

# Integrating Equity, Addressing Barriers: Innovative Learning Practices by Unions



*Second Edition*  
*Updated and Expanded*



September 2009

## **Foreword**

The second edition of this report was prepared for the Canadian Council on Learning's Work and Learning Knowledge Centre (WLKC) by the Labour Education Centre. The opinions and conclusions expressed in the document, however, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the WLKC members.

The Work and Learning Knowledge Centre was one of five knowledge centres established in various learning domains by the Canadian Council on Learning. The WLKC was co-led by Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters and the Canadian Labour Congress.

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## Preface to the Second Edition

This newly revised and expanded edition of the June 2007 publication *Integrating Equity, Addressing Barriers: Innovative Learning Practices by Unions* comes at a time of growing economic crisis. Waves of layoffs and financial insecurity are increasing barriers to education and training, particularly faced by workers of colour, Aboriginal workers, immigrants, youth and women. Equity initiatives are particularly needed as crisis provides fertile ground for racism and discrimination in society.

The economic downturn is also leading to growing restrictions on opportunities for education and training of employed workers, with a resulting negative impact on addressing systemic and other barriers such as time for and cost of training.

- a more difficult bargaining environment is affecting both work time and funding for training and education
- constraints on union budgets in turn affect labour education
- the more challenging political environment over the last several years has resulted in less federal funding for literacy, and this has had an impact on labour programs
- TILMA<sup>1</sup> and the Agreement on Internal Trade present dangers to apprenticeship's Red Seal program and high quality training standards.

Despite the worsening economic context, there have nevertheless been many positive developments since the report's original publication. In fact, the report generated considerable discussion and reflection within the labour movement about how to expand and improve upon union equity initiatives and address systemic and other barriers in union education.

Presentations about the report were made to several cross-affiliate education and training committees, to participants at the 2006 Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Education Conference, as well as at six regional roundtables on Work and Learning sponsored by the CLC and the Canadian Council on Learning's Work and Learning Knowledge Centre (WLKC).

In addition, two other projects were launched that built on the report's themes. In February 2008, the Labour Education Centre (LEC) and the Centre for the Study of Education and Work sponsored a roundtable called "Integrating Equity and Addressing Barriers in Education and Training: In the Workplace, In the Union." Financially supported by the WLKC, the two-day event included voices from the community and academic sectors in an effort to expand the scope of the report (which had focused exclusively on programs created by unions and central labour bodies). As the report itself notes, "unionized workers also participate in the many programs and learning initiatives offered by labour-associated organizations and community groups..."

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<sup>1</sup> The Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement between the Governments of Alberta and British Columbia.

As well, the roundtable featured presentations and discussion on union programs addressing barriers faced by Aboriginal workers, and workers with disabilities (two groups not represented in the original report). Over 60 participants attended the Roundtable from six provinces and one territory, representing various levels and organizations of the labour, academic, and community sectors. A report on the roundtable is available on the WLKC website.<sup>2</sup>

In Fall 2008, LEC partnered with the Toronto Training Board to conduct WLKC-funded research on training collaborations between labour and community groups. The research was based on a small sample of union-community training partnerships, and the final report identifies themes and best practices that are of interest to a wide audience.<sup>3</sup>

These reports and discussions served as the basis for this expanded second edition. Eleven new sketches have been prepared, including sketches focusing on the gaps in the original report as well as featuring innovative programs by worker organizations in communities.

The original report did not include programs addressing barriers faced by Aboriginal workers. This edition includes two new sketches: the Representative Workforce Strategy (included in the section on Workplace Programs), and Unionism on Turtle Island (included in the section on Labour Education).

The original report also did not include programs addressing barriers faced by workers with disabilities. This edition includes a new sketch on the Access Conferences of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (included in the section on Labour Education).

The second edition also includes sketches of programs offered by labour-associated organizations and community groups: the Agriculture Workers Alliance, the Workers Action Centre, and Migrante-Ontario (included in the section on Labour Education). As well, a new section, “Cultural Organizations,” has been added which features sketches on Mayworks / Mayweek Festivals, and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre.

In the Workplace Programs section we have also added new sketches on two innovative programs in the workplace: the Joint Learning Program of the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Canada Public Service Agency, and the Community Training Plan of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation offered with the support of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Locals 416 and 79.

Completing the new sketches is the Aboriginal Workers / Workers of Colour Conferences of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council (included in the section on Labour Education).

We have used the occasion of the second edition to invite our original sketch contacts to update information on the programs featured in the 2007 report. Most have revised the

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.ccl-cca.ca/WorkLearning](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/WorkLearning)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.laboureducation.org/pdf/files/communitytrainingfinalreport.pdf>

sketches on their programs (some sketches have been revised overall; some simply have an Update section at the end of the sketch). Those sketches which have been updated are indicated on the Contents pages as well as at the end of the respective sketches.

### **Acknowledgements**

This enlarged and updated report has been funded by the Canadian Council on Learning's Work and Learning Knowledge Centre (WLKC). The WLKC is co-led by the Canadian Labour Congress and the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

The second edition was prepared by the Labour Education Centre. The project team included: Anna Larsen (project coordinator), Nicole Wall, Jojo Geronimo, D'Arcy Martin and Patricia Chong. We thank John Hugh Edwards, Canadian Labour Congress Liaison to the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre, for his support of the project.

Finally, we would like to thank the busy and dedicated labour and community educators who participated in our interviews, and contributed their time to review and update their sketches.

## **Preface to the First Edition by Barbara Byers**

**Executive Vice-President  
Canadian Labour Congress**

*Integrating Equity, Addressing Barriers: Innovative Learning Practices by Unions* provides an insight into some of the exciting education happening in Canada's labour movement. From workplace-based locals to large national programs, unions and their members are turning the vision of lifelong learning into reality. And it's lifelong learning with big goals: to help individual workers achieve work, union and personal goals, as well as to involve workers in collective efforts to improve conditions for all workers, for social and economic justice in our country and globally.

Lifelong learning is reduced to a cliché if equity goals are not integrated into education, if systemic and other barriers are not addressed. The Canadian Labour Congress and its affiliated unions are committed to expanding learning opportunities for workers, recognizing the need for particular efforts and initiatives to remove barriers.

This commitment is seen in the CLC's Anti-Racism Integration Guide for facilitators and program developers. Originating from the CLC Anti-Racism Task Force Report, the guide provides labour educators and program developers with tools, ideas and strategies to develop and deliver anti-racism analysis as part of labour education courses. Complementing labour's decades-long struggle against inequality and racism, provision of anti-racism and human rights courses, and incorporation of equity themes in other courses, the guide helps users to weave anti-racism into learning materials as part of the core learning objectives in education courses.

Barriers to participation are certainly pervasive: at work, in the community, in the union, in education and training. Well known are the barriers experienced by shift workers, part-time and precariously employed workers, workers who live in small or remote areas. Time and financial constraints are significant barriers for all workers.

Formidable barriers confront the majority of workers in Canada: Aboriginal workers, workers of colour, women, workers with disabilities, youth, immigrant workers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered workers, workers who lack formal education and who may face literacy challenges. Their specific needs and situations require differentiated approaches in seeking solutions. The sketches contained in the report provide many examples of how unions tackle the challenges related to particular barriers.

Barriers are not only about access. As captured in this study, the very approach to learning is fundamental to whether workers are successfully engaged in education programs. A framework of labour education and popular education permeates much that is profiled in the sketches, and is the framework governing the education program of the Canadian Labour Congress.

The themes reflected in this report are themes also reflected in the 2006 CLC Labour Education Conference and Literacy Forum: to build a labour movement where more union members engage in the struggle for social justice, equality and workers' rights in our workplaces, communities and legislatures.

How can we use labour education to:

- build inclusive unions within an inclusive union movement
- enhance the day-to-day work of the union
- build political power
- expand the movement through coalition building, community work and organizing

These conference questions are addressed too in the programs profiled in this report.

Reading through the report sketches, my mind immediately jumped to other union examples not included here. As the CLC Officer responsible for literacy, education, apprenticeship and training, I have had the good fortune of seeing first-hand, innovative union programs which integrate equity and address barriers. But, as noted in the introduction, our experiences are usually shared first-hand – at conventions, conferences, forums, meetings and social gatherings. We don't often have time to write about the rich and varied work of which we are so proud. I thank the research team for gathering so many sketches in this short, three-month project, and challenge all of us to build on this beginning and expand our collective knowledge of union examples of innovative learning practices, integrating equity and addressing barriers.

**Preface to the First Edition by René Roy**  
**General Secretary**  
**Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec**

I want to congratulate those who conceived this study, which illustrates so well the « thousand and one ways of learning » experienced by adults. Indeed, the « Thousand and One Ways of Learning » is the theme of the Quebec Week for Adult Learning, celebrated for the past five years by the full range of organizations engaged in adult education. This celebration involves unions, education institutions, employers and community groups, all of whom provide a voice to the thousands of adults who make the personal investment needed to develop their talents and acquire new skills.

Proud of the commitment they have made, these adult learners insist that their needs be recognized in various ways – how programs are scheduled, how family responsibilities are integrated, how lack of previous diplomas is handled. They also ask that their rhythms of learning be respected, and that their informal experiential learning be valued. This study is aligned with the values asserted by these learners, and opens a vision of what is possible when adult learners are supported.

Access to formal and non-formal education is always a challenge, and it is reassuring to note in this study that union practices have developed so broadly to facilitate access. Unions should continue promoting a broad conception of lifelong learning, so that activists can better fulfil the many representation roles required in their movement, can broaden their personal development, and can engage actively as citizens. Specifically in regard to employment, we share with many others the realization that getting a job, maintaining and progressing in the labour market all require a solid basic skills development, an initial school diploma and recognized job skills certification.

The programs outlined here, the tools developed by affiliated unions, by labour councils and federations of labour all display the creativity of our movement, our capacity to renew learning to remedy gaps in the public education system. The effort to remove barriers is also reflected in the fact that this study will appear in both official languages. In congratulating the initiators of this project, I hope that their document will allow us to exchange experience more widely, and to make known the wide range of innovative efforts now underway to encourage and support adult learning.

## Introduction

For a century and a half, Canada's labour movement has been teaching people about justice, decent work and ways to overcome discrimination. In a sense, every campaign and action in the labour movement is about learning. In a capitalist society that promotes individualism, competition, a narrow version of political democracy, and a sense of the inevitability of inequity, unions encourage workers to value and build community; to recognize inequality and act against it; to feel in solidarity with all people who are oppressed; and to build inclusive organizations.<sup>4</sup> In short, unions promote learning that uncovers and results in action against systemic barriers, and that builds towards a more equitable future.

Unions in Canada represent over 4.3 million workers in virtually all labour market sectors and occupational groups (over 3 million in unions affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress). Learning practices by unions are seen in varied types of education programs: literacy; workplace programs; apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship and work skills training; labour education; programs that combine and build links between some or all of these areas through integrated initiatives.

### Non-formal and informal learning

Writing about labour education ("designed to strengthen union representation, activity and culture") in 1994, Bruce Spencer has noted that: "With more than 120,000 participants per year taking part in forms of labour education... it [is] Canada's most popular form of non-formal, non-vocational adult education."<sup>5</sup> It is testament to the strength of anti-union views in our society that many otherwise well-informed Canadians know little about the scope and richness of this work.

On any weekend, there are dozens of courses under way in union halls, community centres and hotel rooms. The walls are covered with flip chart paper, videos are playing, role plays are moving from heated argument into laughter, instructors are steering the group back into the session objectives... in other words, lively, practical and innovative adult education is happening. Yet this activity is usually invisible to the educators in the community-based literacy centre around the corner, and to the electronics teacher at the local college, or the professor of psychology in the nearby university extension program.

Beyond this extensive non-formal education (courses outside the formal education system) lies a vast sea of informal learning. Here too unions play a significant role, both in the workplace and more obviously in union campaigns, meetings, strikes, etc. Indeed, many union campaigns are of an explicit educational nature.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Education for Changing Unions* for the "six threads" – a synthesis of labour education's agenda, pp. 3-4. Bev Burke, Jojo Geronimo, D'Arcy Martin, Barb Thomas, Carol Wall, *Education for Changing Unions*, Between the Lines, Toronto, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> 1994 article cited in "Labour Education in Canada Today," Centre for Work and Community Studies, Athabasca University, A Report from "Learning Labour: a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Project", Part of the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning Network, 2001, p 17.

We know that “participating in collective bargaining or a strike (either as participant or observer) or simply experiencing a workplace as a waged or salaried worker can result in informal learning if, in the process, one acquires and retains some knowledge about the process or event.”<sup>6</sup> As Judy Darcy, past president of CUPE has said, “The picket line is a great school.” And we know that a great deal of learning happens in the conscious efforts to shift power in the workplace during upheavals such as an organizing drive.<sup>7</sup> Unions are developing indicators that workers are learning to address systemic barriers. For example, activists call each other for help; they encourage the leadership of people from different backgrounds and experiences than themselves, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

This systematic effort draws on generations of story-telling among unionists, passing along the received wisdom of the movement to the next generation through informal channels, invisible to the employer. Now formalized in some unions through mentoring programs, this informal sharing of learning is built on inspiration as well as facts, on social and political vision as much as technical skills. It extends into labour’s advocacy for accessible public schooling, for publicly- and employer-funded job skills training, for language and literacy support to those excluded from the centres of educational capital.

Thus unions shape the character and experience of learning at work beyond course provision, in such areas as collective bargaining, shaping training and vocational education public policy, and shaping the everyday experience of workers within the labour process through information and action campaigns. This broader approach recognizes the inter-relationship of work with political and community spheres.<sup>9</sup>

## **A long tradition**

Union learning builds on a long tradition. The voluntary efforts of working people, so essential in building their labour movement, have long been nurtured by adult education, both informal and non-formal. Unions have been promoting learning for more than a century.

Even before membership in unions was legalized in 1872, labour councils ran reading rooms for workers. Public mobilizations like the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 drew upon the organizational and writing skills picked up by organizers in the increasingly broad public school system. In the decades that followed, initiatives by the Workers Educational Association,<sup>10</sup> the unions themselves and their allies in community and

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<sup>6</sup> Jeffery Taylor, *Union Learning: Canadian Labour Education in the Twentieth Century*, Toronto, Thompson Educational Publishing, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Sue Milling, Education Director of the United Steel Workers, has remarked on how much workers learn in an organizing drive, because power and how it works becomes more clear.

<sup>8</sup> See *Education for Changing Unions*, pp. 174-177 for indicators that people are acting on transformational learning.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Sawchuk, “Unions and Workplace Learning,” J. Bratton, J. Helms-Mills, T. Pynch and P. Sawchuk, *Workplace Learning: A Critical Introduction*, Toronto, Garamond Press, 2003, pp. 141, 143.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster, “‘A Link Between Labour and Learning’: The Workers Educational Association in Ontario, 1917-1951” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, No.8/9 (Autumn/Spring, 1981-82) pp. 41-78.

political organizations ensured that the knowledge, skills and will needed to push for economic and social justice were well-developed among activists. It is on their shoulders that today's generation of union members stand when they make their unions a vehicle for learning.

### **Themes for today**

Certain union education programs are the focus of this report. In seeking innovative learning practices, this project was particularly devoted to increasing knowledge of education programs that address systemic barriers related to class, age, gender, sexual orientation, race and cultural background, disability, literacy, language, lack of formal education as well as barriers faced by workers in small or remote areas, by part-time workers, by shift workers.

The report provides examples of the barriers identified and addressed, barriers which may exist in any and every aspect of education programs:

- *How* learning takes place: the approach to learning, the methodology
- *What* is the subject of learning: the content, the curriculum
- *Who* is and is not participating: the diversity of union members, reflected in recruitment and facilitation
- *Where* the programs are conducted: at the workplace, the union hall, the community, in workers' homes
- *When* programs are scheduled: on work time, on workers' own time while juggling shifts, more than one job, personal responsibilities
- *Why* unions initiate programs: the purpose, how unions shape and define their programs, program planning and design

What are the catalysts and conditions which produce transformational insights and an increased ability to act with others to change things? Is it easier for workers to develop this analysis when they themselves are the target of oppression, than when they have privilege in relation to other workers? What learning conditions assist workers to become good allies to sisters and brothers who experience different forms of oppression than themselves? This document opens such questions, but much deeper and more systematic work is needed to probe under the surface.

Two themes emerge throughout the report: the approach to learning itself, and the barriers of time and cost.

### **A union approach to learning**

Union learning practices are informed by collective goals such as service to fellow workers, to the working class, to society, for social and economic justice. This contrasts with the individualistic goals and structure of learning that infuse much of the corporate training and formal schooling in Canada. As in other areas of union activity, education

builds solidarity, promotes critical thought and democratic participation, and aims to effect change in the workplace and beyond.

Underlying learning practices by unions is their recognition that barriers in education and training include approaches where people are seen as empty vessels to be filled rather than competent, engaged adults who bring with them an enormous range of experiences and capacities. The formal education system has failed many workers, as has much in corporate and other training. Many are left out or left behind.

There is no single set of union aims, objectives and methods in union learning practices. However, one can generally say that unions build their education programs using an adult education approach, reflecting their knowledge and experience of how workers learn best. Instead of an approach that invests the instructor with all knowledge and renders the learner passive, union learning practices rely on active learners who share knowledge with the instructor as together they explore the course topic. Worker-centred learning builds on what people know, and focuses on the whole person. Differences in identity and experience are acknowledged and a respectful and supportive learning environment is collectively valued and built.<sup>11</sup>

Instead of a methodology that relies on lectures and text, union learning practices rely on varied activities appealing to participants' "ears, eyes and hands" and different learning styles. Within union-based education there is extensive use of trained peer instructors. This peer-to-peer training approach often includes the matching of worker-trainers or tutors with staff facilitators or educators from the public education system.

In much of labour's educational practices, a popular education approach has been added to the principles of good adult education. Popular education is a specific tradition within adult education that educates and encourages collective action for change. Learning practices critically examine unequal power relations (race, class, gender, disability, heterosexism, ageism). Popular education pursues a positive social vision, aiming through transformative education to help change power relations in favour of greater social and economic equality.

### **Time and cost**

Time and cost are significant learning barriers for adults.<sup>12</sup> Unions address these barriers on a broad basis, following many avenues toward the goal of education and training opportunities for all workers.

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<sup>11</sup> For an example (from the area of literacy programs) of how labour outlines its education approach, see "Keys to a Worker-Centred Approach," *Learning for Our Lives: A Union Guide to Worker-Centred Literacy*, Canadian Labour Congress, 2000, pp. 23-25.

<sup>12</sup> The most significant, for adults without a high school diploma, according to data from the 2003 Statistics Canada Adult Education and Training Survey. See Karen Myers and Patrice de Broucker, "Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System," Canadian Policy Research Network, 2006, p. 30. <http://www.cprm.org/en/doc.cfm?doc=1479>

- *A cooperative approach*: unions' use of peer-to-peer and informal learning help stretch available resources.
- *Bargaining*: cents per hour per employee for a training fund; hours per year of paid time for education and training; tuition refund and assistance programs, etc.<sup>13</sup>
- *Working in sector councils*: beginning mainly in the 1990s, many sector councils bring together employers and unions in particular industries to address training, adjustment and other human resource issues.<sup>14</sup>
- *Seeking government funding for specific projects*: for example, over the years the National Literacy Secretariat and Human Resources Development Canada at the local, regional, and national levels have been funding sources for union education and training projects.<sup>15</sup>
- *Advocating for public policy measures*: mandated employer training (for example, the Quebec 1% of payroll training requirement; proposals to include training as part of employment standards legislation); Employment Insurance reform to provide EI for workers on full or part-time training leave, plus EI premium reduction or rebate plan for employers who invest in training beyond a specific level.<sup>16</sup>
- *In apprenticeship*: advocating for full funding for an integrated federal/provincial apprenticeship program, as part of a comprehensive policy on apprenticeship.<sup>17</sup>

About these avenues, unions point out the limits of bargained training (for example due to employer size and resources), the precarious nature of project funding, the varied levels of commitment by employers to and uneven training results from sector councils. In apprenticeship, unions underline the general lack of existing apprenticeship opportunities which over-rides attempts to advance equity goals. Overall, unions emphasize the need for public policy on training entitlements.

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<sup>13</sup> See for example: Fabrizio Antonelli, "Training Provisions in Collective Agreements and Canadian Legislation," Canadian Labour Congress, 2006.

[http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/Role\\_of\\_Unions/911](http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/Role_of_Unions/911)

John O'Grady, "Training Trust Funds: a review of their history, legal foundations, and implications for trade union training strategy. Research Paper #37," Canadian Labour Congress, 2005.

<http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/trainingtrustfundsEn.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> A pioneering, innovative education initiative of the Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress sector council (CSTEC) did not survive funding cuts. In the early 1990s, CSTEC negotiated an agreement with federal and some provincial support to deliver foundation skills, technical and industry skills, college accreditation including recognition of prior learning.

<sup>15</sup> See for example: Canadian Labour and Business Centre, "Executive Summary: Workplace Literacy: Funding Sources and Partnership Opportunities for Labour," Canadian Labour Congress, 2006.

[http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/Executive\\_Summary-Eng.pdf](http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/Executive_Summary-Eng.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> See for example, "Canadian Labour Congress. National Training Strategy," 2003.

<http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/nationalTraining.pdf>

In Quebec, see the common declaration of the central labour bodies (FTQ, CSN, CSD, CSQ) on adult basic and continuing education, "La formation continue en emploi, ça vaut le coup et le cout!" (April 2006):

<http://www.ftq.qc.ca/librairies/sfv/telecharger.php?fichier=987>

<sup>17</sup> "Canadian Labour Congress: Policy on Apprenticeship," Approved by the CLC Executive Council, March 5, 2002. <http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/apprentice.pdf>

The themes reflected in this report are intimately tied to labour's vision of workplace training and life-long learning.

As elucidated in the opening paragraphs of the training document adopted by the 2005 Canadian Labour Congress convention:

“Canada needs a new approach to worker training. We need to develop a culture based on the recognition that continuous updating of skills and education is critical, not only for employers and workers, but for the country as a whole.

“A society with an active and engaged citizenry with the skills needed to participate fully in all aspects of life is more vital, inclusive and democratic. This means enabling all workers – both younger and older, full and part time and unemployed, Canadian born, as well as immigrants and refugees – to learn and upgrade their skills on an on-going basis throughout the course of their lives, both on the job and in the classroom.”<sup>18</sup>

## **About this report**

### *Unions, central labour bodies, and beyond*

The report includes only programs directly organized or developed by unions and central labour bodies, including some which are joint union-management programs. Central labour bodies bring together affiliated unions. They include municipal and district labour councils, building trades councils, provincial and territorial federations of labour, and the Canadian Labour Congress.

Unionized workers also participate in the many programs and learning initiatives offered by labour-associated organizations and community groups, such as:

- Union Counselling and other educational programs of Labour Community Services, offered in many centres across Canada (LCS programs are based on the CLC's and labour councils' partnerships with the United Way)
- Health and safety education, in Ontario led by the Workers Health and Safety Centre (initiated by the Ontario Federation of Labour in 1979). WHSC-trained worker activists have delivered health and safety programs to over 155,000 workers, leading to a reduction in the rate of workplace injuries because workers have a heightened awareness of health and safety procedures and of their rights, and are equipped to take action in hazardous situations.
- Cultural organizations such as the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (Ontario) and Mayworks festivals in several communities
- Equity-seeking groups outside union structures but made up of union members, such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the Asian Canadian Labour Alliance

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<sup>18</sup> Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) (2005). Labour's Vision of Workplace Training and Life-Long Learning. 24th Constitutional Convention. Ottawa, CLC, p. 1.  
[http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/CLC\\_Policy\\_on\\_Training.pdf](http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/CLC_Policy_on_Training.pdf)

- Workers centres, such as Montreal’s Immigrant Workers Centre and Toronto’s Workers Action Centre
- Ethno-specific and community centres and organizations serving immigrant workers

In addition, many unions and trade unionists have links to various labour studies programs in colleges and universities in different parts of the country, and collaborate with academic centres such as the Centre for the Study of Education and Work (OISE/UT), the Centre for Research on Work and Society (York University), and *Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la mondialisation et le travail* (Interuniversity Research Centre on Globalization and Work: University of Montreal, Université Laval and HEC Montreal).

### *“Sketching” a picture*

In seeking to share knowledge through this report about innovative learning practices by unions, we were very conscious of the reality that unions do not frequently have or take the time to document and analyze their experiences in this area. We could not rely on existing research due to the many gaps in the written record. We therefore decided to prepare original short “sketches” to convey key information, contacts and references about a cross-section of innovative programs.

To supplement our own knowledge, we undertook outreach to the education and related committees within central labour bodies, etc., seeking additional programs to profile. We then interviewed the trade unionists directly involved in the identified programs and prepared a short sketch. The contact person named in each sketch vetted the sketch of the program for which they are responsible.

From the programs and initiatives that we reviewed and considered, these program sketches were specifically selected for their innovative content, pedagogy, methodology, or organizational practices related to program planning, recruitment and implementation.

The sketches provide a sampling of programs from different parts of Canada that aim to tackle one or more of the barriers identified above. Unfortunately, we were not able to include a sketch on a program addressing barriers faced by workers with disabilities. Examples are included from various unions at the local, provincial and national levels, from several central labour bodies at the labour council, regional building trades council, provincial and territorial federation and level of the Canadian Labour Congress. Some are joint union-management initiatives.

Some readers may find that some of the language in the sketches reflects an adversarial approach to employers. This is part of the reality of labour-management relations and union culture in Canada. Nonetheless, those in the adult education and other fields who may not share this perspective will draw many useful lessons from the union experiences outlined in the sketches.

The sketches are grouped by type of program:

- literacy, high school
- workplace programs
- apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, work skills training
- labour education
- integrated initiatives, that link two or more of these program areas

This structure may seem to reinforce an existing tendency to silo different types of union education and training programs. For example, some may view “only” labour education as transformative learning. However, there is increasing union recognition of the need to build links and increase integration of the different types of programs. There is similarly increasing recognition of the need to integrate equity into all of labour’s education and other activities.

We are quite certain that this brief report will bring forth many more examples of innovative learning practices by unions that address systemic and other barriers. We hope that this small “taste” will inspire unions and central labour bodies to document, analyze and share their experiences.

### **Acknowledgements**

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The project was a partnership between the Labour Education Centre (LEC) and the Centre for the Study of Education and Work (CSEW). LEC is the education project of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council. Its mission is to build the capacity of unions to plan, develop and deliver training, adjustment and labour education programs that transform the lives of individual members and build the strength, solidarity and equity of their unions. CSEW brings together educators from university, union, and community settings to understand and enrich the often undervalued informal and formal learning of working people. Located at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, the CSEW develops research and teaching programs on learning and work.

The project team included: from LEC, Anna Larsen (project coordinator) and Sue Folinsbee; from CSEW, D’Arcy Martin (with Jawara Gairey and Nick Bonokoski). We thank LEC Executive Director Jojo Geronimo and Acting Head of CSEW Peter Sawchuk for their insightful contributions to the project.

We particularly thank all those busy and dedicated labour educators who took the time to participate in our interviews, review sketches, and provide additional information.

**Name of Program:** Workplace Literacy Project

**Central Labour Body:** Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

**Contact Person:** Tamara Levine, former Coordinator, CLC Workplace Literacy Project, 613.526.7437, [tlevine@clc-ctc.ca](mailto:tlevine@clc-ctc.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To help unions create conditions for workers to achieve their full individual and collective potential as literate, informed and active citizens and union members.

**Barriers Addressed:** literacy, language, gender, race, culture, class and issues of remote areas. These barriers are considered in terms of access to union education and other labour programs and addressing issues of racism, sexism, class, and regionalism.

### **Background Information**

The Canadian Labour Congress is the central labour body for Canada's national and international unions, provincial and territorial federations of labour and 137 district labour councils. The CLC has over three million members.

### **How the Program Started**

The CLC launched its first literacy initiative in 1990 with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) for the Effective Adult Skills Training (EAST) Program in New Brunswick. EAST helped workers upgrade their literacy and communication skills in either English or French until its funding ended in 1993.

In 1996-97, the NLS provided funding to the CLC to conduct an organizational needs assessment to find out what affiliates wanted the CLC to do and what support they needed for their work in literacy. At that time, there was no national coordination of the literacy activities of the various unions across the country. Unions and federations of labour wanted the CLC to play a leadership role in literacy.

The CLC's consultations indicated that labour activists wanted to know what was happening in different parts of Canada, and how to start up and bargain for literacy programs with a union approach. They also wanted "how to" resources. In 1997, delegates attending the CLC National Training Conference honed the direction for the CLC's Literacy Project. This direction called for resources (including a newsletter), a literacy working group, an articulation of a labour vision for literacy and the opportunity for labour to maximize their work and share what was being learned across the country.

The organizational needs assessment and conference recommendations set the course of action for the CLC Literacy Project. This included 1) coordinating labour's efforts and activities in the area of literacy and basic skills; 2) communicating a labour vision of

worker-centred literacy, and 3) integrating literacy into the ongoing work of the CLC and its affiliates.

### **The Present Context**

The present work of the CLC Literacy Project includes coordinating the CLC Literacy Working Group (LWG), which started in 1998. The LWG is a forum where labour literacy activists from national unions and provincial and territorial federations of labour exchange information, strategize and participate in skills development. The CLC provides technical support to unions and federations with respect to their literacy and clear language initiatives, develops resources and delivers courses and workshops. The project also focuses on integrating literacy and clear language into the work of the CLC and representing a labour view of literacy within and beyond the labour movement.

The CLC Literacy Project is housed in the CLC Education Department. The Literacy Coordinator reports to the Director of Education. Barbara Byers, CLC Executive Vice President and the elected officer responsible for the literacy file, reports regularly to the CLC Executive Council on literacy.

### **How the Program Evolved**

For the first two or three years after the CLC Literacy Working Group was formed, more unions and federations got involved in literacy. It was a time of synergy. It was also a time when funding for programs like the Ontario Federation of Labour's Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) program and programs in British Columbia in health care and pulp and paper were cut by provincial governments. The CLC and the Literacy Working Group realized that it could not put all its energy into promoting literacy programs, because public policy and funding were not there to support programs. Although clear language had always been a part of the work, there was a move towards both clear language and the integration of literacy as a vehicle for organizational change.

#### *Literacy and clear language: a two-way street*

The move to clear language was an important development because it was a way to talk about literacy that involved everybody. Clear language caught on in an exciting way that fit well with union culture. It could be pitched politically, making the links between education, literacy and power. It connected how power elites use language to shut ordinary people out, which resonated with people's own experience and that of their families. Workers could readily relate to the desire that the labour movement, with its goals of social justice and inclusion, not inadvertently operate like "a closed club" because of not paying enough attention to communicating clearly.

#### *Literacy as a metaphor for inclusion*

There was also the realization that literacy is about more than learning opportunities and clear language. Integration of literacy and clear language is a metaphor for inclusion,

representing an organizational change approach that involves a different way of working and doing things. This realization came about because of the precariousness of funding for literacy programming, and also as a way to address sustainability issues and get commitment from key players in the labour movement. Integration means 1) building awareness of literacy issues organizationally, 2) building skills and awareness in clear language and design, and 3) integrating literacy into organizational structures, policies, programs and practices.

There was a realization from the start that barriers such as racism, sexism and class had to be addressed along with literacy and language. However, as the Literacy Project has grown and evolved, an understanding of these barriers has grown sharper.

### *Moving in from the margins*

As the CLC's literacy work has moved towards literacy integration, it has become clear that there are pluses and minuses of being on the margins. Being on the margins due to uncertain project funding is difficult in terms of planning ahead and making a lasting impact on the mainstream work of the organization. At the same time, being on the margins can also offer unusual spaces of freedom to explore new territory, to try out new strategies and to work in ways that may be seen by some as unorthodox. The question is whether and to what extent this freedom will continue as the work moves into the mainstream of labour organizations.

The CLC has tried to bring literacy into the body of the CLC through various activities, including rewriting its constitution into clear language, and holding clear language training sessions for CLC employees. The CLC Literacy Project supports integration work by making efforts to model it within the CLC and supporting the unions and federations that want to take it on. For example, now that the CLC has put its constitution into clear language, several labour organizations have decided to do the same. One of the challenges of integration is figuring out the points of connection between literacy, clear language and labour's mainstream work, and to present integration in a way that people can understand. The challenge is to show how including literacy can enhance rather than just "add" to people's work, making the union's work easier and better.

### *An evaluation affirms the work*

In 2003, the CLC hired an external evaluator to evaluate its literacy project. The CLC has implemented many of the recommendations from the evaluation. This includes a focus on building capacity for clear language, and greater advocacy work.

*A Clear Language Train the Trainer* course and a 9-hour workshop *Clear Language is a Union Issue* were developed by the CLC to build capacity within the labour movement. Now there are 40 clear language facilitators across the country trained to deliver the 9-hour workshop at schools across Canada in cooperation with labour councils and other organizations. This means less reliance on the CLC Literacy Coordinator to do all the

training. The CLC also developed a clear language animated film in partnership with the National Film Board.

Another way the project has evolved is its greater focus on advocacy. When the federal government held consultations on literacy and essential skills in 2005, labour was able to develop a common response coordinated by the CLC. The CLC also conducted research on essential skills to come up with a labour position. Other important advocacy work was the CLC Literacy Coordinator's participation in the National Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills set up by former Minister of State for Human Resources Development Claudette Bradshaw in late 2005.

## **Impacts**

The CLC evaluation conducted in 2003 showed that the CLC Literacy Project was highly successful in meeting its objectives and carrying out its activities. Moreover, the CLC Literacy Project has had a positive impact on the labour movement as a whole. There is more understanding that labour has to consider what it can do differently to be more inclusive and get more members involved. Literacy, clear language and integration can help create a community where people feel welcome and at home, where they experience the union as “us” rather than “them.” Members understand what the union is about and understand that they have a role to play. Democracy is more alive as a result, and organizations are more inclusive.

Class consciousness is raised through course exercises where people realize that lack of formal education is a result of inequality and income disparities, a consequence of poverty and class. In addition, workers see that the language of the elites – in institutions like academia, the legal, banking and medical systems – is a way of holding on to power that excludes most people.

## **What's Next**

Literacy and clear language featured prominently at the 2006 CLC Literacy Forum and Education Conference. A process is in place to ensure that conference documents are produced in clear language. A template will be developed to use in future event planning.

The CLC current funding proposal to the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program would further the integration agenda. It plans to:

- 1) raise awareness of the union's role in promoting learning opportunities for workers
- 2) create literacy-rich environments for workers within a labour context through clear communications strategies
- 3) show how the tools of literacy and clear language can increase the effectiveness and accessibility of labour education
- 4) engage labour with literacy and clear language and build labour's commitment and capacity to sustain its literacy work

## Update

In 2007, the CLC Workplace Literacy Program lost its federal funding from HRSDC. While the 11-year-old program ended in the wake of this decision, the CLC continues its efforts to integrate literacy and clear language into its ongoing work. This involves incorporating clear language into CLC communications, labour education courses and conferences, and including a focus on literacy in its strategy for workplace training.

*Updated February 2009*

**Reference for sketch:** Bev Burke, *Evaluation of the Canadian Labour Congress' workplace literacy project*, Ottawa, Canadian Labour Congress, 2003.

## Further References

Please see [http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/literacy\\_en](http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/literacy_en) for CLC documents and resources on literacy and clear language. Resources include:

- Back issues of newsletter *Learning Together: Solidarity at Work*
- *Learning for Our Lives: A Union Guide to Worker-Centred Literacy*
- *Bargaining Basic Skills*
- *Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide for Worker-Centred Literacy*
- *Making it Clear: Clear Language for Union Communications*
- *Invasion of the Space Lobsters* (an animated film about clear language)

Tamara Levine, "Learning in Solidarity: A Union Approach to Worker-Centred Literacy," *Just Labour*, Vol. 1 (2002).

[http://www.justlabour.yorku.ca/volume1/pdfs/jl\\_levine.pdf](http://www.justlabour.yorku.ca/volume1/pdfs/jl_levine.pdf)

**Name of Program:** Basic Skills Initiative

**Central Labour Body:** Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

**Contact Person:** Louise Miller, [lmiller@ftq.qc.ca](mailto:lmiller@ftq.qc.ca), 514.383.8015

**Initial Purpose:** To address the literacy needs of members, and support community-based organizations in securing stable funding for literacy work that benefits workers.

**Barriers Addressed:** literacy and other basic skill needs

### **Background Information**

The FTQ is the largest central labour body in Québec with over 500,000 members, including most unionists in the private sector, construction and municipal public services. As a central labour body with limited resources and strong links to the literacy community, the FTQ decided several years ago that its role should be in advocacy and partnerships rather than direct delivery of basic skills programs to members. The FTQ coordinator herself has background in community-based literacy work, and the funding framework provides the FTQ with a seat at the table where policy is set and significant amounts of literacy funding are allocated.

The structures for co-determining training in Quebec are unique in North America, with overall coordination by a commission of labour market partners that includes employers, unions, the school system and community-based employment and training groups. In regional structures, the representation model is the same, while sectoral structures consist of parity representation for unions and employers. A network of union representatives has evolved, with its own needs for orientation and support.

In 1991, the FTQ decided that the public education structures and community organizations should be influenced to respond to workers' needs. When employers refuse to respond, or are not interested, some unions take the initiative, and organize French as a Second Language and basic skills initiatives with funding support from the co-determined structures. This has been particularly strong in UNITE and in UES 800, who have many immigrant members, led by people like Louise Mercier.

### **How the Program Started**

After years of public pressure, the Quebec government passed Bill 90, a law that requires employers to allocate 1% of payroll to skills development of employees. Known as the "law of one percent," its regulations define what expenses are recognized as part of the 1%, and how funds are gathered from those employers who fall short of this amount. In turn, a commission of labour market partners, including unions, advises on policy around education and training and actually allocates these funds. Over time, the needs of FTQ members and other workers for access to literacy and basic skills programs has become a top priority at this table.

## **How the Program Evolved**

The Labour Market Partners Commission is directly linked to the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity, and is consulted on all government policies that impact the labour market and continuing education. Its responsibility is decision-making in actually administering the overall fund for training. It also oversees joint sectoral committees. There are 17 regional structures in Quebec as well, similarly constituted. There are more than 40 FTQ reps in the regions, and more than 70 in the sectoral structures. This gives Louise Miller, the FTQ rep with overall responsibility for training, literacy and basic skills, a network of more than 100 FTQ people directly and deeply engaged in discussion and decisions. Over the last 10 years, the 5 labour bodies of UPA, CSD, CSQ, CSN and FTQ have learned to work together, to bring an integrated workers' voice to public discussions around learning and work. This resulted in a common poster and declaration for the 2006 "Adult Learning Week" across Quebec.

The Law of One Percent was phased in during 1995-97, with a provision to evaluate its impact in 10 years. This review was completed in early 2006, and changes will be made in coming months to make it more responsive to all the labour market partners, with fewer irritants. The recognition of competencies outside the formal school system was also a topic discussed at that time. The range and complexity of the review was very demanding on all parties, including the five union centrals that have representation in the structures. While the employers have sustained their ideological opposition to government involvement in training, and to the requirement for employer investment in training, in practice they contribute effectively to the day-to-day functioning of the system. When differences arise, political coordination among affiliates is handled by senior union leaders, notably the General Secretary of the FTQ, René Roy, who himself sits on the Labour Market Partners Commission.

## **Impacts**

While great progress has happened in the broader structures, the resistance of employers in the workplace remains strong. Faced with the training needs of individuals, most employers still place priority on immediate production, limit backfilling for employees in training, and prefer "just in time" training to longer-term development. This culture is slow to change on the ground, but the context favours "enlightened" employer behaviour, rather than penalizing it as occurs in the rest of North America. The funding structure includes resources for research, and universities bid for this work. Unions are now discussing what research is needed to strengthen their knowledge base and to address challenges in future.

## **What's Next**

In February 2006, the review of the law was completed. It involved hearings by a parliamentary committee, production of many research documents, and lengthy consultations with labour market partners. The closing remarks by the minister and the

opposition critic give a clear sense of the political points still at issue, but reaffirm a commitment to co-determination around learning and work issues.

Within the FTQ, a major need is to support the union reps on joint committees at the workplace level. As Louise Miller observes: “There’s no use having Cadillac clauses but no drivers’ licenses.” To avoid having elaborate models for training, but no way to actually get them moving, the FTQ has developed a guidebook on negotiating training, and a specific course for local union leaders who wish to get involved in training.

### **Further References**

Commission des partenaires du marché du travail, “Mémoire présenté à la commission de l’économie et du travail, sur le rapport quinquennal de mise en oeuvre de la loi favorisant le développement de la formation de la main-d’oeuvre,” février 2006.

Emploi-Québec, “Politique d’Emploi-Québec en matière d’intervention sectorielle,” novembre 2005.

Declaration of the central labour bodies (FTQ, CSN, CSD, CSQ) on adult basic and continuing education, “La formation continue en emploi, ca vaut le coup et le cout!” (April 2006):

<http://www.ftq.qc.ca/librairies/sfv/telecharger.php?fichier=987>

Some information in English on government activities is available at

<http://www.emploi Quebec.net/anglais/index.htm>

**Name of Program:** Lighting the Way with Workplace Education

**Central Labour Body:** Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL)

**Contact Person:** Linda Wentzel, NSFL Workplace Education Coordinator,  
902.634.4501, [linda.wentzel@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:linda.wentzel@ns.sympatico.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To assist in the development of better skills in reading, writing and math, but in the context of the broader trade union struggle to empower working people.

**Barriers Addressed:** lack of formal education, class, members in rural areas

### **Background Information**

The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL) has approximately 70,000 members representing more than 350 union locals in every sector of the Nova Scotian economy.

### **How the Program Started**

The NSFL's work in literacy started in 1996 with a small grant from the Nova Scotia (NS) Department of Education. Unlike most provinces in Canada, the Nova Scotia government provides funding for the class instructors in workplace education programs. The Department had been promoting workplace education to unions but had not been successful in getting unions involved because they were suspicious of the Department. The Department then approached the NSFL's Education Committee about doing the promotion. The federation's literacy work began with promotion of workplace education, but soon the NSFL realized that it needed to do more than promotion.

The NSFL was keenly aware of literacy issues. The Federation saw a need to address literacy when it offered labour education schools and when members had trouble reading and writing. The Federation felt that it was important to address this gap through programs and better communication.

In 1999, the NSFL hired a workplace education coordinator with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) to actually start programs. However, "unions didn't feel they had the expertise to run a program through a project team," says Linda Wentzel, NSFL Workplace Education Coordinator. To address this situation, Wentzel developed a 10-hour workshop which she piloted with one local. The workshop includes three modules and is still offered today. The three modules are: 1) What is literacy and essential skills? 2) What does a good program look like? and 3) Joint committees: making it work for workers.

Once the workshop was developed and delivered to locals, programs were easier to establish. By 2003, the NSFL was directly involved in setting up programs (which until 2006 number 20 to 30 in total). However, some unions still did not get involved because the class instructors were not unionized. Class instructors are all individuals on contract.

The joint committees in each workplace (called Project Teams) hire the instructors. They have the right and often do hire anyone they feel like hiring. Another reason that locals did not get involved was that they were waiting for their national office to give them direction.

### **How the Program Evolved**

When it first got involved in literacy, the NSFL did not work with partners. Now it works with a multitude of different partners including national union affiliates, Workers Compensation, and Literacy Nova Scotia.

In 2002, the NSFL developed partnership agreements with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers (CEP) to give more union members access to government-sponsored workplace education programs and to ensure more union involvement and content in those programs. In the partnership agreements, national affiliates interested in accessing money from the provincial government entered into tripartite agreements with the NSFL and the NS Department of Education. Wentzel stresses, “With the tripartite agreement, all stakeholders had to be at the table or there would be no program.”

Currently, the NSFL has four labour seats on the Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education Committee that informs government on issues related to workplace education. The NSFL also acts as liaison between unions and workplace educators.

In 2002, the NSFL undertook the development of the peer learning guide model and curriculum with CUPE, CEP and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). The model built on previous work from across Canada: Ontario’s Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) Program, and from British Columbia, the Learning and Education Assisted by Peers (LEAP) Program and the Joint Union Management Program (JUMP).

The Peer Learning Guide model trains union members to work with class instructors in workplace education classes. A 40-hour training program was piloted with CUPE, CEP, and CUPW members in January 2005. The intention was that the 12 participants would work directly in the classroom with instructors and peer learners. This year, the training will be rolled out to other unions not involved in the pilot training and the model will also be adapted for apprenticeship classes.

Rural areas and small workplaces are a key challenge for workplace education programs. The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour would like to work with labour councils to address this barrier, but to date the labour councils have not been able to work with the Workplace Education Coordinator on this issue.

For union members outside programs, the NSFL also looks to develop tools for workers through NSFL committees. For example, NSFL’s Workplace Education Coordinator is working with the NSFL committee for Occupational Health and Safety / Workers Compensation to explain to workers their rights and obligations in the WCB system.

Wentzel offered an awareness session and then supported their efforts to develop a wallet card in clear language that explains rights and how to file a claim. The next step is to develop a manual and train the trainer session for this group. With the Workers Compensation Board of Nova Scotia as a partner, every worker in the province will have a card. The success with this committee can lead to success with other committees. Clear language was able to help the committee address a need it had trouble addressing on its own. Committee members latched on to the literacy awareness and clear language training, and are driving the work forward.

Wentzel stresses, “You need a hook to get committees involved. There can be resistance to getting involved because of lack of awareness and unwillingness to take on another job. Literacy is not number one on the radar screen. Committees have competing priorities and people are over-stretched and over-worked.”

The NSFL is moving towards literacy integration as a way to sustain its work when funding ends. Literacy integration means getting the work into the lifeblood of the organization. An obvious way of doing this is to work with NSFL committees, building on the work of the federation.

In 2001, the NSFL passed a resolution to submit convention resolutions in a clear language format. The Resolution Committee saw clear language as a way to address poorly written resolutions and cut down on their workload. In 2002, 34 out of 80 resolutions were submitted in clear language. The Workplace Education Coordinator provided a template. The NSFL office staff has also taken the CLC clear language training.

## **Impacts**

The first few years of the NSFL’s literacy work were difficult. It took three or four years of persistence by the Workplace Education Coordinator to get programs up and running. Now there is a regular report on literacy at the NSFL’s convention. People read the report and ask good questions. They want to know what else the project is doing besides programs. Members are more likely to go to the mike and debate an issue because it was written in clear language.

The workplace programs have a fair and open selection process. The learning focuses on rights and what people want for the future. Program participants are more involved in their local union. They have more opportunities for job promotion because they were able to get their GED. Those who have been through a program have encouraged their brothers and sisters to get involved too or suggested different programs that would benefit others. Participants also take a greater community role.

Class consciousness is raised in the NSFL’s work on seeing language as a class issue and how it is used to keep people out. Even if it is not explicitly addressed, class consciousness is always there in people’s report-backs. Class consciousness will become more explicit through the Peer Learning Guides playing a role in the classroom.

The communication level of the NSFL's office has also improved. People are proud of the work they send out.

## **Update**

The Tools for Workers project has been very successful. The partnership with the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia funded the printing of 150,000 wallet cards that explain workers' and employers' rights and obligations. The nine-hour workshop, *Navigating Your Way: a Worker's Guide to Workers' Compensation in Nova Scotia*, has been well received. The NSFL is working with the newly appointed Office of the Worker Counsellor to develop a train-the-trainer course.

However, overall the NSFL literacy project has been set back. The NSFL has not received federal funding for the last two years (they continue to wait for a response on two proposals). The stop and start method of federal funding has taken a toll on the NSFL's ability to provide consistent support to its affiliates. The peer learning guide model requires a more active role on the part of the Federation, one they have not been able to carry out without financial support. Likewise, the Federation has been stymied in its efforts to integrate literacy awareness and clear language and design into the work of other NSFL committees. There are limited opportunities to find partners able to provide financial support, and initiatives seeking to apply integration approaches are not funded under current federal guidelines.

In early 2009, the NSFL reached a tentative agreement with the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development for interim funding. One of the objectives is to discuss with union locals what supports they need to participate in the peer learning guide model and to determine if the Federation will be able to provide them.

This interim funding will also allow the South Shore Labour Council and the Workplace Education Coordinator to produce a manual for labour councils documenting their recent success and sharing the process of organizing a course for participants from multiple work sites and unions. This experience is an excellent example of how to organize a course for workers that do not have access to a program at their workplace.

Despite setbacks, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour is optimistic about the survival of the *Lighting the Way* project. This is mainly due to the financial support and encouragement from the provincial Department of Labour and Workforce Development, as well as the continued support and encouragement from unions and other federations. Unions and their members in Nova Scotia continue to support the project, as seen for example in the response to project updates at NSFL conventions where resolutions continue to be submitted in the clear-language format.

*Updated February 2009*

**Reference for case:** Bev Burke, *Evaluation of the Canadian Labour Congress' workplace literacy project*, Ottawa, Canadian Labour Congress, 2003.

### **Further References**

Literacy page on NSFL website: <http://www.nsfl.ns.ca/literacy.html>

Linda Wentzel, "Worker to Worker Learning: The Peer Learning Guide Model of Education," *Our Times*, December 2005/January 2006.

**Name of Program:** Literacy Program

**Union:** Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) National

**Contact Person:** Sylvia Sioufi, National Literacy Coordinator, 613.237.1590,  
[ssioufi@cupe.ca](mailto:ssioufi@cupe.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To support and facilitate the development of workplace education programs for CUPE members.

**Barriers Addressed:** lack of formal education and literacy with a recognition of other barriers such as sexism, racism, class, and workers living in remote areas

### **Background Information**

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is Canada's largest union representing over 500,000 public sector workers. CUPE members live and work in almost every Canadian town and city. They work in health care, education, municipal services, childcare, social services, transportation, communications, airlines, emergency services, and other vital services.

### **How the Program Started**

CUPE's National Literacy Program formally started in 2000. It is funded by CUPE with additional project funding support from the federal government. The national literacy coordinator and a national working group guide the program which is housed in the Union Development Department. The motivation for the program was that CUPE was involved in a partnership with the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) at the local level. However, there was no support for these locals from CUPE National. Another motivator was available funding from the National Literacy Secretariat. CUPE indicates that without this funding, the program wouldn't have happened.

The Literacy Program began with support for local programs and promotion of clear language. In 2001, CUPE passed a resolution at its national convention in support of literacy, basic skills, workplace education programs and clear language. The resolution included a union vision for worker-centred literacy. Paul Moist, CUPE president stresses the importance of workplace education programs. He emphasizes, "A workplace skills program says that our union is about more than bargaining and servicing. It makes the union relevant to more people and strengthens our union as a whole."

Sylvia Sioufi, CUPE's National Literacy Coordinator recounts that initially CUPE was looking at opportunities for members who had a lack of formal education. "At first the focus was on supporting workplace programs. Clear language was always promoted but now it is a much bigger part of the work." She also reflects, "When we started, our members were losing jobs. People in their late 40s and early 50s without a lot of formal

education had to retrain or find another job. The workplace had changed and literacy skills were rusty.” She notes that for some workers there are double barriers such as when workers’ first language is not English and they have little formal education.

CUPE sees literacy as an access and equity issue: if people do not have grade 12 they can be left out. In CUPE’s training for labour literacy activists, it is important for people to understand why members may not have certain skills and to understand the experiences and barriers people faced at school. Another important focus of the training is how to make programs comfortable for members, programs in which members are reflected in materials and their voices are valued.

One of the challenges is participation from locals in small remote areas or small locals. In Nova Scotia, CUPE partnered with other unions through the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour to run training out of a labour centre to address this challenge.

At the present time, CUPE’s literacy program engages in five main activities. Activities include supporting local workplace education programs and facilitating new programs. They also focus on coordination, developing resources, offering workshops and union education, and integration of literacy and clear language into the life of the union.

### **How the Program Evolved**

In 2003 CUPE added a third focus – integrating literacy and clear language into the organizational culture and work of the union at the national, provincial and local levels. Integration means working towards a time when a literacy/clear language “lens” is applied to planning, strategizing, implementing and evaluating everything the union does. CUPE saw the integration approach as a way to move literacy and clear language into new areas within CUPE. For example, there have been clear language edits of union courses, and CUPE schools include literacy workshops. Education staff have applied a literacy lens to their work and now other departments are making clear language part of their work. In 2005, CUPE encouraged the submission of convention resolutions in clear language and created a national literacy award. The program has also provided support for bargaining clear language collective agreements, including workshops for a joint union-management audience.

Deepening commitment and involvement from the leadership has been key to the program’s success. In addition, a number of key strategies have built awareness and support for the program as well as the move towards integration. These strategies include partnerships, program location, creation of a literacy working group, and clear language promotion.

Partnerships have played a key role in furthering CUPE’s literacy work. Key partners include employer organizations, literacy organizations, education providers and labour.

Housing the program in the Union Development Program was strategic in that the department offered links with regions through education representatives, the member

education program, and staff training. Literacy and clear language workshops and courses have helped to build activists and advocates for the program. The creation of a national Literacy Reference Group (LRG) has helped ground the program across the union. The LRG received formal union status as a national working group in 2005. This change is an important move towards integrating literacy into CUPE's organizational structure.

Promotion of clear language has been an effective strategy in making the union's communications and programs more accessible to members. It has been a hook for work at conventions, conferences, within departments and within locals.

At the same time, there are systemic barriers. One barrier is that there isn't enough staff time to roll out all the work that needs to be done. This is another reason why integration is so important. For example, staff representatives are already in the regions and can make the links there. The literacy program can help them address issues they deal with such as people understanding their contract so that reps have less work upfront. At the same time, there are many issues that reps have to deal with. Often these issues are seen as coming from the top. Reps have to see benefits of taking on literacy and clear language.

There are other challenges as well. One is that there are different understandings within CUPE about what literacy means. For example, that literacy is about access and equity rather than just reading and writing. In addition, there is a need for more even integration at the provincial Division level and more staff training and support in literacy and clear language.

## **Impacts**

A 2006 evaluation of the CUPE Literacy Program shows clear results. All 600 CUPE members and staff interviewed for the evaluation stressed the importance of literacy and clear language and support for the program. Close to 100% said that literacy was an important union issue.

Through workplace education programs, CUPE members with the least opportunities for education and training have been able to build skills, adapt to changing job requirements and improve family relationships. Stories from workers across the country published in CUPE's *It's Our Right* emphasize these benefits. For example, the CUPE booklet includes the following comments by Terry Bennett, a CUPE Local 569 executive member and outside worker with the City of St. John's. "As a union activist, I am involved in many aspects of the workplace. This course seemed like a good idea and it was!" The program helped him streamline his writing and cope with all the reading he does as part of his union activities. "It also helped at home with the kids," he says, adding: "I used to write long, saucy letters to management. Now I write short, saucy letters to them."

Union benefits include increased member participation and the development of activist skills. The union is more accessible to members because of clear language. CUPE has a

clear vision of literacy, strong leadership commitment, a full-time permanent staff position, a base budget, and a formal national working group.

### **What's Next**

The program is currently working on two key priorities: addressing the literacy needs of Aboriginal members and francophone members outside Quebec. CUPE is working with partners in these key communities, including employers, to develop a community-based approach to literacy needs assessment, program promotion and delivery.

CUPE is also working on a tool to make it easier for staff and bargaining committees to negotiate literacy programs. The tool “makes the case” for employers to invest in literacy and promotes embedding literacy in existing and new skills training programs.

The program will continue to focus on what's working and will shift to more of a focus on capacity building for staff. Since the program is an initiative of the union, CUPE will apply for external funding for specific projects. Some specific initiatives for the future include a focus on development of clear language supports for staff and creating learning opportunities for members in small and rural communities through e-learning.

*Updated February 2009*

**References for sketch:** Bev Burke and Jean Connon Unda, *Case Study: CUPE integrates literacy*, Ottawa, Canadian Labour Congress (in press); and Sue Folinsbee, *It's Our Right*, Ottawa, Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2005.

### **Further References**

Please see [www.cupe.ca/literacy](http://www.cupe.ca/literacy) for CUPE documents and resources on literacy and clear language. Documents include:

- Back issues of CUPE's *Literacy News*
- *Clear Language Contract Guide*
- *It's Our Right* booklet
- Learners' video
- *Literacy in the Workplace* fact sheets

**Name of Program:** BEST Program

**Union:** Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)

**Contact Person:** David Robertson or Laurell Ritchie, Work Organization and Training Department, [cawwork@caw.ca](mailto:cawwork@caw.ca), 416.495.3761

**Initial Purpose:** To provide literacy programs that will strengthen workers and the union and to integrate literacy into other CAW educational programs.

**Barriers Addressed:** literacy, language, lack of formal education; initiation of the program was seen as more about needs and entitlements

### **Background Information**

The CAW is one of the largest private sector unions in Canada with over 225,000 members from across the country. Members are from a diverse range of sectors including auto, auto parts, general manufacturing, fisheries, hospitality and gaming, mining, retail and health care.

### **How the Program Started**

In the late 80s and through the early and mid 90s many CAW locals worked hard to upgrade literacy and basic skills in the workplace. CAW accounted for more than 60% of BEST's active workplace sites, most of them in the auto and auto parts sectors. The Ontario Federation of Labour's BEST project (Basic Education and Skills Training) was historically the largest such project in Canada.<sup>19</sup>

David Robertson, CAW's Director of Work Organization and Training explains that there were a number of different pieces that contributed to the union's involvement in literacy. Programs like BEST developed more consciousness about literacy on the part of the union. Plant closures also exposed the extent of literacy issues. Robertson explains, "If members have concerns about literacy when a plant closes, then we knew they had them before the plant closed." He adds that the union also began to think about how to make a union education system that included literacy and English as a second language.

At the same time, there was more public attention on literacy. This created a more conducive climate for influence. Robertson stresses that literacy in the workplace cannot be addressed without public support.

In 1997, the Conservative Harris government in Ontario terminated funding for workplace literacy. The current contract language with respect to the CAW BEST

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<sup>19</sup> Along with WEST in Saskatchewan (Workers Education for Skills Training), EAST in New Brunswick (Effective Adult Skills Training), LEC in Toronto (Labour Education Centre), and WEC in Hamilton (Workers Education Centre).

Program with the Big 3 automakers in Ontario has been an exemplary achievement. The Collective Agreement includes provisions for 50% paid class time for participants, based on 4 hours weekly and 37 weeks in a year, as well as 2 weeks paid leave for peer instructor training courses. The contract provides paid instruction and preparation time for peer instructors, and funding of needs assessment interviews with employees as well as program promotion and publicity.

### **How the Program Evolved**

CAW's present literacy work comes out of the union's work in organizational development. The approach to literacy is two-pronged with literacy programming as one strategy and addressing literacy in all CAW education programs as the other.

When the government cut the OFL's BEST program, the CAW made a commitment to address needs through collective bargaining. In addition to the negotiated BEST programs with the Big 3 automakers, programs have been set up in other workplaces more informally. The programs are always union initiatives. Management does not come to the union to set up these initiatives.

The BEST program follows general principles on union education such as acknowledging and building on the experiences and skills of workers; involving hearts as well as minds; promoting solidarity and respect among workers; and enhancing workers' capacities for critical reflection and action. CAW BEST is an inclusive program that was developed for any member who has the basics and would like to upgrade their reading, writing, oral communication and math skills.

The CAW has recently moved from an emergent curriculum to one that uses a prepared curriculum 50% of the time. One reason for this development was because it became clear that people need some signposts and milestones. With the prepared curriculum, people know what they have accomplished and what they can do next — there are stages.

There are six prepared curriculum units. The units are: 1) About the CAW and Your Collective Agreement; 2) Community Action; 3) Time and Stress; 4) Reading the Newspaper; 5) A Respectful Workplace; and 6) Promoting a Safe Workplace.

Robertson also explains how the CAW is literacy-conscious in its education work. He says, "In all our programs we explain terms and concepts. Our reading materials are short and concise. Materials are also on audio tape or they are read aloud." There is an understanding that literacy consciousness needs to be built into the design of activities. Facilitators are trained to be conscious of class dynamics and sensitive to literacy.

Literacy consciousness has not moved much beyond union education programs. Briefs and policy papers will always be written as briefs and policy papers. But those documents are then used in CAW education programs. Robertson notes that it is difficult to make collective agreements accessible through a clear language, literacy lens.

In order to address any issue in the union, including literacy, there is a need for resources, capacity and opportunity. Resources refer to people and money. Capacity refers to trained discussion leaders, coordinators and staff who can do the work. Opportunity refers to people getting involved. In order to address literacy within the CAW, one looks for openings and then builds on them. The organizational practice is one of the openings (rather than having literacy as a formal CAW priority).

When the CAW developed the prepared curriculum, it looked like there might be more support through provincial and federal government dollars for literacy programs in the workplace. When that support did not come through, the challenge became how to make the BEST program happen. Bargaining literacy with employers is difficult. Without government support, the CAW will continue to have sporadic programs rather than a major initiative. The CAW can work with peer trainers, design curriculum, put supports in place, and get support for the program. The big issue is not the union but lack of public support. The partnerships that are critical to the CAW's literacy work are 1) the labour management partnership, 2) the federal government, and 3) the literacy community.

### **Impacts**

The benefits and impacts are anecdotal. "It's important not to use testing and a results-based approach because it can reinforce credentialist practices in the workplace," says Robertson. The benefits are seen in the personal accounts of program participants. At graduation, people talk about things they have done for the first time such as write a letter, or read to their child. The program opens up a world they didn't have before. They may or may not have become a union activist. However, it is a moment of personal transformation that sends a powerful message to the union leadership. "The thinking is more what a great thing we have done as a union in providing opportunities rather than how this program has advanced us as a union," concludes Robertson.

**Reference for sketch:** Canadian Auto Workers, *Instructor Handbook: CAW BEST Program*, Toronto, Canadian Auto Workers, 2006.

### **Further References**

Please contact the CAW Work Organization and Training Department for more information about the instructor handbook and prepared curriculum for the CAW BEST Program.

"Education and Training", CAW Collective Bargaining and Political Action Convention, 2008:

<http://www.caw.ca/en/about-the-caw-collective-bargaining-political-action-convention.htm>

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Mature Student Diploma Program

**Union:** United Food and Commercial Workers Local 832

**Contact Person:** Heather Grant-Jury, Director, [grant-jury@ufcwtraining.mb.ca](mailto:grant-jury@ufcwtraining.mb.ca), 204.775.8329

**Initial Purpose:** Training Centre Mission statement: “We want to assist our members to gain greater skills and knowledge so that they can be more confident in meeting the changes that lie ahead – in their workplace, in the labour market, in their union and in their communities. We want to break down barriers to education and training.”

**Barriers Addressed:** lack of formal education

### **Background Information**

UFCW Local 832 has over 15,000 members in all areas of Manitoba, with members in the retail, food processing, health care, security, industrial, the garment industry, and transportation sectors. The Local’s Training Centre, primarily financed through a Trust Fund with bargained employer contributions, offers a wide variety of programs: stewards training, health and safety, computer training, English as an Additional Language, public speaking, Pilates, safe food handling, First Aid, conversational French and Spanish, customized training, and a Career Transition Service.

### **How the Program Started**

When the Training Centre was established in 1998, the union secured accreditation with the province of Manitoba as an Adult Learning Centre. Like other adult learning centres, this enables the Centre to receive funding (through Winnipeg Technical College) to hire accredited teachers to deliver high school credit courses.

### **How the Program Evolved**

The program is free to UFCW members, as well as friends and family members.

True to its description of providing a learner-centred, supportive environment, the Training Centre provides in-kind support for extra pieces such as individual tutoring, literacy and math upgrading.

Since 2000, the program has also offered Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). During the initial interview with potential participants, the program director identifies possible PLAR credits. This is followed by an assessment and report with PLAR recommendations to the Winnipeg Technical College.

Participants are encouraged to consider their prior, informal learning in computer skills, for example. As well, workers fluent in a language other than English or French may consider taking a written and oral exam for additional credit.

In addition to high school credit courses and PLAR credits, the program also suggests participants consider a community service credit (110 hours, with Ministry approval), and Student Initiated Projects (for credit, with approval).

Since 1998, 180 workers have graduated high school through the Training Centre. In each year, between 100 and 200 students participate in the program. About 85% go on to graduate.

### **Impacts**

Many individuals leave school with minimal skills and qualifications. They go on to be disadvantaged in the labour market in terms of earnings and employment prospects. The education and training provided at the Training Centre for union members and their families boost productivity, wages, and individuals' self-image.

The Training Centre finds that a particular form of lifelong learning, work-related training, does have a positive impact on earnings. However, firms tend only to train those workers the employer feels will gain from training and which will benefit the employer.

UFCW is committed to assisting its members and families gain a formal education.

### **What's Next**

The Training Centre offers many non-credit courses that are essential to the labour force, as well as courses accredited through Winnipeg Technical College. As of February 2009, the Training Centre's keyboarding course will be accredited with the college.

*Updated February 2009*

### **Further References**

Training Centre website: <http://www.ufcw832.com/training.php>

"Unions Do More Than File Grievances: Local 832 leads the way in providing educational opportunities," *Union Magazine*, July 2006. [ufcw832.com](http://ufcw832.com)

**Name of Program:** Workplace Training Program

**Union:** Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)

**Contact Person:** David Robertson, Director of Work Organization and Training, [cawwork@caw.ca](mailto:cawwork@caw.ca), 416.495.3761

**Initial Purpose:** To enable all workers to participate in meaningful and effective workplace education and training on paid work time, “to develop our members, build the union, and change the world.”

**Barriers Addressed:** work itself – time considerations of all sorts; different educational levels and learning styles including sensitivity to gender, race and language

### **Background Information**

The CAW is one of the largest private sector unions in Canada with over 225,000 members across the country. Members work in a diverse range of sectors including auto, auto parts, general manufacturing, fisheries, hospitality and gaming, mining, retail and health care. The bargained Workplace Training Program is delivered to all 30,000 members employed by the “Big 3” automakers (General Motors, Chrysler and Ford) as well as members employed by CAMI, Electromotive Canada and General Dynamics.

### **How the Program Started**

Education programs are widespread throughout the Canadian Auto Workers: Work Organization and Training offerings, the Education Department’s weekend schools and Paid Educational Leave (PEL) program (see sketch in this report), women’s activists courses and women’s conferences organized by the Women’s Department, courses for Aboriginal workers and workers of colour as well as workplace-based human rights training from the Human Rights Department, health and safety courses for activists and leadership.

CAW also participates in any relevant and available external opportunity with potential training outcomes, for example over six sector councils, (the now defunct) Ontario Training and Adjustment Board and Canadian Labour Force Development Board. However, despite good intentions, little if any training resulted.

By the mid-1990s, the PEL program and week-long courses were well developed. But relatively few people could participate in these residential schools. The union decided to pursue a major expansion of the education and training program to the workplace. The Workplace Training Program was first bargained in 1996: sixteen hours of training for all members employed by the Big 3, to be delivered over the course of the collective agreement.

From the beginning, the approach to learning was as important as its delivery on paid work time. “The whole model of training in workplaces is pretty dismal,” comments David Robertson. “The just-in-time, sit-down-and-listen model is problematic – this learning model is a barrier in itself. The union’s role is to influence the quality of workplace learning as well as the quantity. Our innovation reflects our knowledge of how workers learn best.”

## **How the Program Evolved**

The current three-year contracts with the Big 3 entitle all members to 40 hours of training over the course of the agreement. In addition to the core Workplace Training Program (WTP), the union has bargained funding for:

- literacy and ESL programs (see BEST sketch in this report)
- Skilled Trades Union Education Program
- Women and Technology Program (see sketch in this report)
- retiree education program
- health and safety training fund

Providing 40 hours of training to 30,000 workers over three years is a huge, and expensive, undertaking. The WTP needs and has the support of union leadership at the top and locally.

Within the WTP core program, there are 2 course developers (curriculum writers), 3 national training coordinators, and 120 trainers in the various workplaces. The latter are recruited from the assembly line and trained by the union with bargained funding: 40-hour facilitator training, 40-hour human rights course, and then course-by-course training.

Classes are delivered in the plant or union hall (some new halls are built with classrooms, with funding negotiated for that purpose). At GM and Ford, courses are delivered day by day (maximum one day each); at Chrysler, workers attend courses for one week: 32 hours are union-designed, 8 hours are company-designed.

In each round of bargaining, specific course titles are listed in the Collective Agreement (avoids subsequent disagreements with the companies). The union sees worker knowledge of their union, plant-workplace-industry as a basic, fundamental worker entitlement. The WTP program therefore includes a course on union awareness (with updated material in each contract period) and a companion piece providing an industry overview.

Within each training round, there is also a course on building a respectful workplace. The focus may change: for example, the current training round focuses on racial and religious harassment, post 9/11; the next round will focus on violence in the workplace.

Other offerings have included civics for trade unionists (how the political system works, government, the union's role in politics, democratic electoral reform); globalization; the environment; economic issues; and worker's health and well-being.

An important consideration in course design is the challenge of the “captive audience.” Contrary to adult education principles and other union education programs, participation in the WTP is not voluntary. “This affects how we teach, what we teach – everything we do is influenced by that,” notes Robertson. The union also ensures that class groups, to the extent possible, mix gender, newer and older members, skilled trades and assembly, etc. Classes are offered in sign language as needed. Showing sensitivity to different learning and facilitator styles, there is a weighted gender participation of women trainers and all courses are taught by co-facilitators (man and woman if possible).

## **Impacts**

Although there has been no systematic analysis of impacts to this point, trainers report general participant engagement and development. On the individual level, workers express views such as “education is fun”; “I can understand the world better.” Indeed, the course content is designed to help people develop an analysis, a better understanding of the world; however it's not known how and if workers act on that.

The assurance of a respectful classroom and supportive learning environment gives workers space to voice opinion. “There are not too many other places where that can happen,” says Robertson. “It doesn't happen on the line, when they deal with the company, or even in union meetings.” That and other features of the WTP disrupt workers' biases regarding education and learning, starting a process that overcomes bad experiences in the school system and with company training. Whenever workers have an education opportunity, they always want more. Members see the trainers as education representatives and often go to them for information on other education programs. In this way, says Robertson, the WTP creates “an educational culture within the union that extends from new-hires to retirees and everything in between.”

Equity representatives point to statistics showing lower incidence of complaints after the respectful workplace course.

On the union level, all locals have attributed greater participation in union meetings and greater activity in the local to the impact of the WTP. At times, they report, there is a better quality to the discussion and debate due to the influence of the program.

There is a broader impact within the union generally. The workforce-wide participation in the WTP brings further to the fore questions of classroom dynamics, for example gender and race dynamics, as well as the effects of different educational levels and learning styles, varied first languages among workers, etc. The whole union becomes more sensitive to these issues, and in union education this underlines the importance in learning approaches of central concepts such as dialogical, “doing,” activity-based curriculum design.

By delivering the Workplace Training Program during people's regular work shift, the work barrier is successfully overcome. Everyone can participate. This contributes to individual, organizational and cultural changes, including an influence on the culture of the workplace – all part of the CAW's goal.

### **What's Next**

The CAW emphasizes the need for public policy changes as critical next steps. As there are limits to what can be bargained successfully, there is a clear financial barrier: training "won't happen if there's no dollars," emphasizes Robertson. "And you need a lot of dollars to do it right." The union does not have the bargaining strength in other sectors to win programs such as the WTP, and within the Big 3 the WTP is likely the limit.

Therefore, the union continues its argument for public policy change, both federally and provincially, to require employers to provide as a minimum, one week of training per year for each worker.

### **Further References**

"Education and Training", CAW Collective Bargaining and Political Action Convention, 2008:

<http://www.caw.ca/en/about-the-caw-collective-bargaining-political-action-convention.htm>

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Anti-Harassment Workplace Training Program

**Union:** United Steel Workers (USW)

**Contact Person:** Sue Milling, Department Head, Education, Equality and Political Action Department, [smilling@usw.ca](mailto:smilling@usw.ca), 416.544.5968

**Initial Purpose:** To involve members on equity issues outside the circle of current activists.

**Barriers Addressed:** barriers faced by equality-seeking groups including those of gender, sexual orientation, cultural diversity, and ability among others

### **Background Information**

The United Steel Workers represents 280,000 workers in a broad range of sectors across Canada, including those reflected in the union's formal name: United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union.

### **How the Program Started**

For the Steelworkers, the two most effective and successful initiatives to address systemic barriers are its Anti-Harassment Workplace Training Program and the Women of Steel leadership program. They were developed at about the same time in the late 1980s and early 1990s in a sympathetic political climate that was helping to support equality initiatives. In some cases this required unions and employers to take new steps around affirmative action, which strengthened the hand of a director who was determined to have leadership reflect the diversity in the membership.

Delivered to all employees on paid work time, the anti-harassment workplace training program has had wide influence, reaching thousands of members since its inception. The two-hour module raises awareness of what harassment is and why it's a union and company issue. The session gives people an opportunity to practice what they've learned by working through a quiz or a video. Parts of the program have had financial support from Labour Canada.

In addressing harassment, the union tried to include supervisors and managers in the sessions. The thinking was that if the union can have everyone together in mixed sessions, then everyone is getting the same message delivered in the same way. This also puts the spotlight on the fact that management is responsible for managing the workplace. Having it on company time meant that the program reached everyone, once it was cleared to go ahead. The USW experience is that where it is voluntary, people who might need it the most may not attend.

As Steelworkers staff representative Kai Lai notes: “A lot of the discussion is participant driven, and if matters of race or ethnicity come up it is pointed out that the Human Rights Code affects both management and union.”

In District 6 (Ontario and the Atlantic provinces), and in District 3 (western Canada and the Territories) it is union policy to negotiate the anti-harassment workplace training into the collective agreements. In addition to the standard non-discrimination and harassment language seen in many collective agreements and in addition to the procedures outlining what to do if there is a complaint and how to investigate and attempt a resolution, the union has also been increasingly successful at negotiating the workplace training.

### **How the Program Evolved**

Initially the focus was around racial harassment, but the Steelworkers expanded that because there were a number of high profile cases in the early 90s around sexual harassment. As a male-dominated union, it was important to take steps to address sexual harassment and gender discrimination. This commitment meant getting involved in campaigns like the white ribbon campaign and issues around violence prevention as an extension of the work of preventing and dealing with harassment.

Since the early 90s the union has also found that there is a need to integrate issues around disability and most recently around accommodation of religious differences and traditions. The program now is more holistic in its approach, but people who were around at the inception of the program have some concerns that the program may have moved further away from dealing with some of the issues of race and racial harassment.

In terms of the class perspective of the course, Sue Milling says: “We are pretty honest about why we are there and the employers are pretty honest about it as well. From an employer’s perspective, they’ll talk about cost saving. They are doing the training not only because it is the smart thing to do, but because they’d rather spend their money in other ways than in litigation. From the union perspective, we don’t shy away from what set the foundation for us in terms of justice for workers and the power relations in the workplace.”

As the union became conscious of addressing barriers, the course evolved. The union changed the materials, tried to integrate different issues into a quiz, changed a video that only focused on racial and sexual harassment from the 90s to one that encompasses the broad range of harassment and is set in a more familiar kind of workplace. The union is constantly training new instructors and works to reflect the diversity of the union in the trainer pool.

### **Impacts**

The training has direct impacts on the workplace climate. As National Representative Marlene Gow observes: “The most common response is that people say they actually do notice an improvement in the way that people are able to deal with each other. At first,

employers are apprehensive and say they don't want to do the training because they will get the human rights complaints afterwards. We say it's better to know about it so that they can do proactive work to make sure there isn't a nasty incident that takes place. Along the way, we reach people that we would normally never see in the workplace, so it's a vehicle to find activists and plug them into the union."

Several of the equality initiatives have happened concurrently. The anti-harassment program and the Women of Steel leadership development program have generated support for the union's women's committees and human rights committees. In turn, this extends into work around issues of pride, and also disability rights.

After 16 years of the program and 16 years of solid support by the District 6 Director who is now the International President, the union staff and local union leaders and committee members understand what the union's policy is on harassment and have more experience "walking the talk." Last year, the non-discrimination and anti-harassment language was expanded and strengthened in the International Constitution. Awareness is promoted in all union events.

This cultural shift affects the union's community links. In the backlash from 9/11 and some anti-Muslim incidents in workplaces, the union has been increasing its outreach efforts and strengthening links with community groups.

## **Update**

The United Steel Workers has updated and continues to add to the Anti-Harassment Workplace Training Program. Currently the Program has two workshops: Preventing and Dealing with Harassment in the Workplace (updated 2008), and Cultural Diversity in the Workplace (2008). Development is under way of a third module, Dealing with Violence in the Workplace. Each module can be delivered as a stand-alone workshop, although they complement each other as a series within the Program.

Related to human rights courses, added workshops currently available include Union Counseling (2007), and Building Respectful Workplaces: Joint Workplace Committees (2009).

Workplace modules around conflict resolution have been developed to give participants more skills in dealing with situations, to prevent or resolve conflict before it escalates. Union education in conflict resolution now includes Confidence with Conflict: Dealing with Workplace and Union Disputes (updated 2008). This workshop can be delivered in varying lengths of two, three and five-day sessions.

The integration of elements in each of these workshops now threads into other courses through core skills of conflict resolution and support of human rights and social activism.

## **Further References**

“Negotiating anti-harassment training,” for union staff and local union leadership, to help them to negotiate the training (updated 2008). This resource has details of size, timing, and the outline of the two-hour session, as well as a list of employers. Accompanying this material, a brochure directed to employers promoting “The USW Anti-Harassment Workplace Training Program” will be ready for distribution in 2009.

Template “Letter of Understanding re: Workplace Policies for Harassment and Discrimination” (2008). This is used to strengthen human rights through specific language in collective agreements.

Policy Booklet: made available to local union leadership at conferences and other union events.

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Systemic and Anti-Racism Organizational Change Program (SAROC)

**Union:** Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)

**Contact Person:** Doug Evetts, OPSEU Human Rights Officer, [devetts@opseu.org](mailto:devetts@opseu.org), 416.443.8888

**Initial Purpose:** To eliminate the barriers to participation of women correctional officers; to promote the equality of women including accommodating staff with family responsibilities, reducing the numerical imbalance between men and women and lack of women in supervisory positions; to facilitate a speedy resolution to discrimination complaints.

**Barriers Addressed:** gender, and more recently race

### **Background Information**

OPSEU is the third largest union in Ontario, with approximately 130,000 full and part-time members in such sectors as education, health care, social services, and the public service. OPSEU represents around 7000 members employed by the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. These members include correctional officers, probation and parole officers, bailiffs, cooks, groundskeepers, maintenance, office and clerical staff, etc. Women correctional officers are a minority in a workforce distinguished by a large proportion of white male workers. The Systemic and Anti-Racism Organizational Change Program is a joint union-management program.

### **How the Program Started**

In 1995, the Grievance Settlement Board ruled on a grievance by a part-time female correctional officer related to sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the *O'Brien* case. The Board ordered both the Ministry and OPSEU to jointly develop a Systemic Change Program focused on culture, policies and practices. The Ministry is responsible for all costs associated with the development, implementation and monitoring of the program objectives and initiatives.

In 2005, a significant change occurred when the Program's mandate was expanded to include anti-racism (hence the change in the program's name to Systemic and Anti-Racism Organizational Change Program). This arose from the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal decision in the *McKinnon* case. The Systemic Change Program was identified by the Tribunal as a tool to deliver the *systemic remedies* ordered in this case, specifically, remedial orders to address racism experienced by Aboriginal and racialized workers. As a result, the SAROC Steering Committee was charged with determining how anti-racism was best integrated into the existing initiatives.

## How the Program Evolved

The joint union-management SAROC Program has travelled a long and bumpy road. The 14 years since the Board order and 4 years since the Tribunal orders have been “years of developing, negotiating and litigating,” says Marg Smoke, an OPSEU front-line member who has been involved in the program since the beginning. She notes several negative effects on moving this work forward more quickly: four different governing bodies (causing numerous different players at the table), two provincial strikes, downsizing, closures (which affected women first as the least senior employees), and the creation of a new “Youth Ministry” (in which a majority of women correctional officers worked, causing even less female representation in the adult correctional facilities). Also impacting implementation was the involvement of the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal and changes directed at this Program that would meet the systemic remedies necessary to bring about change for the whole organization.

### *Implementation of Systemic Remedies*

Several joint committees broke down the Program objectives into headings to identify areas within which the initiatives would fall, providing clearer responsibilities to individuals and departments within the organization. Namely:

- Accountability
- Mediation
- Communication
- Wellness
- Continuing education, training and professional development
- Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and adjustment
- Staffing practices

There have been 52 program initiatives thus far, including:

#### *1. Internal Mediation Program*

This program provides employees with an alternative method for resolving workplace conflicts with the assistance of an impartial third party (the mediator). Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process, and can be used for prohibited and non-prohibited grounds complaints. Correctional Services employees were selected through a joint management-union competition and mediation training was provided by Dr. Ellis of Toronto’s York University.

#### *2. Wellness Resource Program*

Each workplace is to have at least one management and one union representative who act as a resource for employees. The Wellness Resource Representatives ensure easy access to health-related information, “professional” contacts in their community and maintain the “Wellness Information Binder.” The Wellness Resource Representatives can also arrange for massage therapy during lunch hours, sponsor a “health fair” where

professionals present information on stress, shift work, balancing family and work, alternative remedies for health care, Employee Assistance Programs, etc.

### *3. Tracking Registry Protocol*

Where an OPSEU member, management or excluded employee (“respondent”) has a discrimination/harassment incident substantiated through the Ministry’s Workplace Discrimination Harassment Prevention Operating Policy, the grievance process, the Ontario Human Rights Commission or criminal conviction, they will be placed on the Tracking Registry for three years. This placement is made known to the Deputy Minister and the President of OPSEU. If there are no further substantiated incidents within the three year period, the employee can request, in writing, that all correspondence be removed from all files.

### *4. Family Responsibility Policy*

This policy provides workplace accommodation for employees where special needs may arise due to family responsibilities that interfere with their capacity to perform regular duties. Special needs may include illness, injury or disability of a dependent child or elder. The policy also provides supportive short and long-term leaves of absence.

### *5. Policy for Short-Term Temporary/Developmental Opportunity Assignments (STAP)*

The goal of the STAP is to encourage full workplace participation of all Correctional Officers, with a focus on women, by providing a fair and consistent process for filling temporary assignments that are five weeks or longer and less than six months. Correctional Officers who meet the minimum requirements have access to two types of temporary assignments under the policy: 1) any position that would be of career benefit and 2) acting Operational Manager positions. Under the STAP, first preference is given to women who have not had a short-term assignment, then the next assignment to men who have not had a short-term assignment, and then to all employees who have previously had short-term assignments based on the “least recent” short-term assignment. Where there is more than one Correctional Officer on the eligibility list who has not had a short-term assignment, seniority will determine the order in which they are assigned.

### *6. Racist/Sexist Incident Response Protocol*

This mechanism jointly addresses serious racist and sexist incidents in a non-adversarial manner. It does not replace existing policies and procedures that address harassment and discrimination, and it does not provide for the investigation of individual complaints. A critical racist or sexist incident is one, which due to the nature and severity of the discrimination and/or harassment requires a quick response. Such incidents appear systemic in nature and have the potential to adversely affect the workplace as a whole. They may also threaten and cause serious harm to individuals and/or groups of people in the workplace and/or undermine SAROC initiatives.

## *7. Local Systemic and Anti-Racism Organizational Change Committees (Local SAROCCs)*

“This critical initiative will have the greatest impact on organizational and systemic change,” explains Marg Smoke. Local SAROCCs are comprised of bargaining unit and management employees in each institution and in clusters of probation and parole, and corporate offices. The committees are representative of women, Aboriginal and racialized employees and employees who have a knowledge of and commitment to human rights. The Committees’ mandate includes the provision of leadership, resources and ongoing support for the implementation, compliance, and monitoring of SAROC initiatives within their own workplace, and the coordination of the newly established SAROC Mentoring Program.

Currently, there are 10 Local SAROCCs across the province, which have been in place for approximately 18 months. A two-day Aboriginal Awareness training will be provided to each committee to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal issues within their worksites. By the end of 2009, the Ministry and OPSEU will conduct an assessment to ensure that they are working to their fullest capacity and make any changes necessary to their role and functions prior to a full province launch in 2010.

By the end of 2010, there will be 200 to 300 members involved throughout the province, to ensure that SAROC Program initiatives are in place and working, and to develop strategies within their own worksites, champion human rights and implement cultural and organizational change. They report directly to the SAROC Steering Committee, which ensures that the SAROC Program meets its legal requirements of the Grievance Settlement Board and Tribunal orders.

### **Employment Systems Review (ESR)**

To ensure the organizational change process is successful, the Ministry and OPSEU agreed to complete an Employment Systems Review (ESR). An ESR is a review of human resources systems, policies and practices, both formal and informal, and the manner in which these are implemented. The purpose of the ESR is to identify policies and practices that may pose barriers to the attraction, recruitment, promotion and retention of a workforce that is representative of Ontario’s diversity and to implement the necessary changes from recommendations. Such a review includes an examination of the ways in which particular attitudes and ideas ingrained in the workplace culture give rise to behaviours that may operate as barriers as well. A thorough ESR involves a review of all relevant policies and documents and consultation with managers, employees and union representatives.

An ESR was conducted of the Correctional Services Division of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services as part of an overall systemic change process to eliminate racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination, and establish a healthy, diverse workforce. The final report was provided to the SAROC Steering

Committee in December 2008 with 72 recommendations for both the Ministry and OPSEU. The committee is now working towards developing a workplan to implement the recommendations.

### **SAROC Audit**

Another tool to evaluate the SAROC Program is an audit to see if the program is having an effect on organizational change by assessing the program's impact. The external company jointly selected by management and the union completed the Audit in November 2008. They assessed workplace discrimination and harassment, identified areas where there has been little or no change, made recommendations, and also created "benchmarks" so a complete audit can be done every five years to ensure SAROC is reaching its goals. They also evaluated the impact of both the SAROC Steering Committee and Local SAROCCs. The SAROC Steering Committee is now developing a strategic plan for updating the Program to ensure it will meet the goals identified.

OPSEU has increased its own ability to support systemic and cultural change for the members by identifying a pool of staff to work closely with the SAROC Steering Committee. The union has also created a full-time position specifically to ensure that not only the Ministry is being held accountable, but also to look at the union organization and ways to improve and remove barriers on human rights.

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** USW/ Teck Cominco Learning Centre

**Union:** United Steel Workers (USW) Locals 480 and 9705

**Contact Person:** Doug Jones, Local 480 President, [480pres@uswa480.com](mailto:480pres@uswa480.com), 250.368.9131

**Initial Purpose:** To provide opportunities for individual development through learning and education.

**Barriers Addressed:** lack of formal education, shiftwork

### **Background Information**

Teck Cominco is the main employer in Trail, British Columbia. The Trail complex is one of the world's largest zinc and lead smelting and refining sites. USW Local 480 represents over 1100 operations and maintenance workers (about 10% of the membership is female). USW Local 9705 represents about 170 office and technical workers (about half are women). The Learning Centre is a joint union-management initiative, overseen by a joint committee, and funded by the employer.

### **How the Program Started**

The Learning Centre was established in 1998, based on an organizational needs assessment led by the joint union-management Refresh Education and Adult Learning Committee (REAL). Workers participating in focus groups identified the following learning priorities: basic computer skills, reading comprehension, math, writing, science, and oral communication. Many workers did not have the education qualifications for company training for certain jobs, and a significant number of the aging workforce had not finished high school. Rotating and multiple shift schedules further complicated the picture.

Located on site (until 2006), the Learning Centre supports individual development through learning unrelated to specific jobs, offering only courses suggested by employees. All programs are offered on the workers' own time.

### **How the Program Evolved**

From the beginning, the Learning Centre offered a wide variety of interest courses (Boat Pro, stained glass, more recently digital photography, gun safety, tree trimming) as well as academic upgrading and computer courses. Many hundreds of employees have taken one or more courses.

Workers, the union, and the employer have been pleased with the Learning Centre's contribution. "We're high on the program because it offers such a wide range of education, opportunities for workers to better themselves," says Doug Jones, USW Local

480 President. “It’s in the interest of the company too – for example, we have a better safety record.” As noted in the Conference Board case study referenced below, “The Learning Centre’s innovation lies in recognizing that people can develop skills that are transferable to the workplace while learning about topics that interest them and relate to other parts of their lives” (p. 5).

About 30 workers have graduated high school through credit courses arranged by the Learning Centre, including a married couple who were both employed at the workplace.

Community links and partnerships through the Greater Trail Community Skills Centre, school board and Selkirk College are vital ingredients in the program’s success.

Over time, less need and interest have been seen for basic computer courses, high school completion, reading, math and study skills. This is a result of successful programs over the years as well as requirements of a minimum Grade 12 education for new-hires.

### **Impacts**

The biggest impact has been seen on the individual level, notes Jones: “workers who have been able to get promoted due to their upgraded education, workers getting their grade 12. It’s enhanced people’s skills. For the union, there may be greater confidence in writing skills among stewards and safety reps.”

### **What’s Next**

The Learning Centre is in somewhat of a transition. In 2006, course delivery shifted from the workplace to Selkirk College. While courses remain free for Teck Cominco employees and are scheduled to accommodate shift times, participation is now open to the general community. Registration fees for spouses of employees are also now covered for selected courses such as the Learn to Dance Course and Feeding a Healthy Family. Other elements of Learning Centre services may take on more prominence in the period ahead: assisting workers in independent study, tutoring and other supports; providing information for employees on company education rebate policies; advocacy with trainers on job-specific training needs.

Workers continue to identify desired courses, expressing interest in wide-ranging topics. For example, a current course offering is “edible wild mushrooms.” Local 480 is thinking of suggesting a course on building a rock wall. Trail residents have built many unique rock walls, and the Labour Centre is looking at using a rock wall in a planned memorial park honouring union activists who have passed away.

### **Update**

In 2007, Teck Cominco gathered together a group of interested employees to look into forming a workplace Wellness program. The employee group drew from all facets of the organization: representatives from the Union Executive, Senior Management, Human

Resources, and workers from the shop floor. As the Wellness program evolved, it became evident that there was too much work for the committee members to handle alone. Since the Coordinator of the Learning Centre had resigned her post around that time, the two committees decided that the new coordinator would work with both programs. The new Inspiring Wellness and Learning Coordinator is employed by the Greater Trail Community Skills Centre but her office is on the Teck site. The two committees both give direction to the coordinator, but they are considering combining the committees.

The coordinator has formed many community partnerships to enhance the programs being offered to employees. A partnership with Interior Health provided an opportunity to provide Crew Talks to employees, such as one on Dealing with Aging Parents. Crew Talks with 650 employees in 2008 provided information on various health issues and provided updates on courses being offered through the Learning Centre.

Partnerships with other organizations have produced “Learn To” programs such as Learn to Ski, Learn to Golf, and Learn to Mountain Bike. Offering courses with an activity theme has rejuvenated the program and attracted a whole different sector of the workforce.

The Inspiring Wellness and Learning committees now sponsor an on-site yearly Health Check. Employees attend during work hours and have their blood pressure checked, cholesterol screened, flexibility checked, and blood sugar checked by qualified nurses and nurse practitioners from an organization called Hearts at Work. Approximately 500 employees attended these Know Your Numbers sessions in the program’s first two years.

The committee has also developed a Wellness Steps Out program and website. Employees were given pedometers and encouraged to walk for fitness. They can use a map on the website to measure the distance they have traveled.

*Updated February 2009*

### **Further References**

Kurtis Kitagawa, “Cominco Ltd.’s Learning Centre: Refreshing and Extending Learning and Building an Engaged Workforce. Conference Board of Canada, Case Study 35”, 2001, <http://www.teckcominco.com/articles/operations/tr-case-35.pdf>

**Name of Program:** Fondation de la formation économique (Foundation for Economic Education), Workplace Education Initiative

**Union:** Fonds de solidarité de la Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (Solidarity Fund FTQ)

**Contact Person:** Jean Sylvestre, Executive Director, [jsylvestre@fondstq.com](mailto:jsylvestre@fondstq.com), 514.383.8383 ext 5102

**Initial Purpose:** To equip workers to participate as full and informed partners in discussion of economic development in their workplace and the wider society.

**Barriers Addressed:** Class and region

### **Background Information**

The Foundation for Economic Education is an integral part of Canada's largest labour-sponsored investment fund. The Solidarity Fund FTQ calls upon the solidarity and savings of Quebecers to help create and maintain jobs in Québec by investing in small and medium-sized businesses. It also strives to offer its shareholders a fair return for their retirement. Since its inception in June 1983, the Fund, whose net assets stood at \$6.6 billion as at May 31, 2006, has become a hub of knowledge, resources and contacts for Québec companies and a key player in the Québec economy. One of the four key objectives of the Solidarity Fund FTQ is "to promote the economic training of workers in order to enhance their contribution to Québec's economic development." Over half a million people, 30% of whom are FTQ members, have shares in the fund. In the past year, more than 5,000 members, mostly from FTQ unions, participated in the educational work of the Foundation for Economic Education. The Workplace Education Initiative deals specifically with those firms in which the Solidarity Fund has invested.

### **How the Program Started**

In the course of deciding on an investment, the Solidarity Fund FTQ does a careful analysis of the financial, organizational, market and social health of an enterprise. This information is updated constantly, and shared with the employer. The challenge of the Workplace Education Initiative was how to engage all employees of the enterprise in understanding and using this information, for increased transparency throughout the workplace and a chance to influence its development. When an investment is confirmed, the employer contributes \$40 per employee per year to the Foundation for Economic Education, as a first effort to promote such learning. The Foundation pays back 75% of salaries and benefits for the time workers spend in Foundation training.

From an educational perspective, the first challenge is that most workers feel distant from the world of financial analysis, which has historically been jealously guarded as a part of "management rights" in most workplaces. In turn, many employers feel that their audited financial data are a distinctly private matter, whose disclosure can generate advantage to

competitors and disruptive questioning by employees. In addressing these attitudes, the Foundation has needed to act in a way that can be sustained over a long period, to gradually ensure that the enterprise is maintained and that the workers become increasingly knowledgeable about its functioning.

### **How the Program Evolved**

In each partner enterprise, the Foundation staff, now totalling 12 people, develops a tool that summarizes for all employees the current financial health of the enterprise, and keeps it updated. This is the basis of relevant and informed discussion throughout the workplace. Although the Foundation is careful never to intervene in labour relations matters in any way, this information is also used by both management and the union in collective bargaining, and serves to clarify discussions about the financial capacity of the employer when faced with requests and proposals of any sort.

The Foundation commissioned in 2003 an evaluation of the program by an independent team at the UQAM (University of Québec at Montréal), which found that people very much enjoyed the courses and found them personally enriching. However, the courses had not enough impact on the culture of the workplace. This was disturbing, and led to a complete re-working of the program.

One change introduced was to focus effort on the front-line supervisors in each enterprise, whose role had always been operational rather than financial. The initial courses did not include them, with the result that workers who had participated in courses would put questions to supervisors that they could not answer. This created much frustration on both sides. While sessions now often separate hourly employees from supervisory staff, the training itself is substantially the same.

The main change was to break up the program into a series of steps whose timing can be adapted to the needs and culture of the specific enterprise. The first step is an orientation session, in which all employees are booked off at the expense of the employer for a 90-minute orientation to the Solidarity Fund, why it invested in the enterprise, and what its investment will mean; the session introduces the company's business plan.

The second step is a day-long session for everyone, which further explores the business plan of the enterprise and addresses workers' perceptions concerning its evolution. Its goal is to close the gap between perceptions and reality concerning the company's success in attaining the business plan's objectives.

The other four steps build on this, over a period of two years or more, to establish a basis for informed dialogue on financial issues throughout the enterprise. The major tool involved is the company's audited financial statements.

## **Impacts**

Last year, the Workplace Education Initiative reached 50 enterprises, up from the level of 30 at which it had remained for some time. The openness of employers is greater, the engagement of workers is greater, and the recognition of the Solidarity Fund as an active contributor to the culture of the workplace has increased. It is hoped that when a formal evaluation is next conducted, the results will be significantly different.

## **What's Next**

The Workplace Education Initiative is one of five major programs conducted by the Foundation for Economic Education. The others include training of the network of voluntary local representatives for the Solidarity Fund, in which more than 200 sessions have been held, involving more than 2,000 workers. More than 500 summer students are employed through a fund partly financed by the Solidarity Fund. The Foundation trains these students as to their rights and responsibilities as workers and citizens. Further growth and improved quality in the Workplace Education Initiative is the basis for credibility and effectiveness of the Solidarity Fund's work in these other areas.

## **Further References**

“Apprendre pour agir ensemble,” Rapport annuel 2005-2006, Fondation de la formation économique, Fonds de solidarité FTQ.

English-language material is available at [www.fondsftq.com](http://www.fondsftq.com).

**Name of Program:** Joint Learning Program

**Union:** Public Service Alliance of Canada

**Contact Person:** Mark Pecek, JLP Co-Director, PSAC, [pecekm@psac.com](mailto:pecekm@psac.com);  
613.560.2605

**Initial Purpose:** To provide joint training in areas where the employer does not already have the legal obligation to do so; to improve labour-management relations at the workplace through joint learning opportunities; to enhance skills, knowledge and behaviours, and to increase the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the union and employer in the workplace.

**Barriers Addressed:** time, cost, lack of education and training opportunities

### **Background Information**

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) is one of Canada's largest unions, representing 165,000 members. The majority of PSAC members work for the federal government and its agencies. The Joint Learning Program is a partnership between PSAC and the Canada Public Service Agency.

### **How the Program Started**

During 2001 contract negotiations affecting 105,000 members, the PSAC advanced paid union education leave as a bargaining demand (cents per hour worked for a training fund). In the course of bargaining, the union made a proposal for the employer to fund a joint union-management program. The parties negotiated \$7 million for the establishment of the Public Service Alliance of Canada-Treasury Board Secretariat Joint Learning Program (PSAC-TBS JLP).

The objectives of the Joint Learning Program (JLP) were to improve labour relations and increase the understanding of the roles of the union and management in the workplace. This was to be achieved through providing workshops in areas of mutual interest for which the employer did not already have a legal obligation to provide training.

The JLP was developed as a truly joint union-employer program: co-developed, co-delivered and co-managed. All staff and facilitator teams are composed as half from labour and half from management; all policies, facilitation principles, course design, etc. are co-developed. All workshops must be jointly requested by the union and the employer in the workplace. Workshop participants include both PSAC members and managers and supervisors. "Jointness" is woven into the workshop content: for example, the respective roles and responsibilities of the union, employer, and individual worker relative to the topic.

The program's joint nature gives the workshops great credibility. Participants see that there is a legitimate role for both parties, including a role and voice for the union. The workshops stimulate dialogue and commitment of both sides.

The PSAC emphasized a popular education approach and the active engagement of workshop participants. While this approach had not been previously used by management-initiated training, the employer agreed and this approach has proved to be very successful with participants and facilitators.

Four workshops were co-developed for the JLP Core Program during the 2001-04 pilot phase: *Anti-Harassment*; *Respecting Differences and Anti-Discrimination*; *Interpreting the Collective Agreement*; and *Union-Management Consultation*. In addition, the JLP developed a Facilitators' Orientation Course, aimed at training union and management representatives to be workshop facilitators.

The *Respecting Differences and Anti-Discrimination* workshop addresses "how unconscious biases or assumptions impair our ability to work effectively with others and limit our lives." Participants "look at the various roles and responsibilities for adopting strategies to ensure an inclusive and discrimination-free workplace."

The *Anti-Harassment* workshop can be taught as a one or two day workshop. The one-day workshop provides "individual employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to proactively and effectively advocate for a healthy, harassment-free workplace." The two-day workshop allows the union and management to "develop organizational structures and strategies for a harassment-free environment."

By March 2004, some 621 JLP workshops had been delivered in French and English to over 12,700 participants across Canada. A major evaluation of the program at that time praised the program's quality and was generally very favourable. However, when the collective agreements expired in 2004, funding for the JLP ceased.

The PSAC was successful in bargaining for continued employer funding. The new contract provided over \$8 million for the JLP, and included bridge funding for the period between the expiry and renewal of collective agreements.

In 2006, the initiative was re-launched as the PSAC-AGENCY (Canada Public Service Agency) Joint Learning Program. Due to its previous success, much of the workshop content and facilitation approach remained the same. Workshop delivery resumed in January 2007.

### **How the Program Evolved**

From January 2007 to the end of October 2008, the JLP has delivered 500 workshops to approximately 10,000 participants. The JLP overcomes the "time and cost barriers" by delivering training on work time at no charge to the participant or workplace. However,

time is still sometimes a barrier since the JLP “competes” with mandatory training and workers must deal with increased workload due to staff cutbacks.

From the beginning, the JLP has recruited and trained union and employer facilitators. Over 800 people have participated in the five-day facilitator orientation. The orientation package includes a copy of the PSAC anti-oppression policy statement. There are currently 468 active facilitators, including 248 union facilitators. Facilitators have considered the experience a transformational opportunity in which they feel valued and challenged. Some of the union facilitators have gone on to take up other union activist roles.

The JLP encourages applications for staff and facilitator positions from youth (age 30 and under) and equity group members by sending postings to relevant networks. Of the current facilitators, 39 have a disability, 25 are Aboriginal, 51 are racially visible, 121 are women, 23 are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgendered (LGBT) and 20 are youth. One of the co-facilitators of the Respecting Differences workshop is always from an equity-seeking group.

Due to the JLP’s success, workshop demand can outweigh capacity. Demand for the Anti-Harassment workshop is particularly strong since all federal government departments have been asked to prepare action plans as part of a review of the government’s anti-harassment policy. Action plans often include workshops for all department employees. Some departments have 15,000 employees. In the case of Correctional Services, for example, the need exceeds the JLP’s capacity to deliver. To respond to this situation, the JLP has signed memoranda of understanding for strategic partnerships: the JLP provides resources and trains facilitators from the partnering department, and then the department is responsible for workshop delivery.

The JLP also promotes follow-up in recognition of the need to address workplace issues on an on-going basis. Departments are also encouraged to develop their own internal plan to deal with issues raised by the workshops.

In 2008, the JLP launched a new workshop on Employment Equity. The workshop description states: “By creating awareness of the employment equity legislation and by highlighting the role that both the union and the employer play in achieving equality in the workplace, this workshop will equip federal public service employees with the knowledge to become effective advocates for employment equity implementation in their departments and agencies.” This includes looking at the purpose and benefits of the Employment Equity Act and dispelling the myths associated with its implementation.

## **Impacts**

There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to the JLP from both the management and labour side. The partnership brings together union and employer differences in cultures and values in open discussions where these differences are addressed and consensus is reached.

The success of the JLP has also forced the employer at the workplace level to recognize the need for the union and has lessened employer resistance to working with the PSAC as a counterpart in the workplace. Corresponding changes in the workplace environment have allowed for more union organizing opportunities.

For the PSAC, there is now greater workplace credibility as they reach out to members who had little previous knowledge or understanding about their union. JLP workshops provide insight into the union's daily work and its role in the workplace in terms of anti-harassment and the collective agreement for example. Workshops have also helped identify potential union activists, and in turn reactivate dormant locals.

### **What's Next**

The JLP is anticipated to grow, perhaps triple in size. Based on participant feedback, new workshops will continue to be co-developed. One topic under consideration is conflict resolution in the workplace. There is also discussion about using an e-learning platform.

More time will be allotted to assess facilitator skills and to provide follow-up in using these newly acquired skills within the union.

The evaluation framework in use since 2007 includes participant feedback at the time of the workshop as well as post-one and six months. A full program evaluation is planned for 2009.

### **Further References**

Joint Learning Program website: [http://jlp-pam.ca/index\\_e.asp](http://jlp-pam.ca/index_e.asp)

**Name of Program:** Representative Workforce Strategy

**Union:** Canadian Union of Public Employees (Saskatchewan)

**Contact Person:** Don Moran, Senior Officer for First Peoples Issues, Canadian Union of Public Employees, [dmoran@cupe.ca](mailto:dmoran@cupe.ca), 613.237.1590 ext. 347

**Initial Purpose:** To increase the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers in all classifications and at all levels of the Saskatchewan health care sector in proportion to the working-age population.

**Barriers Addressed:** employment, education, income and other systemic disparities experienced by Aboriginal workers

### **Background Information**

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is the largest union in Saskatchewan, representing over 27,000 members working in health care facilities, school boards, universities, municipalities, libraries, community-based organizations and various boards and agencies.

### **How the Program Started**

When Saskatchewan's employment equity plans began in the 1980s, only 2% of the workforce was Aboriginal. (14.88% of people identified themselves as Aboriginal in the 2006 census.) Recognizing the ongoing systemic barriers faced by Aboriginal workers in the province, five Aboriginal CUPE staff in Saskatchewan prepared a paper in 1999 which in turn became a short and long-term plan of the CUPE national staff working in the province. The plan outlined the vision and goals to address the under-representation of Aboriginal people in the workforce.

To implement the program, the involvement and support of union leaders and membership were needed. This was achieved through an education initiative that produced pamphlets, bulletins and other learning materials dispelling myths and misconceptions about Aboriginal people and highlighting their desperate employment statistics and social conditions. All CUPE staff participated in an Aboriginal Awareness workshop.

In November 2000, CUPE signed a partnership agreement with the Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs Department of the Saskatchewan government to promote a Representative Workforce Strategy (RWS). The goal of the RWS was to have Aboriginal people employed in all work classifications and at all levels in proportion to their working-age population in the province.

This would be achieved by ensuring "that Aboriginal people are trained and qualified so that Aboriginal people can compete for jobs on a level playing field," explained Don

Moran, Senior Officer for First Peoples Issues, CUPE. In addition to education and skills training for Aboriginal people, the Strategy also builds active support for Aboriginal workers in the workplace to help ensure they are treated as equals.

The health care sector was chosen to implement the RWS first because it was the largest provincial public sector employer and had the greatest variety of job classifications. A tripartite agreement and committee was formed consisting of the CUPE health care council, the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO) and the provincial government. The committee's goal was to train Aboriginal people for the health care sector and to prepare workplaces to better understand and accept Aboriginal people in order to improve retention rates.

The committee identified possible barriers in the collective agreements (covering 14,000 health care workers) and recommended changes to both the union and employer bargaining committees. Changes to contract language approved by CUPE members included provisions for education programs, succession planning and various initiatives aimed at hiring and retaining Aboriginal workers. For example, the "Representative Workforce" article of the collective agreement includes "Accommodation of Spiritual or Cultural Observances," "In-Service Training" and "Elders" clauses.

The committee successfully lobbied the provincial government for education program funding. The education component included the training of Aboriginal people for health care work and an Aboriginal Awareness Training workshop delivered in the workplace by a joint union-employer committee. The mandatory three-hour workshop engaged participants in active discussion and activities and was co-facilitated by SAHO and CUPE's Aboriginal Education Coordinators.

The workshop objectives are:

- to create awareness and understanding of the Representative Workforce Strategy
- to instill a sense of ownership of the Partnership Agreement and collective agreement language
- to promote action toward a Representative Workforce from each participant
- to prepare the workplace by promoting better understanding of Aboriginal issues and cultural differences
- to promote a desire for further self-education on Aboriginal issues
- to encourage participants to ask questions and challenge the status quo

The training also provides information about the following areas:

- Representative Workforce Strategy
- statistics and demographics
- history of the Treaties
- cultural awareness (provided by Elders)
- myths and misconceptions about Aboriginal people
- employee relations
- language in the partnership agreements about collective agreements

The workshop deals with the perceived negative effects of employment equity programs. Participants wanting more information are encouraged to participate in the one-week labour education course called Unionism on Turtle Island. While there is sometimes participant resentment because the training is mandatory, the workshops have been successful with positive evaluations from 98% of participants.

### **How the Program Evolved**

The Representative Workforce Strategy involves taking a ‘snapshot’ of the health care sector and facilities to identify open positions and the training needed for future positions. Partnerships with Aboriginal communities and educational institutions are then formed to provide the needed training to fill those positions.

The partnerships also addressed the reality that many Aboriginal people were not applying for health care work because they believed they had little chance of being hired. These concerns led to meetings with training institutions to organize appropriate training for Aboriginal people and to assure Aboriginal students that jobs would be available.

In Prince Albert, for example, the snapshot indicated a need for licensed practical nurses. Through a partnership between Aboriginal and government education institutions, training was offered to the Métis community with government funding. The partnership is a success with 20 students trained per year and all graduates finding employment in their health region (and becoming CUPE members).

In addition to specific skills training, 500 Aboriginal people have taken a health care work preparation program funded by the government and employer. The 16-week program includes a half-day CUPE presentation which discusses the union’s structure, the collective agreement, and concerns Aboriginal people have about unions such as seniority provisions.

Once in the workplace, Aboriginal workers can access literacy training, career counseling, and other supports to ensure they are not ‘stuck’ in entry-level positions and can advance their careers. This will hopefully improve the retention rate of Aboriginal workers in the health care sector.

As part of the RWS, CUPE hired an Aboriginal education coordinator for the health care sector and has offered “train the trainer” workshops to both unionized and non-unionized workers in the sector to meet the increased demand for trainers. SAHO reported that 17,000 staff had participated in the Aboriginal Awareness Training workshop as of 2006. As of 2007, CUPE reported that 10,500 out of 12,000 members in the health care sector had been trained.

## **Impacts**

More Aboriginal people now work in the Saskatchewan health care sector, including special care aides, home care workers and licensed practical nurses. More Aboriginal students are entering the health care field, particularly in nursing.

As of 2007, the Aboriginal participation rate in the sector has risen from 1% to 6%, with approximately 2,100 Aboriginal people being hired since the partnership agreement was signed in 2000. There have been especially big gains in areas with traditionally low participation rates and a large Aboriginal population. For example, the participation rate went from almost 0% to 19% in Prince Albert and from 3% to 9.7% in Regina.

The success of the RWS in the Saskatchewan health care sector led to efforts to expand the tripartite agreement to other employment sectors where CUPE represents workers in the province, such as school boards, libraries, municipalities and universities. Other unions have also joined RWS. Nearly 80 partnership agreements exist in Saskatchewan and more unionized workplaces are joining.

The increased involvement of Aboriginal workers in CUPE has led to a greater knowledge of the union, and this in turn has led to a greater knowledge of Aboriginal issues within the union. Don Moran notes: “It is not only our workplaces that have to change. Unions have come to realize that they needed to show real commitment to the goal of developing a representative workforce. As a result, unions have made changes to their structure that allow for Aboriginal representation.”

These changes are illustrated by the greater representation of Aboriginal members in union executives, women’s committees, health and safety committees and other union bodies. CUPE also created the position of Senior Officer for First Peoples Issues with a mandate that includes steering a national program promoting RWS.

On June 21, 2001 (National Aboriginal Day), Saskatchewan was the first region in CUPE to establish an Aboriginal Council at the provincial level and others soon followed. In 2005, a national Aboriginal Council was formed at the CUPE national convention. By 2008, CUPE had six Aboriginal councils at the local level in Saskatchewan.

## **What’s Next**

The success of the Representative Workforce Strategy has generated interest in other provinces and within the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The goal is to have more employers recognize the need for formal partnership agreements to address the under-representation of Aboriginal people in all work classifications and at all work levels.

## Further References

Don Moran, “Aboriginal Organizing In Saskatchewan: The Experience of CUPE,”  
*Just Labour*, Vol. 8 (2006).

<http://www.justlabour.yorku.ca/index.php?page=toc&volume=8>

“Innovative partnership agreement brings health care jobs to Saskatchewan Aboriginal workers,” CUPE, September 13, 2006

[http://cupe.ca/aboriginal/Innovative\\_partnersh](http://cupe.ca/aboriginal/Innovative_partnersh)

**Name of Program:** Community Training Plan

**Employer/Union:** Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) in partnership with the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 416 and Local 79

**Contact Person:** Marion Thomson, Manager, Training and Development, TCHC, 416.981.4268, [Marion.Thomson@torontohousing.ca](mailto:Marion.Thomson@torontohousing.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To provide training for Toronto Community Housing Corporation staff using a participatory model to identify needs, plan and implement training

**Barriers Addressed:** uneven access to workplace training, under-representation of diverse groups and lower job classifications

### **Background Information**

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is the largest social-housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America.<sup>20</sup> It is home to about 164,000 low and moderate-income tenants in 58,500 households, including seniors, families, singles, refugees, recent immigrants to Canada and people with special needs. The majority of TCHC's 1500 employees are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Locals 416 and 79. This includes TCHC maintenance, clerical, recreation staff, community development workers and other front-line staff working with tenants.

### **How the Program Started**

In 2002, TCHC with the support of the labour-management education committee developed a new staff training approach using a more inclusive, democratic and sustainable process. The Community Training Plan (CTP) led by the Training Unit within TCHC draws on various models such as community development, international development, popular education and workplace learning. The new approach complemented participatory initiatives in other TCHC activities, particularly with tenants. For example, TCHC has piloted a community-based business plan modeled on the municipal government of Porte Allegre, Brazil. Tenants in local communities prioritize local budgets for capital projects in their buildings and communities.

The Community Training Plan began with staff working in the large public housing complex of Regent Park in February 2003. The main objective of the CTP was to create a process whereby staff collectively decide what training they need and to design a structure which enables staff to implement their training plan.

A series of three needs analysis workshops were held using popular education and participatory research methods. Frontline staff within the housing “community” discussed

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<sup>20</sup> TCHC was created on January 1, 2002 through the amalgamation of the Toronto Community Housing Company and the Metro Toronto Housing Authority, and also incorporates the former City of Toronto CityHome units.

their training needs and prioritized three job-specific skills needed to do their work better. Staff also voted on five issues for all-staff training needed to function better as a team and to strengthen their understanding of TCHC tenant communities.

Workers were not used to being asked their opinion or speaking in large groups; this was especially so for job classifications such as cleaners. This new way of conducting needs analysis empowered participants to step up and say what they need.

After each housing-community group agrees on their training plan, staff elect or choose a representative from each job group to participate on their Training Committee. The Training Committee is responsible for preparing a budget and presenting the training plan to management, labour representatives and staff for input and approval. The representation of diverse groups in these committees is encouraged.

The CTP builds a strong partnership with labour at every stage of the process including curriculum design, organization, roll-out and the evaluation of training.

“In essence, this is a huge leadership program in the making and has tremendous potential to change the face of training at TCHC and overall workplace relations,” notes TCHC Training Unit staff.

### **How the Program Evolved**

By 2008, the CTP was operating in 17 of the 27 community housing units (CHUs) and 2 business units (administration). Staff training had taken place on such topics as:

- minor repairs, locksmith, electrical, plumbing, carpentry
- leadership/teambuilding, conflict resolution, customer service, time management, communication skills, business writing, organizational skills
- computer skills: Excel, PowerPoint, MSWord, Groupwise

An all-staff training series was also developed, called Understanding Our Communities Better. Nine half-day sessions have been delivered, grouped in two parts:

- Our Society explores issues of poverty and class, gender, race and cultural issues, seniors, mental health, human rights, as well as youth issues and issues of ableism
- Impact on Us discusses the impact of these issues on staff in the workplace and on TCHC communities

Arts-based learning is a feature of many CTP activities, including workshops on creative writing, videography, drama and song-writing. Training Committee members have documented experiences of learning in DVD form, and have also used new skills in preparing newsletter contributions and publicity materials.

The Training Committees themselves have become learning opportunities for the committee members. From preparing budgets and presenting plans, through assessing potential service providers, organizing and evaluating workshops, as well as annual

retreats featuring exciting developmental sessions – the experience of being a Training Committee member has proven to be tremendously enriching to staff.

In cooperation with CUPE, the Training Unit has also created temporary job opportunities for frontline staff (usually Training Committee members at their housing community). Staff have worked as facilitators, in needs analysis, designing and conducting an evaluation of CTP, and other projects. These are opportunities to build skills, learn about popular education and practice adult education techniques, foster critical consciousness and develop leadership capabilities. It is also a great boost for staff to see their colleagues in facilitator roles.

## **Impacts**

CTP has had a significant impact on skills, abilities and workers' confidence. Training also provides a social space and a venue for self-development. Female cleaners, for example, have blossomed and some have applied for promotions to custodian and building superintendent positions. Overall, there is greater interest in learning, seen in higher usage of the tuition reimbursement benefit.

In TCHC training, CTP participants stand out among their peers: they have become better learners, are building on their previous training, and recognize their own strengths and ability to contribute.

In the 2008 participatory evaluation of CTP, workers and managers described the positive impact of the program in various areas (bullet points below are comments quoted in the evaluation report):

### *Personal development*

- Developed my confidence and communication skills
- Helped me to work in groups
- Developed my public speaking skills
- Built leadership

### *Participatory process and committee development*

- The CTP is something we own
- We now have a say and are given the power to design, plan and implement our training plans
- Helps me work with management
- Members feel kinship, building relationships and bonding

### *At the CHU (Community Housing Unit)*

- Through all-staff training we like to get together and exchange ideas and learn
- The training brought me down a few notches, gave me a new appreciation of what staff do
- Staff are speaking more – communication has improved in the CHU
- Helps us cope with the pressure of staff shortages

### *Impact on staff and tenants*

- Training and experiencing more about each other is bringing us closer to understanding each other. We are coming from different backgrounds and cultures but we are all experts in our own way.
- I can better relate to tenants. We are more compassionate. I understand their needs and I react differently with them. I was judgmental before but I changed my attitude.
- There is less conflict and more respect for one another, better communication.

### *Organizational impact*

- I am more open minded now. I speak up more often. I try and help any way I can. I never used to participate but meeting other people through CTP has opened doors for me.
- I would like all staff to get involved so that everyone can make a difference – gaining skills, education. We can succeed in our job performance, make it better. We are all leaders and we need to bring it out in people.
- Staff don't feel stuck at their job as much as they did before training.

On the more general impact of CTP, Training Unit staff note: “A recent evaluation of peer facilitators leading the CTP needs analysis and the support facilitators made clear the possibilities of popular education in a workplace setting. Committee members have been central to becoming change agents throughout TCHC and are visible on various workplace committees and company-wide initiatives. They have a renewed sense of their own power and agency within and outside of TCHC. Many have also returned to school and are embarking on further education goals.”

### **What's Next**

Toronto Community Housing plans to extend the Community Training Plan to all housing units and staff. Flowing from the CTP evaluation, the Training Unit and Training Committees hope to launch discussion of a renewed training strategy with input from staff, workplace, labour and community partners.

### **Further References**

Toronto Community Housing Corporation. 2008. *The Community Training Plan: Road Show Handbook: Presenting some key themes and ideas from our evaluation of the Community Training Plan.*

Toronto Community Housing Corporation. February 19 2008. *Community Training Plan Evaluation.* [www.torontohousing.ca/webfm\\_send/4719/1](http://www.torontohousing.ca/webfm_send/4719/1)

**Name of Program:** Apprenticeship Training Program for Postal Workers

**Union:** Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)

**Contact Person:** John Macdonald, Research Specialist, [jmacdonald@cupw-sttp.org](mailto:jmacdonald@cupw-sttp.org), 613.236.7238

**Initial Purpose:** To provide apprenticeship opportunities for non-skilled-trades CUPW members employed by Canada Post; to provide upgrading opportunities for skilled trades members.

**Barriers Addressed:** lack of promotional opportunities related to skills training; gender

### **Background Information**

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has 54,000 members in large and small communities across Canada. A majority of members work for Canada Post as rural and suburban mail carriers, letter carriers, mail service couriers, postal clerks, mail handlers, mail dispatchers, technicians, mechanics, electricians and electronic technicians.

### **How the Program Started**

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the union saw Canada Post systematically contract work to the private sector and aggressively downsize the workforce. At the same time, the union knew that the corporation was modernizing the sortation equipment in the plants. The union saw many instances of the corporation hiring skilled tradespeople “from the street,” rather than promoting “from within,” on the grounds that the employees did not have the requisite skills for the changing technology.

The union knew that with a declining number of jobs, employee opportunities for promotion into the higher paid and skilled technical services positions were diminishing. Therefore, the union sought ways to oppose the contracting out and downsizing, and to create opportunities for internal promotion. Employee training was among the strategies it embraced.

Negotiated in 1994, the Apprenticeship Training Program was launched with company funding the following year. It operates under the pre-existing joint union-management Service Expansion and Workplace Development Committee.

### **How the Program Evolved**

More than 200 workers across the country have taken the program, training either as vehicle mechanics or industrial maintenance technicians (the two streams of the program).

The program pays the trainees a regular salary and all expenses, including childcare if necessary, throughout the 4-5 year training period. As an apprenticeship program, it combines classroom and mentored on-the-job training. The classroom portion is delivered by community colleges across the country. The on-the-job portion – the bulk of the training – takes place in Canada Post facilities. The program credits trainees for prior learning and work experience, and is delivered in French and English.

Access to the program goes to the most senior applicants who pass an aptitude test administered by the college. The test is supposed to measure the ability of applicants to learn the skills taught in the program. The college offers feedback to those who do not pass regarding their results and suggests remedial courses they can take. To date, the major obstacles to passing the test have been mathematics, and English for those who do not speak it as a first language.

The union also wanted to ensure women had access to the program. In the early 1990s there were no more than one or two women among the 900 or so technical service employees. This was the situation even though Canada Post has legal obligations to eliminate employment barriers in the workplace under the federal Employment Equity Act. Women have secured employment in other groups, such as letter carriers, wicket clerks, and sortation workers.

Working toward the goal of gender equity, the union negotiated the following language into the collective agreement: “The Committee shall make a particular effort to encourage women to apply for admission to apprenticeship programs and training programs” (Article 40.21). However, in practice, the seniority provision blocked women’s access to the program.

To overcome this problem, the union negotiated two gender-based seniority lists in the 1999 round of bargaining. It got agreement from management that half of the apprentice positions open to employees not already working in technical services will be offered to women applicants on the basis of seniority and test results. This was a major step for the union with respect to the principle of seniority. Never before had it departed from a single seniority list.

Disappointingly, however, despite these two measures and periodic union outreach initiatives to women, women’s participation in the program has remained minimal. To this date only three women in total have graduated from the industrial maintenance stream. No women have applied to the vehicle mechanic stream.

An encouraging breakthrough was achieved in the 2007 intake of new apprentices. Publicity of the success of women apprentices created a greater level of awareness among female members and for the first time large numbers of women applied for the available apprentice positions. In this latest intake, the goal of gender equity was achieved and as a result there is potential for 18 additional women to be graduating from the industrial maintenance stream.

The joint program's implementation has seen the union doing most of the work. The union has provided a progressive vision of the program, committed leadership and very effective coordination. Ironically, the corporate failure to carry its load creates a very positive outcome for the union. To all intents and purposes, the union drives the program.

Accordingly, the union has ensured that the program meets union objectives and is delivered in a professional manner. Moreover, the union works with the membership very dynamically and positively as the program leader. The program thus becomes an organizing vehicle that strengthens the union.

## **Impacts**

The benefits of the program to the trainees are significant: upon completion, a guaranteed job as a mechanic or maintenance technician, a job that pays the highest postal worker wage; training in portable technical skills that can be used in other industries; certification by a recognized post secondary educational institution that will be recognized by other employers.

Canada Post gains substantially from the program as well: technicians versed in the latest technology and knowledge; improved employee morale as they see the new job and training opportunities, both of which had been all but non-existent in the skilled classifications in recent years; a better relationship with the union, at least on this front.

From the union's point of view, aside from the low participation rate of women, the program has achieved impressive results. On the whole, the trainees have scored extremely high marks in the college part of the program and performed very well on the job. Their college marks are even more remarkable because most of them have been out of school for many years. The colleges, for their part, have consistently commended the trainees for their strong motivation and hard work. Praised too are the knowledge, experience and enthusiasm they have brought to their classes, making them a stimulating challenge for the instructors. The learning, it seems, has gone in both directions.

The union is particularly pleased about the opportunities that the program brings to members to enter skilled trades jobs, or to upgrade their abilities if they are already in the trades group. These opportunities simply did not exist prior to the advent of the program.

The program has also produced unforeseen benefits for the union. These pertain to relations between members working in the technical services group, as well as relations between that group of members (who are a minority within the union membership) and the union as a whole.

By periodically bringing them together at the colleges, the program has significantly improved contact and communication between technical services members dispersed in plants across the country. As a result, they are now much better able than previously to share information about and resolve their unique workplace issues.

Similarly, they are much more able to formulate and articulate common technical services positions on collective bargaining issues, which will help them advance their concerns to the bargaining table. They had a great deal of difficulty doing this previously.

By playing a dynamic lead role in the development and implementation of the program, the union has substantially improved its contact and communication with the technical services group, and its knowledge about their work and concerns. It has reduced the gap between the union leadership and this somewhat marginalized component of the membership.

### **What's Next**

Despite its success, the future of the program is not secure. Management is introducing sortation equipment that requires less high-end maintenance, and appears to want to reduce the number of equipment-containing plants by consolidating mail processing. This means that the corporation will require fewer maintenance employees who have undergone the training from the program.

*Updated February 2009*

### **Further References**

“Apprenticeship Training in the Canadian Post Office: The Union’s View of the Union’s Idea,” John Macdonald, Research Specialist, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, presented at the Second International Conference on Training, Employability and Employment, Monash University in conjunction with the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management at Leeds University Business School, September 2005.

[http://www.cupw.ca/index.cfm/ci\\_id/5263/la\\_id/1.htm](http://www.cupw.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/5263/la_id/1.htm)

**Name of Program:** Women and Technology Program

**Union:** Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)

**Contact Person:** David Robertson, Director of Work Organization and Training,  
[cawwork@caw.ca](mailto:cawwork@caw.ca), 416.495.3761

**Initial Purpose:** To provide supportive education and training for women auto workers to increase participation in technical jobs and apprenticeships.

**Barriers Addressed:** gender

### **Background Information**

The CAW is one of the largest private sector unions in Canada with over 225,000 members across the country. Members work in a diverse range of sectors including auto, auto parts, general manufacturing, fisheries, hospitality and gaming, mining, retail and health care. The bargained Women and Technology Program is offered to women who are among the 30,000 members employed by the “Big 3” automakers: General Motors, Chrysler and Ford.

### **How the Program Started**

CAW research into equity and barrier issues at Northern Telecom had previously underscored that even women with high seniority were not applying for higher-paid technology-based jobs due to perceived barriers. Bargaining seniority for promotional opportunities was not enough. To address the barriers faced by women considering apprenticeships or technical jobs, the union developed the week-long Women and Technology course. The course addresses cultural barriers and builds confidence. It reviews the history and role of the Skilled Trades in the CAW and prepares women to write apprenticeship exams. It discusses issues such as juggling school, work, and home. For the past eight years, the Women and Technology course has been offered by the CAW Workplace Training Program, bargained with the Big 3 automakers.

### **How the Program Evolved**

A one-week residential program offered once a year at the CAW Education Centre in Port Elgin, Ontario, the Women and Technology Course is delivered to 60 female production workers (20 from each automaker). Women apply to attend, responding to notices posted in the workplace and also encouraged by activists and leaders from their union local.

Co-facilitated by journeywomen and trained discussion leaders, the course includes such topics as:

- how new technology is affecting our work
- what are the trades?

- intimidation issues
- juggling home-school-work

Hands-on exercises are an integral part of the program, for example using tools to wire a light bulb and switch. During the week, journeywomen from four different trades visit the participants. Wonderful role models, they are featured in a show-and-tell panel, describing a day at work as a tool and die maker, for example.

The course also integrates a union piece on skilled trades and women in the union, how women have overcome barriers in the union's past and present. A speaker from the CAW Women's Department is featured during the program.

Another key feature of the Women and Technology course is "the dreaded test." Each person applying for an apprenticeship faces a test in math, spatial relations, grammar, trouble-shooting, problem-solving. The test is a huge intimidating factor, as aspiring apprentices don't know what to expect.

"The more workplaces become credential-based, the more the test barrier emerges," comments David Robertson. "Compare workplace tests with LSATs [test for entry into law school]. People practice for LSATs, but workers are expected to go in cold. They've been out of school for most of their lives, but are now expected to deliver on tests. They may know the material but can't necessarily deliver in a test. So, we said, let's start practicing the test."

Using a simulated test prepared by the CAW Skilled Trades Department, course participants go through the test, and then have a homework assignment based on any areas of shortcomings. This is followed by another test. Participants can see their improvement, which boosts morale and lessens the test barrier.

Having won the course for women, the bargaining committee asked, why only women? Why not men? The union discussion concluded, yes, everyone should have this kind of opportunity. There is now a pre-apprenticeship course offered in the various auto plant locations (16 hours over one weekend, on half paid time). The course has run in each of the Big 3 and now runs when there is an apprenticeship intake. Notes Robertson, "running the course for women helped to leverage the other course. We ended up with more than what we had originally gone for."

## **Impacts**

On a whole number of levels, the program has a significant individual impact. Participants are excited and enthusiastic about the experience. Facilitators report visibly seeing the women's confidence building through the week.

While only a handful of women have got apprenticeships since the course inception, several more have come forward to take the test. In a recent apprenticeship opportunity for example, 85% of the women who had taken the course took the test (the worker with

the highest test score gets the opportunity). Others may learn that apprenticeship is not for them, and that too is a positive outcome of the course.

There are many more educational spin-offs: for example course participants who go on to work on improving high school math.

There's an impact too on journeywomen who speak in the program. These women were not necessarily actively involved in the union previously. Now one of them is on the skilled trades apprenticeship committee, the first woman to hold that position. Another journeywoman was recently appointed by CAW leadership as one of the four staff coordinators of the union's skilled trades program.

Union locals report that more women attend union meetings, and express greater interest in other education programs. All of these impacts contribute to and reflect the changing union culture.

### **What's Next**

The biggest problem today is limited apprenticeship opportunities. "We had started to bargain apprentice numbers, started to get commitments, but lost it in the last round of bargaining. The companies said no – we're closing plants, not taking on apprentices," says Robertson. In this situation, the program emphasizes technology on the job more generally. The union makes it clear that there is no guarantee of apprenticeships.

"This underlines the limits of bargaining," emphasizes Robertson. "We handled the politics inside the union, the financial issues, we got total union commitment. We can overcome the barriers, bargain the support programs – and all of this is not easy. But then it's all gone. The companies say no. The biggest barrier is that there's no public policy that makes apprenticeships real in Canada."

### **Further References**

"Education and Training", CAW Collective Bargaining and Political Action Convention, 2008:

<http://www.caw.ca/en/about-the-caw-collective-bargaining-political-action-convention.htm>

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Preparing Northern Women for Careers in Trades and Technical Occupations in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut: A Model for Program Development and Delivery

**Central Labour Body:** Northern Territories Federation of Labour

**Contact Person:** Sonja Boucher, Vice President (Northwest Territories), 867.873.3695, [ntfl@yk.com](mailto:ntfl@yk.com)

**Initial Purpose:** To encourage more women to enter trades occupations in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

**Barriers Addressed:** gender, literacy, remote areas

### **Background Information**

The Northern Territories Federation of Labour (NTFL) is the central labour body for unions in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

### **How the Program Started**

There are increasing job opportunities and skills shortages in the mining, oil and gas sectors of the northern economy, particularly in trades and technical occupations. However, northern women are not directly benefiting from this job growth. With funding support from the National Literacy Secretariat, the NTFL launched a comprehensive initiative to encourage more women to enter trades occupations.

In year one (2004/2005), the project studied the current status of women in trades and technical occupations in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Barriers to women's participation were identified, and a number of recommendations were offered to encourage more women to seek training in hands-on work.

Year two (2005/2006) focused on developing a model for successful training programs for women interested in trades and technical occupations. This phase researched existing programs in Canada, looked at curricula and learning materials for distance and individualized learning, possible promotional approaches, and supports that would be needed.

Year three (2007/2008) was designed to support northern training providers, such as Aurora College, Yukon College and Nunavut Arctic College, women's and advocacy groups, and union organizations, with resources to enhance their capacity to deliver successful pre-trades training to northern women.

The project team researched training initiatives in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Nunavut to assess existing training for women entering trades and technical occupations, to assess what works and why, and to identify the most suitable role for

community organizations to play to enhance successful learning for women. The team also researched possible distance education software, infrastructure and approaches for pre-trades training for northern women, to determine what is being used or could be used to enhance the success of learning for women in isolated northern communities.

The successes and lessons learned by promising programs are detailed in the 2008 report “Pre-Trades Training for Northern Women, An Inventory of Existing Pre-Trades Training Programs for Women in the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut Territory” (reference at the end of this sketch). The report appendix, “Best Practices for Programs to Introduce Northern Women to Trades and Industrial Occupations: A ‘How-To’ Guide for Northern Program Designers and Instructors,” includes detailed suggestions for designing and operating programs in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon Territory.

### **How the Program Evolved**

The local landscape surrounding the project changed considerably in phase two. Two different groups that were previously working separately are now working in partnership: the North West Territories Status of Women and the Northern Territories Federation of Labour. Together, the groups (and a wide base of partners) have developed a proposal for a three-year pilot project that will include a 16-week exploratory training program, and a number of evening and weekend brief introductory sessions. The pilot project will directly draw on the expertise of the existing strong women’s organizations in the north in planning programs for local women and understanding their needs.

### **Impacts**

A guide for northern program planners was developed, together with a comprehensive research report.

An unexpected impact was the use of the project’s preliminary report as evidence in a human rights hearing in British Columbia involving the delivery of a trades program in a college.

The project generated interest across the north in preparing women academically, socially and personally for entering careers in previously male-dominated workplaces. Political interest has been sparked – the project has been asked to prepare a brief for a supportive MLA to present to the Legislative Assembly.

The role of labour in initiatives to better the circumstances of northern women, and thus to address northern skills shortages, has been enhanced, made more visible, and more acceptable to organizations who previously were suspicious of labour’s role and intent. This will enable the NTFL to undertake other activities and to play a larger role in the future.

## Update

A curriculum guide is now available: “Orientation to Trades, Technology and Operations: A Curriculum Guide and Resource Book for Northern Women’s Programs.” This is an update of a guide produced 20 years ago by Dr. Marcia Braundy. It has been revised for use in the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. It would also be of interest to anyone in the northern or remote sections of the southern provinces, and to those developing programs for Aboriginal women.

The guide is intended for instructors and program planners preparing for orientation programs that prepare women to enter non-traditional occupations. It includes lesson plans, resource lists, a program plan and suggestions for how to teach the content. Case studies and exercises use northern details.<sup>21</sup>

The national conference for women facing barriers to the trades which was proposed for May 2007 was not offered due to insufficient funding. It is possible that such a conference may be offered later by a different organization.

## Further References

*We Can Hold Up Half the World!* prepared by Kate Tompkins, commissioned by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour, 2005.

*Preparing Northern Women for Careers in Trades and Technical Occupations in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut: A Preliminary Model for Program Development and Delivery*, prepared by Kate Tompkins, commissioned by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour, 2006.

*Pre-Trades Training for Northern Women, An Inventory of Existing Pre-Trades Training Programs for Women in the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut Territory*, prepared by Kate Tompkins, commissioned by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour, 2008.

*Updated February 2009*

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<sup>21</sup> A free electronic version is available from K. Tompkins and Associates Ltd. (phone contact: 867.873.4369).

**Name of Program:** Work Skills Program

**Union:** United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1977

**Contact Person:** Marv Funk, Director, Clifford Evans Training Centre,  
[mfunk@cliffordevans.com](mailto:mfunk@cliffordevans.com), 519.658.2444 or 1.800.819.3069

**Initial Purpose:** Training Centre mission statement: “The Clifford Evans Training Centre is committed to the development and delivery of professional programs that will have an impact on improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and work-life of all its members.”

**Barriers Addressed:** promotional opportunities for part-time employees

### **Background Information**

UFCW Local 1977 represents 8500 members, including full- and part-time employees of Zehrs supermarkets in southern Ontario. In 1981, the local negotiated a training trust fund. Six years later they were able to open the Cliff Evans Training Centre. Within a year, the centre offered the first new-skills bakery and produce training courses.

By offering new-skills training, the union wanted to help its part-time members access full-time job opportunities, and to help its female members access work not traditionally done by women. Currently, the Training Centre offers members over 40 courses including Steward Training, Pharmacy Assistant, Floral Design and Food & Nutrition Specialist. In addition to stationary and mobile computer labs, steward training and essential skills courses fortify members’ personal and professional marketability. Since the Centre’s inception, over 20,000 certificates of completion have been awarded.

The Training Centre also partners with Ontario March of Dimes (OMOD) and two school boards to offer their expertise to the community. In their partnership with OMOD, the centre delivers retail skills training to Ontario Works [social assistance] participants that helps them gain employment at regional food retailers. The Waterloo Region District School Board and the Wellington Dufferin Catholic School Board have also benefited from a program the Training Centre delivers to high school students. Seminars in Pharmacy, Floral, Health Foods and Cosmetics are taught to interested students that encourage them to consider the numerous jobs available at a modern supermarket.

### **How the Program Started**

15-20 years ago, store workers were roughly 60% part-time and 40% full-time. It was possible for members to aim for a full-time, good paying job. Currently though, retail food stores run at 15% full time and 85% part time. Few part-time members can hope for full-time hours at good pay. This means that part-timers are not likely to remain in the business for long.

In addition, many of the jobs part-time members get are classic dead-end jobs that don't lead to a full-time position. Full-time positions don't exist for front-end packers and cashiers, for example.

Members wanted training so as to access other jobs. Company practice had been that the employee had to actually quit their job, and then reapply to the new department. Further, management wouldn't recognize members' skills.

The union addressed these barriers by giving part-time workers opportunities to learn skills in departments that have a higher perceived status as well as a greater chance of leading to full-time employment, such as Pharmacy or Natural Value (health food). The Work Skills Program is designed for part-time employees. It offers training in "new skills," on workers' own time.

### **How the Program Evolved**

In 1998, the Work Skills Program offered its first Floral Designer course. The employer initially resisted union efforts for a pharmacy course as "too technical." But two years later, the employer agreed.

"This was a long process," explains Training Centre director Marv Funk. "It was mostly about building trust. Most companies are reluctant to have the union influence who gets positions in a store. We had to show that only members that demonstrated clearly agreed-to standards would be considered graduates. Practically, this meant that not every member passed because they couldn't meet the standards. However this also meant that we found better ways to instruct, so that more members, who were motivated to do the work, could graduate."

The Training Centre, with over 20 years in the retail food business, has identified the competencies needed to be successful in an entry level position in such departments as Pharmacy, Natural Value, Floral, Cosmetics. The union negotiated 'Letters of Understanding' with the employer to recognize workers' skills so that graduates are not tested by the company nor denied the opportunity to get into these departments.

The skills workers learn at the Training Centre are portable and transferable: portable in the sense that the Training Centre will support graduates wherever they go for employment (even outside the company), and transferable because Zehrs really wants to use the Centre's graduates.

### **Impacts**

Tuition-free training allows members, who couldn't otherwise afford such training, to learn new skills. The union-negotiated fund helps those members who may not be able to advance their career because of financial constraints.

Relevant training that considers a worker's life situation limits the actual classroom time so members can still earn an income. (Full-time enrolment in college or university severely cuts back on an employee's earning power.)

The Letters of Understanding negotiated by the union also guarantee members the right to work in more than one department. Traditionally workers could not be scheduled in more than one department. Some Letters of Understanding, i.e. Pharmacy Technician, agree to two weeks of paid training once graduates are placed in the department. The training focuses on location-specific upgrading that cannot be accomplished at the Training Centre.

80% of Pharmacy Technician graduates are now employed in the Pharmacy Department.

### **What's Next**

As more departments are added to traditional grocery stores, the Training Centre will continue to offer courses to its members so they are able to learn new skills. This will open opportunities for more rewarding work and possibly gain access to full-time employment in a sector that has few such placements.

*Updated February 2009*

### **Further References**

Training Centre website: <http://www.cliffordevans.com>

“Worker Perspectives of Effective Training,” revised 2005. Report based on 1996 and 2004 research on retail workers and training. Includes “five principles to effective worker training”: relevance, personal interest, worker involvement, workplace support, and sensitivity towards individual participants.

<http://cliffordevans.com/research%20project/rspage1.html>

**Name of Program:** CHOICE (Career, Help, Opportunity, Incentive, Community, Employment) Pre-Apprenticeship Program

**Union:** Carpenters' Local 27

**Contact Person:** Eddie Thornton, Executive Director, Carpenters Local 27 Training Centre, 905.652.5507, ext. 234

**Initial Purpose:** To stimulate economic development in low income communities while providing youth from within the communities with long-term career opportunities in construction.

**Barriers Addressed:** class

### **Background Information**

Carpenters Local 27 represents 7200 carpenters, cabinetmakers, millwrights, piledrivers, lathers, framers, floorlayers, roofers, drywallers in the Greater Toronto and surrounding areas.

The Carpenters' Local Union 27 Joint Apprenticeship and Training Trust Fund is a jointly trustee labour-management training centre located in Woodbridge, Ontario. It was established to serve the human resources development needs of both the Local 27 membership and its employers. Since its inception in 1986, the Training Trust Fund has offered an extensive variety of pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, health and safety, and journey-worker upgrading courses to thousands of students.

### **How the Program Started**

About 10 years ago, Local 27 apprenticeship training leaders learned about the U.S. program "America Works" (now called American Community Partnerships): building trades workers help to restore public housing projects working directly with youth from these neighbourhoods. Ever since, the Local has worked to launch a similar program in the Greater Toronto Area.

A successful one-off project was held in 2004 in cooperation with an apartment development company and local school trustee, involving youth in the renovation of apartment units in the complex in which they lived. CHOICE got off the ground in 2005 after the Union approached Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC, the largest public housing company in Canada).

### **How the Program Evolved**

Targetting "youth at risk" who were out of work and out of school, CHOICE brings together the Carpenters Union, TCHC, Housing Services Inc. (HSI), YMCA and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). With wages paid by

the YMCA and HSI, youth receive 2 weeks of health and safety and hand tool training at the Carpenters' Training Centre, followed by 10 to 12 weeks in the workplace and/or in additional training. Other supports, such as mentoring and life skills counseling, are also provided. Although MTCU provides a per diem to the Union for the training, Local 27 contributed \$100,000 from Union funds to ensure the full training costs were met.

The participants are predominantly residents of public housing. The young workers do restoration work to doors, walls, kitchen cabinets, flooring, and are exposed to trades such as drywall and carpentry. Four students work alongside one instructor.

### **Impacts**

By early 2009, 4 programs had run successfully, with over 56 graduates. "There's a lot of growing up that goes on," says Union Training Director Cristina Selva. "As they're building their skills and making a living wage, they start looking forward to a better life. Their self-confidence increases and they start planning their futures."

A key part of the program is Union assistance with subsequent job placement. All successful graduates are placed in jobs, some with TCHC and the rest with apprenticeship private sector opportunities.

The Union sees CHOICE as a way to give back to the community. "We have to give a chance to these youth," says Eddie Thornton, Carpenters Local 27 Training Centre Executive Director. "They are the future, the future workforce, and need to be given opportunities."

### **What's Next**

CHOICE will continue and plans for expanding the program are under way.

*Updated February 2009*

### **Further References**

Carpenters' Local 27 Training Centre website:  
<http://www.corcc.com/training/about.html>

Karen Charnow Lior and Arlene Wortsman, research by Jen Liptrot, "Renewing Apprenticeship: Innovative Approaches", published by the Toronto Training Board, March 2006. <http://www.ttb.on.ca/downloads/RenewingApprenticeship4.pdf>

**Name of Program:** Hammer Heads (formerly Youth Access to Apprenticeship)

**Central Labour Body:** Central Ontario Building Trades

**Contact Person:** Jay Peterson, Business Manager, Central Ontario Building Trades, 416.449.5115 ext. 223 [j.peterson@cobtrades.com](mailto:j.peterson@cobtrades.com)

**Initial Purpose:** To help youth from Toronto's priority neighbourhoods access apprenticeship.

**Barriers Addressed:** race, class

### **Background Information**

The Central Ontario Building Trades (COBT) represents 55,000 skilled tradespeople in central Ontario. COBT contributes to community efforts through the independent non-profit Central Ontario Community Builders.

### **How the Program Started**

A January 2006 meeting brought together Ontario Chief Justice Roy McMurtry, Toronto Mayor David Miller and Central Ontario Building Trades Business Manager Jay Peterson. The goal was to find ways to provide apprenticeship opportunities for youth from 13 "at risk" Toronto neighbourhoods (also known as Toronto's priority neighbourhoods).

### **How the Program Evolved**

When one of the 26 agencies involved with the Youth Employment Partnership (YEP) has contact with a youth interested in pursuing a trade, they forward the youth's resume to the YEP who in turn forwards it to Youth Director Joe Bowdring. After meeting with the youth, Bowdring contacts one of the 24 different trades that are part of the Central Ontario Building Trades. Trade Training Centres recommend any extra training or upgrading if needed (for example, extra high school credits). They encourage the youth, and will assist the youth in entering the trade chosen.

### **Impacts**

By September 2006, 22 young men, mostly of Black, Caribbean background, have entered or will be entering registered apprenticeships.

### **Update**

The Youth Access to Apprenticeship Program has now been folded into a new initiative called Hammer Heads. This in-depth, 12-week construction awareness program provides youth in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods with comprehensive exposure to the trades.

The curriculum includes academic upgrading when necessary in order to meet provincial requirements for apprenticeship entry, comprehensive construction health and safety training, field trips to the various training centres for hands-on experience, and field trips to construction sites of all types. By investing 12 weeks in the program, the COBT is able to develop young people as apprentices who demonstrate a desire to succeed and who are job-ready. COBT provides them with a complete set of basic tools as well as personal protective equipment. COBT is confident that the program will lead to successful job placements for the youth, companies and unions involved.

The last week of the program is designed to be a week of volunteering and job placement. Currently COBT has partnered with Heritage Toronto's Plaques and Marker Program. This city-beautification program involves the manufacture of iron posts (by apprentices at Ironworkers Local 721) and the installation of the posts and associated plaques around Toronto. This work teaches history, contributes to the community, and helps build a sense of pride in the youth as they apply their new skills.

Partnerships between COBT and its varied and extensive training centre network are already happening. COBT is also looking to expand its partnerships with owners and clients interested in supporting community. They will also be partnering with the Toronto District School Board for academic upgrading to allow the trades instructors to focus on trades specifics and safety. The Youth Employment Partnership, City of Toronto will be the main referral source for youth.

### **Further References**

Central Ontario Community Builders website: [www.cocb.ca](http://www.cocb.ca)

"Hammer Time: Trades Skills Program Builds Hope for At-Risk Youth," *Toronto Star*, January 29, 2009.

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Canadian Experience Course

**Union:** International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Local 353

**Contact Person:** Barry Stevens, President IBEW 353, [ibew.barrystevens@sympatico.ca](mailto:ibew.barrystevens@sympatico.ca), 416.510.3530

**Initial Purpose:** To provide new Canadians with assistance to enter the workforce and obtain decent paying jobs.

**Barriers Addressed:** language, “Canadian experience”

### **Background Information**

IBEW Local 353 is one of Canada’s largest and oldest electrical locals, with approximately 6000 members in the Greater Toronto Area. Members work in the industrial, commercial, institutional and low-rise residential sectors. Member electricians work in new construction, as well as maintenance, communication cabling, fibre optics, networking, and linework (utilities).

### **How the Program Started**

Many new Canadians face a crisis of unemployment and under-employment, often because their qualifications are ignored or they cannot find assistance in obtaining “on the job” experience. In 2004, part of Barry Stevens’ work for IBEW Local 353 was to review resumes, interview applicants and assist them to apply for non-union jobs, or in some cases, offer union membership.

Stevens noticed that large numbers of resumes were from Russian, Polish, Spanish and particularly Chinese workers. Many had been engineers in their home country (electrical or mechanical engineers for example), but were unable to find work in Canada. In seeking work related to their education and training, they had taken the Ministry test and had acquired an electrical license, many at the Red Seal level. While their success reflected their excellent theoretical knowledge, they often lacked practical skills and experience.

The IBEW Local held monthly meetings for the workers, while attempting to get government funding to run special courses for the immigrant workers, grouped by language so as to provide relevant support. When their efforts to get funding proved unsuccessful, the Local decided to run a course at their own expense (about \$30,000 for materials, instructors, etc).

### **How the Program Evolved**

The 10-session Canadian Experience Course was delivered for 20 Chinese speaking workers (of whom about 80% had university training). Run over five weekends at no

charge to the participants, the course was so in demand that 20 additional workers sat and watched (taking notes).

Content included practical skills as well as “trade English.” Union members who spoke Mandarin or Cantonese were brought in to help with language support. “Not one of the 20 participants was late or missed a session. They were thirsty for knowledge,” says Stevens. “It was amazing, unbelievable.”

Many within the local were somewhat negative about the idea initially. But at the end, there was greater understanding within the union that the course was “salting the mine” for future organizing efforts and helping fellow workers in need.

IBEW now also runs ESL classes at their union hall, reflecting the success of organizing efforts.

### **Impacts**

The course was much appreciated by the participants, and helped many to gain work in the field. The union’s efforts also contributed to the Chinese workers forming the Association of Chinese Electrical Workers, who participated in the Toronto and York Region Labour Council’s Labour Day Parade in 2004.

### **Update**

Since the first experiment of this program the Local has applied for provincial funding from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship three times, twice unsuccessfully. Their third attempt in early 2009 is still awaiting decision. Unfortunately, without financial support the Local cannot sustain this program, targeted to immigrant workers of several language groups. “Funding is key,” states Barry Stevens. “The government should fund such courses to help immigrants.”

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Collège FTQ-Fonds

**Central Labour Body:** Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ), with its Solidarity Fund

**Contact Person:** France Laurendeau, Director, [flaurendeau@ftq.qc.ca](mailto:flaurendeau@ftq.qc.ca), 514.383.8022

**Initial Purpose:** To develop the next wave of leadership for the labour movement, capable of influencing the broad transformations under way in Québec's economy and society.

**Barriers Addressed:** Class, formal education level, and cultural subordination in English-speaking North America. The grassroots orientation of FTQ union education means that full-time union representatives and union staff are provided few programs designed to address their situation and to broaden their perspectives beyond the pressures of immediate work. The Collège addresses this barrier. This population of about 1,500 people is largely white men aged around 45, with high school education, based in Montreal. The participants have reached a group that is younger, more female and more educationally and regionally diverse than the pool on which it draws. In particular, formal education has been a challenge, since participants range from Grade 11 to post-graduate degrees. The international component of the Collège works through "francophonie" (visits by groups of union activists from Francophone Africa) and through "translated guests" (English-speaking resource people from Canada, the U.S., Africa, China, etc.).

### **Background Information**

The FTQ is the largest central labour body in Québec with over 500,000 members, including most unionists in the private sector, construction and municipal public services. Since 1974 it has directed education of its members independent of the Canadian Labour Congress, and has built a network of hundreds of union educators for delivery of courses through its regional councils and affiliates. The Solidarity Fund (*Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs du Québec*) is Canada's largest labour-sponsored investment fund, and the largest source of venture capital in Canada. Its Economic Education Foundation partially sponsors several workplace education initiatives, including the Collège.

### **How the Program Started**

The Collège is a residential 8-week program (five weeks in residence and three weeks at home for readings and working on their project) for union staff and full-time elected officers, which has had over 200 participants in 15 small groups since its founding. When the Solidarity Fund was formed in 1983, the FTQ took on the challenge of influencing the shape of the Quebec economy, not just reacting to changes. Yet the extensive structures of FTQ membership education were focused on emerging activists, while full-time union officers and staff had little educational support for the broader roles now required of them. Throughout the 1990s, discussion of a new college continued, and the first session was held in 2000.

## How the Program Evolved

From the start, participants in the Collège have prepared a major strategic action project, based on their own choice of topic that can be applied on a real problematic situation. This process is supported at every stage by individual and collective tutorials. This is consistent with the FTQ worker educator program, which became a generator of knowledge, not just a transmission belt for the thinking of the leadership.

The program alternates popular education approaches, typical of Quebec union education, with academic and corporate tools. University professors and social movement activists were the majority of guests. Most of the readings were academic texts at the beginning; they were replaced over time by more and more « clear language » texts. Role-plays and activity methods are used, but so are formal lectures and the case study methods from the Harvard Business School. The effort of the Collège is to be broad in its sources without compromising its clarity of purpose. As a matter of policy adopted formally by the FTQ executive, participants in the Collège are challenged to reflect on their assumptions, rather than simply reinforced in their current convictions.

From the start, the Collège program included guided visits in the areas where the residential sessions were being held. Much of this was arranged in cooperation with the community organization “L’Autre Montréal.” More recently, two experiments within the framework of the Collège bear specific mention, both concerning outreach beyond the limits of union members.

One initiative addressed issues of globalization and solidarity. A specific initiative was taken to link the Collège to the Worker Education Program of the ILO, based in Turin, Italy. Each year, a group of Francophone unionists from Africa takes part in a four-week training there, for which the last week is intended to be an international visit. In 2004 and 2005, the full group of African guests participated in one of the five residential weeks of the Collège. Informally and formally, they were fully integrated into the learning experience of their Quebec brothers and sisters. The immediate impact on Quebec participants was to surface and confront pre-conceptions about Africa, to put in question long-held assumptions about “normal” union practices, and to provoke greater curiosity about union and political issues in the global South.

A second initiative was begun with group 12 of the Collège in 2005, involving on-site visits to three specific communities. For this purpose, the participants were divided into three sub-groups, one of which was received on an Aboriginal reserve, one by an anti-poverty initiative and the third by an immigrant settlement service. In all three situations, most Collège participants were in a setting quite unfamiliar to them, and were called upon to self-organize in order to maximize the learning possibilities in the short time of a couple of days. The experiences were then discussed in common as part of the Collège program.

In both these initiatives, the group of participants was immersed in a situation where they were not fully in control. This plunge into the unknown was experienced collectively, and was a rich source of informal learning, to complement the formally structured program.

## **Impacts**

This comment gives the flavour of the program's impact on individual participants:

“We can get too caught up in our technical work, and lack the time to think broadly about the labour movement. Yet we're an important link in the union chain. This has restored my energy to push forward, instead of complaining and criticizing all the time. We need to get past a static, mechanical way of working, to keep our militancy, and for that the Collège has been a big help.”

The Collège has already directly involved 10% of the group it addresses, which may be a critical mass in terms of influencing the culture of the FTQ and its affiliated unions.

After discussion with the “academic committee” of the Collège, university equivalencies were calculated for the program, in case participants might seek formal credit for their work. The total turned out to be well over 250 hours of structured study, with 73 hours of theoretical work, 60 hours of practical skill development, 13 hours of historical and workplace visits and 87 hours of independent supervised study.

## **What's Next**

For the FTQ leadership, evaluation is needed to ensure that the considerable investment of money and staff time in the Collège is worth the trouble. After all, an intensive and future-oriented program is bound to cause trouble to the union leadership in the short term. First of all, members and colleagues are likely to complain about the absence of a seasoned union representative for a period of several weeks; further, the participants return to their union with new ideas and skills, which will destabilize their work environment; and finally, a satisfied participant is likely to encourage colleagues to request assignment for future Collège sessions, so that the trouble will be repeated!

The leaders of affiliated unions, who hold the authority to authorize or withhold participation in the Collège, are a key constituency for evaluation, both informal and formal. They are invited to the closing day of the Collège. Over a longer period, it is these ranking officers of affiliated unions who will see the effects of the Collège on the will, skill and knowledge of their representatives.

## **Further References**

The web site (in French) <http://collegeftqfonds.ftq.qc.ca> gives an overview of the program, conditions of participation, the steering committees, a list of all “graduates” by

union and a list of the topics addressed by each person as their “strategic action project” for future action.

In English, an initial sketch of progress to 2002 can be found in France Laurendeau and D’Arcy Martin, “Equipping the Next Wave of Union Leaders: Québec’s Collège FTQ-Fonds,” in *Unions and Learning in a Global Economy: International Perspectives*, ed. Bruce Spencer, Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2002.

M. Blondin, (1997). La formation économique des employés, facteur de changement dans les milieux de travail. In *Gestion, Revue des Hautes Études Commerciales*, 22(3), automne.

M-J. Gagnon, Ed., (1998). Un syndicalisme en crise d’identité. *Sociologie et Sociétés*. XXX (2).

### **Related Initiative**

One program has grown directly from the Collège. It is a « short course » for the FTQ leadership that involves key Collège resource people, run annually since 2001 for a week. It serves to extend the influence of the Collège, and to engage the union leadership as supporters of those who graduate from the Collège program.

**Name of Program:** Worker-Educator Program: Training Trainers

**Central Labour Body:** Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

**Contact Person:** Johanne Deschamps, Directrice, Service d'éducation, 514.383.8012, [Jdeschamps@ftq.qc.ca](mailto:Jdeschamps@ftq.qc.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** Since 1975, when the FTQ took over member education in Quebec from the Canadian Labour Congress, the educational opportunities provided to 500,000 members through labour councils and affiliated unions have been built around a system of training activists as educators. During this generation, more than 3,000 people have been through courses as “member educators” (formateurs/formatrices), whose initial framework was drawn most from popular education, and is now organized around the related idea of experiential education, a process whereby knowledge is created by the transformation of experience.

**Barriers Addressed:** Class and access by larger numbers of members, especially outside the major urban centres

### **Background Information**

The FTQ is the largest central labour body in Québec with over 500,000 members, including most unionists in the private sector, construction and municipal public services. Quebec unions are relatively strong (40% union density and growing), and live in a kind of healthy competition among three union centrals, of which the FTQ is the largest. Despite the positions of the Charest government at the moment, Quebec's dominant political culture is social-democratic, assuming a strong state, strong public services like health care, and social welfare measures such as strong public subsidies for daycare and parental leave.

### **How the Program Started**

In 1975, the FTQ took over from the CLC in coordinating member education, at a time when few affiliates had full-time education staff and the needs for courses were great. In this situation, those staff in affiliates whose assignment includes education were drawn together into an education committee at the federation level, which develops and provides member education to advance the overall objectives set at conventions. Most courses are designed by a working group of affiliate education officers, led by an FTQ education staff person, and new curriculum is tested and adapted before being widely used. Then, in an initial week-long course, a group of union activists is provided with this tool, as the way to begin a journey as educators. Time after time, they reply « yes » by Friday to the question « Are you ready to educate your fellow workers? » With coaching and specialized refresher courses, this network of grassroots educators has strengthened the knowledge, skills and confidence of a generation of workers.

## How the Program Evolved

The bias towards « teacher-centred » adult education practices in the wider society was strongly present in the early years of the program. For example, the public speaking course used to start with communications theory, until it became clear that the theory could best be grasped *after* the practice. Now people are asked to make a presentation of five minutes, without having been provided with theories on the skills of a good speaker. Then their presentations are analyzed together. The theory is built step by step, based on the presentations and the group’s collective analysis. In effect, this replaces the safety net of theory with the safety net of trust. This is more consistent with the popular education principle of starting from people’s lived experience, and with union values of mutual help, solidarity and teamwork.

The FTQ train the trainer program equips activists to lead their peers in learning, based on five key capacities. The first is to understand what it means to work with a group of adults – to start from the group, to trust the group, to make *the group the central focus* of the educational process. For the initial train the trainer, and for subsequent coaching, the FTQ has identified the following key elements of this capacity, and indicators that it has been developed:

CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF A CAPACITY FOR “STARTING FROM THE GROUP”	INDICATORS THAT THE CAPACITY HAS BEEN DEVELOPED
1. Capacity to integrate into and adapt to the group	1.1 Puts the group at ease
	1.2 Establishes a climate of participation among equals
	1.3 Takes into account needs and interests of the group
	1.4 Respects the rhythms of learning
2. Capacity to recognize the validity of other views	2.1 Listens to different opinions
	2.2 Shows empathy
	2.3 Shows that what the person has said is believed
	2.4 Welcomes non-verbal signals and silences as legitimate forms of expression
3. Capacity to establish a positive climate in the group	3.1 Demonstrates active listening and respect
	3.2 Maximizes participation in the group
4. Capacity to guide the group, to analyze, probe and challenge	4.1 Makes links among people/ explains objectives clearly
	4.2 Poses questions that help the group clarify ideas
	4.3 Draws the best from what has been said
	4.4 Turns back the results to the group for further development and enrichment

The other four capacities are: facilitating the group (educational judgment, group dynamics, task effectiveness); co-facilitation; peer learning; putting learning into action.

## Impacts

The Education Committee of the FTQ is a tight-knit group of about 20 people, which meets for a full day every couple of months and for an annual two-day retreat. Starting at its 2001 retreat, a thorough review has taken place, grappling with three broad questions around relevance, consistency and effectiveness:

- Do the objectives of our courses actually address the needs of the participants, at the level of knowing, feeling and doing (“savoir, savoir-être and savoir-faire”)?
- How consistent are we between what is written in our manuals and what we actually do in the courses?
- Do our courses actually permit a transfer of learning into the workplace? In other words, do they actually strengthen the union?

As a result of this collective reflection, many changes were made. For example, in the pre-retirement course, the manual was completely re-written. It had not been revised since the early 1980s. Nowadays, participants in this course are much more informed, and approach retirement differently. In many unions, the retirement age has come down significantly because they have negotiated better pension plans; some members have been re-married and still have children at home, and so on. On examination, the manual was somewhat condescending, so the tone was changed, “little tips” were replaced by a reflective approach for each participant to build a retirement project based on their dreams and real situations. At a wider level, one result of this shift is more systematic coaching of worker-educators.

## What’s Next

The process of reflection places a greater weight of responsibility on all levels of the “training trainers” system to better align its practices with its vision. Reflection sessions with worker-educators after three years of experience have taken place since 2003. These one-week upgrading sessions start from their practices, by exploring an educational moment that they found difficult. The group probes that experience collectively, in order to bring the experiential approach from theory into critical and collective self-assessment. By writing up the “experiential approach,” the FTQ has entered into critical dialogue with other adult educators in Quebec, and has a consistent basis for intervening in public policy discussions around training and education.

## Further References

Derek Briton, Winston Gereluk and Bruce Spencer, *Labour Education in Canada Today*, Athabasca, Alberta: Centre for Work and Community Studies, Athabasca University, 2001.

Johanne Deschamps, “Re-Thinking Union Pedagogy: Aligning real objectives with real practices,” Presentation to the joint education conference of the AFL-CIO and the United Association for Labour Education, Bal Harbour, Florida, April 11, 2003.

Michel Blondin (1980), « Une formation syndicale faite par les travailleurs eux-mêmes, »  
*Community Development*.

FTQ (2006), Programme d'éducation, 2006-2007, at [www.ftq.qc.ca](http://www.ftq.qc.ca).

**Name of Program:** Equality Initiative

**Central Labour Body:** Ontario Region, Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

**Contact Persons:** Winnie Ng; Karl Flecker, CLC Director, Anti-Racism and Human Rights Department, 613.521.3400 ext 262, [kflecker@clc-ctc.ca](mailto:kflecker@clc-ctc.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To increase participation of racialized and young workers as leaders and participants in education programs.

**Barriers Addressed:** race and age (among others)

### **Background Information**

In the regional structure of Canada's house of labour, the Ontario Region is the largest, with the most diverse racial and cultural membership. The CLC Ontario Region organizes an extensive education program, including week-long courses in an annual Winter School. Initiatives to have the content and process of education respond to the full range of Ontario workers were called for in the 1997 CLC Anti-Racism Task Force Report, "[\*Challenging Racism: Going Beyond Recommendations.\*](#)"

### **How the Program Started**

The Ontario Region office undertook to broaden the range of courses offered, and to integrate anti-racist content into existing courses. In cooperation with the Education Department of the CLC, new courses were piloted, and a series of activities developed that could be integrated into existing courses. Young activists and activists of colour were identified as co-instructors of more courses, and scholarships were used to assist members from discriminated groups to participate in the week-long courses.

This was undertaken in the early years of the Mike Harris Conservative regime in Ontario, when government initiatives like the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat were being abolished, and the language of racial equality purged from government documents. The efforts of the CLC to sustain and expand equality work were part of a wider effort by the labour movement and its allies to hold onto the dream of economic and social justice in an adverse political climate.

In the mid-90s, the issues emerged whatever the title of a course. In a discussion, someone would refer to immigrants as "they", when recent immigrants were in the room and the speaker was a descendant of immigrants. To take on the issues without breaking solidarity meant a renewed focus on what binds unionists together – class.

## **How the Program Evolved**

The CLC Equality Initiative was undertaken in a political climate where unions were spending huge resources in fighting back against a right-wing agenda, rather than doing more equity training. Some union leaders supported the CLC in targeting different groups, developing diverse leadership for the long term, but often resources were limited. Yet throughout the decade from 1996 to 2006, the changing demographics of the province and of the union membership have put pressure on the traditional habits of the union culture.

Courses offered by the CLC, on topics like workplace harassment, complement those provided by affiliated unions. As a result, participants in CLC courses are often drawn largely from smaller affiliates and from organizations newly affiliated. In recent years, much of the membership growth has come in the teachers' unions (like the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation) and in the service sector (like UNITE-HERE), where exposure to other affiliates and their experiences is a great contribution of CLC courses.

Some of the participants are from northern Ontario, and tend to see racism as a problem only in Toronto. In a climate of respect, it emerges that these inequalities affect immigrants, but emerge in the north around Aboriginal peoples. The healing point is when there is a united front against the employers.

When new courses were first offered, enrolment was often low. Participants tended to be people already committed to equality and anti-racism as union values. Among some activists and union leaders, there was also some backlash against the priority placed on such courses. A research project was undertaken, in cooperation with the Centre for the Study of Education and Work, which explored the challenges in this transition. It identified the value of organizational practices beyond the specific course in advancing an equality agenda. In that view, the "activity system" of a course needs to be located inside a set of other systems (the school, the central labour body, the labour movement and the society) for changes to actually be sustained.

These changes are based on the view of racialized union activists that the labour movement's actions can't be limited to pushing the governments for change. What are we doing for the next generation of activists coming in?

## **Impacts**

This work has proceeded in close cooperation with both the national CLC and the labour councils across Ontario. At the CLC level, Aboriginal and workers of colour conferences have been held, and also at the Toronto and York Region Labor Council, which drew more than 400 people to their first such gathering in 2003. Building on that, labour councils were able to involve more of the activists of colour into union campaigns, for example the municipal and other elections. Union education is aimed to action, yet Winnie Ng observes: "with the range of campaigns under way you feel overwhelmed,

and some of the equity issues get left out. For example the erosion of Employment Insurance impacts workers of colour, the racialization of poverty, so these issues are connected, but we need to be much more substantive or concrete in linking.”

### **What’s Next**

Several of the other “innovative practices” described in this report work in close concert with the regional offices of the CLC, and this work is coordinated across Canada by the National Director, Anti-Racism and Human Rights Department, based in Ottawa. Discussion is now under way for a “Solidarity Institute,” an educational program to bring together union activists who face discrimination based on social identity.

In changing the organizational culture of unions, a balance needs to be achieved between mobilizing the people who are targets of discrimination, and building alliances with brothers and sisters who in some sense benefit from inequality. This is slow and often frustrating work. It also requires strategic capacity, to identify opportunities and mobilize support so that the changes that have begun are deepened and the momentum renewed, for the labour movement to build a democratized and multi-racial community that models internally the practices that it calls for in society as a whole.

### **Further References**

On the CLC web site, [www.clc-ctc.ca](http://www.clc-ctc.ca), there are several relevant publications and current statements on equality. See for example, <http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/s42792a5b8468b> .

The study on “The Challenges of Educating for Equality in Unions” can be found at <http://www.wallnetwork.ca/resources/workingpapers.htm> .

The CLC Education Department has available an “Anti-Racism Integration Guide,” widely used in the labour movement to ensure that these issues are kept on the agenda in union education, whatever the specific course title.

### **Related Initiatives**

The human rights work of the CLC addresses these main areas:

- [Anti-racism](#)
- [Aboriginal workers](#)
- [Women](#)
- [Youth](#)
- [Pride](#) (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered)
- [Workers with disabilities](#)
- [Workers of colour](#)

**Name of Program:** Lead Organizer Training Program, Organizing Institute

**Central Labour Body:** British Columbia Federation of Labour

**Contact Person:** John Weir, Director, [organize@bcfed.com](mailto:organize@bcfed.com), 604.430.1421

**Initial Purpose:** To help train new union organizers, to increase cooperation and coordination in affiliate recruitment organizing activities.

**Barriers Addressed:** language, gender, race

### **Background Information**

The British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFL) is the central labour body in British Columbia, representing 380,000 trade union members. The Organizing Institute was created by the mandate of the 1996 BCFL convention, financed by a three cents per-month per capita increase, existing per capita and program cost recoveries.

### **How the Program Started**

Though higher than in many other provinces (37% in 1996), union density in British Columbia had been in decline since the 1960s. Organizing drives were recouping only half the number of union members lost due to technological change, contracting out, and closures. Inter-union cooperation in union organizing was limited. Although the workforce was becoming more diverse, affiliate organizers were predominantly white males. To support affiliates in recruitment efforts, the BCFL launched the Organizing Institute.

The Institute's training program has four main elements:

- Providing centralized organizer training opportunities
- Developing course materials and training resources for affiliates to use in their internal training programs
- Training instructors to enhance the Institute's and affiliates' training capacity
- Developing placement opportunities for newly trained organizers

The Institute holds periodic educational sessions for organizers, roundtables for senior organizers, hosts an email discussion list for 200 activists, and offers various workshops on supports to organizing. The core program though, is the Lead Organizer Training Program, launched in 1998.

The program design focuses on generic organizing skills, and therefore also develops skills transferable to recruitment, community organizing, and internal union mobilizing. The program objectives include building a cross-union network: interaction and the establishment of personal relations help avoid future inter-affiliate conflict.

Participants are chosen by the affiliates, with the only “pre-requisite” being people who are hopefully capable of meeting the demands of organizing. Most are rank and file activists who may be at a level of going on staff. So as not to create an unnecessary barrier, organizing experience is not emphasized.

The intensive, three-day residential course is offered twice a year to 31 people (and on demand based on affiliate need). The experiential approach attempts to simulate life as an organizer. Role playing is used extensively. Held in a location removed from major centres, participants do not go out on their own. Two 12-hour days are followed by a 7-hour session. Participants “lose control” of their personal time; exercises extend even into directions on who to eat meals with. As John Weir notes, “if you can’t adapt to that, then organizing may not be for you.”

There is a low ratio of students to instructor, as personal coaching is an integral element of the program. There are seven instructors for each course; about four participants work with each instructor. Instructors are selected for their diversity, both in the sectors where they normally organize, and in their personal characteristics. The Institute places a heavy emphasis on language skills – groups may be arranged based on language to facilitate role plays in Punjabi, for example. There is less reliance on written material so as to ensure program effectiveness.

The Institute draws on a pool of 25 instructors, all experienced organizers. There is frequent instructor turnover as organizers burn out, move up, etc. Affiliates are encouraged to identify potential new instructors and each program includes two new instructors so as to expand training capacity.

### **How the Program Evolved**

Much attention is devoted to diversity, in program content, design and structure. Affiliates are encouraged to seek out participants from under-represented groups. Institute-sponsored research helped overcome some initial resistance: organizing campaigns are more successful if the organizers’ personal characteristics are similar to the workers trying to unionize. Now the more common complaint is the difficulty finding people from diverse communities who want to do this type of work.

Women are also encouraged to participate, and are always included in the instructor group. “Women organizers face difficulties juggling the work-life balance,” notes Weir. “There are cultural barriers, different opinions about women’s roles, family attitudes. We talk about these challenges and the pressure on families.”

### **Impacts**

About 700 people have taken the course in the 10 years the program has been offered. The chief gain has been the increase in organizational strength, especially around diversity issues and participation. The most recent training session for example, had only two white men among the seven instructors. “The active, experienced organizers used as

instructors in this session included a Black woman from Ghana, a First Nations woman, a Filipino woman – this reflects reality,” says Weir. “We have really driven this issue within the union organizations. Including more people from diverse groups in union leadership is about commitment to equality and also about union survival.”

The diversified pool of organizers increases the odds of recruitment success. The Organizing Institute’s “hiring hall” invites affiliates to lend staff to other unions to meet particular needs. The ability to match organizers by ethnicity and language with the workers being organized has had a significant impact in organizing drives.

Organizers help beyond recruitment, being called on to help with employer attempts to decertify, and to re-organize workers contracted out through B.C. government cuts and policy decisions. “Health care has been a battleground,” Weir points out. “The government has taken away successor rights, and unions are fighting employer deals with ‘rat unions’ like the Christian Labour Association. In many health care workplaces, the majority of workers are immigrants, 90% women of colour. The Organizing Institute helped the Hospital Employees Union, with high success rates despite the odds. Though the workers had no conventional bargaining power, they were resilient, kept on fighting.”

For the Organizing Institute’s program and services as a whole, impacts are varied. Although new members and certifications have not risen (due to a variety of factors), more Federation affiliates have introduced or expanded organizing programs. The culture of organizing has changed, with mutual support and information sharing between affiliates and organizers. This has helped reduce the frequency and severity of organizing disputes between unions in British Columbia.

### **What’s Next**

The spring 2006 strategic planning session of the Organizing Institute identified seven organizing priorities. The major area of focus for the next three years will be to make advances in the growing Chinese immigrant community. 97% of Chinese immigrants live in the Lower Mainland. Most of the job growth is in urban areas, with concentration in hospitality, manufacturing, and health care among women workers.

The labour movement faces a difficult challenge. The language barrier is significant. There is a level of community insularity, and problems have been encountered in identifying progressive community groups. Addressing training opportunities in these communities will make unions more attractive, the Organizing Institute feels. Unions’ successes in the Filipino and Indo-Canadian communities will no doubt strengthen their resolve.

### **Further References**

John Weir, “Increasing Inter-Union Co-operation and Co-ordination: The BC Federation of Labour Organizing Institute”, in Pradeep Kumar and Christopher Schenk, eds., *Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences*, Broadview Press, Peterborough, 2006.

**Name of Program:** Solidarity and Pride

**Unions and Central Labour Bodies:** various

**Contact Person:** Sue Genge, CLC National Representative (staff for the CLC Solidarity and Pride Working Group), 613.521.3400 ext. 281, [sgenge@clc-ctc.ca](mailto:sgenge@clc-ctc.ca)

**Barriers Addressed:** heterosexism, homophobia, LGBT issues (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered)

### **Background Information**

This report has not intended to provide an inventory of union courses offered on equity issues. Virtually all unions offer anti-racism courses, human rights courses, courses and workshops on women's issues, etc. However, LGBT issues are a relatively recent addition. In this sketch we offer a small glimpse of how union work in this area is evolving, with a few examples drawn from labour education. The sketch is based on conversations between the project research team and staff from a number of unions and central labour bodies.

### **How the Program Started**

Labour's work initially focused on encouraging self-organizing among gays and lesbians. Regional and national caucuses, working groups and committees (now constitutionally mandated in several unions) are all examples of the forms of self-organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered workers within the union movement. Several unions and central labour bodies also have designated LGBT positions in their executive/leadership bodies.

The CLC Solidarity and Pride Working Group, for example, was established as a result of policy papers passed by the 1994 CLC convention. Generally, such bodies play several roles including:

- making decisions and recommendations for actions, campaigns, policy and political issues at the respective level within the union or central labour body
- initiating Pride conferences, educational courses and workshops on LGBT issues

Before and after constitutional challenges and victories in Canada, unions have bargained for same sex benefits, protective and other clauses. For example, in 1989 following the Mossop decision, the Public Service Alliance of Canada proposed to the federal Treasury Board that the definition of spouse in the Master Agreement be changed to include same sex spouses. The Yukon Government was the first government in Canada to negotiate such a clause (1990).

Among the earliest initiatives unions undertake within the membership as a whole are bargaining demands, as well as awareness campaigns, particularly for "safe space" – in the workplace and in the union.

## How the Program Is Evolving

### *Canadian Union of Public Employees: Pioneers in Pride Education*

Located within CUPE's national structure, the union's Pink Triangle Committee began its work in 1991. A convention resolution in the same year directed the development of internal education on heterosexism and homophobia. The Committee became directly involved in course development, working with the Union Development Department whose responsibilities include union education (a parallel process took place in Quebec).

The process itself was innovative and set several precedents which later spread to other areas of union education. Until this time, courses had been prepared by staff course writers, sometimes in consultation with leaders and staff in other departments. For the first time, a member sub-committee (of lesbian and gay members) worked together with course writers. It is now routine to involve front-line members in course development.

The union decided to target the course to members generally, to help explain:

- forms of discrimination against gays and lesbians
- how discrimination operates
- why unions had to defend members who suffered from employer discrimination
- how to defend members: as a steward, health and safety person, union executive member

In other words, to explain why heterosexism and homophobia are union issues. Topics were tied in with the union's bargaining agenda, for example on same sex benefits.

There was a lot of debate around what members needed to know, and what they would tolerate. Using adult education techniques and clear language, the course developers addressed expected member discomfort around these issues by the inclusion of fun and funny exercises, in a positive way.

Entitled "Pride in CUPE," the one and a half day course includes a powerful exercise on language. Using familiar, hateful names that slur lesbians and gays, including some words from other cultures and countries, the course reminds members of their own experience with such name-calling. Participants are honest about what these words mean to us; sometimes stories they share are quite embarrassing. The course makes the links with similar language around women. The exercise shows the power of language, the power of speech.

In another innovative move, the union agreed that course facilitators had to be lesbian or gay members. Members would have questions in the course, and trainers needed to be able to answer these questions. The course was also seen as an opportunity for members to talk to members.

While many in the union had promoted starting a practice of member facilitation, Pride in CUPE was the first example that it could be done. Gender identity politics was the way to

make it happen, but once it happened it became a model. The Member Facilitator Program is now over a decade old. All CUPE courses (which are always co-facilitated) include member facilitators. Often both facilitators are members, all of whom must have taken the union's facilitator training plus the course they will facilitate. Facilitators for Pride in CUPE must be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered members or staff, and participate in specific course training offered in retreat session. This provides the needed opportunity for mutual support as personal experiences so often intertwine with the training session.

For the first training, about 25 activists from across the country were recruited (at least one from each province). Participants discussed possible responses to difficult questions, tried out various activities, and helped to improve the course.

The course was piloted and offered a few times in Ontario. In its early offerings, only queer members participated (not by design). The course helped build networks, helped bring queer members closer to the union, increased participation in union activities. Course discussions enriched understanding of differences in heterosexism between gays and lesbians, links to racism, etc. However, the course was not yet fulfilling its goal of reaching the general membership.

Thus, the next hurdle was to offer the course as part of the regular CUPE school calendar. Practice in the union is for the national Union Development Department to offer a list of courses, from which provincial and district council education committees request those courses they wish to include in their regional schools. There was a lot of pressure at the base to provide tool courses such as stewards training, how to chair a meeting, health and safety, financial officer training.

Given the initial lack of response, in the mid to late 90s the promoters of the course encouraged people to put forward resolutions at provincial conventions directing provincial leadership to take the course. This too was precedent-setting: CUPE's union culture includes strong notions about autonomy, which can breed resistance to anyone telling anyone else what to do.

Nonetheless, some leaders came forward to speak in favour of the resolution which then passed. The provincial executive board in Ontario was the first leadership body to take the training (1998). This encouraged other places to participate, for example, the leadership in Newfoundland requested to be trained. In turn, word of mouth helped spread the experience throughout the union and across the country.

For example, an Ontario executive board member from Thunder Bay was a leader with the local of outside city workers. Her praise of the course based on her direct experience helped convince her local executive to take the training, and then the region to put on the school. Soon the course was reaching its intended audience. There was a flurry of activity in the late 90s and early 2000s as locals and area councils sponsored course offerings.

Course content is always evolving: for example, there is now a module on bisexuality, and the course is inclusive of transgendered issues. Material today could support a week-long course, but book-off costs are too much of a challenge. Half-day course modules providing basic knowledge and tools are frequently integrated into other union courses as needed.

From the heyday of the late 90s and early 2000s, requests for the course have declined somewhat. New members, new locals again stress union basics, tool courses. A similar experience has been seen with courses on other equality issues.

However, there continues to be a huge number of requests for the union's course on harassment in the workplace, which is inclusive of LGBT and other equality areas. Thousands of members have taken the 1 to 1.5 day course on work time. The course is offered free to employers by the union, and is often part of resolutions of harassment-related grievances.

At the end of this workplace course, the facilitator promotes CUPE's Union Development courses. Reviewing the list, the facilitator notes that if there are at least 15 people in the local union who will participate in a particular course, the Union Development Department will deliver at no cost to the local. The number one response on these occasions is often "Pride in CUPE." Members clearly state the continued need for the course.

*Other union experiences: courses and workshops, within union education, facilitator training, and links with community*

*Courses and workshops* focused on LGBT issues are offered by many unions. In some regions, they are more likely to be offered by central labour bodies, enabling the participation of members from smaller unions (who may not have such opportunities within their own union). A few examples:

- For several years the Prairie School for Union Women, sponsored by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) has offered a course called Inside and Out, which challenges barriers of homophobia and heterosexism. The course is open to women who come from any sexual orientation.
- The SFL has supported its Solidarity and Pride Committee members providing regular workshops to RCMP recruits for the past six years. Each troop is provided with a one-hour session on hate crimes and GLTB rights. Recently they have also been provided copies of the CLC's Allies booklet. The SFL also provides time to its committee members for GLTB educational workshops for various classes at the university and Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology including Nursing, Social Work, Education and the Police College.
- The Alberta Federation of Labour held its first one-day workshop on these issues in October 2006. Entitled "Queer for Dummies: The ABCs of the GLBT," the workshop

was held at the Pride Centre of Edmonton as part of strengthening connections with the community. The educational workshop was open to trade unionists, social partners and community activists. As part of its discussion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues within the labour movement, the workshop planned to:

- educate on our history and on how to create a safe space through contract language, non-discrimination and education
  - seek to create allies in the labour movement
  - educate on the hurdles that the GLBT community faces at work; be it harassment, discrimination or wrongful termination
- The Canadian Auto Workers offers a one-day course at area schools, *Confronting Homophobia*. The course is also delivered on request, for example to local leadership.

*Within union education*, course developers ensure the inclusion in a range of labour education courses of scenarios, language, etc. relevant to LGBT issues. Human rights courses and forums as well as anti-harassment workshops and courses all usually include LGBT issues.

Some examples:

- The Public Service Alliance of Canada includes case studies involving heterosexism and homophobia in their union's kits on Duty to Accommodate and for Local Officers. Leadership development programs include tools to deal with systemic and cultural (workplace culture and union culture) exclusions and homophobia.
- All tools courses offered by the Canadian Auto Workers include human rights components (such as scenarios), for example in courses on grievance handling, collective bargaining, for women leadership and activists.
- The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario includes LGBT issues as part of steward training (member rights and responsibilities).
- The Canadian Union of Postal Workers incorporates anti-homophobia education in several ways:
  - In the second week of its four-week residential Union Education Program the union provides course material that allows participants to discuss homophobia, and who benefits and who loses as a result of homophobia.
  - In human rights courses the union includes exercises and dialogue on heterosexism and homophobia.
  - In basic union courses scenarios involving same sex partners are used.
  - The union holds a plenary at many national and regional meetings with speakers and discussions on equity issues, including transgender, gay and lesbian issues.

*Facilitator training* often includes how to deal with homophobia and heterosexism in the classroom. Unions also produce *educational resource materials*, such as:

- The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of B.C. has put together a resource binder to assist locals with networking and information. It contains information about

various union pride organizations – their history, activities and accomplishments in networking, lobbying, organizing and negotiating; web links to a broad range of research sources on LGBT issues; and articles of interest covering a range of LGBT topics, among them coming out/living out issues, issues specific to youth, parenting and family issues, issues of intersectionality, issues specific to living in rural communities, LGBT legal equality struggles, hate crime and the disproportionate disadvantage of the transgendered. There is a section dealing with resources within college sector organizations, on resources of other unions, a third with resources from national organizations and a fourth listing some general education research web links and articles.

- The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario has published a curriculum resource for classroom teachers (kindergarten to Grade 8): *Imagine a World that is Free from Fear* (2004). Using stories, the anti-bullying curriculum specifically addresses heterosexism and homophobia and is tied to the Ontario curriculum. ETFO provides professional development workshops based on the resource; thus far over 30 sessions have been held across the province. There are accompanying pamphlets, bookmarks, and a poster.
- The Canadian Union of Postal Workers produces posters for union and work spaces.
- The Canadian Auto Workers produced an educational pamphlet called “To Our Allies: Everything You Wanted to Know about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Issues... well, maybe not everything.” The Canadian Labour Congress has since reprinted the pamphlet four times, and has distributed it at executive meetings and community activities.
- The CAW has co-produced with the CLC Solidarity and Pride Committee a new resource and education guide to help union representatives support transgender workers who are going through transition on the job, called “Workers in Transition: A Practical Guide for Union Representatives.”

Many unions also *link with community*. For example, ETFO provides online resources across the province, and sends a Pride kit to its locals annually.

The CLC continues to provide educational materials for the use of affiliated unions and social partners, focused on the education of allies of the GLTB communities.

### **Further References**

See the Pride section of the Canadian Labour Congress website:

<http://www.canadianlabour.ca/human-rights-equality/pride> See also: websites of unions and other central labour bodies (access through “Links” on the CLC site).

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Youth Internship Program

**Union:** United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW)

**Contact Person:** Chris O'Halloran, National Youth Coordinator, 416.675.1104 ext. 268, [cohalloran@ufcw.ca](mailto:cohalloran@ufcw.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To get young members more involved in the union; to train future labour activists, union representatives and organizers.

**Barriers Addressed:** age, gender

### **Background Information**

The United Food and Commercial Workers Canada represents over 250,000 workers across the country. Members are employed in food production and retail, as well as in the manufacturing, healthcare and service sectors. More than 40% of UFCW Canada's membership is under the age of 30.

### **How the Program Started**

The United Food and Commercial Workers Canada began the Youth Internship Program (YIP) in 2000. Despite their large numbers, youth were under-represented in elected, staff, and leadership positions within the union. Michael Fraser UFCW Canada National Director (2000-07) focused on youth oriented programming. One of the outcomes of a focus on youth issues within UFCW Canada was the YIP.

Each year there are 12-15 participants. The program is four weeks long and is divided into three sessions. The YIP is all about building skills and providing opportunities to use them.

### **How the Program Evolved**

National Youth Coordinator Chris O'Halloran notes that there has been a shift in the last two years from job shadowing union representatives, to a focus on membership activism initiatives in the second session of the program. According to O'Halloran, "the focus on activism allows participants an opportunity to engage in an important union activity during the program and immediately after they are finished the program." Activism skills are helpful in all areas of union work.

One result of the evaluation process of the first run of the YIP was the recognition that equity was important, particularly as youth can face more than one systemic barrier to their participation in the union. After this recognition there was the inclusion of workshops in the program that dealt with white male privilege. However, it became apparent that single workshops were not going to effectively address the wide range of systemic barriers that face the diversity of young workers.

This realization meant program designers needed to integrate equity into all areas of the educational activities in the program. This allows participants to address equity concerns in the practical segments of the program. The focus on equity has led to changes in the selection process. Each local is encouraged to submit names of participants from equity-seeking groups.

This focus on the realities facing different young members works well with the popular education framework of the YIP's educational components. Popular education challenges power imbalances within the workplace, the community, and at home. Participants build skills and knowledge through workshops that start with their experiences and use those to examine and critique processes both big picture – such as Globalization and Wal-Mart's effect on unions and members – and at the local level, such as how the grievance process works.

## **Impacts**

Getting people acquainted with the logistics of being part of an organization gets them ready for working with their local, or a community social justice organization, after the program is over. The YIP has seen real success in this regard. According to O'Halloran there are now 24 UFCW Canada full time staff who have gone through the YIP program. The Talking Union program is carried out largely by YIP graduates who make presentations to young workers and students about their rights in the workplace and their right to organize. The Special Projects Union Representative (SPUR) program has seen many YIP graduates work on union organizing drives for UFCW Canada locals.

O'Halloran points out the benefits of the program have spread into the organization itself, as well as the community: “we have YIP graduates organizing young workers in organizing drives. We have YIP graduates educating young workers through the Talking Union program. This program allows participants and our union to make a real impact on the lives of young workers who are not unionized.” O'Halloran argues that the program has helped the union “walk the walk” as far as increasing access to power in the union for young workers.

O'Halloran makes very clear that one of the reasons the program has been so successful is that it has been given time to develop. Originally cost was a concern, and the national union then decided to absorb all the costs of the program. The national union recognizes that once a participant finishes the program it will probably take a couple of years for them to integrate themselves into their local unions. Participants are supported to get involved with their locals, en route to other important leadership positions throughout the local and the union as a whole. This takes time, but the results show that it is worth it.

## **Further References**

Anna Liu and Christopher O'Halloran, “Mobilizing Young People: A Case Study of UFCW Canada Youth Programs and Initiatives”, in Pradeep Kumar and Christopher

Schenk, eds., *Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences*, Broadview Press, Peterborough, 2006.

See the youth page on the UFCW Canada website: [ufcw.ca](http://ufcw.ca)

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Solidarity Works (SW)

**Central Labour Body:** Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL)

**Contact Person:** Larry Hubich, SFL President, [l.hubich@sfl.sk.ca](mailto:l.hubich@sfl.sk.ca), 306.525.0197

**Initial Purpose:** To increase youth participation in the labour movement, to provide youth an opportunity to participate in labour education and activist skill development.

**Barriers Addressed:** age barriers faced by youth

### **Background Information**

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is the central labour body in that province. The SFL represents over 95,000 members, from 37 national and international unions.

### **How the Program Started**

Natasha Goudar, former SFL youth organizer who facilitated each run of Solidarity Works in Saskatchewan points out that SW grew out of a “push to get young workers involved with the labour movement.”

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) was where SW started. The CLC provides seed funding to one provincial federation of labour a year to run the program. It is then the responsibility of the federation to fund the program after that. Solidarity Works was started by Nrinder Nindy Kaur Nann, the CLC’s first national representative on youth issues (hired in 1998). An article in the labour magazine *Our Times* on her new job states: “it became clear the CLC needed a national representative on youth issues when it held a conference [in 1998] addressing youth and only one person under 30 was in the room.”<sup>22</sup>

Due to the focus on youth, and the fact that SW is delivered by central labour bodies, the program incorporated some innovations that are not seen in most labour education. Not all of SW’s participants are unionized, allowing the program to involve non-union youth who are interested in unions.

SW content addresses power imbalances in the workplace, but it does not stop there. Racism, sexism, class oppression and colonialism are examined as processes and practices that have framed Canadian history and formed today’s local, national, and international situation, as well as each of us personally. Through popular education workshops and placement opportunities, participants are able to apply their learning through discussion and action.

A residential education program, SW takes place in settings where participants stay in the same building, eat meals together, and have spaces to socialize outside of workshops and

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<sup>22</sup> Jan O’Brien, “In your face: CLC’s new national youth rep,” *Our Times*, vol. 17, no. 4, July/Aug 1998, p. 14. This document was gathered through proquest. The quote is on p. 2 of the printout of the article.

other sessions. This helps to build community among participants. Creating this community allows participants and facilitators the opportunity to examine a wide array of injustices and struggles for social justice, within an analytical framework that challenges racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, and heterosexism.

### **How the Program Evolved**

Natasha Goudar points out that one of the key innovations of SW in Saskatchewan was a “turn to organizing” because “young workers are over-represented in the service sector, specifically food service, and that is a sector where unions are under-represented.” This led to a simulated organizing drive in the 2003 run of SW that allowed participants to build organizing skills.

In 2004 the organizing drive was replaced by a popular education facilitation training session. According to Nick Bonokoski, who facilitated and coordinated SW that year, the change happened “because participants got so excited about popular education during the program that we wanted to show them that they could do it themselves outside of SW.”

These two program innovations were attempts to work towards ways to involve the participants in organizing, and stay involved with each other, once the program was over.

### **Impacts**

The first three youth vice presidents of the SFL were graduates of SW. Over 40 participants have a greater understanding of social justice, unions and anti-oppression than they did before participating in SW. Natasha Goudar argues that one of the most important impacts of SW is that “it has built some important long term relationships between people.” Some graduates have gone on to take up elected and/or staff positions with unions or central labour bodies, or elected positions within their locals.

### **What’s Next**

The last run of SW in Saskatchewan was in 2004. This was also the last year there was a young person on SFL staff specifically assigned to the delivery of the Solidarity Works program. Due to the financial cost of running the program and the need for a full-time staffperson to work on SW, it has been on hold since then. But thanks to SW there are a lot of young people in Saskatchewan who have skills, resources, and contacts to make meaningful changes in their locals and unions, in their communities, and in themselves.

*Updated February 2009*

### **Further References**

See the CLC website: [www.canadianlabour.ca/index.php/solidarity\\_works](http://www.canadianlabour.ca/index.php/solidarity_works)  
“Solidarity Works in Nova Scotia: A Roundtable,” *Our Times* (December 2004 – January 2005), [www.ourtimes.ca/features/04\\_dec\\_05\\_jan.html](http://www.ourtimes.ca/features/04_dec_05_jan.html)

**Name of Program:** Prairie School for Union Women (PSUW)

**Central Labour Body:** Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and the PSUW Committee

**Contact Person:** Cara Banks, SFL Ready for Work Coordinator, [c.banks@sfl.sk.ca](mailto:c.banks@sfl.sk.ca), 306.525.0197

**Initial Purpose:** to improve women's access and participation in labour education; to develop women's personal and leadership skills; to build solidarity among women workers

**Barriers Addressed:** gender

### **Background Information**

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is the central labour body in that province. The SFL represents over 95,000 members, from 37 national and international unions.

### **How the Program Started**

The Prairie School for Union Women started in 1996. It was first organized by a group of union women volunteering their time; that is how it continues to be organized. Cara Banks, who works at the SFL and has been involved with PSUW for many years, says simply: "there were not enough women going to [union] schools." She argues that the PSUW was "a response to the need for an educational space where women could learn and feel safe." The decision for a women's school addressed barriers of women not participating as much in rooms where men are present, and the fact that women participants in the usual union education environments often had to deal with harassment.

The four-day school offers a wide variety of courses. The 10 courses offered in 2006, for example, included topics from health and safety to popular education for everyday union work, to resisting the right-wing agenda and greening your workplace. The school provides on-site child care to improve possibilities for women's participation.

### **How the Program Evolved**

A few years into the school's history, the organizers decided that all courses would be designed and facilitated using popular education. The focus of popular education is on building from people's experiences so the knowledge 'in the room' is respected. This is seen as the starting point for making change in organizations, and in people themselves. Popular education is a form of education that challenges inequitable power relationships outside of classrooms by addressing problems within classrooms.

PSUW was at the forefront of the move to popular education within the labour movement in the Prairies. For seven years there has been a facilitator training that accompanies PSUW so people can learn popular education design and delivery techniques. The

SFL/CLC spring school also now participates in this training, which is contributing to the further reach of popular education approaches.

In the school's early years, participants were not as racially diverse as hoped. The PSUW organizing committee addressed this partly through a scholarship program for equity-seeking members including women of colour, women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, lesbian/bisexual/transgendered, unemployed, non-unionized and youth under 29. The CLC anti-racism education integration guide has been used by the school and facilitators. This year one-third of facilitators and participants at the school were women of colour and Aboriginal women. The committee feels that moving towards a policy that ensures equitable participation of racialized groups is a needed step for ongoing improvements.

There is also a move to ensure that the school is not simply designed for women, but that there is a feminist analysis in all courses. In addition, there is now a feeling that "if it doesn't address class it isn't good enough" among the organizing committee. As a result, some policies and course changes have been taken up to address racial equity, feminism, and class consciousness within PSUW.

A mentoring program has "really taken off in the last couple of years." Adrienne Paavo has been working on the mentorship program. She notes that "the program is designed to increase the number of trade union women who are facilitators." While there is a popular education course and facilitator training offered every year, it was felt this was not enough preparation. The mentorship program also enables apprentices to learn how the school itself is organized and to get involved in the PSUW as a whole. The program is designed to ensure that people learn how to use the popular education framework to challenge unequal power relationships outside as well as inside classrooms.

A course that was offered for the first time in 2006 is indicative of this direction. "Popular Education for Everyday Union Work" was facilitated by Barb Thomas and Darla Leard. This course and the mentorship program show how the PSUW is intent on expanding how people can use learning and education to change their organizations, not simply through classroom education, but through looking at everyday organizational places where learning takes place.

## **Impacts**

The 12 years of the PSUW have had significant impacts on the labour movement in the Prairies, and certainly in Saskatchewan. Cara Banks points out that PSUW "puts pressure on the rest of the labour movement" through delivering class conscious feminist popular education to a large number of women every year. The school has seen participants become involved in all levels of union activities, both as elected, and as staff officials.

The impact of the school can be seen in the growing number of women at convention microphones taking stands for feminist issues. Participants often use information and knowledge they have gained at the Prairie School to advance women's issues within their

union. The school has given the women's movement within the labour movement a place where it can have and make community.

### **Update**

The PSUW continues to use a feminist analysis, to address class consciousness and to use an equity lens when developing courses. With the provincial government passing anti-worker, anti-democratic and anti-woman labour legislation, the PSUW feels it is even more important to encourage and support women taking leadership roles in the workplace, community, union and home. Courses have been developed around violence against women, resisting the right-wing agenda, globalization, and the environment.

The Scholarship program has attracted a wide variety of equity-seeking women who otherwise would not have the opportunity to learn about the issues and struggles within the labour movement. The Mentorship program continues to encourage and support women who want to take the next step at facilitating and getting involved at the PSUW, and at various levels within their unions, workplaces and communities.

### **Further References**

SFL website page: [www.sfl.sk.ca/schools.php](http://www.sfl.sk.ca/schools.php)

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Paid Education Leave Program

**Union:** Canadian Auto Workers

**Contact Person:** Rick Rose, Director of Education, 416.497.4110, [Rick.Rose@caw.ca](mailto:Rick.Rose@caw.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To encourage members to develop a broad understanding of the role of the union and themselves as members, to develop activists and social justice advocates.

**Barriers Addressed:** race, class, gender in an anti-oppression framework

### **Background Information:**

The CAW is one of the largest private-sector unions in Canada with over 225,000 members across the country. Members work in a diverse range of sectors including auto, auto parts, general manufacturing, fisheries, hospitality and gaming, mining, education, retail and health care.

### **How the Program Started**

First bargained in 1977 at an auto parts company, the Paid Education Leave (PEL) program is financed by employer contributions based on cents per hour worked (or, in some cases, annual lump sum payments). Today 87% of CAW members are in units where PEL has been bargained. PEL funds travel, accommodations and lost wages for participants in one, two and four week residential education programs. A subsidy program is available to help smaller locals or workplaces to increase participant diversity.

Currently there are 21 programs offered through the Paid Education Leave Program, ranging from one-week courses to the core four-week program. These programs are offered most frequently at the CAW Family Education Centre in Port Elgin, Ontario, with some of the one-week courses offered periodically in other parts of the country.

#### *The Four-Week Core Program*

The four-week Paid Education Leave program is held at the CAW Family Education Centre. Many CAW leaders and staff credit the four-week program as being fundamental to their union experience, providing them with the analytical tools, skills and confidence to become social justice and union leaders. Offered once a year over a six-month period (in one week sessions held every six weeks or so), the program focuses on a number of key themes: the union, the workplace, the economy, politics and human rights.

*The union:* Unions exist to provide a counter-balance to management's role in the workplace and to push for change in broader society. In PEL, participants look at how unions are built (in the past as well as today), and what kind of differences unions can make in working people's lives. Participants talk about the fundamental need for democracy in unions, and in turn how unions can play a role in democratizing the

workplace and broader society. The sessions look at key trade union struggles, analyzing both successes and failures, and debate the key challenges facing unions today.

*The workplace:* Workers sell their labour – what does this mean for each person, what do workers have in common, and what are some of the interesting differences in their experiences? What role does work play in our lives, and how do we feel about it? What is changing about the nature of work, and what drives those changes? How do we evaluate what goes on in our workplaces, and what can we do (in the short term and the long term) to make workplace changes that better our lives and society?

*The economy:* Workers play a key role in the economy, and yet their voices are seldom heard in decision-making. They are often made to feel as if they are not relevant to economic policies that critically affect their everyday lives. This session covers a lot of economic basics – how the capitalist economy works (and how it doesn't work!) – and why. Participants examine alternative economic models (both historical and international), and debate their strengths and weaknesses. The session looks at how the economy is shaped by the global economy, and examines the implications of a globalized economy on workers in Canada and around the world.

*Politics:* What role should workers and their unions play in politics? What kind of policies, systems and structures would benefit all working people? What role can unions play in effecting political change in the immediate and in the long-term? What are some interesting examples of workers taking political power here and abroad? What can we learn from this? What kind of society do we want to build, and what are the different schools of thought on how to do this?

*Human rights:* Racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination divide us as workers. This session takes a hard look at how systems of oppression operate, how narrow gender roles are constructed, and what this means for each of us. Through videos, guest speakers, and challenging conversations, participants talk about what it means to build real equality among and between working people, and how union workers can use their collective power to push for broader social justice.

The PEL program builds skills:

- Communication (listening, debating, public speaking)
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Union-building (experience with meetings, committees, mock conventions)
- Community-building (each participant takes on an 'activist project' during the program)
- Research (internet, interviews, media)

Using union-trained peer Discussion Leaders, active learning is central to the PEL program. Participants are engaged in discussion, working in pairs, in small groups, and in large plenaries. The program uses film and video, guest speakers, project work, case studies, media studies, art and culture to engage participants with each other. Key to learning is building a respectful learning environment, building on each worker's

knowledge and understanding and expanding everyone's confidence. Past participants describe their classroom experience as "fun, engaging, tough, exciting, and empowering."

### *One and Two-Week Programs*

In the mid-90s, CAW added several one-week programs funded by PEL to increase educational opportunities for members. Topics range from grievance handling to collective bargaining, health and safety to WCB, human rights to globalization, building activism, and the environment. In addition, PEL includes a women's leadership program. First offered as a two-week program in the early 1990s, the program was restructured into two one-week programs in 2002. Since then, participation has increased significantly. A two-week Workers of Colour/Aboriginal leadership program continues to be successful. In 2008, the first Women and Collective Bargaining course was offered and was well received. Currently under development is a Health and Safety Course for women.

### **Impacts**

Since 1989, the one and four-week PEL programs at Port Elgin have provided education for over 20,000 members. Participants leave the four-week program with a strong commitment to building a better world for workers in Canada and around the world. Their passion for social justice is enhanced, their confidence is nourished, and their understanding of the lives of working people is deepened.

Despite this success, the union is always concerned about increasing member participation. Newer, smaller locals do not have enough money in their PEL fund for the four-week program, so usually participate in the one-week programs. The national union looks at ways to subsidize participation to reduce the cost. As well, the union would like to increase diversity among participants: geographic, sectoral, age, gender, race, etc. The union encourages its locals to address these areas in their selection process.

Program content is also evaluated, refreshed and revised on a regular basis. The Discussion Leaders (PEL trainers) are key to this process through regular de-briefing and feedback sessions. There are currently 120 Discussion Leaders trained to deliver CAW education programs. They provide direct and immediate feedback on how members respond to the union's education programs and identify new and emerging needs.

The PEL programs underwent a significant review in 2006 by Bob White (retired CAW President) and Jane Armstrong (retired Communications Director). Their report (entitled "CAW Union Education: Shaping 'Time,' The Challenge of Change") notes the following regarding the four-week program: "Spoken with a unanimous voice, those involved in PEL describe it as 'transforming', 'changing me for life', and 'fundamental to our union.' ... It is astonishing to know that four weeks of education can create life-long activists... Local union leadership and national staff with whom we spoke estimate 80% to 85% of the four-week PEL graduates remain life-long activists." 70-75% of Quebec Council delegates are PEL graduates.

The union, the report noted, is at a crossroad, “where significant demographic, economic and social changes are intersecting with our union’s education program.” Demographic changes within the union over the last 20 years have been dramatic and continue to change the shape and face of the union. The membership has doubled. Composition has changed: from 89% of members in manufacturing in 1985, to 47% in 2008; from 80% of members in Ontario to 62%. In 2008, 53% of dues-paying members are found in units of 500 or more members, but half of CAW bargaining units had less than 50 members. The union was once concentrated in auto and auto parts. In 2008 those sectors represented 24% of CAW membership. Women now make up a third of CAW membership – up from 11% when the union was founded. There is also a growing proportion of members who are workers of colour.

The report also notes: “If we had to identify two themes with respect to the dialogue about PEL, they would be the value of the program to building union activists and the concern about the issues of ‘time commitment’ and economics affecting the attracting of participants to the four-week program.”

In an effort to address some of these concerns, the four-week program is now spread out over six months (rather than four months). On-site childcare is now available; participants have the choice of opting for a childcare subsidy if they do not wish to bring their children. On-site childcare is also available for one-week programs several times per year (March break for example). And, one-week programs are now, periodically, offered regionally so members can access education without traveling. These changes help to increase participation in PEL, particularly by women, and reduce the impact on family life.

### **Further References**

“Taking on the Challenge”, Collective Bargaining and Political Action Convention, 2008:  
<http://www.caw.ca/en/about-the-caw-collective-bargaining-political-action-convention.htm>

“Union Education and Training”, CAW 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Collective Bargaining Convention, 2005:  
<http://www.caw.ca/whatwedo/bargaining/cbpac/pdf/Chapter13.pdf>

Bob White and Jane Armstrong, April 2006, “Draft. CAW Union Education: Shaping ‘Time,’ The Challenge of Change.”

Johanna Weststar, “Union Education, Union Leadership and Union Renewal: The Role of PEL”, in Pradeep Kumar and Christopher Schenk, eds., *Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences*, Broadview Press, Peterborough, 2006.

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Canadian Auto Workers / McMaster University Labour Studies Certificate Program

**Union:** Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)

**Contact Person:** David Robertson, Director of Work Organization and Training, [cawwork@caw.ca](mailto:cawwork@caw.ca), 416.495.3761

**Initial Purpose:** To increase access to post-secondary education; to increase use of the negotiated tuition assistance benefit; to offer a customized labour education certificate that expands social consciousness in partnership with a post-secondary institution (McMaster University).

**Barriers Addressed:** lack of access to post-secondary education; shift schedules; distance; approach to learning

### **Background Information**

The CAW is one of the largest private-sector unions in Canada with over 225,000 members across the country. Members work in a diverse range of sectors including auto, auto parts, general manufacturing, fisheries, hospitality and gaming, mining, retail and health care. The Canadian Auto Workers/McMaster University Labour Studies Certificate Program is available for the over 30,000 members employed by the “Big Three” automakers (General Motors, Chrysler and Ford), as well as members employed by CAMI, Electromotive Canada and General Dynamics.

### **How the Program Started**

The CAW/McMaster Labour Studies Certificate program (LSC) started in 2000. A number of collective agreements included a tuition assistance program that enabled employees to be reimbursed by the employer for approved work-related courses taken and passed at educational institutions. However, as noted by David Robertson, “Very few members were using the program, and post-secondary institutions were not very accommodating to the reality of work and shifts.”

The union also had many graduates of the Paid Education Leave (PEL) program who had been “turned on to education. They wanted to continue. PEL had opened up a whole new world to them.”

Against this background, CAW sat down with the Labour Studies Department at McMaster University, determined to develop a new program. Today, any course developed through the LSC program is automatically deemed acceptable for cost reimbursement by the employer. In fact, the employer pays tuition upfront through direct billing (as opposed to the usual administrative hassle of a refund after passing).

Courses are delivered after hours, but on a schedule that takes account of rotating shifts. They are held locally at the union hall or office.

### **How the Program Evolved**

About 250 members are currently involved in the program, usually a three-year commitment. Currently the negotiated tuition assistance stands at \$3250 per year.

The LSC program is an education model that builds on the strengths of adult education, union education, popular education and labour studies. “Hopefully we avoid their weaknesses,” adds Robertson. Courses are structured to feature group work, a range of readings, videos, discussions, and lectures to accommodate workers’ varied learning styles.

An interesting innovation is the use of video conferencing, linking five or six locations simultaneously. Facilities for such a technique exist at all CAW regional offices. A specialized current events course, for example, uses video to bring in speakers from around the world. The topical course focuses on whatever is breaking in the news. For example, a 2009 course examined the financial crisis and what it means for Canadian workers.

The video conferencing template includes a central moderator and discussion leader in each location. A 20-minute lecture by the guest speaker is followed by a break and discussion locally, facilitated by the local discussion leader. After that there is an interactive question-and-answer period with the speaker, followed by a short lecture by the speaker and wrap-up.

The LSC program tries to use technology in an appropriate way for union education purposes (traditional online and correspondence courses were not successful). The union does not want technology to substitute for face to face discussion. They challenge the notion popular within employer approaches that sees everything computer-based as positive. The program recognizes how workers learn while at the same time using technology to do things they couldn’t otherwise do.

A worker who has graduated from the LSC program is given a half-year credit in any degree discipline if they are subsequently accepted in a university degree program at McMaster, Athabasca or Windsor universities.

### **Impacts**

The program’s third class (37 workers) graduated in June 2008. The program has accomplished its goal of increased member use of the tuition assistance benefit. In the process, a unique learning opportunity has been provided for the participants, both union activists and members new to union education.

## **What's Next**

The LSC program is always developing new courses, designed by union course developers. Because people who have finished the program want to continue, the CAW and McMaster have developed an advanced certificate.

## **Further References**

See the program website: <http://socserv.socsci.mcmaster.ca/labourstudies/cawmac/>

“Education and Training”, CAW Collective Bargaining and Political Action Convention, 2008:

<http://www.caw.ca/en/about-the-caw-collective-bargaining-political-action-convention.htm>

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Mentorship Program

**Union:** Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP)

**Contact Person:** Alan Tate, Director, Special Projects, 613.230.5800 ext 277,  
[atate@cep.ca](mailto:atate@cep.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To increase activism, develop the next wave of union leadership, and increase the scope of learning and action accessible to younger members and members of equity-seeking groups.

**Barriers Addressed:** barriers encountered by young members and equity-seeking activists

### **Background Information**

The CEP is a national union whose 150,000 members are spread across the country. Members work in telecommunications, in oil and electrical energy, in paper mills, in print and television media, and other sectors of the economy. The union's education program is well-developed, but like most unions involves only a minority of activists in structured courses. For some years, people had discussed how to revive and support the patterns of earlier years, when experienced activists assisted the next generation and then gave them scope to develop their own leadership. Since more than 80% of CEP members have computer access, the process is done on-line.

### **How the Program Started**

Adopted at the 2004 Convention, the mentorship program matches interested CEP members with more experienced people in the union, mentors. The mentor advises and guides the member's development as an activist and leader. A mentor cannot be a staff rep or a full-time union officer. The program promotes union building, social activism and education, to provide successors for today's leadership from a pool of informed, skilled and committed activists.

The key arguments that persuaded delegates to take this initiative were:

- The union had a demographic challenge, since people in their 50s dominate among staff and local leaders. The group at the top will be gone in 10 years, and should not leave people floundering.
- This is a way for people to become known beyond their immediate work area, and makes a broader pool, from which the leadership can draw for needs like member organizers, member instructors, and staff reps.
- The goal is to increase activism, by providing ongoing support from a more experienced person.

The program invites people to pass through four levels of study and action, to develop their personal capacities as leaders. At each level, people engage in union education courses, practical union experience, community activism and self-study.

### **How the Program Evolved**

The program was launched in June 2006. In the first six weeks, 46 people registered, more than 100 by the end of October. A major challenge was finding enough mentors; at first only nine people volunteered. There was some initial confusion, as some people who wanted to be participants were experienced enough to be mentors. It had to be clarified that the profile of people in the program is as high for participant as for mentor, and that people's informal experience may qualify them to be mentors. Mentors are encouraged to tailor the steps to the person, to use their judgment around equivalencies rather than sticking to strict requirements.

A requirement in the first level of the program is to attend the course on "Anti-harassment and diversity awareness," for which the cost is covered by the local union. This three-day course responds to a growing number of inquiries and complaints from workplaces. Course participants deal with the reality of change and probe feelings in the face of facts ("does this make you feel angry, proud..."). For emerging activists, it is important to keep updated on areas like accommodation, electronic harassment, and to apply insights through an audit of their own collective agreement and through developing a plan for action in their local.

### **Impacts**

A sense of likely impacts can come from reviewing the second level of the program, "Acquiring Leadership Skills":

#### *Union Education Courses*

At level 2, the Mentorship Program activists take one or more additional courses, for example, Steward 2, Advanced Steward, Local Officer 2, Negotiations, Financial Officer, Recording Secretary, Equity Course, Union Organizer, Pensions, Labour History, Advanced Health and Safety, or equivalent courses.

#### *Practical Union Experience*

The program activists discuss with their mentors how to build on the union activity they started at level 1, and how to start to develop leadership abilities within the union. They are encouraged to attend an equity event such as an Anti-Racism course, Women's conference, Disabled Workers conference, Young Workers conference, Pride Day event, International Women's Day event, or equivalent. Mentors suggest to participants that they take on union activities, for example: actively participate at union meetings (propose motions, speak to resolutions, etc.), co-chair a local committee (local communications committee, women's committee, young workers committee, education committee), help

establish a committee, become a health and safety activist, work on an organizing campaign, serve in an elected position (steward, trustee, executive member, bargaining committee member), become a union counselor, serve as a strike coordinator or picket captain, be active on the District Labour Council, attend a labour movement conference, attend convention.

### *Community Activism*

Level 2 activists build on their level 1 community, political, labour or social justice group activism. The activist will discuss with the mentor how to take a leadership role in the community. Participants will participate in one of the following activities: serve on the board of directors of a women's shelter, work on the executive of a riding association, be a labour representative on a coalition (anti-poverty, anti-racism, health care), organize a union sponsored food bank drive, be local coordinator of a CEP sponsored campaign (health care, economic renewal), deliver high school presentations on unions, anti-racism, women's issues, or other equivalent activities.

### *Self-Study*

At level 2 the Mentorship Program activist builds a better understanding of the labour movement, its structure and aims. The activist discusses with the mentor what they already know about the labour movement. Together they develop a self-study plan for the activist to become thoroughly familiar with the structure, leadership, decision-making mechanisms, policies and history of the movement.

Resource materials that may be used include:

- On-line: CLC website, FTQ website, *Just Labour*, Labour Start, Straight Goods, rabble.com, websites of other unions and labour organizations.
- Labour history: Boudreau and Roback, Fournier (FTQ, Laberge), Murray and Tremblay, Seymour, Morton, Heron, *Labour/Le travail*.
- Progressive magazines: such as *Our Times*, *Le Monde Ouvrier*.

It is early in the program to assess the impacts, but comments by delegates at the 2006 convention were very positive.

### **Update**

CEP is reviewing its education program, including the Mentorship Program. This review will be completed by the end of 2009 and they expect there will be changes to the Mentorship Program.

### **Further References**

See the union website: [www.cep.ca](http://www.cep.ca) (Ensure you have a flash player, and click on the rotating cube at the top right of the home page.)

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Leadership Program

**Union:** Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)

**Contact Person:** Victoria Gibb-Carsley, Education Officer, [gibbv@psac-afpc.com](mailto:gibbv@psac-afpc.com), 613.560.5476

**Initial Purpose:** To renew the capacity of the middle-level leadership of the PSAC to exercise their roles effectively.

**Barriers Addressed:**

- Ensuring that secondary-level leadership explore and act on the connections between their leadership roles and anti-oppression work
- Inclusion of the members of national equity committees as full leaders of the organization

**Background Information**

The PSAC is a national union. Many of its 166,000 members work for the federal government or agencies in a broad range of occupations as deliverers, facilitators and enforcers of federal government services. An increasing number of PSAC members work in the private sector in women’s shelters, universities, security agencies and casinos. In the North, the PSAC represents most unionized workers employed by the governments of the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories and some municipalities. Equity initiatives within the PSAC, in staff hiring (through employment equity measures) and in structural reform of the organization (through policies and mechanisms meant to facilitate self-organizing) have been under way for several years.

**How the Program Started**

In the past, a National Officers Training Program was developed to respond to the leadership needs of the union’s component structure. Once regionalization of the PSAC occurred, it became obvious that the PSAC needed to re-frame leadership training to build in participation for elected leaders in the regional councils in addition to the National Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis Circle (NAIM) and the Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC). As such, in 2005, the PSAC Leadership Program was conceived.

It was a challenge to design and roll out the first round of this new course. The decision to go ahead with the Leadership Program was made in October 2005 and 200 people had to be trained before National Convention in May 2006. Success in the first round (two days in length) was seen as essential if the 2006 Convention was to budget for a second phase of the training during the 2007 budget year.

## How the Program Evolved

A reference group was established, including experienced and new leaders in all four of the key groups to be addressed by the program. During discussions, two points emerged. One was that the NAIM and EOC members essentially worked in an advisory capacity rather than as decision-makers. They had substantial responsibilities but few resources and little leverage on the rest of the organization. The other point was that participants from the four groups of leaders had very different starting points, making a common approach difficult but necessary.

One of the key tools developed for the training was a series of short video “triggers.” Each trigger was less than five minutes long and, without proposing easy solutions, dramatized the tensions involved in the transition to a more equitable workplace.

The three video triggers became central to the Leadership Phase I course, which reached 200 PSAC leaders in 12 locations over a period of 3 months. For example, in the afternoon of the first day, a four-minute video called “Comfort Zone” is screened, which portrays tensions in balancing roles between a racialized leader and a white leader. In it, an actor portrays Suzanne, a component president, who approaches Shanice, recently elected to the component executive board. Suzanne asks Shanice to reduce her focus on local issues and engage more in “the big league.” Shanice speaks to the fact that the lack of race representation in PSAC leadership means that she becomes the contact point for most racialized members. Care was taken to ensure that neither of the two characters is shown to be simply good or bad, and the video ends with a challenge to viewers to explore their views of what should happen next.

On the second day of the training, a short video picks up a conversation over coffee between an established white officer of a regional council and a young Aboriginal activist. The third video is used to set the stage for a role play around limited energies and funds for a broad public campaign to protect medicare. In all three videos, the effort is to depict accurately the kinds of conversations that occur inside the union around equity, without modeling correct outcomes. The energies released by such a tool required well-prepared facilitators who were capable of maintaining a climate of respect and curiosity during difficult conversations in the group. These video triggers proved extremely effective in promoting discussion and problem-solving among the leaders taking the course.

The overall goal of the orientation phase of the Leadership Program was to strengthen connections of leaders to each other, their union, and their roles for movement building in the current political and economic context. The objectives of the two-day program were as follows:

### *Day 1 Objectives: Locating Ourselves in the Big Picture and PSAC*

1. Identify our different locations as activists and leaders in PSAC and our communities

2. Identify and explore the impact of changing work and management practices on our membership
3. Connect changes in our workplaces to corporate globalization and identify key global players
4. Examine the structure of PSAC and our roles within it
5. Explore different ways to get things done within the PSAC structure
6. Identify how our different leadership roles interact – component, region, EOC, NAIM

*Day 2 Objectives: Leadership that Builds Union Strength*

1. Identify our own social identities and experiences as sources of knowledge for union building
2. Identify opportunities to strengthen the union by advancing equity in everyday union work
3. Practice critical thinking and creative strategy with everyday union problems
4. Consider the elements of effective leadership
5. Evaluate this course and our next steps as union leaders.

At the 2006 Convention, a budget was approved for a second phase of “skill building” of the full group of secondary leadership in the PSAC. It ran successfully in 2007.

### **What’s Next**

In the spring 2009 a new round of the Leadership Program will be offered across the country. The program is updated to address current realities, but the video triggers will be used again as an integral piece of the training.

### **Further References**

See <http://www.pvac.com/what/education/index-e.shtml> .

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** “The Wall” – Starting With Women’s Lives: Changing Today’s Economy

**Central Labour Body:** Canadian Labour Congress, Women’s and Human Rights Department

**Contact Person:** Bev Burke, [bevburke@i-zoom.net](mailto:bevburke@i-zoom.net), 905.352.2430

**Initial Purpose:** To engage women in discussion of gender and the economy.

**Barriers Addressed:** Gender, international links. Many women feel they don’t know much about the economy, and that it’s very complicated. This matters because in fact women do know a lot about the economy. They need to uncover their knowledge so that they can take part in union conversations, such as bargaining, which have an economic dimension. Women’s work is either invisible or undervalued in traditional economics, so we need to make that contribution visible.

### **Background Information**

This is a workshop methodology, to build a visual picture together of women’s work and the economy. Many women are comfortable with participatory and visual learning methods, but there were few examples of addressing issues of the economy in this way. The Wall explores how the economy affects us as women, how women from equity-seeking groups are most affected, how it affects us differently from men and what we can do together to make changes. We often talk about it as a gender analysis of the economy. It involves women in unions, faith groups and community groups in discussions of economic strategy that are usually dominated by men.

The Wall has been used by unions across the country, and by the Public Service International all over the world. At a broader level, it has increased women’s confidence to understand complicated issues like international trade, which impact very directly on everyone’s lives, not just men’s lives.

### **How the Program Started**

In the late 1990s, CUPE requested the original authors, Suzanne Doerge and Bev Burke, to develop a workshop for their Women’s Conference. They had in mind an adaptation of the “AH-Ha” method developed in the 1980s by GATT-Fly, an ecumenical economic justice initiative. By then, Suzanne Doerge was working with an ecumenical women’s task force on poverty, where the first version of the Wall was piloted. It caught on across Canada in preparations for the World March of Women in 2000. Later, it was picked up by international union networks.

Union women have found that the visual approach helps them to see how things fit together, and how larger issues relate to their daily lives. Younger women have especially

enjoyed the interactive approach and those with less formal education feel able to participate in this because it doesn't require a lot of literacy skills.

### **How the Program Evolved**

The initial "wall design" has been simplified a bit over the past six years. Union women who were instructing with little time to prepare found the initial version overwhelming. The new guide includes some handouts, ready to photocopy, so there are less flipcharts to prepare. Analytically, at the start, the process had a bottom piece to the wall, to look at the foundations of capitalism and racism. This was very complicated for many people to facilitate, so it was moved to the middle of the wall, with less of a structural analysis. The revised versions place more emphasis on equity. Now the sessions actually name on the wall those most affected: young women, rural women, Aboriginal women, women of colour.

The union work started with CUPE and shortly after the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) used it for their Women's Conference. CUPW later adapted the Wall for their first Human Rights Conference. Suzanne Doerge was asked by the CLC to adapt it for a conference on privatization. The first guide was written for the World Women's March in 2000. That is when women in other places started to make contact. A PSI education officer from Australia came to the CLC. The PSI asked Bev Burke and Suzanne Doerge to do a shorter version of the Wall for women across the Americas. It was a total shock how well it worked. Since then, it has also been used in Southeast Asia, and in Africa. In all three places, it worked extremely well. The only common factor was the involvement of the women participants in public sector unions.

This gave a sense that it could be used internationally, and Suzanne Doerge has run "wall" workshops on public health with nurses in several countries, including Vietnam and El Salvador. Most of the adaptations with Canadian unions have been done by Bev Burke.<sup>23</sup>

Among unions in Canada, CUPE has used the Wall across the country. They have stayed with the original approach of applying it to the economy, but also focused on specific sectors, for women's conferences and courses. The adaptations are in the statistics, so they reflect the particular area in which people are located. The Steelworkers brought Bev Burke in to work with the women instructors in their Women of Steel course. Then it was adapted for the International union's women's conference in Pittsburgh, with U.S. statistics and an emphasis on working with community groups.

Other uses have been made by the CLC, by OPSEU, by the PSAC. The most recent use was by the CAW in 2006. They had used it as a workshop in their women's conference before, but this time they adapted it for the entire conference of nearly 200 women. The conference used the Wall to look at the issue of violence, at many levels from domestic to international war. The top of the wall changed to deal with the costs of violence and the

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<sup>23</sup> For a full list, see:

<http://www.wallworkshop.com/English/WhoUsedIt/ListofOrganizations/TradeUnions.html>.

middle analyzed the societal supports to violence such as the economy, media, and government policies.

In 2004, a Nicaraguan women's organization called *Puntos de Encuentro*, joined forces with Suzanne and Montserrat Fernandez to adapt and pilot the methodology for the Nicaraguan context. In the Canadian version, the workshop begins with changes to jobs and public services, while in the Nicaraguan context it was recognized that given the state of the economy, many women will never hold a formal job or have access to public services. The Nicaragua workshop begins with three key stones: "Ways we earn a living", "Public Services" (for those who have access), and "Cost of Living", which touches everyone. It was discovered that the workshop worked well with women with limited literacy and a wide range of economic and life situations (such as *maquila* workers, agricultural workers, nurses). Thanks to support from the Steelworker Humanity Fund, CUSO and OXFAM Canada, a Spanish guide was produced.

In 2004, a website was set up, [www.wallworkshop.com](http://www.wallworkshop.com) and revised in 2009. Money for publication and for the website came from union and church women, who wanted to see how other women are using the Wall, and to make it accessible to women in other countries. The site is in Spanish, French and English. PSAC has helped to keep the French updated. The Spanish printing was covered by the Steelworkers, and the Nicaraguans do the Spanish website. Suzanne Doerge does the English. Almost all the work on the Wall has been unpaid, including the writing of two editions of the book. The costs are for the technical work on the website, and for printing of the book. Later in 2009, the workshop guides will be made available on the website. Until then, they can be ordered directly from the authors (see References below).

## Impacts

A key moment in the workshop, says Suzanne Doerge, is getting past a sense of helplessness to one of empowerment. Doing 'power line-ups' helps this happen. Participants line up in front of the wall and start to talk about how much power they *do* have in this world. They begin to talk about where their strength comes from, and who their potential allies are. "That begins to cause a shift, as they realize their own personal power to make change in the world."

Bev Burke sees the power of drawing out very concrete experiences of union women in all parts of their lives, and seeing together the links among them. She emphasizes the importance in working at the level of home and community with women, not just the workplace and union side of women's lives. This highlights the issue of women's unpaid work. In her words: "The main goal in my work now is to ensure that people come out feeling more powerful than when they started. In the Wall workshops, women really recognize they are not alone, so it works for that."

## **Further References**

Suzanne Doerge and Bev Burke, *Starting with Women's Lives: Changing Today's Economy*, A facilitator's guide to a visual workshop methodology. Available in French, Spanish and English from: Wall Workshop, 1439 Tedder Ave., Ottawa ON K1H 6A5 for \$10 plus postage.

Lorraine Endicott, "Starting with Women's Lives: A gender-based economic analysis," *Our Times*, February-April 2003.

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Access Conferences

**Union:** Public Service Alliance of Canada

**Contact Person:** Seema Lamba, Human Rights Officer, [lambas@psac-afpc.com](mailto:lambas@psac-afpc.com), 613-560-4387

**Initial Purpose:** To provide a self-organizing opportunity for members with disabilities to discuss, network, mobilize and strategize on ways to advance disability rights in the union, the workplace, communities and society.

**Barriers Addressed:** Access, accommodation and other barriers faced by people with disabilities; ableism (the assumption that a disability is not “normal,” underlying negative stereotypes and discrimination)

### **Background Information**

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) is one of Canada’s largest unions representing 165,000 members. The majority of PSAC members work for the federal government and its agencies in a wide range of occupations. A growing number of PSAC members are employed by private sector enterprises operating in women’s shelters and universities, in casinos and in security agencies. The PSAC is also a strong presence in Canada’s north, representing workers employed by some municipalities and the Yukon, Nunavut and Northwest Territories governments.

### **How the Program Started**

Persons with disabilities continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in Canada. Labour recognizes that disability rights are not rights that can be separated from other rights in the workplace and in society. Disabilities affect people differently depending on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, etc. and a disability rights analysis must include these different lenses.

Through political action for legislative changes and through collective bargaining, PSAC fights to ensure that workplaces and communities are barrier-free and free from discrimination. In the 1970s, PSAC and others in the labour movement (such as the Canadian Labour Congress and Canadian Union of Public Employees), focused their work on employment equality through affirmative action programs.

The Supreme Court developed jurisprudence on the duty to accommodate in 1987, although it was only in 1999 that the Court clarified the positive obligation of employers and service providers to remove barriers for people with disabilities. The duty to accommodate persons with disabilities continues to be one of the most pressing issues for disability rights activists.

The PSAC Equal Opportunity Committee (EOC) was formed in 1992. In addition to 1 representative from each of the 17 component unions of the PSAC, the EOC members include 8 equity representatives (a male and female from the 4 equity groups, including members with disabilities). The equity representatives are all elected by members of their respective equity groups at the National Equity Conferences held every three years. The EOC is an advisory committee on various equity issues to the National Board of Directors (the body that runs the union between Triennial Conventions).

In 1993, the PSAC held its first National Access Conference for members with disabilities, the first union in Canada to have such a conference. The conference was an opportunity for delegates with disabilities to come together, discuss, debate, mobilize and strategize around how to continue moving forward the disability rights agenda in the union, their workplaces, communities and in society. The conference provided an impetus to establish regional committees and forums for members with disabilities in several communities across the country.

The union's 1994 Triennial Convention agreed to establish a Local Accessibility Fund, providing financial assistance to locals whose members required accommodation of their disability in order to participate in local events.

The local fund has now been supplemented by a centralized accommodation fund that regions can use to ensure access by union members without tapping into their operational and administrative budgets.

The budget for the Access Conference is funded separately. With 100-120 participants, a budget of \$330,000 provides funding for all participant costs. The two and a half day conference (held Friday to Sunday) combines education and politics, and features speakers, workshops, the election of the representatives to the EOC, and debate of resolutions.

The union's 2000 Triennial Convention agreed that resolutions adopted at the National Access Conference would be reviewed at the next Triennial Convention. All resolutions adopted at the conference are submitted to the Alliance Executive Committee for its consideration. If possible, some resolutions are implemented while others may be referred to the PSAC Triennial Convention. The most recent conference, for example, passed resolutions for union action on various changes to government policies and employer practices of accommodation.

A wide spectrum of members takes part in the conferences. It may be the first union activity for some delegates. They learn about how the union works, about their rights in the workplace, and build links with other participants. The conferences provide information and the tools needed to get involved on return home. Networking is facilitated by the regional committee session held as part of the conferences.

There is an increasing focus at the Access Conferences on disability rights, political action, social services, and the impact of globalization. The objectives of the 2007 National Access Conference “Transforming Our World: Moving Forward” were to:

- defend quality public services for persons with disabilities
- empower and engage persons with disabilities to take action and move the disability agenda forward
- better connect and to include persons with disabilities in our communities, our workplaces and our union
- lobby in order to transform and to advance the disability rights agenda
- provide tools to advocate for disability rights in our communities, our workplaces and our union

## **Impacts**

Members with disabilities have become more vocal within the union, workplace and communities, and there is less stigma attached to disability.

The Access Conferences are part of and have encouraged a broad range of union policies and practices aimed to overcome barriers for members with disabilities. For example, PSAC attempts to ensure that union information is provided for members and staff in alternate formats (braille, large print, cassettes, captioned or signed videos). The union’s policy on scent-free environments “requests all participants attending any union function refrain from using scented products.” An awareness kit, booklet, and video build understanding of the issue. PSAC has prepared an accessibility checklist for union use with hotels and other venues, and there is greater accessibility in union buildings. The union’s work on equity issues has had an impact on its own human resources policies, including an employment equity policy for PSAC staff.

The duty to accommodate is the biggest issue in workplaces and community services. Workshops on this topic are offered at the Access Conferences, and PSAC developed a five-day course in 2002. The PSAC booklet prepared in 1999-2000 which is currently being updated is a clear language resource on this issue, a tool for local leadership that has proven to be very popular.

There have been some regional requests for the workshops delivered at the Access Conferences. While there are some regional courses, nationally-developed courses and kits (available in French and English) are an important component of PSAC education. The national union also provides a clearinghouse of electronic or hard copies of conference and workshop materials from PSAC regions as well as other unions.

Disability rights are integral to the anti-oppression lens used in PSAC education activities. Courses are accessible in the broadest sense, including recruitment, selection, program content and facilitation. Varied types of accommodation have been made: material is available in alternate formats, adjustable flipcharts are available for members in wheelchairs, sign interpretation is provided. Facilitator orientation includes how to facilitate a large group of people with varied disabilities, inclusive tips, alternatives, and

various scenarios. The anti-oppression section is an important part of the facilitator handbook.

### **What's Next**

Work has begun on a labour education course on disability rights. The PSAC booklet on Duty to Accommodate is being updated, moving away from a return-to-work medical approach to a needs-based approach.

### **Further References**

2005 PSAC National Access Conference: Our Rights – Moving on Up!, *Conference Background Paper*, [psac.com/news/conferences-e.shtml](http://psac.com/news/conferences-e.shtml)

*PSAC Policy 37: Disabilities Issues* (adopted in January 1997)  
[psac.com/about/policies/20-40-e.shtml#pol37](http://psac.com/about/policies/20-40-e.shtml#pol37)

*Disability Action in the Public Service Alliance of Canada*, Anne Whitehurst, 1997  
[psac.com/what/humanrights/Disability\\_Action\\_inthePS-e.shtml](http://psac.com/what/humanrights/Disability_Action_inthePS-e.shtml)

Canadian Labour Congress, *Toward Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Workplace*, December 2008, [canadianlabour.ca/en/Workers\\_with\\_Disabil](http://canadianlabour.ca/en/Workers_with_Disabil)

**Name of Program:** Unionism on Turtle Island

**Central Labour Body:** Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL)

**Contact Person:** Marjorie Huard, SFL Aboriginal Committee member and Chair of the Aboriginal Committee of UFCW Local 1400, c/o Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, [sfl@sfl.sk.ca](mailto:sfl@sfl.sk.ca), 306.525.0197

**Initial Purpose:** To develop an awareness of Aboriginal people's history, culture and the issues they face today so as to counter negative stereotypes and racist discrimination.

**Barriers Addressed:** myths and misconceptions about Aboriginal people; systemic barriers faced by Aboriginal workers including hiring practices and day-to-day work practices.

### **Background Information**

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) is the central labour body of the province. The SFL represents over 95,000 members from 37 national and international unions.

The SFL Aboriginal Committee was established to provide a bridge between Aboriginal people and organized labour. The committee's objectives are to:

1. Raise awareness through communication, conferences and education.
2. Recommend strategies as action plans to individual unions in regard to Aboriginal issues.
3. Provide support for equity issues.
4. Network with all equity-seeking groups and report on activities.
5. Act as a resource to unions and Bands, developing policies around Aboriginal issues.

### **How the Program Started**

Saskatchewan has the highest Aboriginal population per capita; 14.6% of the population is Aboriginal and this population is on average 10 years younger than the general population. Aboriginal people are moving to urban centres and entering the labour force in increasing numbers. Over the next 20 years, the Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan could double and this will result in a large increase of the Aboriginal working age population. When many First Nations and Métis people enter the workforce, they may face an environment that is plagued with misunderstanding and discrimination.

To address this, the labour education course Unionism on Turtle Island was developed by the SFL Aboriginal Committee in 2001 and offered at the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Spring School and SFL Spring School. At the Prairie School for Union Women, Union Women on Turtle Island is offered for those "who want to understand the issues [that] Aboriginal women face in diverse working conditions. Participants will explore the reasons for the invisibility of Aboriginal women in union structures and begin to develop strategies that encourage Sisterhood."

Originally intended for non-Aboriginal union members (though with ongoing participation from Aboriginal members), the course develops awareness of the historical events that form the context of issues faced by Aboriginal people today. The course creates a better understanding of the shared struggles of Aboriginal people and unions and builds participant capacity to become instruments of positive change.

## **The Course**

Unionism on Turtle Island uses a popular education approach meaning that facilitators do not “teach” but rather “facilitate” a learning process through a series of exercises that allow participants to draw their own conclusions. The course tries to have a First Nations and Métis person co-facilitate (one male and one female facilitator).

The facilitators are upfront about how issues dealt with in the course may be sensitive for participants, especially when it involves the un-learning of lessons from early childhood. Trying to ease participants into this, facilitators start with the gentler activities and build to more challenging ones. Participation is usually limited to 16 people to ensure a comfortable learning environment (occasionally the course has been expanded to include up to 20 people).

Topics addressed by Unionism on Turtle Island include:

- Developing a common language (i.e. terms and definitions)
- Power relations between Aboriginal people and other Canadians at the turn of the century and today
- Dispelling myths and misconceptions about Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal demographics
- Barriers faced by Aboriginal workers:
  - lack of affordable housing
  - lack of safe drinking water
  - misunderstandings stemming from residential schools
  - trans-racial/international adoption
  - dealing with racism in the workplace
  - Employment Equity backlash and resentment, ‘tokenism’
- Kanesatake-Oka crisis
- Treaties
- History of Aboriginal people
- Forming partnerships with other racialized communities
- Creating a more inclusive work environment for the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers

During the course, a “Candid Conversation with an Elder” provides participants an opportunity to ask questions and the Elders to share their stories. Elders may discuss their experiences of being in residential schools for example. Participants may also have the opportunity to attend a sweat lodge ceremony depending on the sponsoring union’s budget.

The course also addresses the perceived adversarial nature of unions based on the necessity of struggle to achieve many basic worker rights. This can be a barrier to the participation of Aboriginal members in the union, explains Marjorie Huard, SFL Aboriginal Committee member and Chair of the Aboriginal Committee of UFCW Local 1400. This is because most Aboriginal cultures prefer a cooperative approach to problem-solving.

A mock convention with “pro” and “con” debaters helps participants develop arguments and tools they can then use in their workplace and union discussions. As the course comes to a close, participants work in groups on solutions to overcome the barriers that Aboriginal people face every day. They ask themselves: what can we do as individuals, co-workers? What can unions and employers do? Participants gain knowledge, skills and responsibility to themselves and others to work together and not turn a blind eye when they see something that is not right. This includes actions at the local level – strategies for forming allies with the Aboriginal communities, building trust between unions and Aboriginal people, and promoting the inclusion of Aboriginal workers.

### **How the Program Evolved**

Following early success at CLC and SFL schools, individual unions started to request the course. The Saskatchewan Government and General Employees’ Union, the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1400 and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union have offered the course, which has also been delivered in Manitoba.

Originally developed as a five-day course, Unionism on Turtle Island has also been adapted and offered in three-day, three-and-a-half day, and four-day versions. It has also been offered as a mini-workshop called Peek at Turtle Island for UFCW Local 1400’s Steward conference and at the SFL Equity Conference in 2007.

Over the years, the course has been modified by the facilitators. For instance, the well-known 10-square exercise shows the power relations of income earners. But the Aboriginal issue is lost because Aboriginal people are included with other Canadians in the low spectrum. Facilitators adapted the exercise to show the relationship Aboriginal people had with the rest of Canadians at the turn of the century in terms of education and wealth, leading to the question: has it changed all that much today?

### **Impacts**

There have been very good responses to Unionism on Turtle Island and there is no shortage of participants. Asked to comment on the highlights and strengths of the course, participants have noted:

- “The friendly atmosphere enables participants to learn in a comfortable environment.”
- “The timeline was so mind blowing. Oka video was soul shattering.”

- “It cleared up most of the myths that I heard about Aboriginal people.”
- “It has encouraged me to look deeper into issues relating to Aboriginal people. It will help me to promote awareness with my community, workplace and in my union.”
- “I will never again turn my back, my eyes are open.”

The course has contributed to greater participation from Aboriginal members in their unions and the SFL Aboriginal Committee continues to be very active.

UFCW Local 1400’s support of Unionism on Turtle Island earned it a nomination by the Saskatchewan Labour Market Commission for the Training for Excellence Award in 2008. This is the premier training and education awards event for the province’s private and public sector unions, employee associations, First Nation and Métis Nation organizations, community-based organizations, associations, and academic communities. UFCW Local 1400 was one of the finalists and recognized for its on-going support in providing members the opportunity to participate in the course.

### **What’s Next**

*Unionism on Turtle Island* will hopefully continue to expand and be offered by more unions to their members. Marjorie Huard notes: “For solidarity to occur, organized labour and Aboriginal people must work together for both to achieve their goals.”

### **Further References**

SFL Aboriginal Committee: <http://www.sfl.sk.ca/aboriginal.php>

UFCW Local 1400 Aboriginal Committee Report:  
[http://fpufcw14.sasktelwebhosting.com/aboriginal\\_committee\\_page.htm](http://fpufcw14.sasktelwebhosting.com/aboriginal_committee_page.htm)

**Name of Program:** Aboriginal Workers / Workers of Colour Conferences

**Central Labour Body:** Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYLC)

**Contact Person:** TYLC Equity Committee, 416.441.3663, [council@labourcouncil.ca](mailto:council@labourcouncil.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To provide space for Aboriginal workers and other racialized workers to caucus, as part of an overall organizing effort; to underline the importance of fighting racism in society and within the structures of unions; and to strengthen the leadership role of Aboriginal / racialized workers in their unions in Toronto and York Region.

### **Barriers Addressed**

The conference addresses the barriers that Aboriginal workers and workers of colour experience in accessing educational programs on labour issues in particular and continuing education in general. More fundamentally, the conference raises the issue of lack of equitable participation of Aboriginal workers and workers of colour in their own unions and the structural challenges that prevent such equitable participation. For example, these issues relate to underrepresentation of racialized workers in their union leadership and certain staff positions, issues of employment equity, and the lack of effective representation by unions around issues important to Aboriginal workers/workers of colour.

### **Background Information**

The Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYLC) is composed of 150 local unions representing 195,000 working men and women in Toronto and York Region. Its Equity Committee is a standing committee of the TYLC.

### **How the Program Started**

First held in 2003, the one-day Workers of Colour / Aboriginal Workers Conference is an annual event sponsored by the Toronto and York Labour Council. The idea of a conference evolved from the advocacy efforts of Aboriginal workers and workers of colour from various affiliates who are themselves strong champions of equity within their unions and communities. Informed by their struggle to fight racism and remove race-based barriers to participation and access to jobs and services in their lives, these union activists together with their allies, presented a resolution to a gathering of the Toronto and York Region participants at the 2002 Canadian Labour Congress' Aboriginal/-Workers of Colour Conference. The resolution's recommendations included the holding of a "workers of colour conference in Toronto in June 2003 to move (the equity) agenda forward."

Since then the conference has been an event where about 150-200 Aboriginal workers and workers of colour can find their voice, build networks, and frame issues in the context of their reality, as union members and as members of their respective

communities. In this sense the conference, in very practical terms, directly opened up access to training and education and space for networking and advocacy for Aboriginal workers and workers of colour in the Toronto and York regions.

### **How the Program Evolved**

The concept of an annual conference and the actual practices around it evolved very quickly over time: in terms of who participates, the basic themes and content, the program structure, and the pedagogy or learning methodology.

Over the last couple of years, there has been a significant shift in the profile of those who attend. Originally the conference participants were mostly union members. More and more, participants come from communities who do not belong to a union. This shift is due in large part to an explicit effort by the conference committee to expand the range of participants. It is also influenced in no small way by the growing “community unionism” trend that is actively cultivated by council, its two projects (Labour Education Centre and Labour Community Services) and its community partners.

This shift in participant-base is driven by, and to some extent drives the strategic thrust to locate workers’ struggles within the broader framework of a social justice movement. Such a movement goes beyond the bread and butter issues of job security, benefits, and union representation for union members. It expands to include broader social issues like environment, immigration, war, poverty, food security as well as job security.

The conference format has evolved too, reflecting a greater strategic coherence. Instead of simultaneous workshops with multiple themes, a strategic framework was developed that connects various issues and struggles around a common goal, within a defining context. For the last two years (2007-08), that defining context was corporate globalization. The goal: to be an active part of a movement that challenges the global corporate agenda and that creates another world. In 2007 the theme was: “Equity in a Global Economy: Another World is Possible,” with specific topics to understand how the corporate global agenda creates poverty, war, and racism.

#### *Strategic goal*

In 2008, the overarching theme was “Winning and Building Power: towards a broad-based movement for social and racial justice.” In preparation for the conference, the Equity Committee also articulated its strategic goals for the next three to five years, as follows: “to expand our base of activists and allies; to deepen our understanding of the force of corporate globalization as one that destroys our economy, our communities, and our movement; to connect our struggles across borders, communities, and issues to build power for social and economic justice.” Having such long-term goals provides a broader horizon that will enable the committee to plan and strategize more effectively.

The conference brings together various elements to help frame these long-term goals: “to build power, we must *win and build* – *win* our organizing, contract, electoral, and

legislative campaigns; and *build* capacity, consensus, connections, and critical awareness of issues among ourselves. We ourselves – as union and community members – must work towards the same goal, learning to share power with each other.”

The conference organizers see the varied issues as connected. There is no way to fight for the bread and butter issues of good jobs and job security without somehow linking it to the fight against deregulation, privatization, and liberalization of trade and financial markets. There is no way to effectively bargain or undertake legislative or electoral campaigns, without somehow linking it to an ever-constant campaign to preserve workers’ right to have a say about their work, the economy, and society – a right that corporate globalization undermines.

The fight against racism is not put aside, it is broadened and intensified. The racist character of corporate globalization is one for an equity conference to expose and to challenge. The tax-shift from rich to poor, disinvestment from our communities and social infrastructure, and cutting social services hurt all – but more so the most vulnerable, such as racialized groups. Using these themes, the conference has provided its participants the confidence to name the global corporate agenda, the vision to explore alternatives, and the will to shape strategies.

The “shift in faces and voices” is also demonstrated in the range of educational activities used in the conference workshops. Popular theatre, photo galleries, story-telling, and various other popular education methodologies were utilized. At the afternoon plenary, during the Assembly of Popular Movements (entitled: “This is what solidarity looks like”), workshop participants reported back in various languages to express their vision of solidarity, through songs, drawing, poetry, dance, chants, and skits. Workshop groups were named in honour of our heroes who have gone before us: Viola Desmond, Turtle Island Group, Mohawk Clan Mothers, Bromley Armstrong, the Zapatistas, among others.

## **Impacts**

As an immediate impact, participants have expressed a deeper sense of connection with broader issues and communities, which in itself can be very empowering – “we do not fight alone.” One effect of this is a broader understanding of anti-racism as a struggle that is not just about what is good for racialized peoples and good for society as a whole, in the same way that unions do not just fight for their own members’ rights but also benefit all workers and society as a whole. The anti-racist analysis is further integrated into the broader anti-oppression analysis so that race and class and other forms of oppression are seen as intersecting. At the same time, a more acute recognition of racism as a distinct form of oppression emerges because there is a colour line when talking about the economic, political and social power structure.

Quite significantly, this framework facilitates a more robust dialogue among workers of colour, whether they are in or outside the formal structure of unions. The barriers fall away: non-unionized workers get to appreciate the role of unions, and union activists get to recognize the role of non-unionized community activists. Whether based in the

community or the workplace, the struggle of activists is joined to achieve a common end: community groups fight for good jobs too, just as unions also want a racism-free society.

On another level, this “equity as global justice” approach provides the Labour Council, Labour Education Centre, and Labour Community Services a common framework for union education. The elements of equity in unions, community and unions, and the global economy are now shared elements in their work. This shared framework has helped in some significant ways to advance the conversation around minimum wage, manufacturing job loss, precarious/contingent workers, migrant workers, and low-waged workers.

Workers are workers, but some are migrant workers, others are women workers, older workers, gay and lesbian workers, and workers with disability. The recognition of the specificity of work-conditions and work issues prevents marginalization of certain experiences in favour of a homogenized idea of workers. As a result, a broader range of voices and more diverse stories are heard at the conference. The challenge is to keep the discourse flowing, listening to the nuances and valuing the divergence while always seeking common ground.

### **What’s Next**

Conference participants and equity advocates are connecting the conference themes described above to the conversations that take place in their campaigns, workplaces, and communities.

This approach invites participants and the Equity Committee’s conference planning group to now incorporate the issues from the unfolding global financial meltdown and economic crisis. There is a new “teachable moment.” More people are willing to consider alternatives, even those whose thinking had previously been more in line with neo-liberal ideology. Conversations – in the media or in person – are peppered with critical comments about the failure of the global corporate model.

The challenge is to expand the space of this discourse, to create a climate that can bring forth transformative and bold initiatives to hasten the departure of the discredited corporate model of living and working, and to facilitate the arrival of new ways of thinking, doing, and relating.

### **Further References**

Toronto and York Region Labour Council: [www.labourcouncil.ca/equity.html](http://www.labourcouncil.ca/equity.html)

**Name of Program:** Agriculture Workers Alliance Support Centres

**Union:** Agriculture Workers Alliance, United Food and Commercial Workers Canada

**Contact Person:** Stan Raper, National Coordinator, Agriculture Workers Alliance, UFCW Canada, 416.675.1104, ext. 232, [sraper@ufcw.ca](mailto:sraper@ufcw.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To ensure that all agricultural workers (foreign or domestic) have the same rights as other Canadian workers.

**Barriers Addressed:** systemic barriers including legal bans on agricultural workers forming unions, dangerous and unhealthy working and living conditions, worker exploitation and intimidation, language barriers, issues of historic racism, isolation, lack of medical care

### **Background Information**

The United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW Canada) is the largest private-sector union in the country with over 250,000 members. Members work in every aspect of the food industry from field to table, including at a number of agribusiness operations in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec. UFCW members are also employed in the retail, manufacturing and service sectors.

### **How the Program Started**

Building on union efforts to assist agricultural workers undertaken since 1993, UFCW Canada established the first Migrant Agricultural Workers Support Centre in 2002 as a worker-focused, comprehensive resource, training and advocacy centre focused on the workplace, health, legal and social challenges facing migrant agriculture workers.

The first centre (in Leamington, Ontario) marked a new stage in supporting the workers brought to Canada through the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (CSAWP).<sup>24</sup> Established in 1966 by the federal government, CSAWP assists farm employers by facilitating temporary migrant workers to come to Canada. More than 20,000 workers come to Canada each year, from Mexico, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and other Caribbean countries. They work in the fruit, vegetable and horticulture sectors.

Farm labour is seasonal, difficult and low-paying work. In many provinces, migrant farm workers are excluded from the protection of provincial employment standards and labour

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<sup>24</sup> CSAWP served as a model for the broader Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). The 2003 pilot of the TFWP also involved agricultural workers (though not seasonal). Mexican worm harvesters working in London, Ontario (predominantly women), arrived at the UFCW Migrant Workers Support Centre in Simcoe seeking assistance. The union subsequently sponsored a four-month tour in Ontario and Quebec with the three women, emphasizing the potential of the exploitation inherent in the TFWP.

relations legislation. Workers are excluded from the negotiation of their working and living conditions under the CSAWP.

Migrant farm workers face many concerns:

- work accidents and deaths
- repatriation without appeal
- limited if any enforcement or monitoring of work contracts
- mistreatment and violence
- sickness like West Nile Virus and pesticide exposure
- work permits tied to only one employer
- discriminatory treatment
- retention of documents
- sub-standard housing
- delays in receiving pay

At the outset UFCW Canada's support for migrant workers combined legal challenges and advocacy as well as direct programs and free services through the Support Centres. The centres provide a range of training programs in Spanish or English with translation. From small groups of 5-10 people to 200-300 in a church basement, workshops are offered on subjects such as Workers Compensation, Employment Insurance, WHMIS and OSHA training and Know Your Rights. Specific topics have included heat stress, pesticide exposure, handling chemicals safely, and the West Nile virus.

Workers attend on their own time and are also provided with print material in English or Spanish as needed. Computer training on how to use email and the internet has also been provided, enabling workers to keep in touch with family in their home country.

On the legal front, UFCW Canada challenged the exclusion of farm workers from collective bargaining rights as unconstitutional under the Freedom of Association provision of the Charter. In 2001, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of the union's position. The Ontario Government then implemented an association law but without the right to bargain collectively. In late 2008, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that the Ontario government must drop its association law because it violated the Charter rights of agricultural workers. The Ontario government has appealed the decision to the Supreme Court; the hearing is expected to take place in December 2009.

### **How the Program Evolved**

Following the success of the Leamington Support Centre, UFCW Canada, in association with the Agriculture Workers Alliance (see below), now operates a total of nine AWA support centres, located in Kelowna, Abbotsford and Surrey (British Columbia), Portage la Prairie (Manitoba), St. Rémi (Quebec) and Simcoe, Bradford and Virgil (Ontario). The centres operate during the peak growing season (approximately six months) reflecting the seasonal schedule of the workers.

The AWA was established in 2008 as the first-ever Canadian national advocacy and support network for domestic as well as foreign agriculture workers in Canada. In addition to staffing and administering the nine centres, the AWA has also assembled a national databank to keep in touch with workers and members as they move from one province to another. The AWA has its own constitution and bylaws.

The AWA centres' success speaks to the needs of workers and the effectiveness of the outreach and activities of the staff. On average, each centre has one full-time and one part-time staff member. The diverse, multilingual staff is recruited through churches, labour, and community. They undertake case work and offer assistance on a range of areas, including:

- issues about working conditions
- repatriation cases
- filing Workers Compensation claims and appeals
- queries regarding payroll deductions, hours worked and vacation pay entitlements
- translation requests for medical care, banking
- obtaining health cards
- submitting parental benefits claims under Employment Insurance
- English or French as a second language

Language classes are taught by volunteers – union activists, university students, retirees and community members. Held in evenings and weekends, the ESL and FSL classes use resources developed for agriculture workers and focus on basic vocabulary for work and living. With employers and other relevant groups, the AWA also shares information with the Frontier College “labour teachers” who are hired by the employers to work in the fields and teach ESL/FSL during work and in the evenings.

The Alliance also provides Spanish language training through the UFCW’s Training Centres to union members who may be in contact with migrant workers. The AWA operates a multilingual website, and publishes information pamphlets in a number of languages which are distributed through the centres.

Through action and informal learning, the centres help develop agriculture workers as leaders. The centres empower workers by raising awareness of their rights under federal and provincial statutes. Evidence of this can be seen in the 2003 documentary *El Contrato*, as well as the award-winning 2007 documentary, *Los Mexicanos: The Struggles of Patricia Perez*.

Taking a community organizing approach in their ongoing political campaign to achieve justice for migrant workers, UFCW Canada and the AWA work with a wide range of partners (including faith-based groups, academics, local labour leaders, social justice groups and others). The work has resulted in increased public awareness of the inadequacies and inequities faced by agricultural workers and an increasing demand for government action.

## Impacts

Migrant workers have paid a heavy price in the struggle for their rights. Many have suffered intimidation and reprisals from their employers, have been fired unjustly, have endured forced repatriation or have been kicked out of the CSAWP program. “They have sacrificed themselves for the betterment of others, and are never coming back,” notes Stan Raper, AWA National Coordinator.

The Support Centres have helped migrant workers win millions of dollars in tax rebates and Employment Insurance claims. Since 2003, they have handled thousands of cases assisting workers to collect EI parental benefits. In 2008 alone, during the six months in which the centres operate, they assisted with over 2000 claims representing \$10 million in benefits to SAWP workers which they receive in their home country.

The empowerment of workers through knowledge has also been a significant benefit. Through the resources of UFCW Canada/AWA, thousands of migrant and temporary agriculture workers have gained access to workers’ rights and worker education and training in their own language – something that did not exist before.

Workers have trust and respect for the union and the AWA centres. This is seen in successful organizing of both temporary and immigrant agriculture workers in those provinces without or with fewer limitations. UFCW Canada has won certifications in Quebec, British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and has three certifications pending in Ontario.

## What’s Next?

As the Agriculture Workers Alliance grows, a convention will be organized that will allow agriculture workers to elect leaders from the membership. The hope is to build a strong organization at all levels: farm, region, province, national, and with international ties.

Since 2007, UFCW Canada has held meetings with government officials in Canada, Mexico, Jamaica and other Eastern Caribbean countries about improving the conditions of migrant workers in Canada under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. The union has also partnered with two of the largest farmer and community organizations in Mexico, to strengthen the fight for migrant workers’ rights.

## Further References

Agriculture Workers Alliance website: <http://awa-ata.ca/en/>

*Los Mexicanos: The Struggles of Patricia Perez*  
[http://www.macumbainternational.com/eng/2\\_12.php](http://www.macumbainternational.com/eng/2_12.php)

*El Contrato* Documentary website: <http://www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/?id=51087>

UFCW Canada website: [www.ufcw.ca](http://www.ufcw.ca) (see Agricultural Workers under Campaigns)

**Name of Program:** Leadership Training

**Organization:** Workers' Action Centre

**Contact Person:** Sonia Singh, Organizer, [sonia@workersactioncentre.org](mailto:sonia@workersactioncentre.org), 416.531.0778 ext. 221

### **Background Information**

The Workers' Action Centre (WAC) was formed in 2005 through the merger of two existing workers' rights groups: Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment (TOFFE) and the Workers' Information Centre (WIC). The WAC is a worker-based organization committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low-wage and unstable jobs (such as temporary or contract positions).

The WAC aims to ensure that workers' rights are protected and that workers are treated with dignity and fairness. The WAC membership is made up of recent immigrants, workers of colour, women, youth and workers in precarious jobs. Most of their members do not belong to unions because they work in small workplaces, work as temporary workers, work on contract, are independent contractors or unemployed. WAC receives funding from the City of Toronto, private foundations and various union donations.

### **How the Program Started**

The Leadership Training program was created as part of the WAC's commitment to maximizing involvement of workers impacted by precarious work and weak labour laws with the intention of developing a worker-led organization. The program provides members of the Centre a space to learn and practice leadership skills by speaking out about and organizing against low wages and poor working conditions on behalf of the Centre, and also in their communities. WAC sees their leadership program as a fundamental/core part of the organization.

The Leadership Training program includes evening, half-day, and weekend trainings on a variety of topics, including messaging, public speaking, organizing, media training, meeting with politicians, etc. The program also includes movie nights and speakers who talk about different social and workers' struggles. The participants vary from active WAC members and leaders to new members who are just getting involved in the organization.

### **How the Program Evolved**

WAC has been organizing informal leadership workshops at their Centre and in the community since its inception, and previously through the work of TOFFE and WIC. Formal two-day leadership training with members was started in 2004. As WAC's

organizing campaigns evolved, leadership training was connected more closely to campaigns for a higher minimum wage and updated – and enforced – labour laws. Connecting leadership development to campaigns allows members to practice the skills they have developed in the workshops in real campaigns that impact their lives. This in turn builds confidence in their ability to effect social and political change. Each workshop is based on the principle of sharing and valuing members' life experiences (history and struggles) and that those experiences can be applied to WAC organizing. The workshops also have a component of stepping back from the skills development work to look at the broader systemic issues of precarious work and locating members in the struggle. This component includes the historical context, immigration, and struggles lost and won.

WAC ensures that the content used for leadership training is accessible, for example by ensuring translation or language-specific trainings, focusing on issues or skills WAC members have identified. WAC also ensures that the trainings are accessible logistically by offering a range of training times: on weekends for members that work during the week, evenings for members that work during the day. They also provide transit fares, food and child care for members that need it.

Since the program started, over 300 participants have taken part in a leadership training workshop or event through the Workers' Action Centre.

## **Impacts**

Through promoting and profiling their success, WAC has been able to encourage others across Ontario to think about starting similar centres in their areas. Members that have taken the leadership training have helped with outreach by speaking about the Centre's work and programs to community members outside the Greater Toronto Area.

Through WAC's partnerships with various unions, they have been able to connect their non-unionized members to union training opportunities. For example, WAC members participated in the United Steelworkers Globalization School in March 2008. They have also worked in solidarity with unions on joint labour-community campaigns such as the \$10 Minimum Wage Campaign and the Good Jobs for All Summit. WAC has received union support for their campaigns such as the Bad Boss Tour, picketing Amato Pizza, and the Up Against a Giant Campaign (UPS).

Members participating in the leadership training have benefited from having a space to discuss work-related issues and develop skills. When workers first come to the Centre they are usually focused on a very specific individual issue. As they get more involved and participate in the trainings and campaigns, they are able to connect their struggle with the broader community and international fight.

The Centre sees immediate results in members' increased self-confidence and the skills they have learned, developed and improved. For example, after participating in the leadership training, members are able to confidently ask questions at a microphone at an all-candidates meeting and participate in MPP meetings, community events and raise

workers' rights issues. Members have also made connections with broader workers' struggles in Canada and internationally. This encourages movement building along with individual self-empowerment.

### **What's Next**

From each training the Centre learns something new to help improve future trainings. Due to ongoing changes in membership, the WAC constantly evaluates the training methods, content and procedures they use. The organizing team identifies possible barriers participants might face and maps out how to address these issues.

WAC continues to look for effective ways to incorporate translation as participants speak a variety of languages. Structuring training to accommodate language needs and making sure each member feels equally able to participate is a challenge when doing multi-racial organizing.

WAC will continue to do leadership training through its various community organizing committees. They would like to develop more two-day sessions and advanced training for members that have completed the first round of leadership training. WAC also hopes to explore more deeply themes such as anti-oppression, racism and immigration issues.

The Leadership Training program has helped build and strengthen the base of members that play a key role in the Centre, its organizational capacity and campaigns. Members ensure the Centre achieves its mission of being a member-driven active part of the fight to challenge unfair labour laws and bad bosses and the movement for social and economic justice and change in the broader community.

**Further References:** [www.workersactioncentre.org](http://www.workersactioncentre.org)

Juana Berinstein, "Temp Workers & Deadbeat Bosses: The Fight for Jobs with Justice," *Our Times*, October/November 2004.

Cynthia J. Cranford and Deena Ladd, "Community Unionism: Organising for Fair Employment in Canada," *Just Labour*, Volume 3 (Fall 2003), [www.justlabour.yorku.ca/index.php?page=toc&volume=3](http://www.justlabour.yorku.ca/index.php?page=toc&volume=3)

**Name of Program:** Migration: Our History, Our Resistance

**Organization:** Migrante-Ontario

**Contact Person:** Marco Luciano, spokesperson and coordinator, 647.205.5908, [migrante.ontario@gmail.com](mailto:migrante.ontario@gmail.com)

**Barriers Addressed:** Isolation of new immigrants, specifically those who are low-waged, working in contingent jobs (such as temporary or contract positions), and whose immigration status is vulnerable. A large percentage of them are women, which further increases their marginalization. A specific vulnerability of this mostly-female workforce is the nature of their employment as live-in caregivers. Such working conditions engender all kinds of health and safety hazards with very little access to what would typically be available in terms of legal protection.

### **Background Information**

More than 10 percent of the Philippine population works overseas in various industries (for example as skilled and professional workers in seafaring, health care, domestic service, construction, and teaching). Migrante-Ontario is an alliance of Filipino migrant organizations in Ontario. It does education, organizing, and political advocacy around issues of migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, to address the root causes of their exploitation in the context of corporate globalization. It works closely with various Filipino migrant/immigrant groups in British Columbia, Winnipeg, and Montreal (including the Immigrant Workers' Centre).

Migrante-Ontario is part of two global alliances dedicated to addressing the displacement and exploitation of workers from the global south. One is Migrante International, a global alliance of more than 100 overseas Filipino organizations in 22 countries; and the other is the International Migrants Alliance, which consists of migrants' and refugees' organizations across the world. More broadly, Migrante-Ontario also works in collaboration with various international networks of the Philippine popular movement.

### **How the Program Started**

Migrante-Ontario, and its education and organizing work, is essentially an organized response of Filipino workers to corporate globalization. Corporate globalization exploits all workers but specifically displaces the workers from the global south and then pulls them into the workplaces of the global north as cheap and disposable labour. Migrante's educational work links the specific working conditions of migrant workers to the overall economic system that creates migration and a cheap pool of international labour that can be easily moved across borders at the service of global corporations seeking maximum profits.

While working to address the fundamental roots of migrant workers' exploitation, Migrante-Ontario has focused on the need for a fundamental change in the Live-in

Caregiver Program of Canada. This program brings in workers from the global south (mostly women) to work as live-in caregivers in Canadian homes; they are temporary workers with highly restricted employment rights. Concretely, Migrante-Ontario was born in the throes of the Filipino community's struggle to seek justice for the violent death of a Filipina domestic worker, Jocelyn Dulnuan, who was murdered in her employer's home in Toronto in October 2007. Migrante and others worked to gather Filipino organizations, old and new, into one strong voice to be at the forefront of the struggle for equality and rights in Canada and be part of the struggle for freedom and democracy of their homeland.

One of the education programs of Migrante-Ontario is the course, *Migration: Our History, Our Resistance*. It is a four-hour course offered in two sessions, or as part of a day-long workshop. The course is divided into four parts:

1. The history of Filipino migration to other countries
2. Root causes of migration
3. Canada's need for migrants
4. Where do we go from here?

The course was initially designed for new members of Migrante-Ontario. The course helps to connect participants to the broader Filipino community in Ontario, and through them, to the wider Canadian society. Because the history and root causes of the migration of Filipinos and other migrant communities are strikingly similar, Migrante now delivers the course to all those interested in learning about and understanding the history and resistance of Filipino migrants.

### *Course context*

The objectives of the course are directly linked to the struggle of Filipinos in the home country for social and economic justice. The course supports the wider goal of building a broad-based and internationalist movement for social change with roots among migrant workers/immigrants in the Filipino Diaspora.

The displacement of such a huge workforce from the Philippines, many forced to leave the country to work in contract and low-wage jobs, presented a major human rights and workers rights challenge to the Philippine progressive movement. The Philippine popular movements from the labour, peasant, women, faith, and urban poor sectors, have banded together and consciously made links with overseas/migrant Filipino workers. These progressive sectors see the intrinsic link between the struggle for social and economic justice within Philippine society and the specific social and economic issues confronting overseas Filipino workers. They see emigration (out-migration) as but a demonstration of chronic unemployment plaguing the economy, which in turn is rooted in the structural and systemic imbalance of power within the society. It is in this historical and current context that Migrante-Ontario has developed its course, with both general and specific goals.

### *Course goals and objectives*

In general, the course aims to build international solidarity among all Filipino workers, linking those in the Philippines and those overseas. Such solidarity is seen to be a fundamental component of the fight against global capital, which has created and continues to maintain the neo-colonial character of Philippine society. With the Philippine economy subordinated to the demands of global capitalism, Filipino workers are kept in poverty and then forced out to seek other economic options in the richer countries of the global north. And, upon arrival in the north, they undergo another phase of workers' exploitation because of their vulnerable immigration and employment status.

More specifically, the course supports the efforts of workers to protect their rights and welfare as workers, immigrants, or even citizens in Canada. At the same time, the course effectively serves as a form of outreach and organizing among Filipino workers, linking community and workplace struggles, and local issues to the global context. It acts as a forum for leadership development, community networking, and collective advocacy. The course also helps participants develop a critical understanding of Canadian society from a class and race-based perspective, and linking the participants to different activist groups advocating for social change within the broad Canadian society.

In its workshop series, Migrante focuses on the following themes:

1. The history and root causes of Filipino migration
2. Basis of unity among organizations advocating for the rights and welfare among im/migrant Filipinos in Canada
3. Canadian society: workers, immigrants, and live-in caregivers

### **Impacts**

The course has served as an effective rallying point for participants, bringing them together and linking them to other groups in the community. For example, they were actively involved in the Justice for Jeffrey Campaign, a community organizing and advocacy campaign brought about by the shooting death of a Filipino youth, Jeffrey Reodica, by the Toronto police in 2004.

In partnership with the United Steelworkers District 6 and community members, Migrante was instrumental in creating the Independent Workers Association (IWA). This association is lobbying the Canadian government to review immigration laws specific to workers under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program and the Live-in Caregiver Program.

With the support of resource people from the United Steelworkers on such topics as immigration and labour as well as for tax clinics, Migrante offers training and education to IWA members. Various issues are addressed: workers rights, health and safety; leadership skills, community networking, and union and community organizing; skills

upgrading and employment-related information; and access to services in the community and government agencies.

A significant impact can also be seen in the organizing of youth and cultural groups (such as Philippine Advocacy through the Arts and Culture, or PATAC), which now form a vibrant part of its network.

In the broader fight for migrant workers' rights, Migrante has joined forces with Justicia (Justice for Migrant Workers), which advocates for the rights of temporary agricultural workers mostly in southern Ontario. Migrante is now working with the Labour Education Centre to co-develop with Justicia a course for union members on migrant workers' struggles and union renewal.

### **What's Next**

Migrante will continue its education, organizing, and advocacy work for the rights and welfare of migrant workers. This is part of its effort to build international solidarity in its fight against the excesses of global capitalism, specifically in the way it destroys national economies that lead to the displacement of workers. It is in the process of developing stronger links with labour organizations, international solidarity groups and other grassroots social justice organizations. More specifically it aims to support the building of a progressive workers' movement in Canada with a strong internationalist framework, in the context of the global economy. It recently supported a delegation of Canadian unions to meet with unions in the Philippines as part of a continuing effort to build international links between unions.

Migrante will continue to participate in various cross-sector coalitions, such as Toronto's Good Jobs for All coalition, which consists of unions and community-based organizations. It will continue to work to establish a national presence in Canada through the formation of Migrante-Canada, linking Filipino migrant organizations in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. Migrante will intensify its efforts to link migrant workers' struggles here with those of workers in the Philippines, especially with Philippine progressive labour unions.

### **Further References**

Migrante-Ontario website: [migrante.ca](http://migrante.ca)

**Name of Program:** UFCW Canada Training Centres

**Union:** UFCW Canada

**Contact Person:** Bryan Neath, Director, National Training and Education Department, 416.675.1104 ext 253, [bneath@ufcw.ca](mailto:bneath@ufcw.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To develop a place where members could obtain skills and abilities to move forward in the workplace, improve their lives, and increase participation in the union and labour movement.

**Barriers Addressed:** part-time workers, gender, family responsibilities, shifts

### **Background Information**

UFCW Canada represents more than 250,000 workers across the country. Members are employed in food and retail, as well as in the manufacturing and service sectors. While the union continues to have a few single-workplace-based locals of varied sizes, there has been a growing trend within the union toward larger, merged locals. Several locals have memberships province-wide.

### **How the Program Started**

In 1981, UFCW Local 1977 negotiated a training trust fund. Six years later they were able to open the Cliff Evans Training Centre. Within a year, the centre offered the first new-skills bakery and produce training courses. By offering new-skills training, the union wanted to help its part-time members access full-time job opportunities, and to help its female members access work not traditionally done by women. Currently, the centre offers more than 40 courses: skills training, computer courses, steward training and essential skills courses. Since its inception, over 20,000 certificates of completion have been awarded.

The success of Local 1977 inspired other locals to negotiate and establish training trust funds. In almost all cases, the funds are union controlled. All are funded by negotiated employer contributions, based on a certain number of cents per hour per employee. Through the 1990s until today, nine other locals across Canada have established training centres.

The centres offer free training for all members, with scheduling sensitive to shifts and family responsibilities. Programs such as GED, ESL and English upgrading are common. Most courses are instructed by members or union staff.

## How the Program Evolved

The UFCW Canada National Training and Education Department provides ongoing support to the training centres, including an annual educators' conference. The conference program is planned by a committee of training centre directors. The 2008 conference focused on creating multi-media, on-line training, pandemic awareness and diversity training.

In British Columbia, Local 247 has six training centres operating in various communities. Most of its programs focus on members and people in the community with barriers in the labour market such as: workers over age 45, trades workers with transferable skills, English as a second language, youth, and access to GED. Local 247 launched the first Discovery of Apprenticeship program, a 21-week exploration of skilled trades for unemployed youth. This program offers a hands-on opportunity to try out various trades such as carpentry, painting and decorating, masonry trades, transportation and the metal/welding trades. The local also offers a variety of courses such as computers, web design, internet, food safety, CPR and personal growth programs.

Also in British Columbia, UFCW Canada Local 1518 offers in-house courses, as well as online courses for members and their families. Courses include literacy, English as a Second Language, union steward training, organizing, union education through the Internet, floral arranging, nutritional sales, and cashier training. Online courses offer access and flexibility for members, no matter where they are located in the province. Local 1518 was the first centre to offer a course on Computer Anatomy that gives members the skills to build a new computer from scratch. The local is actively exploring other initiatives, including joint education and training with schools, technical institutes, universities, and employers.

UFCW Canada Local 1400's Training Centre in Saskatchewan opened in 1999 and is located in Saskatoon. Responding to the growing diversity of communities in Saskatchewan, Local 1400 was the first local to offer the course Unionism on Turtle Island (described in a separate sketch on page 140 of this publication). This five-day course is designed for all workers (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) who want to learn more about Aboriginal issues and who want to work in solidarity with their First Nations and Métis brothers and sisters. The course provides a supportive environment in which to explore attitudes, ideas, and questions. Local 1400 also offers general and computer-based training, Red Cross Standard First Aid and CPR/AED certification, steward courses, and a new course on workplace violence and bullying prevention.

The *Centre de formation de l'alimentation et du commerce du Québec* (CFACQ; the Quebec Food and Retail Training Centre) has been the door to a better life for hundreds of new Canadians as well as established residents looking for the best in professional, hands-on training in all aspects of the retail food industry. For many years, the leadership of UFCW Canada Local 500R had envisioned the need for such a community-building resource, and it was finally realized in 2005 when their state-of-the-art facility opened in central Montreal. While Local 500R and CFACQ share the same building, the Centre is

an independent not-for-profit corporation with its own board of directors, funded in part by bargained employer contributions to the Local 500R education fund, as well as funding from the Montreal Board of Education and the Quebec Ministry of Labour.

CFACQ and its government partners spent two years developing and delivering a retail grocery training curriculum for new Canadians, high school students, and people on social assistance looking to get into the retail food and commercial sector. The 450-hour food retailing course is delivered to 16 students at a time. Classroom instruction includes such topics as safe food handling and hygiene, business etiquette and organizational skills, and skills about merchandising produce, bakery, meat, seafood, and specialty cheeses.

Local 361W's training centre in Halifax provides members with support on job searching including resume planning. Local 401's training centre in Edmonton provides a broad range of labour studies courses. Local 1000A represents members working at Loblaws and No Frills grocery stores in Ontario. Their training centres offer such courses as steward training, organizing, instructor training, and health and safety.

See also the following sketches in this report:

- UFCW Local 832 Training Centre: Mature Student Diploma Program, page 38
- UFCW Local 1977 Training Centre: Work Skills Program, page 82
- UFCW Locals 175 and 633 Training Centre: Internet Distance Education Program, page 163

## **Impacts**

“We have been working hard to reach thousands of members – members that we normally would not reach with traditional union education – by offering various courses,” says Bryan Neath, Director of the National Training and Education Department. “Members may come in for CPR or floral design, but all training has a union aspect. Members gain a better understanding of the union. Being involved in training provides members with the confidence and desire to be more active in the union.”

The centres and training funds have also enabled the union to develop programs that they otherwise might not be able to do, including union-driven courses such as Unionism on Turtle Island.

## **What's Next**

The training centres continue to develop new materials and new programs such as diversity training, women's issues, strike and lockout training, as well as updating older programs that can be used nationally. They continue to introduce more technology into training programs, such as interactive video and PowerPoint-based games.

The national union also hopes to benefit the training centres and members through its participation in sector councils. Working alongside the Canadian Food Industry Council for example, provides the potential for developing country-wide distance education and other training programs for retail workers.

In January 2009, the National Training and Education Department launched *webCampus*. This interactive online learning facility provides UFCW members and their families the freedom to learn – free of charge. Offered in both English and French, the courses are fully accredited in partnership with Ontario’s Mohawk College. Courses available in both languages include Internet 101; Health & Safety Level I, Part 1; Introduction to the Union and Stewardship; and Workplace Violence. Additional courses to be added soon include Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, WHMIS for Workers, Hours of Work, and Introduction to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point system (HACCP).

In 2009, UFCW Canada’s ongoing battle for migrant workers’ rights will see nine migrant workers’ centres operating across Canada. This includes the addition of the latest centre in Surrey, British Columbia. The focus of these centres is to provide tools and support for temporary or foreign migrant workers. The centres provide such benefits as: information on working conditions (general labour rights, payroll deductions, hours of work, holiday, vacation pay, health and safety); preparing income tax returns; understanding CPP, parental benefits, EI, workers’ compensation, and health cards; as well as general services such as translation, hospital or doctor concerns, and banking. (See sketch in this report on the Agriculture Workers Alliance Support Centres.)

### **Further References**

Links to UFCW Training Centres across Canada can be found in the Training and Education section under Resources on the UFCW website: <http://www.ufcw.ca/>

Links to UFCW Canada webCampus: <http://webCampus.ufcw.ca>

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Internet Distance Education Program

**Union:** United Food and Commercial Workers Locals 175 and 633

**Contact Person:** Kelly Nicholas, Training and Education Coordinator,  
[kelly.nicholas@ufcw175.com](mailto:kelly.nicholas@ufcw175.com), 905.821.8329 or 1.800.565.8329 ext. 2228

**Initial Purpose:** To use technology to help build the union; to provide educational opportunities to as many members as possible, where members live.

**Barriers Addressed:** shift work; time constraints of parents with young children, single parents; participants in remote areas; different learning styles

### **Background Information**

With about 50,000 members, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 175 is the largest union local in Canada. Members are employed in retail, retirement and nursing facilities, packaging, manufacturing and other sectors, throughout Ontario.

Together with Local 633, Local 175 operates Training Centres in Mississauga and Hamilton, supplemented with a wide variety of programs offered regionally. Initiated about 10 years ago, the training program is funded through a training trust fund based on negotiated employer contributions. All programs are available free to members and their families. In addition to the Internet Distance Education Program, the Training Centre offers computer courses, ESL and Grade 12 (in partnership with school boards around the province), stewards seminars, health and safety courses, First Aid/CPR, study and test writing skills, math, enhanced reading and writing, GED test preparation, safe food handling, women's self-defence.

### **How the Program Started**

About eight years ago, the Training Centre started exploring possibilities for distance education, a continuation of efforts to reach more members, where they live. The early stage of the program was experimental, limited by the high cost of development at that time (about \$300,000 to develop a 3-5 hour course).

### **How the Program Evolved**

“A turning point was reached about three years ago,” explains former Training Centre director Victor Carrozzino, with several contributing factors:

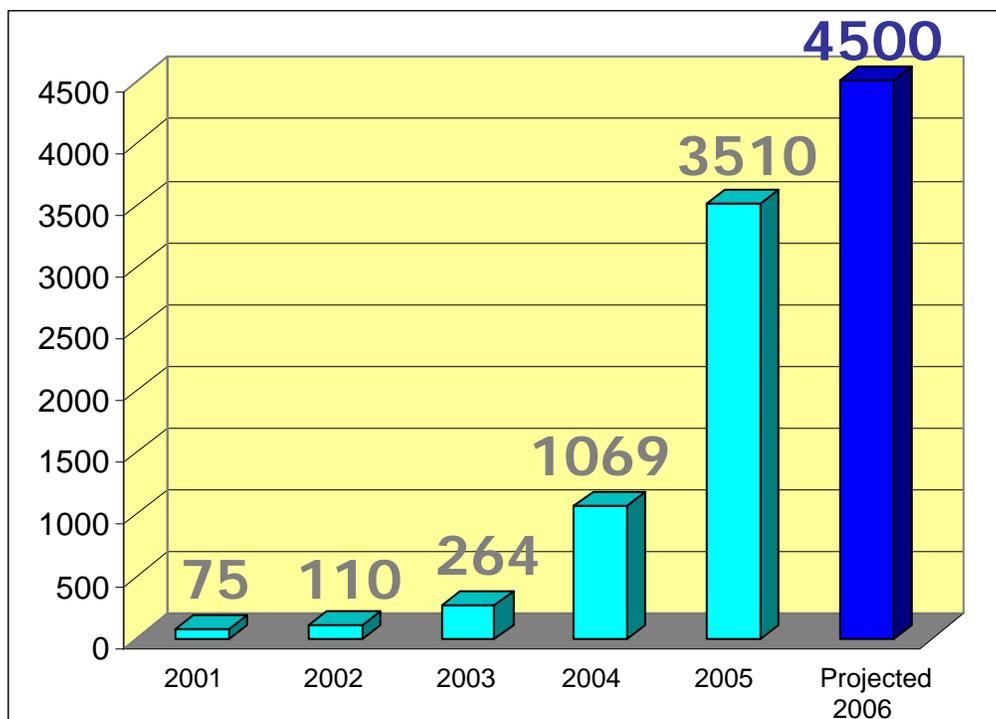
- a full-fledged technical environment, “learning management system”, provided the needed infrastructure and allowed for audio-visual conferencing (today's “TEC Room”)
- access to high speed internet expanded geographically; a growing number of members had access, allowing video in a realistic way as well as more animations, greater interactivity, etc.

- the Centre rapidly increased the number of courses offered using the internet: first mainly technical, computer related courses; then – using the developed methodology, teaching aids, and TEC Room – they expanded course offerings to include health and safety and labour education

The Training Centre’s staff and administrators have undergone technical skills development. Today all five instructors, as well as youth leaders and adjustment staff are able to be course developers. All instructors rotate through assignments in distance education instructing.

Around 60 courses are offered through the internet-based distance education program. About one-third are short, specialized health and safety modules, which together with longer health and safety courses have been developed in partnership with the Workers Health and Safety Centre. There is an orientation available online, to introduce new participants to the system.

### Number Trained Through Internet Distance Education Program



For all Training Centre programs, 3338 people participated in 2003; 4447 in 2004; and 7960 in 2005. Roughly 45% of current distance education participants take health and safety courses, 30% take computer courses, and 25% take labour education courses.

The methodology is highly interactive, well supported, and engages participants in a dynamic way. The program builds connections, links between individual participants and the union. Features of each course include:

- quizzes, demonstrations
- video
- 1-800 # for questions (with instructors responding to participants individually)
- forums
- “TEC Room” Each course includes a TEC room component (TEC stands for Training and Education Centre). At specific times, for about 30-45 minutes, one evening and weekend day each week, the course participants “meet” online at the same time. Moderated by the instructor (who is visible through video), participants ask questions, offer comments, engage in conversation. Using mikes, participants can hear each other, and can see each other if they have a web-cam. TEC Room sessions help build understanding and solidarity across the union.

Although the Training Centre has not yet done a study on gender, age or other aspects of participants, Carrozzino cites strong anecdotal evidence from participants regarding their ability to overcome barriers to participation through distance education. There are no limits on timing (although course duration is normally one month). Course availability and convenience are widely praised. The program helps overcome the problem of shift work including rotating shifts; time constraints of parents with young children, single parents. The program is particularly popular among participants in remote areas, who face the problem of a general lack of community education resources for adults, and whose small numbers may preclude group union classes. In addition, online learning better suits some personalities – it’s a preferred learning method for many members.

The Training Centre has several years experience of school board partnerships in different parts of Ontario to provide high school credits in union classes. However, not all school boards have adult education programs, especially in Northern Ontario. As well, the union doesn’t always have the critical mass of numbers to have a class. To meet continuing need, the Training Centre initiated the provision of high school credit courses in its Distance Education Program, in partnership with the Avon Maitland School Board. The Training Centre enrolls participants and does the paperwork; the school board delivers the courses.

The partnership builds on the school board’s experience with providing high school credit courses using distance education for children of Canadian military personnel overseas. Though the board had good support and methodology, it had no previous experience with adults. The program is proving beneficial for both sides.

## **Impacts**

Through distance education, members are “breaking the ice with education” – they may start with computer courses and then move on to labour education. Distance education is just one component of the local’s broader education, communication, and youth programs whose common goal is to build the membership and union through outreach and service. In this broader context, the program helps bring more members into core union activities.

“Union renewal can only be done through the membership,” suggests Carrozzino. “Education is one of the ways to do that. We hook them through CPR courses, or whatever their personal motivation is. Most adult educators recognize the importance of relevancy of the course to the participant. We give value-added, and then members are more open to other courses. Education, lifelong learning becomes part of their lives, and the union is the catalyst.”

Carrozzino notes that there is now more participation of previously under-represented groups, for example second language speakers and ethnic minorities. Participants spread their experience to others in the workplace.

The program’s impact on the union can be seen clearly in health and safety. Through distance education, courses are now available to all members, beyond the select few. The intent of the health and safety courses offered on the internet is to raise awareness and the knowledge of the membership generally. Carrozzino notes that after taking the courses, “the members are increasing their participation and have become more active in support of the health and safety reps. They assist the reps, question the reps, there is renewed interest in health and safety. This also helps with ongoing transition, which is partly a generational change.”

The Distance Education Program also benefits the broader community. The Training Centre makes some of its courses available to school board partners, for example health and safety, introduction to unionism and safe food handling courses. The Centre has provided curriculum and a one-day training session for teachers from two Toronto-area schools. Health and Safety 1 has been offered to participants in two Toronto non-profit agencies: Working Women Community Centre pre-bakery program and Microskills youth program.

“Distance education breaks the limits on accessibility, helps make the union more open and democratic,” concludes Carrozzino.

## **Update**

In the 2007-08 period, the Training Centre continued to expand its course offerings and also updated its learning management system. The upgraded platform is faster, has some new navigation features for both users and instructors, and is functional on different web browsers. They are offering 2007 MS Office courses (a bit of a leap since the 2007 version is not yet the most-commonly used). Every few years the Centre reflects on how things have been working and what areas need improvement.

The TEC Room (voice, video and text chat software) has also been upgraded and updated. It now features multi-video, simultaneous feed, whereas before it was a one-person window. Additional features make it much more “with the times” and functional for both users and moderators.

The Centre has spent time in the last two years updating course content and presentation so as to improve user-friendliness, and also offers at least one new course each session. There are now close to 100 courses online. Their course catalogue continues to grow, as does the program's popularity and ease of use.

In 2007 the Training Centre had 4300 participants in its online program and another 3100 participated in other programs. It appears a plateau has been reached in terms of overall numbers, but the Centre's staff see a continuous influx of new users. Says Kelly Nicholas: "In our eyes these numbers are not a disappointment. We continue to provide courses to meet and capture the needs of our members. This is our ultimate goal: to serve the members in their life-long learning."

### **Further References**

Training Centre website: <http://www.ufcw175.com/Education/index.shtml>

Victor Carrozzino, "Going the Distance: Online and Distance Education", *Our Times*, June/July 2006, Vol. 25, No. 3.

"Going the Distance: UFCW Locals 175 and 633 Offer WHSC Programs Online", *Source, A Workers Health & Safety Centre Publication*, Spring/Summer 2006.

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Implementing a Labour Education Framework

**Central Labour Body:** Toronto and York Region Labour Council / Labour Education Centre

**Contact Person:** Jojo Geronimo, LEC Executive Director, 416.537.6532 ext 2200, [jgeronimo@laboureducation.org](mailto:jgeronimo@laboureducation.org)

**Initial Purpose:** Mission statement: to build the capacity of unions to plan, develop and deliver training, adjustment, and labour education programs that transform the lives of individual members and build the strength, solidarity and equity of their unions.

**Barriers Addressed:** race, class, gender

### **Background Information**

The Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYLC) is composed of 150 local unions representing 195,000 working men and women in Toronto and York Region. In 1987, the Council established its education project, the Labour Education Centre (LEC), as a non-profit corporation. At that time, LEC included the Council's Labour Studies Certificate Program (begun in the mid-1970s), the English in the Workplace Program (begun in the early 1980s), and the then new programs: Adult Basic Education, services for laid-off workers, and the Equality program. Financed mainly through federal and provincial government funding supplemented by fee for service contracts with unions and other central labour bodies, LEC continues to provide assistance to unions facing layoffs and closures, assistance to unemployed workers, and a Literacy and Basic Skills program.

Replacing its Labour Studies Certificate Program, LEC has revived a labour education program that emphasizes critical understanding of the global economy and its impact on workers, unions, and communities; equity in union structure and practices; and labour-community partnerships as a collective response to build a broad-based movement for social change.

### **How the Program Started**

LEC draws on its long history as an educational centre for working people, building labour solidarity as it tries to address issues of equity such as class, gender and race. In 2006, LEC developed a new strategic plan within the context of the strategic directions of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, its parent organization, which focused on the root causes of unemployment/underemployment, the gap between rich and poor, the erosion of workers' rights and power, and the gutting of essential public services. These strategic priorities, reflected in the Council document "A Million Reasons to Take Action," have provided the context for LEC to embark on activating a coherent labour education framework. This program framework is informed by an understanding of power relations based on a critical analysis of class, race, and gender in a globalized economy, and seen from an anti-oppression perspective.

## How the Program Evolved

The main drivers behind the program are both internal and external. Externally, the domination of global capital over economies and countries and the corresponding retreat by progressive movements, including labour, have led to a re-thinking of the effectiveness of current strategies for building the labour movement.

Internally, there has been an ongoing discourse and critique about how the house of labour itself needs to re-examine its vision, strategies, and structure to respond more effectively to the threat from without and the gaps from within. In this self re-examination, the role of education has been re-assessed. This evolving model wants to see labour's role as a vehicle – strategic, critical and transformative – that can help achieve the resurgence of a labour movement that is activist, progressive, and democratic.

Three years after LEC re-set its strategic directions, the external pressures and the internal challenges facing the labour movement have only intensified, as the crisis of capital leads to an economic meltdown and subsequent job loss.

One of the tensions that this strategy needs to address is that between the need to build the movement and the need to win specific tactical and issue-specific campaigns. This raises a number of key questions that can be phrased as: How do we integrate the immediate goal of “winning campaigns” (be it organizing, political action, or contract negotiation) and “building a movement”, i.e. through member education, capacity building, and forging consensus? How do we integrate political education into our tool-based training courses and issue-specific campaigns?

### *Features of LEC's labour education framework*

LEC's labour education framework is strategically focused on three themes: workers in a global economy, equity in unions, and union-community partnerships. The essential vehicle of this framework is LEC's labour and social justice education. More recently, LEC has started to apply this framework to its training and adjustment program, in a way that defines job loss within the broader context of neoliberalism/corporate globalization and broadens program goals beyond individual adjustment to collective action for social change.

LEC's programmatic approach to its labour and social justice education is characterized by the following features:

- an explicit naming of education as a *political vehicle for change* that challenges the dominant right-wing global corporate agenda
- an *anti-oppression framework* that integrates an analysis of class, race, and gender in the current political moment (e.g. job loss and exploitation of im/migrant workers) and as applied to the concrete realities of the workplace, sector/industry, or geographical community of a particular union, in the context of a globalized economy

- a strong *analytical approach* not only to issues but also to the overall socio-economic and political environment, as the basis for creative strategizing; collective action that arises from a *common analysis*, which in turn is the outcome of education
- close integration of course goals and learning objectives to the different strategic goals of the union, in the areas of organizing, bargaining, political advocacy, coalition building, and internal organizational change; where broad strategic goals are absent, education helps facilitate a strategic debate about priorities
- the use of *popular education* that empowers the learner and incorporates respectful dialogue among learners and instructors, critical reflection, and creative problem-solving
- the linkage between organized labour and community-based groups, using *community unionism* as a model
- the *integration* of such course goals as literacy and basic skills development, citizen engagement, building stronger unions, consciousness raising, community empowerment, and organizational change.

### *Program examples*

Through the *global justice/anti-globalization program* (Workers in a Global Economy) LEC uses a critical analysis of the neoliberal corporate agenda to help inform the work around union renewal and international solidarity. This program includes the following key components: research and development, educational events, network building and cross-border collaboration. Activities during the last two years include:

- two cross-border events: a Cross Border Dialogue that brought together labour educators, policy advocates, and organizers from the US, Canada and Mexico; and a conference on labour renewal and international solidarity, with the participation of Bill Fletcher Jr. from the US Centre for Labor Renewal.
- the program for the Toronto and York Region Labour Council's annual Aboriginal Workers and Workers of Colour Conference, with the overarching theme *Workers in the Global Economy*. LEC also developed and facilitated the Labour Council's annual Leadership Institute, with participation from various affiliates.
- the development of a resource *History of Globalization in Minutes*, written by Tim McCaskell, and its use in pilot workshops
- the research and development of a one-week leadership course on globalization and manufacturing job loss, from a political and historical perspective (in partnership with CAW and labour educators Bev Burke and Herman Rosenfeld)
- an exchange program with the Labour Resource Center of the University of California (Berkeley) in a popular education conference for social justice and union organizations

The themes *equity in unions* and *labour and community* were incorporated into the specific activities and courses of the labour and social justice program. LEC integrates an equity analysis of the working class, not in the generic sense, but in its differentiated

reality: the social realities of women workers, immigrant workers, racialized workers, workers with disabilities, gay and lesbian workers, part-time, contingent and unemployed workers, older and younger workers, etc.

### *Equity in Unions and Labour-Community Partnerships*

Recent LEC activities carried out with a strong focus on equity and/or labour-community partnership include:

- Research and publication of *Integrating Equity and Addressing Barriers: Innovative Learning Practices by Unions* (this publication), which analyzes the barriers to education and training and their differential impacts on workers of colour, Aboriginal workers, immigrants, youth, and women.
- The update of the information package *Facing Layoffs*, part of a contracted project for the CLC/OFL Labour Adjustment Working Group. This publication is complemented by five regional conferences across Ontario in 2009. The first conference (in Toronto) generated a strong consensus on the need for a political framework as a response to job loss.

LEC also works with networks to strengthen union-community links and integrate equity and global justice into labour education programs, such as:

- Joint community-labour consultations/roundtables on training issues
- Network of community and labour organizers, educators, and activists who collaborate around issues of equity within unions
- Network of equity educators, which provides support to Labour Council campaigns (such as the Minimum Wage campaign and Good Jobs For All Coalition)
- Joint efforts with migrant workers' centres (Migrante-Ontario and Justice for Migrant Workers) on advocacy and education efforts.

LEC also helped organize conferences, develop and conduct various short workshops and courses on equity and global justice in collaboration with George Brown College School of Labour (Labour Fair), CLC-Ontario (Weekend School), the OFL (Women's Conference, Colour of Poverty Conference), and various affiliates through their equity and human rights committees.

In its basic skills and literacy program, LEC applies this framework to transform literacy education into a tool not only for “reading the word, but also reading the world.” This enables workers to name their collective reality as workers (overworked, vulnerable, disconnected); to find common ground with other members; to make that link between their lives and political events, and then invites them to help shape a common vision as a union or movement – and thus encourages the learners to action.

LEC also helps facilitate a link between the literacy movement and the labour movement, between literacy educators and labour educators; to support a stronger union role in promoting literacy education for its members, and in valuing literacy education as a potent force for union building.

## What's Next

The Labour Education Centre aims to achieve the following multi-year project goals:

- To seek partnership with community groups, im/migrant workers' centres, and action centres, with the support of Council affiliates. Specifically, the Worker-Activists Program aims to develop critical understanding of the root causes of unemployment and joblessness and the link between workplace closure and the global corporate agenda. This program will assist peer workers to integrate support for individual laid-off workers with an organizing and political education strategy. In this approach, unemployed workers are not simply "individual clients" to be served, but also activists and citizens to be involved in political action. The main issue will be defined not just as job loss, but the inequality of the basic economic structure. The goal is not just economic prosperity of the individual worker but social change.
- To develop a multi-year collaboration program with the Highlander Resource and Education Center based in Tennessee, a pioneer in popular education for social change and movement building. Through this partnership, LEC aims to co-develop resources around economic literacy, labour-community partnership, and organizing from an equity and capacity-building perspective, using a popular education approach and incorporating cultural work.

LEC's mission statement is currently being reviewed in order to reflect (among other things) literacy education as an essential program of LEC and to further underline the strategic importance of developing workers' skills for critical analysis as part of labour education.

In its overall programming goals, LEC aims to integrate more organically its three programs (training and adjustment, literacy and basic skills, and labour and social justice education) within the strategic framework of equity, global justice, and labour and community partnership.

## Further References

Jojo Geronimo, "Labour Education: For What and For Whom?" *A Million Reasons to Speak Out: Toronto Labour 2006 Yearbook*, Toronto and York Region Labour Council, 2006.

Jojo Geronimo, "Labour Education Centre: A Project of Council (What kind of project is it?)" , *Labour Action*, Toronto and York Region Labour Council, Summer 2006.

TYLC Million Reasons website: <http://labourcouncil.ca/amillionreasons/>

LEC website: [laboureducation.org](http://laboureducation.org)

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** A Training Strategy for Hospitality Workers in UNITE HERE

**Union:** UNITE HERE Local 75

**Contact Person:** Janet Dassinger, Special Projects Coordinator, 416.575.6532,  
[janet59@sympatico.ca](mailto:janet59@sympatico.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** To build the union through a training and education strategy integrated into organizing and all facets of the union.

**Barriers Addressed:** race, gender, non-recognition of skills and foreign credentials

### **Background Information**

The 6000 members of UNITE HERE Local 75 work in the hospitality industry in the Greater Toronto Area. Members work as room attendants, servers, and a variety of other occupations in hotels and restaurants.

### **How the Program Started**

When SARS resulted in widespread layoffs and reduced hours for Toronto-area hospitality workers in 2003, UNITE HERE Local 75 quickly learned that training was a huge need of members. Training was intimately related to job opportunity and mobility. This was particularly so for the largely immigrant workforce represented by the union.

Workers face many barriers: denied opportunity to have skills recognized, denied jobs and promotion due to racism and sex typing in jobs. The nature of the contingent work is a further barrier, renowned for its irregular schedules. “Part-time hours and low pay mean many workers have more than one job to cobble together a living,” notes Janet Dassinger, the Local’s special project coordinator.

While the union has always been aware of barriers, there is growing recognition of training as a strategy for equity, and to see the need for a union training strategy that is part of the union building program.

The training program is in the development stage, led by local leadership and staff. A major goal is to link equity objectives and training. The training initiative has four major themes:

- language and literacy, including basic computers and math
- job training, to enable workers to move between job classifications
- apprenticeships and trade certification (for example, members working as cooks and in maintenance jobs have the required hours of work experience, but need theory)
- recognition of prior learning and foreign credentials

Local 75 sees training as an integral part of the international union's comprehensive Hotel Workers Rising initiative, and its key elements of union organizing, community rising, research (new hotel developments), and a customer campaign.

### **How the Program Is Evolving**

The training strategy is part of 2006 contract negotiations with major Toronto hotels. This includes bargaining training funds, as well as seeking agreement on a joint union-management workplace training committee at each worksite. The committee's role would include making programs relevant and monitoring progress, and may be coupled with a workplace ombudsperson regarding training and other opportunities. A breakthrough agreement with the Sheraton Hotel includes an Equal Opportunity Training Fund financed through employer contributions of one cent per hour per employee, and also establishes a joint training committee at the workplace. A Letter of Understanding outlines the intention to provide such courses as English as a second language.

The Local is seeking a union-controlled training fund, financed through bargained dollars supplemented by government funding. The union is pursuing partnerships with educational, community and industry trainers, for example a partnership with the Building Trades Council to assist with theory and test preparation for maintenance workers seeking trade certification. Such partnerships would complement the planned use of worker-trainers, especially for entry-level job training, and of members with teaching degrees from their home countries.

An innovative element of the training strategy is the inclusion of future workers. Over the next five years, 5000 new industry jobs are expected. Working with developers of hotel and related projects, the union is partnering with community groups in the neighbourhood of the development to press for local hiring as part of the community benefits required in development approvals.

Currently, the Local is working with the Regent Park Neighbourhood Initiative to recruit Regent Park (public housing) tenants for training as hotel workers. The goal is to place the trained workers in a condo-hotel being built nearby. Also tied to the major inner-city Regent Park public housing redevelopment, is the union's support for the building of a Hotel Workers Housing Co-op. The ground floor of the 65-unit building will be a union training centre, with full teaching kitchen, a café/restaurant for tenants and the community, two classrooms and offices. Construction is scheduled to start in the spring of 2007.

An extensive campaign was run in Toronto's high-need neighbourhood of Rexdale to combine community-based partnerships, local hiring, affordable housing, training and apprenticeships for local youth with regards to the Woodbine Racetrack redevelopment. An agreement was reached with the City to adopt a local hiring strategy.

Exciting as these plans are, the development of a union training strategy is not easy. "It's a challenge to shift from 'it's *nice* to have a training program' to 'it's *crucial* to have a

training program,” explains Dassinger. Although training and education are a way of building leadership, “it’s hard to expand the union’s way of thinking. They have their own model of organizing and leadership. It’s hard to change organizational culture, since it works.” Training and education are sometimes seen as diverting from the union program, a risk. Activists and leaders can be suspicious of employer partnerships.

In her efforts, Dassinger points to the role of union-provided training in the success of UNITE HERE in Las Vegas, where union membership has grown from 15,000 to 60,000 in the last 10 years. “The highest union honour in UNITE HERE is to be an organizer,” notes Dassinger. “To persuade people is to ‘organize’ them. I’ve yet to ‘organize’ them in the training agenda. To integrate training into the overall organizing of the union, worker leaders, the core rank and file leadership, leaders from the hotel committees will be key.”

## **Update**

The Hotel Workers Housing Co-op is on schedule. In terms of the joint union-management training committees, UNITE HERE realized that 42 separate training trust funds would not be a good approach and have since bargained with the Royal York Hotel to state in their collective agreement that they will take the leadership on pushing for a single sector strategy for a one-cent an hour per member training trust fund.

The union’s Teaching Restaurant and Kitchen is exploring social enterprise opportunities with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation to run a community catering business.

## **Further References**

“Working in Toronto’s Hospitality Industry: Toward Greater Access and Equity For All: Final Report,” prepared by the Labour Education Centre, November 2005.

“An Industry at a Crossroads: A High Road Economic Vision for Toronto Hotels,” prepared by the Toronto Task Force on the Hotel Industry, 2006.

Roger Martin and Richard Florida, “Ontario’s prosperity hinges on creativity,” *Toronto Star*, February 5, 2009, <http://www.thestar.com/article/582556>

Anil Verma, “Low Wage Workers: A Profile,” Martin Prosperity Institute, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, forthcoming (March 2009).

*Updated February 2009*

**Name of Program:** Mayworks / Mayweek Festivals

**Organization / Central Labour Body:** Canadian Labour Congress Arts and Labour Subcommittee and local boards in several cities

**Contact Person:** Don Bouzek, Chair, CLC Arts and Labour Subcommittee, [dbouzek@telusplanet.net](mailto:dbouzek@telusplanet.net), (780) 420-1400

**Initial Purpose:** To support creative production by workers in multiple art forms, and to assist labour-positive artists linking with unions to produce and showcase their work

**Barriers Addressed:** Access of working people to arts networks and lack of worker-positive images in the mainstream media

### **Background Information**

Initially with the Toronto and District Labour Council, and now with several labour councils across the country, a festival is mounted, usually in May, which provides a public face for workers and unions through the arts. This has involved music, visual arts, film, theatre and other media, and takes different forms in various regions. The festival brings together arts-positive unionists (including closet photographers, musicians and poets) with their professional counterparts in a climate of celebration of workers' experience and challenge of the dominant culture.

### **How the Program Started**

Now the oldest and largest labour arts festival in North America, the Mayworks festival began very modestly around a Toronto kitchen table. Building on informal conversations among labour-positive artists and arts-positive unionists, the initial idea was simply to provide a showcase for some of the new work being produced, and to provide an annual occasion for people to stay in touch. When launched in 1986, it was linked to the Labour Arts and Media Working Group of the Toronto Labour Council, and supported by staff in the Ontario Federation of Labour and CLC. From the start, the festival had a practice of inclusion, specifically around class, gender and race, which has broadened over time.

As founding coordinator Catherine Macleod has noted: “the market divides life into a competition between efficiency and profit on one side, and home and community on the other. The Mayworks Festival... reconnect[s] these two spheres of everyday life.” As the push toward free trade accelerated in the late 1980s, artists presented an alternative vision onstage in Ground Zero Production's *Free Trade Show*. As the Oka crisis heated up in Quebec, Aboriginal artists were invited to showcase their work at Mayworks. As the ruling Ontario Conservatives brutalized workers and humbled cities in the late 90s, Festival attendees kicked up their heels at the *Dance of Death* to the Mike Harris regime, and celebrated the Days of Action.

## How the Program Evolved

From early days, the Toronto festival walked into the battles around gender equity. The most successful event was “Womantalk,” a space for women to take the microphone in reaction to the male-dominated cultures of both the arts sector and the labour movement. In poetry, storytelling and music, women union activists expressed their experience of work, society and unions. They alternated with professional artists, addressing the same themes but from a location outside the union culture. In these events, workers became artists but were also exposed to professional arts production as a work process, so that artists became workers.

A similar mix produced visual exhibits where the work of “amateur” union members hung beside that of established visual artists. Over time, a pattern in Mayworks programming emerged, which favoured subordinate voices, mixed unionists with artists and encouraged experimentation. That basic mix remains today, more than 20 years later, and has been adapted in other cities, such as Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Montreal and Moncton. Linkage among these city initiatives is provided through the Arts and Labour Subcommittee of the Canadian Labour Congress, chaired by the veteran theatre and video artist Don Bouzek.

For a sense of the eclectic material in the Toronto festival, there has been a labour button trade fair, show-me workshops such as the *Draw Your Boss* contest and a picket sign project, a classical music quartet playing in workplaces, the premiere of Michael Moore’s film *Roger and Me*, and a tribute to fast food workers and youth.

Similar profiles could be drawn for festivals in each city. For example, the 2008 Edmonton May Week festival included a show by worker artists; a film by a Montreal filmmaker about worker cooperatives in Argentina; a spoken word event featuring artists from Edmonton, Winnipeg and Toronto and including new work from Sudanese young people living in the city; a play reading about Margaret Crang, a young progressive city councillor elected during the 1930s; the annual May Day March down trendy Whyte Avenue and a Labour Cabaret featuring the People’s Poets, a hip hop group formed by children of Chilean refugees who came north after the assassination of Allende.

In Winnipeg, MayWorks 2008 involved 34 events and a total attendance of approximately 1900. The 2009 festival will focus on the 90th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike, with unique artistic presentations and special activities to mark this important anniversary. In Vancouver, there has been a strong presence of film and media. In Montreal, the work is coordinated in an immigrant worker centre, and highlights their issues. In Ottawa, the focus has been strongly historical.

To fully integrate equity into the Mayworks process required more than specific programming. Returning to the Toronto experience, an equity lens was applied to new work incubated for the festival, to the composition of the board, and to the criteria for hiring staff. In some years, then, the festival would focus on Chinese-Canadian issues and art producers, on African descent work, on Aboriginal work and so on. This required

staffing by people knowledgeable about the communities reflected, special resources for translation, shifting events to culturally appropriate venues, and perhaps most difficult, finding the arts-positive union members anchored in those communities.

This kind of outreach was endorsed, but with some reserve, by the unions that regularly supported the festival, and by the labour council that became the reference point for union input. It was also funded by arts organizations, notably the Toronto Arts Council and the Ontario Arts Council. Gradually, the festival developed the collective capacity to navigate the politics of the labour movement, of the arts community and of the arts funders. At any given time, the festival needed solid support from two of these three sponsors, and at least tolerance from the third. This wasn't always easy to achieve, as the form and content of the festival was challenging in different ways to all three.

The current Toronto festival coordinator Florencia Berinstein noted: “By the mid-1990s, the economic landscape changed with changing provincial governments, the non-unionized service sector grew, and identity politics swept across the arts and non-profit sectors. Racialized workers started to claim space in order to have their voices heard through the festival. This widening of representation happened under the leadership of coordinators Min Sook Lee and Lillian Allen. Mayworks’ programming started to reach out to audiences and artists beyond organized labour.”

The transition wasn't easy. As Min Sook Lee states: “I do remember the first opening event I organized at the Great Hall. I'd gotten all of these different artists of colour to headline and a lot of people came, people who had never been to Mayworks. At one point in the festivities that night, it was all people of colour, and someone said to me, ‘This is like, a really unusual Mayworks.’ I said ‘Really?’ It was a recognition that these people had never been to Mayworks before.” In 2000 Min Sook left, and Stephen Seaborn took over as coordinator, a seasoned CUPE union activist from the left and an out gay man. That opening for equity seeking workers, both unionized and non-unionized, as well as the showcase of equity-seeking artists, was further cemented, and has been sustained since Florencia Berinstein became coordinator in 2002.

While the Mayworks’ community was expanding, organized labour continued to play an important role, as union activists sat on the board of directors and on the program committee, and through the continued donations towards the operations of the organization from many national and local unions. An important link of labour to community was the number of racialized union members who became involved or attended festival events.

## **Impacts**

In each festival, some programming has challenged working people and the tastes of union staff and leaders. This occurs with both form and content, when the work of Asian, Black, Filipino, Central and South American communities, queer communities, women and young people are made central to the festival. There has been active, and sometimes heated debate around where Mayworks should focus its attention and audience

development. One view holds that the focus should be on unionized workers, primarily blue-collar. Another view looks more to the emerging sectors of precarious work, and the non-unionized and racialized workers who predominate there. Of course, this tension exists in the union movement as well, and Mayworks serves as a mirror to labour of the importance and complexity of this divide.

In 2006, an evening cabaret held as part of the CLC conference of union educators experienced an extraordinary range of artistic presentations, from community groups to widely-known professionals, which generated a useful guide to integrating arts into labour events. Prepared by Morna Ballantyne, it can be found on-line at <http://canadianlabour.ca/updir/EnglishHandbookCabaret.pdf>

### **What's Next**

As Mayworks festivals beyond Toronto have gathered strength, cooperation across cities is helping to move events and ideas back and forth across the country. The CLC Arts and Labour Sub-Committee is one forum where different experiences are brought together, joint activities planned, joint funding proposals developed. In each location, organizers have to balance the needs and perspectives of union leaders and members, arts producers and funders, and the state of progressive movements in the wider community.

### **Further References**

For Mayworks Montreal, go to <http://iwc-cti.ca>  
For Mayworks Ottawa, go to <http://mayworksottawa.ca>  
For Mayworks Vancouver, go to <http://users.resist.ca/~mayworks>  
For Mayworks Winnipeg, go to <http://mayworks.org>  
For Mayweek Edmonton, go to <http://www.mayweek.ab.ca>  
For Mayworks Toronto, go to [www.mayworks.ca](http://www.mayworks.ca).

The on-line resource for keeping in touch with such work across Canada is [www.Labourarts.ca](http://www.Labourarts.ca), a website designed to be used as a network for labour artists and labour unions. It is also a place where artists can sign in to their own account and link their own page. It serves as a portal into the range of labour arts work across the country, and displays the progress made over the past two decades in both access for workers to the arts and representation of workers in the arts.

**Name of Program:** Workers Arts and Heritage Centre

**Union / Central Labour Body:** Canadian Labour Congress, Ontario Federation of Labour and affiliate representatives elected to the Board

**Contact Person:** Cindy Jennings, Interim Executive Director (to August 2009), then Amanda Coles. 905.522.3003, [wahc@wahc-museum.ca](mailto:wahc@wahc-museum.ca)

**Initial Purpose:** The Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (WAHC) emerged in the late 1980s to meet three needs: to spread labour arts beyond Toronto, more widely across Ontario; to balance the arts work with a heritage perspective; and to develop some solid infrastructure that could sustain creative production and distribution throughout the year.

**Barriers Addressed:** One key barrier, for workers and others, has been the concentration of Ontario cultural power in Toronto. By anchoring the WAHC in a major Hamilton heritage building, the old Customs House, an energy flow was shifted. Through measures like staff hiring, tenant selection and programming, the WAHC has consistently tried to address gender, race, cultural and class imbalances. Most visibly, a list of the exhibits at the Centre over the years since the building opened in 1996, shows the sustained effort to reflect and strengthen equity.

### **Background Information**

The WAHC board includes a nominee from the Canadian Labour Congress, two nominees of the Ontario Federation of Labour and several representatives from affiliated unions who choose to run for election to the board. One co-chair in early 2009 is an OPSEU staff organizer and OFL nominee.

### **How the Program Started**

During the 1980s, the “history buffs” in and around the Ontario labour movement sought to bring public attention to the history of working people and their unions. They pulled together a short video on Ontario labour history, “All We Worked For,” and began discussing ways of ensuring its access to the school system and the wider public.

When the NDP came into government in Ontario in 1990, the time seemed ripe to think bigger. Under direction from the ministry of culture, the group hired a consultant to prepare a feasibility study on the idea of building a permanent home for labour artifacts and displays. The study concluded that the project was not feasible, but the most appropriate site would be Hamilton. The group shrugged off the main recommendation and set to work to build alliances in the Hamilton community and labour movement, to jointly pressure governments for funding. In the end, the province and the municipality of Hamilton provided a total of \$2 million to buy, restore and operate the oldest public building in the city, the 1861 Customs House. As the Harris Conservatives began to squeeze arts funding in their first year of office (1996), only one brand-new cultural facility opened in the province – a home for the heritage and creative capacity of workers.

## **How the Program Evolved**

As the building was restored, partly with donated labour by building trades unionists, exhibits were mounted, including one on workers' marches and one on the 1946 steelworkers strike in Hamilton. As the novelty wore off and the exhausting pace took its toll, exhibits came more slowly, and with more community and labour consultation. Soon there was the "Vita Nuova" exhibit on the history of Italian-Canadian workers in southern Ontario, with a lively one-person performance by actor Calogero Chiarelli. The most ambitious effort was perhaps the exhibit "Booze," which portrayed the positive and negative effects of alcohol in the lives of workers, with half the centre set up as a tavern and the other half as a temperance hall.

Surviving a funding squeeze after about five years of operation, the organization has worked out a way to balance municipal funds for community renewal, union funds to sponsor exhibits and provincial/federal funds to do the research and development needed. In the process, the surrounding working-class neighbourhood, the North End, was drawn into the life of the building, and the space was increasingly used by immigrant service organizations, advocacy groups and arts organizations. Project funds helped to bring in equity-seeking groups as producers and interpreters of the exhibits.

In recent years, the annual fundraising event, named for pro-worker mayor Sam Lawrence, has become a fixture in the Hamilton social calendar, and links union leaders, artists and historians from across the province. Travellers and students of industrial heritage are drawn to the "heritage trail" anchored at the Centre, which leads people to a range of sites across the east end, while self-guided tours are promoted that probe the legacy of the Nine Hour Pioneers, the 1930s Depression and the 1946 steel strike.

Meanwhile, outreach beyond the city has expanded, with exhibits and events associated with major labour conferences, heritage gatherings and arts festivals. Specific projects with unions have taken form, such as posters, an information bus for CUPE painted by artists, and an on-line exhibit on the experience of workers in the trucking industry. As the national scope of work expanded, the organization dropped the "Ontario" in its original name, and became simply the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre.

A striking accomplishment of the Centre has been the exhibit "And Still I Rise," which portrays experiences of Ontario workers of African descent. Using display cases in the form of small rail cars to evoke the Underground Railroad and the railways where so many African-Canadians worked, the exhibit showcases powerful materials and draws strong support from community groups across the province. It has toured a variety of community and union sites, well-received both for form and content, and has helped to spark recognition and activity among groups working to address challenges within the African-Canadian community.

The WAHC has become a high-priority place for unions to donate memorabilia, provide funds and create projects to re-shape the public image of workers and their organizations.

Thus a group of aluminum workers gave the balance of their local treasury upon closure of their plant, to fund a standing exhibit on industrial work designed for high school students. WAHC has become a fixture at major union conferences, often with a substantial exhibit or a fundraising luncheon integrated into the program.

## **Impacts**

The Workers Arts and Heritage Centre has first had a positive impact in the local neighbourhood, where it is perceived as a community resource, a gathering place, and an anchor of efforts for responsible urban renewal. At the municipal level, it has been recognized and supported several times with significant grants since the initial investment, usually passed unanimously by the elected council. At the provincial level, involvement of board members from places like Sudbury and Thunder Bay has helped to broaden the perspective and the reach of the work. At the national level, WAHC has become a recognized voice within the arts and heritage networks, invited to present at national conferences and consulted by others considering specific initiatives or exhibits related to workers.

Every year, the Centre sponsors or supports projects to trace the history of a local union, a labour leader, an educational initiative (like the booklet *Quest for Learning: The Canadian Labour Movement and Worker Literacy Education*, on the origins of labour literacy work). Researchers and labour studies students draw on the Centre for background information, linkage to “kindred spirits” and distribution possibilities. Community concerts and art shows turn to the Centre, and in turn are linked to International Women’s Day, May Day, the International Day of Mourning for Workers Killed and Injured on the Job, Labour Day and so on. In brief, 20 years after it was first imagined, WAHC is a lively and respected voice for the creative legacy of workers in its community, province and in the movement that gave it birth.

## **What’s Next**

At the start of 2009, the Centre is experiencing a major turnover in its small staff, whose time needs to be balanced between stewardship of the building and national outreach. A second balance to strike is between contributing to the cultural life of Hamilton and contributing to reflection and celebration of heritage in the labour movement. Connections to the school system and universities are being strengthened, with efforts to influence curriculum and teaching in the arts, history and social sciences. Fundraising is a continual challenge, since the basic overheads of the building and the core staff are substantial. An active, hands-on board with a strong labour presence is addressing these challenges, and the organization is cautiously optimistic about its future.

## **Further References**

For more information, visit [www.wahc-museum.ca](http://www.wahc-museum.ca), or visit the building itself at 51 Stuart Street, Hamilton, Ontario.

Deidre Walton, “Whose History: Equity at the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre,” *Our Times*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2008.

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