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Only adequate funding for staffing and programs can resolve crisis in developmental services: CUPE

TORONTO, Ont. – Only properly funded community living services can ensure that all people with developmental disabilities have the supports they need to live with dignity, says the Canadian Union for Public Employees (CUPE).

Sufficient funding, says the union, would eliminate long wait lists for programs and cuts to services, as well as provide adequate staffing to deliver the services that support adults with intellectual disabilities.

By contrast, current government funding offers limited capacity to respond to changing needs, deteriorating infrastructure, staff recruitment and retention challenges, and low and disparate wages. Underfunding is most obvious among the 23,000 people in Ontario who are currently on waiting lists for developmental support services, while staff, programs and supports are being reduced in existing services.

The quality and availability of services for adults with developmental disabilities will come into sharper focus in 2014, as more than 50 locals from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) begin negotiating new collective agreements with agencies providing services to adults with developmental disabilities.

CUPE's bargaining will include a focus on continuity of care for people with developmental disabilities. Past negotiations were supported by a KPMG study of developmental services that demonstrated continuity of support was directly tied to wage rates and working conditions of frontline staff.

For example, lack of adequate funding for services for people with developmental disabilities affects employers' ability to retain qualified workers; the resulting high staff turnover jeopardizes continuity of care, which is deeply important to the physical and emotional well being of supported individuals.

Through collective bargaining, CUPE will present workers' concerns and share with employers the worries of families directly affected by underfunding in the Developmental Services sector. Among the issues to be addressed by developmental support workers are wages, pensions, cuts to staff and benefits for part-time workers.

"Everyone from frontline workers to families of people with developmental disabilities understands that the quality of services is directly tied to the day-to-day working conditions of direct support workers," said Jim Beattie, Chair of the CUPE's Developmental Service Workers Coordinating Committee and an instructor with Community Living Hamilton.

"As frontline workers, CUPE members want to ensure that people with developmental disabilities have the support they need to live a life with dignity and respect. We want to protect the supports they need, and the best way to do that is to protect the people who provide those supports," concluded Beattie.

CUPE represents 8,000 workers in developmental services in Ontario.

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