



Government Building

A glimpse inside the trades that keep our public structures standing (PG 4)



Healthcare Crisis
(PG 10)



Group Home Gains
(PG 19)

THE NO-NU STAND

A PUBLICATION OF THE N.S. GOVERNMENT & GENERAL EMPLOYEES UNION

SPRING 2023

Dear members,

This winter has felt like a particularly difficult one for many Nova Scotians. While our day-to-day routines may have returned to “normal” from pre-pandemic times, many aspects of our lives have been upended. We’re dealing with an unprecedented cost of living crisis, with the costs of everything – fuel, household basics, groceries, utilities, housing, and interest rates – rising. Many people are living paycheque to paycheque, including some of our own members.

Unions everywhere – including the NSGEU – have been working hard to make sure that the collective agreements we negotiate include wages that will alleviate some of these pressures. Throughout the past few years, many Nova Scotians gained a newfound understanding of how much we collectively rely on the valuable public services you provide. Now, we need to ensure that your work is compensated appropriately – not an easy task, considering that we’re still playing catch-up from the years of wage freezes and restraint imposed by former Premier Stephen McNeil.

As we head into Spring, I am optimistic that we will be able to make progress together – both at the bargaining table, and on larger issues that the labour movement is tackling together. Through our work with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the National Union for Public and General Employees (NUPGE), we’ve made great progress towards establishing a national pharmacare program in Canada. Here in Nova Scotia, we’ve successfully worked with the Provincial government to secure significant wage increases for our group home workers who were woefully underpaid compared to their Continuing Care counterparts working in the other sectors – and this work was done outside of the collective bargaining process (read more on page 19). Through the classification review process, we achieved an eight per cent wage increase for Nurse Practitioners. The Nova Scotia Council of Health Care Unions recently reached an agreement to see wages for the healthcare bargaining unit adjusted upward by one per cent to match more recent public sector settlements.

There is still much work ahead of us. Almost half of our 100 collective agreements are expired and we are preparing to – or are already in the midst of – negotiations. At the same time, we continue to represent the members’ workplace concerns, such as safe staffing levels and a variety of grievances, and advocate for much-needed improvements and investments to our health care system and public services.



Our union is now almost 36,000 members strong (see page 9 to read about our newest Local). On April 19th, we’ll celebrate our 65th year as a union. We’ve come a long way since our founding in 1958, when a small group of government employees came together to form the Nova Scotia Civil Service Association. Our first Convention had just 97 delegates who passed our first constitution and elected our first eight-member executive. They knew if they stood together, they could improve their working life – and they did.

It is in that spirit that we move forward together – knowing that when we stand together, we can improve our lives.

In solidarity,

Sandra Mullen
President, NSGEU

Hugh Gillis, 1st Vice-President, NSGEU.

Hugh is assisting President Mullen and working directly with local executives to strengthen the NSGEU from one end of the province to the other.

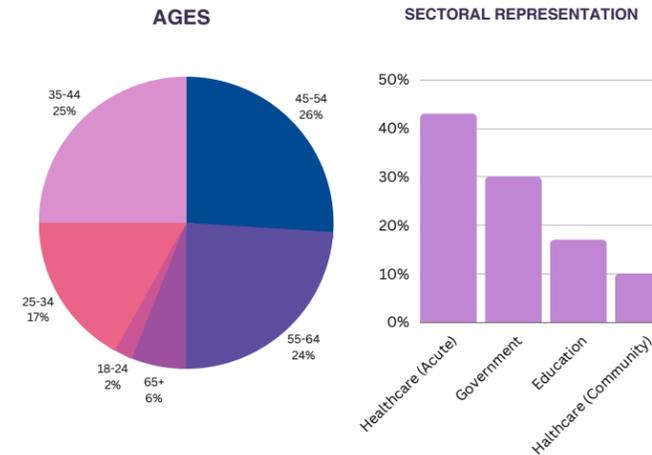
He would like to thank the membership for all their cooperation this fall and he is looking forward to continuing to work together in 2023.

If you have any questions, you can contact Hugh at:

hgillis@nsgeu.ca



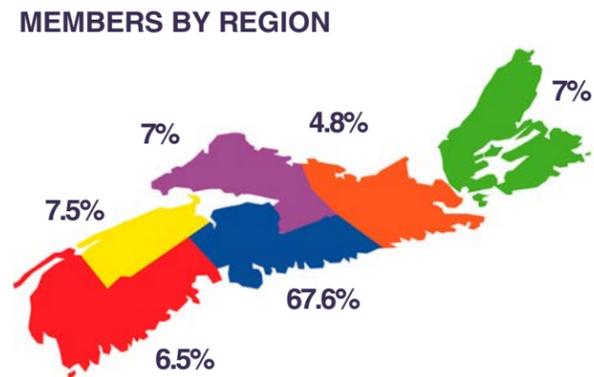
YOUR UNION AT A GLANCE



MEMBERS
35,940

SIGNED MEMBERS
78%

FUN FACT
The total number of NSGEU members are equal to more than the populations of Richmond, Inverness and Guysborough Counties combined. Our memberships is large enough to span three counties; that's strength in numbers!



FEATURES

- 4-8 Feature: Government Building
- 9 New Local 222
- 10-17 Healthcare Crisis
- 18 Member Profile
- 19 Group Homes
- 2-21 NSGEU President goes to Harvard
- 22-25 Around the Union
- 26 Political Update
- 27 NSGEU Staffing Changes
- 30-31 Education Calendar

NSGEU TWEETS

- @kanetse Mar 29
@NUPGE activists from @HSAAlberta, @NSGEU & @hsabc listened to the Budget speech in the House of Commons. We'll analyze it & hold them accountable for public health care w/o privatization, a universal pharmacare & dental program based on need, not your income.
- @kanetse Mar 29
I'm with @nsgeu President Sandra Mullen on Parliament Hill, we're lobbying for @HealthCoalition's #HealthAndHope campaign on budget day with @NUPGE
- @NS_Labour Mar 27
Workers safety isn't something to be taken lightly. Always make sure your workplace is following safety protocols and regulations. #safety #workers #NovaScotia #nslab #canlab @NSGEU @NS_nurses
- @CCPANS Mar 8
Happy #IWD Excited to hear the speakers today at the @NSGEU breakfast. #EmbraceEquity

CONNECT WITH US!

We want to hear from our members. If you have thoughts on this issue of The Stand, or ongoing union issues, send us your feedback! You can email us at inquiry@nsgeu.ca or connect with us:

- facebook.com/NSGEU
- @NSGEU

THE STAND

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Government Building: A Glimpse Inside the Trades that Keep our Public Structures Standing

By Holly Fraughton

When you enter the Provincial government's millwork shop in Dartmouth, you're met by the sweet smell of freshly hewn lumber and the low hum of the dust collection system, punctuated by the sharp whine of a table saw in the background. It's an unassuming structure from the outside, but inside, this is a busy, fully functioning mill equipped with all the tools and equipment needed to complete historical restoration projects.

This is just one of the workplaces for the small but impressive team of approximately 50 tradespeople

and support staff who are responsible for maintaining and modernizing 2,600 provincially government-owned structures in Nova Scotia, spanning from Yarmouth to Sydney. The structures include museums, snowplow sheds, Province House, Lieutenant Governor's house, all provincial courthouses throughout Nova Scotia, and pretty much everything you can imagine in between.

Their team is broken into three divisions: Electrical, Mechanical, and Architectural.

They handle most of the routine, everyday repairs and maintenance needed on more modern provincially owned buildings, with contractors brought in to assist with larger projects occasionally. They are the team tasked with the upkeep of historic properties, such as

the Legislature and Government House in downtown Halifax, which underwent a major restoration in 2009, largely at the hands of the TIR tradespeople.

The three-year project cost approximately \$6.25 million and included major infrastructure modernizations, including lighting, communication, air conditioning, fire protection and alarm systems.

As you can imagine, repairing and maintaining buildings that are two centuries old can be a complicated affair.

"You have to duplicate everything that's there when you tear it apart, and you have to make it look the same. It's awesome. It's a challenge, but we get through it," said Glenn Keefe, Acting Superintendent of Architectural, "Even if we have to duplicate anything like moldings, stuff like that, we get to save it!"



Bottom left: Brittany Walsh, Plumber Apprentice, David Jarvis, Painter/Taper, Roger Gauvin, Mechanical Foreman, Tim Sullivan, Mechanical Trades Coordinating Lead, Matt Woods, Carpenter. Upper left: Todd Jones, Electrician, Joey Pritchard, Supply Tech, Mechanical, Jason Oliver, Carpenter, Sean Flemming, Supply Tech, Electrical, and Akinola Olaoye, Carpenter

Tim Sullivan has worked for the department for almost 21 years.

Today, he's the Mechanical Trades Coordinating Lead, responsible for six disciplines: sprinkler, plumbing, steam fitting, pipefitting, welding, HVAC and sheet metal. He was part of the team that handled the overhaul of Government House and remembers opening up the walls to find shoes that had been placed inside – an old superstition meant to ward off evil spirits – and old lead coal gas lines, which were used for illumination before there was electricity.

"There was coal dust everywhere!" he recalled.

For tradespeople with decades of experience, like Sullivan and Keefe, it was an incredible experience to see how these historic properties were constructed.

"Even the latticework for the plaster was all hand-hewn at the Lieutenant Governor's -- it wasn't cut with a saw," Sullivan said, "The beams we had carbon-dated – 800 years old! So, the shipwrights came off the ship, went into the woods, cut the trees down, hewn the beams down, and built the Lieutenant Governor's, because all the joists were wooden pegged – it was a time capsule."

Still, it was a real challenge to bring such a historic building up to modern standards and code, while still maintaining the integrity of the design and character.

"When we went there, all the pipes were exposed. They had drilled holes through the top of doors to put the pipes through for heating, the plumbing stacks were all exposed, so over the years, they had just gone in and butchered the place. Our mandate was to hide all that, to get rid of it, and then bring the building up to modern-day standards. It was a real scope of work," Sullivan explained, "That was a really interesting project, and we had all kinds of challenges down there – things we ran into, but it was great, because we had a great team."

Gail MacDonald is another member of the team. She's been working as a Supply Tech for the Architectural division of the department for five years, ordering supplies and equipment, processing invoices, and maintaining inventory, a job that got considerably more difficult during the peak of COVID, when supply chain issues created very real material shortages.

"There was a time that we couldn't get lumber at all!" MacDonald recalled, "We went through a period where you couldn't even buy it."

Fortunately, they maintain a solid inventory of materials in their own facilities.

"We've got lots of tools and equipment," said Sean Flemming, an Electrical Supply Tech, gesturing to a stock room of carefully labeled items behind him.



Glenn Keefe, Acting Superintendent of Architectural

"The guys will call in materials they need for a job – wire, or pipe. There's been a lot of price increases in the last couple years, and supply chain issues have been a big problem... it really helped us to have some inventory here to hold us over until the stock came in."

Flemming has been with the Department for 25 years. He started working for TIR in 1998, just two weeks after the Swiss Air disaster. One of his first projects with the Department was helping to set up a morgue in Shearwater. He's seen a great deal change over his time in the role.

"When I first started, we used to write gear in a book. You'd issue material and you'd have to write all the prices down in the ledger, add everything up and send it to the girl downtown, and she would enter the cost to the

jobs," Flemming recalled, "Now, when we started with SAP, that got all on the computer system. Basically, the computer keeps track of all that now."

They also get to source out new equipment: "If something is worn out or we need to replace something, we buy it, or if there's a new tool out there that will help us do our jobs. We try to find the best

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

pricing we can and buy competitively so we're not wasting money."

So, why has he stayed with the TIR team for so long?

"The biggest things: pension, benefits, and pretty good people to work with, most of the time," Flemming said with a grin. A voice in the background shouts back, "Oh yeah, whatever Sean!"

But MacDonald agrees: "The overall atmosphere here is very welcoming, warm, friendly – it's just a really great place to work. I think that was the biggest draw, probably, was the atmosphere, to be honest."

"I've been around a few different departments, a few different divisions, and I'll say this is one of the best, really," she added.

While there's no shortage of work to do – they're currently working on a gift shop renovation in One Government Place, planning a renovation at the 2nd and 3rd floor

of the Johnston Building, 5th floor of the provincial building, and turning the lab space at Miller Lake into office space, upgrading all the audiovisual systems at provincial courthouses to allow for virtual appearances, just to name a few of their ongoing projects – these days, there certainly is a shortage of people to do the work.

"With the labour crunch and the grey revolution that's going on now, it's getting harder and harder to get trades people," Sullivan says with a sigh.

It has gotten increasingly difficult to find qualified trades to join their team, partially because of labour market shortages. According to a recent article in The



Carpenter Matt Woods works in the TIR mill.

Globe & Mail, Canada could be facing a shortage of 100,000 tradespeople by 2029, with an estimated 257,100 construction workers set to retire by 2029.

Part of the problem has been that for the past few decades, young people have been told they need to go to university to be successful.

"The young generation isn't interested in going into trades, it's more technology," said Keefe, "It's really hard to get young people to want to be a carpenter."

Now, Sullivan says, if we want more people getting into trades, the message needs to be "dirty doesn't mean dumb."

But the problems recruiting within TIR are also due to their inability to offer a competitive rate of pay with the private sector.

The wages the Province pays some of the skilled trades workers is approximately 40 per cent less in terms of wages.

For example, their Carpenters make

around \$29 per hour, which works out to about \$22 per hour once you've factored in taxes, benefits and union dues. In the private sector, they make about \$35 per hour.

"For years, they got away with that, because there was never a large amount of work here, and people wanted to stay home, so you really had a good labour pool of plumbers, electricians, and carpenters to pick from: they were there!" Sullivan said, "But then everybody was told to go to university over the last 35 years, and now you've got 26 cranes in Halifax and you've got all these people vying for their talents, and they're saying, 'No, I'm not working for that, I'm going to go work over

here."

With the shortage of skilled workers, there has been a shift towards contracting out more work.

"So now you're paying \$125 per hour for a service call versus \$65, and then when that goes sideways, they hide it all. The person who came up the program gets moved horizontally so no one can even find them to say, 'this is your program, you screwed up, you're fired.' That never happens," said Sullivan, "Give me a job costing and show me how it's cheaper to contract out versus what it is to bring a person in to pay them a pension and a half-decent wage."

Contracting out also creates another layer of work for Department staff, as they cannot leave them to work unsupervised.

"It's great to be able to bring somebody in from outside and be able to put them within the team, and we do have that currently," said Roger Gauvin, the Mechanical Foreman, "The issue that we

have is that for an extended period of time, we are not allowed to leave them alone. They have to be with one of our guys ... If we hire somebody, they're there for 25, 30, 40 years. Bringing somebody on contract, they can be transitioned, depending on whether the company wants them back, or whether or not we're sending them back because of work shortages, and when we go to reinstate a new position, it's not necessarily the same person we've had."

Then they have to start the retraining process over again.

Of course, the previous government's approach to legislating wage patterns and taking away benefits that

were already in collective agreements hasn't helped the situation.

"We lost a lot when McNeil was Premier," said Flemming, "We didn't get any cost-of-living increases for like ten years, so a lot of our trades guys are upset about that. They were told when they came to work here that they'd get a Long Service Award: that was taken away."

Of course, there are perks to working in the public sector, rather than the private sector: pension, health and dental benefits; and vacation. But those seem

to matter less to workers now, as they struggle to keep up with soaring inflation.

Keefe has worked as a carpenter for 40 years and has spent the last 18 years of his career working as a Carpenter and Foreman for the Province.

"When I started here, we had three young children, so I got my vacation time, my benefits, and my pension, and that was

a draw for me," Keefe said, "Today, it's the bottom line: 'I need money now to buy my groceries and pay for my car.'"

The strict safety standards and quality standards they adhere to within TIR are also a draw for some tradespeople.

"We have a set standard ... and our standard tends to be above and beyond plumbing codes and so on," Gauvin explained, "We tend to bring not only our design, but our actual materials up one grade above what the outside does, and the purpose of that so we are actually looking at a 50 to a 100-year building, not a 20-year building. Most often outside, that's what



Tim Sullivan, Mechanical Trades Coordinating Lead

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

they do: they quote things to the lowest cost to them, so they can make a higher profit. That's typically how things work. So, we tend to step things up."

Working for the Provincial government as a tradesperson is also unique in that you only really serve one client.

"There are really great aspects to that, because now you're engaged with the client, you understand what the client's requirements are ... and the relationship works really well," Gauvin added.

They also offer plenty of opportunities to be mentored and learn on the job.

"The opportunities here for mentoring young people here is probably much superior than it is on the outside, because we allow the latitude for us to be able to do that," said Gauvin.

"...For the most part, in the industry, we've probably got an almost 20-year gap of training. So, what's happened is that the industry forgot how to train people ... Now, especially with the generations that are out there, the new kids that are coming in, they're working with people who are basically getting ready to retire, so what they want from (the new hires) is for them to do the heavy work. Well, they are in need of diversification. They get that here. We don't just put them with one person, we put them with multiple people to give them the experience that they need."

One thing is clear: the trades in this province are experiencing the same labour shortages we are seeing in other critical areas, like health care. In the midst

of a clear housing crisis, and in the face of massive numbers of retirements, government must turn their attention to once again making the trades an attractive career path, not just for those working with private industry, but for those we rely on in the public sector who are responsible for maintaining and improving the infrastructure that is owned by us all.

"Trades are only going to get worse, because it's busy out there, and people are retiring. We want to keep the people that we have, because they're good people, but if you're not going to be competitive, we're going to lose them," Flemming warns. ■



Sean Flemming, Supply Tech, Electrical

***Author's note: Writing this story was a very special project for me, as my father, Fred Fraughton, was the Superintendent of Architectural before he passed away in 2012. This was not my first visit to the TIR shop, and I hope it won't be my last. I have a deep appreciation for the work that's done by the incredible skilled trades team at TIR and have no doubt my dad would be very proud of the work they continue to do on behalf of all Nova Scotians.*

Welcome New Local 222 – Halifax Regional Municipality

We would like to welcome our newest members who work for the Halifax Regional Municipality providing a number of vital services for people.

There are approximately 800 members in the local and they work in the following offices: Information Services, Planning & Development, Parks & Recreation, Chief Administrative Office, Corporate & Customer Services, Finance & Asset Management, Fire & Emergency Services, Halifax Regional Police, Halifax Transit, Legal, Municipal Clerk & External Affairs, and Transportation & Public Works.

The membership held a meeting and elected their new Local Executive on February 22nd (02-22). This date coincidentally matches their new local number 222, so all is well!

Their new Local President is Joe Kaiser, Vice-President is Aviva Donaldson. Local Secretary is Melanie Gerrior, and the Local Treasurer is Leslie Anderson. Thank you all for stepping up to take a leadership role in your new union.

We look forward to seeing the members of Local 222 at upcoming educational events and social events. ■



Above from left to right Local 222's newly elected Executive: Aviva Donaldson (VP), Joe Kaiser (President), Leslie Anderson (Treasurer), Kim Taylor

Fixing Health Care ≠ Privatization

On February 23rd, the Government of Canada and the Government of Nova Scotia announced they had reached an agreement in principle for a shared plan that will invest \$4.81 billion in federal funding over 10 years in Nova Scotia, including \$1.01 billion for a new bilateral agreement focusing on the shared health care priorities and \$52 million through the immediate, one-time Canada Health Transfer top-up to address urgent needs, especially in pediatric hospitals and emergency rooms, and long wait times for surgeries.

As the union representing thousands of skilled health care workers in Nova Scotia, as well as thousands more who rely on the critical services they deliver, we are pleased that our Provincial government will have additional funding available to them to help address the ongoing crisis in our healthcare system.

However, it is imperative that those funds be used to strengthen and improve upon our public system, rather than be siphoned off to private companies.

Premier Tim Houston campaigned on fixing health care, not contracting it out. Since his election in the fall of 2021, he has taken steps towards addressing many longstanding and neglected areas of the healthcare system. But far too often, he has decided to rely on the private sector, rather than build capacity within the public system.

Recent examples of this include:

- \$6 million to Praxes to operate mobile health clinics;
- \$5 million per year for cataract surgeries performed at Halifax Vision Surgical Centre;
- \$365 million to Oracle Cerner Canada to implement digital health records;
- \$10.4 million to Telus to deliver virtual counselling

services over five years;

- \$3.25 million to Maple to deliver two virtual care programs.

In each of these instances, private industry will profit

Atlantic provinces sign on to bilateral health-care funding deals with Ottawa

The Nova Scotia government confirmed today it has signed a bilateral health-care deal with Ottawa worth an additional \$1 billion over the next 10 years

Canadian Press
Feb 23, 2023 1:56 PM



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with media as he arrives for a health care meeting with Premiers in Ottawa, Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2023. The federal government is announcing it has reached agreements in principle with Ontario and Prince Edward Island on health care. | THE CANADIAN PRESS/Adrian Wyld

from delivering necessary care which should be delivered through the public system. As always, the NSGEU stands in opposition to increased privatization of our public health care system and calls on the Houston government to focus on investing public funds in strengthening and improving capacity within the public sector, rather than handing off responsibility to deliver care to private interests who stand to profit from the further erosion of the public system.

Do private, for-profit clinics save taxpayers money and reduce wait times? The data says no



'Privatization is such a broad term that it's basically useless,' says one doctor

Marcy Cuttler, Christine Birak · CBC News · Posted: Mar 14, 2023 5:00 AM ADT | Last Updated: March 14



Despite promises from some politicians that it will streamline services and solve the issue of long wait times, health-care professionals that CBC News interviewed say there are nuances and that such happy outcomes are not borne out by the data. (Nicole Germain/Radio-Canada)

Our national union, the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), has recently undertaken a polling and research project to get a sense of where Nova Scotians and Canadians stand of the issue of privatization. Some of the highlights of their findings are in the following article. ■

NDP MPs: Health care privatization 'bleeds' workers from north

'We don't get the same services here in the North, especially for health care...These for-profit corporations will only make things worse by pulling our doctors, nurses and other health care workers out of the public system'

BayToday Staff
Feb 23, 2023 6:30 PM



NDP MPs are aiming to keep the health care system in Ontario public. | Credit: Faurter/Getty Images

Privatization creep in Nova Scotia's medical system raises alarm

John McPhee | Posted: March 3, 2023, 6 a.m. | Updated: March 17, 2023, 3:27 p.m. | 4 Min Read



The Bluenose Health private medical clinic in Halifax offers nurse practitioner services under a monthly subscription program plus added per-service fees. - Ryan Taplin

TORONTO | News Ontario tables health-care bill to expand role of private clinics



Canadian Attitudes on Health Care: Exploring Privatization

Research conducted by Abacus Data for NUPGE

A random sampling of 2,260 Canadians over the age of 18 were surveyed on their views of the healthcare system and their perceptions of whether or not it is working well. People were asked about universal health care, privatization options, and the causes for the state of our healthcare system. Survey participants were also asked about which possible solutions they felt would be most impactful to the healthcare system, patients and workers. Finally, respondents were asked to rate the approval of the Premier and Health Ministers managing the healthcare systems in their province.

Atlantic Canadians had the most negative assessments of the public healthcare system. The most positive reviews were in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. The most common reason cited for the system not working well is a lack of employees or being understaffed.

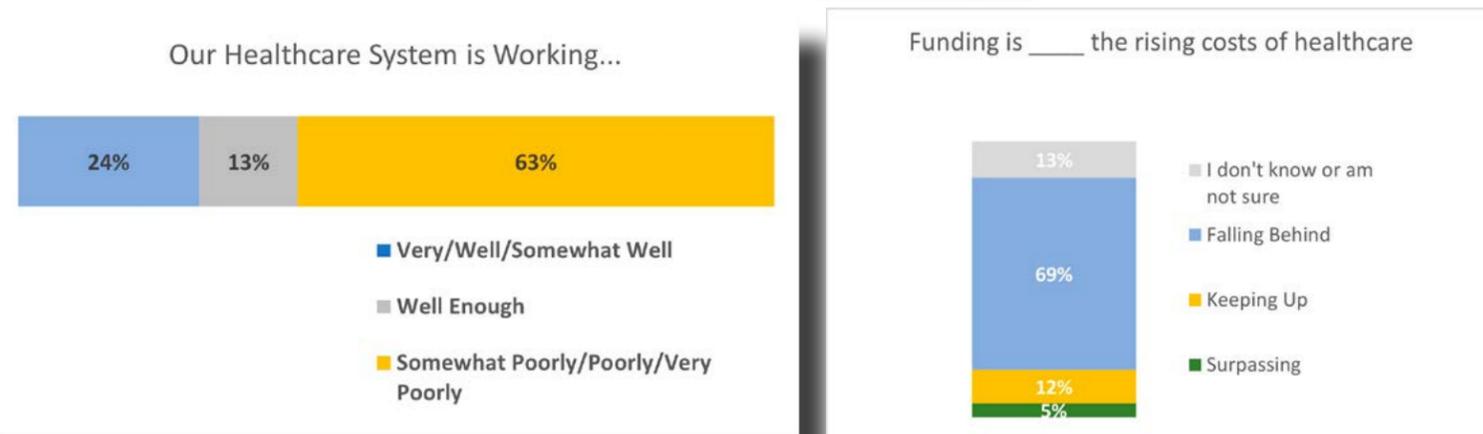
Canadians stated that worker shortages, government mismanagement & under investment were all important factors leading to poor performance in the healthcare system.

Respondents believe that staff shortages are driven by burnout from working long hours and dealing with the emotional and physical strain of their work.

92% of Nova Scotians agreed that the public healthcare system in Canada should be universal, based on need rather than one's ability to pay. PEI and Northern Canada were tied for the strongest support for universal healthcare at 96%, while NS was tied for second with British Columbia.

63% of Nova Scotians think our healthcare system is working poorly, very poorly or somewhat poorly.

Two thirds of Canadians believe the healthcare system in their province is worse than before the pandemic.



When asked about what the top priorities of government should be respondents said:

- 1) Reduce the Cost of Living
- 2) Get Inflation Under Control
- 3) Improve Funding for Public Healthcare

52% think privatizing parts of healthcare delivery is the solution to current strains on the public healthcare system

48% think it will make things worse

From bad to worse...

47% believe that public healthcare workers would take on private sector work out of necessity to keep up with the cost of living

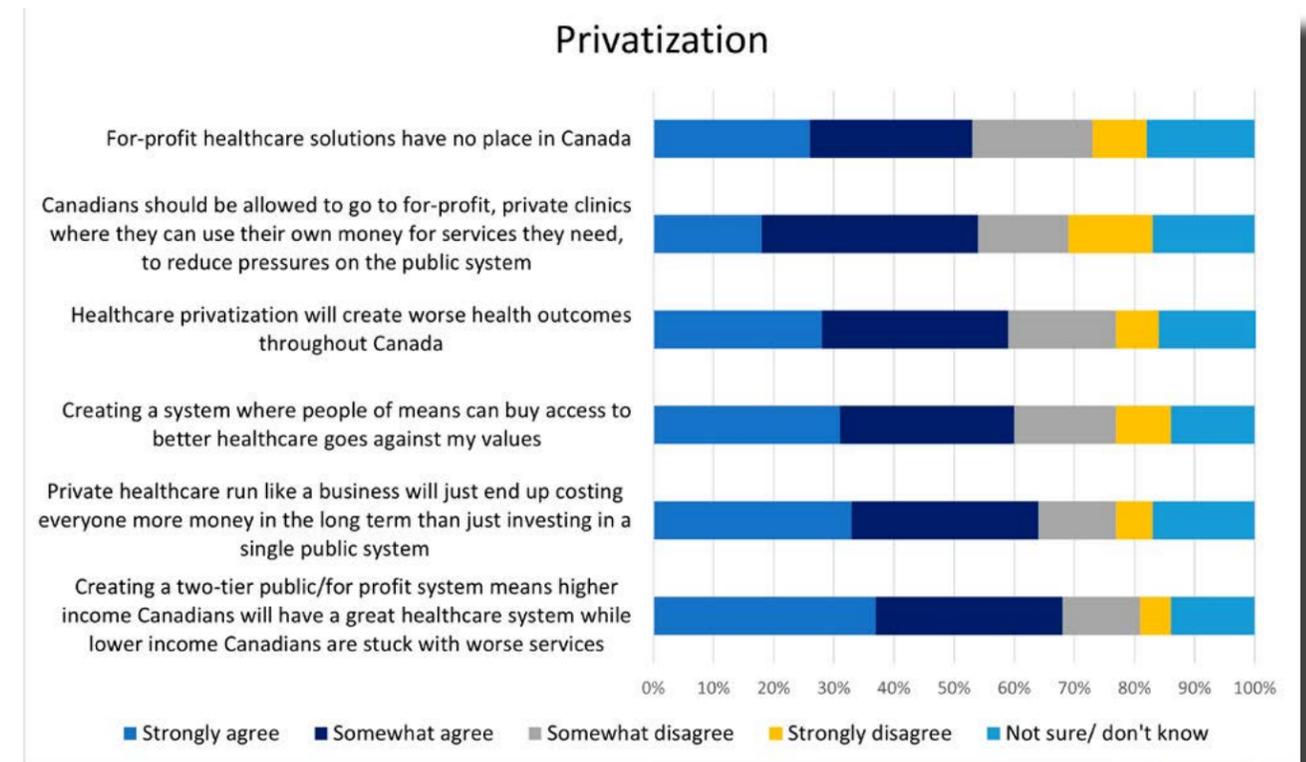
77% are concerned about a possible exodus of workers from the public sector

75% are anxious that privatization would lead to increased fatigue or strain on workers, which could lead to safety concerns

According to the results, "most assume exploring private solutions will end in modestly positive access improvements. They see it as less effective than just investing in the public system." They see privatization as a possible solution for easing wait times.

Most Canadians believe that healthcare systems can be improved through prioritizing healthcare in public budgets, and better fiscal management. Most understand that the money being put towards healthcare in insufficient.

People believe that privatization will drive capacity from the public system, from the survey results it seems as though Canadians see investing more in public healthcare worker pay as one viable solution



Ways Forward

- Invest in the public system to create more positions in the public system. Eighty-seven percent of respondents thought this would have a very positive or somewhat positive impact on the system.
- Invest in higher wages for healthcare workers to increase the attractiveness of the sector. Eighty-five percent of respondents thought this would have a very positive or somewhat positive impact on the system.
- Fifty-eight percent thought that creating more private, for-profit healthcare providers would relieve pressure on the system.

Must-read: “Dying to be Seen”

By Holly Fraughton

A former nurse and union activist has drawn on her decades of experience in the sector and written a book that chronicles the systematic dismantling of the public health care system, and what we must do to restore it.

Catherine MacNeil began her career as a Registered Nurse in 1976, and was a member of the NSGEU, serving as both a Shop Steward and Vice President of her local over the years. She went on to work in health administration, helping to manage a busy emergency department, then co-managing a long-term care facility before she retired in 2016. She currently teaches Continuing Care Assistants at a career college and supervises their clinical placements within long-term care. On top of that work, MacNeil has spent the last seven years researching and writing about the ongoing attack on our public health care system.

The final product of those efforts is “Dying to be Seen: The Race to Save Canadian Medicare,” a 372-page read that outlines how we got to this point, and what evidence-based action is needed to save our public health care system. It was published in January, around the same time as Allison Holthoff and Charlene Snow’s deaths were reported in the media.

As someone who held a variety of different positions within the healthcare system – bedside nurse, manager, administrator, and now, a teaching role – MacNeil was

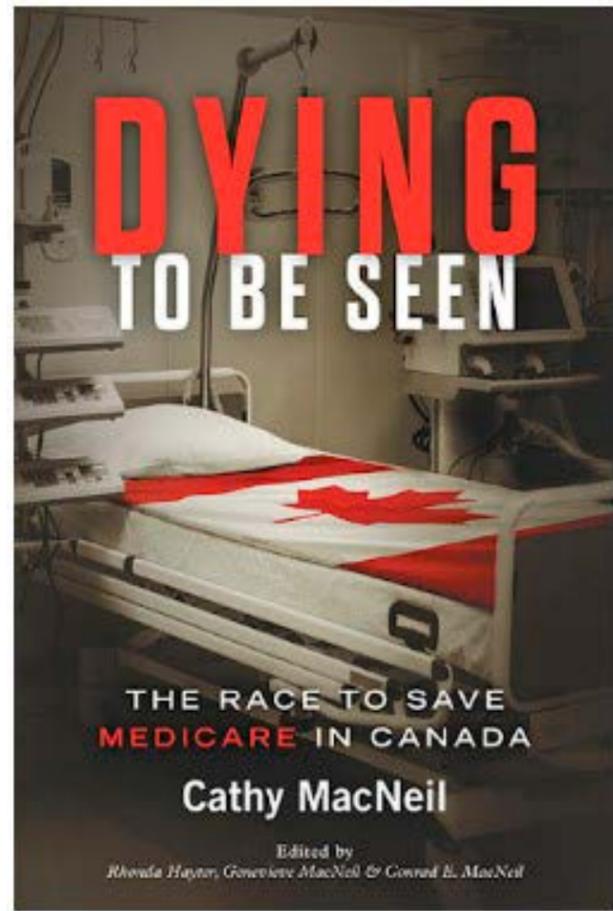
able to draw on those first-hand experiences when writing.

While MacNeil says there have always been “peaks and valleys” in our health care system, things have consistently declined since the cuts in the 90s. She recalls realizing what budgetary cutbacks really meant

for care when she was working as a nurse in day surgery, and patients were suddenly required to come in as out-patients for testing prior to their procedure, and then come in the day-of their surgery:

“Somebody who’s 23 and having an ACL repair, does that person need to come in the day before and take up a bed? Probably not. But before I left the bedside, I had a couple who were 85 – he was having a hip or something done, he was first case (of the day), and they ... had to get up at like 3 a.m. in the dead of winter and drive to the Halifax Infirmary. They weren’t familiar with driving, they got kind of confused about parking, this little old couple, and I thought, ‘this is the story of slashing services. It never just ends at the 23-year-old. It just goes on, and on, and on.’”

From there, things have gotten progressively worse. MacNeil was a manager in the emergency department when Dr. John Ross called a Code Orange – a call that’s normally reserved for an external disaster. While that move briefly got the attention of politicians and media, it eventually quieted down, although it clearly raised its head once again.



Health care is a complex issue, involving many stakeholders and a wide range of priorities and measurements of success. And politics plays a big role.

MacNeil recalls in 2014 when NSGEU’s home care workers were making \$16.67 an hour, and they were asking then-Premier Stephen McNeil for \$18.83 an hour – a \$2.16 an hour raise that would bring them on par with their counterparts in the acute care sector.

“They do crucial work to get people out of beds in hospitals and get them home. I knew some of those home support women – a lot of them single mothers, a lot of them from other countries, a lot of them grandmothers – and at \$16.67 an hour, some of them didn’t even have vehicles to get around – they were taking Metro Transit to get to their clients,” she recalled, “... (Premier McNeil) offered them I think \$1.28 per hour, and they said, no, we want the full \$2.16. To show you how much of a bully he was, he immediately enacted Bill 30, which was essential services legislation, and sent them back to work. They were separated by 88

cents an hour and he would not give in. Fast forward to 2015 and he gave RBC \$22 million in payroll rebates for 150 jobs because they took over the Blackberry place that had been empty, and his argument was, ‘this is how you build the economy, you give people money, they pay taxes.’ Well, you could have upped the salary of the home care workers ... All of those arguments he gave for RBC could have been transferred to supporting home care workers, but he chose not to do it.”

MacNeil also has concerns about Tim Houston’s

approach to fixing health care, which seems to rely heavily on the private sector to deliver public health care.

“Whenever you set up private entities within a private system, it creates competition for human resources and now the nurses ... have not had a lot of support, they’ve had these horrific shifts, they’ve worked short, they’ve been denied vacation, so if a clinic opens up down the street that offers them as much money or

more, and these clinics cherry-pick the healthiest patients, so acuity is lower, the clinic is open 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, no weekends, no holidays, that’s a big draw to exhausted and exasperated nurses who feel they have not been listened to in years.”

She hopes that government officials will read her book, but really, she wrote it for all Canadians who fund the system, particularly those who work within it. And despite it all, she remains optimistic about the future of our health care system.

“I think it is possible to turn it around, but I think if there was one thing

(government) could do, it would be to commit to public health care, and fund it robustly and somehow demonstrate accountability for how they’re doing that.”



Author and former NSGEU Nurse Catherine MacNeil

Exodus in the Emergency Department

In the not-so-distant-past, most Nova Scotians felt that if they experienced a medical emergency, they would be able to access the care they needed. That isn't the case anymore.

The public's confidence in our health care system has been understandably shaken in recent years: more than 130,000 people are on a waitlist for a family doctor, there aren't enough ambulances or paramedics to provide care, and our own Health Minister has admitted that we could use another 1,600 nurses in the acute care system.

There is no doubt now: the crisis in health care that our frontline workers have been warning us all about is now upon us.

While the crisis has permeated virtually every aspect of the health care system, it is perhaps most evident in our emergency departments. It is through those doors that people enter on their worst days: after they've been in a car accident, suffered a heart attack, been violently assaulted, or experienced another form of trauma.

These days, more and more people are turning up at the emergency department (ED) with health concerns that they are unable to have addressed elsewhere, because they simply don't have access to primary care. They usually wait longer than they should to have to be seen by a medical professional because they know they shouldn't be going to the emergency department with their complaint because it isn't technically an emergency. So, they "tough it out",

and what was a minor issue turns into a major one they can no longer ignore. Then, they have to go to the ED, where they are sandwiched into a crowded waiting room, filled with more people who are having very bad days.

At the same time, stretchers filled with patients offloaded from ambulances are lining the hallway, while staff are run ragged trying to make sure the most critically ill patients are being seen.

The ED at the Halifax Infirmary is the largest trauma centre in Atlantic Canada. Last year, there were more than 70,000 visits to this ED alone. At the same time, experienced staff are leaving this area in droves. There are currently just 74 Registered Nurses (RN) working various positions in the ED. They are short 31 full-time nurses.

Rather than invest in addressing this shortfall properly, Nova Scotia Health (NSH) now has a roster of 15 travel nurses who are on the ED schedule. On any given shift, there are up to five travel nurses working in Atlantic Canada's major trauma centre. Many of these temporary nurses have little to no experience working in major trauma centres, have limited access to critical computer systems, and no familiarity with where instruments and equipment are located in the department. At the same time, they are paid

almost double the hourly rate of experienced staff nurses, plus travel and accommodation expenses.

In December, health care and nursing members working

in this ED reached out to the union to raise their serious concerns about ongoing critical staffing shortages. After meeting with the members, on January 9th, NSGEU President Sandra Mullen sent the employer, Premier and Minister of Health a letter outlining the concerns, and a detailed document that included 59 suggestions from frontline staff on how operations within the ED could be improved, both for patients and staff.

At the same time, our letter and recommendations went out, The Chronicle Herald published a story about the tragic death of a young woman, Allison Holthoff, in an ED in Cumberland County. Shortly after, another woman, Charlene Snow, died at home after leaving an ED in Cape Breton.

Media coverage of the crisis in Nova Scotia EDs were swift and intense.

In response, the Minister of Health and Wellness and the CEO for NSH announced a number of changes for Nova Scotia's Emergency Departments, including changes to staffing complements, the introduction of new technology, increased scopes of practice, and other steps that will hopefully alleviate the incredible burden that our health care workers are shouldering on the front lines of the ED.

In March, The Premier announced nursing bonuses and retention incentives for permanent, full-time nurses. However, they still refuse to address the key issue our members have outlined: their inability to retain skilled, experienced nursing staff in the ED.

On January 23rd, nurses working in the Halifax Infirmary Emergency Department (ED) wrote a letter to the Premier, Minister of Health, and CEO of Nova Scotia Health. That letter expressed the nurses' deep distress following the government's failure to address the retention crisis in our ED.

It is the union's position that the employer must provide incentives that will allow them to effectively keep experienced health care professionals in areas of high turnover and specialized need, such as the province's largest trauma centre. ■

'We need to stop this': Some N.S. hospital units have 80% nurse vacancy rates



Nursing unions say some nurses working 24 hour shifts, handling 10 patients at a time

Nicola Seguin - CBC News - Posted: Jan 16, 2023 10:57 AM AST | Last updated: January 16



The CBC's Brett Ruskin in Halifax says the nursing shortage in Nova Scotia is so severe that some units in some hospitals have an 80 per cent vacancy rate. The province is using high financial incentives to lure new nurses.

Nova Scotia union slams lack of plan for ER nurse shortage

John McPhee | Posted: Feb. 8, 2023, 6:47 a.m. | Updated: Feb. 8, 2023, 11:19 a.m. | 4 Min Read



Many nurses at the Halifax Infirmary emergency department are leaving the public sector to work for private agencies at double the pay, an NSGEU official said Tuesday. - File

January 23rd, 2023

Honourable Tim Houston, Premier of Nova Scotia

Honourable Michelle Thompson, M.L.A., Minister of Health and Wellness

Karen Oldfield, President and CEO, Nova Scotia Health

Dear Premier Houston, Minister Thompson and Ms. Oldfield,

We are writing to you with grave and sincere concern for the citizens of Nova Scotia accessing care at the Charles V. Keating Emergency and Trauma Centre at the QEII in Halifax. We, the front-line Registered Nurses in the ED, have bore witness to the ongoing health care crisis with beginnings far outdating the pandemic. Now, as we stand on the other side of that pandemic, it's in an unraveling and hazardous health care landscape that's experiencing a "brain drain" of skilled RNs. The recent press conference on ED improvements instilled one last glimmer of hope in our RNs. We envisioned our calls for help were finally answered. To everyone's bitter disappointment, it is now clear that the Nova Scotia government is completely blind to the needs of and issues facing RNs in our collapsing ED.

The measures announced do not address one of the major issues contributing to increased morbidity and mortality in the ED: retention and recruitment of skilled RNs. Our ED now operates RN staffing levels at an average of 50-60%. With patient to nurse ratios worsening, the burnout experienced by RNs has ballooned. This is affecting our ability to retain and recruit RNs. It is driving our existing RN staff to move to casual positions, sign lucrative travel nurse contracts or leave the profession altogether. Our daily operations are now totally dependent on casual staff and travel RNs, with our core staffing being begged to cancel their vacation, come in for overtime or extend their shifts. The QEII ED is a revolving door for RNs. As soon as our new hires complete their orientation, they realize their licence to practice nursing is at risk by being forced to do the impossible with limited resources, and they leave the department. Without immediate action and interventions focused on RN retention, we fear unnecessary suffering will continue in the ED. We simply cannot be expected to spread ourselves any thinner.

We implore you to save lives and our EDs: implement RN recruitment and retention strategies immediately. Every experienced RN that leaves the ED is taking invaluable experience and expertise with them. The suggested incentives include higher wages, retention bonuses, improved night/weekend shift premiums and work short premiums. These incentives in the ED will entice RNs who have left to return, and will help to retain the few skilled ED RNs who remain. Without these incentives, the "brain drain" will continue, and it will undoubtedly sink our community EDs.

Sincerely,

The Registered Nurse group, Charles V. Keating Emergency and Trauma Centre

Steward Profile: Matthew Beson

1. What made you want to become a Steward?

During my 10 years of employment within the Nova Scotia Government it became clear that many of my colleagues, supervisors and managers struggled with understanding the language of the collective agreement. As a result, I decided to take a more engaged approach to assist us within our work environment to be more informed and potential resource.

2. What issues do you typically deal with in your workplace as a Steward?

The frequent issues that come to my attention are interpretation of the collective agreement, clarification of roles of responsibilities and guidance. More often than not clarification leads to adjusting decisions and working together. If situations arise you are the connect point to the staff at the union office.

3. Have you faced any discrimination in the workplace by stepping forward to become a Steward?

Initially, I would suggest that some reference had been made in an unfavourable light. However, the importance is about education and understanding. Working towards trust, respect and guidance removed those references.

4. What kind of skills has being a Steward given you?

Often colleagues come to you upset and emotionally charged. I believe listening and seeking an understanding of the reason someone has reached out to you is important. Gaining trust, respecting your fellow union members is the utmost importance. Have and open ear, document, act and follow through with your commitment.

5. Would you recommend other people become a Steward in their workplace? Why or why not?

I believe the more people that take advantage of opportunities to learn about this vital role the more knowledge your offices and workplace will have. As we can all attest, workplace demands, staffing issues and expectations are at an all-time high. Developing skills to educate, understand and guide our members is critical to our success for a respectful and enjoyable workplace experience. ■



NOTE: This is the third in a series of Steward profiles we will be sharing throughout The Stand. Please check our website to see more.

Big Gains for the Group Home Sector

Group home workers provide a range of support services for adults with developmental disabilities, and for youth in need. They work in a wide variety of facilities or homes located in communities throughout Nova Scotia. While the services they provide are invaluable, the compensation they've received for that work has long lagged far behind those with similar training working in other sectors.

Because of this, members and employers have reported ongoing, acute difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff to work in the group home sector. This has led to high turnover, which in turn, places a lot of pressure on the long-time staff who care for clients in group homes.

The provincial government finally took a big first step toward addressing the staffing challenges in this sector by negotiating with the NSGEU to provide substantial wage increases along with a one-time classification adjustment that would bring wages for Residential Support Workers or equivalent classifications in line with Continuing Care Assistants.

Charly Weaver has worked in the sector for 21 years now, starting her career at Regional Residential Services Society (Local 66) the same year they went on strike for 77 days in an effort to achieve better pay. Now, she is President of the local and serves as the Chair of the Group Home Occupational Council. She sees the wage increase as an acknowledgement from government that their work is valuable and important.

"For me, it was more the recognition that we're doing the jobs that professionals do, because we've never really been considered that ... To hear from the government that it's the same amount of money as the CCAs, and these jobs are kind of equivalent in their own unique way, meant a lot for me," Weaver said, "It's well-deserved and needed."

The monetary improvements meant that all current Residential Support Workers or equivalent of the 13 affected NSGEU locals were placed at step 5 of the new scale (see below) and would receive the following Classification Adjustment retroactive to April 1st, 2022, or date of hire if hired between April 1st, 2022, and the

signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), as follows:

Residential Support Worker – Classification Adjustment		
	Hourly Rate @ 2080 Hours	Annual rates
Step 1 (start)	\$21.4712	\$44,660
Step 2 (after year 1)	\$21.9096	\$45,572
Step 3 (after 2 years)	\$22.3567	\$46,502
Step 4 (after 3 years)	\$22.8130	\$47,451
Step 5 (after 4 years)	\$23.2784	\$48,419



This wage adjustment combined with the 2022 economic adjustment of 1.5 per cent (previously received), negotiated under the members' existing collective agreements provided a new top annualized salary of \$49,145.

The represents a significant jump in compensation for workers in this sector.

As the MOA required an extension of current collective agreements by one year, a sectoral ratification vote was held among the members. The members voted overwhelmingly in favour, with 97 per cent voting to accept.

"This was a significant win for the many dedicated workers in this sector," said NSGEU President Sandra Mullen, "This wage adjustment represents a well-deserved and long overdue recognition of the important role these workers play in our communities, and we sincerely hope that it will make a positive difference in working conditions in our group homes." ■

NSGEU President Goes to Harvard

For five weeks throughout January and February, NSGEU President Sandra Mullen was once again a student. She travelled to Boston, Massachusetts, where she had been selected to participate in an intensive executive training program designed for trade union leaders at Harvard University.

“It’s an educational experience that is designed to connect union leaders from across North America and beyond – in this case, we had New Zealanders participating – with respect to all those parts of the curriculum, working together on leadership, organizing, membership engagement, labour laws, and more,” Mullen explained.

The education is comparable to the advanced education that the institution offers to executive level individuals in Business, Government, and Law, teaching the essential skills for the management and leadership of unions, as well as providing a unique opportunity to explore key issues for the broader labour movement. It allows participants to gain insights into the complex political, social and economic forces that shape their operating environment; exchange perspectives with faculty who are internationally recognized for their expertise on labour issues; develop relationships among people doing similar work in the national and international labour communities; and interact with future leaders in the corporate and public sectors by attending classes at the country’s most prestigious graduate schools of business, education and government.

The curriculum is taught as a series of thematically related seminars and cases, featuring exchanges with innovative practitioners and analysts in a variety of fields. The diverse selection of seminars provide an opportunity for participants to meet a variety of Harvard faculty, faculty from neighboring universities, and senior labour leaders to discuss selected topics of concern to

labour the world of work.

Our national union – the National Union of Public & General Employees (NUPGE) – typically awards two scholarships per year for component leaders to attend the program at Harvard. Mullen, who has sat on the board of NUPGE for seven years now through her role with NSGEU, applied for one of those scholarships this year, and was awarded it to attend as a NUPGE component leader.



NSGEU President Sandra Mullen with workers from our NUPGE Components.

“I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in such a valuable learning experience,” said Mullen, adding that she was struck by the caliber of faculty that they had leading the programs.

“A lot of days I was in awe of the presenters. If you can run through US labour history with what would have been seven Canadians and three New Zealanders and keep full attention, it was well-delivered,” she added.

One of the most valuable parts of the curriculum for Mullen involved strategic planning and choice. And she was struck by the fact that differences in the political lobbying done in the US compared to here in Canada.

But the real highlight of her time at the prestigious Ivy League school. was the opportunity to connect and share ideas and experiences with other labour leaders.

“We had a lot of AFSCME folks, who are very similar to us with respect to representing government employees from all sectors, as well as nursing unions from across the globe. We were able to work with not only the Massachusetts Nurses Association particularly well there, but there were people in my program who were from the California Nurses, New York Nurses, so just working with them on all that that sector is currently experiencing and what they went through in the pandemic was very interesting.” ■



Upper left: NSGEU President Sandra Mullen with Harvard students in the Harvard JFK Library, with members of AFSCME and PPTA, on a tour of IBEW Union Hall, and with her Harvard classmates.



Administrative Professionals Day

Think back to a time when you visited a physician's office. The first interaction you likely had was with the medical administrative assistant: the friendly folks who greeted you and checked you in for your appointment. While checking patients in is an important for an Administrative Professional, it's not the only role.

Hospitals and medical care facilities are some of the largest types of facilities in which an Administrative Professional can work. With large facilities, roles and responsibilities are typically more specialized and narrowly focused. The roles can vary quite a bit depending upon the type of healthcare setting in which they work. The size of the facility, scope of procedures and geographical location can all play a part in positions and duties.

There are many areas of Healthcare that the Admin Professional plays a part in. Listed below are a couple of examples:

Health Promoter: The Health Promoter provides advanced knowledge in health promotion and community development, while working within the strategic directions of NS Health. The Health Promoter uses health promotion approaches which support participation, partnerships, and equity to perform their work in healthy public policy, community development and mobilization. The Health Promoter shares a core set of public health attitudes and values and applies public health core competencies to all their work.

Medical Administrative: there are too many roles to list, without missing one. Along with many responsibilities and a wide range of tasks to ensure that the office functions properly, Administrative Professionals' tasks

can also vary by location but typically include:

- Scheduling staff
 - Scheduling appointments
 - Checking patients in at the front desk
 - Answering telephone and email inquiries
 - Compiling medical records and charts
 - Processing payments
 - Operating computer software and office equipment
 - Transferring lab results to the appropriate clinician
 - Maintaining supplies and appearance for the office
- Administrative Professionals manage a wide range of tasks to ensure the community receives the care they need and that departments function smoothly.



No matter where you work as an Administrative Professional, all roles come with many transferable skills, such as: Communication, computer skills, organization, multi-tasking, attention to detail and most importantly teamwork.

If you see an Administrative Professional on April 26th, 2023, don't forget to say happy Administrative Professionals day and thanks for all that you do!

Note: These profiles were submitted by the NSGEU Administrative Professionals Occupational Council.

1. What is your name, where do you work and what do you do?

My name is Kim Sheppard. I am an Administrative Professional for the Smoking Cessation program and the Driving While Impaired program in Cape Breton. Along with this role, I also provide support for four Community Outreach workers, three in CBRM and one in Whycocomag.

I look after admissions to both Smoking and DWI programs, collecting fees/receipts for the DWI program, and processing invoices from pharmacies for the Smoking Cessation program. I register appointments for the Community Outreach workers and provide them with any assistance they may need. I process payrolls for all the clinicians that I support.

2. How long have you been in the job and what drew you to this work in the first place?

I have been with this position since 2010. Since a child, I have always had a passion for helping others, this role not only allows me to provide assistance to the team I work with, but also allows me to provide a friendly and helpful welcome to those who are entering our programs or coming to the office for a clinician visit. I enjoy working with the public and being part of a team in our office.

3. Do you like your job? What do you like best about it?

I love my job. I like the fact that I am busy with different programs, tasks are less repetitive. I enjoy building relationships with my co-workers and clients who access our services.

4. Do you have a best day? Worst day?

My best day would be getting to work "on time" and starting the day with a strong cup of coffee.

I try to not to let any bad days arise, usually a good joke can fix any dismal days.

5. What do you think the public should know about the work you do that they might not already be aware of?

The public are probably not aware of what preparation the Administrative Professional does before a program reaches them, the phone intakes, booking and registering, along with the copying and faxing of documents. The public should also know that our programs work if you work with it. Our staff are friendly and always welcoming to all.



1. What is your name, where do you work and what do you do?

Angela MacLennan, I am a Secretary II with Mental Health & Addictions.

2. How long have you been in the job and what drew you to this work in the first place?

I have been in my current role for just over two years but have been with NSHA for nine years. I was drawn to work with mental health and addictions based on the overwhelming need in our province.

3. Do you like your job? What do you like best about it?

I love my job, it has its difficult moments, but I work with a fabulous group of people.

4. Do you have a best day? Worst day?

Every day is different and good in its own way.

5. What do you think the public should know about the work you do that they might not already be aware of?

I feel our office clients have a fairly good understanding of my role within the clinic. Many of them I speak with regularly and have gotten to know them a bit.

1. What is your name, where do you work and what do you do?

My Name is David Watts and I work for Northwood Homecare as a Staffing Officer.

2. How long have you been in the job and what drew you to this work in the first place?

I have been a Staffing Officer since October 2015. I've always enjoyed the daily challenges of putting together the pieces of getting schedules built, and when they fall apart, rebuilding them again.

3. Do you like your job? What do you like best about it?

I thoroughly enjoy the people that I work with. We are there for each other in all situations. Our work can be very challenging at times, and sometimes a fresh set of eyes to look at a situation can change a view and make things work easier.

4. Do you have a best day? Worst day?

Every day is a new day, and a new challenge. Walking into the office for the start of your shift, you never know what to expect and what the day is going to look like.

5. What do you think the public should know about the work you do that they might not already be aware of?

Northwood Homecare is the service provider. Continuing Care is the one who authorizes the service, and although they may authorize it, doesn't mean that we have the resources to be able to provide all service they authorize. We do the best that we can with the resources we have.

**1. What is your name, where do you work and what do you do?**

My name is Morgane Stocker. I am a Health Promoter and Administrative Professional. I work with the Healthy Communities Team, Public Health in Halifax.

Currently, my work is focused on legal substances – Cannabis, Alcohol and Tobacco. I collaborate within Halifax, across the province and country on issues related to substances and healthy public policy. A lot of my day is filled with research on best practices, attending meetings, developing briefing notes, and having conversations with partners to better understand their experience. I usually work regular business hours but at times have to work evenings to attend community meetings or events. I work both in an office and in the community at places like schools, non-profits and libraries.

2. How long have you been in the job and what drew you to this work in the first place?

I have been with Public Health for over 15 years, and during this time I have had the opportunity to be on the Early Years Team and work in partnership with the

Health Protection Team (other Public Health teams). I have been privileged to work with all of Public Health during two pandemics (H1N1 and COVID19).

I was drawn to Public Health, because as a student I was always asking "why?". This is where I learned that health is more than just the physical and mental state of the individual. The answer was just not that simple! As a health promoter, we consider the various determinants of health (e.g. education, income, culture etc.), their impact on health, and work to improve the health of the population through organized efforts of society (e.g. healthy public policy, creating supportive environments etc.).

3. Do you like your job? What do you like best about it?

I appreciate the variety my job has offered me over the years – I have been able to work on numerous topics: poverty, injury prevention, sexual health and physical activity to name a few. In addition, I have been able to work with particular sectors of the community, such as prenatal, LGBTQ+, new immigrants and school-aged children. I enjoy being able to build relationships with a wide range of people from different cultures and backgrounds.

4. Do you have a best day? Worst day?

One of my best days spanned a couple of months, when I was involved as a preceptor to a health promotion intern from Dalhousie University. It was great to renew my passion for the work and to learn from them as well.

5. What do you think the public should know about the work you do that they might not already be aware of?

The public is likely not aware of the work of health promoters, or all the research, meetings and partners involved in healthy public policy. However, I don't think they need to know to enjoy the benefits. For example, a family can enjoy a hike on a public trail with fresh air, without having to think of the policy restricting tobacco use in outdoor public spaces.

1. What is your name, where do you work and what do you do?

My name is Alyssa Gee and I work in the Finance Office at Valley Regional Hospital. My position is within the Accounts Receivable for the Western Zone. I am responsible for patient billing receipting/inquiries, I post for different departments (i.e., Food & Nutrition, Health Records, Chipman/Accounts Payable) to their specific cost centers. I look after providing & collecting fees for parking passes to visitors, patients, doctors & staff. I also collect water tests for clients/the public for the Lab and collect the fees for these/bill our clients. It is a position that carries a wide range of daily tasks, but it keeps everyday interesting and busy.

2. How long have you been in the job and what drew you to this work in the first place?

I have been within this position since fall of 2018, almost four years. I previously had a six-year career in the banking field right from graduating NSCC in 2012. Finance has always been a passion of mine. I was looking at possibilities for a more work/life balance and being in the finance field without being in a "sales" position directly but still working with people when this opportunity came available.

**3. Do you like your job? What do you like best about it?**

I absolutely love my job; I cannot imagine doing anything else in my life right now. It is everything I could want in my field of work. I enjoy building relationships with my clients & patients/visitors I see on a regular basis. I enjoy working with my team across Nova Scotia with NSHA, and meeting people near & far by in person/over the phone and Skype.

4. Do you have a best day? Worst day?

My best day would be getting to work with my hot tea, getting to interact with clients/the public in the mornings (it tends to be my busiest time of the day), and working on internal postings during the afternoon.

I try not to have a "bad day," I try to find the good in everyday and try to spread positivity whenever possible. I find spreading kindness and positivity especially in my position within health care can go a long way.

5. What do you think the public should know about the work you do that they might not already be aware of?

A lot of people may not be aware of the volume and large spread of work that comes through my office and may refer to my office as the "water testing" place, as that is what most of the public comes to me for in person. However, the internal/over the phone work (as stated above) that I do daily may not be seen.

Political Update

By Lucas Wide

The current political landscape can be best summed up with four words: “Show me the money”.

In the lead up to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly spring session, the Houston government communications machine has been in overdrive with a long list of funding announcements targeted to improve the healthcare system.

Over a billion dollars in announcements were made leading up to the opening of the spring legislative session. Much of this funding was not approved by the Legislature but was approved through government appropriations, a practice the province’s Auditor General has previously raised concerns about.

These announcements included:

- \$66.3 million in ongoing funding increased wages for CCAs;
- \$46.6 million to perform more surgeries and address the backlog, including increasing hours for operating rooms;
- \$22.7 million to increase nursing training seats to 200 at CBU, Dal, StFX, and NSCC;
- \$275.1 million for the Halifax Infirmary expansion and the CBRM healthcare redevelopment projects;
- \$91 million for construction and renewal of other hospitals and medical facilities, including Bridgewater, Pugwash, Yarmouth, Amherst and the IWK;
- \$57.7 million for electronic health records (One Person, One Record);
- \$32 million to repair and replace medical equipment;
- \$498.5 million for roads, highways and bridges;
- \$6.2 million more to continue redesigning the foster care system, including recruiting and retaining diverse foster families, expanding foster placement types;
- \$40 million to pay early childhood educators more, help stabilize and grow the workforce and help licensed centers offer more care;



Finance and Treasury Board Minister Allan MacMaster, second from bottom right, standing beside Premier Tim Houston, bottom right, gestures to the opposition parties while tabling the provincial budget at the Nova Scotia legislature in Halifax on Thursday, March 23, 2023. (THE CANADIAN PRESS/Darren Calabrese)

- \$47.1 million more for public schools to address growing enrolment, hire more teachers and address inflationary pressure; and the biggest investment
- \$464 million (\$354 million in 2022-23 & \$110 million in 2023-24) in nurse and healthcare worker retention bonus.

The government introduced its budget on March 23rd, 2023. The budget, entitled ‘More Healthcare, Faster’ laid out \$14.2 billion in expenses, including \$6.5 billion worth of spending on healthcare. Healthcare spending now makes up 45% of the total provincial budget.

The New Democratic Party, led by Claudia Chender, said the budget was a missed opportunity with no new spending on building more affordable housing, no increases for income assistance and no new spending to help keep our schools safe for teachers and students.

The Liberal Party and its leader Zach Churchill criticized the government for adding to the provincial debt and running back-to-back budget deficits. The Liberals have introduced

legislation to amend the income tax system to end bracket creep and leave more money in people’s pockets.

This Legislative session will continue into budget estimates where the opposition parties get to question government ministers on their individual budget spending.

The Houston government continues its main message that they are “laser-focused” on fixing healthcare, regardless of the costs. Most of these projects are longer term and their impacts won’t be felt for many years. Meanwhile, emergency departments continue to work short, tens of thousands of people are without a family doctor and many of the health outcome indicators continue to show the province trending in the wrong direction. Houston has a lot of work to do to keep his promise to Nova Scotians. Time will tell if the investments bring the solutions he and his government need. ■

New NSGEU Staff

Here are a few recent staffing changes at the NSGEU

I came from Local 470 (NSLC) where I was president of sub-local A, and I’m now in the role of Employee Relations Officer here at NSGEU. There are so many things that I like about being here at the NSGEU.



Brian Horne
Employee Relations Officer

I really appreciate the collaborative culture, the encouragement to learn and grow in the position, the opportunity to assist our members and the positive approach to work-life balance.

I’m new to the position of ERO, I previously worked in the Labour Resource Centre for the last three years. I came from Local 1246 (NSHA Administrative Professionals) originally. I love getting to meet the members and supporting them in their issues.



Andrea Tompkins
Employee Relations Officer

Originally from Sydney, but I currently live in Dartmouth. Married for 20 years with two teenage children (19 & 16). I previously worked at the IWK (Local 122) for 24 years as a Youth Care Worker



Terrance O’Callaghan
Employee Relations Officer

II. The last three years working in the Family Intensive Outreach Service (FIOS), and being trained and certified in Eco-systemic Structural Family Therapy (ESFT). My role as an Employee Relations Officer (ERO) allows me to use my previous skill set in mental health in a my new profession. While the problems or issues are much different and less severe in nature, the skills I acquired in my years at the IWK have served me well in transitioning into this new role.

I’ve worked for the NSGEU since Nov., 2011. I came from local 470, NSLC where I was a member since 2005. In my new role of Director of Servicing and Negotiations, I am responsible for the government (Civil Service, Municipalities, Crown Corporations, Housing, WCB & Sherbrooke Village) and education (Public, Post-Secondary, Busing and APSEA) sectors. What I like most about my job is helping members understand their workplace rights and having the opportunity to assist members in achieving a better work-life balance. I enjoy working with the NSGEU staff in my new role as well as being a part of the internal operational and strategic decision-making processes of the Union.



Nicole McKim
Director of Servicing and Negotiations

I previously worked at Metro Community Living (Local: 63A) as a Community Residential Worker in a group home setting. I would spend my 12 hour days supporting individuals in their needs and goals in life, both at home and in the community. I now work in the Labour Resource Centre at NSGEU and use skills from my previous job like effective communication in this new role. What I like about this job is I continue to learn more about the issues in each members workplace, as well as contract language and how it’s applied to better support our members. In my spare time I love to play roller derby.



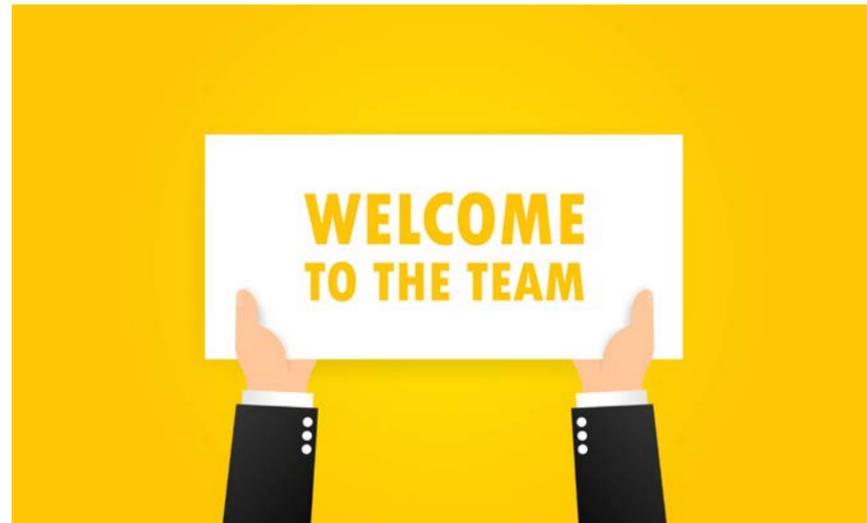
Vanessa Dwyer
Labour Resource Centre

Should I Sign a Union Card?

Who doesn't want to be a member in good standing?

Sending us your membership application form is a great thing to do!

Signing and sending us your NSGEU membership application form is the way you become a member in good standing and the way you fully participate in your union. When we receive and process your application, we will send you back your union card.



- Have direct input into the bargaining priorities of your local by filling out a "bargaining input survey";
- Receive information from your local about meetings and events as well as local bargaining updates when you are in negotiations;
- Attend NSGEU [Education courses](#);
- Attend [Pre-retirement Seminars](#) to learn about retirement planning;

- Get email invitations to union-wide social events such as our Annual Free Family Day Picnic or our Annual Fall Family Fun Day;
- Access to NSGEU's Discount List, which offers savings from stores and services around the province including Marks Work Wearhouse and a variety of hotels and car rental agencies. (For the Discount List, see nsgeu.ca or contact us at 902-424-4063, 1-877-556-7438, or inquiry@nsgeu.ca);
- Access to MHCSI Preferred Pharmacy Provider Program (aka Lawton's Card). (For more information, see nsgeu.ca or contact us at 902-424-4063, 1-877-556-7438, or

inquiry@nsgeu.ca);

- Apply for NSGEU scholarships, bursaries, or awards for yourself or your dependents;

If you have not yet received your membership package in the mail or if you would like to apply for membership, please contact us (902-424-4063, toll-free 877-556-7438, or inquiry@nsgeu.ca) and an application will be mailed to you with a postage-paid return envelope. Just fill it out, send it in, and you will be mailed your NSGEU membership card. We have a strict privacy policy;

Applying for membership provides the union with your current up-to-date contact information, including a personal email, if possible. This is important because the information we get from your employer may not be correct and/or it may not be the best way to reach you. A signed and accepted union card application means you are part of the NSGEU community and can participate fully in all the democratic aspects of it.

When you send us your application form and receive your union card it means you are a member in good standing which means you can:

- Participate fully in your local by having the right to vote for your local executive and other representatives like Regional & Occupational Councillors, as well as your health & safety representation, just to name a few;
- Participate in all votes during negotiations including whether to accept or reject a tentative agreement reached by your bargaining committee;

your personal information will not be shared. If you have misplaced your NSGEU membership card, contact and we'll send you a replacement.

What happens if I don't want to send in my membership application form and get a union card?

When you are hired into a position which is a unionized position and the union has received a signed payroll authorization card

for deduction of dues, you are eligible to become a member of the union. Once your dues have been accepted, automatically, you enjoy all the bargaining gains achieved up until the time you were hired and any negotiated gains

made in the future as long as you are a member. You have the right to be represented by your union should you encounter any problems with your employer, and you have the right to vote on whether to go on strike or not (if your workplace is under the Trade Union Act). Being part of unionized workplace means you

benefit from these basic things if you are a member in good standing or not. However, without signing a union application form and receiving a union card, our constitution states that you are not a member in good standing and cannot participate fully in union activities. The constitution was created by the membership and is maintained and upheld by the membership with a variety of objectives, including:



"1.3.5. To direct the structure of the Union towards providing participation of the membership so as to ensure that the Union always acts in the best interests of the membership." ■

Union make a difference in our lives.

Unions fought for many of the benefits workers enjoy today: Sick leave, maternity & paternity leave, vacation, minimum wage, paid breaks, overtime, workplace safety standards and regulations. collective bargaining rights, and much more.

Do you know of a group of non-unionized workers who might be interested in joining the NSGEU? Please contact:

Lori Smith, Organizing Officer

902-456-6531 or 1877-556-7438 or lsmith@nsgeu.ca



NSGEU Education - Available Courses

Ongoing Education

Steward Orientation (2 days)

Must be a local steward. In this two (2) day workshop, Stewards discuss their role as Educators, Grievance Handlers, Communicators, Leaders, Organizers and Activists. Tools are provided to assist Stewards in supporting local members. Ongoing, local specific, steward training is provided by EROs.

Dealing with Workplace Conflict (1.5 days)

Must be a Steward or Local Executive Officer. In this one-and-a-half (1.5) day workshop, we will define and analyse conflict and look at the range of processes aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict. We will also look at mediation and its role in conflict resolution. Any steward or local executive officer that has not previously attended this workshop is eligible to attend.

Mental Health: Challenging Stigma in the Workplace (1.5 days)

Any steward or local executive officer that has not previously attended this workshop is eligible to attend. In this one-and-a-half (1.5) day workshop, we will explore mental health, mental health concerns, and stigma in the workplace. Some of the topics covered in this course include: demystifying mental health; individual, union, and employer responsibilities; member-to-member issues; and some strategies to challenge stigma and build inclusion.

Workers in Transition (.5 day)

In this ½ day course, Local Executive Officers and Stewards will better understand the role we all play to better protect the rights of our trans members and ensure they have the support they need in our workplaces, in our unions and in our communities.

Domestic Violence: Why is it a Workplace Issue? (.5 day)

In this ½ day course, Local Executive Officers and Stewards will learn about the impact of intimate partner violence in the workplace. They will be provided tools to support members who experience intimate partner violence in the workplace.

Taking Action on Racism (.5 day)

This ½ day course will raise awareness of the issue of racism and includes actions members can take at the local level to build a stronger, anti-racist and more inclusive union. Local Executive Officers and Stewards are eligible to register.

Challenging Bullying and Harassment (1.5 days)

The overall goal of this day-and-a-half course is to strengthen the capacity of NSGEU members and locals to challenge bullying and harassment and promote a respectful workplace. Local Executive Officers and Stewards will explore existing laws and legal decisions, employer responsibilities and successful strategies, and leave with resources and tools to educate members.

Any steward or local executive officer that has not previously attended this workshop is eligible to attend.

Upcoming Education

NSGEU 101 (online)

Any member in good standing can participate. In this online workshop, members will learn the history of NSGEU, how the NSGEU is structured, and why, and discuss why NSGEU and other unions exist.

Steward Orientation (online)

Any member in good standing can participate. A quick overview of the steward role to get you going in the right direction.

Handbooks and Supplements

President, Steward, Secretary and Treasurer Handbooks are available. Supplements available are:

- Running Effective Local Meetings
- Effective Local Elections
- Rules of Order
- Workplace Mapping

All Toolkits and Supplements can be found in the executive portal on the NSGEU website and [here](#).

Additional Resources

Educational **videos**, including an introduction to the NSGEU and short introductions to Local Executive roles as well as videos on Labour/ Management Committees and Rules of Order available on the NSGEU website [here](#).

Pre-Retirement Seminars, Joint Occupational Health and Safety Training, Executive, Regional and Occupational Council and Board training are ongoing.

Please visit the **member library** off the Solarium in the member office area in the Main NSGEU office in Dartmouth. These books include children's books, so take some time to go discover what we have available.

Labour School 2023

Communications, Advanced Steward, Leadership, and Mobilizing Through the Generations will be offered at NSGEU Labour School May 28, 2023 to June 2, 2023

Communications

This course will help activists and leaders improve their confidence and skills in communicating in a variety of different ways. We will discuss and practice public speaking as well as a variety of forms of on-line communication like Zoom, Facebook, and Twitter. We will discuss and practice communicating in ways that respect diversity and are inclusive. We will also discuss and practice communicating with people about topics that are political/social and how best to have difficult conversations. We will look at union campaigns and discuss communicating issues happening in our communities and in our workplaces.

Advanced Steward

The Advanced Steward course is designed to enhance a member's understanding on the role of the steward. The course aims to assist stewards in contract interpretation, investigating complaints and grievances, meeting with members or management, problem solving in a solution focused manner, as well as advocating for workplace leadership. Advanced Steward has been created to support our stewards in becoming comfortable with what traditionally has been uncomfortable in their workplaces.

Mobilizing Through the Generations

Workplaces are rapidly changing, as a new generation enters the workforce. There are at least 4 generations trying to work together, and we need the participation of workers from multiple generations to run this course successfully. Its purpose is to increase your awareness of the needs and realities of the members of different generations in the union and workplace. This course will build your level of comfort and skill to engage in meaningful cross-generational dialogue, in order to make and ensure our workplaces are safe and healthy for all. Union membership has to be active to make gains, protect what we have won, or work out new ways of working together to achieve our goals in the workplace.

Leadership

The Leadership course develops skills necessary for today's leaders in the labour movement. It will review critical issues facing the labour movement while also working on important skills like strategic planning, team building, self-assessment, decision making and critical analysis.

Short Local Delivered Courses

(Participant and Facilitator booklets and more information can be found on the NSGEU website)

Local Executives can provide these 1 hour quick courses independently.

Time Management: Finding Time for the Important Things

Participants will: review some basic principles of time management, set goals and priorities and find time in their schedules for their goals and priorities

Facing the Employer

Participants will build their confidence in facing management, identify common issues and management tactics when challenged and strategize for meetings with management

Effective One on One Communications

Participants will choose the most effective mechanism for communicating each message to their members, use non-verbal communication skills effectively, recognize the non-verbal message when others are speaking, match how they are saying something with the message they are conveying and write and deliver an effective message.

Public Speaking

Participants will build confidence in speaking publicly, practice body language and vocal delivery and practice giving an impromptu speech using the "5 Magic Phrases" technique.

Workplace Mapping

There will be ongoing training for locals on **Building Local Steward Networks through Workplace Mapping**. Workplace Mapping is the process of obtaining accurate and relevant information about where, and who, the local members are. It can form the basis of most successful union activity, including recruiting, communications, developing activists and campaigning around issues. Developing strong local steward networks is the goal!

Happy Birthday

NSGEU is Celebrating 65 years!

Join us for our Open House April 20th 3:00 pm – 8:00 pm

More details will be posted to nsgeu.ca

NSGEU

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