

BULLETIN

HSA activists working to make a difference all over BC

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ast spring, almost 100 HSA activists participated in specially-designed member mobilizing workshops. Since attending the workshop, members have continued their efforts to protect health and social services around the province. Here are some highlights:

St. Michael's Centre / Lions Gate Hospital

Susan Summers (chief steward and music therapist) met with John Nuraney, MLA for Burnaby. Joanne Graham (chief steward, medical technologist) from Lion's Gate Hospital who arranged the meeting also attended, along with then-Region 3 Director Merna Alison. They discussed their individual concerns about recent health care decisions made by the BC government, and also outlined concerns coming from their colleagues at other hospitals and long-term care facilities.

They were well received, and Nuraney seemed interested in hearing their concerns. This meeting opened the door for Summers to encourage other music therapists to organize a campaign for each of them to meet with their MLAs.

Summers was subsequently interviewed by CBC TV, CTV and Global TV, and appeared on the Afternoon Show (CBC radio) regarding the cutbacks to music and recreation therapy positions at St. Paul's Hospital.

Summers was also contacted by the *Vancouver Sun* and *Province* newspapers, and articles appeared in both.

In addition, Summers wrote an extensive article in the summer issue of the music therapy newsletter. She described HSA's member mobilizing workshop, the MLA visit, and her media interviews. With the Music Therapists' Association of BC, she is coordinating a campaign of resource-building and encouraging music therapists to speak out in their own facilities, as well as getting in contact with their own MLAs.

"I think the workshop really helped to focus my energies and give me an overall direction," Summers said. "I look forward to more of this kind of workshop sponsored by HSA."

Victoria Women's Transition Society

Gloria Hoban (chief steward and transition house worker) at Victoria Women's Transition Society phoned MLA Jeff Bray's office regarding the three-week waiting period to apply for income assistance. She asked if her MLA was aware of the difficulties this created for women in transition houses. She was told that her MLA was indeed aware and was advocating for policy change in the legislature. The MLA later e-mailed the Hansard records to Hoban regarding this issue. Gloria Hoban was subsequently awarded HSA's CLC scholarship, and attended the leadership course offered through the Canadian Labour Congress at Harrison Winter School.

Haven: A Society for Women and Children

Irene Hobbins (chief steward and women's support worker) at Haven: A Society for Women and Children wrote the following letter to the editor of her local paper:

I agree whole heartedly with you! The very fabric of Canadian culture is caring and providing a social safety net for those less fortunate and caring for those without a voice to ask for help. I find it ironic that you hold these values for pets but yet you defend the current Liberal government's policies that ultimately will destroy the safety net that is in place for those that do not have a voice to ask for help. Most of these policy changes seem directed at those most in need, with the least voice and presently unable to help themselves; women in crisis, children, seniors and people with physical and mental challenges.

Hobbins has also been discussing the impact of cuts to anyone who will listen, including her co-workers. She frequently phones, faxes and emails MLAs, and the premier.

A proud HSA member, she sports HSA flags in the rear window of her car. She wears her HSA buttons with pride and takes the opportunity to chat with people if they ask about them.

Hobbins was part of an enthusiastic group of members on the North Island who were organizing an HSA family picnic last summer. Unfortunately, the picnic was cancelled due to a virus in the trees at Rath Trevor Park. Hopefully, another such picnic will be planned for this summer.

Campbell River & North Island Transition House Society

Carrie Sjostrom (member at large and transition house worker) at Campbell River & North Island Transition House Society used the information from the workshop to organize a group called *Women Taking Action*.

The group has had excellent coverage in the community media. To date, they have organized an information picket in front of the MLA's office, and received coverage in both of the community papers. The local television station has regularly covered the group's activities since it was formed.

Women Taking Action has done some fundraising which helped to elevate their profile. One was a clothing auction, and the other was a hotdog sale in front of Overwaitea. *Women Taking Action* is now in the process of creating a book of personal stories from around the province about the effects of the cutbacks on the people of British Columbia. They have also met with their MLA.

The radio station has done several interviews with Sjostrom. She ran for municipal office, and although she was not elected, had an impressive vote count in her first attempt at public office.

Queen Charlotte Islands General Hospital

Derek Barton (chief steward and medical radiation technologist) at Queen Charlotte Islands General Hospital gave everyone in the workshop a demonstration of the "bingo game" that members at his worksite play at monthly worksite potlucks. This is an innovative way to bring members together, and has been incorporated into the union's general mobilizing efforts where effective.

Even before attending the mobilizing workshop, Barton was active in organizing a campaign to replace the hospital's unreliable paging system. Because of a lack of cell phones and repeater towers, QCIGH had been using an out-dated tower from the 1970s.

Barton's campaign began with testing and charting the hospital's old pagers. In January 2001, he and a friend went to various sites around the Island, paged themselves and recorded whether the pagers worked or not. He gave this information to the hospital's then-CEO. The CEO's response was to purchase a satellite phone for the doctor, laboratory, and x-ray departments — but unfortunately, these phones only work outdoors, so this was not a very practical solution.

Barton then undertook some research on paging systems. He gave the hospital's materials manager a quote on a system that had a paging radius of 40 km. The CEO turned down a funding request to purchase this

system. When Barton's pager subsequently failed and the hospital could not reach him, the nurses sent the RCMP to find him. These incidents were documented and submitted to the occupational health and safety committee, and were declared a risk management issue. The proposal for a new paging system was sent to the health authority, which approved the new paging system along with seven new pagers.

Comox Valley Transition Society

Ann Davis (program coordinator) at Comox Valley Transition Society organized a successful table at the Festival of Community Action in Courtenay. She put together a display board with information she obtained through HSA. This was an excellent opportunity to engage the public in discussion about the provincial government's cuts, and the crowds seemed to appreciate the handouts and stickers.

Davis wrote: "I wanted to give you the feedback that it [the analysis of potential allies model presented in the workshop] has been quite helpful for me. Looking around at who attended the Festival on Saturday, I saw that some of the people there were "soft" allies in the process of becoming strong allies. It was extremely encouraging to see that and something I might not have particularly noticed if I hadn't had that model to think about."

Kelowna General Hospital

Several stewards at Kelowna Hospital held successful coffee break parties in different departments. Lanyards and other HSA items were given as door prizes to encourage attendance and were well received.

At one gathering, 30 of the 32 lab techs working attended. Everyone was given a recipe card on which to write their concerns, and 25 responses were received. There was a good discussion about different issues such as Bill 29, displacements, and the various activities HSA is undertaking to fight the actions of the government.

Members also discussed the advantages of being in a union with the protection that they have, particularly when they see what is happening to some of the non-contract employees.

St. John Hospital / Stuart Lake General Hospital

Dana Stark, a medical technologist from Williams Lake, went back to her facility and hosted a wine and cheese party at her home for HSA members. It was fun and well attended. She is spearheading a drive for publicity about the health science professions by assigning people to prepare an article about their profession and work in the hospital for submission to the local paper.

St. Paul's Hospital

At St. Paul's Hospital, a new steward team is developing and has recorded a number of successes. The first step in getting going was a complete reorganization of the stewards' and department contacts' duties. The steward team developed a plan to improve communications among stewards and between stewards, department contacts and members. Anita Bardal has been a key player in helping to get the new St. Paul's Hospital up and running to most effectively represent members.

Bardal arranged for the employer to provide office space and to clean it up, paint and update it. The stewards have held successful, interactive chapter meetings with improved turnouts. Lanyards and other HSA items were given away as door prizes. Two large Run for the Cure Teams were organized for last October's run. Safety stewards have been recruited, and efforts are being concentrated on reactivating the safety committee. St. Paul's had a larger than usual turnout for the regional meeting.

Still with St. Paul's Hospital, steward and social worker Chris Whyte requested a meeting with Hedy Fry in January 2003 to discuss the Romanow Commission Report. The issues he and his colleagues raised included the amount of federal dollars committed to health care, the timeline for convening a first ministers conference on health care, and budgetary expectations regarding health spending for the next fiscal year.

Kootenay Lake District Hospital

Janice Morrison, a physiotherapist and member at large in Region 9, held a successful member mobilizing meeting at her home for members in the region.

They developed a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They also outlined a number of recommendations to get members more active including:

1. Organize child care so people can attend rallies
2. Look for and assist people to run for school board, city council and regional districts.
3. Find out more information about the recall process.
4. Get one or two more chapters to join the local CLC.
5. Track community losses.
6. Use the e-mail network or faxes to keep members up to date with community events and encourage members from other chapters to support each other at events when ever possible.
7. Keep up-to-date with web sites like [Kootenaycuts](#), HSA and [BCFed](#), as well as other unions.

Morrison is arranging to have HSA members attend all of the town hall meetings held by her MP, Jim Gouk in the Kootenays. He is holding a series of meeting from January to March, throughout the area, to talk about the issue of health care. Our members will be lobbying for the full implementation of Romanow.

Cariboo Memorial Hospital

Joan Magee, a lab tech and member at large from Cariboo Memorial, organized the first ever all-HSA member event to improve morale. Her plan is to have a different department organize another event in a few months.

She also made a presentation to a public forum at city hall in January. Three representatives from Interior Health attended, after being put under significant public pressure to make an appearance.

West Coast General Hospital

West Coast General stewards and interested members met with HSA organizer Janice Davis to discuss steward involvement and structure. They agreed to take membership lists back to the departments and update them, and will hold a chapter meeting to share information and hold steward elections. As with many chapters, they are considering how to organize their steward structure to share the work among more members.

John Howard Society

Sharon Geoghegan from John Howard Society wore her HSA lanyard with  a community social services worker  sticker everywhere she went for three days. Many people asked her about it and she used this opportunity to educate them about the impact of the Liberal agenda on community and social services.

Region 10 Member Mobilizing Workshop

The Prince George Member Mobilizing Workshop developed a number of ideas to get the members active:

- Member profiles  local press  tell your stories 
- Pot lucks
- Departmentally-organized social activities
- Organize bulletin boards and have a cartoon feature
- Prize draws
- Article of the month
- Monthly steward meetings
- Death of a small town event
- Dice bingo game

Children's and Women's Hospitals

Stewards from Children's and Women's asked members to wear the  Essential to your Health  stickers distributed by HSA last spring. They also made a display using the stickers from various disciplines and put it in a visible place to publicize the wide range of services that HSA members deliver.

Greater Trail Community Coalition Float

HSA members joined with members from other unions and the public to participate in the Greater Trail community coalition float in the Trail parade.

Mary Hatlevik (chief steward and registered psychiatric nurse) from Trail Regional Hospital has been very active in her community speaking out on the effects of the government cuts.

Queen Alexandra Centre for Children

Anna Morton, chief steward and a social worker at the Queen Alexandra Centre, is participating in the Community Solidarity Coalition in Victoria to counter the Liberal agenda.

Prince Rupert Regional Hospital

Marcela Dudas, a lab tech and HSA member-at-large from Prince Rupert met with her MP Andy Burton (Canadian Alliance) in February as follow-up to the Romanow Commission report. She organized a delegation of six people to attend the meeting. Dudas also organized a group to go to Terrace for a public meeting on health.

Tell us about your group's activities! Contact Leila Lolua (leila@hsabc.org) or Janice Davis (janice@hsabc.org) and share your ideas. You can also phone them at 604 439 0994 (lower mainland) or 1-800 663 2017 (toll free in BC).

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