

Voice of Reason



Frontline News & Views from OPSEU's Mental Health Division : Sector 18



Walk the talk on mental health campaign

For the past two and a half years, the Liberal government has been talking about how to improve mental health services across the province while simultaneously cutting budgets and eliminating those front line jobs that care for Ontarians with mental illness. It's time to Walk the Talk on Mental Health

While Ontarians are hearing that “no door is the wrong door”, Ontario mental health service providers want you to know that the doors are simply closing for many services. We in the Mental Health Division know that “fiscal restraint” has actually meant that our ability to provide care, comfort and assistance has been seriously jeopardized. While mental health services are facing shortages, the Liberal government is spending \$2.4 billion on corporate tax cuts. It's “time to walk the talk on mental health!

A number of events have been held to increase public awareness about this campaign.

On March 8th Dalton McGuinty received a special delivery of over 600 signed postcards asking him to “walk the talk” on mental health. Earlier that morning a press conference offered a number of examples of a mental health system in decline:

- Layoff of 28 child and youth workers at Ontario Shores
- 20 jobs cut at the Regional Mental Health Centre in London and St. Thomas
- Only two increases to children's mental health spending since 1992, threatening the system to lose capacity to treat up to 2,000 children across the province.

On March 9th a demonstration began outside of South West LHIN office and then outside of the Health Minister Deb Matthews' constituency office, demanding that she and the Liberal government finally "walk the talk". Even freezing rain could not dampen the spirits of OPSEU activists protesting the transfer of 59 beds from the London and St. Thomas

Regional Mental Health Centre to Windsor later this year, with fears that an additional 21 beds will simply disappear. It is estimated that community-based mental health agencies would each need to see a 50 per cent increase in funding to provide the appropriate level of service to the clients who will no longer have access to treatment beds.

No health without mental health. National union conference on mental health issues.

A group of OPSEU representatives participated in the National Union Conference on Mental Health Issues in Ottawa last October. The conference brought together national labour activists working in healthcare, community mental health, developmental services, and correctional services. Participants shared ideas on how to advance the national No Health without Mental Health campaign, fighting for an

end to corporate tax hikes while increasing mental health services through a well-funded and well-integrated system.

Increased funding could bring expanded mental health services, community treatment programs, supportive housing, mental health courts, research, early intervention programs and public education.

What is PSLRTA?

The Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act, 1997 (PSLRTA) is a piece of legislation that was created during the Mike Harris years, when the downloading of services from the province was at its peak. The legislation has changed and evolved, but here's what it means in a nutshell.

The government created PSLRTA for the benefit of employers. What the legislation does is prevents employers from having two different unions represent the same group or type of employees in a workplace after a download or merger.

For example, kitchen workers in one workplace are represented by Union A, and kitchen workers in another workplace are represented by Union B. These two workplaces are then taken over by one employer. Under PSLRTA, all the

kitchen workers from the two workplaces must now vote to have either Union A or Union B represent them.

This process is time consuming, frustrating and often confusing. And, as governments and employers continually "re-structure" services, these votes occur more and more often.

A vote last week has determined that OPSEU will continue to represent paramedical members at the newly-created North Bay Regional Health Centre (NBRHC).

NBRHC was created by an amalgamation of the former Northeast Mental Health Centre (NEMHC) and the North Bay General Hospital (NBGH). For more information check out: www.opseu.org. OPSEU continues to represent paramedical members at NBRHC

To enhance OPSEU's work on lobbying for improvements to mental health services in the province, the Mental Health Division is conducting a survey on the impacts of mental health. Mental health impacts are felt in many other sectors of OPSEU, including child and youth services, the provincial psychiatric hospitals and mental health agencies, corrections, the courts, acute care hospitals, long term care, developmental services, ambulance, community health care, and others. This will be a starting point for the development of future joint campaigns, identification of mental health needs and its impacts in our various workplaces. A draft report is planned for the BPS Conference in June.

Bargaining - Local 152 arbitration awards

Across the public sector, locals are bracing for upcoming rounds of bargaining amidst promises by the McGuinty government to freeze wages using Bill 16 (Ontario Government's Public Sector Compensation Restraint to Protect Public Services Act).

Across our sector, wage increases are being awarded under provisions from the Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act (HLDAA). For example, an interim award to Local 152 (St. Joseph's Health Centre London/St. Thomas) was issued by the Board of Arbitration on October 27. The interim decision required the employer to immediately implement a wage increase of 2.5 per cent across the board, along with

more specific wage revision for RPNs and Developmental Services Workers.

So, your bargaining teams must send a strong message to your employers: you will NOT accept a wage freeze for your members! You may also want to consider proposing contract provisions that would benefit your members that have little or no cost to the employer.

The division will be exploring ways to coordinate bargaining efforts, developing a centralized source for Collective Bargaining Act language across the division and strategizing about areas to seek improvements at the bargaining table.

In memorium - Brent Larock



Husband, Father, Grandfather, Nurse, Friend, Union Activist, Brent did all of these roles; he did them well.

Above all else, he was a caring person who always took the time to say hello, ask how you were and listened to the answer.

He worked hard to improve the working conditions of his co-workers as a unit steward, a bargaining team member in Local 441, and a picket captain at Kingston Psychiatric

Hospital during the '96 OPS strike. As a member of the mental health division he worked for all the members of the division, while advocating for services.

Brent your dedication and compassion will be missed by all in OPSEU, your friendship will be missed by those of us who knew you.

Sheryl Ferguson - Past President OPSEU local 431, Past Chair Mental Health Division

What's happening at the BPS Conference : June 17-19

Election of your next Mental Health Division Executive

Education session on Union Skills for Workplace Investigations!

Draft report from the cross-sector mental health needs and impacts survey – planning for future cross-sector campaigns!

Mental Health Division Executive

Chair
Alan Donaldson L.329 - MHCP Penetanguishene

Vice-Chair
Jackie Smythe L.636 - Northeast Mental Health Centre

Secretary
Kim McDowell L.152 - St. Joseph's Health Care London/St. Thomas

Treasurer
Martha McDonald L.329 - MHC Penetanguishene

Communications Coordinator
Melissa Leait L.500 - CAMH

Health & Safety Coordinator
Elizabeth Craik L.152 - St. Joseph's Health Care London / St. Thomas – (Paramed)

Bargaining Coordinator
Craig Nesbitt L.636 - Northeast Mental Health Centre

Public Policy & Campaigns
Edward Arvelin L.720 - St. Joseph's Care Group (Paramed)

Membership Coordinator
Tischa Battram L.133 - Canadian Mental Health Association – Oxford Branch

Trustee
Lisa Hawley L.152 - St. Joseph's Health Care London / St. Thomas

Trustee
Anthony Gait L.152 - St. Joseph's Health Care London / St. Thomas

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Just let us know how to reach you. Give us your secure e-mail address by **calling the OPSEU Resource Centre: 1-800-268-7376 or 416-443-8888.**

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The Voice of Reason is authorized for distribution by:

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, OPSEU

