



BULLETIN

Unions win fight to keep Magnolia House open

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When the management of Magnolia House announced last year that they would be closing the North Vancouver facility, the employees - including twelve HSA members - thought they would be losing their jobs.

In fact, they were issued lay-off notices in April, and many workers had already started the process of displacement job-matching through the Healthcare Labour Adjustment Agency.

But sustained efforts by the three health care unions involved resulted in a solution that will allow Magnolia House to continue providing the much-needed acute psychiatric care its workers provide to the community.

HSA Senior Labour Relations Officer Cheri Henderson said that through an innovative agreement, the lay-off notices have been rescinded. This means Magnolia House employees will be able to retain their jobs.

Magnolia House, opened by the Mennonite Central Committee approximately five years ago, provides six short stay beds for acute adult psychiatric care. "Our members at Magnolia House provide just the kind of care that is becoming increasingly vital in delivering an effective range of care for psychiatric patients," Henderson said.

"This agreement is good news for our members at Magnolia House," she said. "The three health care unions - HSA, BCNU, and HEU - presented a joint proposal to the North Shore Health Region, for the Region to assume the management of the facility. This was a coordinated effort, and we commend the Health Region for their part in this very encouraging outcome," Henderson said.

"An adult psychiatric crisis stabilization unit like Magnolia House provides bridging for patients ready to leave hospital in-patient psychiatry but who need to have appropriate accommodations or assisted living arrangements made. This frees up the beds in hospital that are so critically needed," she said.

Henderson added that Magnolia House also provides care for patients waiting to get admitted to in-patient psychiatry.

As a former social worker with experience in the mental health field, Henderson's understanding of the clinical components and specialized professional services offered by staff at Magnolia House were key elements in bringing about this successful outcome.

Chief Steward Colin Journeaux said that while employees are relieved that they will be able to retain their jobs, there is still an undercurrent of uncertainty for most.

"This employer opened Magnolia House with the best possible intentions," he said. "They came into this because they wanted to give something back to the community, but had no experience with running houses like this. So they eventually decided to close our facility because we were not in their "usual line of business. Most of their other facilities are subsidized or other social housing, which has nothing to do with psychiatric care."

Journeaux said he is looking forward to having a new employer, but his colleagues are understandably apprehensive because there have been so many changes recently at the facility.

"We're very pleased that we're going to be able to continue to provide the great service that we offer. There's nothing else like it on the North Shore," he said.

"We've got people who are very dedicated and passionate about the program we deliver. And we get incredibly good feedback - not only from clients, but from community resources who think very highly of us."

Journeaux said that for his colleagues, HSAs' intervention has made all the difference. "I'd like to thank Cheri for all the work she's done, for a small facility like us. She spent a lot of time dealing with our issues, and worked very hard - and I know it's been difficult for her, with all the other facilities she's working with."

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