

March 2015

Memo to Presidents of Municipal Social Service Workers' locals

Subject: SAMS update – news and progress

**From: Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, Chair, SSWCC
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We are all too aware of the problems that SAMS is still creating in Ontario Works offices: major delays, stress and headaches in workplaces across the province.

The SSWCC is still working hard to get a resolution for the problems our members continue to experience and this report is an update on the action and developments over the past month and what's planned for the weeks ahead.

Topics include a run-down of the meeting of the SAMS working group on February 6; the government's independent review; and an outline of the next steps that we will take collectively to tackle the ongoing problems.

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Re-cap

Following the late-December meetings (by phone and in person) with MCSS Minister Helena Jaczek, CUPE representatives were invited to take part in a working group on SAMS. The group's goal was to contribute to concrete solutions that would make it possible for CUPE members to do our jobs and provide good-quality service to Ontarians on social assistance.

An invitation was then issued by a deputy minister from MCSS for up to ten CUPE frontline workers to take part in an initial three-hour meeting with SAMS project staff; representatives from the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) would also attend.

That meeting took place on February 6 at Queen's Park.

The working group meeting was just one of a series of wins CUPE has had over SAMS: meetings with the minister; the establishment of the working group; the minister's visit to Ontario Works workplaces (the result of political pressure from CUPE Ontario, Locals and municipal councils). As the chair of SSWCC reports, the minister was formerly shielded by staff from the problems with SAMS and she was visibly shocked at the state of the workplace in her visit to OW in Toronto.

Working group – planning

Over 65 CUPE members indicated their interest in representing their colleagues on the working group. The ten members selected were chosen on the basis of work experience, how their work was affected by SAMS, their role in determining eligibility for OW applications, geography and provide ongoing support to recipients.

The working group members were asked to identify their "Top 5" SAMS systems improvements to bring to the meeting with the Ministry. The agreed goal was to seek a re-design "page by page, tab by tab, field by field," based on the way that members actually perform their jobs.

Working group

The meeting at Queen's Park lasted 180 minutes and CUPE members took advantage of every second; we were prepared, articulate and forceful. We raised issues about incompatibility with Dragon's assistive technology, along with other major issues of functionality and design. Click [here](#) to see the complete list.

We know this is only the start of the process and many questions remain:

- What will the ministry's SAMS team put at the top of the critical list?
- What will government prioritize?
- At what point will we be able to add to the list of issues discussed during the meeting?
- Is the client portal still in the government's plans for social assistance?
- What are the timelines for fixes?
- Does the working group represent a ploy by government?

Still, one member of the working group reported that she found members were encouraged by the strength of the group; it gave them hope that matters would eventually be resolved, she said.

OMSSA

In advance of the working group meeting CUPE and OMSSA connected to discuss common objectives and next steps since we share many common concerns. During the meeting we also sensed that OMSSA representatives were onside with the issues we raised, since CUPE can be much more forthright with government about the flaws in the system that it implemented than municipal managers can be. After all, the ministry is not our boss or our funder.

We have also seen in our workplaces that OMSSA's business recovery analysis is underway.

Independent review of SAMS

Just two working days after the February 6 working group meeting, Minister Jaczek made a surprise announcement: the government was launching an independent review of SAMS. The announcement was made in a memo to all staff at OW and ODSP.

We think the timing is no accident.

CUPE sent out a statement commending the government of recognizing the seriousness of the issues at hand and indicating that members were looking forward to making their contribution to the process. Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam also followed up with a letter to the minister asking for assurances around CUPE's participation and clarification about the future of the working group in the context of the review.

On 26 February, the ministry followed up with a proposal to establish Front-Line Staff Working Group on SAMS Improvements. CUPE offered its feedback and comments, including request for:

- an increased number of members appointed by CUPE;
- more representatives from CUPE "Corporate Office" to allow for 1 elected leader or designate and one staff;
- full transparency of the participants, job title, and employer of all participants;
- multi-day meetings rather than single days to cut down on travel and have more meaningful solution finding;
- accommodations to be covered as well as transportation.

We expect a 'yes' on all the requests except the increased number of member-participants; we understand the ministry's concern about the group size becoming too large but we will continue to request additional members.

E-mail us @ new SAMS address

Members are CUPE's link to the reality of OW workplaces since SAMS and we are grateful for all the knowledge you have shared with the SSWCC. Your frontline experience has given CUPE credibility and an inside track when we talk to government about resolving these problems.

So we have created a dedicated e-mail address for members who work with SAMS and would like to share their experiences: comments about what you are currently experiencing in the workplace, SAMS' effects on clients; and "impact statements" about your SAMS experience.

Send your words and pictures to sams@cupe.on.ca; all correspondence will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Opportunities for action

Call **CODE RED** on March 12



March 12 is the four-month anniversary of the introduction of SAMS at Ontario Works and we want to make sure people know we're still seeing RED over SAMS!

All CUPE members are asked to wear RED to work on Thursday, March 12, as a symbol of the urgency that SAMS is creating chaos in the workplace. Then e-mail, tweet and post

photos of you and your colleagues sending out a CODE RED from your workplace – and don't forget to tag #CUPEON and link to CUPE Ontario's Facebook page.

Let's make Ontario Works offices a sea of red on March 12. It will help to send a clear message that the situation remains critical and that immediate support is needed in the workplace.

We have ten days to make this happen, so please start planning!

Write to your MPP

We have prepared a draft letter for members to send to their MPPs, alerting them to the ongoing problems at Ontario Works and the concerns that members have as citizens, workers and taxpayers.

You will be welcome to use the sample text or use your own words – ones that describe the impact of SAMS on frontline workers, as well as the impact on our clients. The letter also asks MPPs to apply pressure to the Minister to remedy this situation immediately.

See the letter [here](#).

Information Pickets at MPP Constituency Offices

Work with your local to organize an information picket at MPP's office on Friday, March 13 or another Friday in March or April. Let SSWCC know the date, time, and location. We will support it with news release and quote from your local's spokesperson.

SAMS issues identified by CUPE working group

In the February 6 meeting, CUPE frontline workers identified the following issues with ministry staff:

1. Currently SAMS' "Refresh" button is not working consistently and requires closing out of the file completely to see changes made on the file. The Refresh button should work or, better yet, the system should automatically reflect changes made. The process of "Apply Change" and "Submit for Approval" are unnecessary.
2. Extended Health Benefits EHB/EEHB: benefits are not issuing but rather coming off as a zero cheque. Manual drug benefit card required.
3. Applicants re-applying for assistance within 6 months of their file closing are not having the earnings exemption applied. As a workaround, workers are calculating the earnings exemption manually.
4. Online applications causing more problems, e.g. duplicates files.
5. Recommendation not to turn on the client portal at this time, given the status of SAMS functionality.
6. The amount of time it takes to generate forms is unbelievable and when some letters/forms print (such as 2212), there are 3 copies (1 printed with data the others no data).
7. Search client: 7 pages of data to find OW Case; limit search data, such as a unique identifier, date of birth, caseworker number, office.
8. Initial Search Screen-function is a "click" instead of hit return on keyboard, inconsistent functionality page by page, and a lack of consistency about how to search based on first name, last name. Needs to be standardized, streamlined search function.
9. Training: trainers were frustrated because the test environment was not functioning and scarce in the North.
10. Training Materials: Job Aids/User Guides if online are not useful because SAMS layout does not allow for split screen to work through job aids. The paper job aids are now out of date because of the number of changes to the system since implementation.
11. Manuals posted in SAMS generate payments in error, create O/Ps because they are not reconciling, cannot apply arrears to the overpayment.
12. Hundreds of rows/Resolve/"All Versions" by Search, too much detail.
13. Legacy Payments – using this benefit in order to force cheques out that we otherwise cannot seem to issue. Concerns about how to fix this down the road. Who is covering the cost of these benefits?

14. Pay directs in bulk don't work to Utilities: break them down to be able to check for multiple clients, to resolve issues the search function to fix payment and sometimes impossible, sometimes resulting in evictions and utilities cut off.
15. The search function for case activity only shows up to 100 files and caseload numbers are much higher than that.
16. Closed Reinstate evidence problematic.
17. Communication is needed about Data fixes in advance of them happening.
18. Job Aids – long and not effective, need plain language.
19. Independent parent living with a parent – they are entitled to the special boarder allowance of \$65/month but this is not being issued.
20. System can take up to an hour for refresh, given how we work this is not productive, as well as many steps, and many clicks for something that used to be so efficient.
21. TCB – delay in lump sum TCB payment being applied to benefits months after the payment resulting in hardship as money has long been spent on necessary items. We are noticing that CRA is deducting TCB 3-4 months after a participant actually received Child Tax Benefits back payment from Revenue Canada. Example: in SDMT, a participant receives back payment from CTB on January 20, 2015. SDMT would deduct any TCB from benefit month February 2015. In SAMS, a participant receives back payment from CTB on September 20, 2014. SAMS deducted the TCB payment from benefit month January 2015. Also, if not eligible for one month prior you have to create a new TCB record.
22. Board and Lodging – under the PDC the breakdown under monthly payment states: Board and Lodge \$339. Under the IC evidence – shelter type is rent. Shouldn't it read Basic Needs and not Board and Lodge? SAMS does not issue dependent files correctly. Using old rates prior to October 2014. Plus adding \$65 special boarder allowance that only independent dependents are entitled to. Workaround in place.
23. Problems with Interface CRA/TCB.
24. Cycle-Cancel-Reissue-Apply-O/P.
25. Need a Life events Wizard.
26. Need Instructions = PNA.
27. Need to know what legislation is embedded in SAMS?
28. Un-necessary need to create new records every month for child and child care provider.
29. Outcome Plans – PA's activities Client can't sign under activity need access to multiple redial buttons no activity for deferred but participating, and no ability to type detailed case plan notes to print on form.

30. Create a Popup if O/P is created or is arrears are produced to help workers resolve the issue immediately.
31. O/P – letters O/P paid but has older or other O/P's exist, consolidated to one not individual breakouts as misleading to the client when they receive a letter than O/P is paid but there are still outstanding other overpayments.
32. SAMS is not working – bring back SDMT There is no Integrity/Accountability.
33. Too many workarounds and converted data is not correct.
34. Historical data should be visible but not active, have selection criteria for worker to choose what is active with data showing or a historical read only option.
35. SDMT- has flags for safety, notes with some details, we need the ability to have many details for safety.
36. Dragon voice activated software compatibility (H&S).
37. Assignment of benefits.
38. Need an accommodations Wizard.
39. Resolve inverted dates start date – end date.
40. Earnings – system does not consistently identify earnings, child care OR allow earnings to be offset by child care.
41. Licensed Childcare expenses and Unlicensed Childcare maximums to offset earnings are not correct according to legislation.
42. Self-employment – expenses are not offsetting gross income requiring manual calculations. Workaround is to enter net business income under gross receipt to read “actual” net income since expenses not taken into consideration. Too many fields required to fill out for anything related to self-employment.
43. Legacy payments create overpayment and arrears.
44. Health and Safety concerns for front line staff: system needs to be simpler. Excessive clicking leading to RSIs. Too many pages. Too much information. Font too small (but if you make it bigger you lose functionality). Workers are struggling with mental, emotional, physical health issues.
45. Logged Tickets – unsure if tickets are fixed or not, better communication on how to correct things.
46. Files should not go on suspend if the Participation Agreement is not up to date on the 3 month review date, given many circumstances could occur with this date not being a realistic date to trigger a suspend.

47. Steam line un-suspend – one action not submit for approval, extra steps are unnecessary.
48. Health cards data on Avatar – easier for issuing manual drug cards.
49. Benefits – tally of benefits should have search function for dates using pen/paper/calculator is not working.
50. Consistency with SAMS is needed some data impacting on one file acts differently in another.
51. Evidence Records – reduce multistep parent/child relationships.
52. More client face-to-face time to do good case planning rather than data entry. The concept of more time with clients is lost. SAMS takes away from time spent with clients. No engagement. No personal interaction. Mechanical and all about capturing data rather than connecting with client and their needs.
53. Tasks function design is not working: assign to cue, individual action, duplication of tasks, 9 individual tasks, individual actions.
54. Household Relationship Evidence: time consuming, get rid of it.
55. Language need to be changes from “Evidence” due to what it implies instead “verification requirement”.
56. All versions – current? End dated? Instead of toggle.
57. Printing Forms – need it streamlined and consistent, if a worker makes a wrong selection, receive error, can’t go back have and instead have to start over, Form Printing, Multistep, confidentiality, time consuming.
58. The system is SLOW.
59. Multiple Routes to the same solution can get lost in steps there need to be a logical organization/sequence to SAMS.
60. Trying to find out why a file is on suspend can involve multiple pages to search for a reason compared to providing a reason.
61. Need a drop down menu organization.
62. Flexibility needed with accommodation details as First Nations may not have street names as well as some rural areas of Ontario.
63. Pink and Blue Avatars to represent “gender” are inappropriate.
64. The computer monitor could never be turned for the recipient to see as old records appear as well as previous recipients that were on the file, even though they are no longer active.

65. Some issues might appear as a glitch or small scale to the Ministry but if you are trying to explain to a woman feeling abuse that has her abusers name on her drug card that she is safe and he does not know where she lives that is not a glitch.
66. When you receive an error message it would be helpful to have a description of the error, rather than "Error".
67. Inability to put pay directs to "Utilities" on opening cheque for new file, when some landlords require this, which can result in a recipient not securing accommodations.
68. RESET button doesn't work.
69. EMAIL function doesn't work.
70. SPONTANEOUS grants/arrears.
71. SPONTANEOUS evidence.
72. System times out/logs out too quickly.
73. Unable to apply changes if evidence errors. Cannot be resolved which means inaccurate Form 1's are being printed and signed.
74. Income reporting is too time consuming.
75. Irrelevant data should no longer appear on evidence page once it is end-dated.
76. Funds being deposited into wrong accounts.
77. Repayments – save and auto allocate does not consistently work. You sometimes have to manually allocate funds. Finance does not have access to restricted files in order to process repayments and reimbursements.
78. Reimbursements – data pros are able to enter the amount of reimbursement but don't have rights to allocate funds. Therefore, second step goes to a supervisor to apply changes. Sometimes not all funds are allocated even though it was processed.
79. T5s are going to be incorrect for anyone ongoing at go live date due to excessive overpayments/arrears.

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