#BalanceforBetter** is a call-to-action for driving gender balance across the world. Many of our sisters and friends proudly attended various International Women's Day events throughout the province. These included Surrey's 25<sup>th</sup> Annual International Women's Day Celebration hosted by CUPE Local 728, to CUPE BC's lunch in Richmond to events on Vancouver Island and throughout BC.

## **Future Focus**

One of the issues we believe we should focus on is women living in poverty and research ways we can help, through education, donation, volunteering, and other potential initiatives.

In Canada, 1 in 10 Canadians live in poverty with approximately 1.5 million women in low economic conditions. Statistics record that women are more likely to stay in abusive situations if it means not being homeless or poverty stricken. This has a trickle-down effect to children. Children who live in poverty and/or who witness or are subject to abuse at home have low self-esteem, may do poorly in school, have health issues, are subject to bullying or may become bullies because that is what they believe is the norm. Some of the statistics that women are facing are:

- 21% of single mothers are raising their children in poverty
- 37% of First Nations women (off the reserve) live in poverty
- 28% of visible minority women live in poverty
- 33% of women with disabilities live in poverty
- 15% of single senior women live in poverty

Now is the time to start the conversations, to ask questions, to demand answers and to act now.

## **Bargaining**

Some of our sisters on our committee were directly involved in bargaining at the provincial level and the local level. They continue to ensure that our collective agreements have language that does not allow discrimination regarding gender. They worked hard at ensuring that collective agreements have language on safety standards. Not only will this language help to protect all our sisters in the Union but also our brothers and our friends.

The new collective agreement for the Community Social Service (CSS) Association, which represents 15,000 workers at neighbourhood houses, community centres, shelters and other facilities, have ratified an agreement for \$60 million in redress funding with their employer's association. The new collective agreement that will be in effect from April 1, 2019 until March 31, 2022 and will bring significant wage increases to a sector in which many workers are not yet receiving a living wage. This increase has been the biggest increase in wages in this sector for the longest time.

These wage increases are an important step (even if not sufficient) in order to raise working women out of the cycle of working poverty. According to statistics from the Community Health Bargaining Association, 88 per cent of employees in this sector are female.

Another important component for women in this new collective agreement is three days of special leave for employees experiencing domestic violence.

## **Local Highlights**

Sister and committee member Patricia Skalozub is also a member of the the Kamloops and District Labour Council Women's Committee Comfort Case Project. As a group, we prepared 78 comfort cases which will be provided to victims of sexual and domestic violence. Each comfort case had basic toiletries, socks, underwear and a change of

clothes all put in a clean pillow case. This joint initiative between Royal Inland Hospital and the Sexual Assault Counselling Centre and our amazing team of volunteers, along with the donations from our affiliates will allow immediate crisis support to sexual assault survivors being treated in hospital.

Sister and committee member Marcey Campbell is proud of the work that the Women's Committee at CUPE Local 728 has done over the past year. With hosting the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual International Women's Day Committee, to providing Christmas dinner and presents to families in the community, to providing funds for high school students so that they can have grad dresses and accessories at no cost and to attending various events throughout the lower mainland, to attending the march for missing and murdered indigenous women on the corner of Main and Hastings in Vancouver, CUPE Local 728 is at the forefront of supporting women's rights and equality in the workplace and in our community.

The members of CUPE BC Women's Committee would like to thank CUPE National, CUPE BC, the locals that they are from, their friends and allies for their continued support over this past year. We are excited to look forward and see all the change that we can do.

The Women's Committee have worked diligently and thoughtfully on the resolutions submitted to convention. Please take the time to review and take a stand with us on these very important issues.

Respectfully submitted:

Amber Leonard – Chair  
Patricia Skalozub, Co-Chair  
Marcey Campbell – Recording Secretary  
Debra Cowan  
Daniela Escolar  
Shana Kirkland  
Akeena Legall

Kalinda Naismith  
Ann Purvis  
Julie Roberts  
Heather Scarisbrick  
Laurie Whyte  
Kelly Dussin - Staff Advisor  
Janet Szliske – Communications  
Representative

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