



Illustration: Lisa Walter

It all starts with Shauna: Building Local Capacity

by Scott Kennedy and Barbara Thomas

Shauna has just been elected president of her local of 540 members. She was acclaimed because nobody else ran in a meeting that barely had quorum. It is her first week, and she can hardly breathe, she is so overwhelmed by the challenges she is beginning to see.

Her past president has retired leaving few documents and little advice; the local is two and a half years in financial arrears with most of the records tangled in a box at the bottom of the filing cabinet.

She has three active stewards in one of the five units of her composite local, a new vice-president, and a person prepared to act as treasurer until they can convince someone to run for the position.

One of her new units has just been certified but is, as yet, without a contract.

Does this sound like the twisted nightmare of a union activist? It's real enough.


OPSEU's Building Local Capacity Project, now in its third year, starts with Shauna, the local leader brave enough to step forward, and wise enough to be alarmed.

The Project aims to provide practical support to local leaders working together to assess the strengths and shortcomings of their local, and to develop a feasible plan of action. It has a full-time coordinator, and is supported by an education officer from the Training and Development Unit.

Actions and Tools for Local Support

So far, the Building Local Capacity Project has produced:

- local assessment and action planning tools
- orientation on the tools for all regional staff
- increased support for local capacity-building in regional offices
- work with 23 pilot locals in seven regions to develop action plans
- revisions to the *Local Treasurers' Course*, and increased availability of the course in the regions
- seven 2-hour modules for newly certified units, piloted in 4 regions
- new course called *LEC Leadership and Team Development*, piloted and available to regions this fall
- new course on *Workplace Investigations* currently being rolled out in all regions
- *New Local Presidents' First Week Toolkit* available to new presidents in all regions this fall
- *New Local Presidents Getting Started* 3-hour training available in all regions this fall
- half-hour 'lunch and learns' and short, skill-building activities for local capacity-building to be posted on the website this fall

Local leaders like Shauna have been excited and encouraged by the work to date of the Building Local Capacity Project. "I thought I was the only one who felt completely out of my depth. It's a relief to find there are concrete things I can do to improve things," said one local president. "I'm actually starting to think I could do a good job with other LEC members. The assessment tool helped us have a great discussion about the local," explained another president. Hopefully, as the work progresses, Shauna and other local leaders will get the support they need to build inclusive, effective union locals. 

For more information about Building Local Capacity, contact Scott Kennedy in OPSEU's Sault Ste. Marie office.