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**forum**

VOLUME 51 • ISSUE 1 • 2024





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- 06** **From the Editor/Mot de la rédactrice en chef**
- 08** **Revolution begins at home**  
Localizing the fight to defend public education  
by Munib Sajjad
- 
- 12** **La révolution commence à la maison**  
Localiser la lutte pour défendre l'éducation  
publique  
par Munib Sajjad
- 17** **Improving publicly funded education through  
conversation**  
A guide to having an organizing conversation  
by Bill Hewitt & Mary Fraser-Hamilton
- 22** **How I ended up on a rent strike**  
A reflection on resiliency and collective action  
for tenants in Ontario  
by Sharlene Henry
- 
- 27** **Comment je suis tombée en grève des loyers**  
Une réflexion sur la résilience et l'action  
collective des locataires en Ontario  
par Sharlene Henry
- 31** **We must organize with community**  
by Derik Chica
- 36** **From crisis to change**  
The lasting impact of the HIV/AIDS movement  
and 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy on healthcare  
by Ken Miller
- 
- 39** **De la crise au changement**  
L'impact durable du mouvement de la  
lutte contre le VIH/sida et du plaidoyer  
2SLGBTQIA+ sur les soins de santé  
par Ken Miller

**Accessible format  
available at  
[education-forum.ca](http://education-forum.ca)**

- 42 Labour councils in the Ontario labour community**  
Sites of solidarity and engagement beyond the world of labour  
by Jeff Donkersgoed and Dave Warda
- 45 The history of sexual orientation protections with Windsor unions and politics**  
Unity and pride lead to inclusion  
by Walter Cassidy
- 50 The significance of role models in empowering the Deaf community**  
by Twyla Campbell and Chantal Deketele
- 55 Sport is healing**  
The importance of sport to community strength  
by MPP Sol Mamakwa
- 
- 60 Le sport guérit**  
L'importance du sport pour le renforcement communautaire  
par le député provincial Sol Mamakwa
- 65 Bargaining for the common good**  
Standing up for the public interest  
by Chantal Mancini
- 70 Bargaining Unit boost**
- 72 Top picks**
- 76 Last word/Mot de la fin**

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Canadian Educational Press Association;  
Education Forum (ISSN 0840-9269) is  
indexed in the Canadian Education Index  
and available online in the Canadian  
business & Current Affairs database from  
Micromedia Ltd., 20 Victoria Street, Toronto,  
ON M5C 2N8. Tel. 416-362-5211

**Publisher**

Ontario Secondary School Teachers'  
Federation/Fédération des enseignantes-  
enseignants des écoles secondaires de  
l'Ontario, [osstf.on.ca](http://osstf.on.ca).

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Printed in Canada by union labour





## Socks, sandals, and solidarity

Working together for the common good

We sit at a heck of a time politically and socially. Political divisions run deep both here and abroad; we see pain and suffering locally and internationally. But we also see incredible strength and humanity at every turn. I am always excited by the start of a new school year; it holds so much optimism. Seeing young ones boarding a school bus for the first time, parents tearful and fearful as the child moves up the stairs, backpack larger than the child, always brings a smile to my face. Seeing post-secondary students return to my small town, socks and sandals on, hippy vibes everywhere, businesses flourishing with the influx of (limited but enthusiastic) spending power, I am reminded how important a vibrant community is to our well-being.

This issue of *Education Forum* focuses on the power of community organizing. We see stories of individual community identity building alongside research on the power of organizing and bargaining with the needs of the larger community in mind. This is not a unique approach to community building, and in fact as our articles demonstrate, the power of a regional group of diverse individuals to make change is significant and long-standing. From the history of Queer and HIV/AIDS activism in Ken Miller's article "From crisis to change" to the story told in Ontario Member of Provincial Parliament (Kiiwetinoong) Sol Mamakwa's "Sport is healing" that showcases the local power of sport, we see in these pages a picture of the ways unions and organized labour can and must work alongside our local partners to improve the lives of everyone. Sharlene Henry's article "How I ended

up on a rent strike" is a remarkable example of small-scale organizing for large-scale impact. Similarly, OSSTF/FEESO's Regional Organizers highlight the deep reverberations of empowering community voices in "Improving publicly funded education through conversation." In each article you will find a story of cause and effect, where the effect is always for the greater good.

Further reading through these pages showcases the value of labour councils, local organizing, and bargaining for the common good. I hope as you explore this issue that you find a spark in your own thinking. Perhaps you consider adding your solidarity to a local issue that is a bit outside your usual area of expertise, or potentially you find your way to learn more about a community problem and see where you can help make things better. And while I don't expect you to don your Birkenstocks and socks, if the idea happens to move you and helps ground you in activism, go for it!

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## **Chaussettes, sandales et solidarité**

Travailler ensemble pour le bien commun

Nous sommes, politiquement et socialement, à un moment difficile. Les divisions politiques sont profondes tant ici qu'à l'étranger, et nous constatons des douleurs et des souffrances aux niveaux local et international. Mais nous voyons aussi une force et une humanité incroyables à chaque tournant. Je suis toujours enthousiasmée par le début d'une nouvelle année scolaire; elles sont tellement débordantes d'optimisme. Voir les petits monter dans un autobus scolaire pour la première fois, les parents en larmes et inquiets de voir leur enfant monter les escaliers avec un sac à dos plus grand que l'enfant me fait toujours sourire. Voir les étudiantes et étudiants du postsecondaire revenir dans ma petite ville, chaussettes et sandales aux pieds, dans une ambiance hippie partout, et aussi des entreprises florissantes grâce à l'afflux d'un pouvoir d'achat (limité mais enthousiaste), me rappelle comment le dynamisme de la communauté est important pour notre bien-être.

Ce numéro d'*Education Forum* met l'accent sur le pouvoir de l'organisation communautaire. Nous y découvrirons des témoignages sur l'établissement d'une identité communautaire unique et des recherches sur le pouvoir de s'organiser et de négocier tout en gardant à l'esprit les besoins d'une plus grande communauté. Ce n'est pas la seule façon en matière de développement communautaire et, en fait, comme démontré dans nos témoignages, le potentiel d'un groupe régional composé d'individus divers pour effectuer des changements est important et de longue date. Depuis les débuts de l'activisme queer et du VIH/sida cité dans l'article de Ken Miller « De la crise au changement » à l'histoire

du député provincial de l'Ontario (Kiiwetinoong) Sol Mamakwa *Sport is healing* qui met en vedette le pouvoir local du sport, nous voyons dans ces pages les façons dont les syndicats et les travailleuses et travailleurs organisés peuvent et se doivent de travailler aux côtés de nos partenaires locaux pour améliorer la vie de tous. L'article de Sharlene Henry « Comment je suis tombée en grève des loyers » est un exemple exceptionnel d'organisation à petite échelle qui a eu un impact sur une grande échelle. De même, les organisatrices et organisateurs régionaux d'OSSTF/FEESO soulignent les répercussions de l'habilitation des voix communautaires dans *Improving publicly funded education through conversation*. Dans chaque article, vous trouverez un témoignage de cause à effet, où l'effet est toujours orienté vers le bien commun.

En poursuivant une lecture plus approfondie de ces pages, vous découvrirez l'importance des conseils du travail, de l'organisation locale et de la négociation pour le bien commun. J'espère qu'en explorant ce numéro, vous y trouverez l'étincelle qui déclenchera votre propre réflexion. Peut-être déciderez-vous d'offrir votre solidarité à un problème local qui, même s'il est un peu hors de votre expertise habituelle, peut-être y trouverez-vous une façon d'en apprendre plus sur un problème communautaire et de contribuer à l'améliorer. Finalement, même si je ne m'attends pas à ce que vous enfiliez des Birkenstocks avec des chaussettes, si l'idée vous touche et vous aide à vous ancrer dans l'activisme, allez-y!

**Tracey Germa** (elle)

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# Revolution begins at home



**Localizing the fight to defend public education**

by Munib Sajjad

In 2022, OSSTF/FEESO embarked on an ambitious endeavour to reflect and challenge ourselves in a time that has already challenged us so much. It began with a singular goal: “to create a plan that will foster relationships between organizations, groups, communities, and OSSTF/FEESO to grow a more fair, just, and equitable society together” (OSSTF/FEESO Strategic Action Plan, 2022).

After spending the last two and a half years with OSSTF/FEESO, I find myself continually inspired by the resilience and strength of educators across the province. The power that I see on a daily basis shows how teachers and education workers persevere through hardship and challenge adversity with a government that undermines their work, attacks their livelihoods, and seeks to alienate them from the community abroad.

Building a more fair, just, and equitable society while fostering new relationships starts with reflecting on our principles and deepening relationships with those who depend on us to keep Ontario’s world-class education system alive. Our plan has evolved considerably from just two years ago. Our conviction to defend public education is matched by a bold ambition to enact change in Ontario. We must rethink everything and pursue a path that will shake the very ground under us all.

The Federation began this pursuit by forming a small committee of rank and file members and some elected local leaders entitled the Organizing for Better Schools, Stronger Communities Work Group to answer six significant questions:

1. How do we support and engage with our local leaders to identify and develop positive community relations?
2. How will we know the relationships are positive and complement each other?
3. What are reasonable goals to expect from these relationships?
4. What strategies and supports can we deploy to sustain these relationships over the long term?
5. How can local efforts align with provincial/organizational goals?

6. What can we learn from our Districts with established cultures centred around fostering community relationships?

We took to answering these questions and several more while delving deeper into a reflection of the current practices of OSSTF/FEESO and the experiences felt by members. Through deep discussion and honest reflection, we realized that there is untapped potential in many of our current structures, structures that impact the involvement in community activities that solely falls onto local leaders. Capacity becomes strained and opportunities become lost. This is where we must focus on empowering members, so they may identify their own community members and fight locally. We further researched several other North America unions to explore and identify tactics to integrate into our plan. This article highlights some of our findings.

### **Equity and coalition at the heart of our core principles**

To build power around public education, it is crucial that the principles be foundationally rooted in equity and anti-oppression. This was dictated in how relationships were mapped, how communities were communicated with, and how coalitions were established. Publicly funded schools and post-secondary institutions can demonstrably be places that solve systemic inequities through unhindered and universal access to education.

Building broad-based coalitions, such as *Reclaim Our Schools Los Angeles* with United Teachers of Los Angeles, highlighted a strong example of actively participating and resourcing with major student, parent, and community groups. Developing relationships with these groups was done reflexively and dialectically. Community was given space to identify priorities informing the objectives of the joint coalition.

The practice of this work can also be linked to bargaining for the common good (BCG), where there is an active network of unions, coalitions, and community groups who seek to redefine trad-

itional practices of bargaining, creating campaigns expanding into broader organizing objectives with the community.

The relationships developed are maintained through active and consistent engagement with members, not just local leaders taking part in community-led initiatives. This makes participation sustainable and ensures there is no loss of capacity on behalf of the union.

### **Organizing our membership**

To pursue new partners in the fight for public education, we must work alongside our local leaders, as well as our members, in identifying key communities that exist in all regions that our Districts call home. Our worksites offer unique networks and pathways to various communities. Our memberships will be key in connecting us and providing perspective on the impacts various communities are facing in Ontario under the Ford Conservatives.

To get our members involved in the process, we recognize that we are not only teachers and education workers but that we carry a variety of identities and are affected by a multitude of circumstances that they relate to. Our members have intersectional realities and so must our organizing. As academic and civil rights activist Audre Lorde once stated, “There is nothing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”

The breadth of interests and priorities of our members far exceed those they encounter at their work sites alone. They can be impacted by various circumstances, including conditions of economic status, citizenship status, race, religion, creed, sexual orientation, gender, sex and/or disability among many others. We can enhance public education quite easily when we diversify our approach and centre the experiences of members as well as what informs their decisions.

### **Central campaigns and training programs**

Building the necessary organizing curriculum is imperative in order to achieve our goals. This

can include workshops on community/member mapping, having effective one-on-one conversations with members and community, organizing action, and using digital tools for action.

Member-driven and member-led unions with strong internal organizing structures are paramount to successful community organizing. Each union we researched actively worked to develop member capacity.

Unions like the United Teachers of Los Angeles, the Chicago Teachers Union, as well as the Canadian Union of Postal Workers all have some form of central organizing program and/or a member training centre to train local leaders and rank and file membership alike. Central organizers, working full time, train local organizers at either the local office or the worksite. These organizers then work to build local member capacity and participate in union campaigns, community outreach, and coalition.

### **The road to 2026 and bargaining for the common good**

Applying this theory and research is not an easy feat. To conduct this, it requires a major commitment of leadership, resources, and buy-in from the collective. This is where the OSSTF/FEESO 2023-2027 Strategic Action Plan, envisioned by the Provincial Executive, ushers in that very commitment to build a movement for the change we seek.

Under this plan, the Federation has hired six full-time Regional Organizers to build membership capacity and to work alongside community members to harness our collective power to effect change in our communities. They collaborate with OSSTF/FEESO members, parents and guardians, students, and community groups to build towards provincial and school board Trustee elections as well as our upcoming round of bargaining in 2026. With renewed vigour and focus, we are working to be ready.

Deploying these Regional Organizers alone cannot be the single solution. To conduct this work, it is imperative that members are the ones

“  
...it is about building **long-term power** both within organized labour as well as with the community.”

leading the charge in their communities. We have therefore developed the OSSTF/FEESO Organizing Network, as an additional space for members to work collaboratively towards regional initiatives. The needs and make up of public education are unique in every part of the province; organizing strategies and tactics must then meet the needs of the local communities. There is no one size fits all approach to this, and our networks will allow for the localization of power.

Our work group is ongoing and a central project that will be conducted through members is the creation of a purposeful examination and strategy the Federation can take on BCG. Through this approach, the Federation can actively embed the principles and tactics learned from unions already engaged in revolutionizing their structures.

It is more than just a way of practicing bargaining with a central or local employer, it is about building long-term power both within organized labour as well as with the community. Bargaining, across organized labour, is a time when union organizing is at its highest level of engagement. With concerted purpose, unions generally enlist members to participate in strike votes and job-action, including strikes, and leverage the influence of workers as part of a broader effort to raise public awareness and pressure decision-makers to meet the workers' demands. Strikes don't always need to occur to get to a deal for members, but the lasting impact of effective democratic processes elicits deeper meaning of involvement for activism. Leveraging that power for more than just contract language around wages and benefits

into long-term scaled campaigns, and utilizing that momentum for community issues, elicits deeper relational influence and support for efforts in-between contract bargaining rounds. This does not mean we are neglecting or watering down language in a contract for the sake of community, it means we are strengthening the working conditions of educators and raising the quality of life for all those who directly or indirectly are affected by public education.

A great and recent example of this work can be demonstrated by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and their massive victory with the federal government in the founding of the National School Food Program. It took many years of advocacy to achieve this goal as Canada is the one country among the G20 states that does not have a national school food program for its students. The establishment of this program, with federal funding to the tune of \$1 billion, will support the most marginalized students in accessing free food while at school. The CTF did not have to do this in their advocacy for educators alone, but it saw fit to focus on students and their learning conditions. No student should ever attend school without access to healthy and nourishing food and it will only improve the working conditions of educators by building the best learning conditions for all students. This will lead to better student achievement, enriching our communities.

We, as trade unionists in public education, are on a path of changing hearts and minds. With the Ford Conservative government continually denigrating our roles as educators and defunding education, we must work collectively to shift public opinion by being exacting in defining the impact of this attack on our system with parents, guardians, students, and all stakeholders who believe in universal access to education. The work we do in classrooms, from kindergarten to post-secondary, is already in line with this as we seek to inspire students for the choices they make as growing and ever-learning working members of a fair and just society.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Munib Sajjad** (he/him)  
OSSTF/FEESO Provincial Organizer

# La révolution commence à la maison



Localiser la lutte pour défendre l'éducation publique

par Munib Sajjad

En 2022, OSSTF/FEESO s'est lancé dans un projet ambitieux visant à nous faire réfléchir et nous remettre en question dans une époque qui nous a déjà tant mis au défi. Tout a commencé avec un objectif unique : « Créer un plan qui facilitera les relations parmi les organisations, les groupes, les communautés et OSSTF/FEESO pour établir une société plus juste, sincère et équitable. » (Plan d'action stratégique d'OSSTF/FEESO 2022).

Après avoir passé les deux dernières années et demie avec OSSTF/FEESO, je suis toujours inspiré par la résilience et la force du personnel en éducation de toute la province. Une des forces que je constate au quotidien est la résilience dont les enseignantes et les enseignants, et les travailleuses et travailleurs en éducation font preuve envers les difficultés et l'adversité d'un gouvernement qui sape leur travail, attaque leurs moyens de subsistance et cherche à les aliéner de leur communauté.

Pour rendre une société plus juste, sincère et équitable tout en créant de nouvelles relations, il faut d'abord réfléchir à nos propres principes et approfondir nos relations avec ceux qui comptent sur nous pour conserver le système d'éducation de classe mondiale de l'Ontario. Notre plan a considérablement évolué en moins de deux ans. C'est dû à nos efforts à défendre l'éducation publique et à notre ambition audacieuse à faire changer les choses en Ontario. Tout doit être repensé et nous devons nous diriger vers une voie qui doit remuer le sol sur lequel nous marchons.

La Fédération a commencé sa démarche en formant un petit comité de membres du comité et de quelques dirigeants locaux élus, intitulé Groupe de travail « S'organiser pour de meilleures écoles et de plus fortes communautés » pour répondre à six questions importantes :

1. Comment soutenir et impliquer nos dirigeants locaux à identifier et accroître des relations communautaires positives?
2. Comment saurons-nous si nos relations sont positives et se complètent?
3. Quels sont les objectifs raisonnables à

s'attendre de ces relations?

4. Quelles stratégies et quel soutien devons-nous utiliser à long terme pour entretenir de telles relations?
5. Comment pourrions-nous adapter nos efforts locaux pour qu'ils s'alignent avec les objectifs provinciaux/organisationnels?
6. Que pouvons-nous apprendre des districts dont les cultures établies ciblent efficacement la promotion de relations communautaires?

Nous avons répondu à ces questions et à plusieurs autres en approfondissant notre réflexion sur les pratiques courantes d'OSSTF/FEESO et les expériences vécues par les membres. Grâce à des discussions approfondies et à une réflexion honnête, nous avons constaté qu'il existe un potentiel inexploité dans bon nombre de nos structures actuelles, ce qui a un impact sur la participation aux activités et aux espaces communautaires, qui repose uniquement sur les dirigeants locaux. Les capacités sont mises à rude épreuve et les opportunités risquent de passer inaperçues. C'est là que nous devons travailler sur l'habilitation des membres, afin qu'ils puissent cerner les membres de leur propre communauté et lutter au niveau local. Nous avons effectué des recherches approfondies sur plusieurs syndicats en Amérique du Nord et évalué des tactiques pour les intégrer dans notre plan. Voici quelques conclusions.

### **L'équité et la coalition sont au cœur de nos principes fondamentaux**

Pour renforcer le pouvoir de l'éducation publique, il est essentiel que les principes soient fondamentalement ancrés dans l'équité et la lutte contre l'oppression. Cela a été confirmé par la façon dont les relations sont cartographiées, la façon dont les communautés ont été contactées et comment les coalitions ont été établies. Les écoles publiques et les établissements postsecondaires peuvent devenir des endroits servant à résoudre les iniquités grâce à un accès libre et

universel à l'éducation.

L'établissement de coalitions globales, comme *Reclaim Our Schools Los Angeles* des *United Teachers of Los Angeles*, a mis en évidence un bon exemple de participation active et de mobilisation de ressources avec les principaux groupes d'étudiants, de parents et de groupes communautaires. L'établissement de relations avec les groupes s'est fait de manière réflexive et dialectique. La communauté a la possibilité d'identifier les priorités et cela informe les objectifs de la coalition commune.

Cette pratique peut également être liée à la négociation pour le bien commun, où il existe un réseau actif de syndicats, de coalitions et de groupes communautaires qui cherchent à redéfinir les pratiques traditionnelles de négociation, à organiser des campagnes en objectifs d'organisation plus larges avec la communauté.

Les relations sont entretenues grâce à un engagement actif et constant auprès des membres, et non pas uniquement grâce à la participation active des dirigeants locaux aux initiatives menées par la communauté. Cela rend la participation durable et garantit qu'il n'y a aucune perte de capacité de la part du syndicat.

### **Organisation de nos membres**

Pour trouver de nouveaux partenaires dans la lutte pour l'éducation publique, nous devons travailler aux côtés de nos dirigeant(es) locaux, ainsi que de nos membres, pour identifier les communautés clés qui existent dans toutes les régions où nos districts sont implantés. Nos lieux de travail offrent des réseaux et des voies uniques vers diverses communautés. Nos membres seront essentiels pour nous connecter et nous donner une perspective sur les impacts auxquels font face diverses communautés en Ontario sous les conservateurs de Ford.

Pour impliquer nos membres dans le processus, nous reconnaissons qu'ils ne sont pas seulement des enseignants et des travailleurs en éducation, mais qu'ils ont aussi des identités et sont touchés par la multitude de circon-

stances auxquelles ils sont confrontés. Dans cette optique, puisque nos membres ont des réalités intersectionnelles, notre organisation doit l'être aussi. Comme l'a déclaré un jour Audre Lorde, universitaire et militante des droits civiques, « il n'existe pas de lutte axée sur un seul problème, car nous ne vivons pas une vie axée sur un seul problème ».

L'étendue des intérêts et des priorités de nos membres dépasse de loin ceux auxquels ils sont confrontés au travail. Ils peuvent être affectés par diverses circonstances, qu'il s'agisse de leur situation économique, de leur statut de citoyenneté, de leur race, de leur religion, de leurs croyances, de leur orientation sexuelle, de leur genre et/ou de leur handicap, entre autres. Notre objectif d'améliorer l'éducation publique peut être atteint assez facilement en diversifiant notre approche et en nous concentrant sur les expériences de nos membres ainsi que sur ce qui informe leurs décisions.

### **Campagnes centrales et programmes de formation**

Il est impératif de mettre en place un programme pour atteindre nos objectifs. Cela peut inclure des ateliers sur la cartographie des communautés/membres, sur la manière de tenir des conversations individuelles efficaces avec les membres et la communauté, sur l'organisation d'actions et sur l'utilisation d'outils numériques.

Les syndicats dirigés par leurs membres et dotés de solides structures d'organisation internes sont essentiels à la réussite de l'organisation communautaire. Chaque syndicat étudié a démontré qu'il était actif dans le développement des capacités des membres.

Les syndicats des *United Teachers of Los Angeles*, le *Chicago Teachers Union* et le Syndicat des travailleurs et travailleuses des postes ont tous un programme d'organisation centrale et/ou un centre de formation pour former les dirigeant(es) locaux et les membres. Les organisateurs centraux, qui travaillent à temps plein, forment les organisateurs locaux, soit au bureau, soit au lieu

de travail. Les organisateurs s'emploient ensuite à renforcer la capacité des membres à participer aux campagnes syndicales, à la sensibilisation communautaire et à la coalition.

### **La route vers 2026 et la négociation pour le bien commun**

Appliquer cette théorie et ces recherches n'est pas une mince affaire. Pour y parvenir, il faut un engagement majeur de la part des dirigeants, des ressources et de l'adhésion de la part de la collectivité. C'est là que le Plan d'action stratégique 2023-2027 d'OSSTF/FEESO, envisagé par l'Exécutif provincial, marque le début d'un engagement à bâtir le mouvement pour le changement que nous voulons.

Dans le cadre de ce plan, la Fédération a embauché six organisateurs(trices) régionaux à temps plein qui travailleront à renforcer les capacités des membres et à travailler aux côtés des membres de la communauté pour exploiter notre pouvoir collectif afin d'apporter des changements dans nos communautés. Ils collaboreront avec les membres d'OSSTF/FEESO, les parents, les élèves et les groupes communautaires pour préparer les élections provinciales et scolaires ainsi que notre prochaine ronde de négociations en 2026. Avec une vigueur et une concentration renouvelées, nous travaillons pour être prêts.

Le déploiement de ses organisateurs régionaux ne peut pas être la seule solution. Pour le mener à bien, il est impératif que les membres soient des chefs de file dans leurs communautés. Pour ce faire, nous avons mis sur pied le réseau d'organisation d'OSSTF/FEESO. C'est un espace où les membres pourront travailler en collaboration. Nous savons que les besoins et la composition de l'éducation publique sont uniques dans chaque région. Les stratégies et tactiques d'organisation devront également être uniques pour répondre aux besoins des communautés locales. Il n'existe pas d'approche universelle pour y arriver, et nos réseaux nous permettront de localiser ce pouvoir.

Notre groupe de travail est en cours et un



...mais aussi de construire **un pouvoir à long terme** au sein du mouvement syndical et avec la communauté.



projet majeur sera mené par nos membres pour un examen approfondi et une stratégie sur la manière dont la Fédération peut aborder la négociation du bien commun. Au moyen de cette approche, la Fédération pourra intégrer les principes et les tactiques des syndicats qui révolutionnent déjà leurs structures.

Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une façon de pratiquer la négociation avec un employeur central ou local, mais aussi de construire un pouvoir à long terme au sein du mouvement syndical et avec la communauté. La négociation, dans l'ensemble du mouvement syndical, est un moment où l'organisation syndicale est à son plus haut niveau d'engagement. Dans un but concerté, les syndicats enrôlent généralement leurs membres pour participer aux votes de grève et aux moyens de pression, y compris les grèves, et exploitent l'influence des travailleurs dans le cadre d'un effort plus large pour sensibiliser le public et faire pression sur les décideurs afin qu'ils répondent aux revendications des travailleurs. Les grèves ne sont pas toujours nécessaires pour obtenir un accord, mais l'impact durable des processus démocratiques efficaces suscite un sens plus profond de l'engagement pour le militantisme. Tirer parti de ce pouvoir pour aller au-delà du simple libellé des contrats sur les salaires et les avantages sociaux dans des campagnes à long terme et utiliser cet élan pour les questions communautaires suscite une influence relationnelle plus profonde et un soutien aux efforts entre les cycles de négociation des contrats. Cela ne





OSSTF/FEESO members have a natural affinity for being compassionate and caring individuals. We live this daily for our students, schools, and worksites. We have discussions and create plans to support and engage the students we serve. But when the topic changes to how we support one another in the union, the conversation gets more difficult, and gazes turn towards the floor.

We hear “public education in Ontario is under attack under Doug Ford!” as a refrain to raise members’ ire and start union conversations. A 2018 article by Ricardo Tranjan in the *Monitor* revealed that the Ontario government has decreased spending by \$1,500/student. This is a huge number with staggering systemic impacts. The question becomes: how do we approach system underfunding and build solidarity in the Federation and ultimately in the greater community?

The answer is together, through conversation. Every member of OSSTF/FEESO experiences this underfunding in their workplace daily. We see it through low staffing numbers that lead to dangerous situations for educational assistants (EAs) and other support staff groups, unacceptable wait times for speech and language pathologists, ballooning class sizes for teachers, and crumbling daycare centres. We need to use our experiences to raise the alarm bells about publicly funded education in Ontario. We must talk to our colleagues about our experiences and build the solutions together.

To promote publicly funded education in Ontario, we need to have conversations about the problems we face and take action on solutions to fix them. Teachers and education workers need to humanize the crisis in the system and point to solutions. We do that by telling our stories and making the problems workers and students experience real and tangible. This is how we help the general public recognize and support the vital role public education plays in building strong communities.

Union organizers have a strategy for these conversations that is tactical and focused on a goal: moving their co-workers towards taking collective action and building worker power. These

conversations aren’t chit-chats, gripe sessions, or therapy. They are solutions-focused, galvanizing, action-spurring conversations that happen as many times as necessary until a person is secure in their power.

These steps to organizing conversations were a training component at the inaugural OSSTF/FEESO Organizing Institute in spring 2024. By engaging in these discussions with our colleagues, we set them up to have deeper conversations in their own communities—conversations that will change hearts and minds and that will lead to greater advocacy for public education. The steps shared below allow labour activists and grassroots organizers to turn problems into solutions.

### Check-in

Union representatives have always relied on one-on-one conversations as a basic tenet to support members at their worksite. Often, this is done best by worksite reps where personal connections can be made naturally.

Making connections with one another helps us know each other’s concerns and what we care about. Union leaders must identify a member’s position on a particular issue and what is important to them. Listening is critical in this first part of the conversation as the member is the expert on their issue.

#### Having a conversation

#### An on-the-ground example

**Tia** is an Educational Assistant (EA) in a high school where she is assigned to support mainstream special education students with behavioural needs. Because of her fantastic rapport with students, she often ends up supporting mainstream students in managing their emotions and de-escalating conflicts. **Damian** is an EA in a developmental disabilities self-contained classroom, and Tia’s colleague in the school. The scene takes place in the special education prep room.

Tia

Those girls...

Damian

That fight in the atrium was them, again?

Tia

I swear, I spend half my day ignoring the kids I'm actually supposed to support, just trying to get these two to stop going after each other. Then the bell rings, and bam! They go after each other anyway.

Damian

You can't be in two places at once, Tia. It's not your fault.

Tia

But everyone knows these girls are my girls...

Damian

What do you mean, your girls? Are they assigned to you?

Tia

No, you know I'm supposed to support Zadie and Chris.

Damian

Right, but you also support these girls? Is that officially part of your workload?

Tia

It is when I'm getting texts from the principal asking me if I've seen either of the girls...

Damian

Hold up—you're getting texts from the principal? That's a problem.

Once you have done a check-in and identified the problem you can move on to the second phase of the conversation.

### Focus and empower

To highlight an issue to organize around, you need to identify widely felt concerns that are deeply winnable. The second phase of the conversation is where organizers reassure members that they are not alone and gives both people a chance to focus on the heart of the issue.

This is done by asking open-ended questions, pinpointing concerns, and identifying why they matter to the member. It is important to use the concerns brought forward and lay the blame on a decision-maker who can fix the problem. Validating a concern and identifying where to focus on fixing the problem will lead to mobilizing for action.

Tia

Yes, I'm getting texts from the principal. I don't mind—it's urgent. If I can help the girls...

Damian

But you have to help the girls while also supporting Zadie and Chris?

Tia

Yup.

Damian

That sounds like you're doing the job of two people.

Tia

Three people. Those girls are a lot. I should clone myself.

Damian

Who laid out your responsibilities for the year?

Tia

The vice-principal did an okay job initially. My responsibilities are fine on paper.

Damian

Yeah, but the fight in the atrium didn't happen on paper.

Tia

Most days I can handle it...

Damian

You shouldn't have to clone yourself to have a safe school. How are we gonna fix this?

### Prepare for action

The final step in your organizing conversation is the call to action. Once again, the member must be involved in deciding on the action. This is where the discussions turn to planning and execution. You need to decide on a specific action that will pinpoint the issue and direct the action so that change can happen.

It is important to prepare for responses and possible outcomes to the actions, both positive and negative. This step ensures that when an inevitable response comes to the action, a member won't be thrown by it. Preparing counterpoints and possible action escalations strengthens the resolve of a member in the action and re-affirms their commitment to solving the problem.

Tia

Unless you have a magic wand and can bippidy-bobbidy-boo me a better funding formula for public education, more EAs aren't going to materialize in the school overnight.

Damian

You're right. Fixing the funding formula is a long-term fight that we need to be involved in. I'd love to bring you to our next political action meeting to talk about that. But what can we do right here?

Tia

I guess we could look at which students are assigned to which EA?

Damian

Yup. We could also see if we can pull any levers higher up in the board to get the girls some support.

Tia

I don't know if anyone's reviewed their plans lately.

Damian

Well, that needs to happen. The more we try and make it work with less, the more normalized the underfunding becomes.

Tia

So, I should ask for two meetings: one to go over the workload assignment with the special education VP, and one to get more support for the girls.

Damian

That's a solid plan. How do you think the VP will react when you ask for those meetings?

Tia

She'll probably roll her eyes. Tell me there's nothing more we can do. That everyone is stretched thin. That I need to act like a team player.

Damian

She doesn't know what's coming for her. You're the strongest team player we've got.

Tia

Do you think if I asked the other EAs and the department head, they'd let me CC them on the email? Just so the VP knows it's all of us who are worried about this?

Damian

Team player, right there. Let's go ask them.

## Follow up

As you can see, having the organizing conversation is just the beginning. The organizing conversation sets an action, or series of escalating actions, in motion. As the organizer in your workplace, be it an OSSTF/FEESO Bargaining Unit or District, you need to monitor the results of the actions and follow up.

In the book *Secrets Of A Successful Organizer*, Bradbury, Brenner, and Slaughter (57) note that "90% of organizing is follow-up." Actions need to be monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness. The members taking the actions need support. Actions will, inevitably, lead to further organizing conversions and possibly more actions. Members that take actions, and the actions themselves that see gains in our workplaces need to be celebrated. Don't forget how important it is to recognize our successes and use the lessons learned in your next organizing conversations and actions.

Ultimately, we become stronger together when we are having conversations and taking action to improve public education. This framework, while specifically geared to engaging in workplace conversations, can also be applied to community-level activism, where you work with people in your neighbourhood or community to fight for better services, supports, and resources for all in your community.

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Bill Hewitt (he/him)

OSSTF/FEESO Regional Organizer

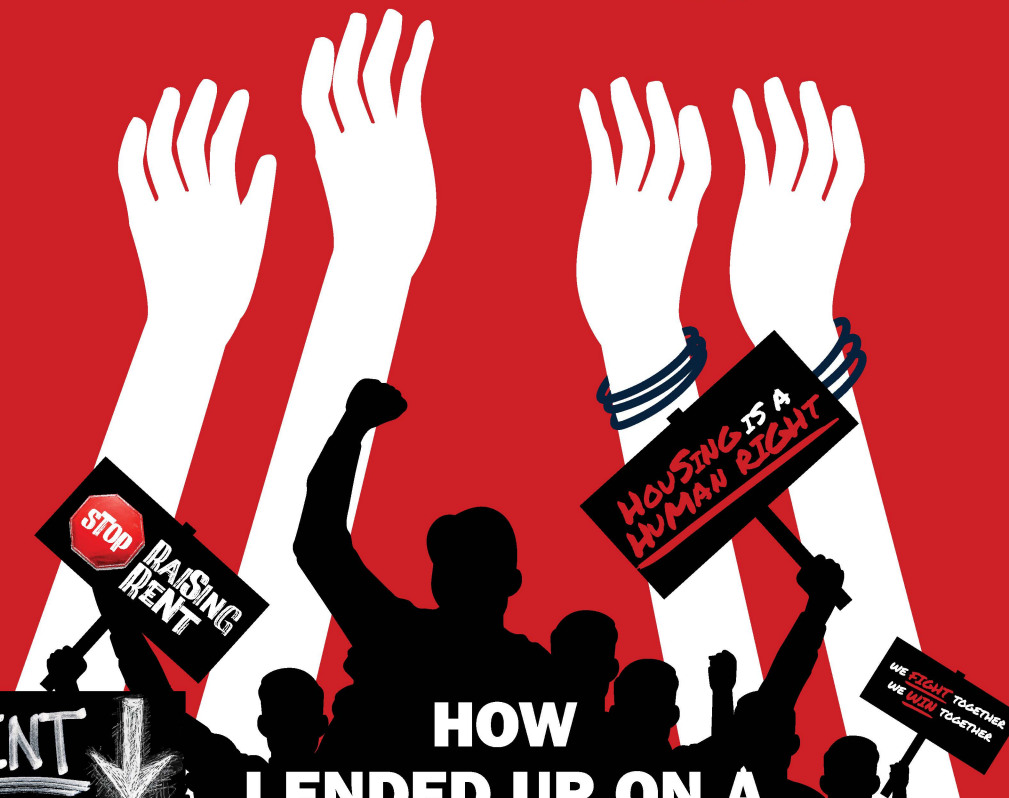
Mary Fraser-Hamilton (she/her)

OSSTF/FEESO Regional Organizer

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STOP RAISING RENT

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

WE FIGHT TOGETHER WE WIN TOGETHER

RENT ↓

HOW I ENDED UP ON A

# RENT STRIKE

A reflection on resiliency and collective action for tenants in Ontario

by Sharlene Henry

Advocating for tenant rights has become my passion! Who knew that this work would lead to the biggest rent strike in the history of the city of Toronto (Frame, 2023). I have become one of the voices and faces of the right to affordable and appropriate housing for the many tenants who are members of the York South-Weston Tenant Union (YSWTU). Maybe I need to roll it back and start at the beginning and explain to everyone why I firmly believe that housing is a human right.

My name is Sharlene Henry, and I am Co-Chair of the York South-Weston Tenant Union. YSWTU is a grassroots organization that advocates for tenant rights in the neighbourhood of York South-Weston in the city of Toronto. We started educating tenants on their rights back in 2017 and formally became a Tenant Union in February 2020 when we had our first Annual General Meeting. YSWTU currently has 14 buildings as members of the union. Each building has a Tenant Leader and a Tenant Association. While working on founding the YSWTU we knew we wanted to create an organization similar to a labour union. An organization for the people of our ward who were renters/tenants. Our goal was to empower tenants to advocate for their rights and to fight for tenant power through collective action and education. At the core of our movement, we were determined to have folks understand that with collective power we can make changes to our circumstances and neighbourhood.

Over the first few years we have focused on education and collective action. We fought back against Above Guideline Increases (AGIs), we teach tenants about their rights including the right to a unit that is clean, free of repairs, with working amenities, and free from infestations of a wide variety of bugs and creatures. We also focus on creating a community within a community, having Tenant Association meetings to discuss what is happening in the specific building, preventing evictions of many tenants from their homes, and celebrating our wins with block parties and events like movie nights at our Community Office on Eglinton Avenue West in Toronto. Organizing as a collective led to us take many actions. We signed

petitions, held rallies all over our neighbourhood, and tried to meet with our elected officials at all levels of government. Like neighbourhoods all over this country, we are seeing the effect of the lack of tenant education in our neighbourhood and this has led to many of our renters/tenants living in sub-par conditions.

In all honesty, the overwhelming amount of AGI applications in my building at 33 King Street led to us currently being on a rent strike that has



...we were determined to have folks understand that **with collective power we can make changes** to our circumstances and neighbourhood.



lasted for over a year. The majority of tenants in our 30-storey high rise building know what an AGI is; they have been a part of our lives for so many years. An AGI is when a landlord applies for a rent increase above the maximum rent increase percentage that the Ontario government allows each year. For 2024 the rent increase guideline is 2.5%. AGI applications are submitted for capital repairs done on the building during the year that the application is for (“What Is An Above Guideline Increase?” 2023). To complicate things even more the allowable rent increase that the Ontario government sets yearly does not apply to buildings built or occupied after November 15th, 2018. The Ford government took away rent control

once they came into office and new builds have no rent control. The building I live in is not under this change and is supposedly “rent controlled.” But on the flip side, our building has seen the most AGIs in the city of Toronto. In 2022 we took part in a banner action and hung “Stop Raising Rent” signs on our balconies. We hung the signs to gain the attention of our landlord and our community. This caught the eye of CBC News, and I was featured in an article and interview called [“‘Explosion’ of above guideline rent increases pricing out some Toronto tenants, advocates say”](#) (2022) by Nicole Brockbank. The article highlighted that 33 King Street had been subject to numerous AGI applications in the past 10 years. With a total of 6 AGI applications brought before the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) in a decade, as tenants we felt confused and quite frustrated. The article detailed how tenants across the city were going through similar challenges with AGIs and neglectful landlords. The pot was stirring and folks were definitely feeling the effects of having their monthly rent go up by an average of \$40 to \$70 each year versus the allowable Ontario increase. On average tenants were seeing rent increases of about \$150 to \$200 after the approval of the AGIs.


During the Covid-19 pandemic the YSWTU continued to grow in our neighbourhood as we kept connecting with more tenants across several of our buildings who were going through the exact same thing. They continue to experience AGI notices every year, renovations that seem useless, and a loss of services like elevators not running. Landlords issue threatening notices to tenants who, thanks to the work of tenant unions, fully understand the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) 2006 who in turn respond by withholding the AGI increases until the Landlord and Tenant Board case is heard and an adjudicator finalizes an order for the increase amount that is approved. The RTA states that the yearly increases cannot exceed 3%. But our experience has proven that many applications are often well beyond the 3% maximum and sometimes spread over 2 or 3 years. Some tenants face confusion and need to be educated

about how this process works so they understand that the RTA often supports what landlords are doing when they file for an AGI. Unfortunately, this process took years for the hundreds of residents affected by the notices at 33 King Street where I live with my family. Our case against the 2018 AGI was scheduled to be heard at the Landlord Tenant Board in the summer of 2022. We put pressure on our landlord, Dream Unlimited, for months before the hearing date and we collectively won a decrease in the total amount of the AGI application.

With ongoing frustration and the lack of transparency to tenants who should have been awarded money back due to the 2018 AGI victory, the majority of tenants at 33 King Street grew more and more frustrated. Some folks who paid into the AGI increase of 2018 did not receive a credit for the AGI victory which then led us to the idea of possibly going on a rent strike. This idea and concept were not new to us, and we had discussed it in the past at meetings but felt it was not the time to proceed with this bold tactic. This feeling changed dramatically in early 2023 when Dream Unlimited refused to have a negotiation with us regarding the pending AGIs for 2019 and 2021.


Our rent strike at 33 King Street started officially on June 1, 2023, with 200 tenants withholding their rent from our landlord. The goal was to get Dream Unlimited to negotiate with us as a collective and tenant union. Our demands were; a commitment to no more AGIs, rent abatement for the loss of our balconies and amenities (over 18 months of construction), and the removal of the pending AGI applications for 2019 and 2021. Yes, you are reading correctly, 33 King Street was hit with an AGI rent increase during the Covid-19 pandemic. The same year where the Ford government set the Ontario increase 0%. AGIs are a loophole and Dream Unlimited was allowed to hit us with a 3% increase during 2021.

On July 1, 2023 our sister building at 22 John Street joined the rent strike and 100 tenants withheld their rent. They are a new building and have no rent control. Residents at 22 John Street have seen rent increases as high as 10% year



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**The support of labour unions has been instrumental** in our success and getting the message of why we are on a rent strike out to the masses.



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over year. With rental costs being so high in the province imagine a rent increase of 10% when we do not even get a pay increase each year. Momentum was growing and folks across the city started taking notice of our collective actions. We continued to have rallies, to canvass our buildings weekly, and to speak with the media about what we were fighting for. Ultimately the movement grew by leaps and bounds thanks to the attention on social media, collaborations with community groups across the city, as well as through news channels, podcasts, and talk radio running stories about this movement for decent housing.

Unions joined our movement early on. The support of labour unions has been instrumental in our success and in getting the message of why we are on a rent strike out to the masses. The support of union allies has been astronomical and has helped create understanding. This support shows that when we come together collectively, educate members and the public, together we can achieve amazing results. Keeping the rent strike going takes many folks coming together to support the efforts of the YSWTU. Unions helped keep the momentum going and with their support

we have been able to maintain our presence in our community. We are thankful for the support of our brothers, sisters, and siblings in the labour movement.

On October 1, 2023 two more buildings from the YSWTU joined the rent strike. One hundred tenants at 1440 and 1442 Lawrence Avenue West decided it was time to stop paying rent to their landlord, Barney Rivers Investments. The building has been hit with several AGI applications over years and renters have been dealing with egregious living conditions. The long-time tenants have major issues in the units including holes in the ceiling, leaking throughout the units, infestations of rats, bed bugs, and cockroaches, and a lack of repairs in the common areas. These conditions had been happening over years and the Tenant Association and YSWTU had tried every method of outreach to gain the attention of the landlord. Barney Rivers never answered calls or petitions from hundreds of residents of these two buildings. Once again, tenants became frustrated and felt the need to take control by making a bold move. The rent strike currently continues as I write this article.

I would like to stress how important this movement is for all renters. We are a large spectrum of people who live in every community across this province and country.

**Renters are made up of young families, middle aged folks, new immigrants, retired seniors, and working-class people. Renters come from all walks of life and are an important part of our communities. We vote, pay taxes, shop local, and enjoy our neighbourhoods just as much as homeowners. We have been silent for too long and have the right to fight to change the laws that affect our lives each and everyday.**

I am a proud resident of York South-Weston. Our community is unique and known for being a vibrant older part of Toronto. We are home to a wide variety of cultures, races, and ethnicities. I have lived in this area for most of my life, and as an adult

my love for this community has grown exponentially. I am a mother to three amazing young children who love and appreciate everything that is York South-Weston, from the parks and trails to many community events. We love our diverse neighbourhood as much as many other residents do. This journey has taught us all that solidarity and resiliency can take many forms and changes lives in the process.

**Because  
when  
we fight  
together,  
we win  
together!**

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**Sharlene Henry** (she/her)  
Co-Chair YSWTU

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# **COMMENT JE SUIS TOMBÉE EN GRÈVE DES LOYERS**





Une réflexion sur la résilience et l'action collective des locataires en Ontario



par Sharlene Henry

Défendre les droits des locataires est devenu ma passion. Qui aurait cru que ce travail mènerait à la plus grande grève des loyers de l'histoire de la ville de Toronto (Frame, 2023). Je suis devenue l'une des voix et l'un des visages du droit à un logement abordable et approprié pour les nombreux locataires, membres de l'Union des locataires de York South-Weston (YSWTU). Peut-être devrais-je revenir en arrière et commencer par le début et expliquer à tout le monde pourquoi je crois fermement que le logement est un droit de la personne.

Je m'appelle Sharlene Henry et je suis coprésidente de l'Union des locataires de York South-Weston. Le YSWTU est une organisation populaire qui défend les droits des locataires dans le quartier de York South-Weston, dans la ville de Toronto. Nous avons commencé à sensibiliser les locataires à leurs droits en 2017 et sommes officiellement devenus un syndicat de locataires en février 2020, lors de notre première assemblée générale annuelle. Le YSWTU compte actuellement 14 immeubles membres du syndicat. Chaque immeuble a un dirigeant de locataires et une association de locataires. En travaillant à la fondation du YSWTU, nous savions que nous voulions créer une organisation similaire à un syndicat. Une organisation pour les personnes de notre quartier qui étaient locataires. Notre objectif était de donner aux locataires les moyens de défendre leurs droits et de lutter pour le pouvoir des locataires par l'action collective et l'éducation. Au cœur de notre mouvement, nous étions déterminés à faire comprendre aux gens qu'avec le pouvoir collectif, nous pouvons améliorer notre situation et notre quartier.

Au cours des premières années, nous avons mis l'accent sur l'éducation et l'action collective. Nous avons lutté contre les augmentations de loyer supérieures (ALS) aux taux légal en éduquant les locataires de leurs droits, notamment le droit à un logement propre, exempt de réparations non complétées, doté d'équipements fonctionnels et exempt d'infestations d'insectes ou d'autres bestioles. Nous nous efforçons également de créer une communauté au sein de notre communauté, en organisant des réunions de locataires pour



...nous étions déterminés à faire comprendre aux gens qu'**avec le pouvoir collectif, nous pouvons améliorer notre situation** et notre quartier.



discuter de ce qui se passe dans l'immeuble, et d'éviter l'expulsion de locataires, de célébrer nos victoires dans des fêtes de quartier et des soirées cinéma à notre bureau communautaire sur Eglinton Ouest, Toronto. S'organiser collectivement nous a menés à entreprendre de nombreuses actions. Nous avons signé des pétitions, organisé des rassemblements partout dans notre quartier et tenté de rencontrer nos élus de tous les niveaux gouvernementaux. Comme dans tous les quartiers du pays, nous constatons les effets du manque d'éducation des locataires dans notre quartier, ce qui a conduit bon nombre de nos locataires à vivre dans des conditions inférieures.

En toute honnêteté, c'est le nombre écrasant de demandes d'ALS dans mon immeuble du 33 rue King qui nous a poussés vers une grève des loyers, qui dure maintenant depuis plus d'un an. La majorité des locataires de notre immeuble, qui compte 30 étages, savent ce qu'est une ALS car elles existent depuis de nombreuses années. Une ALS, ou augmentation de loyer supérieure aux taux légal est une augmentation de loyer dont le taux est supérieur au taux autorisé par le gouvernement de l'Ontario, pour chaque année. Cette année (2024), le taux d'augmentation des loyers autorisé est de 2,5 %. Les ALS soumises sont justifiées par des travaux dits capitalisables effectués pendant la même année que celle de l'ALS (« Qu'est-ce qu'une augmentation de loyer supérieure aux taux légal? »). Pour compliquer davantage les choses, l'augmentation de loyer autorisée que le gouvernement de l'Ontario fixe chaque année ne s'applique PAS aux nouveaux immeubles construits ou occupés après le 15

novembre 2018. Le gouvernement Ford a annulé le contrôle des loyers dès le début de son mandat; les nouveaux immeubles n'ont donc PAS de contrôle des loyers. L'immeuble où j'habite devrait être protégé par le « contrôle des loyers ». Mais au lieu de cela, c'est notre immeuble qui a eu le plus d'ALS dans toute la ville de Toronto.

En 2022, nous avons participé à une protestation et avons attaché des bannières « Stop Raising Rent » sur nos balcons. Les affiches avaient pour but d'attirer l'attention du propriétaire et aussi celle de notre communauté. Le réseau *CBC News* en a pris note et nous a contactés après avoir effectué des recherches sur notre groupe dans les réseaux sociaux. Ils ont parlé de moi dans un article et d'une interview avec l'entête '[Explosion of above guideline rent increases pricing out some Toronto tenants, advocates say](#)' (2022) par Nicole Brockband. L'article a démontré ce que nous savions déjà : l'immeuble du 33 rue King avait fait l'objet de nombreuses demandes d'ALS depuis les 10 dernières années. Au total, le propriétaire avait déposé six demandes d'ALS devant la Commission de la location immobilière en une décennie. En tant que locataires, nous nous sommes sentis désorientés et très frustrés. L'article mettait en évidence d'autres locataires de partout à Toronto qui faisaient face à des ALS et à des propriétaires négligeants. La situation s'est empirée depuis et plusieurs locataires ont vraiment ressenti les conséquences des augmentations de leur loyer mensuel de 40 à 70 dollars en moyenne par année, comparativement à l'augmentation autorisée en Ontario. En moyenne, les locataires ont vu leurs loyers augmenter d'environ 150 à 200 dollars après l'approbation des ALS par la Commission.

Pendant la pandémie de Covid-19, le YSWU n'a cessé de croître dans notre quartier, car nous avons contacté des locataires de plusieurs immeubles qui vivaient des situations semblables à la nôtre. Des avis d'ALS, des rénovations qui semblent inutiles et une diminution des services comme les ascenseurs en pannes. Les propriétaires émettent des avis menaçants aux locataires qui, grâce au travail des syndicats des locataires, comprennent à fond la Loi de 2006 sur la location à

usage d'habitation (LLUH) et qui renaient leurs augmentations jusqu'à ce que leur cause soit entendue par un arbitrage et qu'une décision soit rendue. La LLUH stipule que les augmentations de loyer annuelles ne peuvent pas dépasser 3 %. Mais selon notre expérience, de nombreuses demandes plus élevées que 3 % sont présentées sur une période maximale de 2 ou 3 ans. Certains locataires sont confus et apprennent que la LLUH donne souvent raison au propriétaire lorsqu'une ALS est intentée. Malheureusement, le processus prend des années, comme ce fut le cas pour les centaines de résidents du 33 rue King où j'habite avec ma famille. Notre ALS de 2018 devait être entendue au cours de l'été 2022. Nous avons fait pression sur notre propriétaire *Dream Unlimited* pendant des mois et nous avons obtenu une diminution du montant total de la demande d'ALS.

En raison du manque de transparence envers les locataires qui auraient dû récupérer de l'argent suite à la victoire de l'ALS en 2018, la majorité des locataires du 33 rue King est devenue de plus en plus frustrée. Certains locataires qui avaient contribué à l'ALS de 2018 n'ont pas reçu la somme due, ce qui nous a conduits à tenter une grève des loyers. Ce concept n'était pas une nouveauté, car nous en avons déjà discuté lors des réunions, mais nous avons estimé que le moment n'était pas opportun pour cette tactique audacieuse. Ce sentiment a toutefois disparu au début de 2023, lorsque *Dream Unlimited* a refusé toute négociation sur les ALS en cours pour 2019 et 2021.

Notre grève des loyers du 33 rue King a officiellement débutée le 1er juin 2023, lorsque 200 locataires ont retenu leur paiement de loyer. L'objectif était de négocier avec le propriétaire, en tant que collectif et syndicat de locataires. Nos revendications étaient les suivantes : un engagement à ne plus avoir d'ALS; une réduction de loyer pour la perte de nos balcons et autres commodités (au cours des 18 mois de construction); et le retrait des demandes d'ALS en cours pour 2019 et 2021. Oui, vous lisez bien, le 33 rue King a été frappé par une augmentation de loyer ALS pendant la pandémie de Covid-19. L'année même où le gouvernement Ford a imposé une

augmentation de 0 % en Ontario. Les ALS sont une échappatoire et notre propriétaire, *Dream Unlimited*, a été autorisé, par la Commission, à nous imposer une augmentation de 3 % en 2021.

Le 1er juillet 2023, notre immeuble jumeau du 22 rue John s'est joint à notre grève et 100 locataires ont retenu leur loyer. Il s'agit d'un nouvel immeuble et il n'y a pas de contrôle des loyers. Les résidents du 22 rue John ont vu leur loyer augmenter allant jusqu'à 10 %, année après année. Les coûts de location étant si élevés dans la province; imaginez une augmentation de loyer de 10 % alors que nous n'obtenons même pas d'augmentation de salaire. Le mouvement a pris de l'ampleur et les gens de partout en ville ont commencé à remarquer nos interventions collectives. Nous avons continué à organiser des rassemblements, à faire du porte-à-porte chaque semaine et à parler aux médias sur les raisons de notre combat. En fin de compte, le mouvement a connu une croissance fulgurante grâce à l'attention portée aux médias sociaux, aux collaborations avec des groupes communautaires de toute la ville, ainsi qu'aux chaînes d'informations, aux balados et aux émissions de radio qui ont parlé de ce mouvement en faveur d'un logement raisonnable.

Les syndicats ont rejoint notre mouvement très tôt! Le soutien des syndicats des travailleuses et travailleurs a joué un rôle déterminant dans notre succès et a permis de faire passer le message de notre grève des loyers à la population. Le soutien des syndicats a été astronomique et a contribué à améliorer la compréhension du mouve-



**Le soutien des syndicats des travailleuses et travailleurs a joué un rôle déterminant** dans notre succès et a permis de faire passer le message de notre grève des loyers à la population.



ment. Ce soutien démontre qu'en nous unissant, nous éduquons les membres et le public, et nous pouvons collectivement obtenir des résultats étonnants. Pour que la grève des loyers se poursuive, il faut que de nombreuses personnes se rassemblent et soutiennent les efforts du YSWTU. Les syndicats ont contribué à garder l'élan et, grâce aux syndicats, nous avons pu maintenir notre présence dans notre communauté. Nous sommes reconnaissants du soutien de nos frères, sœurs et partenaires du mouvement syndical.

Le 1er octobre 2023, deux autres immeubles du YSWTU se sont joints à la grève des loyers. Cent locataires des 1440 et 1442 avenue Lawrence Ouest ont décidé qu'il était temps pour eux de suspendre le paiement du loyer à leur propriétaire, *Barney Rivers Investments*. L'immeuble a fait l'objet de plusieurs demandes d'ALS et au fil des ans les locataires ont dû subir des conditions de vie déplorables. Des locataires de longue date ont subi des problèmes majeurs, notamment des trous dans le plafond, des fuites d'eau, une infestation de rongeurs, des punaises de lit et des cafards, en plus de l'absence d'entretien dans les pièces communes. Ces problèmes persistent depuis des années et leur association de locataires et le YSWTU avaient tenté toutes les méthodes de sensibilisation pour attirer l'attention du propriétaire. *Barney Rivers* n'a jamais répondu aux appels et aux pétitions des centaines de résidents des deux immeubles. À nouveau, les locataires se sont sentis frustrés et ont ressenti le besoin de prendre le contrôle de la situation en faisant preuve d'audace. La grève des loyers est toujours en cours au moment d'écrire cet article.

J'aimerais souligner l'importance de ce mouvement pour tous les locataires! Nous sommes composés d'un large éventail de personnes qui vivent dans toutes les communautés de cette province et de ce pays.

**Les locataires comprennent de jeunes familles, des personnes d'âge moyen, de nouveaux immigrants, des retraités et des personnes de la classe ouvrière. Les locataires viennent de tous les horizons et constituent une partie impor-**

**tante de nos communautés. Nous votons, payons des impôts, faisons nos achats localement et profitons de notre quartier tout autant que les propriétaires de maisons. Nous sommes restés silencieux trop longtemps et avons le droit de nous battre pour changer les lois qui affectent notre vie quotidienne.**

Je suis une fière résidente de York South-Weston! Notre communauté est sans pareille et reconnue pour être une des plus anciennes et dynamiques de Toronto. Nous comptons une grande variété de cultures, de races et d'ethnies. J'y suis depuis une grande partie de ma vie, et en tant qu'adulte, mon amour pour cette communauté a grandi de façon exponentielle. Je suis mère de trois jeunes enfants extraordinaires qui aiment et apprécient la communauté, ses parcs et ses sentiers ainsi que les nombreux événements communautaires. Nous aimons notre quartier autant que les autres résidents. Cette aventure nous a appris que la solidarité et la résilience prennent de nombreuses formes et changent parfois des vies au passage.

**En combattant ensemble, nous gagnons ensemble!**

Sharlene Henry (she/her)  
Coprésidente de la YSWTU

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by Derik Chica

We must  
organize with  
***community***



Education workers organizing has been a phenomenon at critical points in history. From Paolo Freire in Brazil using teaching as a tool for liberation and organizing in order to eradicate illiteracy, to Mary McLeod Bethune fighting to advance Black American civil rights in education, to local OSSTF/FEESO members organizing in communities everyday, education workers are uniquely positioned to effectively organize for social and economic change. Our very public education system was developed by people working together, workers engaging in collective action, people forcing the government's hand to support more children in society, and not just the rich few.

But organizing doesn't begin with the hope that someone else will act. It begins with you. It



**Our very public education system was developed by people working together, workers engaging in collective action, people forcing the government's hand to support more children in society, and not just the rich few.**



begins with your colleagues, your communities. It begins with relationships, hopes, and collective empowerment. It begins with actions that place organizing at the forefront of what we do as a union and a progressive society. It begins in your workplace.

Between you, your colleagues, and the community, there are a plethora of issues faced in and around your workplace. Identifying these common issues, the individuals facing them, what has been done about them, and with whom, is the beginning of community organizing. You can then map where the individuals are inside and outside your workplace, chart their relationships, and begin planning relevant initiatives.

I have been community organizing for about 13 years, since I began my career as a teacher. In my schools, I saw a need to create spaces that could empower students and communities, including my own Latine\* community, that have been disenfranchised. Being in the system, I felt a social responsibility to help organize advocacy and construct sustainable activism to help improve our public education system.

I will be sharing a couple of organizing anecdotes, campaign steps taken in each case, and personal insights, with the hope of providing concrete examples of what can be done for the diversity of workplaces and issues within the Ontario public education system. I hope these anecdotes help spark some ideas for you, the reader, and possibilities for our future.

### **Forming the Latin American Education Network**

In 2011-2012 I co-founded the Latin American Education Network. My co-chair and I met with over 50 community organizations within and serving my Latine community. We constructed and coordinated an annual education forum where we brought together students and youth, parents, and community individuals (including education workers) to discuss the systemic barriers they faced, what the education system could do about it, and what we, as a community, could do to help. We collected that information, published it

under the title, "[Community voices, community action: Latin American Education Network 2013 Community Education Forum Report](#)" (Matute & Chica, 2014) in *Latin American Encounters*, a peer-reviewed academic journal and presented it to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). We followed up via Community Advisory Committees and private meetings with senior administrative staff. We won multiple demands because we organized and worked collectively, despite internal disagreements in our community.

And there were disagreements. My Latine community is a diaspora from lands larger than a continent. We come from South America, Central America, and the Caribbean, each with unique colonial and decolonial histories, and reasons for emigration. Some leaders have been serving our community for decades, thus, they may have interpersonal conflicts. Discussions around international politics require more care, but we all love our children here and want the best for them, that is what brought us together.

We mapped and charted our community, picking up varying levels of support along the way. Because of this community work, we established a strong working relationship with the TDSB and TCDSB, which garnered more support amongst community members. People came to monthly meetings to not only gather information, but to co-strategize and co-construct initiatives. We held separate focused spaces for parents and youth who were more directly impacted by systemic barriers and may have less navigational knowledge. We ensured our progress was always led by what parents and youth were telling us, platforming them as often as possible. We obtained funding from the school boards, supported the creation of a school board grant for our community, and received support from unions, including OSSTF/FEESO.

The Latin American Education Network accomplished many of our original goals. Our collaborative wins included an end to streaming, removing police officers from being stationed in schools, the creation of a Spanish parent manual for the

TCDSB, continued meetings with senior staff (including the director) in both English-speaking Toronto school boards, and greater funding for youth community initiatives. Our goals were not accomplished because a few of us met with the school board with demands. We won because we were organized, made decisions together, and empowered each other to demand what we deserved.



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### **The cancellation of the School Resource Officer program**

In 2017, the Toronto District School Board was the first school board in North America to cancel its School Resource Officer (SRO) program, where police officers were stationed at one or multiple schools. One of the reasons this occurred was because a significant number of students felt uncomfortable with police consistently being in their schools, and because of fundamental differences between our education system and our policing system. Regardless of personal opinions about this action, the win was the result of deep organizing within community and worker circles.

I was fortunate to participate in some of the organizing for this campaign and bear witness to much more organizing. It began with community coalitions being built. Various community organizations had already begun advocating for the need to cancel the SRO program, dating back decades. Education workers have been involved in this advocacy from the beginning. We are members of communities too, and often involved in various groups or organizations related to sports, parenting, religious affiliations, recreation, services, or our identities. We can, and were able to, tap into our membership in these groups to bring diverse coalitions advocating for a single issue: the cancellation of the SRO program. Black Lives Matter Toronto then led a disruptive action that called out the Director of the TDSB, who responded positively with the intent of learning.

Trustees were asked to cancel the program but, together with senior staff, responded with the need to first collect research. Focus groups with students and youth from various oppressed communities, facilitated by education workers and community leaders, were struck in an attempt to listen to the most marginalized voices. OSSTF Toronto's Black, Indigenous, and Workers of Colour Committee held an educative panel with our president, a parent, a community organization led by an OSSTF/FEESO member, and a TDSB senior staff person. A TDSB student survey was done to gather mass data for an equity analysis. This equity-based research affirmed what community members had been saying all along: the SRO program was negatively impacting a significant number of TDSB students and needed to end.

Then came the vote. Trustees were mapped out and contacted by various members of communities, education workers, and their constituents. Delegations were made en masse. Education workers and the community showed up the day of the vote. The vote passed and a recess was called to celebrate.

When education workers and the community, which includes parents, work together, history can be made. Since this advocacy, lead organizers and advocates have liaised with national and

international activists for solidarity in their actions. The SRO cancellation did not occur in a vacuum. Organizing requires relationship building, decision making being shared, and disruptive actions sparking reflections and to be constructed upon. At its core it requires listening to the voices most marginalized by our systems, which includes workers. It is foundationally about educating each other so we are consistently learning and improving.

Think about your workplace, union, or political environment. How can you empower others and include them in decision making? How can you work through disagreements and come together on common issues? How can you construct initiatives that respond to disruptive actions by individuals or communities? How can you establish working relationships with communities and parents? How can you co-learn with parents and communities to exchange ideas and knowledge?

### **Relationships and hope**

Relationships are central to organizing. As others have said before me, these relationships cannot be transactional but must be deep and meaningful. I still know I can call someone I organized with a decade ago, see what they're up to, and attempt to organize together again. We know that we worked through differences of opinion to arrive at our common goals. We know that we attempt to build our movements to include more people who have been empowered by collective action. We appreciate and learn from the disruptive (and liberation-leading) activists before and in front of us who spark movements, often to the detriment to their own mental health. Without relationship building, activism is not sustainable, and organizing is not possible.

Bringing it back to our educational workplaces, we labour within an oppressive system that often disenfranchises workers. In conversations with colleagues, I am sure we have all witnessed learned helplessness. The feelings that things are getting worse and there is nothing we can do about it. The thought of leaving our jobs because of the impossible expectations and the undervaluing of

our labour. The sadness that our students are the ones most severely impacted by all of this.

These similar feelings existed, and exist, in my Latin American community. They existed, and exist, in communities negatively impacted by police being stationed in schools. They often exist in many worker communities. Oppression produces these feelings that we can overcome, together, through hope. By organizing, with organizers, we can co-construct hope and breakthrough false masks of apathy.

Relationships build hope. Wins build hope. Rallies build hope. Feeling a part of a community builds hope. We can do all of this and more, but it means we must talk to one another about the issues we face, bring in parents and community for deeper relationship building, and take concrete steps towards acting collectively, which includes mapping, charting, structure tests, campaigns, and coalition building.

If you are a leader in some way, how can you leverage your leadership position to take concrete steps to organize? How can you bring people together to discuss issues affecting them and creatively bring in parents and community to share stories? What resources can you produce for local workplaces to organize themselves?

### Concluding thoughts

In my experience through organizing initiatives, including several since 2017, the system changes when workers (the “inside”) and community (the “outside”) work together on an issue. While this labelling of “inside-outside” could be challenged in multiple ways, the idea of education workers and community working together to achieve a goal has led to successful social movements in numerous places in both the USA and Canada. In Chicago, it even led to the election of their current mayor, who was a former organizer and teacher. I like to imagine our organizing together leading to the election of a provincial Premier for us. That is hope.

Over the past few years, OSSTF/FEESO has been heavily investing in organizing for our

Federation. The union's Strategic Action Plan invests in not only hiring Regional Organizers, but in supporting local participation in election and civic participation. It's important for us to remember that organizers are not here to do the work for us. It is impossible for a few individuals to do all the work of organizing 60,000+ members. We will win only if we empower each other, engage where we can, and put time and work towards a common goal.

OSSTF/FEESO members can, through our elected representatives, access OSSTF/FEESO provincial resources, including financial ones, to do this work. Consider talking to your local executive about supports that exist.

Education workers building relationships and organizing with hope has been present at many critical points in history. The positive aspects of public education today did not come together as a random series of acts by the government, but by people working together to move a vision forward. The solution to Ontario's publicly funded education system's dire situation lies with each and every one of us.

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\* The term “Latine” arose from Queer, gender non-binary, and feminist communities in Spanish speaking countries and has recently begun to be used in Canada in boards like the Toronto District School Board (<https://callmelatine.wordpress.com/2020/12/14/an-open-letter-to-allies/>)

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# From **CRISIS** to **CHANGE**

The lasting impact of the HIV/AIDS movement and 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy on healthcare

by Ken Miller



The early 1980s were a time of crisis and awakening for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, with the HIV/AIDS epidemic emerging as a devastating health emergency and the bathhouse raids in Toronto discriminating and incriminating men for having sex with other men. Out of these experiences, a movement was born; one that not only challenged the status quo but reshaped healthcare, public policy, and civil rights on a global scale.

### **A movement of survival and resistance**

When HIV/AIDS first appeared, it was met with fear, ignorance, and hostility, particularly toward men who have sex with men, who bore the brunt of the epidemic's wrath. The virus quickly became a symbol of the social stigma already deeply entrenched against those who did not conform to heteronormative ideals. But rather than succumbing to despair, activists within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community galvanized a response that would forever change how healthcare is delivered and how public health policies are crafted.

One of the most visible and impactful groups to emerge from this movement was ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), formed in 1987 in New York City. ACT UP was born out of frustration with government inaction and the slow pace of drug approvals, which left countless people dying without access to potentially life-saving treatments. Through direct action, protests, and relentless advocacy, ACT UP pressured the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to expedite the approval process for new drugs, ensuring that patients with life-threatening conditions could access experimental treatments more quickly. Their activism did more than save lives; it reformed the entire drug approval process, setting a precedent that would later benefit patients with other critical illnesses, including cancer and rare diseases.

### **Transforming public policy and healthcare models**

The HIV/AIDS movement's influence was not limited to the United States. In Canada and around

the world, the activism sparked by the epidemic led to profound changes in public policy and the creation of more compassionate, patient-centred care models. The movement's emphasis on equity, access, and patient rights challenged governments and healthcare systems to address the deep-rooted discrimination so deeply engrained in our systems.



**Their activism did more than save lives; it reformed the entire drug approval process, setting a precedent that would later benefit patients with other critical illnesses, including cancer and rare diseases.**



In Toronto, the 1981 bathhouse raids served as a flashpoint for 2SLGBTQIA+ activism in Canada. The police raids, which targeted four bathhouses frequented by gay men and one for women, resulted in the arrest of over 300 individuals and sparked one of the largest mass protests in Canadian history. These events were a stark reminder of the pervasive discrimination against the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and they ignited a movement that would eventually lead to the establishment of Toronto Pride Week—a celebration that continues to be a powerful force for social justice and inclusion.

The advocacy efforts that emerged from the HIV/AIDS crisis and the bathhouse raids led to significant public health innovations, particularly in harm reduction strategies. Programs such as

needle exchanges and safe injection sites, initially developed to curb the spread of HIV, have since become integral to public health approaches worldwide. These strategies, rooted in evidence and compassion, reflect a broader shift towards treating health issues with dignity and care, rather than through criminalization and punishment.

### **The legacy of community-based care**

The HIV/AIDS movement also revolutionized how healthcare is delivered. Faced with a healthcare system that was often indifferent or hostile, activists and healthcare professionals created community-based care models that emphasized holistic, patient-centred services. These models integrated medical care with social and psychological support, recognizing that health is not just about treating the body but also about addressing the mental and emotional well-being of individuals.

This multidisciplinary approach, which brought together doctors, nurses, social workers, and mental health professionals, has since been adopted in other areas of healthcare, particularly in the management of chronic conditions. The emphasis on patient advocacy and involvement—a cornerstone of the HIV/AIDS movement—redefined the role of patients in their own care, empowering them to take an active role in their treatment and ensuring that their voices were heard.

### **Building a more inclusive healthcare system**

Perhaps the most lasting impact of the HIV/AIDS movement and 2SLGBTQIA+ activism has been the push for a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system. The movement highlighted the disparities faced by marginalized communities and drove a broader societal shift towards recognizing and addressing these inequities. In Canada, this shift was reflected in the creation of the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 1982, which was established to support community-based initiatives across the province. The Foundation's focus on funding programs that promote social inclusion, reduce barriers, and support marginalized groups aligns

with the values that were galvanized during the early 1980s activism.

The HIV/AIDS movement's commitment to human rights and healthcare equity has had profound implications for public health frameworks in Canada and beyond. The strategies developed during this crisis—prevention, education, harm reduction—have been integrated into broader public health policies, informing how countries address other infectious diseases and public health emergencies. The urgency of the HIV/AIDS crisis also led to innovations in healthcare delivery, such as the rapid approval and distribution of new treatments and the establishment of specialized clinics. These innovations continue to inform the development of other health interventions, from cancer care to mental health services.

### **A legacy of compassion and justice**

The legacy of the HIV/AIDS movement and 2SLGBTQIA+ activism is evident in how healthcare is delivered today and how public health policies are shaped. Their influence on advocacy, care models, and public health strategies continue to impact healthcare systems globally, promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and responsive approach to health and human rights. The movement not only transformed the response to a devastating health crisis but also laid the groundwork for a more compassionate and just healthcare system that values the dignity and rights of all individuals.

As we reflect on the progress made since the early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it is clear that the fight for health equity and social justice is far from over. The challenges faced by marginalized communities today are a reminder that the principles of the HIV/AIDS movement—compassion, advocacy, and resilience—are as relevant as ever. It is up to us to carry this legacy forward, ensuring that the healthcare system continues to evolve in ways that honour the dignity and rights of all people.

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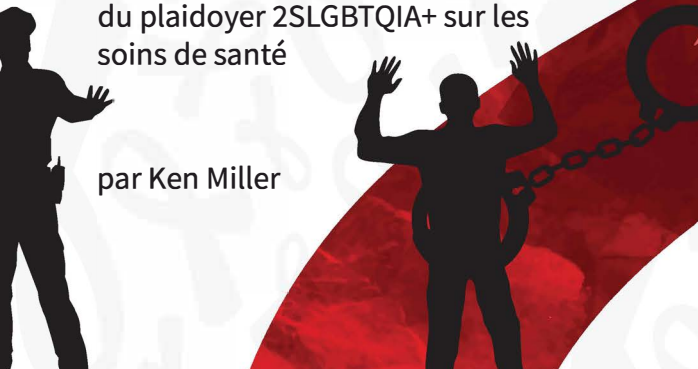
Ken Miller (he/him)  
Executive Director, Canadian AIDS Society



## De la **CRISE** au **CHANGEMENT**

L'impact durable du mouvement  
de la lutte contre le VIH/sida et  
du plaidoyer 2SLGBTQIA+ sur les  
soins de santé

par Ken Miller



Le début des années 1980 a été une période de crise et d'éveil pour la communauté 2SLGBTQIA+, avec l'épidémie de VIH/sida qui s'est révélée être une urgence sanitaire dévastatrice, et les descentes de police dans les bains publics de Toronto qui ont discriminé et incriminé les hommes ayant des relations sexuelles avec d'autres hommes. De ces expériences est né un mouvement qui a non seulement remis en question le statu quo, mais qui a également repensé les soins de santé, les politiques publiques et les droits civils à l'échelle mondiale.

### Un mouvement de survie et de résistance

Lorsque le VIH/sida est apparu pour la première fois, il a été accueilli avec crainte, ignorance et hostilité, en particulier envers les hommes ayant des relations sexuelles avec d'autres hommes, qui ont été les plus touchés par la colère de l'épidémie. Le virus est rapidement devenu un symbole de stigmatisation sociale profondément ancré contre celles et ceux qui ne se conformaient pas aux idéaux hétéronormatifs. Toutefois, plutôt que de succomber au désespoir, les militants de la communauté 2SLGBTQIA+ ont répliqué d'une façon qui allait changer à jamais la manière dont les soins de santé sont prodigués et les politiques de santé publique sont élaborées.

Un des groupes les plus visibles et les plus influents issus de ce mouvement est ACT UP (*AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power*), fondé en 1987 à New York. ACT UP est né de la frustration engendrée par l'inaction du gouvernement et la lenteur de l'approbation des médicaments, qui ont laissé d'innombrables personnes mourir faute d'avoir accès aux traitements qui auraient pu sauver leur vie. Par l'action directe, les protestations et un plaidoyer incessant, ACT UP a fait pression sur la *Food and Drug Administration* aux États-Unis pour qu'elle accélère le processus d'approbation des nouveaux médicaments, afin que les patients atteints de maladies potentiellement mortelles puissent accéder plus rapidement aux traitements expérimentaux. Leur activisme a fait plus que sauver des vies; il a réformé l'ensemble des

processus d'approbation des médicaments, créant ainsi un précédent qui profiterait plus tard aux patients atteints d'autres maladies, notamment le cancer et d'autres maladies rares.

### **Transformer les politiques publiques et les modèles de soins de santé**

L'influence du mouvement de lutte contre le VIH/sida n'était pas limitée aux États-Unis. Au Canada, comme partout au monde, l'activisme suscité par l'épidémie a entraîné de profonds changements dans les politiques publiques et la création de modèles de soins plus compatissants et axés sur le patient. L'accent mis par le mouvement sur l'équité, l'accès et les droits des patients a mis les gouvernements et les systèmes de santé au défi de s'attaquer à la discrimination profondément ancrée dans nos systèmes.



**Leur activisme a fait plus que sauver des vies; il a réformé l'ensemble des processus d'approbation des médicaments, créant ainsi un précédent qui profiterait plus tard aux patients atteints d'autres maladies, notamment le cancer et d'autres maladies rares.**



À Toronto, les descentes dans les bains publics de 1981 ont été le début de l'activisme 2SLGBTQIA+ au Canada. Les descentes policières, qui ont ciblé quatre bains publics fréquentés par des hommes gais et un par les femmes, ont conclu à l'arrestation de plus de 300 personnes et incité l'une des plus grandes protestations de masse de l'histoire du Canada. Ces événements ont souligné d'une manière brutale la discrimination omniprésente contre la communauté 2SLGBTQIA+ et ont déclenché un mouvement qui allait finalement instaurer la Semaine de la fierté de Toronto, une célébration qui est toujours une force puissante pour la justice sociale et l'inclusion.

Les efforts de sensibilisation qui ont émergé de la crise du VIH/sida et des descentes dans les bains publics ont menés à des innovations importantes en matière de santé publique, notamment dans des stratégies de réduction des risques. Des programmes tels que l'échange des seringues et la création de sites d'injection sécurisés, initialement destinés à freiner la propagation du VIH, font désormais partie intégrante des méthodes de protection de la santé publique, partout au monde. Ces programmes, établis sur des faits probants et compatissants, reflètent l'évolution des traitements préservant la dignité, plutôt que la criminalisation et la répression.

### **L'héritage des soins communautaires**

Le mouvement de lutte contre le VIH/sida a aussi révolutionné la façon dont les soins de santé sont prodigués. Confrontés à un système de santé souvent indifférent ou hostile, les militants et les professionnels de la santé ont créé des modèles de soins communautaires qui mettent l'accent sur des services holistiques et centrés sur les patients. Ces modèles intègrent les soins médicaux au soutien social et psychologique, reconnaissant que la santé ne consistait pas seulement à soigner la biologie du corps, mais aussi le bien-être mental et émotionnel des individus.

Cette approche multidisciplinaire, qui a réuni des médecins, des infirmières et infirmiers, des travailleuses sociales et travailleurs sociaux et des professionnels de la santé mentale, a été adoptée dans d'autres secteurs de la santé, notamment dans la gestion des maladies chroniques. L'accent mis sur la défense des droits et la participation des patients, pierre angulaire du mouvement de lutte contre le VIH/sida, a redéfini le rôle des patients dans leurs propres soins, leur permettant de jouer un rôle proactif dans leur traitement et de veiller à ce que leur voix soit entendue.

### **Construire un système de santé plus inclusif**

Fort probablement, l'impact le plus durable du mouvement de lutte contre le VIH/sida et de l'activisme 2SLGBTQIA+ a été la promotion d'un système de santé plus inclusif et plus équitable. Le mouvement a mis en évidence les disparités auxquelles étaient confrontées les communautés marginalisées et a entraîné un changement de la société vers une reconnaissance et une lutte contre ces inégalités. Au Canada, ce changement a servi à créer la Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario en 1982, qui soutient les initiatives communautaires de partout en Ontario. L'accent mis par la fondation sur le financement de programmes favorisant l'inclusion sociale, réduisant les obstacles et soutenant les groupes marginalisés, s'inscrit dans les valeurs galvanisées par l'activisme du début des années 1980.

L'engagement du mouvement de lutte contre le VIH/sida en faveur des droits de la personne et de l'équité en matière de soins de santé a eu de profondes répercussions sur les services de santé publique au Canada et ailleurs. Les stratégies élaborées pendant cette crise—prévention, éducation, réduction des risques—ont été intégrées à des politiques de santé publique plus vastes, mettant en lumière la façon dont les pays abordent les maladies infectieuses et les urgences de santé publique. L'urgence de la crise du VIH/sida a également conduit à des innovations dans la prestation des soins de santé,

comme l'approbation et la distribution accélérées des nouveaux traitements et la création de cliniques spécialisées. Ces innovations continuent d'améliorer les autres interventions en santé, les soins contre le cancer et les services de santé mentale.

### **Un héritage de compassion et de justice**

L'héritage du mouvement de lutte contre le VIH/sida et de l'activisme 2SLGBTQIA+ est évident dans la manière dont les soins de santé sont dispensés aujourd'hui et dans la façon dont les politiques de santé publique sont élaborées. Leur influence sur le plaidoyer, les modèles de soins et les stratégies de santé publique continue d'avoir un impact sur les systèmes de santé du monde entier, favorisant une approche plus inclusive, équitable et réactive de la santé et des droits de la personne. Le mouvement a non seulement transformé la réponse à une crise sanitaire dévastatrice, mais aussi les fondements d'un système de santé plus compatissant et plus juste qui valorise la dignité et les droits de tous les individus.

Alors que nous réfléchissons aux progrès réalisés depuis les premiers jours de l'épidémie de VIH/sida, il est clair que la lutte pour l'équité en matière de santé et de justice sociale est loin d'être terminée. Les défis auxquels sont confrontées les communautés marginalisées aujourd'hui nous rappellent que les principes du mouvement de lutte contre le VIH/sida—compassion, plaidoyer et résilience—sont plus pertinents que jamais. Il nous appartient de perpétuer cet héritage, en veillant à ce que le système de santé continue d'évoluer de manière à respecter la dignité et les droits de tous.

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**Ken Miller** (he/him)

Directeur général, Société canadienne du sida

# Labour councils in the Ontario labour community

Sites of solidarity and engagement beyond the world of labour

by Jeff Donkersgoed & Dave Warda



In the Canadian labour world, there are umbrella national organizations, provincial and territorial federations, and local labour councils, all which act as a centralizing power of organized labour in the country. Specifically, local labour councils work as arms-length extensions of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), with over 100 affiliated councils active at the time of writing. The goal of councils is to unify representative voices from labour federations and unions at the local level, allowing them to focus on meaningful community organizing that will impact people living and working in these communities. Their primary role is to coordinate and support the activities of local unions, advocate for workers' rights, and promote labour solidarity, often through events such as those held on Labour Day, the Day of Mourning (commemorating workers who have been killed, injured, or suffered illness due to workplace related hazards and occupational exposure), and International Women's Day. A labour council is a place to learn about and support the issues and concerns of other unions and workers. In essence, labour councils are the pivotal grassroots spot of solidarity in hometowns, cities, and communities across the country.



One of the first objectives of a labour council is to **build solidarity across the community.**



It is a common misconception that labour councils only host the above-mentioned Labour Day and Day of Mourning events along with some health and safety training—but labour councils are involved in so much more. One of the first objectives of a labour council is to build solidarity across the community. Labour council members show up at strike lines for workers regardless of affiliation. They show up for Drag Storytimes, environmental clean-up days, Pride events, and peaceful demonstrations. A significantly important connection is when labour councils partner with smaller not-for-profits in a region and share in communications and networking. The councils are an opportunity to discuss strategies and updates on the issues faced by our labour colleagues. Larger partnerships with groups like the United Way have opened the door to advancing a renewed understanding of the value of unions as driving forces in supporting robust and healthy communities. As union members, we are lifted, knowing that we always have people to call upon when the chips are down. Everyone at the labour council understands that the work is anchored in defending our members first but that along with this work comes a commitment to improving living and working conditions for everyone in our community.

Labour council is a space where stepping into politics is manageable and practical. Local labour councils are regularly involved in municipal, provincial, and federal elections, canvassing for candidates, and working to hold them accountable. Councils endorse, promote, and support candidates who campaign to respect and support worker and union rights. Not all of us are political animals, but supporting issues in your community only builds possibilities for future wins. Legislators who begin their careers in municipal

politics learn that we can provide electoral support, but we are also a resource to pursue legislative objectives that benefit everyone. Pharmacare, anti-scab legislation, equal pay, housing rights, and human rights on a larger scale are battles that support strong, healthy communities everywhere.

Small towns and big cities around the province all face similar issues. Across the board we are experiencing a housing and poverty crisis. People living in our communities have been slammed by inflation as the cost of living has gone through the roof. We have concerns about the deterioration of our environment and about funding cuts for programs and resources we need to live safely. This is where the labour council really spreads its wings; it is where community and labour can stand side by side to empower positive change for all.

A number of years ago, leadership in OSSTF/FEESO called for greater active involvement in labour councils, and since then we have seen an explosion of local Federation leaders get involved. These smaller councils provide our active and engaged OSSTF/FEESO members opportunities to build community and hone skills in public speaking, communications, organizing, and building relationships beyond our education sector bubble. In showing up for others, we are not just an active part of our labour community; these folks have become stronger leaders within our Federation and have significantly influenced the labour movement.

Sometimes, we think that we are all on our own in the education sector, that no one understands our issues, and we cannot possibly have any allies outside of our tent. In our concern to meet the changing and complex needs of our students and to recognize the value of our crumbling public school system, we have plenty of allies. You can find them in every labour council across Ontario.

Seeing worker power and community in action inspires us and gives us hope that we can make the world a better place. This is the work OSSTF/FEESO must continue to do moving forward to ensure our province has the public education system that we need. This is why we need members in labour council spaces, as there is no telling what they can do for us.

Do you want to get to know your community better? Do you want to know what is going on beyond social media? Want to show up for the working people in your community? Talk to your District or Bargaining Unit leader about being a labour council delegate where you live—and see for yourself just how powerful the labour-community alliance can be.



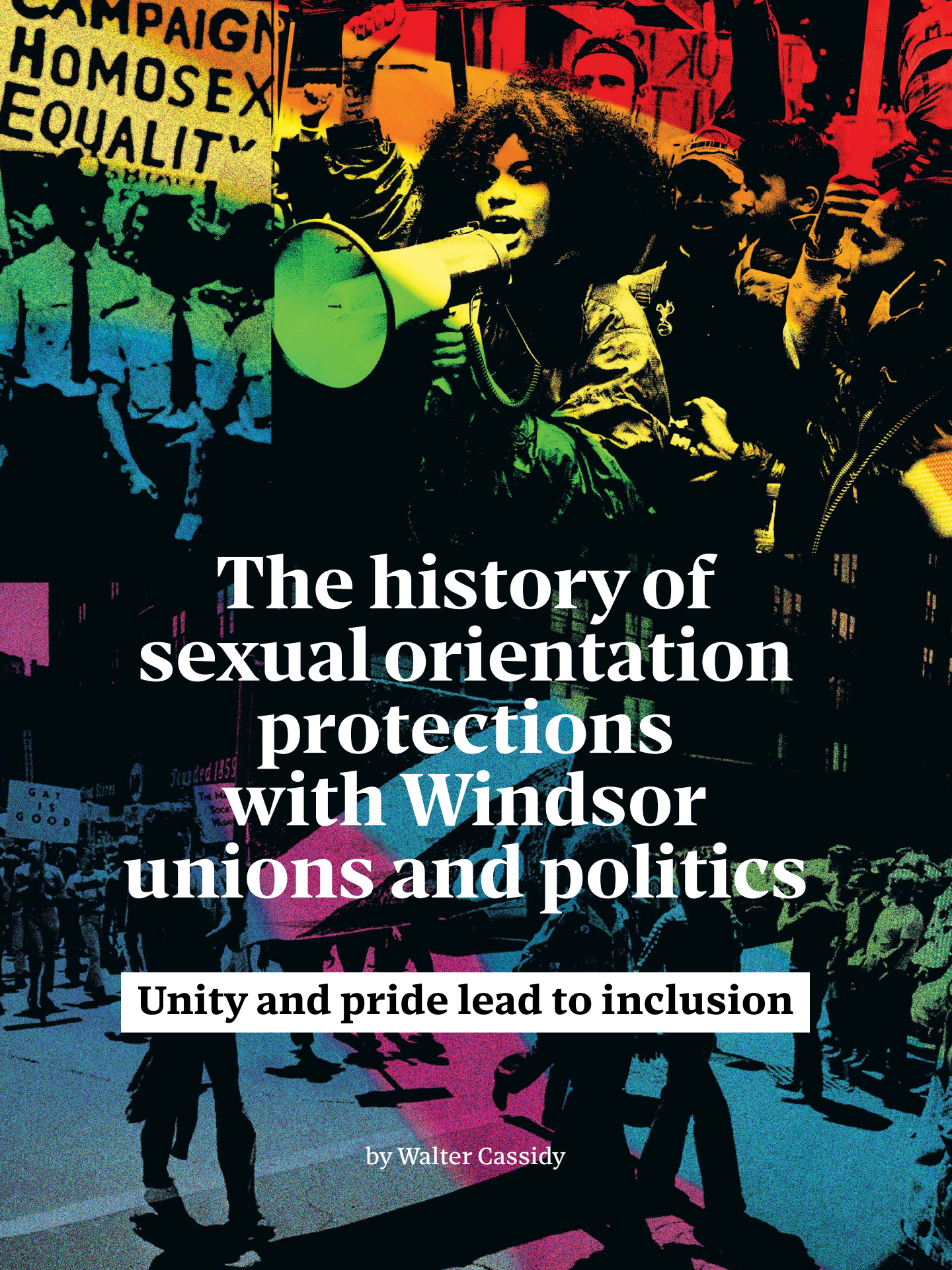
Jeff Donkersgoed (centre) with D24 District president Dave VandenBerg (right) and TBU member Mike Miller (left) at Day of Mourning ceremony, April 28, 2023



Jeff Donkersgoed, MCing Ford Fest counter-protest, Bingemans, Kitchener, September 8, 2023

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**Jeff Donkersgoed** (he/him)  
 OSSTF/FEESO Regional Organizer

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 President, Teachers' Bargaining Unit, District 14, Kawartha Pine Ridge



# The history of sexual orientation protections with Windsor unions and politics

**Unity and pride lead to inclusion**

by Walter Cassidy

The first gay liberation group in Windsor, Ontario started in 1972. The co-founders were Steve Lough, Jim Davies, Jim Monk, and Harold Desmarais. It took them some time to come up with a final name but they settled on Windsor Gay Unity (WGU). They were influenced by the Workers' Unity formed in 1970 by Windsor Chrysler workers John Horne, Al and Lucy Dumouchelle.

Before the group was formed, a few of the early members were part of The Windsor Labour Centre (TWLC). The Windsor Labour Centre was housed in the Community Resource Centre (CRC) which was a bookstore that opened in 1971. Steven Shirreff, an early member, told me that the store stocked gay books and was the only place you could find them in the city at the time. The first director of TWLC was James Brophy.

Brophy was an American draft resister and former student movement leader, having served as student council president during his time at the University of Windsor during the late 1960s where he helped organize demonstrations and occupations on campus. Brophy subsequently moved to Toronto, where he helped establish the countercultural magazine *Guerilla*, and took part in labour organizing through the Militant Co-op, a broad-left rank-and-file group. Brophy soon moved back to Windsor to establish the CRC, believing that a radical bookstore could become a hub of resistance to capitalism and American imperialism and could serve as a common "community centre" of sorts for various left-wing groups and projects (Antay, 2020).

The *Guerilla* magazine had an impact on the gay publication *The Body Politic*. The most important gay publication in Canada in the 1970s and 80s. The magazine was ranked as the 17th most influential magazine in Canadian publishing history.

Back in Windsor, in the summer of 1971, TWLC put on a youth program called *Project Lunch Bucket*. There were talks about creating a gay liberation front working group as part of TWLC

but as Monk tells it, there was some concern that "this might adversely affect other efforts in the organization aimed at encouraging rank and file workers to attend...events and meetings." Lough decided to take a leave of absence from TWLC and instead went with the university format which had already had success in such places like Toronto and London. Their first meeting happened at the University of Windsor's Student Centre.

A few of the original members were union workers for the "Big Three" auto companies including Harold Desmarais at Ford and Jim Monk at Chrysler. At the time it was very isolating to be Queer in union environments. Many members would have to live with the fear of losing their job if their sexuality was found out.

Almost immediately after creating the WGU, the group began to get involved beyond the university and into community endeavours. The WGU was trying to find support for political and social change in Windsor and beyond. Throughout the country Queer groups were focusing on basic rights and protections, especially inclusion in the provincial and federal human rights codes, and inclusion statements in workforce contracts. The risk of getting fired for being openly gay was a true and harsh reality in Canada. John Damien, who grew up in Windsor, a racing Steward, who lived in Toronto at the time, became the public face of this struggle when he got fired in 1975 for being gay. His legal struggle lasted 11 years.

Desmarais knew the only way to change the status quo was to find allies to this cause. He found that person in Les Dickirson. Dickirson would become one of the most important straight white allies in Windsor's local unions. Dickirson was born in England in 1927 and moved to Canada with his family when he was young. In 1942 he began working at the International Playing Card Company in Windsor. Dickirson had a very impressive human rights record. As far back as 1966 Dickirson was on the human rights committee of his United Auto Workers (UAW) local 195. He continued in that position for decades and ended up being the chair of the Windsor Labour Council (WLC) human rights committee



At the time it was **very isolating** to be Queer in union environments. Many members would have to **live with the fear of losing their job** if their sexuality was found out.



till the year 2000. In 1947 he was part of the Windsor Interracial Council which later changed its name to the Windsor Council on Group Relations. The group's goals were to "promote spiritual and secular equality, fellowship, understanding and good-will among all people, regardless of race, religion or national origin." He was involved in various public stand-ins and sit-ins protesting Windsor restaurants and hotels that were refusing to serve people of colour.

Similar arguments were being used against the gay community in the 1970s. If any type of same-sex affection or non-heteronormative behaviour or appearance was observed in public establishments, many Queer and trans people in Windsor were verbally harassed, kicked out, or physically attacked.

Desmarais recalled that "[a]lthough he was heterosexual, his activities caused people to label him as "queer." That label never motivated him to back down or revise his position and beliefs

(Email, 2021)."In 1974 he was already urging his UAW local 195 to include sexual orientation as a protected group in local bargaining. The UAW local 195 represented 60 different workplaces with 60 different contracts. Dickirson sent a letter to "all plant chairmen and general council delegates to... include race, sex, age, religion, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, or political affiliation" in their collective agreements (Desmarais, 7). Dickirson wrote, various times, to each of the reigning Ontario Ministers of Labour of the day to urge them to implement the recommendations by Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC) *Life Together* report, which was released in 1977. The report proposed that sexual orientation be included in the OHRC.

Desmarais also saw the importance of getting involved in political parties if he wanted to see change in government policy including sexual orientation. In 1972, he "got involved in the Windsor-West New Democratic Party (NDP) Riding Association," working hard with one particularly important central focus, gay rights.

On May 11, 1975, the NDP South-Western Regional conference in Chatham voted to urge the party's provincial convention to lobby to amend the OHRC to include sexual orientation and as well as to "urge the Government of Ontario to appoint a Commission for an inquiry the firing of John Damien." Both resolutions were moved by Desmarais (4). The passage of those motions mark the first time in Canada that a political party endorsed the concept of civil rights for Queer people.

A few months later in Kingston, the eighth provincial convention of the NDP saw a similar motion come forward to its members. There was an attempt to send the motion back to committee, but it was strongly contested by the well-organized gay caucus consisting of members from Ottawa, Toronto, and Windsor. The motion strengthened the NDP support for inclusion of a sexual orientation clause in the OHRC but with some changes to the original motion such as child custody for lesbian mothers. It wasn't a complete victory, but it was a start.

Desmarais worked closely with MPP Ted Bounsall (NDP, Windsor-Sandwich) as his constituency assistant during this time. In fact, Desmarais only agreed to that position if Bounsall promised to bring forward a bill to include sexual orientation in the OHRC. In the 1975 provincial campaign Bounsall publicly declared his support of amending the OHRC to include sexual orientation.

That same year at the national convention in Winnipeg, Desmarais was also key in creating the NDP's first gay caucus. Desmarais spoke at the convention on the green paper report on immigration and its failure to end discrimination against gays and he also ran for NDP federal council with a gay platform, but was defeated.

The next year Bounsall, with the help of Desmarais, brought forward a private member's bill to Ontario's provincial parliament to include sexual orientation under the OHRC (the first of its kind in Ontario) right before Margaret Campbell presented a member's resolution on the same issue. The issue was debated and both bills were defeated.

On October 12, 1976, the Windsor & District Labour Council adopted a resolution to urge the "end to discrimination against male and female homosexuals (1976)." The WLC called on the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) to advocate for the inclusion of sexual orientation in the OHRC and all union contracts during their membership meeting. Micky Warner was president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local 82 in 1976 and strongly supported the motion. In 1980 Dickirson was able to get his own collective agreement inclusion with the International Playing Card Company.

Prior to 1977 only two cities in Canada had sexual orientation protections for their workers—Toronto and Ottawa. The WGU and WLC wanted Windsor to be next. WGU worked with Warner, who represented the city's outside workers. Once again Warner pledged his support. He worked hard to get all nine of the city's union representatives to include prohibitions against discrimination against Queer city employees and began to lobby city councillors. WGU achieved their goal on March 14th, 1977, when Windsor City Council adopted



## The history of Queer and trans communities and local unions have an **extraordinarily strong historic alliance in Windsor...**



the resolution. Desmarais spoke to the motion and James Wiggins, a member of the public, spoke against it. In the *Windsor Star* it was reported that Wiggins said, "homosexuals chose their lifestyle and should not be given special consideration by a council...homosexuality is not rained down by God nor caused by a chemical imbalance but is something that is willingly chosen just like biting one's nails." The resolution was carried by a narrow margin, four to three, and only after outbursts of homophobic comments from members of council and spectators. Desmarais remembered arguments during the council meeting that gays and lesbians might use the wrong washrooms if it passed. The accomplishment was covered through many gay newsletters all over North America and even in Europe. This was also the same year that the professors at the University of Windsor included a gay rights clause in their contract.

In 1979, Monk, who was at the time the president of the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario, met with Minister of Labour Robert Elgie as part of a delegation with Mariana Valverde of *The Body Politic*, Rev Brent Hawkes

of Metropolitan Community Church in Toronto, and John Damien. Elgie assured them it was under careful study. Nothing changed while the Conservatives were in office.

In 1981 Monk spoke at the Ontario Legislature's Standing Committee on Bill 7 which would have changed the OHRC. This was the "third time in ten years Ontario gay groups had presented a major brief urging revision of the code." At that point Monk noted it was "frustrating that the members seemed so unaware of how insulting some of their questions were. They obviously know so little." The bill failed by a vote of 69-23 (Jackson, 1981).

The Province of Ontario would have to wait until 1986 before sexual orientation was finally included in the OHRC. It took Canada's federal government until 1996.

The history of Queer and trans communities and local unions have an extraordinarily strong historic alliance in Windsor with many groups popping up throughout the years. There was the Canadian Auto Workers LGBT Caucus which started in 2000 and more recently the Unifor Local 444 2SLGBTQIA+ Committee founded by two local trans workers.

Dickirson retired in 1987. He worked at the card factory for 44 years. In 2007, at the age of 85, he was given the Charles Brooks Labour Community Service Award "which is presented annually to a trade unionist in recognition of outstanding contributions in the area of voluntary community service"(ourwindsor.ca). He died in 2014 at the age of 92.

The International Playing Card Company closed in 1989 and is now an elementary public school named after James L. Dunn, an important local Black educational and activist leader in the Windsor area.

Warner continued his strong union legacy for decades. He died in 2016. Davies was an active union member for Ontario Public Interest Research Group staffers for almost 24 years. He died in 2017. All four original members of Windsor Gay Unity have received recognition awards for their activism from the Windsor Pride

Community. Desmarais and Lough are enjoying their retirement in Toronto and Monk is doing the same in Amherstburg, Ontario.

After a longer reflection on the fight, Desmarais has some advice on the success he had with the city vote.

1. Involvement in your greater community builds up contacts that will be most useful later on. It can create debts that can be collected later.
2. Timing—the presentation of the demand is of crucial importance... Do your homework, seek out your support, scrutinize your enemies for weakness. Attempt to enlist the aid of labour, church, and other groups—all before the formal request is made.

(Desmarais, letter)

This story acts as an important historical reminder of the power of labour, allyship, and the impact of positive social change when everyone is seen, supported, and celebrated.

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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF**

**R O L E M O D E L S**

**IN EMPOWERING THE  
DEAF COMMUNITY**

*by Twyla Campbell & Chantal Deketele*



This article includes some personal narrative from one of the authors, Twyla Campbell, indicated by the use of quotations.

In the realm of education for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, the presence of role models from the Deaf community plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences and opportunities available to these individuals. The Deaf community, characterized by its resilience and unity, often faces marginalization and underrepresentation in educational settings. In a system where the medical perspective often dominates, it is crucial to recognize the importance of integrating the insights and perspectives of Deaf role models to enhance the educational journey of Deaf students. The authors recognize the importance of these dynamics, with Campbell underscoring that educators who act as effective role models possess a comprehensive awareness of the distinct challenges encountered by individuals in the Deaf community. Her reflections, informed by her personal experiences within this community, elucidate how such understanding can significantly impact educational outcomes for Deaf students.

Campbell notes:

“ I have been profoundly Deaf since the age of two due to hereditary factors and come from a multi-generational Deaf family. Members of our community often identify as ‘deaf,’ ‘deafened,’ or ‘hard of hearing’ —terms that denote a socio-linguistic and cultural group. The capitalized term “Deaf” specifically signifies cultural Deafness, representing those who actively engage with and contribute to the Deaf community. My family is proud of our unique minority traditions, navigating distinct social norms. We primarily communicate in American Sign Language (ASL) at home, though I also spoke English with my hearing grandmother. This dynamic has given me advantages in both hearing and Deaf communities. Our

experiences and my grandmother’s insights on raising a Deaf child have equipped me for success. This dual perspective enhances my connection to both communities, reinforcing my Deaf identity. While I appreciate my family’s positive role models, many Deaf students from hearing families struggle with sign language and Deaf culture. Therefore, it’s crucial to provide them with appropriate role models for their success and integration. ”

Our educational system acknowledges the importance of diverse student identities for academic success. However, Deaf and hard of hearing students, a linguistic minority, lack adequate representation. American Sign Language is crucial to Deaf culture, allowing communication through visual and spatial methods that overcome auditory barriers. ASL involves gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and eye contact. A Deaf individual fluent in ASL can inspire peers, improving communication and self-expression while helping students develop essential skills like collaboration, analytical thinking, and problem-solving.

“ Reflecting on my experiences as a Deaf individual, I realize that my desire to connect with the hearing community stemmed from limited exposure to other Deaf students and role models in school. Growing up, I sought connections with those who shared similar challenges, as being the only Deaf student in a mainstream classroom can be isolating.

Imagine a classroom of thirty discussing their Christmas break, where their words appear as floating text bubbles. As a Deaf person, I depend on lip-reading to follow the conversation while interpreting the bubbles and gauging facial expressions for context. This creates a disconnect, as quick exchanges often impede full understanding. ”

Role models in the field of Deaf education play a crucial role for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing by providing:

- Strong language models
- Representation from culturally specific and bi-cultural groups
- Self-contained classrooms
- Immersive language engagement opportunities
- Incidental learning through shared knowledge
- Shared experiences that help navigate educational challenges

Improving communication skills and self-confidence in Deaf individuals can enhance their post-secondary education outcomes. With strong support and mentorship, they are more likely to pursue diverse opportunities.

Recent media representation of the Deaf community, seen in Oscar-winning films like “CODA” and shows like “Hawkeye,” increases visibility and empowers young Deaf individuals by demonstrating that success is achievable in various fields.

It is crucial for the Deaf community to build supportive relationships that offer guidance and foster belonging. Engaging with role models enhances identity pride and helps navigate the challenges of being Deaf, boosting confidence and resilience—highlighting the important role educators play.

While role models are needed to help guide Deaf students through their education, they are also needed to help Deaf students adjust to life once they graduate. Many Deaf individuals still face challenges transitioning from academics to professional life after graduation.

“I’ve noticed that Deaf individuals face significant challenges in showcasing their professional qualifications during job searches. Since deafness is an invisible disability, employers often don’t recognize the necessary accommodations. For instance, one employer suggested using

**individuals with limited sign language skills instead of qualified interpreters, which didn’t meet the needs of Deaf applicants.”**

The absence of role models and peer support can lead to isolation and feelings of exclusion in the Deaf community. Without visible success stories, individuals may struggle to feel confident in their potential, adversely affecting their self-identity and self-esteem. Thus, it is crucial for the Deaf community to connect with mentors who can provide guidance and foster a sense of belonging.

Singleton, Jones, and Hanumantha (2017) note a significant research gap in collaboration with marginalized groups, particularly Deaf individuals. This oversight leads to underrepresentation in Deaf education. The prevailing medical model in education affects how Deaf children are integrated. When parents learn their child is deaf, they often rely on educators for guidance. If educators lack knowledge of effective strategies for deaf students, parents might receive insufficient support, missing opportunities for inclusion. This expertise gap hinders the adoption of necessary research-based methods to meet the needs of deaf learners.

Simms and Thumann highlight that audism severely impacts teacher training and practices by lowering expectations for student achievement. This bias favours English over American Sign Language, accepts inadequate ASL skills, and maintains a predominance of hearing educators and researchers. Such institutions often fail to hire Deaf professionals as role models for students. Additionally, many hearing educators lack the skills to meet the unique educational and sociocultural needs of Deaf students, leading to limited exposure to Deaf culture and insufficient education in crucial subjects like Deaf history, language arts, and behavioural management.

The role of a teacher of the Deaf is critically important; however, with most of these professionals being hearing, it cannot alone provide a comprehensive education for students who are Deaf/hard of hearing. The inclusion of Deaf role models and mentors helps to bridge existing gaps

in support and guidance. Research examining the experiences of Deaf adults with their childhood educators indicated that teachers receiving negative evaluations frequently fell short in meeting students' communication needs (Smith, 2013, p. 675). This study also highlighted a significant preference among students for educators who themselves are Deaf, underscoring instances where educator expectations did not align with student requirements.

Deaf role models can enhance effective communication between teachers and their students, thus improving the educational experience for students while simultaneously fostering greater awareness among instructors regarding these learners' specific needs. To implement best practices in education, it is essential that faculty possess a thorough understanding of, and appreciation for, the unique language and cognitive development needs characteristic of Deaf students. While the involvement of Deaf role models is beneficial, it remains crucial that faculty and staff receive comprehensive training to adequately address the diverse needs of their Deaf students.

A substantial body of research (Bat-Chava, 2000; Foster & Kinuthia, 2003; Holcomb, 1998; Israelite et al., 2002; Kent, 2003; Leigh, 1999; Maxwell-McCaw, 2001; Nikolarazi & Hadjikakou, 2006) emphasizes the pivotal role of educational experiences in shaping Deaf identity. This encompasses both culturally Deaf identities and bicultural identities that blend elements from both Deaf and hearing communities.

Bat-Chava's research highlights that individuals with Deaf and bicultural identities often have higher self-esteem (420). The development of Deaf children relies heavily on educators and administrators recognizing the importance of bilingual education. It is crucial for them to ensure access to appropriate linguistic resources and to foster an environment that respects both Deaf culture and the hearing community. This approach is most effective with well-trained faculty in bilingual-bicultural education, benefiting Deaf students by enhancing skill acquisition, self-esteem, and community engagement. Such strategies support

students' development and long-term success.

Conversely, inadequate accessibility can create significant challenges for Deaf or hard of hearing individuals, affecting their social interactions and educational access. Research emphasizes the need for early access to signed language, as insufficient linguistic exposure during key developmental phases can have lasting impacts. Notably, Deaf/hard of hearing children—who lack sufficient support through auditory technology or oral communication services—are at an increased risk for language deprivation.

This deficiency may lead to significant cognitive impairments if they are not introduced to a visual language promptly. Unfortunately, many children do not achieve full proficiency in natural languages such as English or ASL by age five; additionally, fewer than 8% benefit from consistent opportunities to use sign language within their home environments. Addressing these issues is imperative for fostering inclusive learning experiences that empower all learners effectively.

Research shows that participants with a bicultural identity in hearing-centred environments reported transformative experiences while interacting with Deaf individuals and learning sign language, improving their communication skills, relationships, and knowledge access (Nikolarazi & Hadjikakou, 489). The evidence is overwhelming for the need to actively recruit and integrate Deaf adults into educational settings, as those fluent in both languages tend to achieve better personal and professional outcomes.

Initiatives that connect Deaf role models and mentors are vital for improving job prospects for graduates. Despite the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), discriminatory hiring practices persist, reflecting ongoing ignorance about Deaf community challenges.

**“In my workplace, communication barriers significantly impact my engagement. The lack of sign language interpreters during meetings restricts my access to important information, and emergency notification systems fail to provide essential visual or**

tactile alerts for Deaf individuals, leaving me uninformed during emergencies. In our social media-driven world, prioritizing accessibility and increasing awareness of minority group struggles is crucial. It is unacceptable to overlook these issues.

By sharing my experiences as a Deaf employee, I aim to enhance understanding of the challenges Deaf individuals face in the workplace. This understanding is vital for driving meaningful change within our communities. Improving accommodations for all employees is essential to fostering greater inclusion of Deaf professionals in education. Consistent, equitable practices will greatly benefit our Deaf students. ”

Despite the existence of programs for Deaf and hard of hearing students, the Deaf community in Ontario's school boards is often overlooked as a minority group. Discussions about minority representation routinely exclude this demographic, resulting in inadequate dialogue about their needs. While conversations around accommodations centre on physical modifications like ramps, they frequently fail to distinguish between “accessibility” and “accommodations.” An accessible environment may facilitate participation, but it does not fully eliminate barriers.

Deaf individuals often require specialized accommodations like assistive devices, interpreters, and captioned media to fully participate in education. Despite technological progress, there remains a pressing need to improve upon existing accommodations. While universal design principles are important, current systems frequently fail to address specific accessibility needs, such as adequate ramps for wheelchair users or effective visual alert systems for the Deaf.

With a wide range of disabilities present in our schools and workplaces, it is essential to sustain initiatives that promote inclusivity. A crucial component is ensuring Deaf individuals receive the same recognition and opportunities as their hearing counterparts.

Deaf and hard of hearing students thrive when they can connect with Deaf adult role models and immerse themselves in Deaf culture and language. These meaningful interactions help cultivate a strong sense of identity and community, inspiring students to reach their full potential. As Deaf representation in the media continues to grow, young people in this demographic will increasingly benefit from positive role models who empower them to realize their aspirations.

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# SPORT IS HEALING

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORT TO COMMUNITY STRENGTH

by MPP Sol Mamakwa

MPP Sol Mamakwa wrote this article as an adaptation of a video he created and posted to his [Youtube channel](#) in March of 2024.

Last spring, I attended the Northern Bands Hockey Tournament in Dryden, Ontario. Max Kakepetum has run the tournament for 37 years and witnessed it grow from 4 to 44 teams.

As the Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for the riding of Kiiwetinoong in Northwestern Ontario, I try to attend it every year (although I don't compete in it anymore). At this year's tournament, I was invited to be on the bench for the Kingfisher Lake Flyers. Spending a week with the players and their families at the Dryden Memorial Arena, I was reminded of how important sports are for First Nations in Northern Ontario.

Many Ontarians in other parts of the province cannot imagine living in a community without an arena or organized hockey league nearby. But in most of the places in Kiiwetinoong, organized hockey leagues don't exist. Many teams do not have artificial ice to play on, and some First Nations only have outdoor rinks. Teams in the North must travel long distances to play hockey.

Despite the barriers First Nations people living in Northern Ontario face just for the opportunity to play hockey, it still serves as more than just a sport. It is a lifeline.

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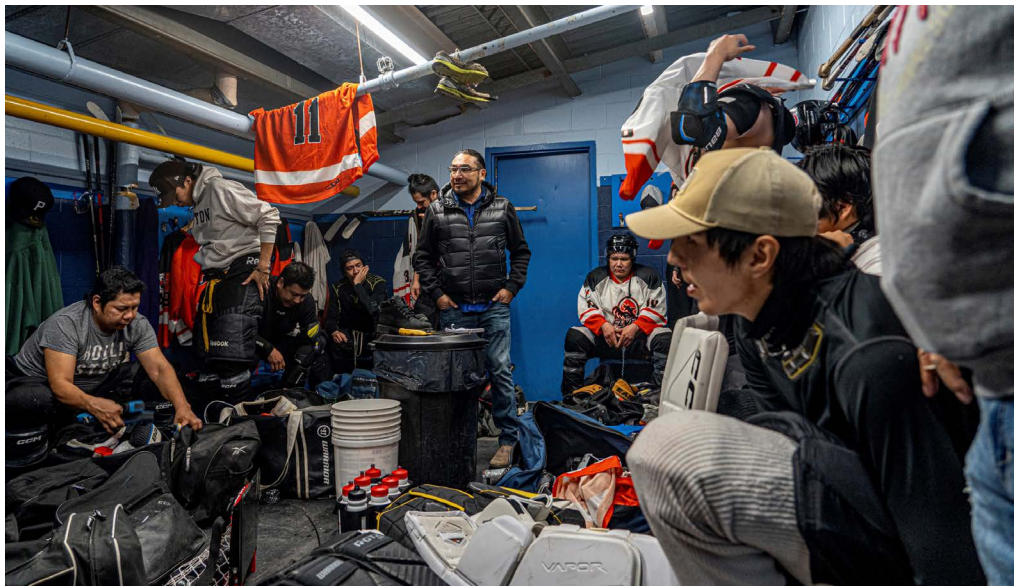
In June of this year, the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) released a report which they titled *Anishiniwug Ajimoowin Animisewiinan*, an Anishiniimowin (Oji-Cree) phrase for which one translation is 'Stories About the Bad State We're In.' The report highlights mental health and substance use crises in the Northern First Nations served by SLFNHA. Referring to the choice of title in the front matter of the report, Christian Quequish notes that "To move closer to *mino bimadiziwin*, the good life, we need to be able to talk about *animisiwiinan*, the hard things in life"(2).

There is a mental health crisis. There is a suicide crisis. It impacts the First Nations youth in the North. Many people are struggling with their mental health and addictions. It's difficult to hear when a twelve-year-old has died by suicide. The challenges faced by First Nations people are a direct result of the intergenerational traumas caused by the Indian Residential School system and the Sixties' Scoop. These colonial policies result in the overrepresentation of First Nations people in the child welfare system and the prison system.

The SLFNA report tells us with data what many First Nations people already know through their experiences. For example, the report shows that ambulatory visits and hospitalization related to mental health and substance use increased substantially for Sioux Lookout area First Nations in the ten years between 2011 to 2021 (*Anishiniwug Ajimoowin Animisewiinan*, 32). The rate of unnatural deaths was over three times



MPP Mamakwa standing, centre, coaching the Kingfish Lake Flyers, spring 2024



MPP Sol Mamakwa standing, centre

Photos courtesy of the Office of MPP Sol Mamakwa

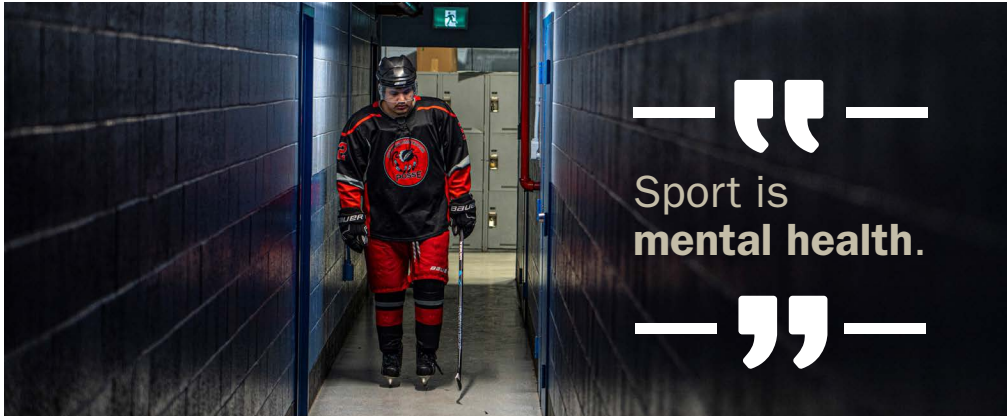


Photo courtesy of the Office of MPP Sol Mamakwa

the provincial average (33). Among the reports' recommendations includes the need to adopt a wholistic approach to health, in which mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being are understood to be interconnected (36).

With that backdrop, it is so beautiful to see people from First Nations in Kiiwetinoong gather every year for tournaments like the Northern Bands Hockey Tournament, the Little Bands, the Little NHL, and the Tournament of Hope. When I attend Northern Bands, I see a reunion of friends and families from different First Nations in the North. And when I see people from Kiiwetinoong playing hockey together—or broomball, or volleyball, or baseball—I see suicide prevention in action. Sport is mental health.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was adopted by the Canadian government in 2016, affirms in Article 31 that “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop [...] sports and traditional games” and that “States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights” (22-23). In Canada, sport is also a necessary aspect of justice and reconciliation. This was acknowledged by 5 of 94 Calls to Action in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's* Final Report in 2015 (numbers 87 to 91) which address the role of sport in Canada's path towards reconciliation.

The 87th call recognizes that Indigenous athletes deserve to have their accomplishments celebrated and stories remembered (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 10). The 88th calls for long term support for Indigenous athletes, and greater funding relating to the North American Indigenous Games (10). The 89th and 90th recommendations call for the federal government to shape policies to affirm the role of physical activity in health, to reduce barriers to participation, and build capacity to make sports more inclusive for Indigenous peoples (10). This entails funding and implementing a range of culturally relevant and anti-racist programming for athletes, coaches, and other sporting officials. As well as calling for the establishment of an elite athlete development program for Indigenous athletes, the Commission also called for “community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples” (10). Finally, the 91st calls for the planning of International Sporting Events to respect the territorial authority of First Nations, and for engagement at all levels of the events' planning and implementation (10).

Through their Field of Dreams program, the Jays Care Foundation has provided grants

to fund the refurbishment and building of new baseball fields to several First Nations in Northern Ontario, one of which is at the Pelican Falls First Nation High School near Sioux Lookout (Bonello). In the fall of 2019, the Pelican Falls First Nations High School and Jays Care Foundation held a tournament together to unveil the new field. While these initiatives have important impacts, First Nations should not need to rely on philanthropy to have adequate sports facilities that are taken for granted in most of the rest of the province.

We need to see the federal and provincial governments make greater investments in sport facilities in First Nations so that the opportunity to lace up skates and play sports is no longer a rarity for so many First Nations people in the North. Decades ago already, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation's (NAN) 1993 *Intervention Report* to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified that organized sports and recreation in NAN member First Nations rely on Band Council support for programming, the existence of facilities, and the organizing of competitions and games between First Nations. Even if two of those recommendations can be achieved more easily, many First Nations are still under-resourced when it comes to sporting facilities.

In a report for the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, Julie Sutherland identifies some of the barriers to physical activity for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples as including environment, socio-economic, and political factors (which also includes the unavailability of facilities in many First Nations), racism, sexism, and for youth specifically, culturally irrelevant programming (13-15).

Teachers and education workers in Ontario schools have a responsibility to support the implementation of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission's* Calls to Action, including those which are specifically related to education, as well as others, such as those relating to sport. I call on Ontario's educators to ensure that the histories and contributions of Indigenous peoples in sports and in other fields are highlighted and celebrated in your lessons wherever possible, and to encourage those students who appear to be struggling to get involved in sports that bring them joy. Sport is healing.

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Sol Mamakwa

Member of Provincial Parliament for Kiiwetinoong

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# LE SPORT GUÉRIT

L'IMPORTANCE DU SPORT  
POUR LE RENFORCEMENT COMMUNAUTAIRE

par le député provincial Sol Mamakwa

Le député provincial Sol Mamakwa a rédigé cet article comme adaptation d'une vidéo créée et affichée à son [compte Youtube](#) en mars 2024.

Au printemps dernier, j'ai assisté au tournoi de hockey des Northern Bands à Dryden, en Ontario. Max Kakepetum dirige le tournoi depuis 37 ans et l'a vu passer de 4 à 44 équipes.

En tant que député provincial de la circonscription de Kiiwetinoong, dans le nord-ouest de l'Ontario, j'essaie d'y assister chaque année (même si je n'y participe pas). Lors du tournoi de cette année, j'ai été invité au banc des Kingfisher Lake Flyers. En passant une semaine avec les joueurs et leurs familles à l'aréna Dryden Memorial, je me suis rappelé à quel point le sport est important pour les Premières Nations du nord de l'Ontario.

De nombreux Ontariens vivant dans d'autres régions de la province ne peuvent pas imaginer vivre dans une communauté sans aréna ou ligue de hockey organisée à proximité. Mais dans la plupart des endroits de Kiiwetinoong, les ligues de hockey organisées n'existent pas. De nombreuses équipes n'ont pas de glace artificielle pour jouer et certaines Premières Nations n'ont que des patinoires extérieures. Les équipes du nord doivent parcourir de longues distances pour jouer au hockey.

Malgré les obstacles auxquels les Premières Nations vivant dans le Nord de l'Ontario doivent faire face pour avoir la possibilité de jouer au hockey, ce sport est bien plus qu'un simple sport. C'est une bouée de sauvetage.

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Malgré les obstacles auxquels les Premières Nations vivant dans le Nord de l'Ontario doivent faire face pour avoir la possibilité de jouer au hockey, ce sport est bien plus qu'un simple sport. C'est une bouée de sauvetage.”

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En juin de cette année, la Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) a publié un rapport intitulé Anishiniwug Ajimoowin Animisewiinan, une expression anishiniimowin (oji-cri) dont l'une des traductions est « Histoires à propos du mauvais état dans lequel nous nous trouvons ». Le rapport met en lumière les crises de santé mentale et de toxicomanie dans les Premières Nations du nord desservies par la SLFNHA. Se référant au choix du titre, Christian Quequish a écrit que « Pour nous rapprocher du mino bimadiziwin, la belle vie, nous devons pouvoir parler d'animisiwiinan, les choses difficiles de la vie » (2).

Il y a une crise de santé mentale. Il y a une crise du suicide. Cela touche les jeunes des Premières Nations du nord. Beaucoup de gens sont aux prises avec des problèmes de santé mentale et de toxicomanie. Il est difficile d'entendre parler de la mort par suicide d'un enfant de douze ans. Les défis auxquels sont confrontés les peuples des Premières Nations sont la cause directe des traumatismes intergénérationnels causés par le système des pensionnats indiens et la rafle des années 1960. Ces politiques coloniales entraînent une surreprésentation des membres des Premières Nations dans le système de protection de l'enfance et du système carcéral.



Le député provincial Sol Mamakwa debout, au centre, dans son poste d'entraîneur des Kingfish Lake Flyers, au printemps 2024



Le député provincial Sol Mamakwa debout, au centre



— “ —  
 Le sport, c'est la  
 santé mentale  
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Crédit photos du Bureau du député provincial Sol Mamakwa

Le rapport de la SLFNA nous explique, à l'aide de données, ce que de nombreux peuples des Premières Nations savent déjà par leurs expériences. Par exemple, le rapport montre que les visites ambulatoires et les hospitalisations liées à la santé mentale et à la consommation de substances ont augmenté considérablement pour les Premières Nations de la région de Sioux Lookout au cours des dix années allant de 2011 à 2021 (Anishiniwug Ajimoowin Animisewiinan, (32). Le taux des décès non naturels était plus de trois fois supérieur à la moyenne provinciale (33). Parmi les recommandations du rapport figure la nécessité d'adopter une approche holistique de la santé, dans laquelle le bien-être mental, physique, spirituel et émotionnel sont considérés comme interconnectés (36).

Dans ce contexte, c'est vraiment beau de voir les membres des Premières Nations de Kiiwetinoong se rassembler chaque année pour des tournois comme le *Northern Bands Hockey Tournament*, les *Little Bands*, le *Little NHL*, et le *Tournament of Hope*. Lorsque j'assiste aux *Northern Bands*, je vois des amis et des familles des différentes Premières Nations du nord se réunir. Et lorsque je vois des gens de Kiiwetinoong jouer au hockey, au ballon-balai, au volley-ball ou au base-ball, je vois la prévention du suicide en action. Le sport, c'est la santé mentale.

La Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones, adoptée par le gouvernement canadien en 2016, affirme dans son article 31 que « les peuples autochtones ont le droit de maintenir, de contrôler, de protéger et de développer [...] les sports et les jeux traditionnels » et que « les États prennent des mesures efficaces pour reconnaître ces droits et en protéger l'exercice » (22-23). Au Canada, le sport est également un aspect nécessaire à la justice et à la réconciliation. Cela a été reconnu dans 5 des 94 appels à l'action du rapport final de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada de 2015 (numéros 87 à 91) qui abordent le rôle du sport dans le cheminement du Canada vers la réconciliation.

Le 87e appel à l'action reconnaît que les athlètes autochtones méritent que leurs réalisations soient célébrées et que l'on se souvienne de leur histoire (Commission de vérité et réconciliation, 10). Le 88e appel à l'action demande un soutien à long terme aux athlètes autochtones et un financement accru pour les Jeux autochtones de l'Amérique du Nord (10). Les 89e et 90e appels d'action invitent le gouvernement fédéral à élaborer des politiques pour affirmer le rôle de l'activité physique dans la santé, pour réduire les obstacles à la participation et pour renforcer la capacité de rendre le sport plus inclusif pour les peuples autochtones (10). Cela implique le financement et la mise en œuvre d'une gamme de programmes culturellement pertinents et antiracistes pour les athlètes, les entraîneurs et les autres responsables sportifs. En plus de demander la création d'un programme de développement des athlètes d'élite pour les athlètes autochtones, la Commission a également appelé à la mise en place de « programmes sportifs communautaires qui reflètent les diverses cultures et les activités sportives traditionnelles des peuples autochtones » (10). Enfin, le 91e appel à l'action demande que la planification des événements sportifs internationaux respecte l'autorité territoriale des Premières Nations et que la participation à tous les niveaux de la planification et de la mise en œuvre des événements soit assurée (10).

Dans le cadre de son programme *Field of Dreams*, la *Jays Care Foundation* a accordé des subventions pour financer la rénovation et la construction de nouveaux terrains de baseball à plusieurs Premières Nations du Nord de l'Ontario, dont l'un se trouve à

l'école secondaire Première Nation de Pelican Falls, près de Sioux Lookout (Bonello). À l'automne 2019, l'école secondaire Premières Nations de Pelican Falls et la *Jays Care Foundation* ont organisé ensemble un tournoi pour inaugurer le nouveau terrain. Bien que ces initiatives aient des répercussions importantes, les Premières Nations ne devraient pas avoir besoin de compter sur la philanthropie pour disposer d'installations sportives adéquates et considérées comme allant de soi dans la plupart des autres régions de la province.

Il faut que les gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux investissent davantage dans les installations sportives des Premières Nations afin que la possibilité de chausser des patins et de faire du sport ne soit plus une rareté pour de nombreux membres des Premières Nations du Nord. Il y a déjà plusieurs décennies, le *Rapport d'intervention* de la Nation Nishnawbe Aski (NAN) de 1993 présenté à la Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones indiquait que les sports et les loisirs organisés dans les Premières Nations membres de la NAN dépendent du soutien des conseils de bande pour la programmation, l'existence d'installations et l'organisation de compétitions et de jeux entre Premières Nations. Même si deux de ces recommandations peuvent être mises en œuvre plus facilement, de nombreuses Premières Nations manquent encore d'installations sportives.

Dans un rapport du Centre de collaboration nationale de la santé autochtone, Julie Sutherland identifie des obstacles à l'activité physique dans les Premières Nations, les Inuits et les Métis, notamment les facteurs environnementaux, socioéconomiques et politiques (qui incluent également l'absence d'installations dans de nombreuses communautés), le racisme et le sexisme et, pour les jeunes en particulier, des programmes culturellement non pertinents (13-15).

Les enseignantes et les enseignants ainsi que les travailleuses et travailleurs en éducation dans les écoles de l'Ontario ont la responsabilité de soutenir la mise en œuvre des programmes de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada, notamment les programmes liés à l'éducation et aux sports. J'invite les éducatrices et les éducateurs de l'Ontario à veiller à ce que les histoires et les contributions des peuples autochtones dans tous les domaines, incluant les sports, soient mis en valeur et célébrés dans leur enseignement, dans la mesure du possible, et à encourager les élèves qui semblent avoir des difficultés à jouer des sports qui leur procurent de la joie. Le sport guérit.

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**Sol Mamakwa**  
Député provincial, Kiiwetinoong

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# Bargaining for the common good

Standing up for  
the public interest

by Chantal Mancini



As I write this article, workers organized by the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union (OPSEU) are set to vote on a tentative agreement following a historic strike against the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO). At issue is the Ford government's wish to further expand alcohol sales into convenience stores, which they claim will help small businesses and provide consumers with more choice and convenience (Jones). Meanwhile, OPSEU contends the move will erode the \$2.5 billion in dividends the LCBO provides annually to provincial coffers, used to fund public services, and hand it to private corporations instead. In a media interview, OPSEU President J.P. Hornick explained that "this strike is not about traditionally [sic] wages and benefits. This strike is about the privatization of alcohol sales in such a way that it strips revenue out of public health care and education...the LCBO wants to grow and modernize along with Ontarians' needs, but we want to do it in such a way that Ontarians are protected." In other words, the purpose of OPSEU's strike was not solely about workers' wages and benefits; instead, it was a fight that impacts everyone. OPSEU's struggle is an example of how public sector workers, whether they work in health care, education, transit, or any public institution, are uniquely positioned to protect public services for the sake of the common good.

OPSEU's framing of their bargaining demands as good for everyone is an essential element of what has become known as "bargaining for the common good," or BCG, a form of collective bargaining that extends beyond the material interests of workers into the wider public interest. BCG demands can be grounded in racial justice, climate action, and equitable services for all, and includes ongoing organizing, increased member engagement, and sometimes elements of open bargaining (a process by which bargaining demands are made public). McCartin (8) stresses that BCG is more than a bargaining strategy: it involves alliances with other unions and community organizations and an active push to redefine the meaning and purpose of collective bargaining. He describes how BCG grew out of a response

...BCG, a form of collective bargaining that extends beyond the material interests of workers into the wider public interest.

by public sector unions to austerity measures that followed the Great Recession in the late 2000s, aiming to expose how financialization, low taxes on the rich, and privatization threaten public services and negatively impact those who depend upon them. The term was formally adopted by activists following the successful strike by the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) in 2012, whose priorities included smaller class sizes, the hiring of nurses and social workers, and an end to school closures in racialized communities (McCartin 9, Blanc 3). Other public sector unions followed suit, with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 workers in Oregon demanding a state lawsuit into banks' practices of manipulating interest rates in 2013 (McCartin 9, Jaffe) and the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), bolstered by strong alliances with parent groups and high public approval, winning demands such as a 50% reduction in standardized testing, a full-time nurse in every school, the end of random student searches, and legal aid for immigrant families in 2019 (McCartin 10, Blanc 3, McCartin et al. 2). Such bargaining outcomes ultimately protect or improve services that benefit entire communities. Currently, the CTU is headed down the BCG path again, and has tabled climate solutions as

bargaining priorities (Ramirez-Franco).

There are recent, notable examples of bargaining for the common good in Canada as well. As part of a wider climate justice campaign, workers with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) brought proposals to the bargaining table in 2018 that included retrofitting all postal buildings with solar panels and the conversion of the Canada Post fleet to electric vehicles. By 2022, Canada Post finally committed to using all electric vehicles by 2040 and began the process of reducing greenhouse gas emissions at their facilities (Canada Post). In Quebec, in the late fall of 2023, 560,000 healthcare and education workers hit the bricks in a historic demonstration of worker militancy. A response to burgeoning inflation and a government austerity agenda, the deterioration of public services was central to their demands (King, Ikebe). Specifically, strikers wanted workload and staff shortages addressed, with striking teachers looking for reduced class sizes and healthcare workers seeking a reduction in patient-staff ratios. Public opinion polls demonstrated that over 70% of people in Quebec supported the strike (Ikebe). Workers were not only successful in making significant wage gains but also, and most notably,

achieved increased funding to deal with worker shortages and overwork (King). The public good was front and centre in their asks and their wins. In Saskatchewan in January 2024, class size was also a central issue for striking teachers, who began job action after over a decade of relative labour peace. Other key issues included classroom complexity, supports for students, and school violence (Smith & Enoch). Following the rejection of a tentative agreement in May 2024 and months of a province-wide work to rule, teachers eventually agreed to binding arbitration and await a decision to settle outstanding issues (Reynoldson). Like their counterparts in Quebec, Saskatchewan teachers also had considerable public support (Mandryk & Prisciak). In the case of the recent strike by OPSEU against the LCBO, polls in Ontario showed that just under half of those asked supported the union's goals (Karadeglija & Saba). When unions tie bargaining priorities to the public interest, they are more likely to be viewed favourably by the public.

BCG does not have to be limited to the public sector. However, public sector workers and their unions are best positioned to be key defenders of the public good. There are several reasons for this. The first is obvious: public sector workers provide important services to the public. They see firsthand the impact of that work, and any policy that regulates it, on the services they provide and on the people that they serve. As Ross (60) puts it, “the material conditions of public sector workers’ labour tends to encourage an occupational consciousness based on identification with the public.” This consciousness also cuts both ways, as the recipients of public services often have insight into the work that public sector workers perform. Second, more public sector workers belong to unions than their private sector counterparts. This is starkly apparent in Canada, where nearly 77% of public sector workers are unionized compared to just under 16% of those in the private sector (Statscan). Unions provide workers with a collective voice, structural organization, and institutional power that non-organized workers do not have. They have political influence

“  
When unions tie bargaining priorities to the public interest, they are more likely to be viewed favourably by the public.”

and financial resources at their disposal, along with the potential to be democratizing forces for good. Finally, as the public sector labour market is necessarily local and tied to communities, workers do not face having their employer pack up and move across the border to avoid their demands (Sweeney 122). Working for the state does come with a price, however: governments in Canada will not hesitate to impose their legislative power upon public sector workers to rein in their resistance to austerity agendas (Panitch & Swartz 31). The government's ability to legislate their will casts a looming shadow as public sector unions devise their bargaining strategies.

Public sector unions' power comes from their ability to strike the state, rather than capitalist business (Ross & Savage 9). At the same time, any actions they take directly impact the people they serve, so there is risk when it comes to public support. The key to getting the public onside is deep organizing in communities to support the shared goals of both union members and the public. As scholar and organizer Jane McAlevey has noted, "education and health care are... particularly strategic fields for organizing and movement building because of their geographic and social placement in the community: they aren't walled-off industrial parks, and the nature of the services they provide creates an intimate relationship between the workers and their community" (204). It is precisely these relationships that set the stage for the deep organizing work of BCG, to build power and solidarity between the public and the workers who serve them. We saw this in the fall of 2022 in Ontario when CUPE education workers went on strike after months of organizing and publicly sharing bargaining proposals. CUPE effectively framed their demands as directly related to their members' ability to provide services to students (Lukacs & Paling). The result was an Abacus poll that indicated that 62% of those surveyed did not blame workers for the labour unrest in schools: they placed the blame squarely on the Ford government. When Ford attempted to use the *Notwithstanding Clause* to end the strike, public opinion and

unprecedented solidarity from other unions, including OSSTF/FEESO, Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens, caused him to back down (Saba). This was a demonstration of how powerful BCG can be, even when workers are faced with a government poised to use its bluntest tool of coercion. It revealed how workers, in solidarity with one another and the public, can extend the function of bargaining beyond the realm of compensation into a mechanism that serves to benefit us all.

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## District 8— Avon Maitland

The Educational Support Staff Professionals (ESSP) Bargaining Unit is made up of several work groups including:

- Child and youth workers (CYWs)
- Designated early childhood educators (DECEs)
- Educational assistants (EAs)
- Office/Clerical
- Tech/Technical resource assistants (TRA)

### What is one of the biggest challenges your members face in their work?

One of the biggest challenges members face is the lack of adequate resources and support. They are often responsible for a wide range of tasks, from assisting students with special needs to managing school operations, yet they frequently encounter insufficient staffing levels and limited access to necessary tools and training. This can lead to a high workload and stress, making it difficult to meet the diverse needs of students and maintain an effective learning environment. Additionally, the lack of recognition and understanding of their roles can sometimes lead to them feeling undervalued despite their essential contributions to the school community. All of this is a direct result of underfunding by the Ford government.

### What is one particularly unique thing about your Bargaining Unit that you think our members probably don't know?

One particularly unique aspect of District 8 ESSP Bargaining Unit that members might not know is the diversity of roles it encompasses. While many might associate support staff primarily



Members of the D8 ESSP Bargaining Unit at Goderich Public School



Members of the D8 ESSP Bargaining Unit at Upper Thames Elementary School in Mitchell Ontario

with educational assistants or school secretaries, the ESSP Bargaining Unit includes a wide range of specialized positions. This can include technical resource assistants who help manage school libraries and support technology initiatives, hardware technicians, IT trainers, and network technicians who ensure that a school's technology infrastructure is running smoothly, and child and youth workers who provide crucial mental health and behavioural support to students. We also represent the clerical employees under the Avon Maitland District School Board Education Centre including accounts payable associates, purchasing, secretary, community use associates, Centre for Employment and Learning secretaries, and e-registrars who make sure all school bills are paid, products are purchased, and all the alternative programs run smoothly.

This diversity means that the Bargaining Unit is involved in nearly every aspect of the school environment, contributing to both the academic and emotional development of students from JK to adult learning. Members might be surprised to learn how interconnected these roles are and

how they collectively contribute to a holistic educational experience. This uniqueness highlights the comprehensive support network within schools that goes beyond the classroom, playing a critical part in students' overall success and well-being.

**Describe some of the value your Bargaining Unit (and District) get from being part of the OSSTF/FEESO community.**

Being part of the OSSTF/FEESO community provides value to the Bargaining Unit and District. This includes a strong, collective voice in advocating for fair working conditions, equitable policies, and adequate resources for support staff. OSSTF/FEESO offers legal support, professional development opportunities, and access to resources that help members stay informed and engaged with current educational issues.

**Describe one misconception members of the public and/or the OSSTF/FEESO membership may have about the work your members do—and correct that misconception.**

Members of the Federation and the community in general often don't realize that support staff are integral to the daily functioning and success of schools. They include educational assistants who work directly with students, particularly those with special needs, providing individualized support that enables these students to participate and succeed in the classroom. The general public would be appalled to see the Kevlar some EAs must wear—they could be mistaken for members of a SWAT team with the gear that is required. There is also a misconception about the difficulty of these jobs, both physical and emotional/mental. Our students are dependent on the dedication of all our members who take on some of the most difficult and important roles in supporting student success. We are an integral part of the whole team of education professionals providing services to students.

Cheryl Rader (she/her)  
e-Registrar, District 8, Avon Maitland

OSSTF/FEESO  
presents

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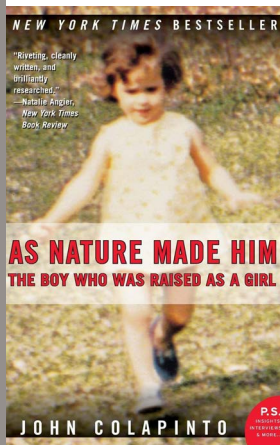
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THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES IN EDUCATION



**As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl**  
by John Colapinto

Harper Perennial, 2000

Book Review by Dr. Stacey Deneka (she/her)  
Teacher, District 17, Simcoe

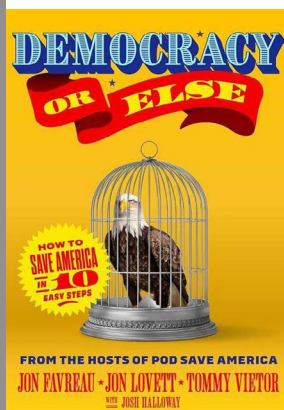
This is a biographical account of the life of David Reimer. David, one of a set of twins, was initially assigned male at birth, but after a seriously mishandled circumcision, was raised as a female. However, in his teen years, David rejected the female identity that had been forced on him. At birth and during the time he was being raised as a girl, David was given different names (known as deadnames). However, out of respect for his choices and his struggle, this article will only use his correct, chosen name: David.

The decision to proceed with this drastic undertaking was the brainchild of then-eminent psychologist Dr. John Money of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. David's family initially followed Dr. Money's advice, but came to support David in his teenage years in his quest to reclaim his male identity. *As Nature Made Him* predominantly follows the life and struggles of David and his family through David's teenage years. The book also highlights the significant impact of Dr. Money's exploitative experimentation and reporting on the global medical community. It critiques his use of the twins in his exploration of the impacts of nature versus nurture on the development of gender identity.

As a young person forced to live as a girl, David experienced isolation, bullying, and struggled to adjust to the assigned female identity. His family also suffered through Dr. Money's experiment and its impacts on David. Dr. Money's lack of empathy or willingness to see the struggles of this family was nothing short of catastrophic. Worse still was his determination to portray the results of

his experiment as a success to the scientific and medical community.

This recounting is an important reminder of the dangers of hubris amongst scientific professionals. Dr. Money's refusal to recognize the warning signs of failure of this "experiment" led to years of further surgical interventions on intersex infants to give them what he considered to be normatively appropriate genitals based on his faulty research. David's ultimate death by suicide only further underlines the importance of advocacy for intersex individuals. As educators strive to support trans and Queer youth, this story is a stark reminder that gender, while a construct, is the sole discretion of the individual—in David's case, no amount of nurture could change the gender identity he knew was his.



**Democracy or Else: How to Save America in 10 Easy Steps**  
 by Jon Favreau, Jon Lovett, Tommy Vietor, with Daniel Halloway  
 Zando—Crooked Media Reads, 2024

Book Review by Richardo Harvey (he/him)  
 OSSTF/FEESO Regional Organizer

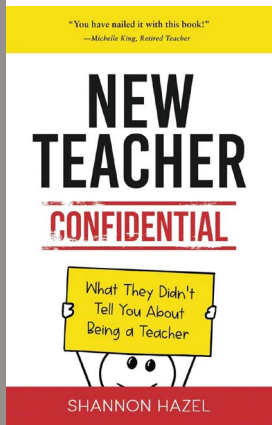
In their collaborative book, *Democracy or Else: How to Save America in 10 Easy Steps*, authors Jon Favreau, Jon Lovett, Tommy Vietor (all former Obama communications staff), with Daniel Halloway present a powerful manifesto on the urgency to preserve and restore democratic principles in the face of modern challenges. Drawing on extensive experience in politics, media, and activism, the authors provide a clear assessment of current threats to democratic institutions while offering practical strategies for individual and collective action. One of the work's strengths is its accessibility and relevance. Despite addressing complex political issues, the authors effectively communicate their message in a direct and engaging manner, ensuring that readers of all backgrounds can understand the importance of their call to action. They directly address the rise of populism, the spread of misinformation, political polarization, and the negative influence of money in politics, emphasizing that passive observation is not an option.

The central argument of the book is that any meaningful transformation begins from the bottom up. Emphasizing the power of local activism and community engagement, Favreau et al. convincingly argue that individuals can bring about meaningful political transformation. They back up their argument with compelling (and impactful) examples, such as grassroots movements that led to important social reforms, including marriage equality and criminal justice reform. Through these stories, they highlight the potential of ordinary citizens to bring about change

when united around shared purposes and values.

*Democracy or Else* not only identifies the problems that plague American democracy, it also offers a practical roadmap for its renewal, a roadmap that is equally applicable to the Canadian context. The book outlines ten actionable steps, such as educating yourself, getting involved in local politics, advocating for voting rights, and supporting independent media. These steps are accompanied by concrete examples and personal anecdotes that are intended to inspire and empower readers to take an active role in the political process. In short, *Democracy or Else* is more than a critique of the current state of things. It is a passionate call for civic engagement and a testament to the belief that democracy, when actively nurtured and defended, can withstand even the most serious threats. Favreau, Lovett, Vietor, and Halloway have created a timely and indispensable guide that challenges readers, including educators, to reconsider their civic roles and work together toward a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient democratic society.

The authors are also co-hosts of the engaging and hilarious Democrat-leaning American political podcast, *Pod Save America*, which acts as a perfect companion piece to the book. The pod, like the book, is filled with energy and information relevant to organizers and political activists, especially those of us seeking to elect progressive candidates to support a just society.



**New Teacher Confidential:  
What They Didn't Tell You About Being a Teacher**  
by **Shannon Hazel**  
Teacheredu, 2024

Book Review by **Marcia Lewis** (she/her)  
Teacher, District 23, Grand Erie

In *New Teacher Confidential: What They Didn't Tell You About Being a Teacher*, author Shannon Hazel, a career teacher of over twenty-five years, special education specialist, and instructional coach, shares personal lessons and experiences from the classroom in order to help new teachers prepare for their careers in education. Hazel claims that in reading the book, a new teacher will learn how to minimize undesirable behaviours, increase student success, establish a productive learning environment, have strategies for stress-free parent communication, foster effective working relationships with administrators, avoid burnout, and create balance between home and school (this made me laugh and roll my eyes as one of the most sought after and rarely achieved goals for anyone working in education).

Theoretically, Hazel's book has merit. However, much of what the author suggests in the book is idealistic in nature and centred around best case scenario classrooms, colleagues, parents, administrators, support staff, and education. It's not that her lessons should be dismissed, but rather they should be taken lightly so as to not garner disappointment when they do not come to fruition in the perfect manner described. Also, many of her strategies are aimed towards an elementary classroom.

By far, the most important lesson the author provides is "*Lesson #3: Kids Don't Learn from Teachers They Don't Like: Connecting with Students Is the Best Classroom Management Strategy.*" This chapter is applicable for both elementary and secondary educators. Her stark reminder

about firm boundaries in this chapter shockingly excludes reference to elementary settings.

It was also disappointing that no chapter is dedicated to the necessary importance of connection and involvement with one's local and provincial union, especially since the author's own bio notes that she was an "active member of the Ontario Elementary Teachers' Federation." After all, it is the union who helps with teachers' rights and responsibilities should anything go awry with any of her aforementioned strategies and lessons, and it is the union who protects working and learning conditions that foster environments that would allow many of Hazel's strategies to work.

*New Teacher Confidential*, while successful in detailing some ways to improve teaching, and a generally good read, could use a greater dose of reality in order to be more beneficial to educators.



### Source

**Produced by the Canadian Teachers' Federation/Fédération  
Canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants (CTF/FCE)**

Podcast Review by **Chris Chandler** (he/him)

Vice-President, Teachers' Bargaining Unit, District 12, Toronto

*Source*, a podcast from the Canadian Teachers' Federation/Fédération Canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants (CTF/FCE), is well worth the listen. *Source* addresses many concerns of educators and has covered critical issues like workplace violence, the staffing and retention crisis, our professional mental health, and the impacts of information technology in rapidly evolving digital learning environments.

*Source* is a professionally produced podcast that amply demonstrates CTF/FCE's core values. The content includes the latest research in whatever area it examines, including contributions by leading academics and advocates, such as Michael Geist on the subject of workers' digital rights, or Fae Johnstone on supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students and educators. Appearances by scholars or researchers are always well balanced with the voices of teachers and education workers in schools. The podcast is bilingual, with both official languages used in many episodes, and some entirely in French. This is where *Source* is strongest: many episodes are rightly focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion, with a particular emphasis on female educators, highlighting for example the achievements of women union leaders and criticizing the inadequate representation of women in Canadian politics.

However, *Source* could perhaps concentrate more on the particular struggles of the unions which comprise the CTF/FCE, as they grapple directly with neoliberal underfunding of public education. There could be more detail on how affiliates (or locals) have undertaken particular

political actions, bargaining fights, or member and community mobilizations, to win against the many problems the podcast so justly and thoroughly explores. If the intended audience of *Source* is the CTF/FTE members themselves (and not just a general public ignorant of the attacks on our work), then such an additional focus could help make the podcast an educational and organizational tool for educators across Canada looking for templates for action.

*Source* is available at <https://ctfce-source.buzzsprout.com/> and on most streaming platforms.



## Opportunities arise when we work together

Unity is the heart of communities

This installment of “last word” comes with a lot of hope and joy in my heart—mainly because I see people working together to try and make a difference. Reflecting on our summer Union Leadership Academy where we gathered Federation leaders from across the province, where we united under the banner of the power of community to better the lives of all, and where we heard Chicago Teachers’ Union president, Stacy Davis Gates speak about bargaining for the common good, I can’t help but be excited for our next steps as a union.

In approving the OSSTF/FEESO Strategic Action Plan, our members voted overwhelmingly to support the creation of an expanded vision within our Federation that embraces the power of organizing and working with our community allies to build power and to fight for the common good. This work has already started in our union and in other unions around the globe—and it will make a difference for more than just the workers. As Stacy Davis Gates reminds us, we need to pull on the “opportunity available to us—if we figure out who our allies are, and more importantly, who our opponents are—the opponents of the common good, the public good, the public sector” we can overcome the forces that want to maximize profits over maximizing people.

This opportunity for unity sees education workers and teachers uniting with members of their community, recognizing and celebrating our differences and our common goals for a better future. As we look ahead to elections, both provincially and federally, it will be this united community that elects education-friendly and community-friendly candidates. We only need to look back over the last decade to see the gross deterioration of public services and how their loss has so negatively impacted our families

and communities. This is not the first time in history when the people have had to unite through their differences to fight a common challenge to a just society. And from those histories we learn that together we must and can realize a world where the people in our communities get what they need to live, and to live well. It is a history that challenged the idea of privatization of public services and a history that said investing in education, health care, housing, and workers brings the greatest wealth and well-being to our lives.

Schools are pillars of these robust communities—where we see investments in public education, we also see investments in other services that matter to those living in our communities. It remains the responsibility of those of us in unions to continue to advocate for what all workers and all communities need—where unions win, communities win. With this reminder, I give everyone a task for this fall: get out in your community, find a local event to attend, celebrate with your neighbours. Find the common needs and frustrations between you and your neighbours and ask how you can work together to make a difference and build stronger communities.

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Karen Littlewood (she/her)  
OSSTF/FEESO President



## De nouvelles occasions apparaissent lorsque nous travaillons ensemble

L'unité est au cœur des communautés

Ce « mot de la fin » est imprégné de beaucoup d'espoir et de joie dans le cœur—principalement parce que je vois des gens travailler ensemble pour tenter de faire changer les choses. Après l'Académie de leadership syndical d'OSSTF/FEESO de cet été, où nous avons réuni des dirigeantes et dirigeants de la Fédération provenant de toute la province, où nous nous sommes réunis sous la bannière de la force communautaire pour améliorer la vie de tous, et où nous avons entendu la présidente du syndicat des enseignants de Chicago, Stacy Davis Gates, nous parler de la négociation pour le bien commun, je ne peux m'empêcher d'être enthousiasmée pour nos prochaines étapes en tant que syndicat.

En approuvant le Plan d'action stratégique d'OSSTF/FEESO, nos membres ont voté massivement pour soutenir la création d'une vision plus large de notre Fédération qui embrasse le pouvoir de s'organiser et de collaborer avec nos alliés communautaires pour renforcer la puissance et lutter pour le bien commun. Ce travail est déjà en cours dans notre syndicat et dans d'autres syndicats partout au monde—et il fera une différence pour plus que les travailleuses et travailleurs. Comme nous le rappelle Stacy Davis Gates, nous devons saisir « l'occasion qui s'offre à nous—si nous déterminons qui sont nos alliés et, plus important encore, qui sont nos adversaires—les adversaires du bien commun, du bien public, du secteur public—nous pourrions vaincre les forces qui cherchent à maximiser les profits au détriment des personnes ».

Cette occasion d'unité pousse les travailleuses et les travailleurs en éducation et les enseignantes et enseignants à s'unir aux membres de leur communauté, reconnaître et célébrer leurs différences et leurs objectifs communs pour un avenir meilleur. Alors que nous nous préparons

aux élections, tant provinciales que fédérales, c'est cette communauté unie qui élira des candidates et candidats favorables à l'éducation et à la communauté. Il suffit de repenser à la dernière décennie pour constater l'importante dégradation des services publics et l'impact négatif de leur diminution sur nos familles et nos communautés. Ce n'est pas la première fois dans l'histoire que les gens doivent s'unir, malgré leurs différences, pour relever un défi commun pour une société juste. Et cet historique nous apprend qu'ensemble, nous devons et pouvons créer un monde où les membres de nos communautés disposent de ce dont ils ont besoin pour vivre et bien vivre. Cet historique a remis en question le concept de la privatisation des services publics et qui a affirmé que l'investissement dans l'éducation, les soins de santé, le logement et les travailleuses et travailleurs rapporte la plus grande richesse et le plus grand bien-être de nos vies.

Les écoles sont les piliers de ces communautés robustes—là où nous constatons des investissements dans l'éducation publique, nous voyons également des investissements dans d'autres services qui sont importants pour les membres dans nos communautés. Il incombe à celles et ceux d'entre nous qui sont syndiqués de continuer à défendre ce dont les travailleuses et travailleurs et toutes les communautés ont besoin : là où les syndicats gagnent, les communautés gagnent. Avec ce rappel, je demande à chacun une tâche : sortez dans votre communauté, trouvez un événement local auquel participer, célébrez avec vos voisins. Trouvez les besoins et les inquiétudes communs et demandez-vous comment travailler ensemble pour faire une différence et bâtir des communautés plus fortes.

Karen Littlewood (elle)  
Présidente d'OSSTF/FEESO

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VOLUME 51 • ISSUE 1 • 2024