

# Teacher



Newsmagazine  
BC Teachers' Federation

Volume 27, Number 2  
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## **YOUR UNION CARES** **BCTF programs for members**



Salary  
Indemnity

Health &  
Wellness

Living  
with  
Balance

Health  
& Safety

Pensions

WCB  
Advocacy

Poster pullout p. 12

# President's message



## Working together to develop our union's strategic plan

On November 7 and 8, 2014, your Local Presidents and Local Representatives convened in Richmond for the Federation's Fall Representative Assembly. It was the first time the RA, one of our most important decision-making bodies, had met since the conclusion of our strike. At the meeting, delegates participated in a debrief of the last round of bargaining and passed important motions on moving forward.

After discussion and debate, delegates voted to develop a new comprehensive, yet flexible, long-term strategic plan. This plan will enable the Federation to deal with future actions of government, strengthen our relationships with partner groups, and organize pushback against any further deterioration of our public education system.

Developing this new plan will require a thoughtful and open discussion of events during the past six months, including our bargaining and strike strategies. With such a process, we will be able to assess our priorities, focus our work, and direct the resources necessary to prepare for the future.

Already, there is a new SURT (School Union Representative Training) called "Lessons from the line" that is helping us analyze our past, present, and future actions. The workshop provides our staff reps with the opportunity to formally discuss the 2014 job action and provide input that will feed into our strategic planning.

The feedback already coming in is extremely helpful. This workshop gives locals and their members the opportunity to continue the conversations that began on picket lines.

When we conclude this process, the Federation will have a new vision for how we build active support for a quality, accessible, well-funded public education system in British Columbia. We will have developed strategies to prevent further privatization and commercialization. We will also focus our work to ensure education policy decisions are based on the real needs of students and schools and respect teachers' professional autonomy. School-based meetings are one important place we can do that work.

That means we must do more to build alliances with other education stakeholder groups, public and private sector unions, and teacher organizations across Canada. We know advocacy works and we have to keep it up. This fall, many teacher locals and partner groups presented to the Legislative Assembly's Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. The committee was tasked with developing a report that informs the 2015 provincial budget.

On November 13, 2014, the committee released its report and public education is front and centre because of our collective action and public engagement. The committee, made up of both Liberal and NDP MLAs, stated, "over the course of the consultations, it became clear that a well-funded public education system remains a top priority for British Columbians." The report continued, "the evidence presented to the committee, however, indicates that increasing operating, maintenance, and capital costs are exceeding current funding allotments."

This is an important acknowledgment by the all-party committee that our system is being underfunded and needs new funding. It speaks to the success of our advocacy and the efforts teachers made during the strike to inform the public and politicians about the true state of public education funding in BC.

We must continue mobilizing member, parent, and community advocacy leading up to the February budget and hold Premier Clark accountable for her promise to make class composition in particular, her number one priority.

*Jim Iker*

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**CEPA** Canadian Educational Press Association



## New paper for newsmagazine

Yes, we changed the newsmagazine paper. Why? Because we're always trying to improve the newsmagazine, both editorially and environmentally. For the past five years, we've used 100% post-consumer paper that came from a mill in Wisconsin. The paper came by truck to Mitchell Press in Burnaby, leaving a rather large carbon footprint.

This edition is printed on paper from a unionized mill on Vancouver Island, which means forestry jobs stay in BC. The cost of this paper is less than the paper we used previously; it is 10% to 30% recycled but still carries the FSC, (Forestry Stewardship Council) certification. In order to qualify for the FSC, the forestry company must follow 10 principles that ensure they are operating in an environmentally friendly and socially responsible manner. Read more about the FSC process on their website:

<https://lic.fsc.org/about-us.1.htm>

### Newsmagazine distribution

*Teacher* is available in print and digitally via the BCTF website. For this school year, each member received a copy of the Sept/Oct issue and will receive the same for the March issue as it contains pertinent BCTF election materials. One copy per two members will be distributed for the remaining issues. We ask that you display the newsmagazine in prominent places such as staffrooms, school offices, and school libraries.

*Teacher* is also sent to MLAs, trustees, post-secondary institutions, academic libraries, and to public and private sector unions. Retired teachers receive a copy if they request it—[newsmag@bctf.ca](mailto:newsmag@bctf.ca).

### Submit an article or write us a letter

Each issue of the newsmagazine features a theme. We are planning on writing about childhood illness and how this affects students, their learning, and of course how you teach for the Jan/Feb 2015 issue. The deadline is December 12. Call or email the editor, Susan Croll at [scroll@bctf.ca](mailto:scroll@bctf.ca), if you are interested in writing an article.

Drop us a line at [newsmag@bctf.ca](mailto:newsmag@bctf.ca) about anything you read in the newsmagazine and we will do our best, space permitting, to publish your letters.

## TEACHER STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

# BCTF partners with Starling Minds

*Statistics Canada reports that 20% of Canadians struggle with some sort of mental health problem. This percentage means that as many as 8,000 BC teachers could be dealing with their own mental health issues.*

— Dr Andrew Miki, 2014



### By Susan Croll

Like the data from Statistics Canada suggests, more and more teachers are experiencing high stress levels. Over the last 10 years, steady increases in Salary Indemnity Plan claims related to mental health have become the norm.

With this in mind, the BCTF teamed with Dr. Andrew Miki, a registered psychologist based in Vancouver, to offer teachers free access to an online "mental fitness" program called Starling. Dr. Miki's program, founded on the tenets of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), is designed to help any BCTF member who wants to learn more about stress, how it affects both the mind and body, and who is open to learning effective strategies that help keep sadness, anxiety, and worry in check.

He based Starling on his experience working with over 75 teachers in his private practice. He says that a majority of teachers under his care needed support because of intense levels of stress in both their professional and personal lives.

"Due to the nature of teaching being a helping profession, the complexities of the job are not confined to the classroom and students. Additional stress from interactions with parents, colleagues, administrators, and from teachers' personal lives, can be the tipping point in a person's ability to manage one's life well and perform at the level one expects of her or himself," Dr. Miki said.

Dr. Miki's vision is to enable teachers to become the key to changing how our society perceives mental health. "The way we combat any kind of stigma is with education. It is my hope that BC teachers will embrace a new way of looking at mental health that is far more logical and understandable."

It all comes down to the size of the BCTF membership and the number of people they can influence. "There are over 41,000 teachers and only 1,200 psychologists in BC. Teachers can provide a vital role in mental health education and preventative psychology. By learning more about it, teachers will not only

*continued page 4*



*Graphic of Virginia, a Canadian teacher who has a lot on her plate. During the course you learn how Starling has helped her overcome emotional distress.*



better manage their own stress but they will position themselves to educate their students, family members, and friends. Think about the power it can have on our society if every teacher helps educate one student every year about mental health."

*"Similar to physical fitness, mental fitness is a skill we can all learn to improve, regardless of where we are on the continuum."*

As part of that education, Dr. Miki views mental health as a continuum and says that it is a mistake to see mental health as an either/or situation. "Throughout history, mental health has been stigmatized to the point that people view it as a black and white issue where people are either 'crazy' or 'normal.' Instead, mental health is a component of our overall health and the continuum ranges from very healthy to severely impaired. Similar to physical fitness, mental fitness is a skill we can all learn to improve, regardless of where we are on the continuum."

Dr. Miki explains that our thoughts, behaviours, and physiology influence our feelings, and the level of stress we experience affects all of these factors. There are often patterns to how these factors interact. For example, when we are highly stressed our thinking can become distorted or faulty. Report cards are a typical stressor for many teachers because they require longer hours and additional work over a compressed period of time.

Dr. Miki thinks that a certain amount of stress and worry are helpful when they help put important things on our radar screens and spur us into action or problem solving, but says they become problematic when we chronically avoid tasks or situations, ruminate in either/or thinking, or self-blame.

"If you already feel overwhelmed, imagine adding report cards to your plate. The most common response is to avoid them by procrastinating. This can be partly due to your increased workload and being worn down toward the end of the semester. It can also be

the result of worrying over the quality of your report cards or how your students or their parents will perceive them. If you think that procrastination implies you are lazy or weak, it will negatively affect your mood. By learning some basic principles of mental health, you will see that procrastination is an attempt to relieve your anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed. So, procrastination is a form of instant gratification but it inevitably leads to increased stress later on because the reports are still not done and you're closer to the deadline."

He also refers to the Big 5, a scale of five personality traits, and describes how teachers score on these traits. For example, teachers fall in the normal range for neuroticism but are closer to the higher range for openness, agreeableness, and extroversion. Not surprising, teachers score at the highest range for conscientiousness. These traits are a good fit for the work teachers do, but our high level of conscientiousness can be a double-edged sword. Because teachers always want to do the best they can for their students, stress levels can soar as teachers work in a system that expects people, year after year, to do more with less.

*As helping professionals, teachers are usually willing to take on more and more to help their students but what if this pattern continues indefinitely?*

"The combination of high standards and a strong work ethic usually leads to academic and professional success. However, when people do not understand some of the basic principles of mental health, that level of conscientiousness can become debilitating because there are no boundaries on how much work is enough. As helping professionals, teachers are usually willing to take on more and more to help their students but what if this pattern continues indefinitely? How long can a person last?"

Before developing the online program, Dr. Miki worked with the BCTF's Health and Wellness Program to organize a pilot project to provide both mental healthcare to a larger number of teachers and allow teachers to

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## Karen's story

*"Edgy, jumpy, and close to tears a lot of the time." That's how New Westminster teacher Karen Harbick describes her feelings and behaviour in the spring of 2012.*

Her feelings were understandable given that teachers had been legislated back to work and Bill 22 had become law. However, as time progressed, her mood did not lift and she felt more and more distressed.

Karen felt stressed at work because of a difficult workload and from a deep sense of unfairness at how teachers were being treated. A noisy group of students who lingered outside her room each day only added to her unease. While she held it together during class time, she often felt weepy and impatient.

"It wasn't until a couple of colleagues approached me and said that I didn't seem myself that I knew I had to deal with what I was feeling. They asked me if I needed some help and they were right, I did."

"Through my local union, I was able to get some help. I didn't want to take time off work but I knew I couldn't keep going the way I was. Through discussions with my doctor and my union, we decided the best route was to approach the district, request accommodation for medical reasons and reduce my teaching load by one block. Decreasing my load by one block may not sound like a lot, but it made the difference I needed."

Karen also chose to use the services of a rehabilitation consultant provided by the BCTF Health and Wellness program. She credits her rehab consultant for getting her in touch with Dr. Andrew Miki. "Basically, the consultant told me about Dr. Miki and that he works with teachers dealing with mental health issues. I began to see him in his private practice, and I found it immensely helpful. Dr. Miki invited me to join his pilot teacher group and I did.

Since then, Dr. Miki has put his mental fitness program, Starling, on line and I've worked through that program too."

Karen describes herself as having been an "all or nothing" thinker and a self-blamer.

"Whenever something didn't go right, I'd blame myself and think that something was wrong with me and therefore I should work harder." Through her participation in Starling and her work with Dr. Miki, Karen learned to untangle her all or nothing thinking and understand how her thoughts were quite literally making her ill. "Now, I can recognize when my thinking is unrealistic and challenge it with more balanced thoughts. You cannot believe how freeing that is. Worrying takes up a huge amount of energy. No wonder people experiencing anxiety are so exhausted. I know I was."

She says that Starling is not a magical program that offers miracle cures. Watching the videos and reading the exercises purely for educational purposes is very worthwhile, however, it takes effort and engagement for change to happen. "You have to do the exercises to really learn and internalize the skills. The mood tracking tool helped me become proactive with my stress management and the goal-setting tool keeps me from getting too overwhelmed. As the modules build, they explain how distress occurs and how we can help ourselves to experience it

less frequently and for shorter periods of time. The Virginia storyline that runs through the program gets into some really tough issues around worry and depression but these are important issues that need to be uncovered."

Karen goes back and revisits some of Starling's modules periodically. She says that knowing Starling exists is reassuring. "If I'm feeling down, I can login and do certain exercises. It doesn't mean that my mood or feelings suddenly disappear, but I have the tools to work it through, to understand what's really going on and to deal with it in a better way than I did before. Plus, each time I revisit Starling, I get new insights and understanding."

Karen encourages all teachers to take a look at Starling. She says that even if you aren't dealing with stress or any other mental health issue, it could help you with your own teaching and how you deal with students. "My teaching is better informed because of my work with Starling. Many of my students are really anxious, some even seem depressed. Now I have some new ways to talk to them using images and metaphors they can really understand."

– Susan Croll

## Programme de santé et de bien-être

# L'histoire de Karen

*« Nerveuse, crispée et souvent au bord des larmes » voilà comment Karen Harbick, enseignante à New Westminster, se décrit au printemps 2012.*

Ses sentiments sont compréhensibles étant donné que les enseignants viennent d'entamer un retour au travail légiféré et que le projet de loi 22 est devenu loi. Toutefois, l'année avançant, son humeur ne change pas et elle se sent de plus en plus en difficulté.

Stressée en raison d'une charge de travail difficile et d'un profond sentiment d'injustice face à la façon dont les enseignants ont été traités, le fait qu'un groupe bruyant d'élèves traîne devant sa classe chaque jour ne fait qu'ajouter à son malaise. Même si elle tient bon pendant les cours, elle se sent souvent au bord des larmes et manque de patience.

« Lorsque quelques collègues, inquiets de mon comportement, sont venus me voir, je savais que je devais faire face à ce que je ressentais. Ils m'ont demandé si j'avais besoin d'aide et ils avaient raison, j'en avais besoin », dit Karen.

« Grâce à mon syndicat local, j'ai pu obtenir de l'aide. Je ne voulais pas prendre un congé, mais je savais que je ne pouvais pas continuer comme cela. Après une discussion avec mon médecin et mon syndicat, nous avons décidé que la meilleure voie était d'approcher le conseil scolaire avec une demande d'adaptation pour des raisons médicales et de réduire ma tâche d'enseignement d'un bloc. Cette petite diminution de ma charge de travail peut ne pas sembler beaucoup, mais cela a fait toute la différence du monde. »

Karen a également choisi d'utiliser les services d'un consultant en réadaptation offerts par le programme de santé et bien-être de la FECB. Elle attribue à sa consultante son entrée en



Starling's™ goal is to start a grassroots movement with BC teachers to transform the way we understand mental health.

Sign in now at [starlingminds.com](http://starlingminds.com).



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[starlingminds.com](http://starlingminds.com)



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support each other. It worked. The results from four groups showed a statistically significant reduction in anxiety and depression. More importantly, the teachers reported that they learned how to better manage the stress in their lives. When participants were asked if they would recommend the program to their colleagues, every teacher responded with a single word—definitely.

*Many teachers who have become familiar with Starling say that it helps them to identify and understand their students' moods and behaviours.*

Teachers outside the Lower Mainland learned about the program and requested something similar in their communities. Dr. Miki thought about it and proposed what has become the online [starlingminds.com](http://starlingminds.com) program. All BCTF members—unless broadband is unavailable where they live—can access the program for free.

## What does the program look like?

Starling consists of 10 online modules with each module featuring video vignettes explaining the basic concepts of mental health, a case study of a teacher named Virginia, how CBT works, and what kinds of strategies people can use to manage stress and its symptoms, before it leads to depression or anxiety.

Dr. Miki uses cognitive behaviour strategies because he finds they work for teachers. "Teachers respond positively to CBT. I believe it's because CBT is based on education and training. Teachers are lifelong learners. They are open to new ideas and willing to take the time and put in the effort to learn new skills and strategies. Teachers are conscientious and part of Starling includes homework and teachers actually complete this assigned work. They know from teaching that in order to really learn something it must be practiced repeatedly to become mastered."

Modules are interactive and participants complete activities according to their own schedules. Each module takes about 20

minutes, excluding the homework. Dr. Miki suggests that teachers complete the homework exercises within a week which means the whole program is about 10 weeks. As well, participants monitor and assess their moods, learning to become more aware of what they are feeling and just as importantly, what they are thinking.

Dr. Miki cautions that while the program is open to all teachers, it particularly benefits people who are experiencing mild or moderate stress levels. He also says that it is useful simply as a resource to learn more about mental health in general. Many teachers who have become familiar with Starling say that it helps them to identify and understand their students' moods and behaviours.

He encourages people who have severe levels of stress to seek additional help. "Unchecked severe stress is not healthy for your mind or your body. Starling tries to educate people on how increased stress and faulty patterns of learning can lead to depression and anxiety. It helps give people a framework on how these conditions develop over time and why it's not a person's fault or that they can simply snap out of it. Without this education, you won't really understand how stress works and often can't get back to a healthy place on your own."

"We are very excited because about 150 teachers have signed onto the program and we are finding the same results as our pilot

project—statistically significant reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety. Take the step and educate yourself. Most likely you will feel better for doing so."

## How can you access the program?

Members can access Starling by signing up at [starlingminds.com](http://starlingminds.com). All you need is your six digit BCTF member identification number that you use to sign into the BCTF portal. If you are unsure of your BCTF ID, you can email [portal@bctf.ca](mailto:portal@bctf.ca) or call to speak to a BCTF staffperson (604-871-2119 or 1-800-663-9163, local 2119).

All personal information shared with Starling is kept completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone including the BCTF or any school district. You will find the privacy statement on the Starling website once you login.

Dr Andrew Miki is available to come to locals to speak to teachers about his program. He presented workshops about Starling at the BCTF Summer Conference in August. More recently, he spoke to Nanaimo teachers at one of their pro-d events. Please contact the BCTF Health and Wellness program at 604-871-1925 or [benefits@bctf.ca](mailto:benefits@bctf.ca) for more information. You can also contact Dr. Miki directly by email: [andrew.miki@starlingminds.com](mailto:andrew.miki@starlingminds.com)

*Susan Croll is Editor, Teacher Newsmagazine*

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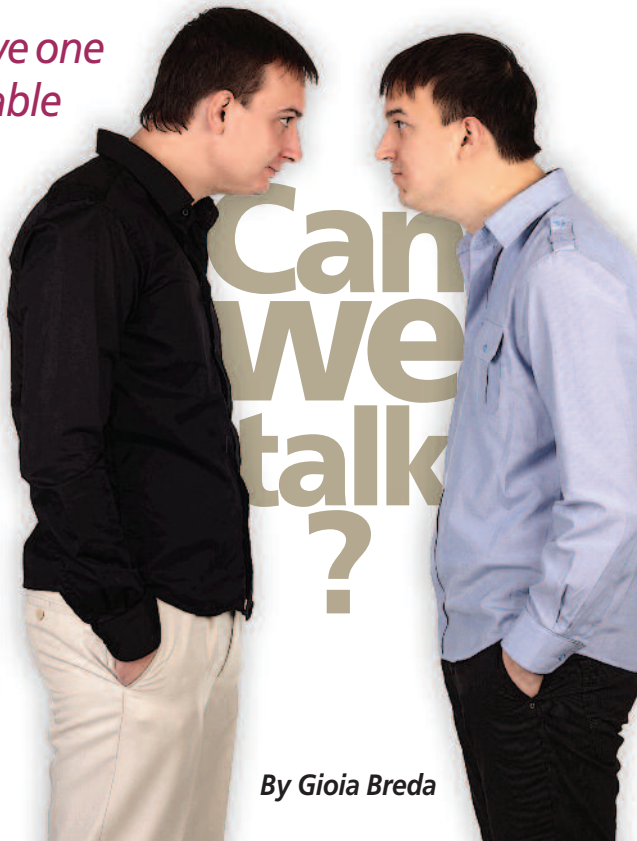
## It may be time to have one of those uncomfortable conversations

When we are worried that a colleague might be stressed or in crisis, when we are concerned about their practice, or perhaps are having a conflict with them, it's critical that we communicate. There are lots of reasons we avoid uncomfortable conversations. Sometimes we underestimate how much that dialogue is needed, or we hope the problem will disappear with time.

Occasionally we may feel it's not our business to get involved, it's not our problem. But often, if we're being honest, the idea of having that conversation is scary or overwhelming and we'd just rather not. When we refer back to our *BCTF Code of Ethics*, it's clear that we have a professional responsibility to one another to have those potentially uncomfortable conversations. The good news is that by having one of these conversations, you could actually help prevent a much worse problem down the road. Problems left unaddressed tend to worsen.

What should we do if we feel worried about how a colleague is treating students? We need to express our concerns. Find a moment to talk privately. Let your colleague know you're there to lend support. Ask if everything is ok, and gently share your concern or observation. For example, "I've noticed that you seem a bit distracted lately. Is everything ok?" or "You don't seem quite yourself these past few weeks; how are you doing?" or "I don't know you that well, but I wanted to offer my support. I know you have a really challenging class this year. Are you ok?"

When people are struggling in their personal lives or are in some kind of crisis, it often impacts them professionally and they may be completely unaware of the changes in their behaviour. You can direct them to the BCTF for more support, which may include the option of counselling through the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) or professional assistance through the Peer Support Services program.



By Gioia Breda

While we are not obligated to be friends with everyone we work with, we must treat each other with professional respect. If we find ourselves in conflict with a colleague, if we feel that an interaction has been less than respectful, there is a process we need to follow. It's imperative to talk to your colleague privately to raise your concern.

If you're feeling apprehensive about having the conversation, talk to your staff rep. Ask them to coach you through the conversation through a role-play and practice, practice, practice what you could say. Call your local union office for this help if the staff rep is not able to provide this coaching. You can also contact the Internal Relations co-ordinator at the BCTF for confidential assistance. Remember, it's still important to try to have the first conversation one-on-one, face-to-face.

If you're not sure how to initiate such a conversation, you might consider sending your colleague an email letting them know you'd like to speak with them about a particular interaction and request some meeting time. Just a word of caution about email. Keep the email very brief. Emails are devoid of any "context" or "cues" and do not always produce the effect you were intending.

If after your initial one-to-one conversation you feel that you weren't heard, then you can approach your staff rep for help. While they are not mediators, they may be able to help act as a neutral party whose presence allows both teachers to feel like they are being heard. For more challenging situations, or any point after the one-to-one talk, teachers can also suggest formal mediation.

The BCTF has a team of 18 teacher-mediators who can be called upon to facilitate a mediated process. Suggesting mediation as the first step may make an unsuspecting colleague feel defensive and they may wonder why you didn't just talk to them.

In most circumstances, the BCTF does not advise teachers to speak with their principals when they are having difficulties or concerns with a colleague, unless of course it is related to child protection issues. The principal, no matter how friendly and well-meaning, is still your manager. They have the power to discipline their employees.

Instead, we strongly encourage you to seek assistance and advice from your union. It is not considered a breach of the *Code of Ethics* to contact your local union office or the designated BCTF staffperson for advice on how to deal with a concern with a colleague.

While teachers can inform their direct supervisors (their principal) if they feel they are being harassed, again we advise you to call your local union office first. Not every conflict between colleagues is harassment. Often mediation is a more appropriate process. Informing the principal or filing harassment charges can still occur at a later time. We recommend trying to resolve the issue first, face-to-face, without bringing in managers when at all possible.

Uncomfortable conversations are often the first step in moving forward and finding resolution. We don't just owe it to each other to have these one-to-one talks, we are professionally obligated to do so.

If you find yourself in this kind of situation and would like some help getting started, don't hesitate to call your local office or the BCTF Internal Relations co-ordinator at 604-871-1803. They are here to support you and help you figure out the next step.

*Gioia Breda is 2nd Vice-President, Surrey Teachers' Association.*

# "I wouldn't wish this on anyone"—Sunita's story

*Often teachers who have been ill or injured want to return to work before they are actually ready to handle the demands of teaching.*

**By Susan Croll**

Two years ago, a primary teacher, we'll call her Sunita, was admitted to hospital for a straightforward, routine surgical procedure. But what happened after surgery was neither routine nor expected. Sunita developed two post-surgery infections and as a result had to undergo a further surgery. During the second surgery her lungs partially collapsed and she contracted sepsis.

Understandably, she remained in the hospital and one of the infections lasted for two and a half months. Lying in bed for such a long time caused her leg muscles to atrophy. Walking became so difficult that Sunita had to use a walker for four months and a cane for over nine months. The combination of multiple surgeries and infections left her weak and in chronic pain. A year and half later, Sunita began her return to teaching, work she loves and lives for.

While Sunita's story could have been tragic, she believes that without the programs and services offered to her by her union, her story could have turned out much worse. Her sick leave was running out which meant no income to pay for the treatment recommended by her doctors. It wasn't until she bumped into a colleague she found out about the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan.

"Because I had my walker, he was concerned and asked me what was going on. I explained what had happened and mentioned that even though I had over 100 days of sick leave, five months later, I only had a few days left. He told me I should call the BCTF office."

Sunita contacted the BCTF and inquired about SIP. She learned that this member-funded program exists to provide BCTF members with income if a member exhausts their sick leave.

She applied for SIP and was assigned a BCTF case manager who told her about the Health and Wellness program and asked her if she

was interested in working with a rehabilitation consultant. She accepted the offer and is still working with a rehab consultant. Sunita sings her high praises.

"She came to my house for my initial interview. Together, we developed small, realistic, attainable goals. Then we met with my doctor and from that meeting she developed a rehab plan with the four to five practitioners that I still see each week. These practitioners consult with and provide her with updates on my progress."

*While Sunita's story could have been tragic, she believes that without the programs and services offered to her by her union, her story could have turned out much worse.*

Sunita's recovery is like having a full-time job. She had daily, and still has frequent appointments with doctors, physiotherapists, and other practitioners. It was clear to Sunita and her consultant that she would not be able to return to work quickly or easily. The rehab consultants who work with the Health and Wellness program are occupational therapists or have much experience in the rehabilitation field. They play an important role in a person's recovery and their expertise is highly valued by their clients' doctors.

Often teachers who have been ill or injured want to return to work before they are actually ready to handle the demands of teaching. Sunita's rehab consultant had developed a relationship with her and understood her physical limitations. The rehab consultant, along with Sunita and her doctor, planned a gradual return to work schedule. They began with work hardening, a process that gives a teacher who is on sick leave, yet preparing a return to work, the opportunity

to work alongside a teacher. This process helped Sunita build up her strength, stamina, and confidence after being away from the classroom for such a long time.

"I appreciated working with another teacher for a few months. It gave me a sense of what my body could handle physically and what my limitations were," says Sunita. "Throughout the process, my rehab consultant and I would talk about what was working and what the challenges were. We'd adjust schedules to fit my needs. It was an empowering process." Working in a classroom often means a lot of bending, squatting, and twisting and given Sunita's physical limitations, her rehab consultant suggested an ergonomic assessment.

"My rehab consultant ordered me an ergonomic chair, a foot stool, and form cushions for my back, she gave me pointers on my posture and how to position my body when working with students at tables. All of these things have helped to reduce pain."

Sunita says she's unsure she could have managed her recovery without the services of her union and her rehab consultant. The Salary Indemnity Plan and the Health and Wellness Program are a tremendous support for me, my recovery, and my return to work. Even though I am an optimistic person, I don't know if I would have been able to cope, to adjust, or even return to work. I may have even been out of a job if I was working somewhere else and these kinds of supports and services didn't exist."

Sunita has one piece of advice for the BCTF—"Promote these programs. Let members know they exist. I don't wish what happened to me to anyone, but the unexpected does happen, and if it happens, these kinds of supports can make such a positive difference. You need someone looking out for you and guiding you through your recovery."

*Susan Croll is Editor of Teacher Newsmagazine*



contact avec le Dr Andrew Miki. « Ma consultante m'a expliqué que le Dr Miki travaillait avec les enseignants aux prises avec des problèmes de santé mentale. J'ai commencé à le voir dans son cabinet privé et j'ai trouvé cela extrêmement utile. Dr Miki m'a invité à rejoindre son groupe pilote d'enseignants et j'ai accepté. Depuis lors, Dr Miki a mis en ligne son programme de remise en forme mentale Starling et j'ai également suivi ce programme. »

Karen se décrit comme étant du genre « tout ou rien » et à se faire des reproches. « Chaque fois que quelque chose ne va pas droit, je me blâme. Je pense que quelque chose cloche chez moi, ce qui veut dire que je dois travailler plus fort. » Grâce à sa participation au programme Starling et à son travail avec le Dr Miki, Karen a appris à faire le tri dans ses pensées de « tout ou rien » et à mieux comprendre comment ces dernières la rendaient, littéralement, malade. « Maintenant, je peux reconnaître quand ma pensée est irréaliste et je peux m'en détourner en utilisant des pensées plus sereines. Vous ne pouvez pas imaginer à quel point cela me libère. S'inquiéter de tout prend une énorme quantité d'énergie. Pas étonnant que les gens souffrant d'anxiété soient tellement épuisés, je sais que /9/je le suis. »

Elle explique que Starling n'est pas un programme magique offrant des remèdes miracles. Regarder les vidéos et faire la lecture des exercices à des fins purement éducatives est très intéressant. Cependant, il faut faire des efforts et prendre un engagement pour que le changement se produise. « Vous devez faire les exercices afin de bien comprendre et d'intérioriser les compétences. L'outil du suivi de l'humeur m'a aidé à être proactive dans ma gestion du stress et l'outil pour définir des objectifs m'évite de me sentir dépassée. Les modules expliquent comment la situation de détresse se produit et comment la ressentir moins fréquemment et sur un plus court laps de temps. Le scénario «Virginia» examine des questions très difficiles autour de l'inquiétude et de la dépression, des questions importantes qui doivent être dévoilées. »

Karen revoit quelques-uns des modules de Starling périodiquement. Être au courant de l'existence du programme Starling la rassure. « Si je me sens mal, j'ouvre une session et je fais certains exercices. Cela ne signifie pas que mon humeur ou mes sentiments s'évaporent soudainement, mais j'ai les outils qui me permettent de comprendre ce qui se passe réellement et de traiter la situation mieux que je ne le faisais avant. De plus, chaque fois que je revois Starling, j'acquies de nouvelles connaissances et de nouveaux éclairages. »

Karen encourage tous les enseignants à examiner Starling. Même si vous ne souffrez pas de stress ou de tout autre problème de santé mentale, le programme pourrait vous aider dans votre propre enseignement et dans la façon dont vous gérez les élèves. « Mon enseignement est mieux informé en raison de mon travail avec Starling. Beaucoup de mes élèves sont vraiment inquiets, certains souffrent de dépression. Maintenant, j'ai de nouvelles façons de discuter avec eux en utilisant des images qu'ils peuvent vraiment comprendre. »

Note : Le programme Starling n'est, malheureusement, pas disponible

en français mais les services d'un consultant en réadaptation offerts par le programme de santé et bien-être de la FECB le sont. Communiquer avec votre syndicat local ou avec les services de santé et bien-être de la FECB au 604-871-1925.

*Translated by Marie Claude Tremblay, BCTF French Programs and Services*

## Sick? Get advice before reducing your assignment

Often teachers take reduced assignments because of lifestyle or family situations. However, if you feel that you are too unwell to maintain your whole assignment, you should seek advice from your local president or local office. Employers are under some obligation to accommodate their employees when sick.

Teachers should be checking with their doctor whether or not their inability to work is health related. By taking a reduced assignment instead of going on a partial sick leave, a teacher would be giving up salary, reduced Salary Indemnity Plan benefits if the illness gets worse, and have reduced pension credit.

All teachers on contract can be referred to the BCTF Health and Wellness Program for additional support. Contact 604-871-1921 or [benefits@bctf.ca](mailto:benefits@bctf.ca) for more information.

## Cmolik Prize

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Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Education is now accepting applications/nominations. This \$50,000 prize is open to all SFU faculty, students and alumni.

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A tribute from Jim Iker

## Farewell to Jim Sinclair a true friend of teachers

Jim Sinclair, the eloquent voice of the union movement for the past 15 years, is stepping aside as President of the BC Federation of Labour. For the past 15 years he has led the BC Fed with skill, and passion, and a tireless commitment to the working people of our province.

Sinclair has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers through all our big battles with the BC Liberals—in 2002, 2005, 2012, and 2014. When our collective agreements were stripped, he was there. When we went out on an illegal strike, he was there and he brought the rest of the labour movement out with us. And this year, there he was again, standing strong with us.

Teachers already know all this, so I want to tell you a couple of things you might NOT know about Jim Sinclair.

For example, he grew up in “Rob Ford territory”—Etobicoke. That’s where he attended Vincent Massey Collegiate. But traditional secondary school wasn’t really Jim’s thing, so he moved on to an alternate program at something called The School of Experiential Education.

There he was encouraged to follow his passion so he enrolled in English and in five Social Studies classes. Five! What did he learn there? “How to be a troublemaker!”

It was around this time that Jim walked his first picket line, it was in support of immigrant women striking for a first contract. They were standing up to the bosses and the cops, and they had an idealistic young man standing with them.

On September 11, 1973, the Socialist government of Chile was overthrown in a CIA-backed coup, and the democratically elected President Salvador Allende was murdered.

That coup changed Jim’s life. The next day he made a picket sign and staged his own demonstration in front of the US embassy in Toronto. For years he devoted himself to solidarity work and defending refugees.

In 1975, Jim came to Vancouver, living in the Cobalt Hotel in the downtown eastside, getting to know the retired miners, loggers, and fishermen who called it home. He helped stage rent strikes for better conditions and got involved in the Aboriginal rights movement.

He later moved to Nelson, where he got a job as a reporter with *The Nelson Daily News*, which at that time was owned by Conrad Black. You won’t be surprised to learn he got fired in a fight over editorial control of his stories!

That’s when Jim turned his journalistic talents to *The Fisherman*, the radical newspaper of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers’ Union.

Over the next 18 years, Jim devoted himself to the union. He was a writer, an organizer, and—after a young fisherman lost both legs in an ice auger—a passionate advocate of occupational health and safety protections. Finally, he served as vice-president of the UFAWU for eight years.

In 1999, Jim was elected president of the BC Fed. He won by four votes. Since then, the Federation has grown by more than 75,000 members, including the 41,000 members of the BCTF.

Jim Sinclair is a true friend of teachers, and we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.

Throughout our long struggle over the past year, Jim supported us. He raised our issues in the media, he organized huge rallies in support, and he brought together numerous unions to help us. He maintained a grueling schedule, travelling to all parts of the province to speak at solidarity rallies and talk to members on the lines.

For all the many BCTF members who have had first-hand experience of Sinclair’s unique brand of solidarity, these are unforgettable moments that we’ll always remember.

One of Jim’s former social studies teachers recently wrote to him saying: “You weren’t such a great student, but you turned into a great person.”

I know you’ll all agree with his teacher’s wise assessment, and join me in expressing our gratitude to Jim Sinclair—a truly great person. Thank you, Jim, for your support and friendship! We wish you all the very best.

---

Jim Iker, BCTF President

# When work makes you sick

## Rita's story

By Sarb Lalli and Susan Croll

Most teachers have worked with students who can be aggressive and even violent. It's never pleasant, difficult to deal with, and can set you on edge. Rita (not her real name) had such a student in her Grade 2 class last year. "The student punched, slapped, spit, kicked, knocked over bookshelves, ripped posters off the wall, bolted, and ran into the street," she says. "I was afraid for myself, for the other staff in the classroom, and of course for my students. We're not talking about isolated or occasional incidents. This behaviour happened every day."

*She describes how her principal told her to stop crying and that the student's behaviour was not that big of a deal. "I began to doubt myself. I felt like I was going crazy."*

Rita raised the child's behaviours with her principal and the school-based team. She was given a two-way radio to call for assistance if the child did not return to the classroom. This response did not adequately deal with the situation; Rita developed panic attacks, and began to dread going to work. She went to her doctor who advised her to take some time off. She returned to work two weeks later.

Because the child's behaviour did not change, her panic did not subside either. Her stress levels climbed to the point that she began experiencing vertigo and face twitching that turned into what's commonly known as face drop. With prompting, she filed a Workers' Compensation claim last October.

Last December, after receiving a letter from the WCB denying her claim, Rita contacted the BCTF. They reviewed her claim and believed that she had grounds for an appeal.

Rita says that she wanted the appeal to go ahead but she felt uneasy. "I was feeling

pretty fragile. When the BCTF told me that they would file the appeal on my behalf and that I did not have to do it myself, I felt relieved. I also had the support of my family. They saw what I was going through and they knew it wasn't right."

And then Rita ran out of sick leave. "I didn't know what to do. I wasn't in the mental shape to return to work. I found out about the BCTF's Salary Indemnity Plan. I applied. I also decided to go to a psychiatrist. I was given medication. It sounds drastic, but that's what I needed and wanted to do."

The BCTF also offered Rita the assistance of a rehabilitation consultant through the Health and Wellness program. Rita accepted and says that the combination of the advocacy for her claim and having a rehab consultant made a huge difference. "Whenever I had a question, it got answered. They pointed me in the right direction and told me about services that I didn't know existed."

During the course of the WCAT (Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal) hearing, evidence showed the principal was not supportive, and had actually claimed Rita was over-reacting to the situation. She describes how her principal told her to stop crying and that the student's behaviour was not that big of a deal. "I began to doubt myself. I felt like I was going crazy."

The employer's representative argued that the claim should be denied, in part because the worker had not personally witnessed all of the behavioural incidents but had learned of them through others. Fortunately, Rita had kept a diary, which documented the difficulties she had experienced with the student. She also explained to the panel that as the teacher, she was responsible for the safety of all the students in her care—a duty akin to that of a parent.

In the end, WCAT overturned the original decision accepting that Rita's claim for mental stress was predominantly caused by significant work-related stressors, namely the child's behaviour.

In accepting her claim, the panel stated, "It is not unusual for a regular classroom teacher to have a special needs student assigned to the regular classroom; but it was the severity and persistence of the behaviour of [the student] in this instance that created the significant stressor."

WCAT's finding was supported by a persuasive medical legal opinion, requested by the BCTF, from a registered psychologist. Based on psychological testing and an interview with Rita, the psychologist

noted that due to the student's behaviour, Rita developed a feeling that she had to be hyper-vigilant and appeared to have developed anticipatory anxiety. The panel placed significant weight upon the psychologist's opinion.

Three of Rita's experienced colleagues (two teachers and an education assistant) also provided submissions refuting the employer's argument that the child's behaviour was typical of what might be usually expected in a typical Grade 2 classroom. Having her colleagues' support in this manner was crucial to impressing upon the panel that Rita's situation is not the norm and it led to the ultimate success of the teacher's WCB appeal.

Rita is now back at work after posting into a position at a different school. She wants other teachers to know that as difficult as her situation was, she's not only healed but learned about her rights. "So many teachers have challenging classes. You are not alone and you are not going crazy. What you're experiencing is yours and don't let other people's judgments about you cloud your situation."

Rita also wants teachers to know that unsafe working conditions must be dealt with. "Push for a safety plan. Do not take no for an answer. If you are unsure how to proceed, know that there are people there to help you. Contact your staff rep, call your local union office, call the BCTF. Don't suffer in silence."

For information about your Health and Safety rights, please contact Mike Wisla, Assistant Director, BCTF Health and Safety, at [mwisla@bctf.ca](mailto:mwisla@bctf.ca) and visit <https://bctf.ca/HealthAndSafety.aspx>

If you've had a WCB claim denied, contact Sarb Lalli at [salli@bctf.ca](mailto:salli@bctf.ca).



iStock/Thinkstock



# Pensions

# Health & Safety

# Salary Indemnity

The BCTF has full-time staff dedicated to providing information regarding your teachers' pension and group benefits.

Topics include:

- how your pension works
- how to purchase service after leaves
- what pension options are available upon retirement
- what happens to your pension in the event of a relationship breakdown
- transferring service from another teachers' pension plan or public service pension plan.

For more information, contact Victor Choy, Assistant Director, BCTF Income Security Division: [vchoy@bctf.ca](mailto:vchoy@bctf.ca) or phone: 604-871-1949, toll free 1-800-663-9163, ext. 1949.

## Seminars offered in all regions of the province

### Thinking about retiring?

For teachers who are within five years of retiring

### Your pension, your future

For teachers in mid-career

To register, visit the Teachers' Pension Plan website: <http://tpp.pensionsbc.ca>

Do you work in a school that contains asbestos? Or in a building with poor ventilation? Have you been hit, kicked, or threatened by a student? Are you experiencing harassment at work?

The BCTF Health and Safety Program provides support and advice to members regarding these issues as well as a host of others including:

- when and how to file a WCB claim
- potential physical, mental, or emotional workplace risks and hazards
- training workshops for health and safety reps
- fundamental health and safety rights
- roles and responsibilities of workplace health and safety committees.

For more information or to book a workshop, contact Mike Wisla, Assistant Director, BCTF Income Security Division: [mwisla@bctf.ca](mailto:mwisla@bctf.ca) or phone: 604-871-1891, toll free 1-800-663-9163, ext. 1891.

For additional information please visit <http://bctf.ca/HealthAndSafety.aspx>

The BCTF operates a plan that provides both short- and long-term benefits to teachers who, because of illness or injury, are disabled from working. If the illness or injury is work-related, a WCB claim must be initiated.

The plan, in accordance with the plan regulations, applies to all active BCTF members with regular assignments. Eligible members pay a percentage of their salary every year into the Salary Indemnity Fund in order to pay benefits to members who need it. For the 2014–15 school year, the fee was 1.67% of salary.

### Salary Indemnity Plan—Short-term

- When ill and unable to work, an eligible teacher should request a short-term package from the BCTF (604-871-1921 or [benefits@bctf.ca](mailto:benefits@bctf.ca)).
- 120 days of short-term benefit, paid at 50% of gross salary.

### Salary Indemnity Plan—Long-term

- Case managers will send you a long-term form close to the end of the ST portion.
- Great West Life adjudicates; the teacher will be assigned a new case manager.
- The benefit paid is 65% of the first \$40,000 gross annual salary, 50% of the next \$40,000 of gross salary, and 40% of the balance.
- Members who turn 64, reach Factor 88, or who are in receipt of a retirement pension under a registered pension plan may voluntary withdraw from the LTD section of the plan.

For more information and answers to frequently asked questions go to <https://bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?id=4782> or contact Chris Harris, Assistant Director, BCTF Income Security Division: [charris@bctf.ca](mailto:charris@bctf.ca) or phone: 604-871-1935, toll free 1-800-663-9163, ext. 1935.

# Health & Wellness

**The Health and Wellness Program, operated through the SIP, is a rehabilitation program to help members who have medical conditions or disabilities with their return to work.**

The program is also available for members who are having difficulty maintaining their teaching assignment because of illness or injury.

The program is strictly voluntary and has rehabilitation consultants throughout the province. Support and services include:

- working with teachers in their own communities
- co-ordinating and planning individualized treatment and wellness interventions in consultation with healthcare providers
- working with employers and unions to support a return to work that is durable and sustainable
- knowledge of the work that teachers do and the workplace environment.

Members who contribute to the Salary Indemnity Program are eligible to receive the support of the Health and Wellness program when they are dealing with medical conditions that impact their ability to work or sustain their work.

For more information, contact your local president or [benefits@bctf.ca](mailto:benefits@bctf.ca) or phone: 604-871-1925, toll free 1-800-663-9163, ext. 1925.

# Living with Balance

**Living with Balance is a group wellness initiative exclusively for members.**

Developed and piloted in 2009, the program consists of a series of workshops to provide strategies and skills for living a healthier lifestyle and managing the stressors that exist at home and in the workplace, including:

- improving personal well-being
- understanding our problems and learning to restructure our thinking
- defining work-life balance and boundaries
- attaining goals toward wellness
- understanding the importance of social connections.

The workshop is designed to assist teachers at all stages of their personal and professional lives, including those who are new to the profession or nearing retirement.

If you are looking to acquire skills and strategies to make positive, sustainable change in your life, this course is for you.

For additional information, the current schedule, or to register for a group offered in their school district visit <http://bctf.ca/LivingWithBalance.aspx> or phone: 604-871-1925, toll free 1-800-663-9163 ext. 1925.

# WCB Advocacy

**Have you been injured at work, developed an occupational disease, or had your Workers' Compensation claim denied?**

The BCTF WCB Advocacy Program provides support and advice to members regarding:

- how to successfully navigate the WCB claims process
- how to appeal WCB claims that have been denied or are inadequate in the compensation.

## **Employment Insurance questions?**

Do you have questions regarding employment insurance benefits with respect to a layoff, shortage of work, pregnancy/parental leave, sickness, or compassionate care? If so, the BCTF's Employment Insurance Advocate may be able to assist you.

The Employment Insurance advocate advises and assists locals and members with regard to EI claims from the initial stages up to and including the hearing of appeals by the Social Security Tribunal.

For more information, contact the BCTF WCB advocate, Sarbrinder Lalli, BCTF Income Security Division: [slalli@bctf.ca](mailto:slalli@bctf.ca) or phone 604-871-1890, 1-800-663-9163, ext. 1890.

# Programs and services by the numbers

## Salary Indemnity Plan

- 1,024 teachers applied for Short Term Disability in 2012–13.
- 1,352 teachers applied for Long Term Disability in 2012–13.
- 44.8% of LTD claims primary diagnosis was mental illness, followed by musculoskeletal (17.1%), nervous system (11.4%), and cancer (8.8%) IN 2012–13.
- 68,092 claims days were paid by June 30, 2013 for claims that began in 2011–12.
- 78.9% of Long Term Disability claimants were over the age of 40 in 2012–13.
- Members on Long Term Disability are offset by CPP Disability that reduced the cost of Long Term Disability payments by \$6.9 million in 2012–13.
- The SIP had \$274 million in assets and \$167 million in liabilities in 2012–13. The surplus allowed the plan to reduce the fee paid by members to 1.67% of salary down from 1.94% of the actual cost.

## Health and Wellness Program

- Health and Wellness operates in 56 of 60 districts in British Columbia and covers over 99% of teachers in the province.
- Health and Wellness spent \$4,189,081 in treatments and services to help teachers return to the classroom.

## Health and Safety

- 4,235 Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) Claims were filed in the education sector in 2013—2,092 were healthcare services, 1,974 required short-term disability, and 167 required long-term disability.
- 2 fatalities occurred in the education sector in 2013 because of asbestos exposure.
- 65,063 days were lost by employees in the education sector in 2013 because of workplace injury.
- WCB paid \$19,792,035 in claims and healthcare services to education sector employees.

Source: Worksafe BC 2013 Statistics serving British Columbia

## WCB Advocacy

- Currently, the BCTF has over 70 active appeals assisting members who have cases before WCAT and the Review Division of Worksafe BC.

## Teachers' Pension Plan

- The Teachers' Pension Plan granted 1,651 new pensions in 2013; the average annual pension provided to members was \$35,400.
- Of the 1,651 pensions granted, 934 members had over 25 years of service in the plan.
- Contributions to the Teachers' Pension Plan by plan members totaled \$326.8 million and \$384.3 million by employers in 2013.
- The Teachers' Pension Plan posted a 14.6% return for 2013, exceeding its market benchmark of 12.3%. The plan's assets increased from \$18.3 billion to \$20.7 billion from 2012 to 2013.
- 33,450 pensions were in payment to members of the Teachers' Pension Plan as of December 31, 2013.
- The Teachers' Pension Plan has over 90,000 members including 45,271 active members—12,098 are male and 33,173 are female.
- 630 plan members purchased a leave of absence from the Teachers' Pension Plan in 2013.

Source: Teachers' Pension Plan 2013 Annual Report

## BCTF/BCSTA Group Life Insurance

- BCTF/BCSTA Group Life Insurance plan covers over 13,500 members in 30 school districts with annual premiums over \$3.3 million. In 2012–13, because of a surplus in the plan, premium rates were reduced by 11.1%



# Resources for your classroom

## Stop wondering, start knowing

A great new resource for secondary teachers and students that includes five short videos of BC students talking about their own mental health. It is designed to help teachers and students:

- better understand and be more aware of mental health.
- recognize the early signs of mental health challenges.
- reflect and share ideas about mental health.
- help decrease the stigma around mental health.
- learn about resources available for support.

In addition to the videos, a teacher's facilitation guide includes:

- Background information
- Lesson plans
- Suggested discussion questions
- Conversation guides
- Optional activities
- Handouts
- Links to additional resources
- Memo for families



BC teacher Alex Gunderson (Prince George) and school counsellors Dave MacKenzie (Vernon) and Theresa Temlett (Coquitlam) served on the advisory group during the development of this resource.

The videos and facilitation guide have been uploaded to **Teach BC** on the BCTF web site and can be accessed at:

<https://teachbcd.bctf.ca/list?q=stop&p=1&ps=25>

– Charlie Naylor, BCTF Research



## Citizenship challenge!

### Test students' national knowledge

Presented by Historica Canada, the Citizenship Challenge is asking students to put their national knowledge to the test by studying for and writing a mock citizenship exam in English or French. Teachers will receive everything they need to explore Canadian history, identity, and democracy with their students.

Over 57,000 Canadian students took the challenge last year. Receive free curriculum-based learning tools, study guides, and quizzes. Win prizes like a school Citizenship Celebration and an all-expenses paid trip to Ottawa for a student. Teachers who register multiple classes are eligible for bonus prizes.

Register online at <http://citizenshipchallenge.ca>

Deadline to submit scores is January 31, 2015. We invite you to participate in the challenge and to share information about the contest among colleagues. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us, [ecotter@HistoricaCanada.ca](mailto:ecotter@HistoricaCanada.ca)

**Climate Justice in BC**  
LESSONS FOR TRANSFORMATION



## Climate justice

"The Climate Justice Project asks how we can tackle global warming with fairness and equality. Our challenge is to build a zero carbon society that also enhances our quality of life." – Marc Lee, Project Director

Are you looking for new ways to teach about climate change and social justice? Frustrated with models that stop at changing light bulbs and driving smart cars?

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the BC Teachers' Federation have teamed up to create free classroom-ready materials that help students engage with the two great inconvenient truths of our time: climate change and rising inequality. And we don't stop at small-scale personal choices, Climate Justice in BC looks at how we can re-imagine the systems around us to make a better life for everyone.

The package consists of eight modules designed for students in Grades 8 to 12, adaptable for intermediate grades. It explores climate justice within the context of BC's communities, history, economy, and ecology.

Thank you to Ryan Cho, a Coquitlam teacher, for his work on this amazing resource.

For more information: <http://teachclimatejustice.ca>

## **mentoringbc.ca** New website

The New Teacher Mentoring Project now has its own website, [mentoringbc.ca](http://mentoringbc.ca). We are excited about the possibilities this website will offer in providing an interactive space for mentors, new teachers, and mentor leaders to network and connect, access resources and research, and document the benefits of their mentoring work.

This website will become an integral part of moving mentorship to every corner of the province and ensuring all new teachers are well supported as they find their place in ongoing communities of practice.

# Building a welcoming community through mentorship in Peace River

By Alison Davies

Journeying to work in school districts or locals in northern BC always brings the weather into sharp focus. I'd been hoping that, on October 23, I would arrive in Fort St. John ahead of the snow—but no such luck! After landing in frozen rain at the airport and renting a car with no snow tires, I found myself precariously driving 50 kms/hour, through the second snowstorm of the season, on the highway to Dawson Creek. I arrived anxious and shaken at the Peace River South Teachers' Association (PRSTA) office an hour later than expected to meet with the newly formed mentorship steering committee for Peace River South.

New teachers in the Peace River Valley, some from as far away as Ontario, Quebec, France, the Ivory Coast, and Haiti. Between the two districts of Peace River North and Peace River South, 49 new teachers were hired for September 2014 and there are still eight positions not yet filled. When I arrived at the PRSTA office, president Lorraine Mackay had just put down the phone after helping a new teacher only three days on the job. "He's been placed with a challenging group and he is all on his own out there. We really need this mentorship program," said Lorraine.

Spending just a couple of days with the locals in Northern BC brought to light the amount of personal support work carried out by the presidents and vice-presidents in this region. Lorraine spent the first three weeks of the school year visiting all schools spread across the three communities of Chetwynd, Tumbler Ridge, and Dawson Creek, personally greeting teachers newly arrived in the district. The district has helped them find housing, and everyone on staff is helping them navigate the new community.

Mary Tremain, PRSTA vice-president has shared many stories that demonstrate the hospitality shown to those new to the teaching community, including helping a new recruit land a second job at the Fort St. John Staples store. "I knew the manager, so I called him and asked if he would consider an interview," said Mary. "Who knows, he might move on next year. But maybe they'll be like

me. I arrived in Fort St. John in 1989 thinking I'd stay two years at the most, and I'm still here after 25 years. I love it here."

Peace River South District 59 is one of the five new districts participating in the New Teacher Mentorship Project this year. I was in Dawson Creek to facilitate a two-day workshop for 43 beginning and mentor teachers who have committed to collaborate in mentoring partnerships. I began the workshop asking who was born in the region, and three hands went up. All others have arrived from elsewhere. Many like Mary had chosen to stay, make a home, and raise a family.

The central challenge of the mentoring workshop is to build a welcoming community of educators where the new teachers can find a place and a voice for themselves, and experienced teachers can meaningfully offer their support, understanding, and knowledge. We know that integrated communities of teachers working together across different levels in age and experience create the most powerful teaching and learning environments. Offering a formalized mentorship program is one way these northern districts/locals are forging and sustaining a community of professionals able to both welcome the new and respect the known.

Peace River is an area of BC where locals and districts are partnering together to bring teachers to the north and keep them here. Peace River South District is contributing \$30,000 to renew its mentoring program this year, recognizing formal mentorship as a key component in helping new teachers find a place of belonging. Peace River North

reinvigorated its program last year with support from the New Teacher Mentoring Project. This year, the local Pro-D committee is providing 30 release days and the school district is providing 60 days to assure continuation of the program.

Testimonials from participants in Fort St. John confirmed an increase in morale and collaboration among the participating teachers, whether mentors or mentees. As one Peace River North mentee said, "Asking for help and collaborating increases my effectiveness as a teacher."

Near the end of the workshop in Dawson Creek, I talked with Jordan Dyck, a mentee teaching alternate secondary school education for the first time. Jordan told me he was circulating an email to the teachers new to the district. "Some of the best conversations I've had over the last two days have been with other beginning teachers," he says, "and I thought I'd organize some social nights so we can continue to meet and talk together." I realize how vital that must be when absolutely so much is new—job, community, home, and friends. I am impressed that Jordan has taken on this initiative so soon into the year. But in many ways Jordan's invitation is evidence of what teachers do well in a culture that balances support, professional challenge, and vision. It creates a space and a place of welcome where teachers can help teachers.

*Alison Davies is co-ordinator of the New Teacher Mentoring Project, a joint initiative of UBC Faculty of Ed, BC Superintendents' Association, and the BCTF.*



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# PSA Day: Social studies teachers explore geography of hope

By **Nancy Knickerbocker**

From Polynesia, to Tibet, to Amazonia, to Haiti, to the Sacred Headwaters and beyond, more than 400 social studies teachers were treated to an epic voyage of cultural genius and diversity thanks to the eloquent voice and stunning photographs of Dr. Wade Davis, renowned ethnobotanist and explorer.

"Other peoples of the world are not failed attempts to be you, failed attempts to be modern. Each culture is a unique answer to a fundamental question: What does it mean to be human and alive?" Davis said.

"When asked that question humanity responds in 7,000 different languages, voices that collectively comprise our repertoire for dealing with all the challenges that will confront us as a species in the coming centuries. Every culture has something to say, and each deserves to be heard."

Now a professor of anthropology at UBC, Davis gave the opening keynote "Ancient Wisdom, Modern World" for the Social Studies PSA conference held at Vancouver Technical Secondary School, October 24.

Drawing examples from different indigenous cultures on all continents, Davis explored the concept of "sacred geography," and the question of "what it means for people to believe that the Earth is actually alive."

For example, in BC many people believe forests were made to be cut down, while Aboriginal people believe they have deeper spiritual value. "You can see a forest in terms of cellulose and board feet or as a wild place of wisdom and home to the spirits—the different world views have differing outcomes," Davis said.

Faced with climate change, environmental devastation and the loss of cultures and languages due to industrial, military, and ideological forces, "...we know we must change the fundamental ways we inhabit the world."

"Technology is no threat to culture. Change is no threat to culture. What is a threat to culture is power," Davis said. "The issue isn't traditional versus modern. It's finding a way

for everyone to embrace the genius of modernity without having to give up who they are."

Dale Martelli, president of the BCSSA, said Davis's address "had an impact that I haven't seen in a while."

"Many teachers left the auditorium with a sense of replenishment, if I can use that term. I think the address was restorative after a combative experience of the past few months," he added.

*Nancy Knickerbocker, Director, BCTF Communications and Campaigns Division*

## Teachers of English Language Arts explore the joy of reading

By **Teri Mooring**

"How do we create joy and engagement for reading and writing in the never-ending, soul sapping tsunami of standardized assessment?"

That was the question Jeffrey Wilhelm, Professor of English Education at Boise State University, asked teachers attending the BC Teachers of English Language Arts conference last month. He surmises that students often read texts that make us uncomfortable. Take *The Hunger Games*, zombie, and vampire series. While these texts are not every teacher's first choice for leisurely reading, many of our students are reaching for these books and enjoying them.

His point is that students are engaged and thinking about what they are reading, regardless of our reading tastes. He described how teachers can use student-chosen books as a hook to get students to read other books, suggesting that teachers have their students compare *The Hunger Games* to Orwell's *1984*.

Wilhelm also believes that when students interact with non-traditional texts, like video games, they learn about plot and characters. In all, Wilhelm's message was that instilling the joy of reading is more important than what they are reading.

*Teri Mooring, BCTF 2nd Vice-President*



## PSA Day tweets

**Nico1e @nico1e Oct 24**

**Burnaby, British Columbia**

#PSADay! I have the shakes I'm so nervous for my presentation. 3rd yr teacher - if I can present, so can you! #BCATML

**Glen Hansman @glenhansman Oct 24**

Happy to be with @janfra2 at @BCPrimaryTeach keynote from @regieroutman. Huge turnout on #psaday

**CUE British Columbia @cuebc Oct 24**

Laughter & collaboration, a great start to our keynote with @willrich45 #cuebc #psaday

**Amanda Long @MsAmandaLong Oct 24**

I wish I could be in more than once place at once today! So many great conferences happening! #psaday @bctf #bced

**Betty Fei @BettyFei Oct 24**

Great workshop on quality assessment at #BCATML

<http://Qualityassessmentwithbarbandmonica.weebly.com> #PSADay #FSLchat #langchat #sd36learn

**Jessica Dodds @mrsjdodds Oct 24**

Excited to add new games and ideas to our Math program! #kimsutton #psaday #prod

**Derek D @DerekDeGear Oct 24**

Amazed at the breadth of quality resources at my first workshop today. Sitting with @LTAPresident. #abed #psaday

**Janice Novakowski @jnovakowskisd38 Oct 24**  
**Richmond, British Columbia**

Joining 300 science educators this afternoon for the @bcscta Catalyst conference at Cambie. #sd38 #psaday

**Shelley Moore @tweetsomemoore Oct 24**

@BCTELA conference is BOOMING!!!!!! #psaday

**Cindy Romphf @clromphf Oct 24**

#PSADay Dr. Tony Maiello is our Keynote Speaker! Absolutely amazing! BCMEA Conference 2014

**Lisa Descary @ldescary Oct 24**

Going through my "goodie bag" after a successful #psaday at the Catalyst Sci tchrs conference. Thanks #bcscta!

**Erica Huang @msyehuang Oct 24**

A fun day learning and sharing at the #bcatml conference. Thx to the execs for a wonderful event! #PSADay

**Kate Campbell @Artofinclusion Oct 25**

Great conference, awesome people, inspiring & rejuvenating. Thank you everyone who attended or presented this year. #bctela14 #psaday



# Greater Victoria votes for school trustees who support teachers

## Election night interview

As votes for school board trustees were tallied in Victoria on November 15, Victoria teacher Robin Tosczak said that teachers finally have a school board that supports teachers. "I believe we've elected trustees who want to work hard and dig deep. They aren't just going to accept the status quo."

"All six of the candidates endorsed by the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association were elected. I feel that our work researching, reviewing, and reporting on candidates' track records paid off. We endorsed and elected candidates who will stand up and speak out for public education," she said.

Tosczak holds the position of Community Liaison for her local and worked closely on the trustee elections. She explains that the GVTA began the endorsement process by emailing all of the candidates asking them if they were interested in receiving a GVTA endorsement.

Three GVTA members then interviewed the interested candidates,

asking questions about local and provincial issues. They researched the candidates, looked at their involvement in our recent dispute, the incumbents' voting records, and reported to the GVTA Executive, which made a recommendation to a general meeting. The GVTA invited the candidates to the meeting to answer questions from members, and then the members voted to endorse six candidates.

"We produced postcard and business-sized poll cards and gave them to our staff reps. We asked staff reps to hold meetings with the teachers at their schools to discuss the upcoming election. Because of our job action, many teachers were familiar with the candidates because they had joined our picket lines, come to our rallies, written letters, moved motions at the board table, and were supportive overall. Jordan Watters, for example, initiated the Facebook page—

Support for BC Teachers. We wanted to support candidates who supported teachers."

The GVTA has 1,500 members but Tosczak believes it wasn't simply teachers' actual votes that made the difference in this election. She says it was teachers' influence. "Every teacher had poll cards to

give to their family and friends, and we had easy-to-share posts on our Facebook and Twitter accounts. We wanted teachers to feel comfortable and confident in explaining to friends, family, and neighbours why they were recommending certain candidates. Many people don't know who to vote for when it comes to school board, and a recommendation from a trusted source is helpful."

Tosczak says most members appreciated the GVTA doing this election homework, checking candidates' records and finding out what they stood for. "It takes a fair amount of work to really know where candidates are coming from and that is what we were able to do for members." A few members did convey they didn't like to be "told how to vote." She said she explained to them endorsements were recommendations and that everyone's decision on how they vote is their own.

Tosczak says that the new school board will not operate in the same way as the previous board. "The candidates we supported will work together. What makes them different is that they want to develop a strategic plan, one that has a vision. They want to set priorities and goals and have meaningful consultation with all of the education partners. They want to form a real trustee budget-setting committee, guided by the bigger picture of public education, not just look at the budget as presented by staff and rubber-stamp the suggested cuts. This is why we endorsed these candidates. And now we've elected trustees who are committed, who will stand up, speak out. Victoria teachers can take some credit for that."



*A group heading out to canvas (Carolina Tudela, parent; Diane McNally, trustee; Pat Butler, teacher; and Catherine Alpha, teacher and outgoing trustee).*

*Saturday, November 15*  
**School Board Elections**  
School District 61 (Greater Victoria)  
*Please vote for candidates who speak up for public education!*  
Victoria Teachers endorse:  
✓ **Loring-Kuhanga, Edith**  
✓ **McNally, Diane**  
✓ **Nohr, Deborah**  
✓ **Paynter, Rob**  
✓ **Watters, Jordan**  
✓ **Whiteaker, Ann**  
You can save this list & take it with you to vote!  
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# Tough and tender reads for tweens

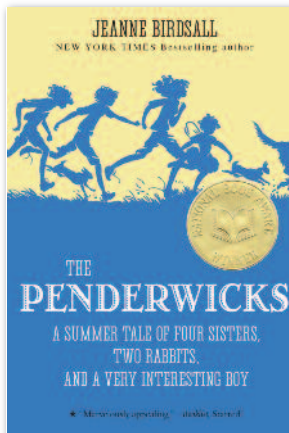
By Lucinda Tooker, a teacher-librarian in Maple Ridge



*Diamond Willow* is a story-poem by author Helen Frost, set in central Alaska, where 12-year-old Willow lives with her Science teacher father and Athbascan mother. When Willow and a friend are finally deemed old enough to take a sled dog team into the bush to visit her grandparents, a blizzard moves in and an accident leads to a series of heart-wrenching family decisions. Two unique elements are evident in this story-poem. The first are the diamond-shaped paragraphs, with Willow's hidden thoughts printed in darker ink. Also, the spirits of Willow's ancestors inhabit the pages as wildlife who comment on and assist the characters in their adventure and help to reveal a family secret. Suitable for kids aged 8–13.



In *A Tinfoil Sky*, by Cyndi Sand-Eveland, Mel and her mother, Cecily, are toughing it out in a big city, on the run from an abusive ex-partner, living rough in a car under a bridge, eating at a soup kitchen, and busking to raise money. Mel's only sanctuary is the public library. When Cecily is sent to prison for a month, Mel has to live with her resentful and distrustful grandmother in an apartment kept dark with tinfoil covering the windows. Gradually, they make a tenuous connection, with the help of a friendly store-owner and a caring soup kitchen cook. While the subject matter sounds extreme, this is a sensitive and moving account of a marginalized family, and it is suitable for students in the intermediate grades.



*The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits, and a Very Interesting Boy*, by Jane Birdsall, is the exact opposite of *A Tinfoil Sky*. It features a rosy-cheeked family, bursting with good health and vitality, who spend a near-idyllic three weeks at a cottage in New England. There, the four Penderwick sisters get up to all sorts of light-hearted misadventures. This novel is a throwback to a much gentler time, which may never have existed, but for many of us "of a certain age" remember fondly. This first book in the Penderwick series has been compared to *Little Women*, partly because it unfolds as a series of events rather than having a conventional story arc, and partly because of the good-spirited and healthy bond between the Penderwick sisters and their dog, Hound. Suitable for kids age 9–12.

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# PD Calendar

## DECEMBER 2014

### December 4–6 Vancouver First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) Annual Aboriginal Education Conference

The conference will be held at The Westin Bayshore, showcasing innovative curriculum, inspiring people and networking opportunities, the First Nations Education Steering Committee Annual Conference on Aboriginal Education draws several hundred educators each year. In recognition of the conferences' 20th year anniversary, our theme this year is *20 Years: Transforming Education*. Everyone is welcome and it is an opportunity for sharing, learning and celebrating our achievements. For more info visit <http://www.fnesc.ca/conference>

## FEBRUARY 2015

### February 19–20 Vancouver BC Alternate Education Association Challenge and Change conference

The conference will be held at the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre with Keynote Speaker Martin Brokenleg. Visit our website for more information <http://bctf.ca/bcaea/conference.html>

### February 24–28 Victoria BC Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia offers BC teachers an exciting professional development program at the Parliament Buildings in our provincial capital. Learn about parliamentary democracy and become champions of citizenship education. You will return to your school with an enhanced understanding of our political system in British Columbia. You will meet with the Speaker of the House, MLAs, senior public officials, and have a behind-the-scenes tour of your Parliament Buildings. You will have plenty of opportunities to collaborate and share with colleagues from across the province. The deadline to apply online is Monday, December 15, 2014. For more information, visit: [www.leg.bc.ca/bcti](http://www.leg.bc.ca/bcti)

## MARCH 2015

### March 5–6 Vancouver Special Education Association (SEA) 40th Annual Crosscurrent Conference

The conference will be held at Vancouver Sheraton Airport Hotel. For more information contact Stephanie Koropatnick: [seaconferencechair@gmail.com](mailto:seaconferencechair@gmail.com)

### PD Online Calendar <http://bctf.ca/PDcalendar>

Changes/additions:  
[msteele@bctf.ca](mailto:msteele@bctf.ca)

Future October PSA days:  
2015–16: October. 23, 2015

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<p><b>MORE</b> than half of children report being involved in appearance based bullying. <i>Be part of the solution.</i></p> <p>A positive body-image can lead to better self-esteem, emotional stability, happiness and confidence in children.</p> <p><i>Beyond Images</i> helps students understand how and why media messages are constructed – and then learn to make their own.</p> <p>Join us on this journey of self-discovery and build understanding and resilience towards negative messaging in students and in the schoolyard.</p> <p>Developed by the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (<a href="http://www.nedic.ca">www.nedic.ca</a>). <i>Beyond Images</i> is generously supported by the Dove Self-Esteem Project</p>		<p><b>TEACHER ADVANTAGES:</b> a comprehensive media literacy curriculum written by teachers that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesson objectives</li> <li>• Lesson plans and media examples</li> <li>• Student worksheets</li> <li>• Evaluation rubrics</li> <li>• Curriculum outcomes matched</li> </ul>	



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