

Department Reports

Political Action and Education (PA&E)

Introduction

The last two (2) years have been extremely busy for the Political Action and Education (PA&E) department as we have been responsive to an ever-changing landscape. We have been at the forefront of planning with the Provincial Contract Action Team (ProCAT) to strengthen our effort at our largest collective bargaining table (SEIU-West & SAHO). Our struggle during COVID-19 was to keep our demonstrations visible yet (legal) compliant with Public Health Orders.

In our move to modify our work to virtual platforms – we have placed heavy emphasis on member engagement via social media. Our goal continues to be creating meaningful connections with new members – to that end, we have introduced new member orientation remotely. We have gauged the ability of the SEIU-West Committees to maintain their work in this climate with a view to providing necessary supports. We have boldly faced our challenge and introduced virtual member training – and we have begun a systemic intervention within our units to agitate for active and well-resourced Occupational Health & Safety committees.

We continue to splash purple across the province – in our reactions to the inequity of provincial government planning; whether it be the unfair rollout of the vaccination plan, the inequity associated with the temporary wage supplement or the ongoing strategy to devalue public services within the provincial budget cycles. We do this work to build unity within our membership; our main desire is for the leaders and activists to influence decision-makers in our province. We know your front-line experience is a valuable lens and should be considered to inform improvements in decision-making. We take pride in the visibility afforded to our leadership via regular and social media – the voices of our many members working hard on the front line resonate in the public statements reported by the media.

Purple has partnered on targeted issues with the Sask Medical Association (SMA), Dr. Kyle Anderson and the other health care unions, as well as, representative bodies on COVID related issues. We have combined efforts with the Sask Federation of Labour (SFL) and the Canadian Labour of Congress (CLC) on all levels of government election campaigns, legislative agendas and budgetary issues. We have contributed to the success in building the Bargaining Association with the health provider unions and we have continued to actively participate within the Community Based Organizations (CBO) coalition with CUPE and SGEU.

We continue to support the actions taken by Stop the Cuts, the Women’s March, Climate Justice Saskatoon, Provincial Association of Transition Houses & Services (PATHS), CHEP Good Food Inc., YXE Connects, and United Way among other community partners.



Department Reports

All of this work has been invaluable as we join forces with others to demonstrate to the general public our common progressive causes and our innovative approach to getting our message out.

Member Engagement & Campaigns

The PA&E team appreciates all that is done on the front line, irrespective of the sector or the job being done; we know that every member of the team contributes in a positive way. Our Convention theme in 2021 - **Front Line Heroes Unite** - is indicative of our potential in building membership power and the valuable work being done every single day in all sectors.

In the last two years, we have undertaken campaigns to wield member and community solidarity on a number of issues. Our campaigns have varied – within the health care sector, we have been working to combat understaffing, within the CBO sector our tri-union group has been fighting for multi-year stable funding to achieve sustainability; and we have been working with our members at a number of units such as Canadian Blood Services to gain stability in their hours of work through outreach to donors. Campaign efforts have been geared up to support collective bargaining efforts at the SAHO table, among others. Since the onset of COVID we have sought public support for all front line members who are in need of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the offer of a vaccination and those who have been excluded from access to the provincial government temporary wage supplement program. This work has evolved to our popular **#Hey Moe** campaign on social media.

The provincial government has clearly demonstrated a lack of respect for so many during COVID. Commitments made by them have not been met repeatedly. We call their lack of industry ‘intelligence’ what it is: worker exploitation. They have been grinding workers in long term care, group homes, health care and education support for far too long. As a result, we know that we need to magnify the volume of our collective efforts, create added partnerships and reach out to members of the general public for support. We have experienced success in our efforts to partner with the other health provider unions through our new bargaining association. In the CBO sector, we achieved visibility during the last provincial election with our partners in our coalition through yard signs. Our efforts to showcase your work are intended to target the general public including patients, clients and residents; our communities can provide statements of support to influence the government funder.

The Political Action and Awareness Committee sought department support as they led the effort to engage in the federal, provincial and civic election campaigns since 2019. They crafted scripts, assisted with recruitment and led in a video project last fall. The video content focused upon the message: ‘the government is letting us down’ which resonated with many members. Our purple works campaign through these elections included Activist



Department Reports

Camps, engagements with party leaders to ensure a clear understanding of the priorities of working people and the sharing of all information received – offering resources for members to measure their candidates' values.

The Nursing Care Committee prompted us last year to move forward with post-COVID contests within the membership. We have partnered with them annually in the celebration of Nursing week. We have engaged with the Young Worker, Worker Safety and Nursing Care Committees on merchandising and targeted issues of concern and/or recognition dates/events. Our support of Committee work provides a valuable field perspective.

Throughout the last two years we have attempted to engage member leaders who participate in their Occupational Health Committee (OHC). We have introduced a training session and we are working to design campaign strategies and ongoing support to ensure that workload issues are presented as an occupational health and safety issue in the workplace.

Moving forward, it is our desire to demonstrate to employers, government and public that Front Line Heroes need respect – they need safety at work – they need fairness. This speaks to the theme of Convention as well as our ongoing showcasing of our members with their profile/superpowers and the operative tag line in recent months:
#RespectUSProtectUsPayUs.

Communications

Recognizing the past two (2) years have been a real challenge for our members our department has risen to meet the occasion.

In any 'normal' year, we are able to run contests and have members come in to accept their prizes; go to a unit and take pictures to complete member PurpleWorks profiles and add the authenticity to our ad campaigns; and send out regular mailings with a ton of useful information that can be displayed on union bulletin boards on a quarterly basis.

We've successfully shifted our strategies to not only meet public health guidelines but exceed expectations of what our members can achieve during the worst circumstances they've ever faced.

Initially, we scaled back our contests and focused on what our members needed most and that was support for what they were facing in the workplace. We implemented a COVID-19 page as a hub for information for all our members, hosted Facebook Live events, posted regular video President's messages, and directed all questions coming through our FB messenger to our contact form so no question would go unanswered.

Instead of in-person pictures, our members sent us selfies, filled in member profiles online



Department Reports

and met our challenge to provide words of hope and inspiration as we implemented motivational Mondays, and Front Line Heroes (FLH) profiles that revealed an awe-inspiring amount of super powers our members have been keeping undercover for so long.

To ensure members were still receiving regular updates, we pivoted our newsletter into an interactive online format and continued to share regular media releases and latest information including regular features like 'Jargon Moose' and 'MRC Quick Tips' on our website and social media platforms.

We continue to do our best to interact with members and have been slowly reintroducing contests since the beginning of 2021. Arranging for pick up as much as possible and transferring through inter-office mail.

Sadly our text messaging platform went defunct in 2020. We have a new platform in play which will launch in 2021.

Despite the ever-changing rules around Social Media platforms, member voices are reaching a wider audience. Our Facebook page has been gathering likes steadily since our last convention gaining approximately 1,500 new Likes with about 4300 Followers. Our Instagram has almost doubled in the addition of 627 followers since 2019. Our Twitter has experienced steady growth as well with an increase of 152 followers. We expect our social media platform experience will continue to flourish in the coming years.

We hope that members have had a chance to explore our recently refreshed website. There is a ton of new functionality that will help to navigate the ever-growing list of content we have available to our members including a search bar that works effectively!

Better yet, we are getting closer to launching a Member Portal that will give our members access to select information and provide some new features designed specifically for you. While we work out the data and details of roll out, feel free to send us suggestions on functionality through actions@seiuwest.ca.

Over the past two (2) years, our proudest moment as a department may very well be the August 12, 2020 **#DoneWaiting** demos when our members in Saskatoon pulled off a multi-site pandemic protest. This was an all-hands on deck moment that truly sets this union of working people apart. You rise to the occasion when it's presented. And it didn't stop there. The protests continued well into the fall in multiple communities around the province. That's the power SEIU-West members have – we are stronger together.

Research

The focus of PAE's research efforts has always been to help ensure that everything SEIU-



Department Reports

West “says” is backed by solid, credible evidence.

For example, if an SEIU-West media release, submission to government, social media post or top officer speech contains facts and figures, these were likely found and checked by PAE staff.

We analyze and respond to government legislation, regulations, and spending plans.

In support of collective bargaining, we investigate the corporate structure and financial and land titles records of the organizations that employ our members.

But we do more than just sit back and react to what governments and employers throw at us. A big part of PAE research includes “environmental scanning”: proactively keeping an eye out for new and emerging trends, threats and opportunities affecting SEIU-West and its members, and sharing our findings and recommendations with staff and leadership. In particular, this includes regular monitoring of:

- Statistics Canada data releases, especially those related to labour, employment and income.
- SaskTenders, the site where Saskatchewan’s governments, the SHA and school boards “shop” for goods and services. The site provides clues about the government’s plans for privatization and restructuring affecting our members and their communities.
- Canadian Legal Information Institute (CanLII) postings of key decisions by courts, labour boards, arbitrators, and other tribunals.

We play a lead role in the design, rollout, and analysis of surveys and votes involving our membership. This became especially true as the COVID pandemic compelled us to move more and more of our activities online. Our experience using Alchemer (formerly Survey Gizmo) and Simply Voting enabled us to play lead roles in the 2021 SAHO TA vote, the online selection of Convention delegates, and the 2021 Membership survey—which was revived after being put on hold so as not to interfere with SAHO bargaining.

Since the emergence of COVID in early 2020 much of our research has focused on how the virus and government and employer responses to it (e.g. PPE delivery, vaccination schedules, pandemic pay) have affected our members. Our findings were presented in a special COVID-19 section of our website, as well as informing our communication to members and the public.

Since the creation of the SHA, we have kept a close eye out for signs of government efforts to force representation votes in the health sector. We have monitored health sector representation votes and bargaining associations in other provinces, in support of work to establish a tri-union health care bargaining association with CUPE and SGEU.



Department Reports

Since last Convention we launched an online Workload Tracking Form and used data from member submissions to support public campaigns and posts critical of underfunding and understaffing, e.g. #WheresJimReiter. On a go forward basis, we will work with CBE to revise our processes/forms so as to ensure compliance with new language in the collective agreements.

We monitor and analyze the performance of our website and social media presence, to see what ways of reaching our members and the public work best.

Member Education

In keeping with the current unusual times we find ourselves in we have made some significant changes within our world of member education. First, it is important to acknowledge the great work of Catherine Gendron in her term as our Education Coordinator. Both her efforts to engage broadly with Members and her tutelage prior to leaving SEIU-West, gave a fantastic boost in the launch of our new Education Coordinator, Sinda Cathcart, as she moved into this vital role in December of 2020.

So to begin, we can proudly report that our online application and registration system, for all of our courses, remains to be a very convenient way for members to submit their applications.

This process includes conferences, external education opportunities and other Labour Conventions/meetings such as the SFL and District Labour Councils. We hope to eventually phase out the paper system but for now we offer both an online registration process and a paper version.

In the continued desire to ensure the Union's presence is experienced by new Members, the SEIU-West Education Department also continues with its newly designed outreach initiative (New Member Orientation), in order to present information about SEIU-West, to new hires during their first months in the Union.

Between May of 2019 and April 2021, our department offered the following in-house programs for members interested in taking on a leadership, activist and representative roles.

SEIU-West Education Module Participants since May 2019 to April 2021

Activist Training	127
Advanced Facilitator training	21
Anti-bullying	38
Complete Stewards in Action	94



Department Reports

Domestic Violence Workshop	26
Facilitator Training	7
Facing Management Level II	30
OH&S, Knowledge to Action	68
Stewards In Action Level I	73
Stewards in Action, The Next Steps Level II	42
Tech Course Level I, Progressive Discipline and Investigation	24
Tech Course Level II, Investigations & Grievance	139
Tech Course Level III, Investigations & Formal Doc	85
Turtle Island	19
Unionism 101	62
Unionism in Practice	128
Unit Leadership – BS&S	37
Total Member Education/Training Spaces	1020

*Many of the Members who signed up for the Union’s courses were first time participants!! These programs have been developed with a view to addressing the needs of the SEIU-West membership. We currently have 11 Member facilitators, 8 of whom are trained to deliver all of our in house training with exception of the Activist Training, Duty to Accommodate/Attendance Management course, and the Technical Certificate courses which are facilitated by Union staff and supported by Member facilitators for logistics. With that, we will soon be actively recruiting new Member Facilitators via the Union’s internal process.

Your Member Facilitators are Lisa Zunti, Colleen Denniss, Jason Monteith, Lynette Pinfeld, Kyla Wotypka, Jessica Boisvert, Janine Lazaro, Myrna Gehl, with alternates Fawn Ross, Celeste Rodman, and Brittney Servetnyk. Our Domestic Violence Course facilitators require special training from the CLC. The individuals who have assisted SEIU-West over the years in offering this course (and continue to do so) are Lori Johb and Andrea Howe.

While our world has experienced some significant challenges over the past two years, we have continued offering education to the Members, very successfully, with the online format of Zoom. This team of dedicated facilitators work hard to ensure that our training is delivered in a respectful, meaningful way and they help to maximize your learning experience.

The following courses were offered so far this year:

Advanced Facilitator Training (*This course is designed for Members who have been promoted to be Member Facilitators through the Union’s internal selection process).
Stewards in Action Levels I & II (*This course is designed for any Member who has



Department Reports

interest in serving the Union and its Members as a Shop Steward).

Occupational Health & Safety, Knowledge to Action (*This course is designed for SEIU-West Occupational Health Committee members and alternates).

Unionism 101 (*This course is designed for any Member who has not taken any other union training and was also designed to assist in the Union's recruitment efforts, inviting new members to get involved).

And here is a list of courses that are upcoming for the remainder of 2021:

Technical Course Level II/Investigations & Grievance Process (*This course is offered to Shop Stewards and Unit Executive Officers).

Anti-Harassment/Anti-Bullying Training (*This course is designed for any Member and Unit Leader who has an appetite to help co-workers learn how to address these serious and harmful issues in the workplace).

Activist Training Camp (*This course is designed for any Member who has an interest in testing their political activist wings).

Comprehensive Unit Leadership Training (*This will be a new and improved rendition of 'Unit Leadership' and will serve as a precursor to an exciting new 'Leadership Series' which we are hoping to unveil at the 2022 Leadership Conference...stay tuned ☺!!)

Duty to Accommodate/Attendance Management (*This course is designed to support Shop Stewards, OHC Members and Unit leaders in particular, with representing Members in their accommodation or attendance management needs)

Turtle Island (*This valuable opportunity is offered to any Union Member who wishes to educate themselves on the issues pertaining to our Indigenous communities, many of whom are our Sisters and Brothers).

Facing Management (*This course is offered predominantly to Members who are in Union positions currently, but is open to all Members who desire to learn the art of presenting a solid and professional approach, when addressing the Employer).

Domestic Violence (*This course is open to all Members interested in learning more about this critical issue and how it plays out in each and every one of our workplaces).

Though the online format using Zoom has been effective, members have delivered a resounding wish - that we return to 'in-person' education sessions soon. This has not been a reflection of our member's satisfaction with having had the ability to participate online, rather, the absence of the simple pleasure of the 'social' connection we gain from meeting in-person. With that, we are pressing forward in what will be an ambitious next couple of years... and as mentioned, please stay tuned for some exciting Education developments coming soon! All we can say at this juncture, is that we are reviewing the potential of developing a new 'Leadership Series' that will deliver some valuable dividends for the Union, our Members and even our respective communities!!

Very special thanks goes out to the extremely dedicated USW Members of our SEIU-West Operations Department, who manage registration details, handle event-day chaos, and process member expense forms. Their contribution to the smooth running of our education



Department Reports

events cannot be understated, so let's make a point of offering our 'thanks' for their excellent support over the last two years (and always)!

Our Education motto, that we believe will steady SEIU-West in its position as a leader throughout 2021 – 2023, is specifically attached to our commitment to provide the foundation for strong stewardship and succession planning within our many leadership roles. This will surely be the envy of many in the House of Labour and beyond and we hope you will join us in this commitment!!

Conclusion

The last two years have been difficult, stressful and isolating for too many. While we cannot fully comprehend the loss and the overwhelming sense of exhaustion that is the everyday experience of our front line heroes – we are ready to hear your narrative and share it with others. We appreciate the need for fundamental change within all aspects of public service as the current government strategy has been to starve (through underfunding) the health, municipal, education and community based sectors, then outline the deficiencies within each sector using a 'blame the worker' strategy accompanied by the move to privatize by stealth. Unity is what is needed to disrupt this cycle. We will continue to work hard with you and your fellow members to shine the light on decisions made that do not serve your clients, students, patients, residents and communities well and create obstacles for our membership as they struggle to manage their many roles.

Last but not least, we have embraced change within our department in the last two years due to departures and through the recruitment process. Through all of this – we have welcomed new strengths and we have worked hard to share our values and priorities. In the last year, we have recruited Tammy Robert as our Project Coordinator, Sinda Cathcart as our Education Coordinator and Dannel Pickering as our Member Engagement Field Worker. Together with the assistance of both Christine Miller, our Deputy Director, and Karman Kawchuk, our Research Coordinator, we have embraced new skill sets and carved out brave ideas to build our new team. While my plan is to leave the team behind in the coming weeks, I have confidence that they will continue to be adept, credible, responsive, clever and caring in all that they do. I will miss our team - as I leave them behind I hope that they know I will always wish them the best in all that they do. I am confident that they will work hard to keep SEIU-West on track as the most recognized (and best looking) union in the province.

Finally, I wish to say goodbye to the staff, our member leaders, and our membership as a whole. It's been a wild ride – I've learned so very much and it has been with great pride that I have been able to call myself a leader at SEIU-West. Thank you always for your trust in me and the meaningful work that I have been afforded – it's been an honour to work with you all.

