



OFFICE OF THE WORKER COUNSELLOR

**YEAR END REPORT
2015**

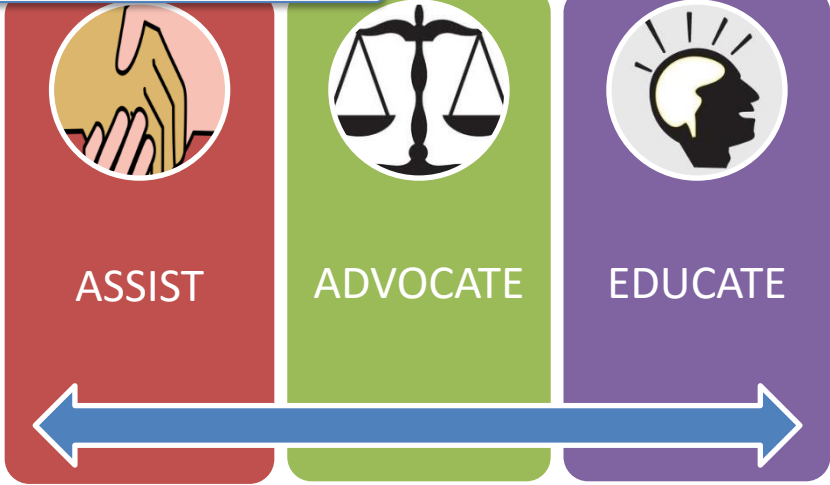


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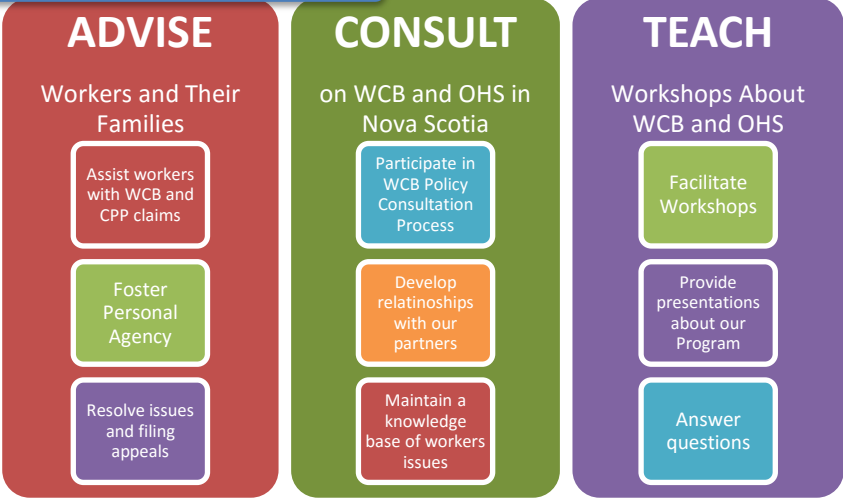
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WHAT we do



HOW we do it



WHY we do it

Our Mission is to assist and advise injured workers and their families on matters related to Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety in Nova Scotia

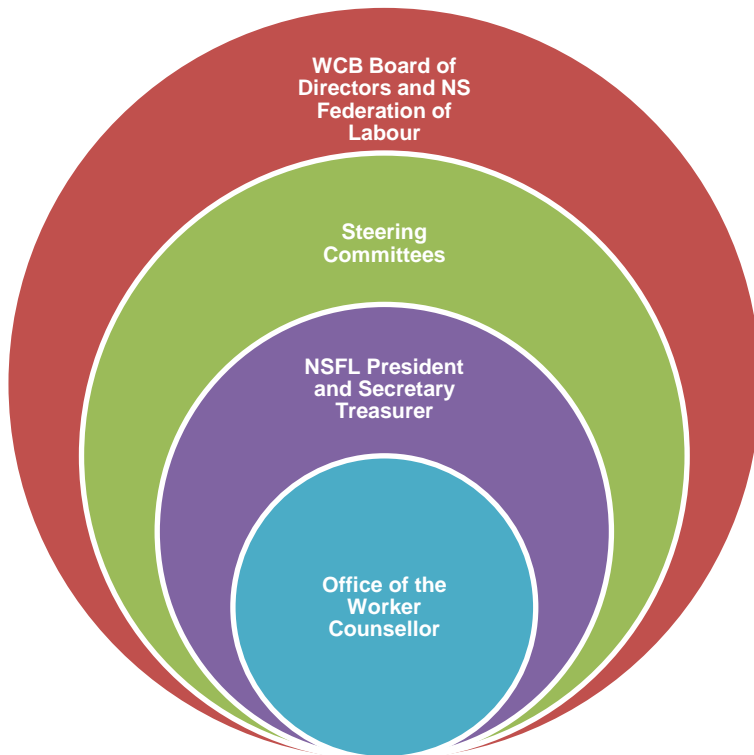
2015 at a glance

- JANUARY**
Linda Wentzell, our Education Coordinator, retires
- MAY**
Rachel Barbour, an expert in workers compensation law, is hired as a new Worker Counsellor
- JUNE**
Jessie Parkinson, long-time Worker Counsellor, retires
- AUGUST**
Dean Tupper, an experienced union educator, joins the Office as the second Worker Counsellor
- SEPTEMBER**
Rachel attends the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association of Worker Advocates and Advisors in Winnipeg, Manitoba
- OCTOBER**
Dean and Rachel travel to Cape Breton to facilitate their first Workshop together and receive great reviews

The New Counsellors attend the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour's Convention and reach over 250 union activists
- NOVEMBER**
The Office of the Worker Counsellor presents to the NSGEU's Human Rights Conference about workers' compensation as a human right
- DECEMBER**
The Worker Counsellors are hosted by the Cape Breton Injured-Workers' Association to provide customized training.

GOVERNANCE

The Office of the Worker Counsellor was created in 2008 out of an Agreement between the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL) and the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB).



The Office provides regular operational and financial reports to the Workers' Compensation Board of Directors and to the NSFL's Executive Council.

Steering Committees from both the WCB and the NSFL provide high level guidance and direction for the Office.

Day to day operations are overseen by the NSFL President, Danny Cavanagh, and Secretary Treasurer, Kyle Buott.

The three Staff of the Office of the Worker Counsellor plan, implement and action the operations.

FINANCIALS

The Office of the Worker Counsellor continues to operate within their annual budget. The detailed financial position is set out in the document attached.

The Office ended 2015 with a surplus for several reasons.

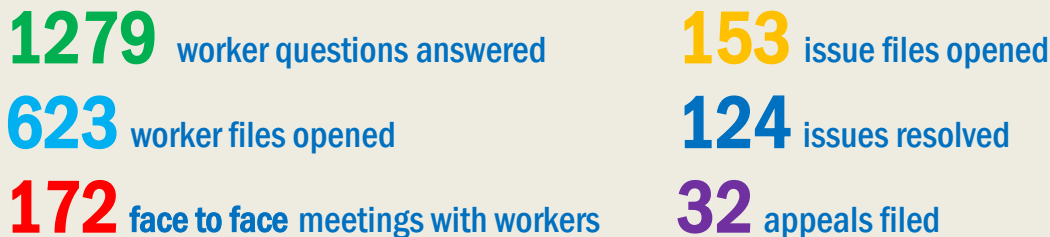
- There were two rather than three staff persons between January and August 2015.
- The large expenditure budgeted for a new database system was planned in 2015, but not made until January 2016.
- The staffing levels required a focus on providing Assistance and Advice, limiting the number of Workshops provided as well as professional development and travel opportunities for staff.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor has an ambitious plan for 2016, and will continue to make responsible use of its existing financial resources through the year.

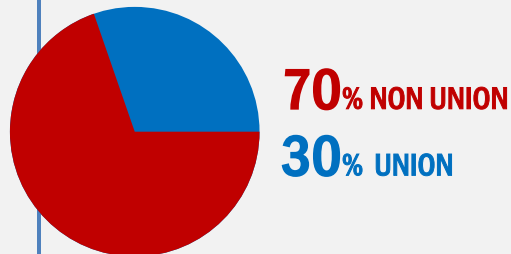


ASSISTANCE

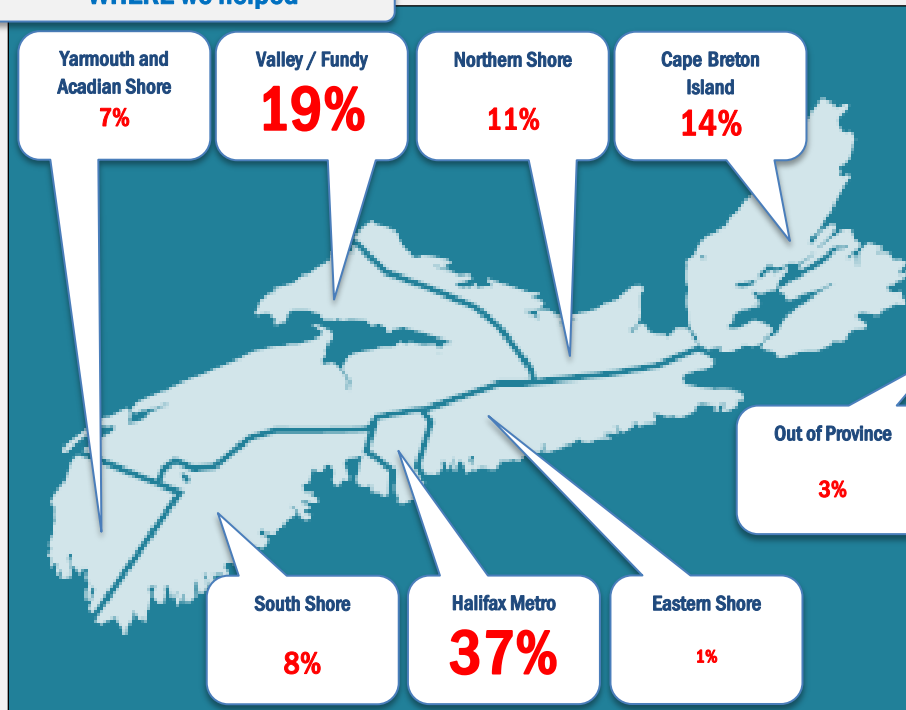
HOW we helped



WHO we helped



WHERE we helped



Services offered by the Office of the Worker Counsellor are taken advantage of by Nova Scotian's everywhere across the province.

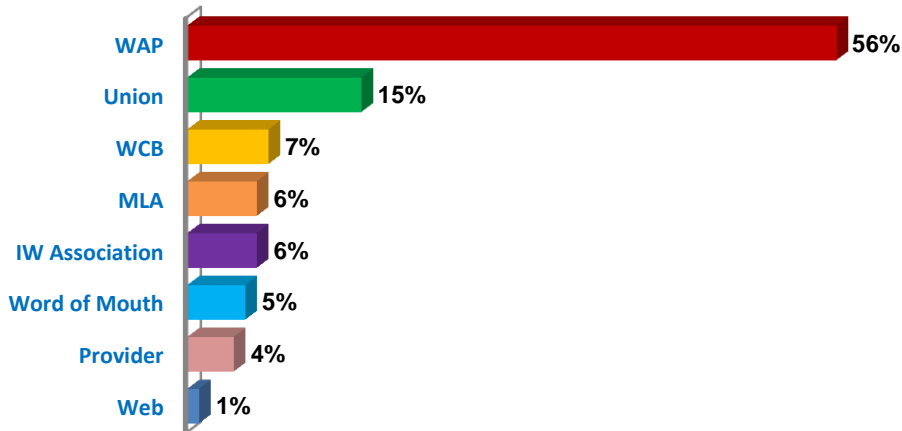
We note, however, that our usage on the Eastern Shore is not as high as we expect given statistics from WCB.

We will be strategizing ways to reach out to communities on the Eastern Shore to ensure awareness of our program grows, and our services are accessible to all Nova Scotians, regardless of where they live.



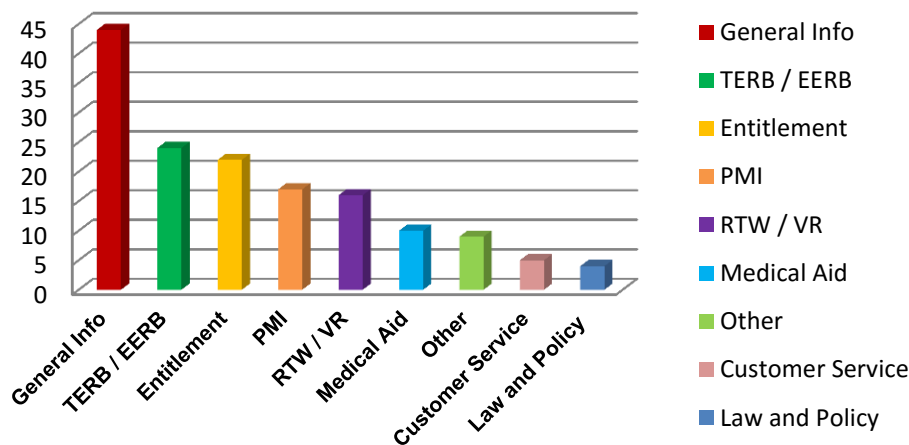
...ASSISTANCE

Referral Source



As in previous years, the bulk of referrals to the Office of the Worker Counsellor came from the Workers Advisers Program (WAP). However we have seen a significant increase in referrals from other sources, including Unions, MLAs, and health care providers due to our outreach efforts in 2015.

Primary Issues



The largest numbers of calls we receive are from workers who simply have questions about workers' compensation and/or their claims. However more than half of our callers have problems with which they need help. Earnings Replacement, Entitlement, and Permanent Medical Impairment are the biggest areas of concern.

CASE STUDY*

Alex is a 23 year old man who was badly injured at work several years ago. He suffered fractures and severe crush injuries to both his legs.

Alex lives in Amherst and has no means of transportation.

He contacted the Office of the Worker Counsellor when his Case Manager began discussing Vocational Rehabilitation and return to work plans. He'd heard horror stories, and thought he was going to be cut off.

The Worker Counsellors drove to Amherst to meet with him and his Case Manager.

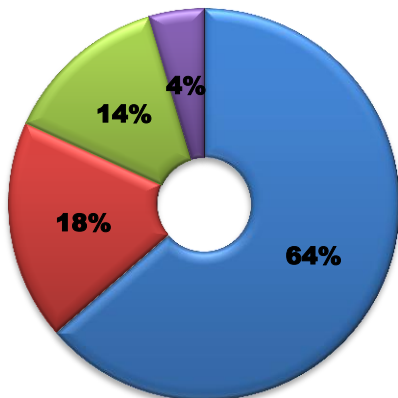
They helped Alex talk to his Case Manager about his concerns and anxieties surrounding return to work.

Alex's Case Manager arranged some counselling for him to help the difficult transition to return to work. His attitude toward his job search and his future has improved immeasurably.

*all identifying factors have been changed to ensure privacy

Customer Service Issues

■ Timeliness ■ No decision letter ■ Return calls ■ Demeanor



Almost all of those who contact the Office of the Worker Counsellor describe issues with the customer service they've received from the Workers Compensation Board.

Unlike prior years, in 2015 the lack of return calls was not the major complaint regarding service.

Instead, the primary issue described was timeliness - both to make decisions and to provide them in writing.

CASE STUDY*

Jake injured his shoulder at work. He had started a graduated return to work when he had a severe allergy attack. His doctor told him to take time off from the program.

Jake's Case Manager contacted him and told him his benefits would be suspended until he was well enough to start his graduated return to work again.

Jake's doctor cleared him to return to the program less than two weeks later. When Jake called his Case Manager he didn't get a call back.

Two months later Jake contacted the Office of the Worker Counsellor for help. We were able to reach his Case Manager. However it took five more months to receive the decision that his benefits and treatment would be reinstated.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor appreciates there are many reasons why decisions may require time to make. However we will continue to advocate for the right decision at the right time to ensure fairness for our clients.



ADVOCACY

The Office of the Worker Counsellor provides Advocacy Services for all workers relating to workers compensation or occupational health and safety in the province.

Consultations

We have always welcomed input from workers and their representatives about their areas of concern. We have been open to suggestions for improvement of the Workers' Compensation or Occupational Health and Safety systems. However we did not have an active outreach plan.

In 2015 we started gathering names for a database of individuals and organizations who wish to be more involved in consultations. We now have a list of over 200 individuals to contact and obtain input from when preparing for opportunities to advocate for workers. This list is growing every day.

With the strength of those standing with us, we will be vigorously participating in all upcoming Policy Consultation and Review processes for the Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety systems.

Consultation on Nova Scotia's Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council

In October 2015, the Office of the Worker Counsellor was approached by the Department of Labour and Advanced Education to participate in their review of the OH&S Advisory Council.

The Council is an appointed body, with equal representation from employers and workers, which advises the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education on OHS&S matters.

The Worker Counsellors met with a consultant from the firm Royer Thompson Associates on October 14, 2016. We provided input on behalf of workers in the province. We strongly advocated to ensure the Council's very important function in the province be not only maintained but strengthened.





EDUCATION

2015 in numbers

6 workshops delivered in 2015

107 participants in total

100% positive evaluations

7 workshops scheduled for the first quarter of 2016

25 workshops targeted for 2016

Changes through 2015 required us to prioritize assisting injured workers. As a result our Education Program was quiet for much of the year. However, when the second Worker Counsellor started in September, we started to aggressively market our workshops. Interest in our services took off.

In the final quarter of 2015 alone we delivered more Workshops than were completed in all of the previous year. We anticipate over 25 workshops will be delivered in 2016.

SELECTED FEEDBACK FROM OUR LEARNERS

"The course was very informative for someone who had no experience"

"The teachers were the best part of the course!"

We are making it a priority to ensure our workshops are accessible to all Nova Scotians.

"I now know there is help for workers who are struggling"

"Thank you for the power of knowledge!"

"The Counsellors were very knowledgeable, and readily available to answer questions"

- We're holding workshops all across the province. In 2015 we held workshops in Halifax, Cape Breton, and the Annapolis Valley.

- We are scheduling workshops anytime we have enough learners to fill a class.

- We are modifying and customizing our workshops to ensure they meet each organization's needs.





UPDATES

SOCIAL MEDIA

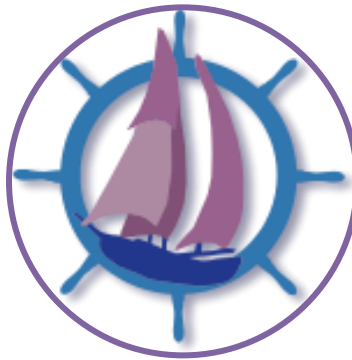
Through the last quarter of 2015, we had a goal to increase our social media presence. We started with our Facebook page. Between August and December 2015, we increased our followers by 55%, and our post reach by over 5000%. By far, the largest issues of interest to our followers are related to Occupational Health and Safety, and charges laid against employers under the “Westray Act”.

DATABASE

The Office of the Worker Counsellor was budgeted to purchase a database in 2015, but will not be disbursed until early 2016.

We have upgraded the hardware for the office, and have contracted with a Nova Scotian provider to customize a “Client Relationship Management” Solution. The beta system will be in place in early April 2016.

The quote for our system was under \$10,000, substantially below what we had expected to pay.



PARTNERSHIPS

The Office of the Worker Counsellor continues to expand our community reach. We maintain important partnerships with both the Pictou County and Cape Breton Injured Workers Association.

We continue to be involved with the Canadian Association of Workers Advocates and Advisors. We look forward to working with the Workers Advisors Program to host CAWAA’s annual meeting in Halifax this September.

RESILIENCY WORKSHOP

Our 2016 Business Plan included a proposal for a Resiliency Workshop for injured workers. We are continuing our research on this important initiative. We’ve spoken with several other organizations that provide similar workshops, and will consider the option when choosing something that is right for Nova Scotian workers.



CONCLUSION

The Office of the Worker Counsellor has met the challenges of significant organizational changes through 2015. These changes are also presenting opportunities on which we will capitalize in the future.

We said goodbye to two long term employees, and have welcomed two new Worker Counsellors.

The priority in 2015 was maintaining our capacity to provide assistance and advice, and we have succeeded in ensuring the organizational renewal has not impacted the vital services we provide to the injured workers of this province.

We are deeply committed to the goal of safe and injury free workplaces for all Nova Scotians, and we are always seeking new ways to foster a culture of safety within the province.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor thanks you for your support and assistance throughout 2015.

We look forward to working with our partners throughout Nova Scotians in 2016.

As always, we welcome any questions or concerns regarding our organization and any input or feedback on how we can continue to improve the services we provide to the workers of Nova Scotia.