

CUPE BC 2022 CONVENTION LIBRARY COMMITTEE REPORT

The CUPE BC Library Committee is made up of members representing CUPE library workers in four sectors: public libraries (municipal and regional systems), colleges, universities, and K-12. Our committee valued the opportunities to connect with workers in the same field, share what is going on in individual worksites, discuss ideas, concerns and common goals .

A large percentage of library workers are precariously employed, many working part-time or taking temporary, casual or contract work. Fewer full-time positions often result in limited access to benefits, such as extended health, sick benefits and pensions. This particularly impacts library workers working in a temporary or casual capacity.

Libraries are the cornerstone of our communities, a place where everyone has access to free services and resources regardless of their socio-economic status. Libraries, no matter what sector, are so much more than the physical resources within their walls. They continued to thrive despite the pandemic, relying on the skills, knowledge and innovation of their staff to meet the challenges presented by COVID.

In 2021 libraries redirected their resources and continued to provide their services on-line and in person when possible. They redesigned their programs so that they could continue to meet the changing needs of their communities. Many libraries had to consider how they could continue to provide quality services with less staff, while at the same time keeping up with the health and safety challenges presented by the rapid changes associated with COVID-19 and the OMICRON variance.

The committee met virtually in October, November of 2021 and January of 2022 to discuss issues facing library workers in their respective sectors. Many libraries did not return to full hours or staffing levels until late summer or early fall of 2021 and the impact of those cuts continue to be felt by all. Concerns over staffing levels, increases to workload, and frequent changes to guidelines and protocols were common discussion items for the committee.

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Anxiety, uncertainty and stress became more prevalent. Increases in precarious work, health and safety concerns and, as always, government austerity, were also on the agenda.

2021 brought new challenges to libraries: checking vaccine cards, continued need for proper protective equipment and cleaning protocol, conflicts with members of the public that are against vaccines and wearing masks, and retention and recruitment, issues that will most likely continue to plague libraries in 2022 as well. Some employers implemented stringent vaccine policies for their staff, mandatory vaccination, or unpaid leave of absence with possible loss of job. Other employers were less stringent and had policies that included rapid testing for unvaccinated staff, while others did not have any policy regarding vaccines.

One of the committee's priorities was raising public awareness about the changing work of library workers as well as the increase in precarity of cross-sector library workers. The committee felt that the public is unaware that a significant percentage of library workers are precariously employed and living in financial hardship. Nor are they aware how precarity can affect the continuity and quality of service library workers provide their community. Plans are in place for an article in the Public Employee for the fall of 2022.

Truth and Reconciliation:

The committee wanted to honor the ongoing tragic and painful impact of residential schools in our country. The devastating findings of burial sites on residential schools grounds shocked and horrified us all, but in reality, as we all know, it really only confirmed what many survivors had known for decades. The committee's project for 2021-2022 was to create a booklist celebrating the works of Indigenous writers. We had many great writers to choose from and it was difficult to narrow it down to a few. Our list contains titles for Children, Young Adult and Adult books. We hope it will inspire each and every one of us to find new authors, read their stories and learn more about them.

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BC Library Association (BCLA) Conference:

The importance of collaboration and partnerships with other organizations is always one of our goals. The committee once again made a recommendation to the CUPE BC Board to support the BCLA conference scheduled for April 19-22nd 2022. The theme of the conference is Collective Restoration. Our workshop submission: Library Services for Migrant, Undocumented and Temporary Foreign Workers is scheduled for April 20th. The discussion will focus on ways libraries currently provide access to migrant and undocumented workers, and will explore why/what is keeping libraries from doing it in a more equitable, accessible and effective manner. We hope it will challenge attendees to go back to their respective libraries and find ways they can provide much-needed services to the migrant, undocumented or temporary workers in their community. Thank you to our three presenters, Tania Thomas: Community Outreach Librarian, Surrey Public Library, Byron Cruz: Organizer and Outreach Co-ordinator, BC Federation of Labor's Occupational Health and Safety Centre's Migrant Workers Program, and Angela Contreras: Independent consultant and Freirean Decolonizing Researcher Practitioner.

B.C. Summer Reading Club (SRC):

2021 was another successful year for the BC Summer Reading Club. CUPE BC continues to be the proud co-sponsor of the BC SRC, the biggest free literacy program for children and families in our Province. CUPE members deliver, free, fun, quality programs for children ages 5-14, that support their literacy skills and foster a love of reading by exposing them to a variety of activities and reading materials. The theme for 2021 was Crack The Case. Zoe Si, a cartoonist and illustrator, was the artist. Zoe's works include several children's books including the Wolfie and the Fly series (2018), the Sorry Plane in 2019, and the upcoming picture book the Sorry life of Timothy Schmoe. Most libraries continued to provide SRC online in 2021 with some having limited in-person programs and take and make crafts for kids. Even with some parents wanting to limit screen time for their children, the total registration for SRC was 63,758. Each child completing their reading log received an SRC medal with the CUPE Logo on the back.

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Organizing:

On March 31, 2021, Prince George library workers voted to become part of CUPE. We welcome 50 new members to CUPE 4951. Members ratified their first collective agreement in a vote that concluded on November 9th, 2021. The 50 new members include pages, collections librarians, cataloguers, technical services clerks, librarians, library assistants and circulation staff. They work in two branches serving Prince George and surrounding area.

Kimberley Public Library lost 5 members (date of vote: March 11, 2021).

Organizing continues to be a standing issue as many smaller libraries in our Province remain unorganized.

Governance Structure: Why it matters and how it can help you

We would like to thank Steven Beasley - CUPE Local Government Liaison and Kathryn Davies – CUPE Research Representative for this presentation. Steven attended the January 11th meeting and his presentation covered topics such as:

Governance versus Management

Governance Structures and Examples

Knowing your Audience

Communicating with Boards

Making a Plan for your Local

Conflict of Interest

Steven's presentation covered the Library Act (Municipal, Regional Libraries and Public Library Association) as well as the School Act, the College and Institute Act, and University Act.

In order to be successful in meeting the needs of their members, Locals need to know who their board members are, and they need to effectively communicate with them. One of our most important take aways was the need for ongoing political action, not only during elections but throughout the term of the elected officials.

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Library Sector Bargaining Conference:

The conference was held virtually January 26-28 with more than two dozen participants from across B.C. Conference topics included: Preparing for bargaining, Mobilizing Members for Bargaining, Strategic Planning for Bargaining, Communications throughout Bargaining and Notetaking for Bargaining. Members attending the conference walked away with valuable information, knowledge and tools they could take back to their local and use in their bargaining.

The committee would like to thank all staff for their support and dedication to our sector. In particular we would like to thank our Staff Advisor, Tracey Mathieson, and Pearly Kheriwal, our Admin Assistant, for their invaluable assistance.

Respectfully Submitted:

Rose Jurkic, Chair
Denise Parks, Co-Chair
Erynne Grant, Recording Secretary
Laurie Angus
Ashley Jellicoe
Wendy Jewell
Katy Livingston
Denise Parks
Katherine Percival
Kari Scott-Whyte
Darcie Smith
Tracey Mathieson, Staff Advisor
Pearly Kheriwal, Administrative Assistant

March 2022

