



SEFPO

# FRONT *lines*

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A bulletin for  
members in the  
Ontario Public  
Service

## Innovative agreement changes how ODSP does business

The winds of change are starting to blow through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) – and everyone involved agrees that it's high time and good news.

The change will mean more staff participation in the way work is done. Members will have a say in the process. There will be a new system of training, a new orientation, better communication between workers and management to resolve problems and address issues. Staff will gain ownership over their work, and the employer will address the inadequacies of the computer system.

### Computer problems

Those inadequacies hit the front pages of daily papers July 6 when it was revealed that the \$500 million computer project run by Accenture (formerly Anderson Consulting) was incapable of calculating an increase for ODSP recipients.

The computer system's difficulty in reacting to changes – to a client's medical condition, family status, living arrangements, or other moves – has created stress and anguish for both clients and staff.

As the computer system was phased in, staff consistently asked

that the bugs be worked out before the next stage was implemented, but this never happened.

### Good for clients

Under the agreement, clients will get more information and better communication, with new pamphlets explaining processes and procedures. This will give them information so they don't have to make unneeded office visits, and so they can become less dependent on the system. Better outreach will mean better service for clients.

What began with a series of 10 grievances – individual, policy and group complaints on workload health and safety, filed between 1999 and 2003 – turned into an innovative "Joint Problem Solving Process" in March, 2003, after a year of scattered hearing dates before the Grievance Settlement Board (GSB).

### Hearings adjourned

At that point, the board adjourned hearings to permit the joint process. That entailed more than a year of monthly meetings before an agreement was reached in June.

Under that agreement, the Ministry of Community and Social

Services and the union will work together to build a positive working relationship at all levels, and to create safe, healthy, effective and innovative work environments throughout the ODSP. And if there are problems with implementation, the agreement can be enforced through the GSB.

### Delighted

Pam Smith, president of Local 455, was co-chair of the problem solving process. She's delighted that union members will get input into the way the ODSP works.

"When the ODSP was introduced in 1998, the ministry made radical changes to how workers did business without consultation or input. The new agreement will allow workers to once again gain some control and say in how they do their work."

One key to the success of this effort was a report by Wayne Lewchuk, director of the Labour Studies Program at McMaster University in Hamilton. He did a study of the ODSP, and found a link between workload and health and safety. The nature of the work was such that it hurt workers' health.

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Check the web: [www.opseu.org](http://www.opseu.org) has the latest on everything.

# Innovative agreement

**Continued from P1**

## Try something new

When OPSEU presented his evidence at the Grievance Settlement Board, the board and the employer agreed to try the new approach.

Smith said the employer knew something had to be done. A change of administration after the 2002 strike may have been a factor in getting the management co-operation, she said. She praised Marni Campbell, the director of social assistance and municipal operations for having the insight to go with the process and fix things.

For staff at the ODSP, the new agreement will mean an opportunity

for adequate training and a review of the operating standards. "It will introduce a new way for how we do our business. It will mean local office flexibility, employee input and promotion of a safe and healthy work environment," Smith said. "There will be separate and joint training for stewards and managers on grievance prevention and resolution, and we will explore things like local mediation and arbitration.

"There will be a new emphasis on better service for recipients and more accountability to taxpayers."

## Union committee

A union subcommittee will monitor the implementation of the

new agreement. That group is Smith, along with Normand Pilon of Local 615, Carolle Hamilton of Local 635, Ron Strong of Local 586, Leanne Pold-Della Vedova of Local 601 and Ministry Team Chair Roxanne Barnes.

Smith, Pilon, and Job Security Officer Stephen George worked out the details in meetings with four management representatives.

A series of meetings at each ODSP regional office will give union and management representatives a chance to explain to new agreement, which is to be fully implemented by July, 2005.

# Union demands review of Frost Centre closure

OPSEU has called on the McGuinty government to review its decision to close the Leslie Frost Centre, an outdoor education centre in the Haliburton Highlands.

The Ministry of Natural Resources notified the Frost Centre's 31 employees and the public earlier this week that the Centre will close July 14.

24,000 hectares of pristine crown land, currently accessible to the public, could be sold off.

"The government has justified the closure by saying it needs to focus on public services that matter to the public," said Leah Casselman, president of OPSEU. "The Frost Centre's educational programs and the surrounding crown land are

used by thousands of students and lovers of the outdoors.

"I think it's pretty obvious that educating our young people about the environment and preserving our natural heritage matters to people."

Casselman said the union shares the local community's outrage over the closure. She said the government should review its decision.

"The government should investigate whether the Ministry of Natural Resources could partner with another ministry, such as Education and Training," said Casselman. "In the meantime, the government should not attempt any quick sell-off of these valuable public assets."

Eric Roth, a maintenance technician and a 14-year employee of the Frost Centre, says employees were devastated by news of the closure.

"We have a sense of pride and protection about the place," said Roth, a steward with OPSEU Local 317. "The closure will be a big loss to the local economy and to future generations."

Authorized for publication by:



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