



HEU's Living Tree for Living Wages spreads messages of hope

HEU's Living Wage Campaign continues to educate the public about the impact poverty-level wages have on workers, their families and communities.



In mid-December, living wage activists brought the *Living Tree for Living Wages* to Surrey Memorial, Children's and Women's, Vancouver General and Lions Gate hospitals. They invited low-income workers to decorate a holiday tag to place on the tree with messages about what a living wage would mean to them.



HEU Provincial Executive member Louella Vincent, who is part of the union's living wage working group, donned a Christmas tree costume and let members post their message tags on her for all to read.

A photographer from the *North Shore News* checked out the action at Lions Gate Hospital on December 16.

In recent weeks, our allies at the Living Wage for Families Campaign – along with 54 organizations representing more than 300,000 British Columbians – sent an open letter to Metro Vancouver civic election candidates urging them to support and adopt a living wage policy to ensure that all city staff and contracted workers be paid a living wage.



And on Vancouver Island, the District 69 Living Wage for Families Coalition held a public forum on living wages with municipal candidates from Parksville, Qualicum and the Regional District of Nanaimo.

More than 100 candidates were receptive to the concept. You can read more about this at www.livingwageforfamilies.ca.



Prior to the municipal elections, the Columbia Institute polled voters throughout British Columbia. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents said they would support a living wage bylaw in their communities.

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For B.C. businesses interested in learning more about the living wage employer program, the Living Wage for Families Campaign has launched a new website (www.lwemployers.ca) with useful tools, including videos, general information about the program and its participants, and details on how to calculate benefits packages into the living wage figure. HEU became a living wage employer in April 2011.

Since our last newsletter, living wage campaigns have been launched in Kelowna and Cranbrook, B.C., plus Kingston and Hamilton, Ontario (living wage calculated at \$14.95/hr). City of North Vancouver Councilor Craig Keating introduced a living wage initiative that was passed unanimously at a council meeting in September. This motion invites all three municipalities on the North Shore to explore calculating a living wage to address the high cost of living in the community.



Living wage calculations have now been released in Kamloops (\$17.27/hr), Abbotsford (\$16.42/hr) and Kelowna (\$16.98/hr). Parksville/Qualicum and the Sunshine Coast will be releasing their calculations soon.

(photo) Vancouver Public Library Living Wage Forum: *Joey Hartman, president, Vancouver & District Labour Council; Gurpreet Pabla, legal advocate, Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society; HEU member Luiza Leite, Aramark housekeeper at Lions Gate Hospital; and Pastor Brian Heinrich, Lutheran Urban Mission Society.*

Globalization and migrant workers conference

In November, the Hari Sharma Foundation and labour partners, including the B.C. Federation of Labour and the Canadian Farmworkers' Union, hosted the *Globalization and Migrant Labour Conference: Focus on South Asia* at SFU's downtown Vancouver campus, attended by some HEU Living Wage Campaign members.

The three-day conference brought together sociology and anthropology professors, scholars and activists from around the world to discuss the exploitation of immigrant workers (including temporary foreign workers and domestic workers, such as “nannies”), labour rights and policies, poverty; class, race and gender discrimination, and post-9/11 Islamophobia. There was also a lecture on the progressive steps sex-trade workers in India have taken to organize themselves as a collective and educate their children. Guest speakers came from Canada, the U.S., Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Nepal and the Philippines.

One of the most powerful sessions was a short video featuring a Sri Lankan migrant worker named Ariyawathie who was savagely abused while employed as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. Her story can be viewed at

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vql20WHj9jQ>>.

