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OPSEU launches campaign to increase funding and respect for developmental service workers

Think you're alone? Think again!

Did you know that OPSEU represents 8000 people just like you who spend their days (and nights) caring for people with developmental disabilities?

On our own, none of us is able to improve our wages, stop violence in our workplaces, stop the overuse of part-time and casual staff, get better deals for part-time workers, keep the Regional Centres open or improve the quality of services we're able to provide people with developmental disabilities.

BUT when all 8,000 of us band together, just think what we can do.

That's why your elected leadership in the OPS and community based care have come together to launch a joint campaign. The campaign's focus:

- Increase public awareness of the incredibly important work we do.
- Pressure the government to stop under-funding services for people with developmental

disabilities.

- Improve our wages and pensions.
- Stop the closure of the Regional Centres.

Together we have the ability to improve our own lives - bring home more money, build good pensions to secure our future, and make sure we keep our jobs.

Look for workplace posters and newspaper ads to promote the value of the work we do.

Get ready to lobby! We are putting together lobby kits and organizing a full scale Queen's Park lobby for when MPPs are back at the Legislature in October.

The lobby will include OPSEU members in community agencies and the Regional Centres, along with families of people with developmental disabilities who value the work we do, are on waiting lists for services, or who are trying to stop losing the services they have.

Fighting for ourselves means improvements for the people we serve.

Closure of the Regional Centres is bad news for all

The Minister of Community and Social Service has announced plans to close Southwestern, Rideau and Huronia Regional Centres for the developmentally disabled starting this fall — a few residents have already been moved.

The three regional centres are home to 1,000 people with severe or profound developmental disabilities. Most of residents are over the age of 50 with many individuals in their 80s. Most have lived in these centres for more than 30 years. Many are medically fragile, have multiple disabilities, or are dually diagnosed with mental health disorders. Few have verbal skills and many are dependent on specially designed wheel chairs.

The Regional Centres care for people with developmental disabilities who need the highest level of support, including around-the-clock medical care. The Regional Centres are one of the few places in Ontario that offer this diverse level of specialized care.

There are thousands of people on waiting lists for community-based care. In the Greater Toronto Area alone, there are more than 2200 people whose aging parents can no longer care for them at home and are desperately waiting for a placement. Why should they be forced to wait longer while the Ministry fills community beds with the residents of the Regional Centres?

Rather than closing these centres at a time when Ontario is facing a crisis in the developmental service delivery, the centres should continue to deliver the high quality care they provide to their high-needs population.

Instead of closing their doors, the Minister should transform them into Centres of Excellence, allowing the aging high-needs residents to stay in their homes and allow community access to their specialized and much needed services.

The Ministry should be focused on investing in new community-based spaces that address the needs of those on waiting lists,

—————Hope on the Horizon—————

After more than a decade of serious under-funding, low wages, increased use of part-time and casual workers, high staff turnover, and reduction in available training, there may just be hope on the horizon...

The Metro Agencies Representatives Council (MARC) recently released 'Beyond

Numbers,' a report about the financial restraints and changing needs in developmental services. The report emphasizes the critical need of more funding to provide better wages to people working in developmental services.

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IN PROFILE

Violet Stringer Health and Safety Officer at Pathways

In a recent poll of OPSEU developmental service workers, 75 per cent said they often or sometimes face health and safety issues such as difficult lifting or violent behaviour from clients. No one is more concerned about this than Violet Stringer.

Violet has been working in developmental services since 1976 and became aware of the health and safety issue she and her fellow workers faced, early on in her career. She formed the unions first health and safety committee and became trained as an instructor. For more than 20 years Violet has worked with members and employers to promote safety on the job, and to teach members about their legal rights and ways of avoiding dangerous situations.

Thanks to Violet's hard work and expertise her employer has become proactive in striving to achieve a hazard-free workplace. She now works for Pathways to Independence as the agency's Health and Safety Officer. She also sits on OPSEU's Developmental Services Sector Two Executive as our Health and Safety Chair.

If anyone would like to get in touch with Violet her contact information is on the back page.

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The report states:

“Stagnating salaries makes it difficult to hire and retain full-time staff. There is already a shortage of trained developmental service workers as colleges have reduced the programs offered due to declining enrollment. Salaries in the sector are also no longer competitive with those offered by other sector employers.”

This may sound like us talking, but no — it’s our employers. When even our employers are saying they need to pay us more you know that times are changing.

The reality is we now hold the power. There is a serious shortage of trained developmental service workers in this province and as more and more parents age and can no longer care for their developmentally disabled child at home, the demand for services is on a steady increase. They need us and we need to make it clear — if they want our valuable, caring work they have to pay us what we’re worth.

It’s up to us to grab hold of this advantage and turn it into results — better pay and benefits, more control over our schedule and a safer and more supportive work environment.

Turning our advantage into results requires a three pronged plan:

1. A public awareness campaign

Most people in Ontario never have to think about services for the developmentally disabled, so the government never has to make funding for these services a priority because they know it won’t cost them votes.

We need to educate the public about the work we do and why it’s so important. The more visible we are the more pressure we will put on the government to properly fund developmental services.

2. MPP lobby

Unless MPPs have a personal connection to someone with developmental disabilities, they are usually unaware of the services that exist or the need for further investment.

It’s up to us to make them aware. The more they know about our issues the more likely they will be to support the need for more investment or even join us in putting pressure on the Premier and the Minister.

3. Bargaining

The more we work together the more power we have at the bargaining table.

As we continue to explore coordinated bargaining it’s important we develop clear and consistent demands increase our bargaining leverage by working with other locals that are also in bargaining.

IN PROFILE

Nancy Finn Dental Assistant at Rideau

For many people with developmental disabilities a simple dental procedure can cause significant anxiety and agitation. When the dentist or hygienist has no training in working with people with developmental disabilities this can lead to unnecessary sedation and hospitalization. A recent Ontario study shows that almost 50 per cent of community-based dental treatment for people with developmental disabilities requires full anesthetic, while anesthetic use in equivalent Regional Centre-based treatment was only 5 per cent. This is thanks to people like Nancy Finn who has worked as a dental assistant specializing in developmental disabilities for over 24 years.

Nancy provides assistance with dental care to the high-needs residents at Rideau Regional Centre. Along with her co-workers she provides more than 100 professional cleanings a month. Residents receive a thorough cleaning approximately every three months and a complete check-up twice a year. She also assists with restorative and surgical procedures such as fillings, tooth extractions, root canals, tooth replacement and bridge work. All this is done with little anesthetic and no need for costly hospital stays.

Nancy is just one example of the dedication developmental service workers have to the people they care for day in and day out. Her knowledge and understanding of the clients she serves improves their quality of life.

Centres of Excellence: Making services work for everyone

In March OPSEU submitted its Centres of Excellence report to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The report outlines OPSEU's review of Ontario's developmental services and proposes tangible solutions to improve access to services and allow aging people with severe developmental disabilities to maintain the care they need.

Proposals include:

Improved accessibility and individualized service

provision: Centres of Excellence would act as regional hubs for intake, needs assessment and access to all developmental services, by developing a province-wide inter-service database and building on regional centre expertise in the development of individual service plans.

Best Practices and policy

development: Centres of Excellence would provide the Ministry of Community and Social Services the ability to develop, monitor and update sector-wide Best Practice policy and guidelines to ensure quality and accountability across the developmental sector.

Quality and accountability in individualized service

provision: A central network for tracking programs and services would ensure clients are getting the quality services that meet their individual needs and ensure no one falls through the cracks.

Specialized medical, dental and therapeutic services: Building on

the high quality services provided in the Regional Centres by experts who specialize in working with the developmentally disabled, Centres of Excellence would provide regional hubs to address service gaps in the community.

Training and Research: Building on the college and university training programs already in operation at the Regional Centres, Centres of Excellence would provide an incredible foundation for Ontario to become a leader in training for new students and people already working in the community. The Centres would also provide the optimum setting for much needed research through on-site services and community access.

Specialized long-term care:

Building on the high quality services provided by the Regional Centres, Centres of Excellence would provide long-term care to meet the increasing need as the number of seniors with developmental disabilities continues to grow.

Respite care: Centres of Excellence would provide families one place to contact to find the respite care they need in their community or within the centre itself.

For a copy of the Centres of Excellence report visit:

www.opseu.org

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