CUPE’s Sharon Teare: value our elders by respecting the people who care for them

By SUSAN O’DONNELL

Sharon Teare entered the long-term care setting 23 years ago “because I care, genuinely care about the seniors. We have all we have today because of all the hard work that seniors had done.”

Teare is president of the New Brunswick Council of Nursing Home Unions (NBCHU), representing about 4,000 workers in the 53 nursing homes unionized by CUPE, New Brunswick and Canada’s largest union. “The 53 local presidents give me direction,” she explained. Teare uses this direction as a member of the CUPE New Brunswick executive.

The nursing home sector in New Brunswick has a history of strong women fighting for their rights as workers. Teare’s first experience on a picket was in 2001, before she became a union activist. The 2001 nursing home strike was settled in part because the government agreed with the workers’ demand tocommission a study on the quality of care in nursing homes.

That report, released in February 2002, was prepared by the DMR Consulting for the NB Department of Family and Community Services. For their study, DMR consulted more than 250 individuals through focus groups, interviews and surveys.

The 2002 DMR report, “Nursing Home Services Resident Care Needs Project,” found that home care residents required an increasing level of attention from professional staff compared to the previous 10 years. Some of the findings: 80% of residents presented with cognitive impairments / dementia or psychiatric disorders requiring behaviour management approaches; incontinence management was required for 66% of the residents; 42% of residents required major or total feeding assistance; about 17% of residents had formal rehabilitation plans that were not being fully implemented, and, since 1997, there had been a 46% increase in special treatments and procedures required for patients.

The report also identified the major weaknesses in the nursing home system, including: staff burnout and dissatisfaction, high absenteeism related to injury and burnout, staff challenged to meet basic care needs, a large percentage of staff not full-time, growing waiting lists, and crisis management prevailed over best practices.

The DMR consultants described “the stressed state of the service providers.” Their report states: “Nursing home service providers are beyond accepting cosmetic changes or ‘window dressing’ initiatives and are at record low levels of patience and tolerance.” Workers are “just trying to keep their heads above water.”

The report labelled this situation a vicious reinforcing circle. “Over the years, I feel that governments have failed to address the crisis even with all the information provided to them, and as a result we’re here now with our current working conditions that have led to this situation: we’re not monetarily being compensated for the work being done because it’s taking such a physical, emotional and mental drain on us,” Teare explained.

She is very concerned about the mental health of nursing home workers. Statistics show that nursing home workers have an increased use of anti-anxiety medication. The sector is predominantly female: “We get up in the morning and get our children ready, you’re caring all day, making sure the kids are taken care of, the residents are taken care of. So who is taking care of those who are taking care of our seniors?”

Teare believes that Premier Higgs and other senior decision makers are “only seeing CUPE and that’s unfortunate.” She says that if they could see past CUPE they would see workers who provide a good quality public service: “when you provide service within the community you live in, you’re going to be more apt to take pride in your work.” For example, for a municipal outside worker who had built up the cement on the curb, when you’re taking a walk, you can say to your daughter: “hey mommy or daddy did that.”

She believes it’s unfortunate that the media reports about the struggle of nursing home workers are always about wages. “Wages are very important,” she says, but it’s also about “recognition and respect.”

“As women working in a predominantly female sector, we don’t complain, we’re care providers. As workers as a whole, we have to stand up and value our worth, and say: it’s OK to value yourself enough to say that I’m worth more, and until that recognition happens within the sector, we’re not going to have the resources to be able to give the care.”

Sharon Teare, President of the NB Council for Nursing Home Unions in Fredericton. Photo by Susan O’Donnell.

Wearing a hijab in Fredericton

By SARAH TAH

Saturday, Feb. 1 was world hijab day, it was also the first official display of my handmade headscarves at the northside market. Today is another first, the opportunity to share my hijab story and the experience of being a hijabi in Fredericton with a wider audience.

I decided to wear a hijab when I was 15 years old, in 2001. I was living in Egypt with my parents. Back then, even though more than 90 percent of Egyptians are Muslims and Egypt is a somewhat Islamic country, being a hijabi was not easy. There were many challenges for anyone choosing to wear a hijab.

For example, hijabs were associated with being ignorant, poor and uneducated, and this prejudice often influenced how people dealt with you. Also, there was no such thing as fashionable hijab. You couldn’t easily find stores selling modest hijab-type clothes.

The situation in Fredericton today for women wearing a hijab is not very different. When I arrived in Freddy last summer, I learned that many locals think any woman wearing a hijab is a Syrian refugee, doesn’t speak English, and is living on government assistance, and they don’t like them for the latter.

I quickly learned to clarify that I am from Egypt when I introduce myself to people around the city to avoid any friction. I had a random guy come near me at Walmart and yell “ignorant mountain girl.” Sarcastically speaking, if I am an ignorant mountain girl (which I’m not), what is he? An astronaut?

My hijab story started when my mom used to listen to Islamic lessons in the car. Whenever I was with her, we listened together and, from there, I started feeling a growing urge to be more religious. I am a Muslim and I wanted to be the best Muslim I can, so I considered wearing a hijab.

On the other hand, my family, with more experience in life, understood the challenges I would face if I chose to wear it. They like the hijab but believed I was too young to wear it and go through all the challenges that might come towards me as a result. Nevertheless, after a while, my mom allowed me to wear it. Many of my friends believed I would not go through with it, or I would just wear it for a while and then take it off. Here I am, 19 years down the road, still wearing it.

Overall, my experience wearing a hijab in Fredericton has been OK. I have met plenty of nice people around the city, I wouldn’t let some small situations here and there shape my opinion of everyone. That said, I believe wearing a hijab in New Brunswick is not the same as wearing it in other provinces and cities in Canada. I’ve heard mixed opinions about being a hijabi (hijab-wearing) in Quebec.

I’ve heard more positive stories from Toronto, London, and Mississauga.

What does wearing a hijab mean? First and foremost, there’s nothing to be afraid off! Wearing a hijab is about not only fulfilling a religious requirement but also expressing your identity and who you are. A woman wearing a hijab is not judgmental – or jealous – of women choosing to wear differently. A truly religious person at heart is very judgmental of their own self but not of others, or else they are not truly religious. Women don’t wear hijabs at home while with their families and female friends.

Letters from New Brunswick’s Future

Write a letter from New Brunswick’s future. The letters can be a speculative and fictional look back from the future to imagine what New Brunswick could be like if we could meet our climate change obligations. It is fiction, but it need not stay fiction. Read published letters from New Brunswick’s future at nbmediacoop.org. To submit a letter or for more information, contact: info@nbmediacoop.org.
Dear municipal candidates: #MeToo made survivors a powerful political constituency. Why should we vote for you? By KYLIE BERGALK

In October 2017, I was introduced to Harvey Weinstein through a story in The New York Times containing multiple allegations of sexual assault and harassment and, almost four years to the day since the Ghomeshi scandal broke, I expected very little would come of it. I watched with consternation as #MeToo appeared on my social media feeds, and then blew up online and in real life and in international news. I’d seen so many survivor’s stories shared, their pain briefly sensational, only to fade from view with the news cycle or pushed into the background of daily living. I worried that all of this would also add up to what felt like nothing.

But I was wrong. Ex-Mossad agents couldn’t prevent Weinstein from having to face consequences for some of his behavior in court. #MeToo has been less like a tidal wave and more like the tide – a cyclic rise and fall of survivors, everywhere, from all walks of life, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement every day, everywhere, from all walks of life, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement every day, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement every day, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement every day, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to the #MeToo movement everyday, adding their voices to 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