



# *The* Provincial

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## Community Social Services

*Caring for those in need*



**Inside:** Bargaining Updates • KidStart profile • Women in the Union

# In this issue:

Bargaining News ..... 4-7  
Activist Profiles ..... 8-9  
Women in the Union ..... 11  
Component Profile ..... 13  
News/Community ..... 14-15  
CSS Month ..... 16-19

## The Provincial

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Darryl Walker

# Government's zero mandate makes 2010 a tough year to negotiate agreements



This is a critical time for many BCGEU members. Most members are deep in negotiations or in the ratification process for new contracts. Faced with the provincial government's mandate on zero wage increases, program cuts and layoffs, it has been a difficult round of bargaining.

Tentative agreements have been reached in both community health and facilities, where the bargaining associations have managed to protect wages and make progress on key benefits such as vision care and a BlueNet card.

Negotiations with the B.C. government for 29,000 public service members began in February and are continuing. Bargaining priorities are improvements to employment security, benefits and sick leave among other changes.



Community Social Services bargaining has been particularly challenging. The employers' association (CSSEA) has refused to budge on any monetary issues — whether it's shift premiums or a transportation allowance. Reaching a tentative agreement that the bargaining association can accept will be difficult.

Let me acknowledge the work of the activists on the union bargaining committees — not just the large multi-union tables, but the small stand-alone contracts that we are continuing to negotiate.

College instructors and support staff are also preparing for what they know will be a tough round of bargaining this year.

There are also some important events to acknowledge. This year on March 8, the BCGEU will mark the 26th anniversary of securing bargaining rights for our members. It's also International Women's Day, and we should acknowledge the achievements of the women activists who have made a contribution to our union — including women like Joan Gower and Nancy Hamilton, who were leaders in the union's early years. Also Diane Wood and our current treasurer Judi Filion. I hope BCGEU members will take part in one of the many International Women's Day events that are organized across the province.

Communities across B.C. are declaring March to be Community Social Services Awareness Month — the result of a collective effort by unions in this sector. Our aim is to raise the profile of the community social services sector and build greater public support for their important work. If there are events or information booths in your community, please support them.

Finally, let me acknowledge the work of the activists on the union bargaining committees — not just the large multi-union tables, but the small stand-alone contracts that we are continuing to negotiate. Bargaining has been a very rough and disappointing experience this time. In many cases, we have had to struggle just to maintain benefits we believed we had locked down years ago. These activists have earned your support and respect, and I thank them for their hard work.

# BCGEU-supported women's group in forefront of Honduran struggle

While the international media attention about the recent overthrow of Honduras' democratically-elected president has died down, the situation in the country is far from settled. And a Honduran women's organization that BCGEU helps fund is playing a leading role in pro-democracy activities.

Last June, the country's president, Manuel Zelaya, was forced from his bed and put on a plane to Costa Rica by the Honduran Army. His only "crime" was to set a date to ask the Honduran people if they would like to have a referendum on changing the constitution, once he had left office.

In the months that followed, there were dramatic moments: Zelaya tried to fly back to the country, but the army occupied the runway and the plane had to turn back. He then appeared in the Brazilian embassy in the Honduran capital, having secretly re-entered the country. Honduran army soldiers were photographed using advanced acoustic weapons against Zelaya.

With the tacit support of Canada and the U.S., the coup leaders continued in power and went ahead with presidential elections in November. Intimidation and fraud were widespread. Late last month, the "newly elected president" was sworn in. Meanwhile, the repression in Honduras continues, with Zelaya supporters being threatened, imprisoned and tortured.

On the ground, public anger against the coup d'état has grown more organized. The resistance has spread to all sectors of Honduran society. Ordinary people are demanding deep structural change—and are determined to find a way to get it.

The BCGEU's partner in Honduras, the Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH) has played a major role in the resistance in San Pedro Sula, where it organized regular marches and demonstrations in the country's second largest city.

As well, the collective has held a series of work-



**COUP FIGHTERS** — A women's group in Honduras that BCGEU supports has been in the forefront of the fight to preserve democracy and justice for workers in that Central American country where last year a progressive elected president was deposed in a coup d'état.

shops and information forums to inform women about the situation and what they can do.

CODEMUH has also compiled reports of abuses from sweatshop factory owners that include busing workers to pro-coup marches, using the chaos to introduce new legislation permitting temporary contract workers, and offering discounts in stores for people who can show they voted in the de facto government's November elections.

CODEMUH receives funding from BCGEU's International Solidarity Committee. Committee chair Colleen Jones says she's inspired by the vital work the CODEMUH is undertaking.

"The group is on the frontlines protecting the interests of workers from the attack by the country's political elite," says Jones. "The work is important and we'll continue to support it."



The BCGEU's partner in Honduras, the Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH) has played a major role in the resistance in San Pedro Sula.



# Bargaining 2010

## Public service employment security demand is 'solid'

**N**egotiations with the provincial government to get a new collective agreement for 29,000 public service members are difficult, but BCGEU president Darryl Walker is keeping the union's demand for employment security on the bargaining table.

"These are tough negotiations," said Walker. "However, we are committed to getting an agreement that meets our members' needs. We won't settle for nothing. Our demands are solid."

Negotiations for a new collective agreement got under way in February and will continue into March. The process has been underway since January 12 when the union and the Public Service Agency, representing the government, exchanged proposals.

Employment security has emerged as the key issue in the talks.

"The need to improve our employment security protections was really brought home when myself and other members of the bargaining committee had the opportunity to meet with many of the 158 BCGEU members who are scheduled for layoff in March," said Walker.

"Listening to the personal stories of these members, many of whom have highly specialized skills, and recently hired from right across the country, make you realize how counterproductive and short-sighted these cuts are."



**PUBLIC SERVICE COMPONENT BARGAINING** — Above left (l-r): **Component 1** — Back row: Dean Purdy (Comp. 1 chair), Wiho Papenbrock (Staff). Middle: Ron McCabe (Local 104), Robin Lajeunesse (Local 111), Tony Tessari (Local 105). Front row: Derrick Goodwin (Local 103), Peter Clegg (Local 103), Mike Scott (Local 102). **Component 5** — Back: Craig MacKay (Comp. 5 chair) Front (l-r): Brenda Vaillancourt (Local 504), Kimberlee MacGregor (Local 504), Ian Teeple (Local 501), Janet Seccia (Staff). Not in photo: Margie Edmondson (Local 507).

"The layoffs announced by the government have made negotiations more difficult than they already were," said Walker.

Government negotiators also put a damper on talks with a demand that the Article 29 consultative process be scrapped. Article 29 committees operate as labour/management committees in each ministry, providing consultation on grievances, workplace issues and assisting workers when layoffs or major changes occur. The proposal to scrap the process has now been dropped by the government.

Talks in early February also focused on benefit and sick leave improvements, which the union is seeking.

"It was quickly apparent the union's suggestions to save money by helping injured and ill workers get back to work sooner was dismissed out of hand. The employer insists their sick leave management

program represents the best practice in Canada," said Walker.

As the Provincial went to press, the two sides had met for four sessions. Component bargaining took place for two weeks in February. This bargaining deals with occupational specific items.

More dates for "main table" bargaining are set through to March 31 when the contract expires.

Members can get updates by checking the union's web site ([www.bcgeu.ca](http://www.bcgeu.ca)) or by calling the union's Bargaining Hotline at: **(604) 473-5444** or **1-800-335-5665**.

### **Your 2010 Public Service Bargaining Committee members:**

BCGEU president: **Darryl Walker**  
 BCGEU vice-president: **Colleen Jones**  
 Component 1: **Dean Purdy**  
 Component 2: **Susanne Francoeur**  
 Component 5: **Craig MacKay**  
 Component 6: **Doug Kinna**  
 Component 1: **Sandi McLean, Lori Joaquin**  
 Component 20: **Byron Goerz**  
 Staff negotiators: **Jaynie Clark, David Vipond**

# Bargaining 2010



## Progress made for health workers in tough round of bargaining



As the economy struggles to recover from the downturn, BCGEU and other health care unions are focused on protecting wages, job security, and making progress on other key priorities for health care workers in this round of bargaining.

The B.C. government has shown an unwillingness to lift the wage freeze announced last year. At the same time health authorities are facing increasing budget constraints.

Although the zero mandate on wages has created a difficult setting for negotiations in the health care sector, BCGEU and other unions have managed to reach tentative agreements in both community health and facilities.



### Community Health

B.C.'s 14,000 Community Health Workers — including 8,800 BCGEU members — are in the midst of the ratification process on a new two-year collective agreement.

Many of the bargaining gains in community health will benefit a large group of members. The gains include the new BlueNet card (direct pay drug card), shift premiums for weekend work, and higher vision care benefits. A new joint committee will tackle the problem of scheduling — hoping to find solutions to increase members' access to hours and create opportunities to work within an 8.5 hour window.

"In a year of very tough bargaining, your committee was able to find under-utilized benefits and rework them into a range of improvements that are now accessible to a broad cross section of the membership," said BCGEU president Darryl Walker.

### Facilities

A tentative agreement covering more than 48,000 hospital and long-term care workers, including about 2,000 BCGEU members, was reached in early February between the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association and B.C.'s health employers.

Following the framework laid by community health bargaining, the tentative agreement in facilities managed to make real progress on key priorities identified by members.

The two-year agreement protects wages, extends health benefits, expands options for workers affected by restructuring and privatization, and provides compensation increases for targeted job categories.

"The overall framework is similar to what we achieved in the tentative commun-

ity health agreement," said Walker.

The ratification process in Facilities is expected to extend into late March, due to scheduling conflicts caused by the Olympics.

### Health Science Professionals

Bargaining for the province's health science professionals — including more than 1,000 BCGEU members — will begin in March.

BCGEU will be working closely with other unions, including the Health Sciences Association of B.C., the lead union in the sector.

Key priorities include wages, improved benefits, and a restructuring of classifications.

For more information on the tentative agreements and upcoming bargaining, visit [www.bcgeu.ca](http://www.bcgeu.ca).



"These are tough negotiations. However, we are committed to getting an agreement that meets our members' needs."



# Bargaining 2010

## Community Social Services bargaining continues despite employers' refusal to move on some key issues

**D**uring the last few months, leaders of BCGEU's community social services workers, along with representatives of other unions in the sector, have been in discussions with the employer, the Community Social Services Employers' Association (CSSEA) about a collective agreement. CSSEA is the arm of government that conducts negotiations on behalf of employers.

The discussions have been very challenging. The B.C. Liberal government has refused to budge from its zero mandate. The mandate is completely unfair, particularly for community social service workers whose wages continue to lag behind other sectors. It ignores rising costs and the coming HST.

Before Christmas CSSEA was insisting it could not renew the continuity of service memorandum and talks collapsed. The BCGEU bargaining committee kept communications channels open and in late January thought they had the basis of an agreement in principle, including renewal of the memorandum.

Important elements in the two year agreement included:

- Renewal of employment security through the Continuity of Service and Employment memorandum;
- Continuation of employer-matched RRSP contributions for the term of the agreement for employees who declined



to participate in the Municipal Pension Plan;

- Agreement that if enrolment in the new Municipal Pension Plan was below 74 per cent, half of the unspent government funds would be available for members in another form after paying for the continued RRSPs;
- A four month delay in the start up for the Municipal Pension Plan;
- New language on bullying in the workplace;
- An expedited process for resolving job selection grievances.

CSSEA refused to move on wages, sick leave, shift premiums, standby pay or the transportation allowance (mileage) and was unwilling to respond on no-cost issues or housekeeping changes. The employers also refused to budge even on non-monetary items.

Unfortunately some unions in the bargaining association do not support the agreement in principle because it doesn't meet all their priorities .

The next step will be to secure additional meetings with CSSEA to continue the bargaining, but it is becoming clear that it may take member action to get any further improvements.

The BCGEU and other sector unions will be holding membership meetings across the province during March to provide detailed bargaining updates, and to encourage members to stay enrolled in the new municipal pension program.

For details of meetings in your community, check the BCGEU website [www.bcgeu.ca](http://www.bcgeu.ca) and join the Facebook group "BCGEU community social services". To receive the latest news from your union, make sure we have your correct mailing and email addresses: [www.bcgeu.ca/change\\_of\\_address](http://www.bcgeu.ca/change_of_address)

### AT THE TABLE

BCGEU Community Social Services Bargaining Committee members discuss bargaining priorities in December.



The next step will be to secure additional meetings with CSSEA... but it is becoming clear that it may take member action to get further improvements.

# Stand-Alone Bargaining



## AirCare members reach tentative agreement with Envirotech Canada

**S**taff who operate the successful AirCare program in the Lower Mainland have reached a tentative agreement with their employer, Envirotech Canada (Air Care).

If ratified, the agreement provides general wage increases of 2 per cent in January 2010 and 2011. The new agreement is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2011, the same day the AirCare program is scheduled to end.

The parties renewed a Memorandum of Understanding that sets out a transition process from the AirCare III program to an AirCare IV. Language amendments ensure that assistant managers cannot be required to permanently transfer to a different station, and a process to ensure that existing part-time employees won't lose shifts or hours when full-time employees revert to part-time status.

TransLink is reviewing AirCare to determine if it will continue past 2011, and how the program that significantly lowers vehicle particulate emissions would be structured.

## ProTrans bargaining makes headway

Since talks got underway in early January, measurable progress has already been achieved for a first contract for almost 200 BCGEU members who work on the Canada Line. To date, the union and the employer have spent five days in face-to-face discussions.

No talks were scheduled in February. The two sides will get back to the table in March.

## New members bargaining

First contracts are being sought for more than 200 new union members at Surrey's **Elim Village** seniors' centre and **Brookside Lodge** in Langley. At Elim Village, members have chosen a bargaining committee and bargaining dates are being set with the employer. At Brookside Lodge, the bargaining committee met in February to set priorities and strategy. It's hoped talks will get underway in March.

About 40 staff of the **Salvation Army** in Campbell River who provide a variety of services for



**BCGEU AIRCARE MEMBERS** — have reached a tentative collective agreement for staff who monitor car exhaust emissions and improve air quality in the Lower Mainland. From left, are union bargaining committee members Dave Cumming, an AirCare inspector and Local 1003 chair; BCGEU negotiator Barbara Crowley; AirCare assistant manager Toni Campbell; and clerk III Gina Cherubini.

North Island communities are also in talks to reach a first contract. More talks are set for early March. Meanwhile, staff at the **Northern John Howard Society** who work with ex-offenders in the Prince George area are also in the middle of talks for a first contract.

Staff of the **Fresh Water Fisheries Society** tabled their package of bargaining proposals in a mid-February negotiating session with their employer. Talks for the 75 BCGEU members continue later in March.

## Child care deal ratified, others in progress

Some 75 BCGEU members and early childhood educators have ratified a new contract at the **SFU Child Care Society**. The deal includes a seven per cent wage increase at the time of ratification and a \$2,100 signing bonus.

Talks also continue for new agreements at several child care centres including **Mission Day Care Society** in the Fraser Valley and three Vancouver centres: **Brant Villa (Learning Tree)**, **Pooh Corner Day Care Society** and **Kiwassa Child Care**. Mediation is being sought by BCGEU in another set of negotiations with **St. Michaels Church Day Care**.

## Centre line markers voting

More than 20 BCGEU members who paint highway lines for **Mainroad Pavement Marking** are in the process of voting to ratify a new contract that provides wage increases, a signing bonus plus improved shift premiums and allowances.



# ACTIVIST



## **BARB PETERS**

**Clerk, MHSD, Nanaimo, Local 1202**

Barb Peters has helped cure more than a few backaches in her work as a BCGEU health and safety facilitator.

Peters most enjoys conducting ergonomic evaluations. She has assessed more than 1,000 government works stations, ensuring workers have proper lighting, chairs and desks.

“Some of the stuff I’ve come across has made people’s lives hell.” she said recalling the suffering caused by the use of old wooden desks unsuitable for computers.

“They had the keyboard up on their desktop. Their shoulders were up, their elbows were up and their screens were about 8 inches too high. Everyone had pain in their necks, their shoulders and their backs.”

Those days are gone thanks to Peters convincing employers to buy ergonomically-correct equipment. Facilitating has also made a difference in her own life.

“I was freaked about by public speaking, embarrassed that I was scared to speak publicly. Now, I love speaking publically.”

## **GREGG FLETCHER**

**Corrections Officer, View Royal-Saanich Local 101**

Gregg Fletcher loves receiving feedback when it relates to making a difference in people’s lives. Fletcher, an OSH facilitator from Victoria, says a small amount of worker training can pay huge dividends. He recalls the story of one BCGEU member.

“We gave her one day training, basic knowledge of ergonomics. She wrote me a letter to say she’d had back pain for three years and thought it was something she was supposed to endure,” said Fletcher.

But after incorporating the ergonomic changes Fletcher suggested at her workstation, the woman was pain free. Fletcher believes OSH programs are more important than ever before.

“If you don’t have a good OSH program you’re probably going to have more people hurt. Especially these days with cutbacks. We don’t have enough staff as it is,” said Fletcher.

Fletcher has advice for others considering becoming facilitators — make the training fun because if it’s not, people won’t learn.

# PROFILES



## **PATTY TURNER**

**Resource Social Worker, Kamloops  
Local 605**

You could say becoming a union activist was Patty Turner's destiny.

"My father was a steelworker. I grew up with the union frame of reference."

Her father, a Cominco worker in Trail, was a proud member of the United Steelworkers Union. Turner, the chairperson of local 605, became active with the BCGEU 20 years ago after a friend took her to a union meeting.

"I quickly realised most workers don't understand their rights," she said. "I began to learn my rights and began to share that information."

The sharing hasn't stopped. As if being a social worker, singer-songwriter, motorcyclist and grandmother doesn't keep her busy enough, Turner devotes "considerable hours" to her activism.

"I receive calls every day about the contract," she said. "I have members coming to me in my office."

And Turner wouldn't have it any other way. "You get a lot of satisfaction from helping others," she said.



## **VICTORIA ZALAMEA**

**Admin. Asst., Kelowna, Local 707  
Young worker activist**

Passion and energy. Victoria Zalamea brings an abundance of both to her work as a member-at-large young worker representative on the executive of Local 707.

The best part is connecting with other people.

"It's amazing how many members we have out there. Their issues are all very different. I like doing this, reaching out to other members within my age group and also the older members. I learn from them. I really like that," said the UBC Okanagan worker.

Zalamea is especially passionate about the environment and the BCGEU's Cool Communities campaign. She often sends information to co-workers on ways to green their home, environment and workspace.

Her future could include a leadership run. But not any time soon.

"I want to be in a leadership role. Maybe the treasurer or president," she said. "I need to do more work in my local and in other communities."



# SPECIES AT RISK STILL UNPROTECTED

What the B.C. government like to call “the best place on earth” risks becoming one of the last places on earth without an endangered species law. So say members of a B.C. coalition fighting for legislation to protect species at risk and their habitat.

“B.C. is one of the last jurisdictions in North America that doesn’t have species at risk legislation. We have the federal species at risk act, but it covers only 5 per cent of B.C.’s land mass,” said Susan Howatt, campaigns director for the Sierra Club BC, one of the coalition members. The BCGEU is a partner in the coalition’s species at risk campaign.

What currently exists, she said, is a mishmash of relatively ineffective provincial laws that do nothing to protect endangered species or help at-risk species recover. Alberta is the only other Canadian province without species-at-risk legislation.

B.C. has approximately 2,000 endangered species — including a large number of plant communities. At-risk animal species include the burrowing owl, the Vancouver Island marmot and the marbled murrelet.

The coalition, whose other members include The David Suzuki Foundation, Ecojustice, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee and ForestEthics, is demanding

the B.C. government enact a law that does more than just protect species at risk.

“We really need to be looking at the habitat and how we maintain healthy marshlands and ecosystems,” said Howatt. “One reason we need to focus on moving provincial policy is climate change. Habitats are under incredible pressure, more than ever before.”



“One reason we need to focus on moving provincial policy is climate change. Habitats are under incredible pressure, more than ever before.”

But getting the government to focus on the issue is proving to be a challenge. Last summer’s throne speech announced the creation of a Species at Risk Task Force to outline a new defining vision. But its terms of reference and member list have yet to be made public.

Howatt intends to direct her efforts toward expanding support for species-at-risk legislation. She expects to encounter opposition along the way, especially from the mining and real estate development industries.

“I’ve been focusing on engaging municipal governments and getting mayors to sign on,” she said. “So far eight municipalities are supporting us, including Whistler and Burnaby. My next push is to grow the list”

Howatt is urging BCGEU members to visit the campaign website at [www.lastplaceonearth.ca](http://www.lastplaceonearth.ca) and join more than 7,000 others who have sent a letter to the leaders of B.C.’s political parties to demand endangered species legislation.

## WOMEN IN THE UNION

# STAND UP AND BE COUNTED!



*“In the early days of the Victoria Branch, we used to hold meetings for the women members. Then we stopped that because we wanted to get away from the “women’s auxiliary” thing. We wanted to become part of the mainstream of the association. It was an uphill fight to do that.”* **Joan (Gower) Gillatt (1942)**

**S**ince the early days as an association of provincial government employees, women members have fought for full rights to participate in their union.

On March 8, 1974 the BCGEU became a full-fledged trade union when the Labour Relations Board granted it rights as a bargaining agent. It was symbolic that this significant achievement in the union’s history happened on International Women’s Day, a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future.

Since the 1990s, our union has grown exponentially by organizing female dominated job categories, largely in health and community social services. The number of women members has grown, and many women have moved into leadership positions.

In celebration of International Women’s Day, here is a snapshot of a few of the women activists who have played a leadership role in the union over the years.

### LEADING WOMEN

**Joan Gower** was a leader in the B.C. Government Employees’ Association in the 1940s and 1950s. At the association’s 1956 convention she had to settle for the office of 1st vice-president. She was convinced, sexism barred her from election as president. Gower became president for a short period in 1958 after George Horridge died in office.

Another early woman leader in the BCGEU was **Nancy Hamilton** — a government employee at Woodlands, and a member of the union from 1951 until her retirement in 1979. Hamilton was elected treasurer in 1967,

a position she held for 12 years. She became active in the union over the issue of dues collection, insisting that new members be signed up and dues be collected. Hamilton also co-chaired the union’s first women’s committee.

**Diane Wood** served as an elected officer from 1971 until her retirement in 2005. Her leadership in the union took her from being a steward at the government agent’s office in Pouce Coupe to union headquarters in Burnaby, where she served 8 terms as full-time Secretary-Treasurer.

Wood was a strong voice for women’s issues at provincial, national and international levels of the union movement. She was also a leader in joint-trusteeship for members’ pensions.

## WOMEN AND THE BCGEU

The 1993 Convention established two female vice-president positions to ensure that women are represented at the executive level of the union. Currently, nine of 20 members of the provincial executive are women, including treasurer **Judi Filion**.

### Membership

- **1976:** women form 36 per cent of the union’s membership.
- **2010:** women form 67 per cent of the union’s membership.

### Participation in Conventions

- **1976:** there were 222 delegates to the convention. 46 were women, representing 21 per cent of the delegates.
- **2008:** 356 delegates attended the 47th Constitutional Convention. 194 were women, representing 54% of the delegates.



Pictured, from left: Rob Dakau and Dave Jorgenson; Denise Dauvin

Photos: Bill Horne

# Photo series links B.C. workers and the arts

For project organizer Bill Horne, the Solidarity Series is all about solidarity.

"I started this series to illustrate our interconnectedness at a time when the B.C. government has made drastic cuts to arts funding," said the Wells B.C. resident.

The series is a collection of photographs. Each features working people holding a sign in support of the arts and artists. Horne says his aim is to challenge the stereotype that working people aren't involved in the arts, don't care about the arts and that the arts are "inherently elitist."

Devlin's Beach gold miners Rob Dakau and Dave Jorgenson are among those who've posed for Horne.

Jorgenson notes local arts events, such as the ArtsWells Festival, draw many visitors who put badly-needed dollars into the area economy. Jorgenson says the region's young people have benefitted enormously from classes conducted by the Island Mountain Arts organization in Wells.

Prince George pulp mill worker Denise Dauvin posed for Horne to highlight the need for more arts funding in B.C. Dauvin believes arts education is critical for children's healthy growth and development.

Horne is delighted with the public's reaction to the series.

"I'm pleased the response to these photos has been so positive both from artists and non-artists. I think people yearn for the concept of solidarity. It's missing in our lives because people are often

fighting their own battles. To see people willing to stand up for others is really heartening," Horne said.

Horne has more photo shoots planned. He's especially interested in getting more images of people who work in resource extraction and industrial trades. Anyone who would like to pose for the Solidarity Series should email Horne: [bill@claireart.ca](mailto:bill@claireart.ca). The Solidarity Series can be viewed at [www.claireart.ca](http://www.claireart.ca).



BILL HORNE



"I think people yearn for the concept of solidarity. It's missing in our lives because people are often fighting their own battles."

# Teamwork, volunteers key to KidStart's success

**R**ecruiting volunteers to mentor young children and teens in the KidStart program in Metro Vancouver requires dedication and teamwork.

KidStart is a program for children and youth experiencing difficulties at school, or with families and friends. The program, which operates on the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, provides volunteer mentors for one-on-one activities.

Operated as a program by PLEA, a community social services agency and staffed by BCGEU members, KidStart helps over 300 vulnerable kids a year -- referred through the youth justice system and various agencies.

"We are helping out where role models haven't been present," says Lisa Nixon, a KidStart volunteer co-ordinator in the teen program. "Many of the teens that we work with have challenges with school and home."

"Young people deserve to be heard," she said.

Nixon has a lot of experience working in group homes and other programs with people facing difficult issues, and describes her work at KidStart as "fabulous."

Hala Nugent, a volunteer co-ordinator for six to 12 year-olds, explains that working with younger children requires more family involvement and coordination, and presents unique challenges for her volunteers.



"Each volunteer is different," she adds. "At Kidstart they try to understand and work according to each volunteer's individual needs and abilities."

Nugent is an example of how successful KidStart has been. She started out as a volunteer 11 years ago and has been an employee in the program for five years.

Like any organization, KidStart is always fundraising. That's Michelle Duncan's job. As the development coordinator in charge of fundraising and communications, Duncan works closely with the other team members to get KidStart's message out and raise the funds they need.

"Thankfully, we haven't been hit too hard by the difficult economy, although our funding from foundations hasn't provided quite as much as before," said Duncan.

"I feel like we are making a difference in people's lives," she says.

Long-time employee Kevin

Taylor has been a steward off and on for around 25 years. A co-ordinator like Nugent, he shares the same passion for the KidStart program.

"It doesn't feel like a job," Taylor says. "I like helping people."

Taylor and his co-workers emphasized that success is measured in small, meaningful increments -- like teaching a child to say thank you, or creating an atmosphere where a young teen can ask for help.

The kindness and enthusiasm of the KidStart team is common among BCGEU members across the community social services sector.

"We are really passionate about the work we do," said Nixon. "Our success always outweighs the many problems our clients face."

KidStart's services are in high demand. They're always looking for new volunteers. Male volunteers, in particular, are in short supply. Check them out at [www.KidStart.ca](http://www.KidStart.ca).

**NEW START** — KidStart Vancouver staff members (l-r): Michelle Duncan, Hala Nugent, Kevin Taylor, Lisa Nixon



"We are really passionate about the work we do. Our success always outweighs the many problems our clients face."



**JAMES CLANCY**  
President, NUPGE



Darryl Walker talks at a Nanaimo event about the recession's impact on communities

## 'Bread & Butter Tour' fuels plan to rebuild economy

**F**or the past year, NUPGE's top priority has been the economy. With our component unions we held town hall forums in 26 communities across the country last year — from Miscouche in PEI to Nanaimo British Columbia

Our goal was to give Canadians from all walks of life a chance to share with us their experiences in the economic crisis and their insights to get us out of the mess we've been handed.

We wanted a chance to discuss their ideas to remake Canada's economy so it is equitable and sustainable.

For the last 20 years, governments in Canada and around the world listened to the 'experts' who said our economy would stay strong forever if we applied free market formula of smaller governments social program cuts, fewer regulations on corporations and tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, as well as free trade deals.

We know the result. Economic crisis. In Canada the manu-

facturing, and forestry sectors are in trouble. Public services are being cut. Pensions and retirement savings are eroding. Labour rights of working people are under attack.

The gap between the rich and the poor is growing, and child poverty rates are very high.

Our "Bread and Butter Tour", last year showed that everyday people have the real bright ideas to keep our economy strong.

In the forums and on our interactive website — ([www.peoplesresponse.ca](http://www.peoplesresponse.ca)) 6 broad themes emerged:

1. People want to work, and the priority must be job creation and full employment.
2. The EI program must provide greater benefits for a longer period of time and be more accessible.
3. People must retire with security and dignity. We need to increase guaranteed income supplement benefits, protect workplace pensions plans and dramatically

increase the Canada pension plan.

4. We need to protect, strengthen and expand public services
5. The solutions to the climate crisis are the same measures needed to strengthen our economy. We don't have to choose between jobs and the environment.
6. Canada's big banks must cut interest rate cuts, sky-high credit card interest rates and ATM fees

See [www.nupge.ca](http://www.nupge.ca) for more information from the tour.

In the coming months, we will be exposing some of the myths about the current economic crisis and will be laying out a more detailed alternative economic strategy that aligns the indicators of economic progress with the values Canadians hold in their hearts.



"Our 'Bread and Butter Tour' last year showed that everyday people have the real bright ideas to keep our economy strong."

# Coalition to Build a Better B.C. gains momentum

Labour unions, community groups, student organizations, environmental groups and others have joined together to fight back against cuts to public services, arts and culture and communities, under the Coalition to Build a Better B.C. banner.

So far, a B.C. Budget 'teach-in' is being planned for March 20, and a rally is planned for April 10 at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Thousands of labour and community activists are expected to attend to send a message to the B.C. government about how cuts are affecting communities.

For more information on the Coalition to Build a Better B.C. and upcoming events, watch [www.bcgeu.ca](http://www.bcgeu.ca)

## *Statement from the Coalition to Build a Better BC:*

*T*he strength of British Columbia is our people. We each contribute in unique and different ways, through our talents, ideas and hard work to build a better B.C.

Building communities where every woman, man and child is treated with fairness and dignity, and respect is a shared responsibility.

When government singles out groups of individuals – by cutting services they depend on, raising fees inequitably, and unfairly shifting taxes – it diminishes all of us. It doesn't bring us together. It divides us.

The purpose of the Coalition to Build a Better BC is to bring us together.

The public, community and cultural services that we have built together over the years contribute greatly to a vibrant and diverse B.C. They help to ensure that every British Columbian can participate and share in a quality of life that is recognized around the world.

Public, community and cultural services are essential cornerstones of a civil society. They are a critical component of our economic well-being, especially in difficult economic times. A strong public sector to support, build and regulate the private sector is vital to the social, environmental and economic health of the province.

Due to drastic funding cuts, chronic underfunding and misaligned political priorities many of these services are at risk of disappearing, and putting our way of life and the environment at risk.

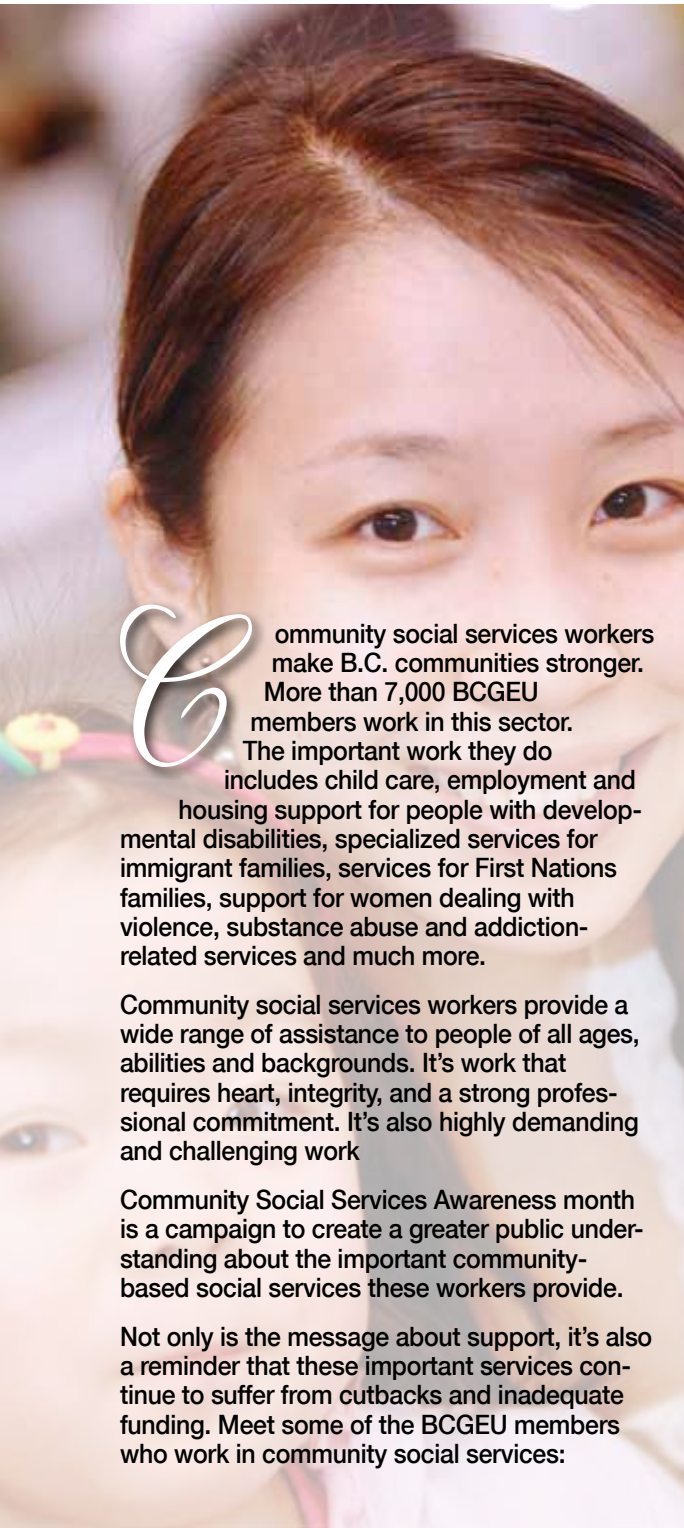
Many of the cuts affect the most vulnerable people in our communities, particularly women, children, isolated seniors, and those with the lowest incomes. It is unacceptable for government to take more from those who have the least, in order to give more to those who have the most.

We call on the provincial government to:

- Immediately stop eliminating public and community services;
- Fulfill their legislative responsibility to provide adequate, fair and consistent funding to support public services and community groups;
- Work in substantive consultation with groups and individuals to build public and community services that give every individual the democratic opportunity to participate in building a better B.C.

We are joining our voices together. We will work with community partners, from every background and region, to build a better British Columbia.

## MARCH is Community Social Services Awareness Month



**C**ommunity social services workers make B.C. communities stronger. More than 7,000 BCGEU members work in this sector. The important work they do includes child care, employment and housing support for people with developmental disabilities, specialized services for immigrant families, services for First Nations families, support for women dealing with violence, substance abuse and addiction-related services and much more.

Community social services workers provide a wide range of assistance to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. It's work that requires heart, integrity, and a strong professional commitment. It's also highly demanding and challenging work

Community Social Services Awareness month is a campaign to create a greater public understanding about the important community-based social services these workers provide.

Not only is the message about support, it's also a reminder that these important services continue to suffer from cutbacks and inadequate funding. Meet some of the BCGEU members who work in community social services:



**DOROTHY BARTSOFF**  
Community Living, Terrace

**M**y clients are physically and mentally challenged. I take care of their medication, meals and personal hygiene.

Depending on the day some go to work, some go to medical or dental appointments and some do in-home activities. They struggle with their disabilities, so we're there to support them in their day-to-day routines, to make sure they're safe and secure. We enhance and support their life in public and in the community.

They deserve respect and dignity. I find the work extremely rewarding, knowing that you can make a difference and

*"I've given them my whole heart and soul and there's nothing that I wouldn't do for them. I believe community social service workers have enhanced their clients' lives a thousand times over."*

help someone with a disability.

I think I have a great connection with them all. I've enjoyed my journey with them tremendously. I've given them my whole heart and soul and there's nothing that I wouldn't do for them. I believe community social service workers have enhanced their clients' lives a thousand times over.

I'm a very positive person. I believe I'm a very good role model. I'm always looking at the best interests of all people. I believe in equality. I'm very genuine. I'm never afraid to stand up and make a difference for the vulnerable people I care for. The work has taught me how very important it is to treat every individual with respect

*Dorothy Bartsoff is a community support worker with Thompson Community Services in Terrace, B.C. Bartsoff has worked in community social services for nearly 20 years.*

Photos: Joshua Berson



## TED FRANCIS

### Aboriginal Services, Vancouver

**I**'m a shelter worker at the Aboriginal Shelter near Vancouver's downtown eastside. It's an important place for people to come to and it helps a lot of people who need it.

The people who come here are down on themselves. They don't know where they're going to turn. We help them turn that around. We help them get back on their feet.

There's a lot of demand. We normally open at 5:30 pm but people start lining up between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

The best part of the job is having the odd person come back and say thank you. It feels great when that happens. Working here has taught me there's a good side to everyone.

One day I had a couple come in to thank me. They had lost everything and they came in to tell me they found a job and found a place to live. Right after that a guy came in and said if we weren't around he'd harm himself.



*"The best part of the job is having the odd person come back and say thank you. It feels great when that happens. Working here has taught me there's a good side to everyone."*

He was a big guy and he was crying. I'll never forget that day. These are the kinds of things that keep me going.

*Ted Francis has been a shelter worker at The Aboriginal Shelter since 2008. He has been a social services provider for more than three decades.*



*"I hope I've also taught them and shown them through my eyes what's out there in the world. One of them is blind and both are non-verbal. I just want to make life better for them."*

**I** work with two adult developmentally delayed men. They're roommates and both are in wheelchairs. I do everything from waking them up and helping with personal care to feeding and communicating with them.

## LOANNE PICKARD

### Community Living, Armstrong

I take them to do the day's events. I typically work alone. My job is to make their life better. It's about spending my 8 hours making sure that, at the end of my day, I've made a difference in their lives.

I hope I've also taught them and shown them through my eyes what's out there in the world. One of them is blind and both are non-verbal. I just want to make life better for them.

My work has taught me patience and acceptance for who we are as individuals.

I recall one special moment a couple of years ago, one of my greatest times with the men. We took them to West Edmonton Mall for a five day vacation. It was fabulous. We had so much fun. It was wonderful to see them light up when they heard the crowds around them. It was like they got the treat of their life. Their expressions showed their happiness.

*Loanne Pickard has been a residential care aide with the Kindale Developmental Association in Armstrong since 2004.*

## KAREN WICKHAM

General Services, Victoria

**I** do crisis response. I do client intake, provide crisis support, grounding, service referral, and I oversee the sexual assault response team. In a victim services role, I explore whether someone wants to make a police report regarding either a current or past sexual assault. I familiarize clients with the police reporting, courts and corrections systems.

There's no typical day. I may spend one week in a Supreme Court hearing, the next week with someone who's just starting a police report, or who was sexually assaulted the day before.

I take on a lot of roles that aren't reflected in my job description. I recently rewrote our protocol with the Vancouver Island Health Authority and municipal police forces. I do policy development, statistics, and file maintenance.

My work helps clients find a path that is comfortable for them. It's making sure they know they are able to change their mind, and I help advocate for that change if necessary.

I'm rewarded when I see someone come out the other end and get strength from the processes they've been



*"I'm rewarded when I see someone come out the other end and get strength from the processes they've been through... It's an honour and a privilege to help nurture that resilience and help it flower in each individual."*

through. Within everyone, even someone who has experienced massive trauma, there's always this kernel of resilience. It's an honour and a privilege to help nurture that resilience and help it flower in each individual.

*Karen Wickham is a Crisis Line Support Worker at the Women's Sexual Assault Centre in Victoria. She has been a community social services worker for nearly 25 years.*



*"I think, in a way, we've been able to establish a kind of wealth distribution. If somebody needs something... we do our best to fulfill the need."*

## PAM SCHNEIDER

General Services, Cranbrook

issues and don't have the funds to purchase nutritional foods. We try to meet some of these basic needs for women in Cranbrook.

I really enjoy being at the women's centre and spending time with the women. A typical day might involve trying to open the front door, because there are so many donations on our porch. We receive a lot of support from the community. People know the women might not have towels or food, so we get a regular stream of donations coming in.

I think, in a way, we've been able to establish a kind of wealth distribution. If somebody needs something, they can express that need and we do our best to fulfill the need, whether it's a woman needing a bed for her child or somebody short of food being able to access the emergency food cupboard.

This job has taught me gratitude, that I'm privileged. I need to remember that and be grateful for what I have.

*Pam Schneider is a Moving Forward Project Coordinator with Community Connections of Southeast B.C. in Cranbrook. She has been a community social services worker for two decades.*

**I**'m a moving forward project coordinator. In some ways my work is crisis management. Many of the women we work with are having difficulty securing safe housing. They have poverty



## Frontline community-based social services workers finally set to benefit from pension plan

**B**CGEU members who work in community-based social services are about to gain a strong measure of financial security.

An estimated 6,500 BCGEU members employed by community agencies will be eligible to join the Municipal Pension Plan (MPP) as of April 1, 2010.

Access to the pension plan was a key element of the sector's 2006 collective agreement.

The MPP, like other public sector pension plans, is a 'defined benefit' pension plan, the most reliable option for retirement security. Until now, workers have had only employer-matched registered retirement savings plans.

The provincial government's "zero mandate" approach to public sector negotiations has raised concerns that some members will choose not to enrol in the MPP, losing it as well as employer contributions to their RRSPs.

Members' contribution rate to the MPP will be almost 7 per cent, which is roughly 4 per cent more than most members are currently contributing to their RRSPs.

"Wages in community social services are the lowest in all of the broad public sector," said Joanne Dyck, a group home worker in Salmon Arm and local 305 chairperson. "We

know the extra amount coming off members' paycheques will have an impact. But this is such a great benefit we are strongly encouraging members to take the long view."

Walking away from the MPP will mean walking away from employer contributions of between 8 and 16 per cent, depending on demographics.

Patsy Harmston points out "this is a women's issue." A transition house worker in Trail and chairperson of local 309, Harmston is a sole support parent and feminist activist. "About three quarters of our members are women. This plan will give our members security in retirement."

Cam Gerard, a group home residence worker in Surrey, is leading by example. The 30 year-old has been looking forward to the day he can enrol in the MPP.

The difference between starting now and waiting is significant. It can mean hundreds of dollars each month in retirement.

"Even though I might change careers once or twice before I retire, this is a good deal for me" he said. "The MPP is portable to other public sector pension plans."

Gale Enstrom is closer to retirement. A group home supervisor in Williams Lake, she has worked in community social services for more than 25 years.

"I look at the pension as a

paycheque for life," she said. "I've contributed to the Canada Pension Plan for years but it won't be enough."

The BCGEU is encouraging all eligible members to sign up for the Municipal Pension Plan. The Community Social Services component will hold education sessions around the province to educate members about the pension plan.

For more information go to: [www.mpp.pensionsbc.ca](http://www.mpp.pensionsbc.ca) or the community social services pension page at [www.bcgeu.ca/C03\\_pension\\_news](http://www.bcgeu.ca/C03_pension_news).

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“Even though I might change careers once or twice before I retire, this is a good deal for me. The MPP is portable to other public sector pension plans.”



MARCH 8

Whatever became of me?

**How tough is it to find time for yourself?**

How tough is it to balance work life and home life?

We want to know so we can work on making it easier.

We asked. You answered. What's next?

Watch for reports from our April "Quality of Women's Lives" Conference.

Visit our website at [www.nupge.ca](http://www.nupge.ca)



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