
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Locked out shelter counsellors fear for safety of displaced women and children

Aurora- In a move that shows a reckless disregard for the safety of residents and their children, the management and board of directors of Yellow Brick House, yesterday locked out shelter counsellors, and moved women fleeing abuse to a facility offering little security and protection.

“We are very concerned about the safety of the residents and their children. Throughout this impasse with management, we have been very clear we did not want to displace the residents or disrupt their counselling. These are vulnerable women and closing the shelter is unconscionable. This is why we have not gone on strike, although we have been in a legal strike position for over a month.

“It’s clear that the Yellow Brick House management doesn’t share our concerns. Or they would not have chosen to lock us out, close the shelter and put women and children at-risk,” says Colleen Johnson, a shelter counsellor and a member of Local 3636 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

At issue is a workplace re-organization plan that the Yellow Brick House management claims can only be implemented by terminating nine shelter counsellors who collectively have more than 75 years work experience at the Aurora shelter. All those targeted for firing are strong union activists or members of the current bargaining committee.

The proposed re-organization also sets out new job qualifications that include graduate degrees and multi-lingual skills. The union has argued that rather than firing shelter counsellors outright, management must consider the merits of their work experience, educational equivalencies, and in some cases the ability to speak a second language, as the basis for “grandparenting” the current employees. The union has also asked that the counsellors be given adequate time to upgrade their degrees in order to meet the new job qualifications.

However, management has refused to consider the union’s fair proposals. Over a four-month period, management has only agreed to negotiate on three occasions. They have cancelled two days of bargaining and forced employees to vote on a final offer (a little-used provision in the labour code) and have now proceeded with a lock out.

“Without any warning to loyal, experienced workers, our employer has decided that new skills, new degrees and a second language are needed to do our jobs. We aren’t given any time to get the degrees or learn a new language. We just get a pink slip. It’s just not right,” says Johnson.

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