



**April 2016**

## **Memo to Presidents of Municipal Social Service Workers' locals**

**Subject: SAMS in Ontario Works offices – update**

**From: Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, Chair, SSWCC  
Andrew Hunter, Coordinator, SSWCC**

In advance of the upcoming CUPE Ontario Social Services Conference, being held April 7 to 10, 2016 in London Ontario, the Social Services Workers Coordinating Committee (SSWCC) wanted to take the opportunity to update members on some developments since the implementation of SAMS sixteen months ago.

### **SAMS Postcard Campaign**

To mark the one-year anniversary of the shotgun “go-live” of SAMS technology, the SSWCC coordinated another “Code Red” postcard campaign. Thirty-one CUPE locals participated and we received more than 1,800 postcards to deliver to Ontario’s Ministry of Community and Social Services.

We met with the Deputy Minister and Chief of Staff on February 29 to deliver the postcards. They were quite surprised at the volume of cards and really wanted to focus on how we might move forward. Your committee representatives made it very clear that, regardless of system improvements, frontline, support and back-end members carried the full freight of the botched launch, and moving forward with PTSD (post-traumatic SAMS disorder) is challenging.

### **SAMS Working Group**

As previously reported, CUPE demanded the Ministry establish a frontline working group in our meeting on December 23, 2014 meeting with Minister Helena Jaczek.

The working group, made up of CUPE and OPSEU members, commenced meeting in February 2015 and has met face-to-face or by conference call a total of 10 times.

These meetings have been challenging and another one is scheduled for April 13, 2016. We have expressed to the Ministry that CUPE feels it is time to wrap up this working group, based on the feedback we have received from the CUPE members who are participating.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the CUPE members who have attended the working group meetings to bring forward issues and proposed solutions to make SAMS more user friendly.

## New SAMS Survey!

As we move through our conference and into work planning for the coming years, it would be very helpful if CUPE members who work with SAMS took the time to complete a new survey (links below).

We have decided to benchmark five questions that were asked in December 2014 and March 2015 to determine where members are with SAMS. The survey will be open until Friday, April 15, 2016. Please distribute widely through your networks.

Complete the latest SAMS survey:

- English: <http://surveys.cupe.ca/index.php/528746?lang=en>
- French: <http://surveys.cupe.ca/index.php/528746?lang=fr>

## Accessibility Software and SAMS

In December 2015, we became aware of a third-party consultant who was approaching municipalities to offer SAMS-specific solutions for Dragon assistive technology.

The feedback we had received from some members who had worked with this consultant was quite positive. CUPE Ontario has been raising alarm since Day 1 of SAMS about the extreme barriers of compatibility with assistive software.

We immediately reached out to the Ministry to share with them that this third-party consultant was being procured by municipalities, that feedback was positive, and that the Ministry should reach out to the provider and provide this expertise to all municipalities and DSSABs to create widespread necessary accommodations for members who are in need of assistive technology.

We have flagged this issue again in our most recent meeting with the Ministry on February 29 and we continue to wait for a response.

## LATE-BREAKING NEWS regarding Budget Announcements & Legislation, Bill 173

In the February 2016 budget announcement by the provincial government, there were a few announcements that may have raised questions with respect to social assistance delivery in Ontario. We were able to follow up with the Ministry about these announcements.

But we also wanted to draw your attention to a very radical component of the new budget bill, Bill 173. "Schedule 3" of the Bill is the *Benefits Administration Integration Act* and it could have major implications for CUPE and for the public sector generally. The new legislative powers would allow the government to create a new centralized body for benefits administration that could manage virtually all paid benefit programs.

This could potentially include programs like OW, ODSP, OSAP, the new so-called “free tuition” program, pensions, medical benefits, the low-income GAINS program and more.

“Schedule 3” would also allow benefits operations to be contracted out and run by a private third-party operator, all under the guise of “providing easier access to services by consumers.”

At this early stage, CUPE is still working to understand fully the significance of this legislation. CUPE Ontario raised our concerns in its presentation to the budget committee hearings at Queen’s Park on March 22 and we remain in contact with OPSEU and the Ontario NDP Research team as we develop our response.

Bill 173 is expected to pass in the House before the end of April.

### **Guaranteed Income Supplement Pilot Project**

With the announcement of a pilot project to deliver a Guaranteed Income Supplement in Ontario, CUPE requested more details with respect to this announcement. Specifically, we wanted to know the group targeted to participate in the pilot; and who would be delivering the program.

The Deputy Minister and Chief of Staff stated this program is in its infancy and these details have not yet been worked out, but they assured us details will become clearer by the end of 2016.

We pushed further on the question of delivery and the response was that whoever delivers during the pilot project may not be the same post-pilot. We will continue to keep a close eye on this project.

### **Family Support Program**

Following the mobilization of anti-poverty and advocacy groups, the Government is now exploring changing the dollar-for-dollar support deductions from Ontario Works and ODSP recipients. We inquired with the Ministry to determine the impact on whether or not the pursuit of support would continue under Ontario Works. The Ministry confirmed pursuing support continues to be the mandate, as it is a valued program for securing support revenue for when recipients transition off social assistance.

### **Rumours of Upload/Download**

Speculation continues about a potential uploads or downloads of delivery and programs between Ontario Works and ODSP. CUPE did obtain a letter from Minister Jaczek that indicated there was no plan to upload or download services.

We re-visited this issue in our February 29 meeting and in the GIS announcement in the budget, the same message was delivered. The Ministry continues to strengthen their relationship with Municipal partners and it is not on the horizon to upload or download programs or services.

## Social Assistance Ministry Buzzwords

The provincial government communications advisors are certainly keen on sticking to a message track. For the Ministry of Community Social Services, the following are included in all announcements and in our meetings with senior staff:

Modernization ♦ Simplification ♦ Streamlining ♦ Integration ♦ Local Flexibility  
High Change Environment ♦ Community Hubs

We also continue to hear how SAMS' improvements will increase the frontline workers time to spend more face-to-face and case planning time with recipients. We don't know exactly what this all means, but we continue to keep our ear to the ground to be able to respond and mobilize as necessary.

## Wrap-up

Don't forget the SAMS survey and its closing date, Friday, April 15:

- English: <http://surveys.cupe.ca/index.php/528746?lang=en>
- French: <http://surveys.cupe.ca/index.php/528746?lang=fr>

And a reminder about SAMs email address: [sams@cupe.on.ca](mailto:sams@cupe.on.ca) for not just same concerns but if there are any other delivery intelligence or changes we should be aware of. Drop us a line any time.

MU:gb/cope491