



CUPE BC 2022 CONVENTION PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

After being appointed in the Fall of 2021, the Persons with Disabilities Committee met once at the virtual One Big Committee Webinar (the virtual version of the One Big Committee Meeting – OBCM) on October 19, 2021, on November 8, 2021, and on January 14, 2022 – all with full agendas.

At the CUPE BC 2021 Convention, Pat Shade was re-elected as Diversity Vice-President Persons with Disabilities and Laurie Whyte was elected as Alternate Diversity Vice-President Persons with Disabilities, which put them in the roles of Chair of the Committee (Pat) and Co-Chair (Laurie).

Our CUPE National Staff Advisor to the committee, Anusha Balram, left us in January to work on the research side of CUPE and we were lucky to have Sarah Cibart, CUPE National Human Rights Representative, as the new Staff Advisor to our committee. We were sad to see Anusha go, but are glad she hasn't gone too far. We were very grateful to have had her guidance while she was our Staff Advisor.

When asked why they wanted to be on this committee, our members said that they were passionate about advocating for persons with disabilities and supporting members through issues such as workplaces not hiring applicants or denying workers accommodations, in spite of the Duty to Accommodate within collective agreements and the BC Human Rights Code. Our committee expressed concern that workers have many barriers to overcome when needing an accommodation and want to work to educate our union and workplaces that having a disability is actually quite common, and workers with disabilities are just as hard-working and accomplished as workers without disabilities. Committee members noted that they wanted to learn more about what could be done to advocate for people with disabilities in their workplaces and unions, especially in smaller communities that might not have all the resources

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needed to accommodate workers. We are aware that a disability could strike anyone at any time, regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background or race – while recognizing that Indigenous, Black and Racialized members with disabilities are disproportionately impacted in negative ways.

After our first two meetings in 2021, the committee developed an ambitious Action Plan with the following items:

- Continue with the 'Not All Disabilities are Visible' campaign.
- Submit an article to the Public Employee regarding Invisible Disabilities.
- Continue to work on improving the visibility of designated seating on transit and improving transit for people with disabilities.
- Intersect and build alliances with the other three CUPE BC Equity Committees and other Sectoral and Standing Committees such as the Skilled Trades and Women's Committees.
- Work to support the TRC Calls to Action – Health #18-24, emphasizing #18 and 19.
- Ensure all CUPE BC meeting places and event venues are accessible to all through accessibility audits.
- Have at least one person in each local trained in conducting accessibility audits and encourage locals to form Human Rights committees to help them identify accessibility issues in their workplaces and union spaces.

To date we have: submitted an article on 'Invisible Disabilities' for the Public Employee, slated to be published in the Spring 2022 issue; successfully canvassed the CUPE BC Executive to include 'accessibility' in their Action Plan; brought attention to concerns around the visibility of designated seating on transit to the CUPE BC Transportation Committee; begun organizing joint training and meetings with the other three CUPE BC Equity committees; joined the other three Equity Committees in sharing a booth at the 2022 Convention and holding a draw to raise awareness of equity issues; are in the process of scheduling a meeting of the Skilled Trades committee Chairs and Co-Chairs to discuss the resolution passed at the 2021 CUPE BC Convention around working together to help create opportunities for persons with disabilities in Skilled Trades; and finally, submitted four resolutions to CUPE BC regarding:

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1. Not All Disabilities Are Visible – Action Resolution.
2. Accessibility Audits – Action Resolution.
3. Education and the Use of Non-Stigmatizing Language – Action & Policy Resolution.
4. Infertility is an Invisible Disability – Action Resolution.

Our committee members appreciated being able to meet virtually as it eliminated lengthy travel and accessibility limitations, especially during winter road conditions. We had hoped to be able to continue meeting with a hybrid of virtual and in-person meetings; however, CUPE BC does not yet have the technical ability to accommodate this.

Although the pandemic was devastating and being forced to ‘go virtual’ was challenging for members with and without disabilities alike, it did normalize the concept of working remotely, and made apparent the benefits of increased accessibility to the workplace, particularly for persons with disabilities. Members who struggled with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), members with limited mobility, members with mental health disorders, invisible disabilities and many others found that working remotely allowed them to be ‘present’ in the workplace more consistently, and to be more productive as they worked in their familiar and safe home environments. Working from home allowed members to take a five-minute break to walk outside or lie down, ice or apply heat to their injuries, and avoid lengthy (and often painful) commutes to work.

Unfortunately, Employers across the country did not seem to want to allow remote work as a medical accommodation and some of our members continue to fight for remote work to be recognized as a legitimate accommodation by their Employers.

We also want to recognize that remote work certainly isn’t a perfect solution. It made challenges worse for some members, especially people who were in a strained or dangerous living situations, and for those who lost their jobs because remote work just wasn’t feasible for the type of work they performed. Remote work also wasn’t perfect for everyone with a disability, as it could also be isolating and not all members had proper ergonomic work setups at home.

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Our committee will continue to fight passionately for the rights of persons with disabilities, to raise awareness and educate, and to work towards a brighter future where everyone is treated fairly, equitably, with respect, and are valued for their contribution to the workplace and society regardless of their ability.



Equality = we all get the same – Equity = we all get what we need.

The committee would like to extend our most sincere appreciation to Darci Schmid for her administrative support to the committee and everything she does for us above and beyond!

We'd also like to thank Sarah Cibart, for being our Staff Advisor and helping to guide us through our work.

Respectfully submitted:

Pat Shade, Chair
Laurie Whyte, Co-Chair
Monica Brady, Recording Secretary
Yvonne Desabrais
Brittany Gibbons, Young Workers Liaison
Allan Henricks
Ellen Monteith
Harmony Raine
Azucena (Azu) Rudland
Amber Wynn
Sarah Cibart, Staff Advisor
Darci Schmid, Administrative Assistant

March 2022

