

## Canadian Health Care Workers Find Common Ground

Health care workers in western Canada are all members of amalgamated locals, which brings a unique set of challenges. Health care is not typically the dominant sector in these locals, and there are not always opportunities for health care workers to connect as a group.

This is why meetings like the one that took place in Edmonton, Alberta, on March 1 and 2 are so important in helping health care units share information on common concerns.

“There is a lot of benefit to having members from different health care units talk to one another,” said Ray White, District 3 health care coordinator and president of Local 1-207. “It’s easy to feel that issues like staff shortages, inadequate training and unreasonable allotments for getting work done are unique to a workplace when in fact they’re endemic to the whole industry.”

Some 16 members from three locals in Alberta and British Columbia spent the two-day meeting networking, sharing experiences, and discussing potential actions around organizing and workplace hazards.

First and foremost, the group found commonality in their reasons for working in the sector – a desire to provide nurturing and dignified care for fellow human beings.

They also discussed how employer policies like quotas and time frames can put unrealistic expectations on the workers, often leaving them in a position where they must choose between doing their job well or adhering to untenable rules.

Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health for the Province of Alberta, spoke with the group and listened to their concerns.

The group learned about regulatory and legal requirements regarding workplace violence, hazards and safety, along with some practical tools to address these needs in specific workplaces. They also learned about the successes the union has had in lobbying for better workplace protections and charted a course for further strengthening their collective voice.

“Health care is a growing and vital sector of our union,” said White. “We want to keep the lines of communication open between health care units in our area so we can support and learn from one another.”

## Local 1223-08 Ratifies Contract, Welcomes New Members

Workers at Carriage Inn, a nursing home in Cadiz, Ohio, this week ratified a new contract after a series of extensions of the old contract and months of hard bargaining.

The negotiations also sparked a successful internal organizing campaign, adding some 30 new members and more than tripling membership in the open-shop unit, comprised of laundry, kitchen and maintenance workers, nurses’ aides and other support staff.

A modified Building Power workshop and lots of member-to-member communications were key to both endeavors, said Local 1223 President Greg Burwell.

“From start to finish, the owner didn’t want to recognize our union,” said Burwell. “He’s against seniority, benefits, everything, and he has a hard time even understanding what we stand for.”

There is a lot of turnover at the facility, said Burwell, and the owner makes it as difficult as possible for union members to talk to new hires. He also regularly denied requests for release time so the bargaining committee could participate in negotiations.

But a core group of committed members kept pushing,

knowing they could have strength in numbers. They invited the district to do a training session and formed a Communications Action Team so they could better inform their fellow workers of their rights.

In the end, they were able to get a four-year deal that wrested some of the power away from Carriage Inn’s owner, including a flat 3 percent pay raise that moves the unit away from the evaluation-based system the owner previously controlled. It also leaves open the opportunity for a further 2 percent increase based on merit.

Now, it’s a matter of continuing to grow the membership and staying committed to the fight, said Burwell.

“We need more communication, and we need to get more people involved,” he said. “Growing the membership will keep making us stronger.”

“This contract was truly a team effort,” said District 1 Director Dave McCall. “The bargaining committee stayed strong, and the leadership and commitment of John Saunders and the other district staff ensured that we could keep going with negotiations even when management tried to derail talks.”



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