



Prevention is Protection

CASe Notes



A BULLETIN FOR OPSEU MEMBERS IN CAS

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Making the issue of workload visible

Your sector executive and bargaining council is urging all units to enforce workload articles in collective agreements and employer policies. The systemic problem of overwork in CAS workplaces is a management issue, not a problem of individual competency.

Overwork impacts on our health and contributes to instability in child protection with high turnover rates and long-term disability (LTD) absenteeism. Collectively, we can draw attention to this issue when the impact and real costs of overwork are felt by management. For example, claiming overtime for hours worked is necessary if we want to defend workload limits. If we all commit to enforcing our collective agreements and employer policies by claiming overtime we will effectively send a message to employers and government that this systemic problem is costly and dangerous.

Book your meeting today: *“Workload and overwork, let’s take action”*

All CAS units are encouraged to schedule information meetings on how to address “Workload and Overwork” in their workplace.

A power point presentation has been distributed to all CAS local executives to assist them as they lead discussions on how best to use enforcement tools at the local level. Your local executive needs all members to rally around a collective strategy to address this issue. We know that standing together as one is key to making change.

We are asking all CAS members to start claiming unpaid overtime hours and to file individual/group grievances where applicable. We know from first-hand experience that our clients are the first victims of overwork. Together, it’s time we advocate for change.

Education bursary established in memory of Nicole Belair

An education bursary has been established by the divisional executive in memory of Nicole Belair, a 33-year old CAS worker in Sudbury-Manitoulin (Local 668) who passed away on May 13 after she was caught in an apartment fire while attending to a client of hers.

The \$250 post-secondary bursary will be awarded annually to a member, or a family member, of an OPSEU CAS worker. The 'Nicole Belair Education Fund' will be awarded to a candidate studying in the field of child welfare.

"The divisional executive felt this would be a fitting tribute to the memory of Nicole who represented the finest qualities of her profession," said divisional chair, Jane Kaija. "It will greatly assist in keeping her memory eternal for her family and colleagues."

Worker safety survey results are in!

More than 75 per cent of almost 6,000 CAS workers across Ontario report they suffer from one or more types of violence over an average career of 11 years. In 2013 alone, almost one quarter of workers report they were the victim of an assault, threats, verbal abuse, or having witnessed others experience these traumas.

Those sorts of numbers are unlikely to surprise CAS workers. They represent the results of a recently-released survey conducted by the Worker Safety Survey in February 2014 by SPR Associates under the direction of Worker Safety Sub-Committee of the Joint Labour-Management Committee of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. The goal of the survey was to provide an assessment of the current state of safety practices in Ontario's Children's Aid Societies.

Using individual surveys, the exercise gathered information from workers about violence and perspectives on CAS safety. Thirty four CASs returned organizational surveys that provided management's perspective on safety measures. Focus groups were held to gather additional details throughout the project.

Survey highlights:

- Most violence that workers experienced occurred inside a client's home; about one third of violent acts occurred when caseworker was working alone.
- Current CAS reporting systems fail to record all incidents of violence, threats or verbal abuse experienced workers.
- Many workers report that their role has changed to become more of a "policing" activity in recent years.
- Results show a gap in perceptions of safety between those held by workers and those of management. Workers had less favourable perceptions of how well CASs protects them against workplace violence. Organizations, on the other hand, rated their own performance as high.

The report offers 46 recommendations to improve safety in child protection work. System-wide recommendations include obtaining provincial commitments to prioritize safety in child protection work; developing laws for working alone, and scheduling meetings with police to discuss and address safety risks in child protection.

Workplace-level recommendations such as management commitment, consistency, and evaluation of safety measures, incident reporting processes, and improved training are some of the recommendations for moving forward. The report recommends implementing workplace practices such as developing criteria for co-teaming, situational risk assessments, involving police where assaults have occurred, developing client interaction protocols, and improving safety in vehicles and working off-site. Recommendations to improve psycho-social supports such as adopting and maintaining critical incident debriefing programs and peer support programs that help respond to the aftermath of traumatic incidents that CAS workers regularly face.

The study illustrates the close ties between CAS worker safety and the services they provide in the local community. The extent to which police and the community engages, and the degree to which troubled families receive community assistance, directly affects the safety of CAS workers. The findings raise questions about how child protection is—or should be—delivered in Ontario and what role the CAS worker occupies in the system.

Moving forward, all CAS joint health and safety committees should review the report carefully. While the worker safety committee will discuss the recommendations at the provincial level, nothing should stop individual JHSCs from reviewing the recommendations in tandem with their CAS policies with an eye to making improvements to local systems to ensure worker safety.

The survey confirmed that the work of OPSEU's CAS members is very important and, too often, can be downright dangerous. It also confirms our belief that many improvements must be made. OPSEU welcomes our contributions to the worker safety committee and is committed to working with you so that the project's recommendations are thoroughly implemented – and not neglected as is too often the case.

Priority demands to be set at CAS bargaining council Nov. 20-21

Circle these dates! The autumn bargaining council meeting will be held in Toronto on Nov. 20-21. (Units who are in bargaining are invited to attend as per the sector bylaws).

A majority of OPSEU bargaining units in child welfare will begin preparations for setting their coordinated strategy and mapping out bargaining time lines. Systemic issues will be debated and voted on by the council as sector bargaining priorities to be endorsed by local demand setting meetings.

The bargaining council draws representatives from all of OPSEU's CAS locals (about 20 members in all) along with members of the divisional executive to discuss bargaining strategy and campaign mobilizing. Reps also use the occasion to exchange ideas on how we can put your priorities at the centre of future campaigns and mobilizing efforts.

On Oct. 1, wear black to work!

As part of OPSEU's ongoing campaign to draw attention to increasing workloads, funding cutbacks and layoffs, CAS members in ALL locals are urged to wear black to work on Wednesday Oct. 1. The first Wednesday of each month has been designated for this workplace action and, to-date, the response by members has been outstanding!

Let's all stand together for child protection services that we can be proud of. We know that investing in prevention reduces the need for protection.



Members of your CAS bargaining council

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