



## FILE THIS!

### Administrative Services Conference

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Affordable BC campaign

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Fair Elections campaign

p. 5

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## provincial

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**Contributing Editors:** Karen Tankard, Chris Bradshaw, Holly Reid, Keith Cameron, Katie Riecken, Simon Kelly, Megan Scott, Bronwen Barnett, Stefan Avljas, James Cavalluzzo, Rodrigo Samayoa, Ann Bradbury, Erin Sikora  
**Design & Layout:** Chris Bradshaw  
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### Provincial Executive

President:	Stephanie Smith
Treasurer:	Paul Finch
Exec. Vice-President:	Sussanne Skidmore
Exec. Vice-President:	Kari Michaels
Exec. Vice-President:	James Coccola
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	Scott De Long
Component 10:	Rory Smith
Component 12:	Maria Middlemiss
	Matt Damario
Component 17:	Dave MacDonald
Component 20:	George Buis



bcgeu



4911 Canada Way, Burnaby, B.C. V5G 3W3  
Phone: 604-291-9611  
Fax: 604-291-6030  
1-800-663-1674 (toll free)  
[www.bcgeu.ca](http://www.bcgeu.ca)

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## LETTER

### From the President

## Reconciliation

**W**hat an incredible and busy year 2017 was. Your union held our triennial constitutional convention in June and a new, energized executive was elected.

We celebrated some major victories, such as securing a first collective agreement for almost one thousand new members at the River Rock Casino. We launched campaigns to improve our members' lives, such as Affordable B.C. and Fair Elections B.C., and introduced new education curriculum for you, our members.

While it was all memorable, one memory that sticks out particularly is the reconciliation circle that our senior staff and elected leaders took part in. It was a special experience that focused on what reconciliation means and how important it is for Canada.

I learned that the work of reconciliation truly belongs to all of us who've settled here. Governments must continue to acknowledge and apologize. Still, there's more work to do. We all need to engage in reconciliation efforts and move on the 94 calls to action if we truly want to move forward together.

*"I learned that the work of reconciliation truly belongs to all of us who've settled here. Governments must continue to acknowledge and apologize. Still, there's more work to do."*

Your union has been working towards change. At our 2017 convention, we committed to strengthening relationships with Indigenous members.

As well, we pledged support for all Indigenous peoples in their fight for self-determination and self-governance, and to advocate for government to

honour the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples.

We're so fortunate to live in this beautiful, dynamic country and we need to respect the true history of Canada and its relationship with Indigenous peoples.

One step I've recently taken is to learn about the territory where I was born—a borough of Montreal that I knew as the city of Pierrefonds. After doing some research, I discovered I was born on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg Nations.

I was challenged to do this, and I'd like to challenge you to do the same, to determine whose traditional lands you were born on, or where you now live.

There are many online resources to help, including maps at [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca) for people born in Canada.

We can't change Canada's past. But we must learn from it so that mistakes are never repeated.

We owe it to ourselves and to future generations.





## BCGEU out of the gate early with fall bargaining conferences

**I**t pays to be prepared. That's the message the BCGEU is sending by convening bargaining conferences in November 2017, even though sectoral agreements don't expire until spring 2019.

Delegates from across the public service and community social service sectors gathered in Vancouver to hammer out bargaining priorities for upcoming negotiations. We expect to begin talks in 2018.

"A year and a half may seem like a long way away, but there are important issues that require urgent attention," said BCGEU president Stephanie Smith. "We've made some limited progress on key priorities in recent months, but our members can't wait a year and a half for real solutions."

"There are so many priorities that need immediate attention. Enhancing child protection services, addressing widespread recruitment and retention issues, and ensuring adequate service levels for resource ministries are just a few priorities. We have an opportunity to work proactively with the B.C. government to reverse 16 years of erosion in the delivery of public services, and we're eager to get to work."

A recent survey of public service workers backs up the president's comments. BCGEU members from across the province have expressed concern that 16 years of wage restraint under the former Liberal government has eroded competitiveness with the private sector.

This has led to serious recruitment and retention issues as experienced workers move into competing sectors that offer better pay.

"Unfilled vacancies, unsustainable workloads and uncompetitive wages have created a siege mentality in many workplaces," said Smith. "Social workers, sheriffs, corrections officers and child protection workers are just a few areas that need immediate attention."

More than 2,500 BCGEU members replied to an online survey asking them to identify their top five bargaining priorities. The top-rated responses were:

1. **Wages**
2. **Better benefits** – including extended health, dental, massage, counselling, chiropractic, naturopath, psychology, sleep apnea equipment, acupuncture and HEP A/B vaccines.
3. **Work hours** – including flex time, four-day work week and telework.
4. **Staffing shortages** – including lack of training opportunities.
5. **Workload** – including the impact of work-related stress and burnout on members' health outcomes.

Almost 85 per cent of BCGEU members covered by sectoral agreements will be at the bargaining table with the B.C. government in the coming months. Stay tuned for updates as bargaining unfolds.



### Member comments from the public service bargaining survey:

*"British Columbia is one of the most expensive provinces to reside in and our current salaries do not reflect the cost of living."*

*"Wages need to increase since most BCGEU members live in the CRD, which is a very expensive place to live. And because percentage increases just widen the gap between the wages of the lower classifications and higher classifications."*

*"Missing Pacific Blue Cross. Great West Life is nowhere near as good."*

*"Work from home as an alternative when home with a sick kid. Or flexible work day so you can work different hours if you have an important appointment."*

*"No five-year agreement. Three years max."*



## Working to build an Affordable B.C.

**B**ritish Columbia is experiencing a housing affordability crisis that extends beyond metro Vancouver and working people are feeling that the deck has been stacked against them. They aren't wrong. For those wondering if the system is rigged against them, we have a simple message: it is, and we know how to fix it.

BCGEU members are among the many struggling to find affordable housing that meets their needs. Longer commutes, higher cost of living, and inappropriate housing leave many feeling hopeless. It's one of the reasons delegates to the BCGEU 2017 provincial convention passed multiple resolutions making housing affordability a priority for our union.

Governments at all levels know they have to act, but they fear collapsing the housing market and the home equity many rely on to fund their retirement.

That's why BCGEU treasurer Paul Finch, CUPE 1767 president Jared Melvin and first vice Harpinder Sandhu, who both work at BC Assessment, put together a provincial policy proposal that we believe can fix the housing crisis. We call it the Affordable B.C. plan. It invites the government to:

1. Reform property taxes to target speculators and raise funds for affordable housing and infrastructure.
2. Amend legislation to protect renters and better regulate real estate transactions.
3. Invest in new affordable public housing and infrastructure.

Our plan addresses the common problem for homeowners, renters and businesses: land value speculation.

We know the "wild west" atmosphere of low taxation and regulation in B.C. brings global capital which helped start the crisis, but that isn't the whole story. Global capital is the catalyst, but it's banks that are fueling speculation and turning housing in to a commodity instead of a place to live.

Banks profit from compound interest on loans, so they push up housing prices by providing increasingly large loans to new buyers looking to build a home or chase speculative profits.



BCGEU and community activists protest in Clayton Heights, Surrey where city hall attempted to evict residents due to parking shortages in the area.

## B.C. has the most expensive average home price in Canada



Source: National Price Map, 2017  
The Canadian Real Estate Association



As speculation and larger loans drive up the cost of land, our outdated tax structure increases the cost of development and fails to capture windfall gains made by speculators. The solution is simple: by progressively taxing land value we can lower the cost of development and generate revenue to build out affordable housing and public transit.

The stakes are high. Wealthy landowners and banks will oppose sensible solutions that cut into their profits in the same way oil companies in Alberta opposed proper royalties and a prosperity fund at the height of the oil boom.

That's why the BCGEU and CUPE 1767 are building support for bold action on housing through the Affordable B.C. campaign. The first phase of the campaign this fall featured a website, with an explanation of the plan, and a petition you can sign.

In 2018, the campaign will organize members and communities around B.C. We'll work to put direct pressure on provincial and municipal leaders to take bold action to build a British Columbia where all workers can live affordably.

You can show your support for the campaign and sign up to get updates at [www.AffordableBC.ca](http://www.AffordableBC.ca)





**F**airness in the electoral process. Some of us have been thinking long and hard about it for some time. The movement for electoral reform in B.C. has spanned two decades and been championed by citizens from all across the political spectrum.

We most often hear concerns following elections. It seems many voters in the province see the electoral process as unfair — the product of a broken system that needs fixing, a system known as first past the post.

Elections over the decades have had some peculiar outcomes.

ABCNDP majority government in 1996 was elected with fewer votes than the opposition BC Liberals garnered. The 2001 provincial election saw the BC NDP win just two seats despite getting over 20 per cent of the provincial vote. Third parties, like the BC Greens, have been repeatedly under-represented or shut out of the legislature completely despite earning an impressive number of votes.

Results like these make it hard to convince people to have faith in the electoral system. That means voters have come to learn that they have to be more strategic in how they vote — often voting against someone, rather than for their candidate of choice and the vision of the province they best identify with.

The BC NDP government were elected last spring with a mandate to restore confidence in our democratic system. In November, they unveiled a process to engage British Columbians in advance of an electoral reform referendum that will happen before December 2018.

A new electoral system, if approved by voters in the referendum, would be in effect for the next provincial election in 2021.



Next year, British Columbians will get an opportunity to restore confidence in our democracy with a referendum on our electoral system. Working together, BCGEU members could make a big difference.

***It's important that we rise to this historic opportunity of securing a fair election system for future generations so that they can be confident and engaged in our democracy.***

The referendum question will be announced in the coming month. But, we already know which side we're on.

In our view, the existing first past the post system erodes trust in democracy and favours establishment politics. We support a fair electoral system based on proportional representation. This would see seats in the legislature won based on the number of votes a political party receives.

"As one of the largest member-run, democratic organizations in the province, we have a wealth of experience when it comes to making sure that all voices are heard in decision-making. It's important that we rise to this historic opportunity of securing a fair

election system for future generations so that they can be confident and engaged in our democracy," said BCGEU president Stephanie Smith.

The BCGEU has just launched a campaign in response to the government's referendum initiative. Our hope is to tap into the collective organizing power of the union to spread the word about fair elections and encourage our members to become involved in the public consultation process.

This is an amazing opportunity to shape the debate by telling the government how the referendum process should unfold and what a fair electoral system could look like under proportional representation.

Go to [fairelections.bcgeu.ca](http://fairelections.bcgeu.ca) and sign onto our campaign. From there, you can send a message to government, share your ideas about electoral reform, connect with other activists in your community, and learn about campaign opportunities near you.



## Casino story a powerful demonstration of union organizing

**T**he BCGEU won important victories for members in recent months.

The story of the BCGEU coming to represent 1,000 workers at the River Rock Casino in Richmond, B.C. began like so many. The workers felt used. Despite giving years of dedicated service, they were nowhere close to being secure and happy at their jobs. They worked hard and supported their co-workers. Still, they weren't getting pay increases much above the minimum wage.

Joining the BCGEU was step one to a better future, but negotiating their first contract didn't come quickly or easily. Over a year of negotiations, the employer, Great Canadian Casinos, used every trick they could at the bargaining committee to slow down the process. They cancelled days of bargaining and refused to schedule more. They stalled whenever possible. At the same time, the company was pulling in roughly \$15 million per month in revenue.

Despite this, the workers, determined to fight for the best possible contract, decided they were ready to do the necessary organizing work to make it happen. They started with small actions like face-to-face meetings to include more people in the conversation. Then, members got 800 people to sign a petition. Nearly 300 members delivered it to management at



River Rock Casino workers celebrating the ratification of a four-year collective agreement after a year of bargaining. September 25, 2017 at BCGEU HQ.

open bargaining, thereby sending the strong message that they wanted a fair contract. Later, 870 members showed up for their strike vote. Only five people voted no and 99.4 per cent voted in favour of job action.

*It brought an average wage increase of 19 per cent, plus extended health and dental care, pensions, fair vacation entitlements and more.*

With mounting pressure and a mandate as strong as this one, Great Canadian Casinos finally realized they were facing determined and resilient opposition. They had only one choice among two to make: offer the workers a fair deal or risk a potentially expensive strike.

The employer bowed to the pressure and River Rock Casino workers won a strong first collective agreement. It brought an average wage increase of 19 per cent, plus extended health and dental care, pensions, fair vaca-



tion entitlements and more. These were long overdue and well-deserved gains. Now, River Rock workers are among the best compensated casino employees in B.C.

It was the happy ending everyone wanted. These wins illustrate why unions play a vital role in achieving workers' rights, economic fairness, and family-supporting jobs.

It's true, we can't always have victories as big as the one for workers at River Rock Casino. But, it wouldn't have happened without the hard work and commitment of the members. Anything is possible when you're willing to work collectively and organize.

You can read more about the River Rock Casino workers' win in Briarpatch Magazine: <http://bit.ly/RRbargaining>







**C**annabis legalization. It seemed unthinkable a decade ago. Now, we're less than one year away from the promised legislation to make cannabis legal in Canada. The provincial government is presently working out how cannabis will be sold and where it can be consumed.

We know the roll-out has to be done responsibly. We know British Columbians and our province's 162 municipalities are wondering how legal, non-medical cannabis will affect our communities. This was made clear at the annual Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Convention, a gathering of hundreds of municipal politicians and staff, which was held in Vancouver during the last week of September.

The BCGEU has a keen interest too. That's why our retail stores and warehouse component had a sizeable presence at the UBCM trade show. We were there to speak with municipal staff and elected councilors about our plan for the distribution and retail of legal, non-medical cannabis and why it makes sense for B.C.

Our plan was developed in partnership with the Alliance of Beverage Licensees of BC (ABLE). Together, we've established the Responsible Marijuana Retail Alliance. It advocates for legal, non-medical cannabis to be warehoused and distributed by the Liquor Distribution Branch (LDB) and sold at public and private liquor stores all across B.C.

We believe liquor stores are the best place to sell non-medical cannabis for three main reasons:

- 1. Distribution:** The LDB has been warehousing and distributing alcohol in B.C. since the end of prohibition in 1921. That's almost 100 years of safely distributing a controlled substance to almost every community in the province. Additionally, the profits from B.C.'s public liquor stores and distribution network contribute over \$1 billion every year to pay for education, health care and other necessary public services.
- 2. Retail:** Non-medical cannabis must be sold with public safety and social responsibility as the priority over profits. Cannabis will be a controlled substance, like alcohol, and we must ensure it's kept out of the hands of minors.
- 3. Co-location:** We support an evidence-based public policy approach that discourages the co-consumption of marijuana, alcohol and tobacco. However, we don't agree with those who argue recreational cannabis and recreational alcohol shouldn't be sold in the same

*Local government officials made it clear to us they want controlled substances kept away from minors and sold in secure, age-controlled environments with trained staff.*

location. That's because there's no evidence that co-location of cannabis and alcohol leads to increased or concurrent uses of both substances.

The UBCM convention was a great opportunity for BCGEU activists to share and build support for our plan. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Local government officials made it clear to us they want controlled substances kept away from minors and sold in secure, age-controlled environments with trained staff.

We encourage all BCGEU members to sign up to support our plan by visiting [www.responsibleretail.ca](http://www.responsibleretail.ca)

**NEWS:** In early December, the B.C. government announced it would make the Liquor Distribution Branch responsible for the distribution of non-medical cannabis. We applaud the decision. The government also noted they anticipate establishing a public-private retail model for non-medical cannabis. This announcement is expected in early 2018.







# Administrative services conference: Worth the wait



Delegates and activists attend the first administrative services conference in October.

**W**e made BCGEU history in early October. For the first time ever, the BCGEU hosted a conference exclusively for members who work in administrative services, in a variety of occupational groups represented by the union.

*File This!* brought together more than 100 members from all over B.C. — from government administration, justice, education, community social services, community health and other sectors.

We admit it. A conference for this segment of the BCGEU membership was long overdue. Incredibly, it was first discussed 12 years ago. But, the real push to make it happen came in 2016. Planning began more than a year ago.

“Because it was our first conference for administrative workers, we wanted to get things right — the right people in the room, the right content and workshop presenters, and the right topics. We had a great planning committee,” said Maria Middlemiss, administrative services component vice president.

A lot of planning went into finding a good mix of participants. We took

into account the kind of administrative work they do, and their geographic location — we wanted members from all over B.C. Most important was inviting members who are involved with the union, but haven’t had opportunities before to attend a BCGEU educational conference.

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*File This! brought together more than 100 members from all over B.C. — from government administration, justice, education, community social services, community health and other sectors.*

“I think it was a good idea to focus on people who hadn’t been too deeply involved with the union before. It really seems to have engaged people in a way that they may step up into other roles in the BCGEU after this,” said Matt Damario, the second administrative services component representative.

BCGEU president Stephanie Smith opened the conference.

“Administrative work has always been considered women’s work. Because

helping, supporting, organizing and nurturing come naturally to women — we’ve been told — women could be paid less and didn’t need recognition. This attitude prevails in some workplaces and it’s wrong,” she said. “When do employers notice the work of administrative support? When you’re not there and things don’t get done and office systems begin to fall apart.”

Leadership and communications expert Ann Coombs gave the keynote address. Her presentation covered the need for listening and communication in the workplace to improve office relationships.

“We all need courage and determination in our lives,” she said. “Trust, respect, kindness for self and for others. This can change the way we speak to one another.”

Workshops covered topics such as: dealing with conflict, stress management and mental health in the workplace. Attendees also participated in sessions on bullying and harassment, ergonomics and violence in the workplace.

They also tackled their own workplace issues in a world café session. World cafés facilitate large group discussions by engaging small groups in short, dynamic



conversations. We asked participants to share their thoughts in three areas: what they love about their job, one thing they'd change about their job, and what would make their job better.

They told us they love their co-workers and clients, but cited stress, no access to training, poor management, unrealistic expectations and office politics as problems. They identified a variety of possible remedies, including flexible work hours, respect and equality, and being consulted more often on workplace matters.

"I came to network, to find out what members are going through, and talk to them and see what their work world is like — to learn some skills we can take back to work," said Debbie Jones, an administrative worker from Castlegar. "It used to be that you had enough people to do the job and now it's do more with less. So, I'm getting some tools to deal with that."

"This conference is totally different from what I've taken before. I really enjoyed the managing your stress workshop because my life is all about stress," said April Duffield, an administrative services member who works in community social services in Vancouver.

"It was a great conference — a chance to hash out our issues and provide members with skills they can take back to their worksite so they feel better able to cope and have a better sense of their identity as an administrative support worker," said Damario.

This won't be our last administrative services conference. Delegates to the BCGEU's triennial convention in June 2017 passed a motion in favour of holding a conference for members in administrative services every three years.

"It was amazing to see so many administrative workers from so many union components around the province. People were interacting and engaged. I heard such great feedback. I'm so proud it finally happened. I can't wait for the next one in 2020," said Middlemiss.



The *File This!* conference coincided with the end of a BCGEU campaign to recognize and celebrate the efforts of administrative workers. The *Unsung Superstars* campaign launched in April 2017 and asked members in the BCGEU's administrative services component to nominate co-workers who made a positive difference in the workplace.

We received more than 30 nominations and profiled the *Unsung Superstars* on social media and the BCGEU website.

"Their days are long and the work is never-ending. They have to cover for each other because employers won't backfill vacation time or hire more staff. They're the glue that holds offices together. Workplaces couldn't function without them. The campaign was meant to increase awareness about the value of work performed by administrative services, plus praise their efforts and dedication," said Maria Middlemiss. "We also wanted to show the broad range of jobs they do."

We're not finished singing the praises of our members in administrative services and look forward to profiling their important work in the future.





## Consultations coming on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls

**W**e're taking an important step toward reconciliation. The BCGEU is hard at work preparing our submission to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The task before us is immense. We'll be examining the unworkable systems in place within a variety of occupational sectors, identifying barriers to moving forward, and offering recommendations we hope will provide the supports that Indigenous women and girls need to begin healing.

Our plan is to consult as widely as we can. That's why we'll be holding events with BCGEU members in several regions of the province — Prince George, Vancouver and Victoria in early 2018.

The BCGEU will be inviting members who work in a number of government ministries, community social services, Aboriginal services and other sectors to state their interest in participating in one of the regional meetings.

The regional events will be an opportunity for members with knowledge

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and expertise to come together and share information. The information arising out of these meetings will form

the basis of our submission to the inquiry. Members who cannot attend a regional meeting will be asked for input via a questionnaire.

We want to gather as much research as possible, and include as many members as possible in the process.

That's not all. We'll also be establishing a working group of BCGEU members who have knowledge and experience working with Indigenous women and girls in their occupational sectors. This group will include Indigenous women members of the union who will provide advice and guidance as we develop our submission.

For more information contact the BCGEU's Aboriginal liaison: [keith.cameron@bcgeu.ca](mailto:keith.cameron@bcgeu.ca)

### Tears for Justice Walk

We've been involved with the Tears for Justice Walk for many years. Beginning in late September, our sister and friend Gladys Radek started her walk from Prince Rupert to Smithers. The start date coincided with the anniversary of her niece Tamara's disappearance.

The BCGEU was along for the walk. Executive vice president Kari Michaels and Cheryl Gilbert, an Aboriginal member of our equity and human rights committee, travelled to Smithers to meet Gladys and other families of missing women.

They were invited to meet commissioners from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered

Indigenous Women and Girls to share their stories. Michaels and Gilbert tell us the opportunity to listen to the stories was a very powerful experience.

"It was a start and was so needed. But, there is still so much more left to say. There needs to be more meetings in more areas. I hope we all attend other hearings held across the province," said Gilbert.

### Walk for Reconciliation

The BCGEU also participated in the Walk for Reconciliation in Vancouver. It was held on September 24 and attracted tens of thousands of people. Our yellow BCGEU flags could be seen over long distances.



# Opening up about mental health

**A**wareness, Acceptance, Action. This was the motto of our recent mental health conference hosted by the BCGEU and the Compensation Employees' Union (CEU).

The two-day conference was an opportunity for members of the BCGEU's occupational health and safety (OHS) committee to have an open conversation on how to promote mental health at the workplace.

Bringing together BCGEU and CEU members gave participants the space to share experiences, discuss successes and brainstorm new ways to improve mental health conditions on the job. On day one, a panel of BCGEU and CEU members spoke about their own experiences dealing with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and bi-polar disorder.

Participants also attended workshops on psychological health and safety standards, bullying and harassment, mental health hygiene, burnout, and using art to express a person's psychological state.

BCGEU president Stephanie Smith opened the conference. "Only by speaking openly about mental health can we really tackle the issue," she said.

Smith said mental health has been ignored by employers and labour unions for far too long. She thanked activist members, many of them present at the conference, for making mental health a major priority for the BCGEU.

We've tripled the size of our OHS department and started offering more mental health training courses, including one on mental health first aid.

Conference participants also heard from a variety of speakers who shared their experiences. One of them was Robert



***We've tripled the size of our OHS department and started offering more mental health training courses, including one on mental health first aid.***

Gagnon, a Canadian Armed Forces veteran and correctional officer who walked from Prince George to Victoria last summer to raise awareness about PTSD.

He shared his experience dealing with PTSD — a personal journey that ultimately led him to organize the walk to Victoria as part of his healing journey.

Another speaker was Angus Reid, the former center for the B.C. Lions. Reid is a recovering gambling addict whose addiction almost led him to lose everything within a matter of months.

He spoke about his bi-polar tendencies, which helped him become an elite athlete, but also took him down the frightening path of gambling addiction.

We got terrific feedback from participants. One told us she was moved by the honesty to share personal stories and feelings. Others said they were encouraged to speak out about their own mental health in the hope it would give other people the opportunity to grow and learn.



## Get ready to STEP UP

### New course set to launch

**W**e're excited to announce a new education course for BCGEU stewards. STEP UP is a one-day course designed to introduce them to the BCGEU and explore our shared values and interests.

STEP UP uses the storytelling approach to deepen participants' identification with our union. This method is a current best practice in adult learning. Research indicates adults learn best through stories — retaining, relating to, and integrating information better.

Stewards taking our course will hear about — and also share — stories of stepping up. Many of us know the great story of a brave Rosa Parks, the civil rights campaigner who refused to give up her seat in the white section of a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama during the civil rights era.

But we all have our own stories about stepping up. Even small moments like standing up to a bully, challenging unfairness or questioning the boss can

be tapped for inspiration. Our shared experiences can help to shape how we view power at work, in our workplaces and in society.

One feature of the course is a short video of BCGEU president Stephanie Smith. She shares her own story of how she stepped up in her journey from a teenage retail clerk in New Zealand to early childhood educator to the first woman president of the BCGEU.

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*An important goal of ours is to promote and develop union awareness in our membership and this course moves us toward that. STEP UP educates stewards about the tools we use to establish and defend our members' rights...*

We also showcase our organizing drive at the River Rock casino in Richmond and the workers' efforts to win a fair collective agreement. It's a compelling good news story that reminds us what unions are for and how important it is that we continue to organize workplaces.

The many lessons and tactics used in the struggle at River Rock also provide useful examples of how all workplaces benefit when the union applies organizing methods to all of its work.

An important goal of ours is to promote and develop union awareness in our membership and this course moves us toward that. STEP UP educates stewards about the tools we use to establish and defend our members' rights, such as organizing, bargaining, the grievance procedure and campaigning.

The course aims to build solidarity among our diverse members and, we hope, spark some participants to get further involved in the BCGEU.

Another goal of STEP UP is to start building worker power in the workplace, a critical objective as tens of thousands of BCGEU members will head into bargaining in the next year.

STEP UP is currently being piloted with newly elected stewards. Over the long term, we hope to offer the course more broadly to any interested member who want to learn more about their union.

Participants should expect an engaging and stimulating learning experience.



# Health Care Assistant Day: *Celebrating our health care superheroes*

community



**W**hat would we do without health care workers? Imagine what our lives would be like without them. That's why acknowledgement is so important. We acknowledge Health Care Assistant Day each October 18 in recognition of the essential role they play in our health care system, providing support to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

"Health care assistants work around the clock to deliver hands-on, quality, compassionate care to seniors and others living with chronic conditions," said BCGEU president Stephanie Smith. "They're the superheroes of health care: the frontline workers who provide a supportive, caring environment, which allows their patients to live in dignity and remain independent and active as long as possible."

The BCGEU represents thousands of health care assistants in our union's community health services and health services components. Health care assistants include community health workers, residential care aides, long-term care aides, food service workers, and many more. These caregivers make a difference in people's lives every day, providing personal care to clients at their home and at health care facilities.

"Health care assistants are truly the unsung heroes of the health care system, so we decided it would be fitting to shine the spotlight on them and recognize them as health-care superheroes," said Sherry Ogasawara, vice president, health services.

"Superhero-themed posters, pins and postcards were distributed and members were asked to identify their personal superpower. On October 18th, at worksites across the province, our members were recognized and applauded for the incredible work they do."



Dunrovin Park Lodge  
Quesnel



Broadmead Care - Victoria



Hearts & Hands Conference - Vancouver



## Shifty at 50

**H**ow's this for workplace longevity? Mike (Shifty) Shafer is celebrating 50 years of work as a B.C. highways worker.

Shafer began working in highways the year of Canada's centennial — 1967. He was 19 years old and his first job was as a sign man's helper. Not long after, Shafer became a sign man himself, and eventually was the only member of the crew after sign men in Merritt and Boston Bar quit.

There was no daily commute to work for Shafer. He lived in a bunkhouse in Boston Bar for most of the work

week and went home to Merritt on weekends.

Shafer graduated from sign man to grader operator. In the decades since, he has operated nearly every piece of equipment used in highways maintenance, including the excavator, which he operates to this day.

His co-workers say there's no one better to work with than Shafer.

"After forty some odd years I have never seen him in a bad mood. In fact, he is the guy that quite often cheers everybody else up. Standing 6'4", he is one of those quiet giants with an attitude of live and let live, and he gets along well with everyone," said Fred Street, chair of BCGEU's Local 1005.



Mike Shafer

You'd think that after 50 years he'd be thinking about retirement. As far as his co-workers know, it could be another 50 years before Shafer finally shuts off the excavator.

## A home away from home for PTSD sufferers

**O**ne of the activities in which the BCGEU took part in 2017 was Robert Gagnon's Walk for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) Awareness. Gagnon is a correctional officer and a long-time BCGEU member.

In the summer of 2017, he walked from Prince George to the legislature in Victoria — stopping along the way to share his experience with PTSD.

His walk was also meant to raise money for PTSD services. By the time he reached Victoria, Gagnon had raised \$18,400 for the Veterans Ranch in Quesnel and the Honour Ranch in Kamloops.

In the coming months, Honour Ranch is set to begin offering mental health treatment specifically for PTSD sufferers. The program is an expansion of the work presently being done for veterans and first responders by Honour House, a related facility in New Westminster.



(L-R) Brandon Cox, BCGEU C1 exec member; Stephanie Smith, BCGEU president; Rob Bryson, retired BC sheriff and Honour House volunteer; Craig Longstaff, general manager, Honour House Society; Brandon Thistle, BCGEU staff.

BCGEU president Stephanie Smith toured Honour House last fall to learn more about the services available.

Access to treatment for BCGEU members is important because of ongoing violence in B.C.'s prisons where assaults on correctional officers are rising.

They, along with sheriffs, conservation officers and forest fire fighters represented by the BCGEU, have access to Honour House. The facility

provides free lodging to service people and their families while they receive medical care and treatment in the Vancouver area.

"Some BCGEU members have a very high rate of operational stress injuries. This is one of many reasons why the services of Honour House are so important to our members," said Stephanie Smith, BCGEU president. "We're proud to support the work of Honour House and Honour Ranch."



## Our new Fort St. John area office opens

**W**e're happy to report the opening of our new BCGEU area office in Fort St. John.

It's located at the corner of 100th Ave and 102nd Street in the downtown core. The two-storey, 6,300-square-foot building was built by unionized workers. With eco-friendly building materials and power saving features, we designed it to be one of the most modern and sustainable buildings in the region.

It's a terrific place for both staff and members. Staff offices are located on the first floor and accommodate three servicing staff and two support staff. The second floor is devoted to member services and community space. It comes complete with a member's lounge, kitchen, and meeting rooms. Meeting spaces are equipped with state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment, which is ideal for community gatherings and member events. Outside there's parking for members and block heaters for frosty days.

The office's official opening was in October when BCGEU president Stephanie Smith and the provincial executive travelled to Fort St. John to conduct worksite visits and hold meetings.

"Being available to meet face to face is part of our commitment to northern communities. In Dawson Creek and Fort St. John, the BCGEU is here for working people. It's why we decided to put that commitment into action, and invest in building a new union area office in Fort St. John," said Smith on opening day.

The opening event was kicked off with a First Nations greeting from West Moberly elder George Desjarlais. Our area office sits on his nation's trad-



BCGEU's Newest Area Office in Fort St. John has been called "the cornerstone of downtown revitalization" by city Councillors and even the Mayor.



itional territory. Desjarlais also spoke about the community's opposition to the Site C mega dam project. He called on all those present to be mindful of our obligation to reconciliation with indigenous communities, who would be vastly affected by major projects like Site C.

***"Being available to meet face to face is part of our commitment to northern communities. In Dawson Creek and Fort St. John, the BCGEU is here for working people."***

Fort St. John Mayor Lori Ackerman also addressed guests and congratulated the BCGEU for the completion of our new area office. Ackerman said the building is a cornerstone to the

city's downtown revitalization plan. She hoped it would be an example for other new developments.

The mayor's speech also touched on the important difference being in a union can make for a worker. She spoke about the roles of BCGEU members in the city and gave recognition to City of Fort St. John employees.

The evening was capped off with a bhangra performance from the Northern Lights College dance troupe. They helped to create a lively atmosphere for our guests.

We feel a lot of pride about our new area office and heard a lot of positive feedback from guests. They were especially excited, as we are too, about the new community space. We look forward to all the great work that will be done there.



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