

Striking OPSEU workers walk the picket line at the Children's Aid Society office on Millard Avenue in Newmarket.



STAFF PHOTO/BILL ROBERTS

Union, management disagree on turnover

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2006 show 6,457 families were served, there are 950 open cases at any given time, between 200 and 400 cases being investigated a month and 130 foster homes were overseen.

Both sides agree: workload will be the key issue when talks get under way Monday morning.

The union insists so many frontline workers are leaving the York Region Children's Aid Society, it creates a revolving door situation.

Mr. Lake disputes the gravity of the issue.

"The situation is influenced by having two dozen worker on maternity leave," Mr. Lake said.

The turnover rate at the Children's Aid Society offices across the Greater Toronto Area is between 8 and 20 per cent, according to Jennifer Grant, the local society's communications director.

"We are at the high end," Ms Grant said. "We're at 18 per cent. In 2006, 34 frontline workers left."

The union, meanwhile, presents different numbers.

In the past 18 months, 70 child and family services workers left York Region, most taking jobs at other Children's Aid offices, Local 304 union vice-president Erin Kingsley said.

"We're not prepared to work in the present environment of the CAS," Ms Kingsley said.

The turnover rate has a negative impact on the children and families, said Terry Lynn Phillips, a 15-year family service worker. "In some cases, it results in children and families having to re-tell their stories," she said.

When both sides return to the bargaining table, workload is expected to take priority.

"It is an issue we, as an agency, will address," Ms Grant stressed.

As the first strike in the history of the local Children's Aid drags on, society intake worker Erin Satoor isn't discouraged.

"I'm still pumped," Ms Satoor said. "I'm hopeful this will be over very soon."

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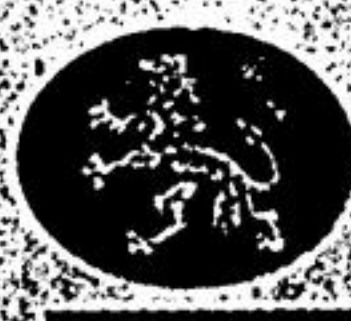
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