



Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs
Agences ontariennes de soutien pour les personnes qui ont des besoins speciaux

INFORMATION BULLETIN
TO ONTARIO MEMBERS OF PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT

November 2007

Dear Member of the Ontario Legislature

Congratulations to each of you on your election to the legislature. For the information of first time MPP's, this Bulletin is sent to all elected members at the start of each legislature session to inform you of topical issues in the Developmental Services sector.

OASIS members provide services to citizens with an intellectual disability in your riding. We appreciate the feedback that we have received from MPP's regarding previous issues, and look forward to sustaining that dialogue. As part of OASIS' ongoing efforts to communicate issues of importance for our member agencies, we have prepared this Information Bulletin, briefly outlining current topics of concern for your reference and consideration.

The Summer of '07

You are likely aware that our sector experienced a great deal of labour unrest over the summer months. There were 7 agencies which were not able to successfully conclude Collective Bargaining with their unions, resulting in employees striking for periods between 1 and 8 weeks. The principle item of dispute in each case was the long-standing wage disparity which exists between employees in our sector, when compared to those doing similar work in other fields. The wage gap is estimated to be between 25% - 30%.

There was considerable effort made by the sector to communicate issues of concern to MPP's prior to the Government's Spring Budget. These efforts highlighted the need for the Government to begin to address this long standing dispute by making a significant increase in funding to our agencies, and the importance of providing us with a multiyear funding commitment. In response, the Government did in fact announce a significant increase of funds to our sector (\$200 million) with these funds being allocated over a 4-year period. While the sector was pleased to receive a multiyear commitment, we very clearly stated that the allocation of the funds dedicated to wages in the first year fell far short of the sector's expectations and needs. Predictably, what resulted was a summer of strikes, picketing, criminal charges being laid, and significant disruption to the lives of hundreds of the disabled individuals who rely on the support and services we provide.

Furthermore, the sector was shocked when it became known that the Government had in fact intervened in the negotiation process of those striking agencies by directly negotiating with the union (without management involvement or awareness), wage increases for those seven agencies and then indicating that additional funds would be made available to them in order to settle the strikes. While this intervention no doubt pleased those who had been on strike, it caused considerable concern throughout the remainder of the sector. Not surprisingly, unions and employers alike requested that the Ministry provide additional funding equal to what was bargained at the seven affected agencies. The Government's direct intervention in the negotiation process has damaged the credibility of not for profit agencies with their bargaining agents.

Recently a process has been undertaken by the Ministry within the sector to collect the necessary information related to wages in order to provide the same wage increases to all agencies as provided to those that had been on strike. While

this appears to be a positive development, many in the sector are concerned that the Government's intervention has now created 'central bargaining' for the sector with no involvement or agreement from employers across the province.

Equally important, an additional issue arising from the recent labour disruptions is the impact the strikes had on the lives of the people we support. People were forced out of their places of work and day activities, and in many instances were forced out of their homes into temporary settings, or had their homes picketed while the strikes continued. This not only caused considerable anguish amongst those affected, but also for their families. The community's perception of individuals with an intellectual disability living within their neighbourhood has also been negatively impacted. In response to this concern, the option of the sector being declared an 'essential service', thereby removing the potential for strikes or lock-outs, is now being openly debated within the sector.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, we are also occupied with the planned "Transformation" of our sector, including the final push towards closing the 3 remaining facilities in the Province. Many projects are currently underway as new initiatives are being tried and tested. OASIS remains committed to the transformation process and is available to assist, consult with, and support the many changes that are forthcoming.

We hope that you find this summary to be of assistance as you debate issues of social concern to the people of Ontario. We encourage you to obtain details on these matters from the OASIS website at: www.oasisonline.ca

Sincerely,



Gerald Sutton
President

