

Human Rights Advisor

Report to National Board of Directors- December 2011

The few months since convention have been a busy time. Our human rights coordinator team has come together and we are sharing information back and forth on a regular basis.

Once we have approval of our way ahead from this meeting it will be full speed ahead as this is a team interested in make a difference for our members. We are lacking a member for Ontario and our person in the NCR has asked to be replaced. It is my hope two new people can be found quickly as we have a lot of members in those two regions.

Personally, I have been busy working with individual members of the team to determine specific interests, strengths and where we have resources we can all tap into so each coordinator is not attempting to reinvent the wheel in his or her region. Learning what each of us has to bring to the table makes us a much stronger team as we deal with issues at the local, regional and national levels.

There is no question a big issue facing our team rests in the area o disabilities and in particular mental health and how it impacts on the rights of our members in the workplace. Long considered a medical issue we did not talk about or a concern that only raised its head in the realm of health and safety, today mental health is an issue our activists are talking about almost daily. We are seeing more and more members seeking help for issues 10 years ago would never have crossed our desks.

It is our belief this is a situation that is going to continue as we deal with:

- more and more retired military members who have released on medicals and bring with them a host of health issues we are being asked to assist with;
- the stresses on the bodies of our aging population continue to grow and they deal with the frustrations of workers comp and disability insurance when they would much rather be working;
- the stress of the unknown in the workplace as we don't know from one day to the next what is coming and if we will even have a job tomorrow or the person next to us will leave landing us with that much more work;
- a workforce being pulled between aging parents and grown children – both who need their attention and assistance with the stresses that brings; and
- an employer that simply needs to get the work done and is in no mood to be accommodating or supportive of a workforce that cannot give 120% seven days a week.

It is my considered belief we are not at this point properly equipped to deal with serious mental health concerns of our members and that is something the human rights team must and will address.

Additionally, we need to be more prepared to work with members who have been off work for whatever reason and want or need to get back to work.

My concern in this area was raised even more when I attended a return to work advisory committee training course where both the instructor and various speakers were making it clear the expectation is that union activists and local stewards are the people who will be pulling the weight in getting workers back into the workplace and helping them navigate workers compensation and disability claims. The message was clear, union reps are going to be asked to be the go between that explains the facts of life to difficult clients and helps them deal with the fallout of paperwork overload. This will be even more prevalent as local compensation advisors are no longer available thanks to centralization of services.

Our aboriginal brothers and sisters are facing their own specific battles these days and programs are in place or being developed to make sure their needs are at least identified. When the Canadian Human Rights Commission sees fit to devote major resources to an Aboriginal Initiative we know there are issues here that we must be aware of and keep on our radar. I recently attended a workshop on recruitment and retention of aboriginal persons into the public service and there are valid concerns that must be monitored and addressed as we move into the fallout from the strategic reviews. Many of our aboriginal members are in the lower ranks of the public service and must not be the first out the door simply because of their classifications.

There have been no issues raised recently by our members of color or within the GLBT community. That does not mean there are no issues there- it simply means no one has come forward to raise any issues lately.

Since convention I have attended a number of meetings and events including:

- PSAC Aboriginal People's Conference in Yellowknife
- Take Back the Night March with aboriginal sisters in Yellowknife
- Take Back the Night March with aboriginal sisters in Winnipeg
- Workshop presented by Manitoba Federal Council on recruitment and retention of aboriginal people into the public service - Winnipeg
- Course offered by DSafeG on return to work advisory committee's (3 days)-Halifax
- PSAC equal opportunities committee meeting – Ottawa

Gloria Kelly