



BULLETIN

## Social justice at work in community and home

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FIGHTING INEQUALITY, WORKING FOR CHANGE

by LAURA BUSHEIKIN

Like many HSA members, Anne Davis is actively engaged in the fight for social justice. But even the unions most passionate activists might be surprised by how hard Davis is working to advance social justice, human rights, labour, and gender equality.

First of all, there is her job. Davis is program coordinator for the Comox Valley Transition Society, a non-profit organization that runs a womens transition shelter, a public outreach office, and a fundraising thrift store in Courtenay. -A big part of my job is being involved in the community. I sit on a number of coordinating committees that work on issues related to violence against women. Also, I speak out a lot about the inequality of women."

Anne Davis Assistant Chief Steward Program Coordinator Comox Valley Transition Society HSA representative and second vice president, Campbell River, Courtenay & District Labour Council
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Davis appreciates having a job she is passionate about. -Im incredibly lucky to get paid for work I really care about that allows me to be an activist in my community. I dont take that for granted. I know lots of people go to work every day and its a slog and not very meaningful."

Another benefit Davis does not take for granted is the advantage of a unionized workplace. In fact, she was active in the organizing drive when she and her colleagues decided they wanted to join a union. This was back in 1993, soon after Davis started her job.

-We checked out a couple of unions. HSA won hands down. The staff representative who came to talk to us already knew a lot about transition houses, and she brought along a woman who was a steward at the Nanaimo transition house to talk about their experience with HSA. They were both very prepared and knowledgeable.

-We get really good service from HSA," she continues. -The social services sector is just a tiny part of the union ... about five per cent. Yet the union is aware of our issues and respond very quickly if we have problems. I feel we receive the same level of service as the other 95 per cent, and we really appreciate that."

**DAVIS IS THE UNION'S** assistant chief steward at her workplace, and also HSAs representative on the

Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council. She has been on the labour council for over 10 years and is also its second vice president.

The labour council is an umbrella organization made up of delegates from all the local unions. -We get together once a month so we can share information, support each other through job actions, and provide a united voice for labour locally," Davis explained. -Its something I really enjoy because I like to get together with other union activists."

It was at a gathering of union activists many years ago that Davis first realized just how broad and powerful the labour movement could be.

-When I first belonged to a union ... it was BCGEU ... the local rep called me up and invited me to go to the BC Federation of Labour convention. At that time I thought unions were just about decent wages, benefits and working conditions: certainly reasonable things to work for, but pretty specific.

-On the first morning of the convention, I was riding down on the elevator with these steelworkers from Trail. They were great big guys with Steelworker jackets. I had a definite stereotype of who they were and why they were there.

-Well, later one of these guys got up and talked about child care. He talked about an incident where some children at an unlicensed child care facility had burned to death, and he broke down and cried at the microphone; he wept and he talked about the injustice of children not having adequate childcare and about its effect on women and communities as well," she said.

-That completely shattered all my preconceptions. I realized that unions were about more than wages. It was a real eye opener to see how much work unions do around social justice and community issues. It was very inspiring."

**DAVIS IS STILL** learning about the labour movement ... and encouraging others to learn. She has a strong interest in labour history, and for the last couple of years has been the emcee at Miners Memorial Day in Cumberland, a former mining community with a rich labour movement history.

-On Miners Memorial Day we honour local workers and labour activists. People come from across Canada and as far away as Australia. People send wreaths that are laid on the graves of Ginger Goodwin and the miners who died in the mines." Ginger Goodwin was a United Mine Workers labour organizer who was shot by hired private police in 1918. His murder is credited with sparking Canadas first General Strike.

-Labour history is really important," says Davis. -When we go to school we dont learn much about the history of working people. Its all about kings and queens and national leaders. But the history of working people is very interesting; its the history of our own communities."

Davis has attended the Pacific Northwest Labour History Conference three times, thanks to funding from HSAs Madden Memorial Fund. -That funding has allowed me to go to these conferences where I can learn more about labour history and feel more connected to the larger labour movement," she said. She urges other HSA members to take advantage of the Madden Fund, which pays costs associated with travel to educational events.

**FOR THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS**, Davis ... along with her husband, a retired union educator ... have been instrumental in organizing the Comox Valley Mayworks Festival of Labour and the Arts. The festival presents visual art, music, spoken word and theatre about work and peoples working lives.

-Its a really fun way of getting some of the issues out into the community and getting people talking and thinking about them. People go to work every day, five days a week. But there isnt a lot of arts and public commentary about work."

Even in the co-called private sphere of family, Davis is an activist: -Ive got four kids and one has a serious mental illness ... although things are getting much better now. Ive become quite an advocate around the issues of people who are really marginalized, including through mental illness," she said.

Advocating, organizing, leading, coordinating, speaking out: Davis is a busy woman, but shows no signs of slowing down.

-I think in every generation there have been lots of people who work for social justice, and even though theres lots around us that doesnt work, or isnt just, it would be much worse if it werent for those people who get out there and do the work. Im just one of many people and I believe that somewhere, somehow, it does make a difference," she said. 

*For more information about the Madden Memorial Fund, contact HSAs education officer. Information and an application form are available on HSAs website at [www.hsabc.org](http://www.hsabc.org).*

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