

Part Time and Auxiliary workers presentation to the Library Board
22 February 2012

Intro.

Good evening library board trustees and thank you for hearing this presentation tonight on work issues as they relate to part time and auxiliary workers.

My name is Gary Jarvis, and I work part time and auxiliary shifts at Vancouver Public Library primarily in the shelving capacity. I have also worked tagging and shipping shifts.

I am the second vice president of our union local CUPE 391 and also a member of the bargaining committee.

I'm going to tell you about the difficulties experienced by part timers and auxiliaries who work at the Library.

I will focus on the issues that stem from the very nature of casual work and include the inability to earn a living wage, the ability to access shifts in a fair and transparent manner and the complex scheduling practices.

When I tell people I work at the library – their response normally goes something like – oh working for The City – that must be good.

Yes, it is must be good and in a lot of ways it is a job I enjoy.

For part timers and auxiliaries the difficulty we face in the job relates primarily to our hours of work and trying to live in an expensive city where rent for a two bedroom apartment is 37 per cent higher than the average in any other Canadian city.

Tonight I will focus on the following points:

- The absence of a living wage for most part timers and auxiliary employees
- The increasing use of casual labour at the library
- The difficulty in accessing available hours
- And the over complicated scheduling practices

One of the things you need to know is when I say auxiliary – you need to think casual.

The absence of a Living Wage

The part timers and auxiliary workers can be found in several classifications of the library.

We are;

- Librarians
- Shipping Clerks
- Shelves
- Event Service Assistants (ESA)
- Library Assistants
- Information Assistants
- And most recently we are Taggers.

For many of the staff working in these positions, it is not possible to earn a living wage.

The living wage for Vancouver in 2011 is calculated to be \$18.81 per hour.

The straight hourly wage at the library for casual and part time employees are:

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| - Shelver | \$15.78 |
| - Tagger | \$18.18 (first have to work in another classification) |
| - ESA | \$18.90 |

The lowest paid jobs are almost all filled on a part time or casual basis and as you can see these classifications are below the Vancouver living wage figure.

The combination of low wages, no benefits and too few hours of work means many workers at the library do not make a living wage pay packet.

The employer has tried to justify these low wages by referring to them as “student jobs” – implying that because it is mostly students that do the work, then it’s okay to pay these workers a lower pay rate.

Increasingly adults are taking shelving and tagging shifts to make ends meet.

I know this because I’ve watched the average age of my co-workers, those working around me, increase in the nearly, four years I’ve worked at the library.

Casual Labour

We are also dissatisfied with the increasing use of casual labour at the library.

All auxiliary work is casual labour.

The employer would like the public to believe that it is the employees that want casual work. The majority of our members tell us that they do not – and they tell me on a regular basis.

A 2008 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report found that 80 per cent of the people it surveyed would prefer to have permanent work and not casual work.

It's a no brainer as far as I'm concerned.

Having regular part time hours at library allows me to plan my life. I can make commitments to friends, employers and family, weeks and months ahead.

When I first started working at the library and having to find hours – being then only an auxiliary, I could only make commitments to people when I knew the library was closed.

That was challenging given at the time I was a radio student at BCIT.

And don't just take my word for it.

One of the key findings of that CCPA report is the following:

“The overwhelming picture that emerges from our survey is of the double bind in which financial and time constraints affect all aspects of casual workers' lives and their ability to balance work and family obligations. There is a constant need for more income, yet this is continually undermined by irregular hours, shift work, short call-ins, minimal notice of work schedules, and low pay.”

Short notice call-ins, irregular hours, minimal notice of shift changes are the reality at VPL for casual staff.

It's a challenge to combine casual work with any other aspect of our lives.

The fact that many VPL employees are looking for permanent work is reflected in the number of workers who quit the Library when they get more reliable work elsewhere.

There is no commitment from VPL to employees doing casual work.

When auxiliaries are hired at VPL, the library asks that auxiliary employees be available to work twenty hours a week. At the same time the library will not commit to give these employees any regular hours from day one.

The Library does not guarantee a single shift to a new employee. This is unusual and can be very disheartening for new hires.

Essentially new auxiliary hires have to know how to self promote in order to get work.

This leads to a culture of favouritism and resentment, and when younger workers aren't successful in jockeying for shifts, they leave the Library.

The turnover is high in the shelver classification and consequently is costly to our human resources department. H R has to recruit and select new auxiliaries, new casuals.

A solution would be not to employ auxiliary workers at all. Part timers could be hired with a guaranteed 8 to 12 hours with the possibility of getting additional shifts.

And finally, the increasing use of casual labour in Canada also means that the rift between those with permanent work and full time hours, and those with limited hours of work is growing, increasing the wage divide that is detrimental to the welfare of our nation.

An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report of last year states that

“Shifts in the labour market are a key reason why the gap is widening. The prevalence of part-time work is eroding wages.”

Accessing shifts

I've worked in three classifications and never been able to acquire more than 28 hours in one week of work. In fact I have only once clocked up 28 hours.

Right now I have twenty regular shelving hours. But it took me three years to get there. When I was first hired I got 20 auxiliary hours most weeks, but these were not regular permanent hours.

Most part timers need to work additional auxiliary shifts to make ends meet and if you don't have regular part time hours then you are struggling to find all your shifts.

As a shelver and a tagger you are limited to 20 hours per week of work.

You can only work 20 hours as a shelver or 20 hours as a tagger or twenty hours of a combination.

For library assistants whose employment pre-dates the introduction of shelving staff their frustration is two-fold.

They are being told that there are not enough library assistant shifts to go round.

So what do they do? They take shifts shelving. This is work at a lower pay grade to their original pay grade when they were first hired.

And here's the second part of their frustration.

The shelving staff who were hired as shelvers, have now since gained the employment classification as library assistants, are now taking the available auxiliary library assistants shifts.

Scheduling

Both the Library and our union local have long recognized that there is a problem relating to the distribution of auxiliary shifts. The Library has previously stated that it has problems filling shifts because auxiliaries once hired do not appear to be available to work.

We understand that our members have to find other employment because they have no guarantee of hours, thus may not be as available as when hired, and as stated earlier the shelve and tagger classification are limited to a 20 hour work week.

That's definitely a problem for the library in terms of managing and filling work shifts.

The new hires are also frustrated that they want to work but can not get hours because they find that they either miss out on the available hours, or that the hours clash with a second job, school or another life commitment.

If the unfilled and available hours were more transparent and the method of filling available shifts more accessible we could work together to avoid not having enough employees at crucial times of library business.

Currently this complicated scheduling system leaves employees without enough work.

The Library and the union have an opportunity in upcoming bargaining to improve a practice that is not working well for either party.

A survey by the union local of our members came back with some interesting statistics.

84 per cent of part timers and auxiliaries said if they could get enough hours they would work just for the library.

57 per cent of staff wrote that they are not given fair access to hours. A common difficulty is being able to respond to upcoming shifts as they are announced.

In addition to those stats were the following comments,

“The type and number of available hours is a bit of a mystery to me, and seems dependent on who you know. Also, calls to auxiliary staff for hours seem non-existent, as those hours seem to rely on who replies to e-mail the fastest. That is not very equitable if some people work more than one job and can’t answer e-mail during that time or who don’t have smart phones”

“It’s mostly self-promotion that gets you the hours. It’s hard to be tied to my email to check for shift postings. I also wish I could get more 8 hour shifts. I can’t live off 4 hours shifts here and there and it forces me to take on other work outside VPL that is guaranteed.”

“mass emails that go out offering hours are dependent on how fast your “device” is, whether you are able to answer an email etc. It often feels as though people who get most hours are those who are permanently attached to their smart phones.”

Together we can eliminate the difficulties experienced by part timers and auxiliary library workers.

Our union members are having to make the tough decision to leave the Library. It means leaving the job and a community that they love.

They want guaranteed hours of work. The library needs to maximize the number of full time employees and use part timers where necessary and move towards the reduction of auxiliary hours.

We know that the Library Board cares about those who are disenfranchised from our community and that outreach is done to help the poor and the homeless. A move to an improved scheduling system will go a long way to demonstrating that our members are also a respected part of the Library organization.

What would an improved scheduling system look like – it would be one that gives our members regular hours and means that they do not need to be constantly checking a smart phone or the internet to get hours.

The Library needs to catch up with pay rates and hours worked so that staff can earn a Living Wage.

Our part time and auxiliary members love representing the library in our community. These workers are people who are well educated and ready to represent the digital age generation in library service.

Please help us make improvements for the most vulnerable classification of workers at the Library as you do other parts of our community.

Thank you.