

MSN adds to workload burden in ODSP

As of March 2008, the number of beneficiaries of the ODSP hit a new high mark of 332,627 – an increase of more than 20 per cent from when the program was established in 1998.

Contributing to the dramatic growth has been the demands placed on ODSP staff by the addition of the Mandatory Special Necessities (MSN).

MSN was not part of the ODSP model when it was established almost a decade ago. The responsibility for administering the MSN benefit, which includes Diabetic Supplies, Surgical Supplies and Medical Transportation, was transferred from the Ontario Works Municipal world in 1999 to ours without staffing resources.

The MSN workload responsibility has tripled for the Income Support Specialist (ISS) and Client Services Rep (CSR) since the implementation of this benefit.

Notwithstanding a policy review and the results of focus group testing, nothing has changed. The issue has been on the table of the ODSP sub committee, but there has been no progress on caseload reduction.

No one is able to predict the amount of requests or which office will receive them, or what the unique

needs will be for each individual recipient.

In September 2007 the employer advised us there would be discussion and feedback within six months. That deadline has come and gone and now the position of the employer is that it has been put on the backburner because of other priorities.

The MSN workload has been constantly increasing due to Consolidated Verification Process (CVP) and Intake.

This remains a priority issue for your ODSP MERC subcommittee, regardless of the employer's dithering.

Welcome to the first issue of *Crunch*

Staff with the Ontario Disability Support Program now have a newsletter all of their own.

Welcome to the first issue of the **Crunch** – a newsletter intended to keep ODSP staff across Ontario up-to-date with news and information affecting you and your workplace.

Working conditions inside the ODSP have been under the microscope the past couple of years. The important research conducted by Prof. Wayne Lewchuk found that high caseload demands have caused an increase in the stress, tension and ill health of our members. The decision to begin publication of a newsletter like **Crunch** is another step by your union, OPSEU, to improve the lines of communication so that positive change takes place inside our workplaces.

We are always looking for ways to improve the content of **Crunch**. ODSP staff is strongly encouraged to submit story ideas or personal experiences that you feel would benefit your brothers and sisters inside ODSP. To submit material – or to get your name added to our email distribution list – please contact a member of your ODSP MERC subcommittee. Contact information can be found on the next page.



Photo by Brian Willier

OPSEU president Smokey Thomas, centre, was joined by dozens of ODSP staff in downtown Toronto for the successful March 4 Day of Action.

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ODSP staff in North Bay enjoyed a day of sunshine at the May 22 Walk for a Healthy Workplace

Lack of training hurts ODSP delivery

How does lack of training affect you? And what does lack of training really mean in the in the ODSP world?

Once upon a time many years ago when Service Delivery Model Technology (SDMT) rolled out everyone went on training. The level of training was limited to your job position and the extent of any previous training you had received.

The staff turnover 10 years ago was very small. We had just downsized from the Family Benefit Act (FBA) and the staff numbers were chopped in half across the province.

Since then we have seen numerous changes to the ODSP/SDMT world and how new staff get trained, or more accurately, how they don't get trained. It has been years since we have enjoyed the services of a trainer and this absence is showing in the work that we struggle to perform.

The lack of training is very revealing and shows itself in output. Believe it or not we even have Eligibility Review Officers (EROs) who have been permanent for many years and still have not received core training.

Our Ministry seems to take the position that it's cheaper to avoid putting a proper training program in place – regardless of the negative impact it has on public service.

In the view of MCSS Minister Madeleine Meilleur, everything is just fine. Staff has been added to process files and improve frontline service; processes have been streamlined to reduce paperwork, and improved technology has eased the pressures on frontline workers.

That may be the view from the Minister's office but the reality on the ground is something different.

We take pride in the service of our work and the clients we serve, but like any fine tuned machine with no check ups or training sessions it quickly erodes the program integrity of the ODSP.



CVP targets decreased

The subject of insufficient resources in ODSP has been discussed directly or indirectly for as long as the subcommittee has been in existence. In his final report Professor Wayne Lewchuk of McMaster University recommended that changes be resourced. Based on his findings, OPSEU requested that the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) implementation be resourced and if the government could not resource the implementation it needed to reduce some workload targets.

At the June 2008 meeting, we were advised that the ADM had agreed to reduce CVP targets from 2 per cent to 0.5 per cent for the months of July and August 2008. Communication of this reduction was left up to the regions. As we go to print with the newsletter we had not been made aware that these targets had been reduced for two months. This reduction is to be included with the fiscal year end CVP target.

Interest Based Problem Solving (IBPS)

Over the past few years OPSEU and the employer have been trying to change how we communicate with one another within our local offices. This was articulated within the MOA of 2004 and the New Framework for Service Delivery of 2005, subsequently followed with training of managers and stewards on the use of IBPS. Members of the ODSP subcommittee have just about concluded the final edits to the next phase in improving local communications – the Joint Problem Solving Process (JPSP) Transition to Regions should be out shortly.

OPSEU Division meeting Nov. 15-16

Mark your calendars! The OPSEU Divisional meeting is scheduled for Nov. 15-16 at the Fairmount Royal York hotel in Toronto. ODSP is part of the MCSS Occupational Group. During these meetings we review OPSEU policy and, most importantly, elect our representatives for the next two years on the MERC team and the ODSP subcommittee. We strongly encourage all ODSP offices to send a representative.

Hang on to those T's, pins and scarves!

Negotiations with the Ontario Public Service begins in a few short months. Solidarity is the key to our success. Hang on to any pins, T shirts, scarves and other material you have that displays the OPSEU or ODSP logo and be prepared to wear them proudly when the time comes. Stay tuned for more details!

Work Place Wellness

The latest cliché from our employer is this: *Work-Life Balance*.

Sounds great!

A healthy work life balance can be an asset to both the employer and employee.

A healthier, happier employee can be more productive and provide better customer service. The employee has less stress. In theory this should lead to a reduction of stress-related ailments and illnesses. This was at the core of previous reports by Dr Wayne Lewchuk on behalf of the ministry and OPSEU.

At the ODSP the employer's overall goal has been to improve the program and customer service. A healthier program and happier client equal outcomes. Clients were happier with additions to the program and improved customer service.

This in turn lead to less negative calls to the clients' MPP, which makes the elected representative happier.

This has been achieved, in part, through good discussions with the bargaining agent at the sub committee.

Future discussion must include our health and wellness where it demands to be treated as a priority.

Budget fails to address ODSP understaffing crisis

In spite of a massive show of support for the ODSP 'Day of Action' on March 4 from staff and labour supporters across Ontario, the McGuinty government and the Ministry of Community and Social Services ignored the needs of the ODSP in this year's Spring Budget.

While spending increased in other ministries, the government chose to turn a blind eye to the needs of the ODSP where mounting caseloads and the resulting workload burden continue to exact a toll on staff workers through illness, stress, tension and high rates of absenteeism.

MERC sub committee chair Normand Pilon said the government's indifference to the problems facing staff is at odds with McGuinty's pledge to reduce poverty in Ontario.

"On the one hand the government is determined to reduce poverty," said Pilon. "But at the same time it is underfunding the public services we have – like ODSP – that can make a real difference in the fight against poverty.

"Until the government gets serious about increasing the level of staffing in the ODSP, so that our clients receive the services they are entitled to, then there will be no real progress in the war on poverty."

Lewchuk Report

To view the complete Lewchuk Report on work and health conditions inside the ODSP please visit:
<http://www.opseu.org/ops/ministry/odsp/odspindex.htm>
and follow the links.

The ODSP Crunch is authorized for distribution by:



Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, OPSEU

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