

NEWSLETTER



BPS Corrections – Issue #1 – May 11, 2021

Blindsided by closures, layoffs

As if the past year hasn't been difficult enough for BPS Corrections.

You've been risking your health and safety and your lives on the front lines of this pandemic. And not just your own lives. COVID-19 doesn't disappear at the doors of your facilities. Every time you go home from your job, the lives of your family and loved ones are on the line, too.

And yet you continue to show up because you know what we know: your work is essential to your community and your province.

On behalf of OPSEU/SEFPO's entire Executive Board, we want to say thank you. Thank you for all the work you do and all the risks you take. In the true sense of the word, you're all heroes.

This is why we were so disappointed last month when the provincial government announced its plan to close 25 BPS Corrections facilities, including 10 facilities where OPSEU/SEFPO members work. Roughly 140 of you are now facing layoffs.

As soon as we heard, we were on the phone to the government. We're doing everything we can to protect all of you – the 140 facing layoff and all the rest left behind to deal with the chaos.

We've heard from many of you that even your managers seem to have been caught off guard. There seems to be no clear plan about how the facilities will close or where their clients will go.

It's heartbreaking to us to see any of our members lose their jobs, especially in the middle of a pandemic.

We've successfully negotiated enhanced severance for many facing layoffs and we also have pushed the government to make it easier for those laid off to get similar jobs in OPS Corrections. Everything that can be done is being done.

This is an especially cruel consequence of the two-tier system in youth corrections that we've been fighting against for years. You do exactly the same work as those working at OPS facilities. You're just as important to the safety of our communities. And yet, you don't have the same benefits and job security as those in the OPS.

It's not fair. It's not right. And it's no way to treat front-line heroes risking all to get us through the pandemic. We will keep fighting for you.

In solidarity,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, OPSEU/SEFPO

Eduardo (Eddy) Almeida
First Vice-President/Treasurer,
OPSEU/SEFPO

Youth Corrections facility closures

With no advance warning, OPSEU/SEFPO was informed by government on March 1, 2021, that 25 Youth Corrections facilities are being closed, including 10 where OPSEU/SEFPO members work

The closures, which have already begun, mean roughly 140 OPSEU/SEFPO members have been laid-off or are facing lay-off.

Since the surprise announcement, OPSEU/SEFPO leaders and staff have been working hard to ease the blow that's been dealt to members.

In many instances, the union has been able to negotiate severance packages

far superior to provisions laid out in members' collective agreements.

The union was also successful in pushing government to recognize the skills and experience of the laid-off workers and exempt them from parts of the application process for similar jobs in Youth Corrections facilities managed directly by the OPS.

All laid off OPSEU/SEFPO members applying for work at OPS Youth Corrections facilities are strongly encouraged to indicate that they were laid off from a BPS Youth Corrections facility.

Facilities being closed where OPSEU/SEFPO members worked:

Butch Collins Residence, Windsor

Syl Apps Youth Centre (Youth Justice Beds), Oakville

Bernhardt House, Hamilton

Macmillan Youth Centre, Milton

Oakwood Residence – Millbrook (previously closed)

St. Lawrence Observation, Kingston

Justice Derek Holder House, Thunder Bay

William H. Roy House, Sudbury

Pineger Youth Centre, Timmins

Creighton Youth Centre, Kenora

Message from the Sector 7 Chair: Abrupt, mass closures hurting us all

As the leaders of BPS Corrections, your divisional executive has been mapping and monitoring youth justice trends for over 20 years. For quite some time, we have been anticipating that a number of closures were looming and expected an event similar to 2007 when the province announced the immediate closure of 10 open youth justice facilities.

While the odd, isolated, single-unit closure has occurred every few years, we were shocked when the news of 25 closures broke to our members on the morning of March 1, 2021.

This was in addition to the six other secure and open youth justice facilities that had been closed over the last year -- most recently, the Brookside OPS Secure Unit on Feb. 12, 2021.

There was zero consultation. And there was no rationale provided to OPSEU/SEFPO or its members.

We recognize that bed-count utilization rates are low. The 2003 YCJA has progressively and successfully reduced the incarceration rates with its increased emphasis on therapeutic practices such as court diversion, community programming and re-integration planning.

However, since the pandemic began over a year ago, the bed-numbers have been historically low because the government was working with the courts to avoid incarcerating youth at all costs in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and because of the additional workload imposed on facilities as every new intake was forced to be in unique isolation programming.

Your divisional executive members feel these recent cuts were too deep and the reasons that the province described in the media were unreasonable.

The closures hit hard in every region in Ontario. When things return to normal, it will be impossible to maintain quality services. Several of the remaining facilities are now dealing with numbers approaching full capacity with no additional staffing or funding.

Furthermore, the logistics for successful re-integration is nearing impossible. The remaining facilities have a catchment area so large that an entire eight-hour shift could be spent just driving the youth to their community, which drastically limits quality time and increases costs. This new geographical challenge also makes it impossible for some families or community supports to visit the youth in-person.

While the ministry encouraged facilities to significantly increase the number of re-integration leaves over the last few years, they have now implemented a huge geographical barrier. Online virtual meetings with families, social workers, medical staff and other supports must be the norm during this pandemic. But after the pandemic, they're just not as effective as in-person meetings when it comes to building strong relationships, focus, and trust.

OPSEU/SEFPO staff, sector executive, local executives and general members from across the province have been networking with allies and applying extra effort since the news of the closures broke. I am pleased to say that OPSEU/SEFPO has done a great job and can now share some of the successes that can

help make a bad situation a little better for the affected members.

OPSEU/SEFPO was in discussion with government and there has been some successful negotiations to give special consideration for any BPS Youth Justice Worker who lost their job in this recent closure. We are also pleased to hear that many of our affected units were successful in negotiating voluntary retirement packages as well enhanced severance packages.

As the dust is beginning to settle, the total job losses for OPSEU/SEFPO BPS Corrections members are approximately 140 members.

We are continuing to advocate for the sector and this unprecedented transformation that will need improvements. This massive list of

closures has affected many union and non-union programs across our province. Many of the facilities offered unique programs, alternatives to secure incarceration and were previously praised as jewels in the crown of Ontario's Youth Justice System -- now they have vanished with nothing in their place.

There are huge voids to fill and we expect re-purposing of these youth justice jobs, not elimination. We will be continuing to advocate for improvements as we apply strategies from within OPSEU/SEFPO and in continuing to build and improve alliances to lobby for positive change.

In Solidarity,

Jonathan Guider
Chair, BPS Corrections Sector 7
VP Local 166, Craigwood Unit



Sector 7, BPS Corrections, represents the following workers: Youth Care Workers, Child and Youth Workers, Community Counsellors, Direct Care Workers, various Program Coordinators, Psychometrists, Psychologists, Residential Counsellors, Social Workers, Youth Workers, Team Leaders, Adolescent Workers, Cooks, Clerks, Bail Supervisors, Secretaries, Cleaners, Maintenance Workers, Students, Child Care Workers, and Nurses.



Authorized for distribution by:

Warren (Smokey) Thomas,
OPSEU/SEFPO President