

BULLETIN

Union education helps build confidence to serve HSA members

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by CAROLE PEARSON



I've never, ever regretted becoming a chief steward," says Mo Norton, HSA Chief Steward for North Shore Health and Community Services in North Vancouver.

-I honestly haven't had any situations with management that haven't been resolved satisfactorily, even under difficult situations," she said. -It's really nice to go in to a meeting, wearing the hat of an equal, have a discussion and work out an agreement for members that takes some of the stress away."

Norton has worked the past 15 years at the Central Community Health Centre in North Vancouver. She's a program support clerk, providing clerical support for community health care programs.

A year and a half ago, Norton became the chief steward when the position came vacant and there were no other takers.

-I took over the year we went into bargaining," she recalls. -For the first year, I was the only steward in the community and was responsible for five different facilities ... the three health centres [Central, Parkgate, and West] and Kiwanis and Cedarview lodges. I was thrown in very quickly so I took all the union courses I could."

-I was so happy to get the support from HSA office. They are just absolutely amazing people. They really stepped up to the plate and offered me as much education and steward training as I wanted."

Besides her work at the Central Community Health Centre, Norton is a certified drug and alcohol counselor, does advocacy work with youth and seniors, and runs her own financial services business.

-I was able to go in [as a chief steward] fairly strongly thanks to my counseling background," she says. Negotiations and facilitating discussions were familiar territory, and helped make taking on the role of chief steward a little less intimidating. But Norton discovered there was a lot to learn ... and quickly ... about bargaining, essential services, writing bargaining proposals, and developing potential job action plans.

Mo Norton Program Support Clerk Chief Steward Central Community Health Centre
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-The amount of support I got from the HSA office was absolutely huge," she said. -When I had questions, I would call my labour relations officer Lori Horvat ... she is always available for me. If she doesn't have the answer right away, she always gets back to me. I have Julio [Trujillo, HSAs intake officer] on my speed dial. They're all great. HSA has a very strong supportive staff, everyone one of them.

-I've never called someone and not have someone call me back with a satisfactory answer."

In addition to her role as an HSA member and chief steward, Norton participated as a representative at the BC Liberal government's recent *Conversations on Health*. She attended the forum for health care workers held by the government, giving those in the health field an opportunity to raise questions and concerns with ministry officials. Norton was clearly impressed by the level of dialogue presented by her health care colleagues. -It made me happy to be with such intelligent people with such innovative ideas that came out of that *Conversation*. It was spectacular."

Norton also attended a *Conversation on Health* forum for seniors held by North Vancouver- Seymour MLA Dan Jarvis. -That was an experience! The audience was right on top of things." She reported back to HSA on the somewhat raucous meeting. -It was absolutely clear the public wishes to retain the public system. In particular, the seniors were extremely concerned the government was making noises about a two-tier system. Many of the seniors no longer have incomes so they are in situations where they are concerned they won't be able to afford health care should it become privatized." she said. -They built medicare. Seniors deserve to feel secure about the care they'll receive."

Norton is preparing to be HSAs constituency liaison to West Vancouver-Capilano MLA Ralph Sultan, who also happens to be chair of the Select Standing Committee on Health. -HSAs president has spoken with Gordon Campbell with regard to health care shortages, and Campbell had recommended that we provide him with some further information on these shortages. I have some data that has been compiled by the union, so I will take that over to Ralph Sultan and ask him to bring it forward at his meetings."

This past summer, she attended the BC Federation of Labour's Summer Institute for Union Women and was thrilled to be able to speak with BC NDP leader Carole James, former BCTF president Jinny Sims and BC Fed's Angela Schira, -people I look up to."

The numerous workshops included public speaking and training in how to motivate people. Judging from Norton's own enthusiasm, the latter is a course she should be teaching.

-Every time I hear of some education opportunity offered by HSA I take it and I find out how little I know." she laughs. -When I was younger, I couldn't wait to get out of school but now, I love learning and the education and value you get working with HSA - there's nothing else like it." 

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