

BULLETIN

John Hindle, respiratory therapist

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When respiratory therapist John Hindle first got involved in HSA as a shop steward, his goal was fairly modest.

"I just wanted to help resolve some problems at my workplace," says Hindle. But once he started learning about union issues, Hindle wanted more.

A year or so later, Hindle found himself fully immersed in HSA activity as a member of HSA's anti-raid team, an experience he describes a deep dive into the power and meaning of unions.

"I'm excited to be part of the labour movement. This work changes people's lives," he says.

Hindle's initial interest in HSA began soon after he started working at Surrey Memorial Hospital in 2014, after graduating with a diploma in Respiratory Therapy from Thompson Rivers University. He loves his job for many reasons: "It's fast-paced, acute and exciting. It's life or death. It's newborns to end stage. And I love being part of a multidisciplinary team."

But the workload and the 12-hour shifts tired him out, and he could see that there were ongoing problems between management and workers. He became a steward in 2015. Intrigued by the deeper social justice elements of unions, he enrolled in HSA's local leadership training workshop, and in 2016 joined the anti-raid team.

"The team was originally created to combat raiding by the BC Nurses' Union," explains Hindle. "The raiding had been going on since 2009 and HSA organizers responded with limited resources. But in 2016, at convention, there was an emergency resolution to create and fund a multi-disciplinary task force."

The anti-raid team, consisting of six staff organizers and four union members on full-time leave, started out by asking a key question: why were HSA members leaving the union?

"We found that at the core of the problem was a lack of engagement," says Hindle. "So many people had workplace issues and weren't letting HSA know. Members didn't know what the union did. They said no one was visiting or reaching out to them. So then when another union comes and offers the stars and the moon, it sounds attractive. So the best defence against raiding was to increase engagement in our membership."

The anti-raid team knew that workload was a huge challenge all over BC, and so chose that as a focus, launching a campaign that had the team travelling the province, visiting worksites and talking with thousands of members. Workload was the main topic but there was room to discuss any issues on members' minds.

"Once we said we were there to listen, it was amazing what we uncovered – bullying, dangerous workplaces, people burning out. People were internalizing these things. I've had conversations with people who broke down crying because of the amount of work they were expected to do, or because they blamed themselves and thought they weren't good enough. I've talked to people working unpaid overtime because they are scared of losing their jobs if they reach out for help," says Hindle.

By showing up to listen, Hindle and his team changed the dynamic and reignited trust in HSA. "It opened the floodgates to more grievances, giving us more to do, which is great," he says.

As well, this campaign is contributing to a revitalization of HSA's core values, says Hindle. "I'm excited because I'm getting to see changes. HSA is moving in a progressive direction. There are a lot of awesome ideas around revival of the basic tenets of trade unions, around how to engage in different areas of people's lives, and how to engage in a range of ethical and social justice issues."

Hindle remains excited by union involvement and has many plans for an active future with HSA. "I put forward a resolution at convention to secure permanent funding for the Anti-Raid Team, and it passed. I plan to continue my work with the HSA Engagement Team as the role of the team evolves, I'll continue to fight the raids by the BC Nurses' Union as long as they practice such predatory behaviour, and I'm looking forward to opportunities to get further involved with HSA as part of the new Young Worker's Initiative created at this year's convention."

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