



a Living Wage Campaign

Because work should lift you out of poverty,
not keep you there.

“THIS IS A WORKSHOP FOR OUR FUTURE, FOR OUR KIDS.” THAT WAS THE MESSAGE FROM ONE OF THE 13 HEU MEMBERS WHO ATTENDED THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF LIVING WAGE OUTREACH TRAINING WORKSHOPS IN LATE SEPTEMBER.

Outreach training workshops build confidence and momentum

The living wage working group has organized six more workshops throughout October, as part of the plan to build strong teams of members who are ready to take the campaign out to their communities.

“We have to work in unity, working by yourself you can’t make your dreams come true,” said one member, when asked why she wanted to attend the workshop.

Another member told the group, “We need to stand up for ourselves [because] we are trying to build a better family and community and life for the next generation.”

The workshops were facilitated by the living wage campaign outreach coordinator Priti Shah and working group member Cora Mojica. Priti and Cora spent the three-hour session helping members brainstorm ways to

expand the campaign into their communities and create a groundswell of support for workers’ rights to earn living wages.

“Who can be a voice for us and

support this campaign?” Priti asked the participants. “How will we explain to them that our campaign is important, not just for us, but for our families and communities?”

Participants, who came from St Paul’s, Vancouver General and Children’s and Women’s hospitals, talked about organizations and individuals who might be interested in the campaign’s issues and could be supporters.

Some members decided to talk to their church leaders. Oth-

ers named immigrant organizations and community activists, whom they thought would sign on to the campaign’s call for living wages and improved working conditions for HEU members employed by Sodexho, Aramark and Compass.

As one housekeeper pointed out, support service workers perform some of the most dangerous and dirty jobs in health care.

She said, “We have an important responsibility, but we don’t get fair pay.”

At the end of the workshop, participants had divided into two action teams. Each team set a meeting date and location so they could prepare to go out to their communities and talk about the importance of the campaign. Priti assured the teams that they would have lots of support from HEU, including information kits and training for making presentations.

With less than one year until contracts with Sodexho, Aramark and Compass expire, all the workshop participants were eager to take action.

“My expectation,” said one member, “is that we will win what we are fighting for.”

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Members of the Living Wage Working Group gather at the HEU Provincial Office for their monthly meeting.



Bill 29 and the Living Wage Campaign

On June 8, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down key parts of *Bill 29* – the 2002 B.C. government law that contracted out the cleaning and dietary support services in hospitals and health care facilities in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island.

HEU is in the early stages of negotiations with government to determine how the Court decision will be implemented.

Many HEU members who work for Sodexho, Aramark and Compass have wondered what this decision will mean for their job security and the living wage campaign.

HEU is committed to representing the interests of all its members, in the workplace and at the bargaining table.

HEU members who work in contracted services know better than anyone the damage that privatization has caused to wages, working conditions and health care delivery. That's why HEU supports the public delivery of health services and is working to ensure that current and past members who want to work in health care have an opportunity to do so. There is a serious shortage of health care workers in B.C. so we can't afford to lose experienced people.

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The living wage campaign has a very important role to play. It will raise public awareness about the low pay, unsafe working conditions, high rates of turnover, inadequate training and short staffing caused by contracting out.

And the living wage campaign will help ensure that workers receive better wages and working conditions – whether through bargaining with Sodexho, Aramark and Compass or through negotiations with government.

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What exactly is a “living wage”?

When asked, many members will tell you that a living wage means they can get by with just one job, means a better future for their children, more time with family, less emotional stress and a little extra money to save for a rainy day. But what about the actual wage rate?

There is currently a team of independent researchers working on a specific living wage calculation. This number will be based on the cost of living for the region. It is expected that their research will be released in early 2008. However, this wage rate does not determine what HEU members can ask for at the bargaining table.

The phrase “living wage” represents what all workers deserve from their jobs – access to a decent and dignified standard of living.

It's important to remember that members who work for Sodexho, Aramark and Compass will elect representatives to attend a bargaining conference this spring. It is this conference that will decide what wage rates the bargaining committee asks for in negotiations with the employer.

Most importantly, the term “living wage” is a powerful concept. The phrase “living wage” represents what all workers deserve from their jobs – access to a decent and dignified standard of living.

What is the Living Wage campaign?

Living wage campaigns involve community groups, faith groups, multi-cultural organizations, anti-poverty advocates, women's groups and the labour movement – working together to be a strong voice in support of decent and dignified wages and working conditions.

Campaigns have been very successful in the United States and England. In one British hospital, workers were able to bring their cleaning positions back in-house with big improvements to their wages, benefits and workload. In the U.S., over 130 cities have passed living wage laws, which require companies who receive public contracts – like the ones between health authorities and Sodexho, Aramark and Compass – to pay their workers fair, family-supporting wages.



Campaign kicks into high gear with member outreach teams, a living wage petition and more

With less than one year until HEU members bargain their second collective agreement with Sodexho, Aramark and Compass, the living wage campaign working group and outreach teams are picking up speed.

Outreach training workshops are preparing teams of members to gather community support for the campaign's message that all workers deserve decent, dignified wages and working conditions.

All HEU members are being asked to gather signatures on a new living wage petition that calls on the health authorities to “fulfill their mandate to promote strong and healthy communities by ensuring their cleaning and food service workers have access to living wages and safe working conditions.”

The campaign is also preparing a video series, as well as public presentations to show the impacts of low wages on personal and family lives, patient care and community health.



Top: Vancouver Central Sodexho local potluck.
Left: HEU members listen to speaker Carmencita Karagdag.
Right: Carmencita Karagdag speaks at interfaith event.

Working group keeps busy over summer months

In June, the Vancouver Central Sodexho local hosted a potluck for members employed by Sodexho, Aramark and Compass to get together, share a meal, and learn more about the campaign. The event was a success, attended by about 30 members, including Vancouver Coastal Regional Vice-President Kevin O'Neil.

In July, HEU president Fred Muzin attended a barbecue organized by the Compass Nanaimo local. Fred answered members' questions about the role of the living wage campaign and the significance of the Supreme Court's decision on *Bill 29*.

In August, HEU members from locals around the Lower Mainland organized an event featuring well-known Filipino activist Carmencita Karagdag. She spoke about the connections between struggles for dignity and human rights in the Philippines and those in Canada. Karagdag was in Vancouver as part of the Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movements. The Institute also hosted a day-long workshop on interfaith organizing for living wages.

In August, HEU members from locals around the Lower Mainland organized an event featuring a speaker from the Philippines

In September, the living wage campaign was featured in an article for *Our Times* magazine, a national publication focused on labour and social justice issues. The Labour Day edition of *Burnaby Now* also published a story about the campaign, which featured an interview with campaign working group member Natividad Basa, who talked about the impact of low wages on her family and personal life.

At a recent national living wage conference, HEU research staff shared stories from our own campaign and learned about the amazing work in Canada and the United States to build movements of workers, who are standing up for their rights to living wages and safe working conditions.

“A living wage means you don’t run out of money at the end of the month.”



“A living wage means you can afford to start a family.”



“A living wage means you don’t have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet.”



“A living wage means you can plan for a secure retirement.”

