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The 503 VOICE

Vision to Action!

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Standing together for 59 days...

Parry Center Victory



Workers from the Parry Center celebrate reaching a tentative agreement after a two-month strike.

SEIU members at the Parry Center for Children won a fifty-nine day strike on Jan. 26, when we settled a contract in the early morning hours. The settlement includes raises in all three years of the contract. It protects the union security article, which allows workers the right to decide how to fund their own union. And, despite management's announcement that it had "permanently replaced" most of the strikers, the settlement guarantees all strikers' return to their pre-strike positions.

This victory results from incredibly hard work by the Parry Center strikers and enormous support from Jobs with Justice, faith-based community leaders, elected officials, other labor unions, the public, and brothers and sisters in SEIU Local 49 and SEIU Local 503. Striker Sara Saffir kept a diary during the strike. Sara shares her thoughts on three very different days of the strike...

Strike Diary: Day 51

by Sara Saffir, Parry Center Child Therapist

Now that the ice has thawed, we will resume our circular walk on the familiar stretch of sidewalk, cheered on by the honks of passing cars.

Not only are we fighting to win a fair contract and return to work, we are also fighting, at times, to keep our morale up. An enormously successful fundraising concert at Lola's Room, as well as the continuing (and fantastic) support from politicians, religious leaders, labor and the community help keep us afloat.

Twenty-one faith leaders wrote and signed a letter to the Governor, urging him to "do all in your power to bring this matter to a fair resolution immediately."

Multnomah County Commissioners passed a resolution, calling on all contractors doing business with Multnomah County to respect workers' right to organize by remaining neutral during any employee organizing campaign. The Portland City Council passed a resolution calling for a settlement through binding arbitration.

With so much support and with so much pressure on the Parry Center, it amazes me that management still makes decisions that perpetuate the strike.

In bargaining they continue to put up roadblocks to true progress. Their most recent proposal still leaves us without union security, and without assurance that we can return to our jobs at all. After "permanently replacing" us, management is still refusing to give us back our jobs when the strike settles.

They want to punish us, but by replacing caregivers who have established relationships with the children in residential treatment, they are also punishing the kids.

The Governor has involved mediator Bryan Johnston and a session has been scheduled for January 20. Let's hope that Parry Center management finally comes to the table with a less insulting attitude and makes an honest effort to settle these issues and return us to where we belong - with the kids.

Day 54: We're arrested

On January 21, the day after a less-than-productive bargaining session, strikers came together with faith-based leaders and community supporters for a rally in downtown Portland. We took our cheers and chanting to the street and marched on 1000 SW Broadway, the building where Peter Northrup, a prominent Trillium board member, has an office. Everyone sat down and began singing and chanting, staging the most peaceful of protests. The energy was peaceful but passionate, determined to get

the attention we had so far been denied by the Trillium board. Eventually 13 of us - strikers, faith-based leaders and supporters - took the elevator up to Northrup's office. Northrup refused to speak with us, so we sat down and resumed singing. Police made people in the lobby move outside, where they continued the rally with enthusiastic support for those of us upstairs who got arrested for civil disobedience.

At the Justice Center, we were asked a few questions, searched, had mug shots and fingerprints taken. The woman taking my prints was, as were many of the police officers, very sympathetic to our cause. When she finished taking prints and released my hand, she said, "Well, I sure hope you guys get what you want." So do we.

Day 59: Settlement

The day after the big action, negotiations resumed with an eleven-hour session. Four days later, we reached a conceptual agreement on all issues, including wages, union security and return to work.

The fate of the arrested strikers was an issue as the Trillium board wanted to exact some consequence. Rather than leaving our reprimand in the hands of the board, we agreed to sentence ourselves to 40 hours of community service, should the court not charge us.

This is a great victory for the Parry Center workers, the kids we care for, and the labor community as a whole. We're ready to return to work and make our individual and collective voices heard - voices we have fought so hard to have.

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“It's really exciting that co-workers stood together, even those who weren't sure they wanted to go out on strike. We recognize that maintaining union security is a huge victory. Our union is stronger than ever and we have bonded through this fight - that means better care for kids.”

Colleen Sullivan is a shop steward and works directly with children at the Parry Center.

