

Human Rights Advisor
Report to National Executive – August 2014

Sisters and brothers, the world of human rights and equity is, and I believe always will be, a challenge within our department. It's a challenge we must always recognize and be aware of as we go about our busy day to day lives.

I would like to start my synopsis of the past three years with a thank you to all of you who have provided support, to the team members who have worked so hard on this file and to our national leadership. Without this broad base of support the work that has been accomplished might not be recognized and its value lost to our membership.

As the National Human Rights Advisor I walk a different path than your regional vice presidents. Although I sit at the national executive table with voice I have no vote as this is an advisory position- voted on and elected by any and all delegates who self identify who choose to vote. As an advisor to the national executive this position also has a function to liaise with PSAC and the employer.

At the PSAC the role of component human rights advisors and indeed the whole national human rights structure seems to be in a state of flux. By the time the next meeting of the national human rights committee meets in November 2014 it will have be close to two years since the last meeting and there are activists who are beginning to questions PSAC's commitment to human rights.

The employer is another story. As is the case with this government across the board the theme is dictate however they call it consultation. Such was the case on the revamped Civilian Employment Equity Plan 2014-2017 that was published earlier this year. We had no role in drafting this document and a minimal role in commenting on it.

The past three years have seen growth in your human rights team as we have sought knowledge, education and training not to mention linkages within our broader community and the house of labour. I need to say a special thanks to our national president John MacLennan for his support in approving business plans that allowed human rights coordinators to take part in a wide variety of activities that have strengthened our commitment to human rights.

We have a full team at the moment and they are listed at the end of this document. Each member is in contact with his/her regional vice president to offer support and more often than not is found hard at work with a local on a specific issue.

Over the past two years our team has come together for two working group sessions with speakers on issues ranging from aboriginal affairs by the Canadian Human Rights Commission to changes in health and safety legislation, return to work programs and yes, even how human rights legislation is changing and the impact of those changes.

Make no mistake; this government is no friend to equity or human rights in the context to which we understand it.

When it comes to individual issues the two that quickly rise to the top are how do we deal with mental health in the workplace and duty to accommodate. Yes, there is a cross-over here with health and safety but it is better to look at the issues holistically than through one particular lens. With upwards of 50% of all claims to Sun Life mental health in nature we have a problem that is not going away and we recognize at times we struggle with the best way to provide required support.

While my report may sound negative in nature there are indeed bright spots. The fact regional vice presidents and locals are engaging with regional human rights coordinators is a real step forward. It is my hope in the coming mandate that the majority of locals will be able to add to their team a member with an interest in human rights to act as a local conduit for information sharing.

In 2013 UNDE sent 42 members to the PSAC National Equity Conference with representatives from all regions and into each equity group. In each region we sent members to regional women's conferences and have activists on regional committees across the country.

At some locations management is engaging our leaders in working with challenging members and issues, often those that fall into the human rights category. We are finding that if we can engage at the lowest level with clear, concise and accurate information we build a high degree of respect and willingness to undertake team work to find solutions.

As many of you know I have been an activist most of my life. I was born into a family where a social conscious was a must and politics was considered sport. Yes, I am an easterner and proud of it although I now live about as far away from the ocean as I can get on those oh so flat prairies. I wish to thank you for the opportunity over the past three years. It has been eye-opening, challenging, at times frustrating, at times very rewarding and it is never boring.

We have much more to do, to learn and to pass on to our members. I truly believe we are just beginning to see the tip of the iceberg in terms of the support our members are going to need. As the understanding grows about human rights and equity in the context of our federal workplaces I believe more and more of our members are going to begin to stand up and say this is not right and it is well past time we did something about it. I may be dreaming in five shades of Technicolor but I don't think so.

Education is the key. Knowledge is power and you now have on board a human rights team dedicated to expanding their knowledge base and sharing it with every one of you.

In addition to my work as the National Human Rights Advisor I have remained active in my local and am engaged at the regional level in human rights committee, regional women's committee and area council.

Again I want to thank you all for your support. Below is the list of your regional coordinators followed by a listing of my activities as your National Human Rights Advisor since August 2011.

UNDE Human Rights Coordinators:

British Columbia – Ken Waldron, Esquimalt
Alberta/North – MJ Sooley, Cold Lake
Man/Sask - Shaunna Plourde, Moose Jaw
Ontario - Joshua Sadler, Kingston
NCR - Sandra Griffith Bonaparte - Ottawa
Quebec - Cathy Dallaire, Bagotville
Nova Scotia - Doreen Brown, Halifax
NB/Nfld - Shirley Ryan, St John's
NPF- Sharon Chernow, Ottawa
CSE – Shelley Anderson and Zahra Nafar-Ross will share the portfolio - Ottawa

My activities by month:

(Note: there is a break in mid 2013 as I was on medical leave due to surgery)

2011:

September:

Winnipeg area council
Winnipeg Regional Women's Committee

October:

Winnipeg area council
Winnipeg human rights committee

November:

PSAC EOC national meeting- Ottawa
Winnipeg Regional Women's Committee

December:

UNDE National executive meeting

2012:

January:

Winnipeg PSAC Human Rights Committee- seasonal celebration

February:

Briefing by CIDA hosted by Manitoba Council on International Cooperation reference reconstruction in Haiti

Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Briefing provided by KPMG and CFIB on Building and Keeping a Productive Workforce. (CFIB talking about minimum wages and pensions)

Manitoba Human Rights Commission course on Harassment in the Workplace

Winnipeg PSAC Human Rights Committee

Winnipeg Regional Women's Committee (PSAC)

March:

International Women's Day breakfast hosted by Manitoba Federation of Labour

International Women's Day reception at Manitoba Legislature hosted by labour minister Jennifer Howard- focus women in business

International Women's Day PSAC film fest and reception – also provision of information on range of services and resources for women including mental health

PSAC Web based presentation on pending federal budget and job cuts

PSAC Budget Watch meeting in Winnipeg

Attended Prairie Leadership Meeting, Edmonton, on invitation from PSAC Prairie VP Robyn Benson.

UNDE human rights coordinator's meeting in Ottawa (two days)

April:

UNDE National executive meeting

Attended the president's conference where provided a briefing on human rights

PSAC triennial convention- attended caucus on disabilities and women

May:

Winnipeg regional women's committee meeting

June:

Attended retirement for Patricia Davis at PSAC (regional coordinator)

Phone conference with Canadian Human Rights Commission ref employment equity and compliance within the department

Attended Manitoba Federal Council Workforce Adjustment Cafe- full day of briefings from variety of professionals

Conference call ref late June wave of affected letters

July:

Attended conference call with affected member at 38 CBG

Conference call ref national day of action and reports on our national actions response

August:

Briefings with affected members at CFHA (twice) - concern raised here about possible ageism

Sept:

Conference call - Snooks appeal
Press conference re national day of action
Attended National Day of Action in Nova Scotia
Winnipeg Take Back the Night community march
PSAC advanced course on duty to accommodate

October:

Winnipeg area human rights committee meeting
Winnipeg regional women's committee
ATCO structures initial employment equity committee meeting in Calgary- they were audited by Canadian Human Rights Commission and failed miserably
Lunch and learn on CPP rehabilitation program
Phone conference with Brother Kiley reference issues and concerns to be aware of within the DND National Health and Safety Conference

November:

CLC consultation on future direction of labour councils across Canada and the role of member unions and community activist - Chaired by Paul Moist of CUPE
DND national health and safety conference - issue of concern is disability management
PSAC Leadership Course

December:

UNDE National executive meeting

2013:

January:

Attended PSAC regional tri-committee event with speaker from Canadian mental health society - Winnipeg

February:

Conference call on RAND campaign
Attended annual women's memorial march (Manitoba) for missing and murdered women
Attended training in Toronto on future of labour

March:

International women's day events in Yellowknife
Manitoba Federation of Labour women's committee
Took part in ATCO employment equity committee meeting by conference call

April:

Attended CLC/MFL budget reaction meeting
PSAC national health and safety conference
PSAC regional human rights committee - Winnipeg

CLC community activists meeting - Winnipeg
National day of mourning leaders walk - Winnipeg
Phone conference on equity in national defence with ADM (HR) Civ official

May:

Prairie Regional Women's conference - Banff
UNDE National executive meeting
Attended Spirit 4 event for children of aboriginal and color in north end Winnipeg
PSAC leadership meeting (Winnipeg)
Winnipeg regional human rights committee meeting

June:

National executive conference call
off for 10 weeks due to surgery

July

support to national office to review equity applications for November conference

August:

National executive conference call
CLC led community activists network research team meeting

September:

MFL women's committee meeting
PSAC regional human rights committee
Reviewed and provided comments to DND EE plan for 2014-2019
Analysis of UNDE delegates to PSAC equity conference
Organized TC table vote for 17 Wing Winnipeg members

October:

MFL Women's Conference with theme human rights
National executive conference call
Winnipeg Area Council meeting
Working with Sandra connected with delegates to PSAC Equity Conference reference
breakfast with national board

November:

PSAC demo in Calgary at Conservative national policy conference
UNDE meeting re bargaining team membership, Toronto
UNDE national executive meeting - attended parts where possible around PSAC Equity Conference

National PSAC Equity Conference, Toronto
CLC Fall Educational- Gimli, MB

December:

PSAC Winnipeg regional equity committee joint meeting with regional EVP
Province of Manitoba sunrise breakfast (day of remembrance)
Manitoba Federation of Labour Day of Remembrance luncheon

2014:

January:

Winnipeg area council general meeting – seasonal celebration for all committees hosted by WAC

February:

MFL Women's Committee meeting
PSAC meeting prior to bargaining conference (Ottawa)
PSAC Bargaining Conference, Ottawa
Winnipeg area human rights committee AGM (elected as vice-chair)
Winnipeg Area Council

March:

Winnipeg Regional Women's Committee – voted chair for 2014
21-UNDE Council of Locals- Edmonton
UNDE Human Rights team meeting- Ottawa

April:

Winnipeg area human rights committee
Winnipeg RWC meeting
Winnipeg area council

May:

UNDE National executive meeting

June:

Winnipeg Regional Women's Committee
Manitoba Federation of Labour Women's Committee meeting
National Aboriginal Day activities at The Forks, Winnipeg
PSAC Prairie Regional Convention- Saskatoon

July:

facilitated a workshop titled Stop Harper as part of the Building a People's Agenda Forum- Winnipeg

