



SSWCC Chair Report to Convention Submitted By: Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam

It has been a whirlwind year in Social Services across the province and we continue to be a committee and sector that strives to tackle every hurdle that is thrown at us by the government and employers. The Social Service Sector continues to be under a strategic attack by municipal and provincial government initiatives. The stress on the system is being felt by the membership, at bargaining tables, and by the people supported by social services. Drummond recommends expenditure growth for social programs are kept at or below 0.5% annual growth. However, Drummond himself freely admits that keeping annual spending at or below the 0.5% recommended threshold will be “immensely challenging”. The Ontario Budget has come forward with spending recommendations being held at 2.7% which translates to millions of dollars of cuts to programs and services in Social Services. Transformation of the sector is also noted in the Ontario Budget, referring to all of our sub-sectors, with the exception of Childcare which was completely neglected from the budget.

As a sector we represent 5 sub-sectors including Children’s Aid Society’s, Childcare, Community Agencies, Developmental Services, Municipal Social services and workers from WSIB. While our workplace concerns may have differences, the common theme across all of the sub-sectors is the government policy and supports for social services are drastically shifting. Restructuring, re-engineering and new delivery and funding models including new social entrepreneurship and social venture capital options will push services into hybrid-semi public-private partnership models. Radical reforms that include aspects of privatization are being proposed that will affect service quality, service accessibility and not-for-profit delivery and on the workers’ working conditions in much of the social service sector.

These reforms come after years of consistent provincial underfunding for social services that has eroded access to services and the quality of supports and fostered a weak patchwork of programs. The result is that the sector is ever further from a model of public services and entitlements.

Today the ground is inching closer to private sector models for funding and service delivery through the:

- Expansion of direct funding models

- Devolution and spin-off of services from existing stable and comparatively well funded providers such as in child welfare agencies to underfunded and stretched community agencies
- A push for “shared service” or regional delivery models
- Municipal governments considering a shift to for-profit delivery of existing child care programs while for-profit delivery expands in community based child care
- Expanding social entrepreneurship partnerships

What gives us strength is the most important similarity - we are CUPE members who are committed and dedicated to providing quality services to the client's that we support and the solidarity we demonstrate to push back the government through campaigns and working with community coalition partners.

Here is a Snapshot of the Recent Activities in the Social Services Sector:

Children's Aid Societies (CAS)

With the exception of 2 Bargaining Units, which are still at the table, every CAS Bargaining Unit which came open in 2010 and 2011 successfully bargained in the Union – Employer Consensus Agreement. The two remaining Bargaining Units are Timmins and Payukotayno: James and Hudson Bay Family Services. The Payukotayno members are working past a strike / lockout deadline with a plan to work with the employer to address the systemic funding concerns their northern agency experiences while serving remote aboriginal communities. Timmins is most likely headed for a No Board report.

As a handful of CAS Bargaining Units and the first collective agreements from the merger PSLRTA votes start their 2012 Consensus Agreement bargaining, the 2010/11 Bargaining Units are implementing the Consensus Agreement's Union – Employer – Ministry working groups on safety and workload. CAS representatives on the SSWCC are participating in these working groups as well as the ongoing meeting with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

Sometime in the Spring, four additional CUPE Bargaining Units will be involved in merger PSLRTA votes.

Developmental Services (DS)

As a way to improve service quality, the DS sector continues to push for standardized funding and appropriate staff compensation and benefits.

Attempts to establish a form of central bargaining devolved into co-ordinated bargaining. While the sector works to leverage achievements at the Provincial Discussion Table, local bargaining tables continue to struggle. In order to support coordinated bargaining, the sector is mobilizing the membership to do positive community outreach events and advocacy for the services they provide. March 1st, the Developmental Social Services

Coordinating Committee met in Toronto to talk about next steps in Coordinated Bargaining and creating the political climate for bargaining. A submission has been made to the National Strategic Directions fund to allow for the coordinated bargaining strategy to move forward and activities to create a political climate for bargaining the remaining 40 Collective Agreements that are open.

Child Care

Simultaneous with the announcement of the Ontario debut of a multi-national for-profit Child Care company, Edleun, a CUPE Child Care Campaign was kicked off at Queen's Park. The campaign is focused on the following short term goals:

- an immediate commitment of \$287 million emergency funding to stabilize the sector;
- an immediate halt to licensing new for-profit childcare operations; and
- development of a full, modern, provincial policy framework for Child Care

While continuing to work on this enormous task with coalition partners, the CUPE Child Care community is celebrating a recent success. On January 26th, Peel Regional Council was scheduled to vote on a recommendation to close all twelve of its regionally operated Child Care Centres. Approximately sixty deputants and one hundred and fifty written statements resulted in a unanimous vote to defer the issue to September 2012 pending research and community consultation. At the same time, a CUPE – supported coalition of concerned parents were very active at Toronto City Council which was also proposing to close some of its centres.

Much work lies ahead in the Child Care sector as the threat of closures, the expansion of for-profit providers, and the implementation of full-day kindergarten squeezes our municipal and not-for-profit community Child Care Centres. Drummond was silent on childcare for children between 0-3.8 and 6 to 12, and made the dreadful recommendation of cancellation of the Full Day Kindergarten program. Although the Liberals state they will not be moving forward with Drummond's recommendation there is much work to be done on the importance of Early Learning and Care for a child's development and how the investment contributes to the economy.

Community Agencies

With municipalities and other service providers, such as Children's Aid Societies, shedding services, this already under-resourced sector is braced for an infusion of underfunded services. The effects of traditional service provider restructuring and scaling back services will be accelerated by the release of the Drummond Report and the provincial budget. Agencies that provide settlement services, LINC programs and employment services funded through the Federal government have received notice of cancellation of funding and programs are closing leaving huge gaps in services.

Municipal Social Services

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario released its second discussion paper on Friday, February 3rd. A working group was formed of 4 Municipal Social Services workers from different areas of the province and met with CUPE research February 27th to 29th to respond to the 29 questions asked by the Commission. We have submitted our response to the Commissions' recommendations March 16th 2012. We expect the Commissions final recommendations on Social Assistance programs June 2012.

Social Service Workers' Conference



The Annual Social Services Conference was held March 22nd to 25th in Niagara Falls. 285 registered delegates attended and our Agenda was ambitious to set the stage to “Stand Up for Social Services”. Our goal during the conference was to provide delegates with an environment to learn new things, to be inspired into Action mode, within Locals, the Sector, and within their communities. The conference was opportunity to share ideas, best practices and lessons learned on how to move forward together to advocate for ourselves and the very important services we provide to our communities. Radical shifts in the Social Service sector require a radical shift in our preparations and response. It is more important than ever that members and Local Unions work as advocates for the services they provide, not solely as bargaining agents and grievance handlers.

In Solidarity,

Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, Chair SSWCC