

CUPE FACTS

Precarious Work Threatens Library Workers' Security and Service Quality *October 2015*

Every day CUPE's 22,000 library workers provide quality services to Canadians across the country. But the quality of services provided is being undermined by the increasingly precarious nature of work. Quality services can be maintained and enhanced by a stable, full-time, trained library workforce that is fairly compensated.

Precarious employment in the form of part-time, temporary, casual, relief or contract work represents a cheaper supply of labour for cash-strapped library boards. Precarious workers are paid a lower wage than full-time workers, work fewer hours and are provided few, if any, employment benefits. Most precarious workers are excluded from or must meet high standards to be eligible for workplace pension plans.

Precarity is extremely common in the library sector. Nearly 45 per cent of CUPE library workers are part-time, while that number is over 70 per cent for CUPE library clerks. Library workers are least likely to be paid for sick days and many must work several years before securing a full-time job.

According to the 2014 CUPE Membership Survey, you are more likely to be a precarious worker if you are a young woman (34 years of age or younger), have a physical or mental health injury, are racialized, speak a language other than French or English at home, or be a non-citizen. The survey also reveals that precarious workers earn less than \$40 thousand annually.

Findings from other research show that precarious workers are often unaware of their work schedules, report low job satisfaction and have limited career prospects. Employers rarely provide training to precarious workers. In fact, oftentimes precarious workers pay for their own training.

The rise of precarity in the library sector jeopardizes the provision of quality services. It is challenging to recruit new hires and retain existing library staff when the compensation is poor and the work is insecure. The lack of full-time work opportunities make it difficult to attract young workers into the field.

Moreover, many precarious workers are forced to hold down several jobs to make ends meet. Consequently, through no fault of their own, they are often unable to make the same commitment to a single employer as a full-time worker. Split shifts and a lack of guaranteed hours make coordinating with other jobs and achieving a healthy work-life balance difficult. Precarious employment leads to high stress levels, health problems and affects household well-being.

The loss of skills and de-professionalization is yet another negative fallout of precarity. We have witnessed a trend in the library sector whereby the job responsibilities of higher paid classifications are downloaded to lower paid classifications. In one instance, two librarian manager positions were eliminated due to budget cuts and some of the responsibilities were downloaded to lower classifications in the bargaining unit with no increase in salary.

So, what can we do as union activists to combat precarity in our workplaces and increase the job security of library workers? We can:

- Bargain collective agreement language to convert part-time, casual, contract and relief positions to full-time positions;
- Bargain improved benefits for part-time and other precarious library workers;
- Start a conversation with your library board about precarity and lobby for a reduction in precarious employment;
- Start a conversation with your municipal government about precarity as local governments are often the main funders of libraries;
- Lobby municipal, and other levels of government where applicable, for increased funding to recruit and retain full-time, qualified library workers;
- Lobby your library board to increase funding for staff training;
- Work with community partners such as the United Way so they know that CUPE supports and participates in the *Good Jobs for All Campaign*;
<http://goodjobsforall.ca/about/>
- Get involved with your local library associations and school libraries to inform them about precarity and how it negatively impacts library workers and quality services;
- Refer to this fact sheet when developing arguments to present to library boards and governments during bargaining and lobbying.

It is important more than ever to tackle precarity in our workplaces because we know that involvement in our union increases with job security. The more members we have actively engaged in our union the more successful we will be at the bargaining table and in countering attacks on labour from corporations and governments.

Please visit www.CUPE.ca for more information on precarity. And join us for a discussion on precarious work in libraries at the Library Sector Meeting at the next CUPE National Convention scheduled for November 1st, 2015, starting at 10:00am.

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