



CASe NOTES

This Newsletter is Produced by & for OPSEU CAS workers

Winter 2000

Bill 136 and its impact: one vote, one solidarity, one union: OPSEU

On January 1, 2001, the Prescott-Russell Children's Aid Society, represented by OPSEU, merged with four other social service groups represented by three different unions. The new organization is called Prescott-Russell Children and Adult Services.

The merger presents two challenges. The first is to win the vote. The employer has reached a special agreement with the Harris government. Bill 136 applies to municipalities, hospitals and school boards; because of a request the employer made to the Ontario government, we are now plunged into controversies surrounding the bill. This situation allows the employer to easily divide and conquer since the four unions will confront each other in the vote. The second challenge is to build solidarity following the vote. We must prevent the employer from taking advantage of the situation, under the pretext of Bill 136. We should have a strong and united voice in order to build our forces for future collective bargaining.

The merger has not reduced the workload of staff members. On the contrary, because of the vote, one can assume that the following weeks will be even more hectic.

We are confident that OPSEU will be the union chosen to represent all staff members of Prescott-Russell Children and Adult Services for several reasons. We have our own sector within the structure of the union, we have a regional office in Ottawa, we have our French language services, etc. Furthermore, we know very well the employer with whom we have had difficult labour relations in the past. Any good strategist will tell you that a profound understanding of the employer is a definite advantage in collective bargaining and labour relations and OPSEU has this advantage.

Finally, we want to reiterate that OPSEU is the union of choice. Having said that, we have a lot of work to do.

In solidarity,

The executive committee, Local 426

C.A.S. Master Contract is Up to Date

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings from the Great White North & well maybe not quite, but while looking out my window, one would have a difficult time determining whether you were in Sudbury or Inuvik!!! I hope everyone is wintering well, and looking forward to the warm spring breezes, the first sight of grass & oh who am I fooling & I think Spring is set to arrive sometime in July this year & just in time for next winter. Wait till I get my hands on Warton Willy!!

Your Sector Executive and Bargaining Teams have been rather busy over these past several months, in the never-ending fight to achieve recognition for the workload crisis the Ministry has created.

One thing is clear, the government sets the rules that all CAS's have to live by. So it only seems natural that we should try to standardize our collective agreements. This is a task for the CAS Sector Bargaining Team & we have delivered.

A draft Master Agreement will be available to C.A.S. Local representatives at Convention 2001. This is one of the largest accomplishments coming out of the sector this year. The Master Contract looks at most of the articles included in our collective agreements. We have reviewed all the collective agreements from C.A.S. bargaining units within OPSEU and taken the **Best** language for each article. Your bargaining teams can put any language in the Master Contract on the bargaining table and know that it has already been negotiated elsewhere.

I would like to take this time to speak a little about the process. At the onset, we were fortunate to be able to work from the first Master Contract that had been completed by the Sector in 1995. The

work done at that time was great, but a process was not put in place to keep it current.

At the OPSEU Broader Public Sector Conference in 1999, the Network for Better Contracts (NBC) was unveiled. At that conference the membership made it well known that above everything else, they wanted to be able to negotiate the best collective agreements. They wanted to learn how to bargain effectively. We have provided you with the best language to help you accomplish that goal.

We are lucky that the NBC has reduced the number of staff representatives who bargain C.A.S. collective agreements. This smaller group will have a much better understanding of our work and the issues that need to be addressed in bargaining. The plan is to get them to give us some feedback on the language we have presented to you and to help us keep the Master Contract current. Keeping the Contract current will be a responsibility shared by us all. If you are able to make improvements on the language please let us know.

Turnover has become an issue for your Sector Executive and Bargaining Team. **Paul Melanson** of Kitchener Waterloo C.A.S., left the Sector to become a supervisor. While we wish him well, we miss his contributions. As well, **Michael Whitehead**, Rainy River, left his agency to see how things are run in the States, and has now become a supervisor somewhere in Minnesota. Finally, **Dan Carson**, who replaced **Bonnie Conlon**, has left the C.A.S. in Peterborough to pursue his own personal goals. This has left the Sector with a workload problem of our own. If you are interested in helping out, please let us know.

Personally, I'm very proud of the work we have done on the Master Contract. It was a long haul, but it's here. As a mom, it was almost like delivering a child in that it

came with a lot of labor pains, but in the end it is beautiful. I encourage you to review it and use it to set your demands. Remember, we are in this together and together we will win.

As a final thought & don't forget **March 31** is the expiration date of choice in the C.A.S. Sector!!!

Linda Aho, Chair
C.A.S. Sector Executive & Bargaining Team

OACAS Workload Study Report

by David Calvert

The OACAS released their *Workload Measurement Project Report - February 2001* on Monday, February 19, 2001. Your OPSEU C.A.S. Sector Executive already knew the findings because we were represented on the Steering Committee who oversaw the work. It confirms what we said in both the "Put the Children First" and "Workload Alert" reports. Simply put, front line staff are overworked and stressed out as a result of increased administrative demands on far too many cases. We have been alone in raising these issues until now. It is an important step forward to finally have management on side.

Our challenge will be to find a way to get the government to participate with us in any future studies of workload because workload drives the funding formula and a comprehensive review of it is due in 2001. We will put pressure on the Ministry to consult directly with us on this issue. Your Local can play an important role by asking for a meeting with the M.P.P. s in your area to discuss the report and what government

needs to do to responsibly address the issues raised in the report. As well, the Union will put pressure on the government to participate in Phase III of the workload measurement project in order to get realistic benchmarks for all aspects of child protection.

While this study is the most comprehensive ever done in Ontario, there are some significant shortcomings. For example, the workload of support staff has not been addressed. The fact that many agencies use support staff in different ways is no excuse. We will need to continue to work hard to convince management that this issue is as important as any other to the effective provision of child protection services. We must continue to advocate on behalf of support staff whenever possible.

The results of this study lead to some rather startling conclusions. We can agree that a front line worker has roughly 900 hours of direct service time available in any given year. We can also accept, for the time being, that an average investigation takes 19.3 hours (our study found 20.3 hours). These are investigations that do not involve apprehensions. If we do the simple math, each intake worker should only be expected to complete 46 investigations per year or to say it another way, intake workers should only be expected to pick up less than 1 investigation per week. The Ministry benchmark only gives us 12.5 hours to do an investigation and we are already being forced to do more than time allows.

We can accept for now that it takes a front line worker 7.07 hours per month on average to monitor an ongoing protection file, even though our study showed that it takes 11 hours per month. Again, doing the math using 900 hours as the total amount of time available, ongoing workers should only be expected to work with 10.6 cases at any given time. The Ministry benchmark only gives us 5.5 hours per month to monitor a

family where the children remain in the home.

We can also accept the initial finding that any apprehension and placement takes 33.3 hours to complete. This is just a little less than half of the total time available to do direct service work in any given month. There is no benchmark for admissions to care and so there is no funding for admissions to care, even though this study shows that admissions are up by 26%. In effect, we are expected to do placements on our own time.

And what else are we expected to do on our own time? We don't get paid to:

- " supervise children from other jurisdictions;
- " assist with investigations at the request of other Societies;
- " serve court documents;
- " do adoption & foster parent and child matching and placement;
- " provide post adoption services of any kind;
- " do adoption disclosures;
- " respond to and document inquiries at telephone intake, or;
- " do repatriations.

Some of these tasks take a lot of time! For example, the study shows that an average adoption matching and placement takes 28.6 hours and the Ministry doesn't provide funds for this.

No wonder we are stressed out. No wonder dedicated staff are leaving as soon as they can find something else to do.

And on the issue of staff turnover, we did try to get some data on this last year but received very few responses to our inquiries. Likely due to the fact that we were too busy

or stressed out to complete the survey. But nevertheless, the report does indicate that staff turnover is becoming a problem. If we really want to highlight this issue then we are going to have to generate some data. This will likely be a topic on the agenda for the C.A.S. Sector Convention 2001 caucus.

But, the fact remains that we have large numbers of new and inexperienced workers in our membership. The study was done using workers with more than one year of experience. They, no doubt, can do the work faster than our new colleagues, who through no fault of their own, are on a very steep learning curve to learn a very complex job. So, the findings would have been much more dramatic and perhaps a little more realistic if only workers with less than one year of experience were surveyed.

Speaking of what we are learning, this study also demonstrates that we have all learned to cut corners in order to keep our heads above water. Front line staff reported that not only are they not meeting "best practices", they don't feel that they are even meeting "good practices". The conclusion can only be that we are being forced to use bad practices in order to get the job done. We, who are dedicated to doing good work, and our clients deserve better.

This summary has only hit some of the high spots. You need to read the report in its entirety to get the full impact of how serious the situation really is. The fact that we spend less than 30% of our time actually seeing families is an absolute disgrace. And there are no doubt a number of other issues that could be identified.

Where do we go from here? It seems clear that neither the OACAS nor our management, in most cases, is prepared to go to bat for us or our clients. Their press releases barely raised an eyebrow. Some agencies have told their Ministry masters that they are ignoring some of the expectations

that have been laid down. We should expect this from all agencies and from the OACAS. The case should be made by us all that until staffing levels are adequate across the system, some of the fancy frills are just going to have to be put on hold. The question ought to be posed like this. Would you sooner have workers out in the community seeing children and assessing risk or stuck at their desk struggling to learn some new computer program. The answer ought to be obvious.

In July 1998, OPSEU told representatives from the OACAS that workload is a front line issue. We told them that we would not recommend that our members participate in their study unless we had a direct role in the project. This stand got us representation on the steering committee and a report that is actually grounded in our reality.

Well it seems that workload is still our issue to resolve. Your Sector Executive is not going to let this issue die. Sample letters to the editor are being prepared and will be out to the Local leadership soon along with other campaign ideas that can be used at the local level. But no campaign will be successful without the support of each and every one of us. When your Local leadership calls on you to get involved, it will be time to take a stand. We owe it to ourselves and to the children we work so hard to protect.

Youth in Care Meet in London

By Kim Ireland, Local 116

The South/Southwestern Region which comprises 7 Children's Aid Societies is having its annual "Youth in Care Conference". The conference is being held in London this year, May 11-13. The Ministry

has funded two youth to each staff attending and it is expected that approximately 40 people will attend. The theme of the weekend is, "Surviving with a Circle of Friends" and there will be on-going survival challenges throughout the weekend.

The participants will sleep at Fanshawe College, in a residence while the workshops and meals will be held at London CAS. Workshops include; Drug and alcohol awareness, Peer helping and mentoring within the agencies and Information regarding Extended Care and Maintenance and the advocating of it being extended to the age of 24 years. As well, there will be numerous recreational activities throughout the weekend.

Information packages will soon be sent to the agencies in the region.

Warm Thoughts From Ottawa

by Michael Mulroney , Local 454

On May 26, 2001 the 11th Annual Cobourg CAS baseball tournament will be held. For the second year ,the Ottawa Society is coordinating the tournament to be held at the Baltimore Recreation Grounds. We are aiming for a full roster of 16 teams. As in previous years, teams are guaranteed 3 games, full course meal, dance, prizes and fun. Tournament registration packages will soon be distributed and we are looking forward to the big event.

See you all in Cobourg.

Who We Are & How to Contact Us

The C.A.S. Sector represents the support staff, foster care & adoption workers, family support and protection workers at 17 Children's Aid Societies in Ontario. *CASE Notes* is written by and for those workers.

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