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180 lobbyists expose crisis in developmental services

Caregivers and family members from across Ontario met with 40 MPPs with one clear message:

“We will no longer accept MPPs who put people with developmental disabilities at the bottom of the government’s priority list.”

One size fits all does not work in developmental services

So why is the Minister Papatello trying to pit one service against another?

Member profiles

Every issue highlights members and the important work we do.

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Grace Mungal

Developmental Service Worker, Community Living Mississauga

Rose Clark

Senior Developmental Service Worker, Southwestern Regional Centre

New Sector 2 executive elected at BPS conference

Developmental Services Occupational Committee for the OPS

Developmental service campaign launched with a bang

More than 180 caregivers and families of people with developmental disabilities descended on Queen’s Park Thursday, Nov. 3 and met with 40 MPPs, including Minister Papatello and three other Cabinet Ministers. The lobbyists came from across Ontario to deliver one clear message:

“We are very concerned about the state of services for people with developmental disabilities. We will no longer accept MPPs who put people with developmental disabilities at the bottom of the government’s priority list.”

After more than a decade of cuts and under-funding the developmental service sector is no longer able to provide the level of care and support many people with developmental disabilities need. Community based agencies have been forced to cut staff and service levels because they simply don’t have the funding they need. Wages in the sector are so low that many of the well trained staff are quitting and agencies can’t attract new ones.

On top of this, the need for developmental services is on a steady incline. There are more than 6000 people on waiting lists in Ontario. Most are aging parents who can’t look after their developmentally disabled child at home anymore. As a result of decades of medical advancement more developmentally disabled babies are surviving at birth and people with developmental disabilities are living longer. As

well, the planned closure of the Regional Centres means 1000 of the highest needs people are being forced into the community leaving people who are desperate for care on waiting lists even longer.

Without significant political will and investment things are going to deteriorate further.

“If we don’t act now, what’s going to happen when aging parents pass away and there just isn’t anyone to care for their adult child?” asked Peggy MacDonald, a community caregiver in the Kingston area. “Some of these families have been waiting for over 10 years.”

“We are already trying to do too much with too little,” she continued. “We’re really concerned about what will happen to the people we care for. Will they be placed inappropriately in long-term care beds or even worse, in jails or mental health facilities? People with developmental disabilities deserve to have a stable home with the supports they need to live a good life. Without government commitment to adequate funding services are deteriorating and it’s the developmentally disabled who are suffering.”

The Nov. 3 lobby day was the beginning of a long-term campaign to educate elected MPPs about the needs of people with developmental disabilities and their responsibility to ensure that these vulnerable people get the care they need.

One size does not fit all

When it comes to the needs of people with developmental disabilities a variety of supports and services are essential.

As developmental service workers know better than anyone, the level of developmental disability varies widely from person to person.

Levels range from minor intellectual disabilities to severe or profound developmental disabilities, some have multiple disabilities, some have related health problems and some are dually diagnosed with serious behavioural issues.

People with developmental disabilities need a broad spectrum of services. Minimal supports are needed for high functioning individuals who can live independently and work in the community. Around the clock residential care with on-site medical support is needed for those with profound disabilities that leave them unable to speak or walk and suffer from fragile health. For most, the level of care required falls somewhere in the middle.

Lately we've been hearing that trying to stop the closure of the Regional Centres will hurt the care provided in the community. This is a line being spun by a Ministry that is trying to get away with continuing to under fund services for people with developmental disabilities. The Minister is trying to suggest it has to be one or the other. This is a foolhardy plan that sacrifices the extremely high-needs, aging residents of the Regional Centres.

If we truly want to provide quality developmental services, no one should be sacrificed. Rather than trying to pit one type of service against another, the Minister should be working with all of us to build services that ensure all people with developmental disabilities get the level of care they need.

Newly elected Sector 2 executive

Your "go to" list for developmental service workers in the BPS

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(905) 574-7445

Vice-Chair, Associations for Community Living (Sector 2a)

Grace Mungal, Local 251
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Vice-Chair, Schedule 2 agencies(Sector 2b)

Helen Riehl, Local 664
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Vice-Chair, Community Services(Sector 2c)

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Bargaining Representative

Peggy MacDonald, Local 433
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Health and Safety Representative

Ilanthe (Violet) Stringer
(613) 476-4533

IN PROFILE

Grace Mungal Developmental Service Worker, Community Living Mississauga

Grace Mungal works for Community Living Mississauga. She's also president of her 350 member local – two thirds of whom are part-time.

Though Grace loves caring for her developmentally disabled clients, she's found it impossible to ignore the serious problems part-timers face in her workplace. These members are mainly women and they earn on average \$3 an hour less than their full-time counterparts. They're often their family's main wage earner with no guaranteed hours. If they get sick they don't get paid. They have no drug plan and can't afford expensive medicines no matter how much they need them.

"I work with these women every day. They work hard. Most of them hold down more than one job and still most of them live at or below the poverty line," says Grace. "This just isn't right."

The increasing use of part-timers is a trend with developmental service agencies across Ontario - a direct result of the ongoing under-funding by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

"Hiring mostly part-timers isn't just bad for the workers, it affects the care our clients receive," she says. "They need ongoing, consistent care. The minute one of our part-timers finds a full-time job they're gone and our clients face another loss."

Grace has taken her fight for fair treatment of her part-time membership to the bargaining table.

"Agencies have to stop funding services by hiring mostly part-timers and paying them badly," says Grace. "Our part-time members work hard. They deserve equal wages and benefits."

OPS Developmental Services Occupational Committee

Fighting the closure of the Regional Centres

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Secretary/Treasurer

Executive Board Member
Dave Lundy, Rideau
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Member at large

Dave Chew, Huronia
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A pictures worth a thousand words...

In the community and in the Regional Centres:

OPSEU developmental service workers - caring for and empowering people with developmental disabilities.



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If you know someone we should profile or have a story idea or comment, please contact one of your editorial team members or call OPSEU head office and ask to speak to the communications department.

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SEFPO

IN PROFILE

Rose Clark Developmental Service Worker Southwestern Regional Centre

For Rose Clark, the hardest part of the planned Regional Centre closure is saying good-bye to the people she has cared for for more than 10 years - one since 1979.

Rose has worked at Southwestern for 28 years and now the residents in her area are the first to be moved out.

"I love my job because of the clients," says Rose. "They're just such neat people with wonderful, warm personalities. They're so trusting and caring. You get back what you give."

"Every morning I have one guy who says, 'Good morning Rosie. I love you,' and I will never see him again."

For Rose the closure is like having her family torn apart. The worst part is not knowing if they're going to be okay.

"Will they still get to dance?" she asks. "We have a dance here every week and it makes them so happy."

She also raises concerns about medical care and physiotherapy. Many of the residents regularly need these services provided at Southwestern by experts who specialize in working with people with developmental disabilities. The community has a shortage of doctors and physiotherapists.

"How can a bunch of politicians and bureaucrats in Toronto, who have never met the people I care for, just change a policy and say it's what's best for them?" asks Rose. "It's not right."