



# VOLUME 2 ISSUE 12

PSAC ONTARIO

SPRING 2020

## COVID-19 – Staying Informed



PSAC has created a dedicated COVID-19 webpage with materials to help our members during this crisis. I encourage you to visit this page, which is being continuously updated as new information is released: [psacunion.ca/covid-19](https://psacunion.ca/covid-19).

This page contains information on announcements made by the federal and provincial governments on supports available, funding announcements and legislative changes with respect to COVID-19.

There are also many great websites that offer resources around health and safety protections and mental health services and programs. Here are a few below:

- Workers Health and Safety Centre’s (WHSC) - <https://www.whsc.on.ca/Resources/Publications/COVID-19-Resources>
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety - <https://www.ccohs.ca/topics/hazards/health/pandemics/>
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) - <http://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19>
- Public Health Ontario - <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus>

With announcements being made daily, I know it can be overwhelming for many of us. Your union is here to help, so please reach out with your questions and concerns to our regional staff or to my office (<http://ontario.pvac.com/our-organization/staff>).

Stay safe and let us support each other during this difficult time, together we will get through this.

Sharon DeSousa,  
PSAC Ontario Regional Executive Vice-President



Inside this issue:	
Working on the Front-Line Through a Pandemic	2
2019 Ontario Fall School	3
Services can Continue Without Compromising Safety	4
Racially Visible Conference	5
What do your Union Dues Pay For? Retirees’ Corner	6
Members’ Corner	7
Workers Arts & Heritage Centre Fundraiser Dinner	8
PSAC National Health and Safety Conference	9
Building International Solidarity	10
Queer in the time of COVID -19	11
Breaking the Glass Ceiling Federal Public Sector Workers Step Up	12



## Working on the Front-Line through a Pandemic

Border Services Officers are the first line of defence in protecting the safety of our borders to ensure the wellbeing of Canadians. This March, we have been put to the test after the emergence of the COVID-19 virus in Canada.

As the threat and number of cases in our country increased; we were faced with unprecedented challenges, which included increased passenger numbers, confusing communications and shortages of Personal Protective Equipment.

Through all the uncertainty, our Officers have maintained their professionalism and dealt efficiently with the return of over one million Canadians. Many of those travelers expressed their gratitude for our presence and commented on how good it was to be home.

I have worked on the front line since 1998 and seen many emergency situations. I witnessed planes grounded and lined up on the tarmac after our airspace was closed on 9/11. In 2003, we dealt with the SARS epidemic and several years later, the H1N1 virus. As always, Border Services Officers, as well as the administrative staff who help keep it all running, stepped up to protect the public.

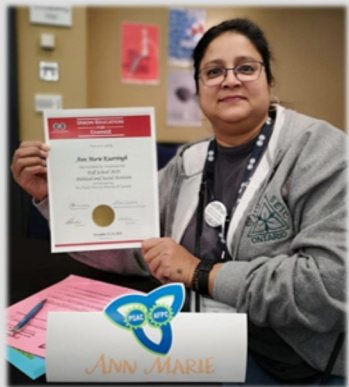
But it's not just our officers that the public rely upon, it's the entire public service. Whether you're on the front line, or behind the scenes making sure people get paid, or ensuring our food and water is still safe, or keeping public transportation moving: We thank you and we stand by you!

Leslie Searl,  
GTA Region 5 Representative





## 2019 Ontario Fall School



PSAC Ontario’s Fall School was held in Toronto from November 19 to 24, 2019. Eighty members had the opportunity to immerse themselves in extensive union training, in an environment that promoted learning, activism and networking.

One of the courses offered was WSIB Level III, which delivered practical skills for representing workers at hearings before the WSIB and the WSIAT. Members reviewed public case files and conducted mock hearings to practice representing members in dispute resolutions.

Stewards were offered the Advanced Representation Training workshop in order to support members with the grievance process. Participants appreciated the focus on the processes and legal framework of grievance handling, as these were the most requested learning activities by stewards.

Other attendees were split between the Political and Social Action and Unions Work for Women training workshops. Both courses provided participants with an understanding of the role and history of the union, as well as the tools and skills required to take effective action.

The workshops were amazing, but I have to say that the best part of the School was spending a week with other PSAC members from across the province; networking and building our power!

Ann Marie Kuarsingh – LGBTQ2+ Representative





## Services can Continue Without Compromising Safety



The decision to close down the Service Canada offices was a big decision and one that I know was fought for by PSAC and my Component, CEIU. This was done to ensure the safety of our members and the public; to make sure we were doing our part to flatten the curve.

The decision to push the government to close Service Canada offices also came after our members had raised concerns over massive volumes of clients flooding the offices, many who declared themselves ill or had just returned from other countries. Tensions were understandably high and there were acts of aggression and threats made to our staff.

However, many media outlets portrayed the closures in a negative light. This was a completely unfair depiction, as Service Canada centres are **NOT** Employment Insurance (E.I.) offices. Service Canada front service staff are also not processors for the programs the clients come in for (CPP, OAS, Passport, etc.). They are receiving agents. They take in documents, review applications and answer questions on the multitude of programs and services offered by Service Canada. This was not stated well in the media and resulted in angering the public who were led to believe that this would impact their E.I. claims.

Often our public service workers are unfairly depicted, despite the tremendous work and sacrifice we make for the good of the public. For example, Service Canada staff have jumped in to take on duties and roles that have never been ascribed to their role to help during this crisis. We are taking calls, assisting with applications, reviewing files and assisting with Employment Insurance and other programs available. Those who work on the front lines serving the public are still here and we will continue to work diligently to help.

Missy Taylor, Regional Women's Committees Representative



## PSAC Ontario Racially Visible Conference



I had the pleasure of being a delegate to the Racially Visible Conference, which took place from February 7-9, 2020. It was such a wonderful experience to be able to be around other equity members from across Ontario. As a second time attendee to this conference, it really felt like being home and around family.

We had the pleasure of having phenomenal speakers throughout the conference, which ended with a powerful talk from the PSAC National Executive Vice-President, Magali Picard. Magali stressed the importance of solidarity as we continue with bargaining and how mobilizing our members is critical to get fair agreements.

Shalane Rooney, Region 2 Northeastern Representative





## What do your Union Dues Pay For?

I have been a union activist for many years. One question I often get asked is what our union dues pay for. Many members think that dues are simply for covering the costs associated with bargaining, but our union does so much more than that!

Here are a few of the areas in which our Union provides support to our members:

- ⇒ Representation of grievances;
- ⇒ Training, education, workshops and conferences;
- ⇒ Participation in areas such as Employment Equity/Equal Opportunity to ensure that members' rights are recognized and respected.
- ⇒ Organizing new workplaces/Locals;
- ⇒ Supporting members who have been the target of harassment or discrimination

In addition, our union undertakes many campaigns that benefit our members and the public. From campaigns that protect public services, fight for environmental protections or to form a national universal childcare program; PSAC is at the forefront in making our society better. Our dues contribute to this important work and have resulted in some of the best collective agreements in the country!

Melanee Jessup, Region 4, Southwestern Ontario Representative, Chair, Education Committee

## Retiree's Corner



**Goodbye Sheila!  
Thank you and  
all the best  
in your  
retirement!!**

Boozhoo>Hello, I am now officially retired from the federal public service. My final workday was on January 22, 2020. I began my career as a casual Grain Weigher for the Canadian Grain Commission in July 1982 (Agriculture Local 30). I was workforce adjusted to Indigenous Services Canada as a Funding Services Officer in June of 2013 (Local 00296 of the Union of National Employees).

As the previous Indigenous representative for PSAC Ontario Council, as well as the National Indigenous People's Circle Ontario Women's rep; I have learned so much and gained many friends over the years. I will miss you all, until we meet again, Miigwech!

Sheila Karasiewicz,

Retired PSAC Member, former Indigenous Representative, Ontario Council





## Why is it important for us to vote YES for a strike?

Voting “Yes” does not mean we are going to go on strike, but it does give our bargaining teams leverage at the negotiations table. A strong strike mandate shows the employer that the membership is ready and willing to take action for a fair agreement. If we have a strong strike mandate, then Treasury Board will be forced to go back to the bargaining table or risk members taking strike action.

If we vote “No” however, we will be sending this government the message that we are not willing to fight and will accept concession after concession. Is this what we want, is this where we want to go? I don’t think so. I think we need to stand strong and show this government that they need to respect the work that we do and give us what we deserve.

Look at how the Phoenix Pay System has destroyed so many families and lives. With four years of suffering under this system, we still come into every day. We deserve to be paid properly and recognized for the sacrifices we have made for the benefit of all Canadians. Please stand with me and vote YES! We need to stand together at this critical time.

Tammy Lucas, Acting President - USJE Local 00039



---

### Members’ Corner

PSAC members—and retirees—across Ontario are doing amazing things! Rallies, parades, training, lobbying MPs, picnics and many more — we want to hear about it! Share your thoughts, tell a story, speak on an issue that’s important to you. We’ve set aside space in every issue for a member’s submission. Articles should be approximately 250 words and pictures are welcome!

Send your submissions to Lino Vieira, PSAC Ontario Region Political Communications Officer, at [vieiral@psac-afpc.com](mailto:vieiral@psac-afpc.com).

**Submissions are welcome anytime!**

---

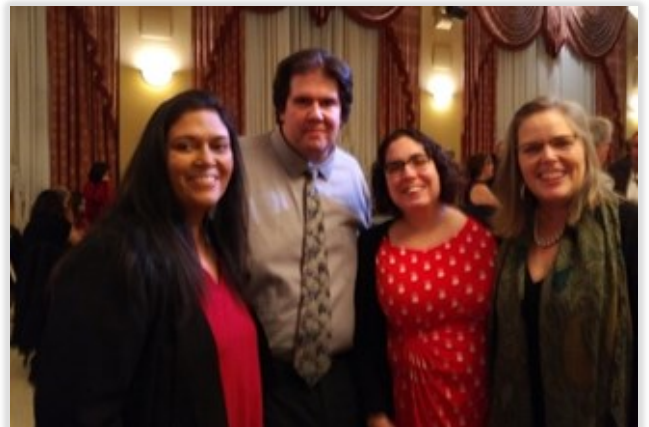


## Workers Arts & Heritage Centre Fundraiser Dinner

PSAC continues to be a strong supporter of the Workers Arts & Heritage Centre (WAHC) in Hamilton. To recognize our partnership, five of our Hamilton members were given tickets to the WAHC fundraiser dinner on November 8, 2019.

The dinner was well attended by a variety of unions in the area. The speakers were fantastic and the buzz in the room carried a common theme - unions are under attack and we need the Labour Movement to stand together in solidarity.

Isabel Wrotkowski, PSAC Hamilton Area Council member







## PSAC National Health and Safety Conference

Attending the National Health and Safety Conference was such a terrific opportunity to learn from fellow activists. We had great workshops and speakers and even had the opportunity to conduct a resolutions debate.

The conference was full of seasoned activists who shared their experiences in promoting health and safety in the workplace, each from a different viewpoint. It was fascinating to hear how different our understanding was on various topics based on where we lived in Canada and who we worked for.

It dawned on me that we have so much work within the umbrella of health and safety and it will forever be evolving. As health and safety activists we need to be constantly upgrading our skills, learning new techniques and adapting to changing workplaces.

Shalane Rooney, Region 2 Northeastern Representative



## Building International Solidarity



In November of 2019, I had the privilege of travelling with a group of activists from the Toronto Airports Workers Council (TAWC) to Seoul, South Korea. There we had the opportunity to meet other trade unionists that work at airports around the world.

On November 9th, our delegation visited a local cemetery and learned about the sacrifice of Jeon Tae-il, a 22-year old factory worker who lit himself aflame outside of his workplace on November 13th, 1970. He did this in protest of the terrible working conditions in Korea. His mother would go on to take up his cause after his death, helping a movement to improve working conditions for all. He is remembered every year in South Korea with a workers' day rally. We attended the rally in the streets of Seoul with over 100,000 people participating from all employment sectors. To say that it was moving to participate in a march with so many workers would be an understatement.

It was difficult to hear the tragic stories of many of the international union activists who have to fear for their safety or work under the threat of imprisonment due to their union involvement. For example, in Indonesia, worker groups still have to organize in secret, due to the potential of imprisonment. We are fortunate to have a legacy of rights and protections in Canada, thanks to the tireless work of the labour heroes that came before us.

Personally, it was an honour to meet so many like-minded activists from around the globe. I look forward to seeing many of them again through my union work and in my travels!

Leslie Searl, Region 5 GTA Representative





## Queer in the time of COVID-19

As COVID-19 surges through local and global communities, our LGBTQ2+ members are facing a unique set of challenges. While not at a higher risk of catching COVID-19 than the general population, the LGBTQ2+ community is disproportionately affected in times of crisis, because our needs are often ignored by the government and our employers.

Experts agree that social distancing (including self-isolation), is essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19 and preventing our healthcare system from being overburdened. However, social distancing may also lead to a lack of access to specific types of healthcare and community supports. It may also lead to individuals being forced to stay in a hostile living environment, or a rise in mental health issues.

The strength and positivity of the LGBTQ2+ community is rooted in social responsibility and connection; so how do we stay emotionally and spiritually connected while maintaining social distancing?

If you can join an online group that is dedicated to mutual aid and community care during the pandemic, please do so. You can also volunteer to make doorstep deliveries for people in quarantine without risking infection or transmission. Where possible, continue to patronize local queer artists and small businesses and use online tools such as Zoom or Skype to stay connected with family and friends.

Ann Marie Kuarsingh – LGBTQ2+ Representative

### Resources

[Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#): This site is designed to provide information and suggestions about coping strategies. It is not intended to be a resource for people who require screening for COVID-19 or are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please contact 911 immediately or present to your nearest emergency department.

[Canada.ca](#): The government of Canada site that provides information on the current situation; your health; financial and economic support; travel, safety and security; and provides a number of resources to help you through the pandemic.

**Why The Coronavirus Is Triggering Mental Health Issues:**

Despair	Mindset switch from "living" to "survival"	Triggers feelings of hopelessness
Increased health anxiety		Decreased job security
Fear for loved ones lives		Promotes social withdrawal
Decreased financial security		Loneliness

Quarantine makes it more difficult to distract oneself from existing mental health issues

**Coronavirus isn't just threatening our physical health, but our mental health too. Look after it. Please share to raise awareness.**

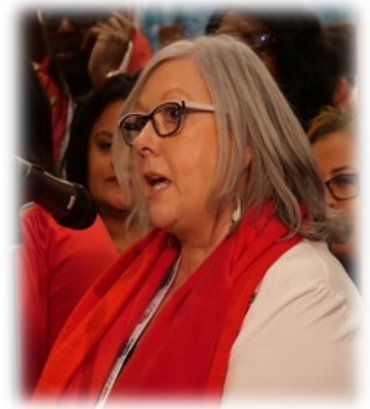
@RealDepressionProject



## Breaking the Glass Ceiling

Representation and a celebration of diversity is integral to a strong labour movement. Unions have always been at the forefront of progressive change and champions of human rights.

In November 2019, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) held their biennial Convention in Toronto. In historic fashion, Patty Coates became the first woman ever to be elected to the position of President of the OFL. This momentous occasion has contributed to breaking the glass ceiling of Canada's largest federation of labour and is an important milestone in our province's history. Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions across our society and milestones such as these help to create space for greater inclusion.



With over a thousand delegates in attendance, the convention theme of the "Power of Many" was in full display. This was especially true when the delegation marched to Queen's Park to protest the countless cuts by the Ford government.

With Patty leading the way, along with Secretary-Treasurer Ahmad Gaied and Executive Vice-President Janice Folk-Dawson, our march exemplified the commitment of the labour movement in Ontario to fight against this government's austerity agenda, which is especially devastating to marginalized groups.

Sharon DeSousa, PSAC Ontario Regional Executive Vice-President

---

## Federal Public Sector Workers Step Up

On March 25, 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), to aid Canadians who had lost their jobs due to the measures taken to battle COVID-19.

This massive undertaking wouldn't have been possible in most situations, however, federal public service workers are accustomed to sudden changes in government policy and are fast on their feet. When the call came for volunteers to assist the workers in the call centres to provide support to the millions of Canadians who would be applying for this benefit, federal workers immediately raised their hands and said, "I will!"

Across the country, 9,000 workers volunteered, including 1,700 in Ontario. They picked up laptops and desktops, were assigned phones and on April 3rd, just days after the announcement, they settled down to do what they had signed up to do — provide service to Canadians. Within the first two hours alone, 113,000 applications were processed!

Comments from the public are overwhelmingly positive; they have been pleasantly surprised at the ease of the process and how helpful and friendly staff has been. Public service workers know we're all in this together and we will continue to provide the support and service Canadians need.

Melanee Jessup, Region 4, Southwestern Ontario Representative