

your Table Officers & Stewards

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Brenda-Lee Johnstone

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Vice-President: Donna Janzen
Steward: Rosemarie Hendrickson

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President: Ashleigh Chudobiak
Chief Steward: Shelley Wiggins
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Stewards: Claudette Dorge, Alysha Fox, Alexandra Guemili, John Helliari, Charlene Hogg, Leza Jacques, Nola Miller, Juanita Pomareda, Wesley Whiteside

Local 48, Area 8
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Steward: Kim Beardy

MGEU Continues Work on Behalf of Social Sciences Component

As your new Component Director, I'd like to thank you for taking a moment to catch up on the latest news from your Component. Social Sciences continue to face some major challenges, including media scrutiny, staffing shortages coupled with increasing workloads, and workplace health and safety issues.

The reality is that we have many members worrying about cutbacks and unrealistic job expectations. The fear is real not only in our Component but in many others as well. Throughout the Civil Service, we're seeing lengthy delays in hiring and term positions not being extended. Of course, these things all have an impact on service delivery.

I can tell you that MGEU leadership continues to work hard on our behalf to make the government aware of the true cost of such constraints on front line services.

A few weeks ago, MGEU President, Michelle Gawronsky, along with several MGEU representatives met with Manitoba Finance Minister Stan Struthers to present recommendations about maintaining strong front-line services, finding savings in the upcoming provincial budget, and identifying revenue sources.

They made 15 recommendations, including three that would directly affect our Component:

1. Address workloads for social workers in the child welfare system by adding positions to achieve a better resource balance in favour of front line care.
2. Commit to maintaining front line services, even if it means a longer time frame to balance the budget. No wholesale reduction of public sector services, wages and employees as seen elsewhere in Canada. Manitoba must honour its "no lay-off" pledge in spirit and in practice.
3. Modernize current balanced budget legislation and do away with rigid requirements which put key services at risk during a severe economic downturn while



Social Sciences Component Back Row (L-R): Diego Garcia, Wendy Hardy, Amanda Russell, Brenda-Lee Johnstone (Component Director), Loren Findlay (staff rep)
Front Row (L-R): Jan Henley, Ashleigh Chudobiak, Melody Jones
Missing: Misty Bousquet, Sharon Cheung, Luis Coelho, Barbara Korman, Donna Tumak, Crystal Wilson

eliminating American-style referendums for tax changes.

As part of the presentation, the MGEU presented recent public polling data that identified protecting public services and jobs as Manitobans' overwhelming 2013 budget priority.

It's nice to know that we have the public on our side. The challenge of course is then for people to make the connection between maintaining and improving services and the need for adequate revenue, or at the very least, to convince the government that now is not the time to worry about having a balanced budget.

You can go to www.mgeu.ca/news/article/1978 to read the brief, *Services First: Commonsense Proposals for the 2013 Manitoba Budget*, in its entirety.

Along with our table officers and stewards, we will continue to work on ensuring that we have a strong voice in the years ahead as we continue to face these tough times.

If you have any questions or concerns, I am available through our Resource Centre at 1-866-982-6438, or by email at bod-socsci@mgeu.ca.

In Solidarity,

Brenda-Lee Johnstone,
Social Sciences Director, MGEU

Family Services Activists, Reps Meet with *Protegra* to Discuss Concerns

IN JANUARY, we heard from several Family Services & Labour members (EIA & CFS) with concerns about *Protegra*, a Winnipeg business consulting firm the Province had hired to evaluate the efficiency of services and make recommendations to Government on improvements to service delivery.

Those who contacted us felt strongly that front-line staff had little understanding of what this project was all about — and what they did know left them afraid it was all part of the current wave of budget constraints and strained resources departments are experiencing right now. They told us many members did not feel properly informed as to the rationale or goals of what was obviously an extensive initiative, leaving everyone leery that once again, the Province was pursuing a top-down approach to change.

In response to your requests, we brought up the *Protegra* project at the last Joint Council meeting with the Province. As a result, they agreed to set up a meeting of MGEU activists and staff reps and *Protegra* to discuss the project in detail and share some of the union members' concerns.

In a nutshell, here is what we learned when we spent the afternoon with two *Protegra* reps on Tuesday, February 5, 2013.

1. The Province hired them in July 2012 to initiate a “transformation change” project that would explore better service delivery options within current budget parameters.
2. Throughout the “diagnostic” phase, they met with management and front-line staff in different areas of the province. They described many meetings as “ad-hoc,” or based on who happened to be available at certain times.
3. They described the project as proceeding on two tracks:
 - a) they were compiling and reviewing existing reports along with feedback from the diagnostic process;
 - b) a “transformation team” of management and selected front-line staff would spend eight weeks exploring options and ultimately recommending improvements.

At this meeting with *Protegra*, we made our concerns about the process clear, and asked for a complete list of all work sites included in the diagnostic phase, as well as an overview of who is participating on the transformation team and how they were selected. Activists in attendance also offered up their ideas for new approaches to front-line services.

The next day (February 6, 2013), an e-mail was sent to members from the Deputy Minister which answered some of our questions, but not all. She also suggested that plans were in the works to ensure those departments who have not participated so far have a chance to participate.

If this applies to you, and there's been no follow-up in your department, we encourage you to request the “group session” which the Deputy Minister offered. In the mean time, your MGEU reps will continue to keep up contact with the *Protegra* reps and strive to keep as you informed as possible.

MGEU's vital role at Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry continues...

AS THE PHOENIX SINCLAIR INQUIRY enters its seventh month, the MGEU legal team is wrapping up its efforts to give voice to our members who were on the front-lines when the tragedy occurred.

“This is an instance where our union has a vital role to play outside of the usual bargaining and everyday workplace concerns scenario,” said MGEU President Michelle Gawronsky. “Ensuring these members feel they get a fair hearing is what being part of a union is all about.”

Staff rep Janet Kehler, who was a social worker for nearly 20 years before joining the MGEU staff, did a series of in-depth interviews just before the new year that aimed to put the dire challenges workers were facing, and the government's repeated lack of response to their concerns, in the spotlight.

Kehler will take the stand at the end of April to testify about the numerous letters the union wrote to four different Ministers.

“At the time,” Gawronsky said, “we heard over and over how worried members were that a child might fall through the cracks.”

MGEU

Manitoba
Government
and General
Employees'
Union

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