

NEWS Community Social Services Awareness Month: Honouring our members' commitment

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BURNABY—March is Community Social Services (CSS) Awareness Month. As the world marks the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, CUPE BC honours and appreciates the more than 3,500 CUPE members who work in community social services. These include community support workers for the developmentally challenged, employment counsellors, addiction counsellors, legal advocates, early childhood educators and more.

B.C.'s frontline community social service workers and agencies help build safe and caring communities that support everyone when they need it—especially our most vulnerable citizens. Community social services are critical to B.C.'s safety net because they help make sure that people in need don't fall through the cracks.

The work CUPE CSS members do has become all the more critical during this global pandemic. In these times of crisis, already vulnerable clients experience increased mental and emotional stress around loss of income, access to housing, social distancing, and other challenges. This increases the burden for the community social service workers who are there to help them.

“Since the pandemic was declared we've seen a big increase in overtime, with some of our members putting in 60-to-80-hour weeks,” says CUPE BC CSS Committee member Bob Crozier, a CUPE 523 member who works at the Turning Points emergency centre in Vernon. “They're putting in these extra hours while facing a number of challenges imposed by COVID-19.”

Challenges include training clients in various COVID protocols, and stress caused by fatigue, general safety concerns, and increased isolation—for both clients and staff—as a result of staff shortages and social distancing. Home visits for outreach programs have been severely curtailed by provincial health orders. And staff working in residential treatment programs for children face uncertainty over parental decisions on whether to keep kids at home or in the program full-time.

CUPE CSS members are expected to work, and they keep on working—some despite having yet to receive pandemic pay and despite uncertainty around safety issues. Community social service workers keep on providing these vital public services because they are committed to helping people. That's why they're the heart and soul of our communities.

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