



# Tentative settlement reached in community social services sector

May 29, 1999

A plan to end wage and benefit discrimination, employment security and protection of contracts through successorship are key elements of a tentative settlement reached late last night between the four unions representing 10,000 community social services workers and the Community Social Services Employers' Association.

The tentative five-year agreement was reached with the assistance of mediator Don Munroe. The unions will recommend their members accept Munroe's recommendations on issues the parties were unable to resolve in face to face talks. The 11-week old job action is ended, and the unions will work with employers to fully staff community social services worksites as quickly as possible.

Pending ratification votes by workers in the next few weeks, details of the settlement will not be made public. However, the unions say that their members' main concerns - parity in wages and benefits with health workers, employment security, an end to 24-hour live-in shifts, pensions, and protection of their contracts through successorship - are contained in the settlement.

"This has been a long and difficult process for community social services workers and for the clients and residents they care for," said Cliff Andstein, chief negotiator for the BCGEU. "But in the end, we've achieved a measure of dignity and respect for the women and men who care for society's most needy and vulnerable that wasn't there before."

Andstein said child care workers will be covered by a separate but comparable deal.

CUPE BC President Barry O'Neill said community social services workers should take credit for mounting job actions which kept politicians focused on their previous commitments to end wage and benefit discrimination.

"Almost every elected member of the government caucus had a visit - both planned and unplanned - from community social services workers," O'Neill said. "Our members applied the necessary political pressure to keep government negotiators focused on making good on their commitments to workers in this sector."

Zorica Bosancic, HEU acting secretary-business manager, said her members are anxious to return to work and resume providing the critical services that thousands of British Columbians rely on every day.

"For the workers, the first order of business is to re-establish relationships with residents and clients," Bosancic said. "Continuity of care is very important. This agreement provides for vastly improved working and caring conditions that will attract and keep care-providers in this sector. And the new successorship provisions mean we can preserve our contract provisions even if a contracted service changes hands."

Julio Trujillo, HSA's negotiator, said the dispute focused public attention on critical community services that are often ignored because the people accessing these services are invisible and often marginalized.

"I believe this dispute generated a new appreciation for the importance of providing counselling and care to vulnerable British Columbians right in their own community," Trujillo said. "And in order for these services to be delivered seamlessly, community-based services must be offered on a level playing field with those based in large public institutions."

Community social services workers provide services to families, people with physical or developmental disabilities, youth and children, and women in crisis. Most of the workers' collective agreements had expired March 31, 1998.

**For more information contact:**

Rebecca Maurer, Director of Communications  
(604) 439-0994

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180 East Columbia  
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website  
[www.hsabc.org](http://www.hsabc.org)

Telephone 604-517-0994  
1-800-663-2017