

# ComSoc MERC NEWS

News from your OPSEU Ministry Enforcement and Renewal Committee team for the Ministry of Community and Social Services



Issue No. 1  
Feb. 2006

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

### New article protects workers affected by closures

BY ROXANNE BARNES  
*Chair, MCSS MERC team*

It's been a while since our Divisional meeting where you elected a new MERC team.

Due to bargaining for the new OPS agreement, for the first six months we were only able to deal with issues surrounding the closure of our three Developmental Services facilities.

The employer did not want to deal with the issues until after we had a collective agreement signed. They came with no answers to a very long list of questions. We sent this concern to the chair of the OPS bargaining team, Marg Simmons.

The issue was tabled during bargaining, and as a result we obtained a new article in our Collective Agreement. Art. 36 states that we would establish a Reasonable Efforts Committee to look at employment and

training opportunities for members affected by the closure of the facilities.

We now have a new contract, and your MERC team is dealing with all unresolved issues within ComSoc. Our first couple of meetings was the same old thing — we presented issues and got no answers. But when we met again in October, it was like we were dealing with a new employer. We have the feeling that we are going to get results at our table, not just empty words.

The management co-chair, Linda MacQueen, left and now we have Colette Kent as management co-chair. Hopefully we will continue to see results and not revert back to empty words.

Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to your work places.



We are looking for interested members to assist us with the publishing of our newsletter.

Please submit any articles to [roxanne\\_barnes@hotmail.com](mailto:roxanne_barnes@hotmail.com) for our next issue. Please send in your ideas of what you might want to see in our newsletter.

### In this Bulletin:

<b>New article protects workers affected by closures</b> .....	1
<b>Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Subcommittee Report</b> .....	2
<b>Family Responsibility Office understaffed</b> .....	3
<b>Developmental Services Occupational Committee (DSOC)</b> .....	4
<b>Disability Rights Caucus opposes closures</b> .....	5

# Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Subcommittee Report

BY NORM PILON

*Chair, ODSP Subcommittee*

The members of the MERC ODSP Subcommittee have been meeting monthly since the end the last collective bargaining process.

Separate from the subject matters that we discuss, we tend to take for granted the manner in which the committee functions. This is a committee that works on the basis of understanding our different roles, open and meaningful dialogue and working collectively on those matters that are within the authority of the participants.

Given the experiences of the Joint Problem Solving Process, the committee members learned to communicate with a great deal of trust and respect for each other.

Our minutes are available on the OPSEU web site and on the SAMO web site.

## Joint Problem Solving Process

For those new ODSP members, and for those MCSS members that are not part of the Ontario Disability Support Program, the Harris government undertook a massive restructuring of

provincial and municipal programs and funding in the mid-1990s. The fashion in which public assistance was being delivered was a large piece of this restructuring.

The payment scheme for the private multinational company, Accenture, which designed the new delivery model for public assistance, went something like this: Your pay is relative to the savings you find within the system; the more you save the higher your profits. With such a formula, the results were devastating for our members who delivered Family Benefits Assistance and ODSP, and for the citizens of Ontario who have to rely on social assistance to meet their daily needs.

As a result of numerous health and safety grievances, the ministry asked representatives from OPSEU and members of the MERC ODSP Subcommittee to enter into a dialogue to review and possibly improve some of the problems that existed within ODSP.

OPSEU agreed to leave in abeyance the grievance to provide time for discussion to take place. These discussions became know as the Joint Problem Solving Process. They started in early 2003

and culminated with a Memorandum of Agreement signed in April 2004.

This agreement is significant for OPSEU members within MCSS. The ministry acknowledged that OPSEU was an entity within the workplace and that it needed to be included in the dialogue, planning and implementation of change.

Within ODSP, the first significant event was to bring changes to the delivery of ODSP from a cold, anonymous assembly-line process to more of a social work/services approach where people (staff and clients) know each other by name and where workers have more control over their work.

This was significant, but the fashion in which OPSEU and the Ministry agreed to bring about these changes is ground-breaking and unprecedented within the OPS. The parties agree to work within their local union and management structures to empower local employees (bargaining unit and management) to work together to make changes that best met their needs.

This work is not yet complete, and although the

*continued on p. 3*

*continued from p. 2*  
principles behind this venture appear simple, putting this in practice has not been without hurdles. By far the biggest hurdle has been the need to change our mindset from how we dealt with labour relations in the past — adversarial and at times confrontational — to a more open consultative process of respect and working together for a common goal.

Learning to work more cooperatively together and changing the ODSP service delivery model is well underway but in many offices this has not concluded.

On behalf of the MERC ODSP Subcommittee, our hats are off to all of you who have taken the challenge. Your commitment to improve the workplace for you and your members and your

commitment to improve how we deliver public assistance to this vulnerable segment of Ontario that we serve is exemplary and continues to be a hallmark of who we are within OPSEU and within MCSS. This is an enormous undertaking and we wish you courage, patience and determination.

---

## Family Responsibility Office understaffed

BY SHAWN LAVERY

The Family Responsibility Office's role is to enforce court orders for child and spousal support by ensuring that support payments flow from the payors (people who make support payments) to recipients (people who receive them). The office has the legal authority to take enforcement action against those that do not meet their family obligations.

While every support order in Ontario is registered with our program, clients have the option of withdrawing from the program so that they can make their own private payment arrangement.

Since 1996, the Family Responsibility Office has operated a call centre in

Toronto staffed by 350 OPSEU members. While providing service, employees have been managing issues rather than cases. Since 2001, our office has been working to introduce a new service-delivery model while staff struggle in a chronically under-resourced program.

In May, 1995, the contract to develop a new service delivery model was awarded.

The office has an active Local Employer/Employee Relations Committee (LERC) and Health and safety Committee. In 2002, management was required to establish a Workload Committee. The Ministry Employer/Employee Relations Committee recognized that our program had special workload issues and wants

management and the union to explore alternative solutions to workload issues.

In the past few years, these committees have raised numerous issues and successfully influenced management actions. Some of these issues include our office's identification policy – use of first name and ID rather than full name, attendance policy, human resources practices, PDR criteria, mould issues, building retrofit issues and site security.

# Developmental Services Occupational Committee (DSOC)

BY TAMMY KIRKWOOD  
*Chair, DSOC Subcommittee*

The families of residents and the local members who worked on our campaign to keep the regional centres open must be applauded for their untiring efforts.

The court ruling handed down Jan. 26 will force the Ontario government to fund top-quality community care for people with developmental disabilities before it can move them out of Ontario's regional centres.

Superior Court Justice Charles Hackland said that the 1,000 residents at the three remaining regional centres cannot be moved from those facilities without their consent or the consent of their legal guardians.

We know the services just aren't there to put another 1,000 people with severe disabilities into the community. This ruling gives our residents and their families the power to force Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello to pay for the high level of care they need.

At the OPS Divisional Meeting in January, 2005, the Developmental Services Occupational Committee

was elected. In September, DSOC was given the task of heading the Stop the Closure campaign, beginning with a proposal to the executive board for funds to mobilize the members to get involved with educating the public about the resources available at the centres, and to have the Centres of Excellence Proposal adopted by this Liberal government.

Meanwhile, James Gray, a brother of a resident started a class action lawsuit against the government to stop the impending closures of the Rideau Regional Centre (RRC). The case was heard in Ottawa Superior Court on Sept. 22. A bus donated by the OPSEU Orillia Area Council carried members from Huronia Regional Centre, MPP Garfield Dunlop, and the MCSS MERC chair to show support to RRC lawyers and families as they embarked on their endeavour to obtain an order for and injunction to stop the placement of the residents at Rideau. A 90-day stay was put in place, preventing the placement of any resident without the expressed consent of a family member or guardian.

The families from Huronia Regional Centre (HRC)

also launched a lawsuit in September and by October through mutual agreement with the Crown also received a 90 day stay.

Tammy Kirkwood, Local 323 and chair of DSOC, attended a meeting at Southwestern Regional Centre (SRC) by invitation of the Parents Auxiliary, along with the President of the Huronia Helpers. This meeting was to allow the families insight into the proceedings of Huronia families fight to keep the centres open.

The Chair of DSOC along with the president of Local 436, Dave Lundy, attended another meeting in Chatham to educate staff and parents from (SRC) on their rights and limitations during the STOP THE CLOSURE campaign.

SRC parents later banned together and formed Saviours of Southwest (SOS), now actively involved with stopping the closure of the facilities.

DSOC has also been meeting with Steve Sanderson, third vice-president of CUPE towards a common goal, encouraging the government to look at the crisis facing the community. More than a decade of under-funding has caused cuts to staffing,

*continued on p. 5*

*continued from p. 4*  
training, resources, housing, transportation, and support services.

On top of this, the Minister wants to add another 1,000 high-needs persons to the mix.

The waiting lists of more than 6,000 persons with developmental disabilities across the province will only increase if not dealt with immediately. When does the health and welfare of those individuals waiting for services become paramount?

The Developmental Services Occupational Committee is committed to supporting the staff, residents and families to ensure that all rights are preserved.

Support from all our brothers and sisters in OPSEU is appreciated and required as we attempt to show the Minister that one size does not fit all!!

Thanks are extended wholeheartedly to the lawyers representing these families for the outstanding job they have done.

www.savehuroniacentre.com  
www.rrcassociation.ca

DSOC (OPS)

Chair: Tammy Kirkwood Local 323  
kurkles@sympatico.ca  
705-730-8444

Secretary/Treasurer:

Dave Lundy Local 436

Member-at-Large:

David Chew Local 323

---

## Disability Rights Caucus opposes closures

**BY GREG SNIDER**

*Chair, OPSEU Disability Rights Caucus*

The OPSEU Disability Rights Caucus felt that it may have something to contribute to the battle to keep members employed at the three developmental services facilities slated for closure. OPSEU Campaigns Officer Sara Jordison attended the January, 2005, caucus meeting and discussed how to combat these closures.

The members of the Disability Rights Caucus understand there is an anti institutional bias in the Disability Community.

There is some justification for this bias, but we also know that these closures are more about saving money and a dumping of provincial responsibility than for the improvement of the lives of those living in today's Centres of Excellence.

In November, 2005, the Disability Rights Caucus sat together at the CLC Disabilities Conference and listened, with OPSEU Brother Greg Bondy, a worker in one of the facilities scheduled to close. Cathy Suijker, who works with one of the Associations for Community Living represented by OPSEU, told us that her

worksite had also been closed due to funding cuts.

Clearly the services are not better in the community. This story did not go untold, either to the CLC Conference, or my Member of Parliament. Perhaps it's just easier to hide the cutbacks.



Authorized for Distribution:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Leah Casselman'.

Leah Casselman, *President*