



VOLUME 2 ISSUE 13

PSAC ONTARIO

FALL/WINTER 2020

The People of Ontario Demand Change!



We are nine months into a radically transformed world, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The consequences of which continue to impact each of us in similar, and yet very different ways. It is no secret that the working poor, often racialized, have suffered the brunt of the economic and health impacts of this virus; while the rich have become richer.

Throughout this time, we have seen the Ontario government deliver their message of wanting to protect citizens and help our healthcare workers get us through this crisis. Our healthcare system had been stretched thin for years by consecutive government cuts, but now it is truly overburdened by the spread of this virus.

Premier Ford has often praised the efforts of our healthcare workers, yet his actions tell a much different story. His government has slashed healthcare funding and interfered in collective bargaining for nurses, doctors and health practitioners; delivering unjust legislation that minimized any contract gains.

The hypocrisy of this Premier is infuriating. This Progressive Conservative government has called our minimum wage workers “heroes”, while having stopped the rise in minimum wage and taken away their paid sick days. We cannot and will not forget what this government has done to working people.

Let’s take action! This pandemic won’t stop us from organizing, mobilizing and demanding progressive change for workers. I know it’s hard that we can’t get together, that we can’t attend conferences, events and rallies; everything we were used to as union activists. But this new reality for the Labour Movement means that we have to adapt and change the way we fight. Our voices cannot be silent. We must continue to push for progressive change because we owe it to ourselves and to the next generation.

So I ask you, whether it’s a phone call or an email to your local politician, participating in a phone bank, a virtual meeting, or a letter writing campaign. Please continue to stay involved, because it matters! We can build a better world and it’s time to demand the changes we need to make this happen.

Craig Reynolds, PSAC Ontario Regional Executive Vice-President



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Mental Health - When It All Seems to Be Falling Apart

Approximately 30% of people living in Ontario experience a mental health or addiction problem at some point in their lives. However, now with the circumstances we are facing, with the pandemic, climate change and vast changes in our daily lives; it is vital that we have access to critical mental health resources.



Through your employer, if you or a family member require mental health support, federal employees (and some others) have access to the following (<http://psacunion.ca/covid-19-mental-health-resources-cope>):

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP);
- Extended health benefits (services of psychologists and psychiatrists);
- Sick leave as provided in your collective agreement;
- Long Term Disability – you may file a claim for extended absences due to mental health issues

In addition to employer-provided help, the following resources are free and confidential:

- Telehealth Ontario [1-866-797-0000](tel:1-866-797-0000) to speak to a registered nurse. 
- ConnexOntario provides treatment service information if you have problems with gambling, drugs, alcohol or mental health: [1-866-531-2600](tel:1-866-531-2600) [Live web chat](#). 
- Together All (<https://togetherall.com/en-ca/>) is an online community that offers free, peer-to-peer support for anyone dealing with anxiety, depression or other mental health issues. 
- Kids Help Phone For children and youth: [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868) to speak with a professional counselor or Text: CONNECT to 686868 to connect with a trained volunteer Crisis Responder. 
- Good2Talk provides confidential support services for post-secondary students (17-25 years of age) [Good2Talk 1-866-925-5454](tel:1-866-925-5454) to speak with a professional counsellor. 
- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) (<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19>). 
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, offers lots of education opportunities and information: https://www.ccohs.ca/topics/hazards/health/pandemics/#ctqt_wb-auto-6 

In the event of an emergency or if you or someone you know is in immediate danger, please call 911 or go to your nearest hospital or emergency department

Even though we may be separated from our co-workers, friends and family, we need to find ways to connect and ask for help. There are so many unknowns right now, but we should never doubt that there are people and services that are here to help us.

Sara Johnson, Region 4 (Southwestern) Representative



Social Distancing Activism



COVID-19 did not prevent the labour movement from celebrating Labour Day in Hamilton. The PSAC Hamilton Area Council was proud to participate in the 2020 Labour Day car caravan and socially distanced tailgate hosted by the Hamilton District Labour Council. The car caravan travelled from Hamilton City Hall, through the city to the Starlite Drive-In in Stoney Creek.

Although we were unable to hold the traditional Labour Day BBQ to celebrate with our members, the car caravan and tailgate was a wonderful experience, while respecting social distancing rules.

Watch the video of the event featuring appearances by PSAC members Ingrid Ritums, Gina Degner and Sandra Harrington: (<https://youtu.be/smBHON6HBFg>).

The video also includes appearances by several prominent individuals in our community, including: Hamilton Centre MPP and Leader of the Ontario New Democrats, Andrea Horwath; Matthew Green, Hamilton Centre MP; Hamilton District Labour Council President, Anthony Marco; and Hamilton Ward 3 City Councillor, Nrinder Nann.

Matthew Freeland, Region 6 (Hamilton/Niagara) Representative





Joint Learning Program (JLP) – Empowering Conversations Discussion Series

The JLP's Empowering Conversations series creates spaces for focused, honest discussions about the impact the pandemic has had on employees and their families. In a series of facilitated conversations, employees and their managers will discuss their different situations, ongoing stressors during the pandemic, and ways of moving forward and rebuilding the workplace in the post COVID-19 world.

As with all JLP learning events, the target audience is employees of the core public administration which includes unionized employees and their supervisors/managers. In order to ensure the most effective conditions for fruitful discussions, these sessions are designed for intact work teams of no more than 15 participants.

JLP Facilitators representing the Union & Employer will co-facilitate these sessions. Our facilitators are activists and collaborative role models who play a strong function in creating and maintaining healthy and safe workplaces in the federal public service. This year has been a year of change for the JLP, as we created and launched this Series and for our Facilitators as they adjust their in-person facilitation skills to the virtual environment. In the Ontario/Nunavut Region, we have delivered over 100 sessions to date, with more than 30 scheduled in the coming weeks.

Visit: <https://jlp-pam.ca/discussion-eng> for more information and to submit a request. You can also connect with Ryan Winger wingerr@psac-afpc.com or Teresa Morgan morgant@psac-afpc.com for more information.



JOINT
LEARNING
PROGRAM



PROGRAMME
D'APPRENTISSAGE
MIXTE



Ontario Council Members' Bios



My name is Trevis Carey and I am pleased to rejoin Ontario Council as one of the Region 2 Northeastern Ontario Representatives. I live in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, and began my career in the public service in 1992. I am currently the Vice President of the Union of Veteran Affairs Employees Local 0043, and the Co-Chair of our Local's Health and Safety Committee.

Previously, I was very active on the Education Committee for Ontario Council, fighting hard to ensure the best quality of education is provided to as many of our members as possible.

I am pleased to now sit on the Ontario Council Health & Safety Committee. As a member with hidden disabilities, I understand how difficult it can be to request accommodation in the workplace and have taken Duty to Accommodate and other health and safety training to be able to assist our members. I believe in accommodation needs being met for all and the end of racism and discrimination in all of its forms.

Trevis Carey, Region 2 (Northeastern) Representative



If you are a new activist in Kingston, it will not be long before you cross paths with Chris Snooks, PSAC Kingston Area Council President, UNDE 641 Chief Steward and now Region 3 (Southeastern) Representative on Ontario Council. If an information table needs a volunteer, a rally needs a great sign, or a politician needs to be put on notice, Chris is there.

After a heart attack in July, it would have been understandable if Chris stepped back from volunteer work. But for Chris, labour activism is about a fight for life – the right to a dignified, happy existence. When first meeting him, you quickly learn that the fight is important to Chris.

Raised in Kingston, he has seen first-hand how the community has grown into a comfortable place for the privileged on the backs of the poor. His empathy for those with less, shines through in his moments of frustration – in a recent Kingston Whig Standard article covering a homelessness protest, Chris stated bluntly, *“I am tired of watching this city council do sweet dick all!”*

2020 has been a different year, not just because of the heart attack, but the changing face of activism in Kingston. There is a sense of rejuvenation around the core values that justify our work. From LGBTQ2+ equality to Indigenous land rights, homelessness, anti-racism and beyond, Chris might be considered a “completionist” when it comes to solidarity. His tireless allyship has earned him the trust of a diverse coalition of activists in Kingston, and the friendship of many. So, we say “Cheers!”, to many more years, with our brother and friend, Chris Snooks!



Sean McNeill, 2nd Vice President, PSAC Kingston Area Council 2nd Vice President



Members' Corner

Justice 4 Black Lives...And we Rise



2020 has been a year of upheaval; reality has been thrown into question. In this turmoil, with a reduced human footprint the planet has taken a breath. Humanity had a chance to see what a reduced footprint would look like, and racism, as ever, reared its ugly head, except this time, everyone was watching.

The joke goes: "They don't tell you black lives don't matter... They hit you with that slick shit; 'ALL LIVES MATTER'. Really, Semantics? That would be like if your wife came to you and was like; 'Do you love me?' 'Baby, I love everybody, what are you talking about? I love all of god's creatures, you're no different.'" (Michael Che, Netflix)

Ahmaud Aubrey, George Floyd and Breanna Taylor: Last year they were strangers to us all, but now we know these names that sparked a worldwide discussion on systemic anti-Black racism. These horrific murders, captured on video for all to see, have sparked outrage, a sense of injustice and deep pain.

For the first time, the world stood outraged and united in their condemnation of the treatment of Black people in America. This also helped spark a movement here in Niagara Falls, Ontario and "Justice 4 Black Lives" was born. Sherri Darlene created this new organization, which has resulted in an exhibit at the Niagara Falls History Museum, from Sept. 26 to Jan. 10, 2021, titled "And We Rise".

Dian Wright,
Union of Taxation Employees Local 00016—St. Catharines

#Justice4BlackLives
Niagara Falls, Ontario
Peaceful Demonstration



Demonstrators to stand 6'ft apart on sidewalk along Victoria Ave
On both sides of the road starting at Hwy-420 entrance
Asking all participants to wear black to show unity
sherridarlene@gmail.com
Bring your sign
Be a part of the fight for change





Solidarity and Anti-Racism



In July 2020, PSAC National held a webinar titled: “*An introduction to anti-racism for White folks*”, designed to raise awareness of systemic and institutional racism. The webinar focused on the inherent benefits White people receive based merely on their skin colour; due to the historical biases within how our institutions and systems of power were created.

Within days, almost a thousand members registered to participate. A significantly smaller group however, felt that the title using “white folks” was a form of discrimination and campaigned against the offering of this webinar.

I believe it’s important to ask ourselves the hard questions, especially if they make us uncomfortable. We should also remember that we, as individuals, are not the system or institutions that govern our lives. Author Robin DiAngelo wrote “The simplistic idea that racism is limited to individual intentional acts committed by unkind people is at the root of virtually all white defensiveness on this topic.”

We need to move away from the binary concept that acknowledging racism is admitting racist behaviour. We should focus instead on moving forward with dismantling these racist systems and ensuring equitable treatment for all. We are stronger when we stand together.

Ann Marie Kuarsingh, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans, Queer and 2-Spirit Members Representative



Paige Galette (left) and Nora Loreto, panelists, “*An introduction to anti-racism for White folks*”



Members’ Corner

PSAC members—and retirees—across Ontario are doing amazing things and 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.

Submissions are welcome anytime!



PSAC Ontario Fall/Winter Education

COVID-19 has meant that we've had to make adjustments to how we do virtually everything and that includes Union education. Because of our need to maintain social distancing, face-to-face and in-person education is not currently possible, so the Education Committee of Ontario Regional Council is providing a Fall/Winter schedule consisting of webinars.

This new format will provide an opportunity for hundreds of members to attend each training session delivered. Check back on the PSAC Ontario Education page, <http://ontario.psic.com/events/courses>, for the Winter offerings.

Melanee Jessup, Region 4 (Southwestern) Representative

Health and Safety 101

Saturday November 21, 11:00 am to 1:00 pm
Register - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7520810577636625936> by November 18.

- Employer responsibilities
- Workers' rights and responsibilities
- Best practices
- Occupational Health and Safety principles

Return to Work, Part 1

Wednesday, November 25, 2020 - 7:00pm
Register - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1609880047254584080> by November 23.

Saturday, November 28, 2020 - 11:00am
Register - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2870915430730350606> by November 25.

- Moving forward in this current climate
- Provincial & Federal legislation
- What Health and Safety committees should be doing
- How we build the union

PSAC 101

Tuesday, November 24, 6:00 to 8:00 pm
Register - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7118215599229812494> by November 20.

An introduction to your Union:

- Structure
- The membership
- The Union Advantage
- How to get help

Return to Work, Part 2

December 2, 2020 - 7:00pm
Register - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3021186784410928400> by November 30.

Saturday, December 5, 2020 - 11:00am
Register - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4381646606319591181> by December 2.

- Moving forward in this current climate
- What Employers Unions and H&S committees should be considering
- Understanding the fear of returning to the workplace and Helping members navigate it
- What a return to work plan should look like

Union Trivia Game

Wednesday, December 16, 7:00 to 9:00 pm
Register - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/400137980815208461> by December 14.

Compete online in real time! Members create teams and compete for the bragging rights of being the champions of PSAC Ontario Trivia! Watch the Education page for more details.