

7 August 2008 – Bill 77 presentation in Timmons

By Cindy Hertz

Good morning, I am Cindy Hertz. I am a front line worker and have worked in the developmental service sector for 15 years. I am also active in my Union which is Local 1880 of CUPE.

I have travelled from S.S. Marie to make this presentation. As I'm sure you can appreciate, the issue of distance and isolation is significant in the north. That how ever does not mean that communication is a problem! Word traveled fast in the Sault and I was approached over the last week by family members and co-workers with comments they wanted me to share with you today.

I also got on the phone to spoke to people in Manitoulan, Sudbury, Espanola, and Fort Francis. If I was going to drive 6 hours each direction I wanted to make a presentation that was reflective of more then just my experience and thoughts.

My job is to work as part of a team with family, coworkers and others in the community. But to be honest it often feels like being part of a family. I have worked with some for the same individuals for 8 to 9 years. One woman I worked with for 15 years until she passed away. I've been blessed to share in these people's lives. This is more then a job – it is an important part of my life. As much as I love the work I have struggled with the reality that I should look for other work --- I have a family to support and I have worked two jobs to make enough money to pay my bills – and I am one of many in this position in my agency.

I'm sure it is not a surprise to anyone in this room that staff turn over is a big problem. A couple of years ago I read a paper the employers' wrote entitled "Quality Supports through Competitive Compensation" which they submitted to the ministry. They explained how agencies are facing serious staffing issues and they listed issues including – [this is not a complete list]

- Difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified employees
- High turnover resulting in increased recruitment, training and supervision costs
- Many employees are forced to hold multiple jobs due to low wages & part-time hours
- Experiencing a diminishing pool of potential employees
- Finding it increasingly difficult to meet emerging service needs

All these issues certainly applies to the north.

So I was excited when I heard there was going to be new legislation. When I read it however I did not see how this new legislation was going to address the problems I just listed. In fact with direct funding I can see things getting worse for families and worse for workers.

I can not tell you hard numbers – I'm sure the ministry has this information –but as difficult as staff turn over is and how difficult it is to find people to fill vacancies in other parts of the province – this issue is huge in the north. Our populations are smaller and more spread out and the distances we need to travel are greater. The issues of distance and isolation only intensify these challenges.

If you look at Manitoulin Island, Sudbury, Espanola, Fort Francis, or S.S. Marie, the reality is the same. Finding developmental services staff and keeping them is a challenge. This challenge of accessing people with certain skill sets... and keeping them is profound. In Manitoulin, the turn over of staff prior to the 4 month mark is presenting a challenge. The feeling by many is that the job has

become a transitional job as increasing numbers of staff do not see a future in staying within the sector. The same trend is seen across the north.

I'd like to spend some time today talking about this issue which some would on first glance might see as a "worker issue" but it would not take long for anyone who lives within the realities of the developmental service sector to realize the very direct impact of the issue of retention and recruitment on services and supports for individuals and families.

Give example from my work experience – not using names

We work with an individual who lives at home and who became physically aggressive to himself and others when he moved into his teens – the family needed the support of staff working in the home for the families and teens safety. Staff needed ongoing training and supervision and had to coordinate between a number of individuals who were involved with the client. As the relationship and understanding of this individual grew the individual's personal care plan has begun to show results. The key continues to be

- importance of knowing the client and family and having experience with a wide variety of strategies to deal with the individuals challenges
- importance of working with a team
- importance of supervision and training

This example is about an individual who is not someone over 18 years old but he will continue with our agency through his adulthood.

In S.S. Marie, our agency is working to provide more supports to people in their homes. We are having challenges finding people who will stay in this program but we are working together to make it work. There is a large training component as there are unique challenges presented when working in someone's home.

We are seeing a major problem in finding staff to do respite thru direct funding as salaries are minimum wage or slightly above.

The agency, at least, offers staff benefits, training, job security and a salary better than what parents are able to provide thru direct funding. If agencies with their infrastructure, supports, and compensation packages are having challenges finding and keeping staff how is it reasonable to think a direct funding option is going to work?

In addition to compensation and training, there is also a reality that this field has a high incidence of injury. How will this issue be dealt with in direct funding relationships? The government will need to take a look at liability issues of parents as they expand the direct funding model.

In order to provide the services and supports that are right for the people we work with – we, as workers, need support too --- to make sure we have the training, information, skills and resources to do our job

This bill says it is about choice ---- but what is the choice really? -- When there are waiting lists, parents have no choice. If they receive direct funding but can not realistically recruit and/or keep qualified staff what is the choice? When this fragmented funding model undermines agency funding what is the choice? If Community Living Agencies are having problems with staffing – how are families going to staff their homes? Again – is this really providing a choice?

We have seen what happens when work is casualized becoming part time and transient. Workers come and go, quality goes down....what does choice mean when the quality of service is eroded?

If families need support to keep loved ones in the home – agencies can be funded to provide these supports – if an individual needs a day

program, employment supports, independent living supports, residential placements – agencies can provide these supports too if they are funded in a way that they can develop these programs

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When you look at the education sector and the health sector, it is recognized that individuals who deliver these services must have a skill set to do the work. Well we do too. Systems to provide service are put in place for a reason. Eroding agencies ability to develop a skilled work force is not good for workers/ families, the two are interlinked.

The explanatory note for Bill 77 sets out that the concept of the bill is to ensure that the Act is applied consistently to persons with similar degrees of developmental disability. How can there be consistency when we move from the number of employers we have in the north to hundred through direct funding arrangements?

This Bill will deskill the sector when what should be the priority is building a sector that is firmly based on a strong agency foundation. Developmental services as a sector is not going away. It is crucial that sector can rely on that fact that they are able to hire and keep people whose skills can support individuals and their families. A system of direct funding that undermines agencies, deskills workers is not good for workers, individuals or families.

In summary, many of us were drawn to this work as we have family members or friends who are involved in the developmental services sector. Our work on the front lines as parents, other family members, staff, and agencies, are as a team who work together to support individuals. We are not all separate groups with different agendas. Our goal is to support individuals to have full participation in the community to the extent that they are able. This is a shared agenda. We know that quality of life for people with supports is intrinsically linked to those that provide the support. In the north --- how can it be good to further isolate workers by not having then part of an agency?

How are parents going to find qualified people to work as independent contractors? How can the ministry ensure that parents as employers are providing appropriate levels of training and supports to ensure quality care?

Legislation such as Bill 77 needs to come with a budget to support it. Being able to develop an individualized plan for an individual with a developmental disability and then having a variety of high quality options to access is what creates choice for individuals and families.

The focus of this bill seems to be more about setting up a new funding model than it is about addressing long standing challenge in the sector.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to address you today.

