

**ALERT**

For all BCGEU members  
March 25, 2008

## **Low wages causing widespread recruitment problems in community social services--study**

**A** new study by the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC BC) confirms that employers in community-based social services are experiencing recruitment and retention problems across the sector. The cause of the problem is clear—low wages and a lack of respect for the work performed.

The report, entitled *Exploring Recruitment and Retention Issues for Community Social Service Sector Employers*, presents survey results gathered from a number of B.C.'s unionized community social services workplaces, including community living, child care centres and agencies providing child, family and counselling services. It was conducted for the BCGEU on behalf of unions in the Community Social Services Bargaining Association.

According to Rebecca Siggner, who prepared the report for SPARC BC, "every employer we spoke to is having trouble hiring and keeping staff, especially casual workers."

Siggner says employers also reported they are struggling to find qualified applicants for vacancies. Some 43 per cent of employers had at least one vacancy.

Recruitment of casuals and relief workers was particularly problematic with more than half of the respondents acknowledging positions stayed vacant for over three months. Average

annual turnover was 10 per cent. For casuals it was 47 per cent in the past year.

Similar results were also found in a comprehensive survey of community living employers undertaken by the Community Social Services Employers' Association.

The SPARC study also showed that recruitment and retention problems were in turn responsible for increased stress and burnout among existing workers.

BCGEU president George Heyman says front line workers have reported these problems for several years now. "Unless the wages in this field are increased," says Heyman, "the government will find it cannot provide stable, and reliable programs for adults with developmental disabilities, for children, women and others in our communities who depend on these services."

Meanwhile, Siggner reports that community social service employers are looking for more funding to raise wages to reflect the cost of living and place value on the work done.

The study makes a number of recommendations including increased funding for wages, comparability with work done in other sectors to promote recruitment and retention, and a program of training incentives to increase the pool of qualified workers.

[Click here](#) for a copy of the SPARC report.



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