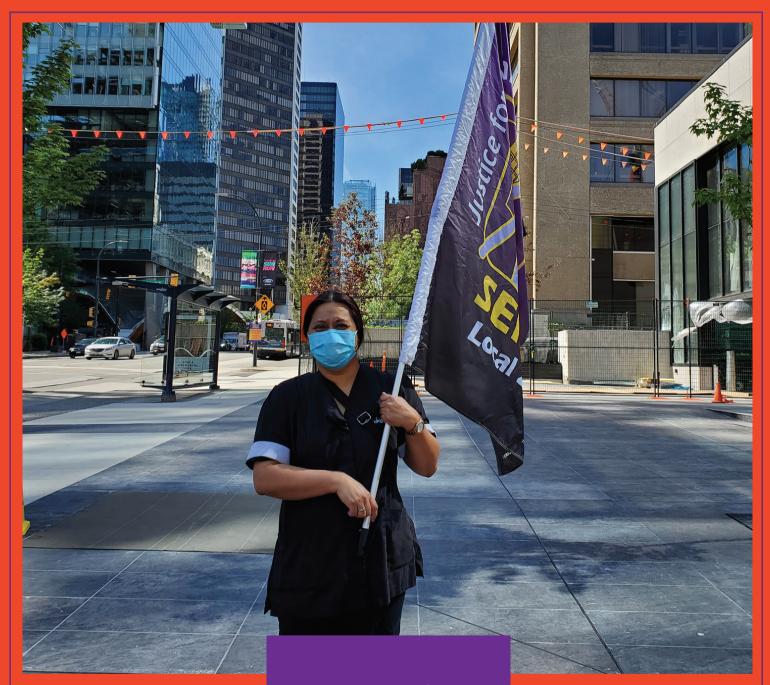
# National Magazine



p. 06 WORKING THROUGH SCHOOL CLOSURES ISSUE NO<sup>°</sup>01 SUMMER 2021 FREE

**P**-1/ BECOMING A UNION LEADER

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# Stay Safe

COVER) JANITOR STANDS WITH A SEIU LOCAL 2 JUSTICE FOR JANITORS FLAG

← MEMBER SIMONE SEELOCHAN - RESOURCES & INFORMATION SPECIALIST STANDING AT A TROPICANA SOLIDARITY RALLY IN NOVEMBER 2020

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The increased consumption of alcohol resulted in a boon for the retail sector and for burgeoning craft breweries.working parents.



← BEE CLEAN JANITORS CLEANING HE MARINE BUILDING IN VANCOUVER STAND TOGETHER FOLLOWING A SUCCESSFUL UNION VOTE

### Letter from the Leadership

The pandemic has brought momentous changes to our lives, but the shifts for working people have been especially dramatic. In an instant, working people across Canada saw their communities shut down as governments struggled at all levels while attempting to mitigate the spread of a dangerous disease. What was initially presented as a temporary measure has ended up lasting well over a year.

SEIU 2 has sought to support our members from the very beginning. Union operations had to shift drastically at the onset of the pandemic, and staff had to suddenly manage an entirely new set of challenges.

The lives of our members were turned upside down. Working parents had to suddenly manage children who were sent home from school. Hundreds of our members were laid off, some permanently, and those who were called back found themselves having to work under stressful conditions. Since March 2020, membership all over the country has gone through ups and downs as COVID-19 cases have risen and fallen and as governments have struggled to cope with containing the virus and implementing measures that varied considerably around the country. But through these tumultuous times, SEIU has kept its members' interests as a top priority. Despite the difficulties, we have supported membership by pressuring employers to provide safe work environments and increased pay during the pandemic, purchased and distributed masks, and protected members as they took forced or voluntary leaves.

The Union has also continued to accelerate our growth, another key element to developing our power and better serving the current membership. We've had major breakthroughs in the brewery industry in the West and the janitorial industry in the East. Together we have managed to add hundreds of new members including workers who have been motivated to fight for better wages and working conditions.

As we continue into 2021-2022, we are looking forward to further wins. It has been extraordinary times, but times of crisis are also times of opportunity. We are going to continue seizing it for the good of our growing membership from coast to coast.



FEATURED:

### A New Ottawa Office

SEIU Local 2 is going through a period of growth and transformation. Despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization has continued to make great strides in bettering its services for its membership and empowering all working people.

SEIU Local 2 is going through a period of growth and transformation. Despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to make great strides in bettering our services for our membership and empowering all working people. One of our big wins in 2020 was finding and preparing a new office for the substantial membership in downtown Ottawa. Depending on the outcome of the pandemic, the SEIU Local 2 plans to open the new office in Ottawa in 2021.

Ottawa is home to thousands of members within a diverse linguistic and cultural community. We had been renting our Ottawa office space from a building downtown since 2011, and the original space was too small to match the needs of the Ottawa community. In 2017, discussions commenced on upgrading the office.

The location was a feature that the Ottawa membership wanted to preserve. The older office was situated at a very accessible location in downtown Ottawa, and it received frequent drop-ins from the membership. After a few months of searching, a new space was located and arrangements for renting the space were finalized.

The new office features a large room near the entrance that will function as a multi-use public space. It will include labour-related books, collective bargaining agreements, photos, and other Union-related information. The move-in was completed in January 2020, and the Ottawa membership hosted an openhouse in February 2020. The pandemic hit the very next month, meaning that the office has sadly been shut down since.

When the pandemic ends and the office can be safely opened again, the space will be able to fulfil its original intention as a members' resource. Members will be able to drop in to discuss issues at work, and it will serve as a space where stewards can meet.

Phones, computers, internet, and a printer will be made available so that members without these at home can do things like print pay stubs.

Most of all, the new office will be used to

facilitate important Union business, such as votes. The previous space had hosted city-wide ratification votes but was so small that the membership had to stand in the hallway. This new space is large enough to accommodate large meetings and can also serve activist groups throughout Ottawa. The Union is always looking for ways to create and cement ties with groups above and beyond the membership, and having space to offer is an excellent way to do so. The Union perennially participates in political campaigning and engagement, and the office space will be invaluable for efforts like phone banking.

Sarah Mostafa-Kamel, Organizer for SEIU Local 2 in the Ottawa region, says that the space is a vision in many ways. Because the space hasn't been used yet, there are many ideas to explore and much feedback on better uses to gather from the membership.

For example, Sarah explains, "We were thinking about having a little kids' area so that members can put their kids down while they speak. But we want to build this all together with all of the members."

With the end of the pandemic drawing closer and closer, members across Canada are looking forward to a return to normal life. The Ottawa membership is ready to hit the ground running and serve as a national example of what a member-driven space can look like.



FEATURED

### Working Through School Closures

The duration of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic has been unprecedented in North America during peacetime. The sudden closures of schools and the advent of remote learning posed many challenges for working parents. Even with schools now open and the pandemic receding, a great many children are still learning from home as parents continue to worry about the impacts of COVID-19. In this article, we interview two SEIU Local 2 members to learn about how they and their families dealt with school closures and the lessons they've learned from the experience.

#### SOFIA DA SILVA'S STORY JANITOR AT HUMBER RIVER HOSPITAL

Sofia is a mother of two children, a fourteen-year-old daughter and an eight-year-old son. She had been working at Humber River Hospital for twelve years as a housekeeper. Prior to the pandemic, Sofia had worked the 6 am to 2 pm shift, which allowed her to be home with her kids after school. When the initial shutdown of the schools was announced in March 2020, it merely seemed as though March Break was starting a bit earlier than usual.

"March Break was fine," says Sofia "It was just a bit of a longer break."

But when the "break" became a month-long closure into mid-April, and then mutated again to an indefinite shift to online learning, that's when the difficulties began. Sofia says, "I had to work because I'm an essential worker. And then I had to come home and teach my kids myself. In the beginning, there were no textbooks, no nothing. Homework was just posted onto Google classroom. I had to explain to the kids how to do it all."

The transition was especially challenging for her eight-year-old, who, being so young, wasn't familiar with using videoconferencing technology to learn and communicate. Simple things like learning to unmute or mute oneself when communicating in the virtual classroom was a learning process. The first couple of weeks of online learning were extremely challenging, especially when it came to submitting homework through the quickly-created online portal. Sofia says, "It was not easy. It's not [the schools'] fault what's going on, but you get frustrated and you want to give up."

But as time went on and the schools were able to send their pupils more support, things improved for Sofia and her children: "Once you got the hang of the whole Google classroom, it got better."

The school year wrapped up under a 100% remote learning paradigm. Again, Sofia and her family's routines were interrupted, as they would usually use the summertime for travel.

When September rolled back around, the Da Silva family were faced with the decision of whether to send their children back to school now that in-person instruction had recommenced. In the end, they opted for online learning, and both children have been learning from home since September. Sofia explains, "I was nervous. I found that the schools were not fully prepared to take in kids. I found it unsafe. I'm already out there myself, their dad is exposed to it as well, so I didn't want to increase the exposure. It was a hard decision to make.

Thankfully, both kids had adapted to the remote learning and were doing much better. As Sofia describes, "Now with the improvements to remote learning, they see the teacher, they can ask the teacher the question, and it's much easier now. It feels almost the same as they were as they were in school." However, Sofia emphasizes that she is still offering more support than usual and that her goal is to send her kids back to in-person learning in September.

When asked what might have been done differently, Sofia answers, "They could have had a different kind of protocol for the kids. For example, how is my eight-year-old going to know how to properly wear masks? They are going to pull it down. It seems like these rules were not prepared for a young child."

Beyond schooling, Sofia cites the broader social challenges involved with the pandemic that she has observed her children struggling with. "For the younger kids, everything was taken away from them. Even the outdoors was taken away from them. My kids are always wondering when coronavirus is going to go away."

Overall, she thinks that the teachers, the schools, and the government did their best. But it's undoubtedly been a difficult time to navigate for her family, and she is looking forward to things going back to normal.

I had to work because I'm an essential worker. And then I had to come home and teach my kids myself.



Blanca could not continue working full-time when the pandemic hit because her son needs direct attention. She feels thankful to the Union and her business agent who helped her approach her employer and take an emergency protected leave.

#### BLANCA PONCE'S STORY JANITOR AT DOMUS BUILDING CLEANING COMPANY

Blanca Ponce has been working as a janitor for Domus Building Cleaning Company in Ottawa for nearly eight years when the pandemic hit. She has two children—her daughter, Samantha La Bell de Araugo, is fully grown and is a nurse at a long-term care home, which makes her an essential worker as well. Her son, Mateo, is only eight years old and has a speech delay.

Blanca could not continue working full-time when the pandemic hit because her son needs direct attention. She feels thankful to the Union and her business agent who helped her approach her employer and take an emergency protected leave. This allowed her to temporarily cut her hours to part-time while schools got organized and better systems were put into place.

"The Union was very good. Chris [Blanca's business agent] is amazing, he really worked for me. Everything was perfect."

After the school closures in March, Blanca worked part-time and was able to be more present with her family. She, Samantha, and her live-in mother worked together to ensure that Mateo was getting the assistance he needs to learn remotely.

Luckily for the Ponce family, the special language schools were some of the first to reopen in May. (They also were among the schools that stayed open). The main challenge was arranging transportation. In regular times, Mateo would attend two schools during the day: one was regular school, and he would then be transported to the special language school at a different location. The special language school is far from the Ponce residence, so Mateo would require some childcare while she travelled to pick him up. The pandemic saw most childcare cancelled, so re-arrangements had to be made with the school board around transportation.

"We didn't have the option to stay home, we are both essential workers," says Samantha. "But even if we could, school is better for him. My brother needs one-on-one attention."

Like Sofia, the pandemic has had a wider negative impact on Blanca's family. Samantha explains, "We are scared about getting COVID-19, it's definitely scary. We disinfect all of our bags and take off all our clothing at the front door. We disinfect everything that we bring home to keep my grandmother safe."

Working people have had to continue to work from the start of the pandemic, ensuring that all essential services are running smoothly. But they have also had to make large sacrifices in terms of their family and social lives as well as making major adjustments to follow health and safety protocols. As vaccinations are completed, it's important to remember how much working people had to sacrifice for the duration of the pandemic.

> ▷ MEMBER BIANCA PONCE POSE WITH HER SON MATEC



#### TIMELINE OF EVENTS:

### Janitorial Power in Vancouver

SEIU Local 2 has been investing a huge amount of effort and time into expanding our presence the janitorial sector on the West Coast. Over the last year, several major battles in extending workers' rights for janitors in British Columbia have been won. Here is a timeline of events:



Bee-Clean janitors start organizing in B.C.'s Lower Mainland. Bee-Clean janitors are mainly non-union, working with no health benefits, low wages, no paid sick days, and no job security.

Bee-Clean janitors at two Oxford Properties sites in Vancouver (401 West Georgia and 355 Burrard Street) voted to unionize and win job security and better working conditions for themselves and their families. Bee-Clean attempts to displace almost all of the newly unionized workforce, arguing that the new successorship provisions instituted in May 2019 by the BC provincial government should not apply to this group of workers. The BC Labour Relations Board held an expedited hearing on this matter and ruled that Bee-Clean is the successor contractor.

Another Oxford Properties site (1055 West Hastings) voted to join the Union. The newly unionized workers began negotiations in December 2019 for a first collective agreement with the goal of establishing decent working standards for Bee-Clean workers across British Columbia.

## MAR 2020

MAY 2020



The COVID-19 pandemic hits. Many janitors are laid off, with many more continuing to go into work. SEIU Local 2 launches the Invisible to Essential campaign in order to highlight the contributions of janitors in keeping people safe during the pandemic, as well as to pressure the government for a pandemic premium.

A new study is launched by the Canadian Capital Stewardship Network (CCSN) to assess Canadian real estate managers' response to COVID-19 risks among essential workers in commercial properties. According to CCSN, "Recognizing the critical role that property service workers play in protecting public health, a network of Canadian pension fund trustees and union representatives is analyzing how Canadian real estate managers are ensuring that conditions are in place for essential building workers to meet health and safety standards.

Just two days before they were set to picket various locations across the Lower Mainland, unionized Bee-Clean janitors ratified their first collective agreement. The new collective agreement represents a substantial improvement to working conditions on various fronts. Namely, it includes a considerable wage boost, paid sick days, and employer-paid health and dental benefits.

#### VANCOUVER:

### Major Wins for Bee-Clean Janitors

Wage Increases Health and Welfare Job Security Paid Sick Days



- » Guaranteed wage increases every year that keep workers significantly above the minimum wage.
- » Pay premiums for lead hands, project workers, and graveyard shifts.
- » Guarantees that workers getting paid rates at or higher than those on the pay grid will also get raises every year and never suffer a reduction in pay.
- » Health and welfare benefits that include medical, dental, vision care, short-term disability and more!
- » Additional paid holiday for Boxing Day.
- >> Paid personal/sick days including three paid days off per year that can be used for personal emergencies, illness, or nonemergency-related absences.
- » Better vacation pay and leave of absence for up to three months that can be combined with vacation and protects seniority when a worker returns.
- » Paid Bereavement Leave including three paid days for immediate family and one day for in-laws.
- >> Job Security including grievance procedure and protection against unjust terminations or disciplines and any potential contract changes in the future.
- » Strong language on health and safety, discrimination, harassment.
- » Lay-off and recall language that ensures employees will keep seniority for one year if they are laid off.

### SEIU Local 2 Returning to its Roots in the Brewery Sector

The pandemic has had an uneven impact on economic sectors across the country. Many sectors, such as the leisure and travel industries, suffered significant job losses due to the lockdowns and restrictions brought on by COVID-19. But not all sectors have seen grey skies during the pandemic. Many companies have seen profits soar and have never seen better days.





Being part of a union will ensure that, going forward, we as employees will finally have a seat at the table when it comes to our working lives. This is a tremendous victory that we are all very proud of.

 MEMBER QUENTIN ROWE-CODNER, WORKER AT JAK'S BEER WINE SPIRITS MEMBER EDWARD ORDONA, WORKER AT MOLSON COORS

> One of these sectors is the brewery industry. John Locke, president of SEIU Local 2 Local 300, a local unionizing over 750 brewery workers, explains what happened: "Bars and restaurants closed initially, people were staying home more and that explains why sales were going up. Things have calmed down a bit, but they are still very high for mid-level products such as bagged and boxed wines."

> The increased consumption of alcohol resulted in a boon for the retail sector and for burgeoning craft breweries. Across the industry, volumes were increasing, and this was not only being reflected in the bottom line. Workers in every sector of the beverage industry – wine, liquor, retail, and brewery – saw the pace of their work pick up significantly. As volumes rose, workers also had to implement new health and safety protocols. In other words, their jobs became harder.

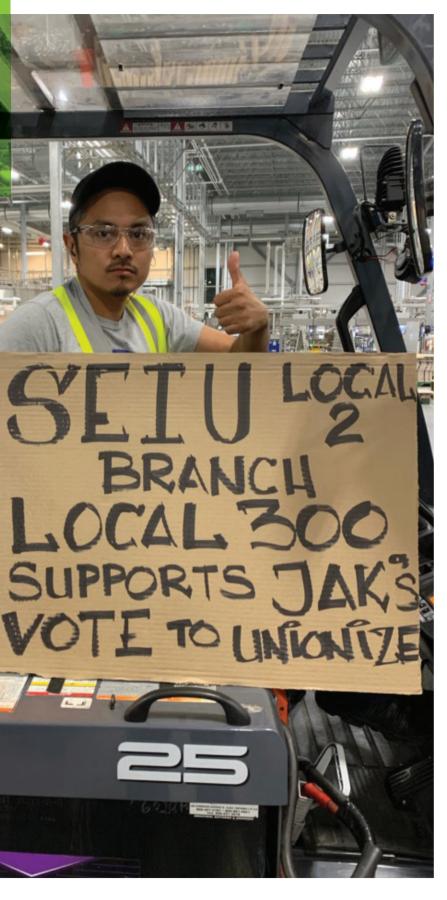
> But the sunny times in the corporate boardroom weren't reaching the workers on the brewing or retail floor. Member Neil Singh works as a Logistics Operator for Turning Point Brewery, and he explains the point of view of a worker on the alcohol boom: "When the pandemic started, sales skyrocketed by something like 80 percent. To compensate us for the extra effort due to increased demand, we were paid a pandemic wage top-up, but it was ended after two months for no apparent reason. Vancouver is an expensive city and it was insulting."

The pandemic created an unfair situation for workers, and they started dealing with it the only way that works: by forming unions. And history would have it that SEIU Local 2 was perfectly positioned to welcome these new members.

SEIU Local 2 started out as a brewery workers' union back in 1902 and still has a large number of brewery workers, but for many years the Union shifted its focus away from the brewery industry, especially into the janitorial industry. Nonetheless, SEIU Local 2 still has over a thousand of worker in the beverage industry and had been representing these workers and working to improve their conditions.

But even as SEIU Local 2 shifted its focus, it continued to be involved in campaigning and advocacy for workers in the brewery industry. For instance, SEIU Local 2 played a leading role in the brewery industry through the Canadian Brewery Council, which brings together members of the brewery industry together regularly.





SEIU Local 2 was thus aware of the momentous changes the brewery industry was undergoing. As John Locke stated, "Automation really displaced a lot of the workers in the traditional brewery industry. Local 300 was down from over 2,700 members back in the 1980s to only 700-750 by 2016. The automation reduced the numbers of jobs in the large brewers."

Concurrently, however, there was a resurgence in the craft and microbrewer sector. Roy Graham, ex-president of Local 300, commented, "They [the microbreweries] were popping up like crazy." The sector continues to lead the way as the fastest growing sector in the brewery industry.

SEIU Local 2 was observing these changes and started making moves to get plugged back into the brewery sector. Back in 2018, Local 300 merged in with SEIU Local 2, adding eleven new brewery units to the Union. The merger was a mutually beneficial endeavour. Local 300 had been one of the strongest Unions in British Columbia, having fought for the best brewery worker contracts in the industry as well as trailblazing for workers in other companies across the country in terms of pension and wage parity. But Local 300 had always been small and scrappy. As Roy Graham put it, "Local 300 leadership were wearing all of the hats. We didn't have a lot of time or resources to throw at organizing." SEIU Local 2 thus benefitted from the energetic members and history inherited from Local 300, and Local 300 benefited from the large capacity of SEIU Local 2 to thrive in the new paradigm of the brewery sector.

One of the first pieces of growth happened in 2020, when workers at Turning Point Brewing company unionized with SEIU Local 2, in cooperation with Local 300. These craft brewery workers were experiencing what so many other workers in the sector were experiencing: low wages and poor working conditions despite surges in company profits and volumes.

The victory at Turning Point was also complemented by the unionization of JAK's Beer Wine Spirits earlier in the year, which celebrated a unionized workplace after seventy-five percent voted yes to unionize with the SEIU Local. "We were all confident that we'd win our union, and we remain confident in our collective strength," explains Quentin Rowe-Codner, who worked in the store for over two years. "Being part of a union will ensure that, going forward, we as employees will finally have a seat at the table when it comes to our working lives. This is a tremendous victory that we are all very proud of."

Turning Point marked the first major unionization of brewery workers in the province for years. Jak's Beer Wine Spirits was also a first: the first private liquor store first retail store to unionize during the pandemic.

With the joining of Local 300 and these path-breaking victories, SEIU Local 2 is planning on expanding aggressively in the beverage industry, bringing in workers in the retail, brewery, liquor, and wine sectors. It is a huge and growing industry, and most workers are not unionized. SEIU Local 2 is going to fix that. TBM STEWARDS SPEAK:

### Becoming a Leader in the Union

When members form a union at work, or join an existing one, they usually don't give much thought beyond the standard advantages of unionizing. No doubt, the protections, higher wages, and benefits that being a part of SEIU Local 2 rightfully gets the most attention. But there are more than just these material benefits when it comes to being a part of our union. A union represents a way in which workers can form meaningful friendships, develop their own leadership, and promote the betterment of themselves and their coworkers on a daily basis.

One way members can do this is by becoming involved in union leadership. There are several levels of leadership, but the first step is getting involved at your unit level as a shop steward. This is where all union leaders start out, including the current SEIU Local 2 president Dave Bridger, who began union activism as a shop steward on the floor of Labatt breweries.

We interviewed Mukisa Musoke and Jules Samuel, both of whom are technicians working for TBM Service Group. They speak to why they entered into Union leadership and what it's been like for them.



It can be tricky being on the frontline of defence. Often, it's easy to deal with issues because most issues that my coworkers bring me are clearly the boss doing something that goes against



the collective agreement. But sometimes, I do have to act as a mediator between the supervisor and the workers. That can be a hard balance to strike."

#### MUKISA MUSOKE, FUELER TBM SERVICE GROUP

Mukisa immigrated to Canada a couple of years ago and joined TMB Service Group as a Fueler in August 2020. His work involves refuelling Toronto Transit Commission buses to ready them for a full shift of driving. SEIU Local 2 had unionized this workplace for several years, and Mukisa immediately entered the union when he started working for TBM.

Although he was new to the country and had entered a new workplace, Mukisa immediately jumped at the opportunity to become a shop steward. Mukisa describes how his prior experience in his country of origin affected his decision: "I used to work in a non-profit organization in Uganda. I was used to seeing people not know their rights and getting treated unjustly. I wanted to be a voice on behalf of other people here in my workplace as well. To ensure that human rights are respected."

Mukisa started in August, and by September, he had already run and been elected as a shop steward—and he has been steward ever since.

Overall, Mukisa has very much enjoyed his experience. He described the satisfaction from getting to know all of his coworkers more personally. A big part of being a shop steward is being the first point of contact when it comes to worker rights. Stewards are typically the first person that coworkers come to when they have issues at work or with the boss. Coworkers have can have high expectations and can get frustrated at times.

Mukisa describes his experience as such: "It can be tricky being on the frontline of defence. Often, it's easy to deal with issues because most issues that my coworkers bring me are clearly the boss doing something that goes against the collective agreement. But sometimes, I do have to act as a mediator between the supervisor and the workers. That can be a hard

balance to strike"

Mukisa uses diplomacy and, of course, in-depth knowledge of the collective agreement in order to navigate sticker situations. But for Mukisa, the challenges are minimal compared to the benefits.

"I love getting to work as a team to understand what my coworkers' rights and responsibilities are. They come to consult me on the terms of the collective agreement and help them if they need to go speak with the supervisor. I'll support them when they need to file grievances."

Mukisa wants to progress through leadership and take on more responsibility. His plan is to participate on the bargaining committee next.



### "

I always believed in equal fairness and justice for people. I always wanted to see things go the proper way."

### JULES SAMUEL CLEANING TECHNICIAN

Jules also works at TBM, but at another location. Even though he has never met Mukisa, his experience and thoughts on being a steward with SEIU Local 2 are quite similar.

He initially joined TBM six years ago as a sweeper, and he has transitioned into the role of Special Cleaner since then. His role involves detailed cleaning of Toronto Transit Commission Buses. As he describes: "Every night, we have a quantity of buses. Four to five people have to detail the interior of the bus. It takes around two-and-a-half hours each bus, and we usually do three busses per night." Jules and his co-workers are responsible for providing the famously clean buses and subways of Toronto. With the onset of the pandemic, his work has of course gained a new level of importance.

Jules first became interested in stewarding after going to a union meeting. The business agent running the meeting asked for people to volunteer to be a steward. He had just joined the company and was still technically on probation, but he immediately knew it was something he wanted to do. "I put my hand up as soon as I was done probation. Everyone voted for me. And I've never lost the position since." Jules has been a steward for six years now.

Like Mukisa, Jules says that his motivations come from a desire to protect workers' rights at his workplace. He says, "I always believed in equal fairness and justice for people. I always wanted to see things go the proper way."

The biggest challenge that Jules describes is dealing with managers, who often have a poor understanding of the collective agreement and give orders that break contract rules. "Managers often come to me to understand the rules of the agreement. I definitely think that managers need better training on the collective agreement."

Nonetheless, Jules loves being a steward, as testified by the fact he has continued to return to it year after year. (Stewards have a one-year term). Jules says, "It lets me make a better relationship with my co-workers, and I'm always able to help them with things about benefits and collective agreement rules. A lot of people join the company and don't know their rights, the management doesn't tell them. I always tell them their rights and what they are entitled to."

Jules says that his favourite parts of being a steward include the respect he receives from coworkers, the learning and self-development, and the feeling that you are wanted and helpful.

Jules has also been involved in the past two bargaining committees and plans to join the next one at the end of 2021.

During the pandemic, stewarding has been busier at TBM. There have been more safety protocols to enforce, and it has been a challenge to push employers to provide and timely and adequate PPE and to organize shifts so that people can appropriately social distance. But both Jules and Mukisa would absolutely do it all over again.

As Jules says, "It's very good to be in a union, to be with the workers and help them. It helps everyone work together well, and [it means] less work for everyone." Being a part of leadership can help make things better both for yourself, and everyone else. When asked what he has to say to members considering becoming stewards, Mukisa says: "Believe in yourself. You won't know everything in one day. But if you have a passion for something, regardless of your level of education, you can give back to the community. It will develop your leadership skills and if you want to advance through leadership, it's a great place to start."

There are leadership positions at the branch, regional, and national levels. Union leadership at every level comes directly from the membership of the organization. Every member of the Union's leadership is answerable and accountable to the membership and seeks to represent its best interests. You can find out more about these roles and how to enter them through your business agent and in the SEIU Local 2 constitution, available on the website.





SEIU LOCAL 2 NATIONAL MAGAZINE

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