

# ComSoc MERC NEWS

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

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## ODSP Day of Action, March 4, 2008

By ANITA COHEN,  
PRESIDENT LOCAL 586



*ODSP Day of Action: With President Thomas in Toronto*

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It was a great day for ODSP staff right across Ontario! Congratulations to all our brothers and sisters who work for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) throughout Ontario, on our Day of Action, March 4, 2008.

The Day of Action was a day of picketing, and sharing information. It was a day of reaching out to the communities, our community partners, the media and MPPs.

In demonstrations all across the province, we sent a message: we let them know ODSP

workers just cannot provide the services and benefits to clients within the timeframes that the government boasts it is providing.

The media recognized our valiant efforts everywhere but in the Greater Toronto Area. Was it because housing advocates – our allies – chose that day to storm city hall? Or do the Toronto media just not care about poverty?

This started with a province-wide workload issue grievance that led to a Memorandum of Settlement. Then Dr. Wayne

Lewchuk from McMaster University completed his study.

That was followed by a two-year joint labour/employer problem-solving committee: a textbook failure. It was an attempt by the government to provide everything except what is required to alleviate the record number of OPSEU members forced to go on sick leave.

The reality: Our members are overworked, stressed out, unsuccessfully juggling caseloads, failing to serve clients to the standards of

## ODSP Day of Action (cont.)

the Ministry's expectations and booking off record sick time.

Dr. Lewchuk documented that there was a minimal change to the workers' plight; the failure to add staff to alleviate the 520:1 ratio of client to worker. The government has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on band-aid solutions to the staffing problem.

There is no solution other than additional staff.

The employer hides this because the conscientious workers — our members — work through their lunch

hours, work extra minutes in the morning and stay beyond their workday. It has been out of the goodness of their hearts, the genuine concern they have for their clients.

The workers are not paid for this work AND it gives the appearance that additional staff is not required. This is unrecognized, unpaid time.

We have been working for free!

For the sake of fairness to the workers and clients, for the sake of health and safety, this practice of free labour must stop. More

staff is needed.

Our many thanks to Brother Smokey Thomas, Sister Patty Rout, all the Executive Board Members (EBMs), the brothers and sisters from other work sites, and OPSEU staff for their quick response to helping put together the Day of Action, for your incredible support.

**Please go to OPSEU's website <http://www.opseu.org/ops/ministry/odsp/odspindex.htm> to read about the Day of Action. Keep your eyes open for more action to come.**



Woodstock, Ontario



President Greg Snider speaking to the Thunder Bay Chronical Journal newspaper



Brantford, Ontario

## ODSP Walk for a Healthy Workplace Thursday, May 22: 12 Noon - 1 pm

On May 22, all available ODSP workers in communities across Ontario will put down their files at 12 noon to participate in a Walk for a Healthy Workplace. This action is the next stage in the campaign to address the ODSP understaffing crisis, which follows on the release of 2007 report that showed ODSP staff experience abnormal rates of illness, stress, tension and high absentee rates caused by unmanageable caseload

demands. Every ODSP frontline worker in Ontario handles an average of 530 cases. This compares with a national average of about 250 cases for every support worker. On May 22, show your support by joining the Walk for a Healthy Workplace at an ODSP office near you.

**For more information and updates, please visit:**  
<http://www.opseu.org/ops/ministry/odsp/odspindex.htm>



# Developmental services update

BY LIZ DAUBNEY



A lot has happened in Developmental Services since our last newsletter. In August 2007 a Memorandum of Agreement was reached with the ministry enhancing our members' entitlements. But as with everything, there have been some bumps in the road putting this agreement into place. The agreement has increased funding for re-training, resume writing, career counselling, opportunities through postings, to name a few. (See OPSEU's website for the agreement or your union representative.)

There have been six rounds of surplusings in total and some of our members have been able to exit through the Variable Surplus Date Agreement. There have been, however, many members who have been surplusings who have chosen to remain available and are awaiting their redeployment. There have not been many who have been directly assigned

within the OPS and this has to change. The employer is bound by the Collective Agreement to look for direct and conditional assignments and this is non-existent or slow going. The reasons are varied as to why jobs have not been found but I would encourage anyone who is looking to stay with the OPS to assess their skills and upgrade them as needed to make themselves more "redeployable." These assignments are limited to the terms of the Collective Agreement as laid out in Article 20B.3 and 20B.12 with the restrictions such as 5 per cent above and 15 per cent below your current salary. As such, you may need to obtain more or different skill sets. There are funds there and a commitment from the employer to work with you to try to accommodate training schedules. Tap into whatever your Career Centre has to offer and suggest to them what you are interested in or need.

On a personal note, after much reflection, I put my name on the Variable Surplus Date List and have been surplusings. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who I have worked with through this very difficult time. Roxanne you are a work horse and a slave driver!! Keep up the exceptional work, Sister. I am proud to call you Sister and take care of

## **THIS CENTRAL COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT**

made on the 31st day of August, 2005

between

### **THE ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION**

(Hereinafter referred to as the "Union")

and

### **THE CROWN IN RIGHT OF ONTARIO**

Represented by

### **MANAGEMENT BOARD OF CABINET**

(Hereinafter referred to as the "Employer")

*Central Collective Agreement, Ontario Public Service*

yourself. Ron and Shawn keep up the fight. With my departure, my alternate David Chew has joined the MERC Team in February. I would be remiss if I did not thank our Job Security Officer, Stephen George, for his insight, support and especially, his patience. He has been awesome and I will miss his "having said that"!!!

This whole closure process never easy, but your support and hard work have made it easier. There is still work to be done to continue with the Reasonable Efforts motto — "The best for the most".

# Message from the MERC Chair

BY ROXANNE BARNES

There has been a lot going on in our ministry over the last year. Just to highlight a few items, the Interest Based Problem Solving Training continued; the Bullying in the Workplace Policy in the Hamilton/Niagara Region developed; Program reviews were conducted at FRO, South West Region, North East Region; An MOA for the DS facilities was signed; the Northern recruitment Pilot Project rolled out; and the Ottawa ODSP office finally moved.

The Lewchuk report was released in June 2007. It is on the OPSEU's web site at: <http://www.opseu.org/ops/ministry/odsp/June%2007%20Lewchuk%20report.pdf>. We have raised the concerns entailed in the report, to no avail.

This led us to spearhead our campaign of awareness on ODSP understaffing.

Thanks to Greg Hamara and Mary-Anne DiAdamo, and many other OPSEU staff, for their hard work and dedication to this campaign; to the ODSP subcommittee for all their assistance in putting this campaign together; and the executive board of OPSEU for their support. Stay tuned for the next steps.

We engaged in IBPS with the employer to try and resolve the Plexiglas grievance in Windsor. We left that table with the understanding that we had an agreement but somewhere along the way it fell apart and we will be off to the GSB on

April 17, 2008.

I had the opportunity, along with OPSEU's First Vice-President/Treasurer Sister Patty Rout, and Brothers Eric Morin (OPS CERC Chair) and Bob Eaton (OPSEU Administrator), to meet with our minister, Hon. Madeleine Meilleur. We raised the issue of the ODSP workload and under resourced program.

The minister asked me to relay a message to the members, "We've heard you; we hear you; I want you to thank the members for their dedication; it's their work." These are fine words, but unfortunately there was no commitment to increase resources to the ODSP.

We will continue to voice our concerns with every chance we get. They will be tired of hearing from us. But here is a message to the minister and our employer: "We are not going away."

Thanks to all our members including those who have left our ministry, for their dedication and hard work. You are a great team to work with. Keep up the great work and the fight!

## Sister Liz Daubney takes her surplus factor 80

In December 2007 Sister Liz Daubney called me to have a conversation about issues in the DS facilities. She also told me she had put her name on the VSD list. Although I was saddened by the news, I knew that it was a very difficult decision for Liz.

Liz was very dedicated to the

work that she had done, both in the workplace and on the committees that she sat on. I can not thank Liz enough for all the hard work and the support that she gave me. Enjoy your retirement, you so much deserve it.

With the departure of Sister Liz Daubney, I welcome Brother David Chew to the MERC. Brother Chew comes to us from Huronia Arsenal Centre where he is a residential counsellor and the local president. He is also the chair of DSOC. Welcome David.

**In Solidarity,  
Roxanne Barnes  
MERC Chair**



## Bargaining 2008

We are now in another year of bargaining. The Ontario Public Service Agreement expires this Dec. 31. Bargaining is set to begin soon. Please be proactive within your local and attend your demand setting meetings.

The elected bargaining team will need your support. It is your contract, Keep informed!

# NUPGE income assistance workers meet

BY DORIS MIDDLETON

Recently I was part of a delegation invited to a meeting of “income assistance” workers from across Canada, members of component-unions of our national union, NUPGE (National Union of Public and General Employees).

NUPGE is made up of unions that have a similar composition to OPSEU, from most Canadian provinces. A total of 19 delegates from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island gathered in Ottawa Oct. 15-16, 2007.

The representatives attending from Ontario (OPSEU) were Roxanne Barnes, MCSS MERC co-chair Cindy Hayes Wright, MERC ODSP subcommittee member, Ken Hord and this writer

The focus of the two days was on a broad range of policy issues and labour relations developments. It quickly became apparent that many of OPSEU’s concerns in this field were common across Canada.

Some problems that OPSEU had dealt with were of interest to our sister unions. The other component representatives were very impressed with the process of the Lewchuk Report and its findings. However, we advised them that the recommendations of the report, in OPSEU’s opinion, had not been acted on by management to any great extent.

Throughout the two days of lively discussion two main

themes emerged. They were the shrinking funds for social assistance across the country and the excessive caseloads and their effect on our work environments.

## Other common issues that came forward:

\*Management’s inability to fill positions within a reasonable period of time so that already short staffed offices are even more so,

\*Classification issues across the country seemed to be common- additional duties being added to jobs and positions being under classified,

\*Increase in number of clients with mental health and addiction issues which leads to more stressful and difficult encounters with clients,

\*Increased health and safety issues- i.e. bullying from managers and other staff members, increasing incidence of violence in the workplace encounters with clients, heightened exposure to communicable diseases and sick building syndrome,

\*Ergonomic issues because of increased time working on computers and less time in the field,

\*High stress and burnout rate because of increased caseload/ workload and difficult clients as well as lack of support from management.

A great revelation — Ontario leads the country in caseload size! In our discussions and information sharing it was realized that caseloads varied in size from 700 in Ontario to 120 in the Eastern provinces.

Two excellent guest speakers provided informative and confirming presentations. Ginette Clarke from the Canadian Association of Social Workers and Rob Rainer, the Executive Director of the National Antipoverty Organization gave dynamic overviews of their fields and work.

Although their addresses to us may not have been specific to our roles in these worlds, they shared with us similar concerns. Those concerns included underfunding, lack of recognition for the issues and a low priority given to these issues by the governments of the day.

There were also some very apparent differences between the unions. For example, in all provinces except for Ontario, social assistance is a one-tiered program. The disability program is integrated into the overall social assistance program and is delivered by the province.

Wage range and educational requirements varied dramatically across the country. Some provinces did have the right to strike in this sector while others were prohibited.

At the end of the two days the delegation from Ontario came away from the meeting

## NUPGE income assistance workers meet (cont.)

motivated and inspired to act on the shortcomings of our division. Management does not seem to have made any serious

attempts to help rectify the problems that would make our work lives and the lives of our clients better. The campaign that

OPSEU is undertaking over the next two months is part of that action...to work towards making it better.

## Getting involved: An OPSEU activist's journal

BY CINDY HAYES-WRIGHT

After many years of being involved in my local, I decided it was time to become involved on a provincial level. I decided to run for the ODSP subcommittee at the 2006 Divisional meetings.

After being elected as the secretary/treasurer I was not quite sure what to expect. It is a decision I'm glad I made.

After meeting the other subcommittee members and recognizing their dedication, I knew it was going to be a busy and productive two years. The committee faced important challenges; the Lewchuk report certainly made us aware of the

difficulties our members face in the workplace.

We continue to meet with the Employer dealing with workload issues, stress in the workplace and Health and Safety issues on behalf of the members. We will continue to move forward on the issues over the remainder of this term.

### ODSP sub-committee work

Since being elected to the subcommittee in Nov. 2006 there have been many opportunities to gain additional knowledge in the interactions of committee. These experiences for most part have been positive ones.

While these experiences are of a great asset to me personally they shall just as importantly enhance my skills at the table where I'm one of those elected to act on behalf of the interest of the OPSEU members within ODSP.

The future appears to be shaping up to be extremely busy period of time for the Subcommittee, with the transition of IBPS to the Regional Offices and further discussions with the employer in regards to Dr. Lewchuk's recent review, findings and recommendations.

## Respect in the Workplace

BY STUART MCINNIS

In late 2006, a Local OPSEU President expressed some concerns about bullying in the workplace to the Hamilton-Niagara ODSP Program Manager.

This led to a working group consisting of three managers, three OPSEU members, an OPSEU staff member. This group was facilitated by Kathleen Tribe.

The group first met in Dec. 2006 and arrived with a final document late April 2007.

The working group quickly learned they would be breaking new ground on the issue of bullying in the workplace. There was no federal or provincial legislation in place on

workplace bullying.

The final document was approved by the Hamilton-Niagara Regional Management Team (RMT) to be added to the Regional Standards of Conduct. This addition to the Standards of Conduct prompted immediate mandatory training for all Hamilton-Niagara MCSS / MCYS Staff.

The document includes procedures and guidelines to all management and staff as to their responsibility. It also outlines a process in dealing with those that may make false accusations of bullying in the workplace.

Their may be a need for such

a policy in your workplace. If so, please contact your immediate manager, Program Manager and/or your RD, requesting they make enquires of this Policy Standard of Conduct contact to the Human Resources manager of Hamilton Niagara Area.



Authorized for distribution:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Thomas".

Warren (Smokey) Thomas, *President*