



Sept. 10, 2004

Local Action

Information for OPSEU members at regional centres in the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services

It's official: Facilities to close -- time to turn up the heat! Fight for our jobs and clients

Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello publicly announced the closure of the last three regional centres by March 31, 2009.

This is an immoral move – for the clients and for all the dedicated OPSEU members who work with them in their homes. As we all know from earlier “*Local Actions*” circulated in our facilities, we knew this announcement was coming.

Now that it's official, it's time to turn up the heat.

Thanks, in large part, to the work you've been doing to date in your communities, the announcement got province-wide coverage, and your voice was heard. An editorial in the Welland Tribune summed up our concerns very well: “On paper it looks good, but in practice it's full of pitfalls.”

OPSEU President Leah Casselman told a news conference that residents of the three institutions have a multitude of developmental and mental disabilities and require around-the-

clock care. OPSEU members are concerned that there won't be enough community support available to ensure they get the care they require.

“We do not have confidence in the Ontario Liberal government to provide the complex system of support required,” she said.

Local and provincial politicians are getting on board to stop these closures. Orillia Mayor Ron Stevens has publicly spoken out against the closure, and is demanding a meeting with the minister to discuss it.

Liberal MPP Pat Hoy, who represents the riding in which

Southwest Regional Centre is located, continues to speak out against the closure. The NDP also sent out a strongly-worded press release opposing the plan. NDP MPP Gilles Bisson says the McGuinty government's decision to close regional centres for Ontarians with developmental disabilities is all about cutting funding and could vulnerable people at risk.

“The community support these residents will need simply doesn't exist,” Bisson said. “Group homes are closing not expanding.”

OPSEU requests information on contract entitlements

The OPSEU Job Security Unit has requested the employer indicate what part of the OPS of the collective agreement (either Appendix 18 or Article 20) will be applied to your entitlements on closure of the DS facilities. We are awaiting a response. The terms of the Collective Agreement will be adhered to with regards to their entitlements. OPSEU will alert members as soon as the employer's position is known.

OPS bargaining can help

The closure of the three regional centres is part of a number of initiatives that the provincial “Fiberals” have planned. Over the past 10 years, the Ontario Public Service has undergone sweeping changes with massive budget cuts and layoffs, privatization, downloading, mergers of functions, an increase in the use of fee-for-service consultants and temp agency workers and many other changes.

By the end of the Liberals first term, more than 5,000 jobs will be lost. No matter what ministry you work in, the lives of OPSEU members will continue to be turned upside down.

The impression is not improved by the fact that the Liberals have – so far – refused to undo a major Tory move. During the election campaign, McGuinty promised

to restore “successor rights” to OPS employees. Successor rights mean that employees who are divested from the public service have the legal right to move to the new employer with their, their collective agreement and their union intact. So far, nothing has changed. The Tory law is still in place.

Fortunately, you have access to a critical tool – your collective agreement. Your agreement sets out your pension, your benefits and your job security entitlements. It is a strong agreement, but it can do better. This fall, you and your elected bargaining team will have an opportunity to figure out how to shape the changes the employer wants to make. The bargaining team will have to decide how it can protect members from stress

and suffering created by the employer’s restructuring plans. How can job security and employment stability be improved so members have access to work and other key protections?

Your campaign to fight the closures will be an important part of supporting your bargaining team. The closure of your facility will have a negative impact on you and your clients. The employer and your community needs to hear this loud and clear. Not only today, but in the coming months as you work with your bargaining team – we have a vision for our community and for the Ontario public service.

The way to rebuild public services in Ontario is to start with the foundation of the public service and this is people. When you start treating the people and clients with respect, when you start recognizing their needs – that is when you will see public services improve. That is our challenge in the months ahead.

Stay tuned to your Local

Your Local Presidents will be working with your Ministry Employee/Employer Relations Committee (MERC) and OPSEU staff to develop a clear campaign plan to follow on the great work we’ve been doing to date. Contact your Local President if you’ve not already done so to let them know you’re ready to do what it takes to try to save your jobs and the lives of clients.

At **Southwestern** Regional Centre contact Rose Clark at (519) 676-5431 ext. 2368 or (519) 351-6713

At **Huron** Regional Centre, contact Liz Daubney at (705) 326-7361 ext. 2402 or (705) 327-5896

At **Rideau** Regional Centre, contact Dave Lundy at (613) 284-0123 ext 2600 or (613) 269-2584



Authorized for distribution by Leah Casselman, president.