

June 2016

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

**Subject:** Municipal Social Services update

**From:** Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, Chair, SSWCC  
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Coming out of CUPE Ontario's annual Social Services conference held early April in London, Ontario, the Municipal representatives on the Social Service Workers Coordinating Committee (SSWCC) heard loud and clear from delegates that SAMS continues to be a significant barrier in the workplace.

Other hot topics during our discussions included the announcement of the Basic Income Pilot in the 2016-2017 Provincial Budget; concerns around the Family Support Worker programs; and Human Services Integration.

There are also some updates from the Ministry on other matters, including the results of our SAMS survey, which closed shortly after the conference.



### SAMS

On Friday, April 22, 2016 we released the results from our survey of members; the survey benchmarked the answers to five questions that were asked one month, four months and 15 months after the introduction of SAMS. The results remain clear that SAMS is still not performing the way that we were promised it would; that it continues to have a detrimental effect on members and recipients; and that overall, the system is not good enough.

Below is a summary of the survey questions and results from late 2014 to spring 2016.

**Question 1: Is SAMS still having a negative impact on your health & family life?**

OPTIONS	DEC 2014	MARCH 2015	APRIL 2016
YES	96%	91%	75.22%
NO	4%	9%	24.78%

**Question 2: Does the design of SAMS allow for more or less face to face case-planning time with recipients?**

OPTIONS	DEC 2014	MARCH 2015	APRIL 2016
MORE	3%	2%	2.70%
LESS	97%	98%	97.03%

**Question 3: Do you believe the “new normal” with SAMS is sustainable?**

OPTIONS	DEC 2014	MARCH 2015	APRIL 2016
YES		3%	19.54%
NO		97%	80.46%

**Question 4: Do you believe SAMS has had a positive or negative impact on recipients?**

OPTIONS	DEC 2014	MARCH 2015	APRIL 2016
NEGATIVE	100%	99%	96.76%
POSITIVE	0%	1%	3.34%

**Question 5: Has SAMS had a negative impact on your work performance?**

OPTIONS	DEC 2014	MARCH 2015	APRIL 2016
YES	98%		85.84%
NO	2%		14.16%

## Adapting Dragon speech recognition software for SAMS

We have heard from the Ministry of Community and Social Services that they will be starting a pilot project to work with a third-party provider to develop tools for all municipalities and DSSABs to customize browser settings to make Dragon software more compatible with SAMS. We have not yet heard what Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) has been selected for the pilot, but we will keep you updated as we receive this information, as well as the feedback.

## Basic Income Pilot

Coming out of our February 29, 2016 meeting with the Ministry, there were more questions than answers about the announcement in the budget of a Basic Income Pilot. We received a Ministry of Finance briefing, thanks to a Freedom of Information request made by the NDP; from the document, we are now able to report that 2016 will be a year of “consultative process” to develop the Basic Income Pilot; 2017 appears to be the launch timeframe.

We will follow up to learn any additional information and CUPE Ontario will be asking the Minister to ensure that it is included in the stakeholder consultation process.

At the 2016 CUPE Ontario Convention, the Action Plan that was adopted by delegates speaks to a series of subjects, including Basic Income. Below are the relevant paragraphs (37 through 46) that outline some of our next steps on the Basic Income announcement.

## Fighting Poverty and Income Inequality (excerpt from 2016-17 CUPE Ontario Action Plan)

37. Poverty continues to be rampant, and governments have done nothing to change this. Economic justice has been denied to a large segment of our society. Social assistance rates continue to be set far below poverty levels. Many workers continue to work at poverty wages. Almost 30% of workers in Ontario earn less than \$15/hour. Women, Aboriginal workers, racialized workers, workers with disabilities, LGBTQ workers, and young workers are overrepresented in the group of low wage employees. Far too many workers only have access to part-time, casual, and other forms of precarious work, which further exacerbates their income insecurity.
38. The provincial government has proposed a Basic Income pilot project. To some the promise of a guaranteed annual income, or a Basic Income Guarantee, has some immediate appeal. For those of us who care about social justice it sounds like a way to raise incomes for everyone. However, guaranteed income programs can be designed on a highly regressive basis. These programs can be used as an excuse to merge and eliminate other income support programs, and can act as subsidies to low wage employers. Regressive forms of a Basic Income are used to justify privatization, cutting services and jobs. We must fight against the austerity model of the Basic Income.

39. The government's plan is to implement a Basic Income pilot project by the end of the year. Since this government has a dismal record on eliminating poverty, and has fully embraced austerity, we are unconvinced that this pilot project will be based on progressive principles.
40. Any anti-poverty plan must be based on the principles of universality, and be designed to raise everyone out of poverty. It must be publicly delivered, and based on enhancing the important services that our members provide. It must a component of a broadly based anti-poverty strategy. We can promote the principles of a progressive model as part of our campaign against the anti-worker models that we know will be coming from the Liberals.

CUPE Ontario will:

41. Aggressively defend and fight to expand all public services provided to support recipients. Under no circumstances can we accept a model for a Basic Income that leads to reductions in the vitally important services that are delivered, or that results in our members losing jobs.
42. Work with the SSWCC to develop a comprehensive vision of what a socially progressive anti-poverty plan would look like, and actively campaign against any Basic Income project that fails to live up to that progressive vision.
43. Provide resources to locals so members can have extensive knowledge about the different models of a Basic Income plan, and so they can develop the skills to fight against the kinds of proposals that are promoted by right wingers like Liberals and Conservatives.
44. Work with local leadership, sectoral committees, District Councils, and rank-and-file activists to pressure the government to design a comprehensive anti-poverty plan based on universal and expanded public services, full-employment, incomes and social assistance rates high enough to raise everyone out of poverty, and increases to corporate taxation to redistribute wealth.
45. Continue to work on the Raise the Rates campaign, including allocating money to the campaign to support its activities. Work with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and other allies to continue the struggle to raise social assistance rates to levels that will raise people out of poverty. Through this work, and through these alliances we will build a strong social movement union that can contribute to building broader working class power.
46. Engage with our allies in the labour movement and other coalition partners and progressive organizations to join the fight for true economic and social justice by fighting for full employment and real poverty elimination strategies, including providing concrete support to the \$15 and Fairness Campaign, and the OFL's Make it Fair campaign.

## Family Support Worker Program

We are expecting an announcement from the Ministry of Community and Social Services in the coming weeks that will clarify an item in the provincial budget. This statement spoke to changing the dollar-for-dollar deductions of child support from social assistance recipients.

When we met with the Ministry on February 29, 2016 we were assured that pursuing support would continue to be a legislative requirement and part of the mandate. However that does not mean that everything will remain status quo. We understand the implementation of changes to support deductions will take effect in early 2017 and, as new information comes in, we will continue to provide updates.

## Human Services Integration

At the OMSSA Leadership meeting held the end of May, a few more details of the transformation and modernization plan for social assistance became a little clearer. Details are still being fleshed out, but on the horizon are:

- Exploring and/or introducing “commissioning”, a new-ish form of privatization out of the UK and Australia, particularly regarding Employment Ontario services.
- Human services integration across the board in areas like social assistance, housing, child care, and health benefits.
- Simplification of social assistance; moving many services online; and having case workers focus more on case planning.
- Common benefits administration in which the front-end (client application) and back end (administration) would be centralized across multiple income support programs (e.g. social assistance, ODSP, legal aid, Healthy Smiles Ontario). Again, they’re eventually seeing the application occurring through a central online portal.
- Standardized templates, funding models, payment and reporting schedules for provincial transfer payment agencies, with a common identifier number for each agency.

## Final words

One thing remains clear since the implementation of SAMs: there is a much bigger agenda and plan when it comes to the delivery of social assistance. We continue to monitor this file closely and are working to piece things together to gain some clarity over the new vision. As further intelligence is gathered, we will share it through these bulletins and will be requesting a further meeting with the Minister to bring forward our concerns and demand greater transparency around the transformation.

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