



Local job action in social services

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Employees at the Central Okanagan Child Development Association walked off the job today as part of rotating strikes in the province's community social services sector.

The COCDA is affiliated with the Health Sciences Association, but they fall under the community services contract. The group has been working without a contract since April of last year and routinely find themselves understaffed. "We'll be out front of the building from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and our goal is to get some awareness out there about who we are and what we do," says Terri Russell, chief steward of the union and a support child development consultant.

"We're trying to get the message to the government that all children matter and that we deserve equal pay for equal work." Russell says they are unhappy knowing that staff members in other contracts do the same job, but are paid up to \$10 more per hour, while they haven't seen a wage increase since 2009.

Another issue frustrating the union is the lengthy wait lists for new patients, especially young children. "Our wait lists for children under the age of five are anywhere from one to two years long. So because there is no funding for our sector, we cannot recruit and retain staff. As long as there is a position vacant, then the wait lists grow and there's no funding to increase the number of staff we have."

The entire office was shut down on Wednesday morning and approximately 80 staff, including: therapists, pathologists, consultants and assistants rallied outside. Those most affected by this job action will ostensibly be the parents who frequent the facility with their children suffering from developmental delays and special needs.

"All of the families coming here for the autism program, families coming here for therapy with speech, occupational or physiotherapy (will be affected), including daycare programs and preschool programs," says Russell, adding the COCDA has the support of the parents in this strike action.

"Chances are that some (parents) will not be able to attend, that means they'll have to take the day off work in order to stay home with their child." Ideally, Russell says she would like to see the government agree that children matter and that they will begin investing again into the programs once again. If the government chooses to disregard their actions, Russell says the group may decide to conduct more job action, but that would be dependent on the response from media, the feedback from parents and what direction their union decides to take.

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