

# Year End Report

**2013**

Office of the Worker Counsellor

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## Executive Summary

The Office of the Worker Counsellor has continued to build on the work we have done over the last 5 years, providing advice, assistance, education and advocacy to injured workers, their families and their representatives.

We continue to emphasize education, as it is a cost-effective way to reach workers and their representatives in order to educate them on their rights and obligations under the Workers' Compensation Act of Nova Scotia. Our evaluations received at the end of our workshops and the follow-up requests for more workshops, speaking events and information have convinced us that the workshops and events offered in 2013 are valuable and effective.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor increased workshop participation in 2013 by targeted advertising for workshops and by developing a new set of mini-workshops. As a result participation has been dramatically increased by almost 300%. The workshops have also provided an additional stream of revenue for the Office of the Worker Counsellor. This enabled us to develop and deliver the new mini-workshops that are proving popular. Our web site was launched in 2012. As dictated by our 2013 marketing plan, the web site is easy to navigate, is an informative resource and has relevant content. The site is used to advertise services, events and workshops. These are reinforced by the use of Twitter, which also draws people back to our web site. In 2013 the [www.workercounsellor.ca](http://www.workercounsellor.ca) site had 16,789 visits. There were 30,660 page views and an average of 1.83 pages were viewed per visit.

As well, in recognition of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Meredith Report on October 31, 2013 and the upcoming anniversary of the Workers' Compensation system in Nova Scotia, we are in the process of creating a photographic essay depicting the impact a life-altering injury has had on the lives of individual workers.

2013 was also the year that succession planning started to take place, as there are two senior staff members retiring one in 2014 and the other in 2015. This has included making sure the work done by the current staff members is easily understood by new staff so that it can be a platform for future undertakings.

Our relationships with other WCB system organizations has been congenial and collaborative and we look forward in 2014 to more substantial and creative work that will strengthen and enhance the Workers' Compensation system.

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## Introduction

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The Office of the Worker Counsellor developed the 2013 Business Plan based on our mandate to provide advice, assistance, education and advocacy to injured workers, their families, and their representatives. This report addresses all areas of the Business Plan under the following headings, which also incorporate our mandate goals: Marketing, Operations, Management and Organizational Structure, Performance Measures, and External Relationships. The report highlights our activities and successes and points out areas where the Office of the Worker Counsellor is experiencing challenges.

The central function of the Office of the Worker Counsellor is to educate workers about the Workers' Compensation system in Nova Scotia. Education is a part of every action taken by our office whether it is an in-person meeting with an injured worker experiencing case management problems or interacting with Workers' Compensation Board staff and its Board of Directors, union leadership and general membership, or outreach to groups of workers including unorganized workers. We see our main role as education, which is often followed by actions that will resolve problems. The Office of the Worker Counsellor believes that our most valuable contribution to the lives of workers in Nova Scotia is education for action as outlined in our education program: Educating for Change.

This report also highlights the areas of growth and change for the Office of the Worker Counsellor. The Educating for Change program has grown over the past year. We have been successful in establishing an annual school at the Tatamagouche Centre, developed a good working relationship with labour councils to deliver workshops, and have started to develop a new series of mini-workshops to meet the demand for shorter interactions with workers.

The current staff has worked hard to develop good relationships and programs that can be easily understood by new staff when current staff retires at the end of 2014. This is a significant task, but one that has been made manageable through the collective efforts of the staff and the Office of the Worker Counsellor Program Steering Committee members: Rick Clarke, Kyle Buott, Tony Tracy, and Ray Larkin as well as senior staff members of the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia.

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## Mission Statement & Mandate

### Mission Statement

The Office of the Worker Counsellor provides assistance and advice to injured workers and their families on matters related to Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety in Nova Scotia.

Through a series of workshops, the program provides education to workers and their representatives in the workplace on the compensation system.

The Worker Counsellor represents the interests of workers in consultations, provides feedback on proposals for system change and advocates on behalf of workers for improvements and enhancements

### Mandate

The Office of the Worker Counsellor has a mandate to provide Advice, Assistance, Education and Advocacy to injured workers, their representatives in the workplace and their family members on all aspects of workers' compensation.



Participants at Tatamagouche School, November 22-23, 2013

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## Staff

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The Office of the Worker Counsellor has three full-time positions: a Worker Counsellor, and Education Co-ordinator, and an Administrative Assistant.

The Worker Counsellor is responsible for the oversight of all programming and office functions. Her duties include oversight of the work plan for staff members and offering advice and assistance to injured workers, their families and representatives. As the public face of the Office of the Worker Counsellor, she also fulfills the advocacy mandate, which includes consultation and participation on stakeholder committees, responding to requests for input on policies, and speaking engagements.

The Education Co-ordinator is responsible for development and delivery of new workshops, keeping current workshops up-to-date, training Facilitation Team members to deliver workshops, scheduling workshops and other events, oversight of designing communication tools such as the web site, posters, etc. in addition, she is responsible for gathering data and filing quarterly reports and financial reports to the program oversight steering committee and the program funder, the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia.

The Administrative Assistant is responsible for general office functions such as answering the phone, taking messages, opening mail, typing case files, etc. In addition, she also designs and prints posters and other materials for workshops and special events, helps with event planning, office organization and maintains the web site. Since receiving training, she has been able to triage phone calls for the Worker Counsellor and answer simple questions, which has streamlined the in-take work of the Office of the Worker Counsellor.

All positions in the Office of the Worker Counsellor are flexible, involve teamwork, and members are able to assume new duties as required.

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## Marketing

The Office of the Worker Counsellor launched its web site in 2012. As dictated by our 2013 marketing plan, the web site is easy to navigate, is an informative resource and has relevant content. The site is used to advertise services, events and workshops. These are reinforced by the use of Twitter, which also draws people back to our web site. In 2013 the [www.workercounsellor.ca](http://www.workercounsellor.ca) site had 16,789 visits. There were 30,660 page views and an average of 1.83 pages were viewed per visit.

The performance indicators for the web site are an increase in worker and organization contacts and an increased advocacy role. While it's difficult to track whether or not a worker or organization decided to contact our office as a result of logging onto our web site, there has been an increase in the number of requests for information and assistance. There has also been an increase in the number of workshop participants, which can be partially attributed to the web site, since the Office of the Worker Counsellor has also increased advertising.

Advertising workshops and events was a priority activity in 2013. Registration was improved through use of mail outs to targeted audiences, the web site calendar and use of Twitter to advertise workshops and events. As well, requests for workshops increased and scheduled events were well attended. For example, the Office of the Worker Counsellor hosted a lunch-and-learn on return to work programs during the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour convention on October 28. As well as advertising the event in the convention information package, we used Twitter to generate a buzz at the convention. As a result, there were 120 registered participants for the lunch-and-learn.

What will you take away with you? What new skills have you learned?

*"I understand the basics of appeals and who is involved. I can refer to my course materials to easily find answers and contacts."*

The performance indicator for advertising workshops and events was a 50% increase in registration. The Office of the Worker Counsellor has more than met that target. Our workshop registration went from 72 participants in 2012 to 243 in 2013, which is 337% increase over the 2012 number. Requests for workshops and events have also increased and scheduled workshops and events have been well attended. For example, the workshop: *Appealing WCB Decisions: a guide for union activists*, held on November 23 had 28 participants which is an unusually strong turn out. The speaking events, which are discussed under Advocacy in this report reached another 115 persons, making our total educational interaction with workers 358, an improvement of almost 500%.

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Workshop/Event	Location	Date (2013)	# Participants
Speaking engagement: RTW programs	Liverpool	Feb. 20	30
Navigating Your Way: a worker's guide to workers' compensation in Nova Scotia	Yarmouth	April 12-13	10
Navigating Your Way: a worker's guide to workers' compensation in Nova Scotia	New Glasgow	April 26-27	12
Navigating Your Way: a worker's guide to workers' compensation in Nova Scotia	Bridgewater	May 3-4	8
Navigating Your Way: a worker's guide to workers' compensation in Nova Scotia	Sydney	May 24-25	19
Navigating Your Way: a worker's guide to workers' compensation in Nova Scotia	Kentville	Oct. 18-19	8
Mini-workshop: RTW programs	Halifax	Oct. 28	120
Information sessions & booth: PSAC Health & Safety Conference	Dartmouth	Nov. 1	70
Navigating Your Way: a worker's guide to workers' compensation in Nova Scotia	Tatamagouche	Nov. 22-23	10
Mini-workshop: RTW programs	Tatamagouche	Nov. 22	28
Appealing WCB Decisions: a guide for union activists	Tatamagouche	Nov. 23	28
Discussion on RTW planning with WCB IST Wholesale, Utility Resources Team	Halifax	Dec. 10	15
<b>Total workshops/events: 11</b>	<b>9 locations</b>		<b>358</b>

In recognition of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Meredith Report on October 31, 2013 and the upcoming anniversary of the Workers' Compensation system in Nova Scotia in 2015, we are in the process of creating a photographic essay depicting the impact a life-altering injury has had on the lives of individual workers in Nova Scotia. With financial assistance from the Workers' Compensation Board and input from Threads of Life and our affiliates, we are identifying a number of workers whom we will interview and photograph for the essay. We plan to unveil the exhibit at a ceremony on the Day of Mourning, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and then exhibit it throughout the province until April 23, 2015.



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## Operations

### Education

The 2013 Business Plan for Education focused on improving our ability to deliver workshops in all areas of the province. The Office of the Worker Counsellor has a mentoring program in place to train new facilitation team members. Currently there are 3 persons enrolled in the program who are learning to deliver the *Navigating Your Way: a worker's guide to workers' compensation in Nova Scotia* workshop. We are also training our experienced facilitation team members to deliver other workshops offered through our *Educating for Change* program.

How has this workshop changed the way you think about the WCB system?

*"I now have a better understanding of the WCB system. I had only heard the horror stories previously."*

Participant: Navigating Your Way

The Office of the Worker Counsellor is exploring ways to encourage networking among the facilitators, currently most networking occurs around the scheduled workshops during breaks. The facilitators have access to a password-protected space on our web

site, but usage is low, as they seem to prefer face-to-face meetings.

Targeting workshops to specific areas has worked well in 2013. Our Business Plan included a 15% increase in the number of workshops and we have achieved a 300% increase. We have learned that this approach works well and will continue to target areas and offer timely topics in 2014.

All of our workshop and event materials are now printed in-house and workshop and event supplies are ordered in bulk when possible. This has kept our materials expenses at a reasonable level in 2013. Much of this was possible because our Administrative Assistant has taken digital media courses through NSCAD, which have allowed us to design posters and other graphics in-house. We will continue to work in this way in 2014.

### Advocacy

The Office of the Worker Counsellor continues to represent injured workers at Canada Pension Plan disability hearings. However, 2013 saw a significant change in the way in which CPP disability appeals were to be conducted. The Office of the Commissioner of Review Tribunals was abolished effective March 31<sup>st</sup> and a new office, the Social Security Tribunal, established to conduct all appeals under Federal programs. As a result all appeals were put on hold until the new office was up and running creating a backlog of four for us. In September we began to receive information concerning our appeals. Given the structure of the new process, we

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expect that there will be fewer in person appeals and more appeals heard by way of written submission, which will allow us to increase our outreach.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor accepts requests for speaker and panel events because this allows us to reach a wider audience and often generates requests for assistance and/or advice. It also increases the knowledge of the workers' compensation system for those in attendance, including a clearer understanding of the benefits and financial limitations of the system. In 2013 there were 3 speaker events with an audience of 115 persons. As well, our report to the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour delegates reached a further 244 labour activists who were able to take that information back to their union locals.

In December, Jessie Parkinson was invited to meet with Case Managers from the IST Wholesale Utility Resources Infrastructure Team by Manager Deborah Eddy. The response from the Case Managers was extremely positive and illustrates for us the benefit of working together to achieve the best outcomes for injured workers. A good relationship with Board staff is, we feel crucial to the success of the program.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor responded to all stakeholder consultation papers and provided input to the Board of Directors on the consultation process generally. We participated in Administration Penalties Stakeholder sessions and workshop, Leadership Matters and consultations on the Internal Appeals Review.

As a result of the recent election in 2014, we will be offering an information session for staff from the offices of the newly elected MLAs to educate them on the role our office can play in assisting them.

## Assistance & Advice

The Office of the Worker Counsellor provides assistance with claims for Workers' Compensation, up to but not including representation at appeals or legal advice with the exception of Canada Pension Plan disability hearings where we do represent injured workers. Our mandate to provide assistance is carried out through answering telephone requests, in-person meetings, and CPP disability appeals.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor receives an average of 14 calls per day. Most calls are from individuals seeking assistance with claims management. The most common problem is a break down in the relationship between the injured worker and their Case Manager. The Worker Counsellor, Jessie Parkinson has worked hard to develop good relationships with WCB Case Managers so that when she phones them to discuss a claim, she and the Case Manager are able to resolve issues. We see the role of the Office of the Worker Counsellor as being one that assists when the relationship between injured workers and their Case Managers has broken down. This allows the WCB staff to do their work of adjudicating claims.

Most requests for assistance and advice are satisfied by information provided over the phone, either with the Administrative Assistant or in more complex cases, the Worker Counsellor. The more complex cases often

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require in-person meetings, phone calls to WCB Case Managers and Directors, and sometimes referrals to the Workers Advisers Program.

## Capital Expenditures

The Workers Advisers Program are acquiring a new electronic case management system which we understand may be suitable to accommodate our needs. We anticipate having a fully functioning system, which will not only manage our caseload but will also be able to track our educational activities, in place within 6 months.

## Advisory Support

The Office of the Worker Counsellor is overseen by a steering committee comprised of: Rick Clarke, President, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, Kyle Buott, Secretary-Treasurer, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, Tony Tracy, National Representative, Canadian Labour Congress, and Ray Larkin, Member-at-Large representing the community. This steering committee receives and approves all reports to the Workers' Compensation Board, oversees the fiscal management of the program, and ensures that the Office of the Worker Counsellor undergoes a yearly financial audit.

The staff members of the Office of the Worker Counsellor have appreciated the direction and support of the steering committee.

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## Performance Measures

### Education

The Office of the Worker Counsellor 2013 objective for the Educating for Change program was to increase participant knowledge by 50%. 93% of participants reported that their knowledge had increased by at least 50% and of those, 57% reported that their knowledge increased by 80% or more.

The other main education goal was to develop a workshop that would enable workers to understand Occupational Health and Safety legislation and regulations. This objective will be carried forward to 2014. We will work with the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour Occupational Health and Safety/Workers' Compensation Committee to develop curricula on Occupational Health and Safety. We will also use the expertise of the Worker Health and Safety Centre, Toronto to develop the curricula and our first workshop in the series. Our goal is to offer comprehensive occupational health and safety training to all workers and to eventually achieve certification for the workshops so that members of joint occupational health and safety committees will be able to participate in workshops and receive a certificate.



Participants: Appealing WCB Decisions: a guide for union activists

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## Advice & Assistance

Our 2013 goal was to increase client understanding and satisfaction with the Workers' Compensation system by 50%. This includes knowledge of the Workers' Compensation system, understanding how decisions are made, improving our communication with WCB staff, providing effective advice and assistance on the appropriateness of an appeal and assistance in filing an appeal if required, and determining whether or not there was client satisfaction with the services provided. In other words, did the service change or affect the outcome? At this time, we have only verbal feedback and decisions by Case Managers when it comes to tracking this goal. Based on the feedback, we believe that our services have made a difference.

## Reporting

Our goal of having timely and accurate quarterly, semi-annual and year-end reports is moving forward.

## Advocacy

In 2013, the Office of the Worker Counsellor strived to increase input and feedback on policy development and program reviews. We responded to each request in a timely manner as evidenced in other sections of this report. The Office of the Worker Counsellor carries out this function in order to enhance the quality of changes to the WSIS system, which can be measured in stakeholder satisfaction.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor staff has also started work on a position paper on the Workers' Compensation Board's Vocational Rehabilitation program. We expect to publish it in early 2014.

## Governance & Accountability

The 2013 goal for Governance and Accountability was to identify staffing roles and needs by revising job descriptions, improving and monitoring efficiency, providing professional development to staff members and utilizing a performance tool. All goals have been accomplished. The staffing roles have been identified and job descriptions are reviewed and adjusted semi-annually. Efficiency is monitored by the Steering Committee and the use of a performance tool.

Professional development was offered to only 1 staff member as the other 2 members are nearing retirement and it was felt that it would be best to focus training on the staff member who will be remaining after 2014. That person is the Administrative Assistant. She enrolled in a digital media course at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD). She will continue to work toward a certificate in digital media in 2014, and as a result of her interest in this field and the courses, her duties have increased to include graphic design functions.

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## Financial Management

The Office of the Worker Counsellor 2013 Financial Management plans included the development of a multi-year financial plan that includes a financial plan based on the funding received from the Workers' Compensation Board.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor was able to generate \$9,600.00 in registration fees in 2013, which is more than double the amount projected in our 2013 Business Plan. This revenue has allowed us to develop and deliver mini-workshops, which were not budgeted for in the 2013 plan.

## Business Planning

Business planning for 2013 centred on succession planning, as our 2 senior staff persons both planned to retire in 2014. There will be a job posting for each position and a small overlap of staff in order to allow for transfer of knowledge. The plan is to have the Education Co-ordinator retire in December 2014 and the Worker Counsellor retire in early 2015 to allow for the knowledge transfer to new staff members.

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## External Relations

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The Office of the Worker Counsellor does more than simply mitigate communications between injured workers, their representatives and WCB staffmembers; there are other relationships that benefit from the input of this office.

External relations include the 2 injured workers associations in Cape Breton and Pictou County. The Office of the Worker Counsellor maintains these relationships in order to discuss matters of common interest. We offer both associations the resources to attend our education programs and events as a means to assist in the professional development of the associations' staffs.

As well, the Worker Counsellor, Jessie Parkinson, meets regularly with the staff of the Workers' Advisers Program and we have begun working with other WCB stakeholders through meetings arranged by the Workers' Compensation Board in order to improve the level of confidence, trust and good communications between our office and the organizations. This will ultimately help injured workers navigate the WCB system in a timely manner.



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Participants: Appealing WCB Decisions: a guide for union activists