

# CSSEA NEWS

COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION

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## Investing in the future of your employees: making a case for training

Doris Sun, Communications Coordinator

A management retreat. A Lunch and Learn. An afternoon tutorial on a new computer program. What do these three things have in common?

In the current climate of cutbacks and recession, the significance of training is often overlooked. However, the benefits of properly equipping employees with skills and know-how that will make them comfortable on the job and confident in their abilities is a long-term strategy that can yield fruitful dividends for any organization.

"Social services in BC is cyclical in terms of funding," said Bruce Hardy, a professor and trainer. "For agencies, a well-trained work force is something they can 'sell' to funders as a reason to continue funding. In fact many current government contracts call for minimum levels of education [as a pre-requisite for funding]."

Assisting members in meeting those minimum levels is something CSSEA has been deeply committed to. "Since CSSEA's inception, member training has always been an area of priority and something we have taken very seriously," said Kathie Best, Director of Member Services. "We have implemented a variety of flexible training options, from courses at the fall conference, regional meeting training and on-demand training delivered by CSSEA staff and external consultants."



Lilla Tipton, who runs Powell River Association for Community Living, ensures one per cent of her entire budget is reserved for professional development, thereby making it an agency responsibility to invest in its staff.

Tipton believes those efforts have led to increased morale, including the successful recruitment and retention of her staff. "Our staff survey results show 75 per cent staff satisfaction with their work," she said. "We believe that in order to be successful in achieving our mission, vision and values for our clients, we must treat our staff in the manner that we want our clients treated." Hardy adds that, in a unionized environment where wages are fairly comparable across the sector, training is a huge draw in attracting employees. "The two things that [employees] will look at is opportunities for training as

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# From the CEO

October is always a busy month at CSSEA, as it brings with it the impending AGM and Fall Conference, our largest and most significant annual training event.

As final preparations are made on our latest Fall Conference, it's natural to reflect on the distance we've come in getting our training offerings to where they are today.

We've long recognized that training is an integral factor in capacity building in our sector and as such, have incorporated it both into our mandate and operational planning. Because we made explicit commitments to training, we have been able to produce concrete results with the development of several projects, including the Best Practices Series and the expansion of online resource materials.

But our efforts to innovate services do not end there. We have developed

a package of training programs that are delivered to members by staff trainers and external consultants at members' work sites. Because our in-house training programs are specialized to our sector, the knowledge obtained is immediately applicable.

**TRAINING STILL  
A KEY PART OF  
CSSEA'S MANDATE**  
- Lorne Reider

We are also of the view that the internet is an important avenue that we will continue to utilize to reach members. At this year's Fall Conference, we will use the internet to distribute

conference presentations, service evaluations and other key pieces of communications. We are evaluating other web-based tools and studying how they can be expanded.

Another component of our training mandate involves the continual training of our own staff members. Such an investment, whether it be through a technology-related tutorial or an HR course, ensures that we adequately equip our employees to serve you in an efficient and knowledgeable manner.

We remain committed to our advocacy of training and invite you to take advantage of the fruits of that commitment.



Recently, the BC Supreme Court ruled that under an employment contract, an employer could not reduce severance it owed a terminated employee even though the employee had mitigated his losses by obtaining other work.

*In Pacific Ballet British Columbia Society (Re)*, 2009 BCSC 820, the society's Artistic Director entered a fixed-term contract with the society for 3 years. Four months into the contract, the Director was fired without severance. Shortly thereafter, the same Director was hired back with the society under a different six-month contract.

The central issue for this decision was that the Director was suing for severance under the previous contract, while the society claimed

it owed the Director a reduced severance due to his losses being mitigated by accepting a new contract.

**BE AWARE OF  
CONTRACT  
LANGUAGE IN  
TERMINATION CASES**  
by Anushé Rabbani, Legal Research Analyst

At court, Justice Carol J. Ross ruled in favour of the Director, noting that the latter was suing for a debt arising from breach of the first contract, versus claiming damages for wrongful dismissal.

The salient point for employers is to exercise caution when drafting termination clauses in employment contracts. Where a termination clause creates (or appears to create) an independent contractual right, the contractual severance pay may be upheld regardless of whether the terminated employee mitigates his or her damages. Employment contracts should clearly state that former employees are required to mitigate their damages and avoid loss, as this will not be inferred in the contract if these words are absent.

*Before drafting any employment contracts, members are encouraged to contact legal counsel. ■*

# In Profile Q&A: Active Support Against Poverty Housing Society

We spoke with executive director, Audrey Schwartz, to learn more about her agency, one of six new members to join CSSEA

*Tell us a bit about your organization. (What you do, where you are located, who you serve?)*

Active Support Against Poverty Housing Society was established in 1993 to address the shelter and housing needs of the homeless at risk population in Prince George. In 1998 we opened a 16-unit housing complex for low income urban singles and in 2001 we opened a new 30 bed shelter and 28-unit housing complex for homeless, at-risk individuals.

*What is the size of your organization?*

Our organization employs 30 people.

*If someone were to walk into your office on a completely random day, describe what he/she would see. What would the atmosphere be like?*

ASAPHS is a busy places. If you were to walk into the Bridget Moran Place shelter any day of the week, in the morning you would find a large comfortable room, coffee brewing and the news on the television with up to 80 people milling around. As the morning goes by, people move to get things done and the shelter closes during good weather for a couple of hours. After the brief closure for cleaning, you'd find the morning scene repeated until drop-in hours are over and it's time for rest. Our office opens usually to a line up of people. One staff member

found the line up so overwhelming on a particular day that she simply got in the line and gave herself a few minutes respite (good thing no one recognized her). As the services provided on our advocacy side are varied and are targeted to different groups of people, we have a steady stream of people throughout the day needing assistance from our two advocates and one support staff who provide front line service.

*Describe an instance where you or your staff really made a difference in someone's life.*

Our organization has been providing service in our community and region for such a long time we often hear about how our agency assisted people in moving forward in their lives. We provide our services to people with the goal of empowerment. Our best successes are people who have received our services to never require them again. Thus we never see them again.

*What are some important qualities you look for when hiring staff?*

Empathy and a good work ethic. We also look for people who understand that no one is immune to finding themselves or their families in a position of needing to knock on our door.

*You will be attending your first AGM this month. What are you most looking forward to? How important are the AGM training sessions to you?*

We're looking forward to everything. We're just beginning with the process and we need to feel grounded. We hope attending the AGM/Conference will assist us in gaining practical skills and knowledge but also connect us with other organizations that have survived and thrived.

*What has your experience with CSSEA been like so far? How are you hoping the relationship will evolve over the years?*

CSSEA has helped us navigate a process that is completely foreign to us. It's not an exaggeration to state that we couldn't have done it without them - I don't think we could have. We look forward to a time when we don't have to call your very competent staff daily, but I think they're looking forward to that too!

*What aspect about working in this sector do you enjoy the most?*

Because we do such a wide variety of different tasks with different people, our days are rarely the same. The best thing about working in this sector is the people. ■

## CSSEIP Review Beginning

A review of the Community Social Services Early Intervention Program is set to take place in October, 2009. An external consultant at the National Institute of Disability Management and Research will be conducting the review. For more information, be sure to join us at the Fall Conference on October 22 at 7:30 am for a breakfast presentation on disability management. As well, please check our website for updates.

well as upward mobility and the two are linked.”

The embracing of training, according to Hardy, is a kind of win-win strategy that allows employers to remain progressive and sought-after by potential employees. “Workers like to feel that there are benefits in working for an employer. Training is just such a benefit.

It means that the worker is encouraged to grow. It means that the worker remains current in terms of skills development and thus more employable. It means that the worker feels valued. The days are long over when workers would accept an employer saying, ‘Experience is the equivalent of training.’ Its just not true and workers know it.”■

### Training Resources:

Access CSSEA’s training page, on [www.cssea.bc.ca](http://www.cssea.bc.ca) under Members & Associates / Training and Development to learn more about our programs.



## Bargaining Update

The Executive Summary for the 2010 Bargaining Survey, Monetary and Non-monetary Issues, has been posted on the website. We’d like to thank members for their input. The 2010 Bargaining Plan has been approved by the board and will be presented to the members at the AGM. For those unable to attend the meeting, the plan will be posted on our website under 2010 Bargaining following the AGM.

Please continue to stay in touch with your bargaining teams:

**General services:** [gsbt@cssea.bc.ca](mailto:gsbt@cssea.bc.ca)

**Community living services:** [clsbt@cssea.bc.ca](mailto:clsbt@cssea.bc.ca)

**Aboriginal services:** [asbt@cssea.bc.ca](mailto:asbt@cssea.bc.ca)

## Sectoral Case Updates

**Article 13.1 and 26.7** – The issue has arisen in a second agency and will be addressed on an employer-specific basis.

**Expedited arbitration** – CSSEA and CSSBA will set a final meeting with the arbitrator.

**Pacific Coast Community Resources Inc.** – Arbitrator Gordon’s file has been placed in abeyance. We are expecting a decision from Arbitrator Germaine on our summary dismissal application by October 13th. If we are unsuccessful, the next round of preliminary issues will be submitted November 2nd.

**Use of sick leave by part-time employees** – A case management meeting will be scheduled for January, 2010.

**Job Evaluation** – Hearing dates have been set for October, 2009.

## AGM News

With the 2009 AGM and Fall Conference just weeks away, here are some things to remember:

- CSSEA’s Service Satisfaction Survey has been posted on the website under Members & Associates/Surveys. For those unable to attend the AGM, where they will be filled out, we ask that you take a moment and complete it. Your feedback is very important to us!
- Conference presentation materials are trickling in and we will be posting them on our website, under Members & Associates/HRLR Resources/Conference Presentations, as soon as we receive them. Please check the site regularly!
- We are going **GREEN** this AGM and will therefore be limiting our use of handouts. We encourage delegates to preview conference materials and print only what is required.