

What is an advocate? The Webster's dictionary has two definitions that certainly describe our nominee, Lori Sutherland.

The first definition is: "one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal". Lori has been a proud member of CUPE since the formation of Local 3681. This local was formed to improve the wages and working conditions of educational support workers in the former Potashville School Division. When Lori started work in that school division in December of 1989, there were only a handful of employees that were not teachers. Teacher assistants as they were called then had wages that were set by the school division. As a young mother, Lori took a job at Esterhazy High School and was very dismayed to find that upon receipt of her first paycheque, it barely covered her travelling expenses let alone her childcare expenses. She went home and (in her words) had a "good cry", then armed with the knowledge that she was worth a raise, she went back and successfully negotiated an increase. The rest is history. A future advocate was made. Only a few short years later, Lori and her co-workers were instrumental in forming CUPE local 3681. As a former co-worker said "the process took countless hours as we had to set up our by-laws etc. Lori's role was no different than the rest of ours to start but it soon came apparent that she was a leader, she made us all feel important in the development and she became our first president and continued as such until the amalgamation of the Good Spirit School Division."

Local 3681 was located in a potash mining country and during lean years it was customary for the miners to be laid off for short periods of time and collect Unemployment Insurance. Some of these short layoff periods were also used to put in “the two week waiting period” so that workers could collect EI immediately during the next layoff. When members of local 3681 heard this, they felt education workers, laid off for short periods of time, had the same rights as the mine workers. Time after time their claims were rejected by Unemployment Insurance, until, under the leadership of their president, Lori Sutherland. In the late 1990’s Local 3681 enlisted the help of CUPE Saskatchewan and took the federal government to court. This small local from a small town was elated in 2001 when they found out that they had won their case and because of this victory, education workers across Saskatchewan collect EI through the short breaks within the school year.

The role of an education worker was evolving and with the advent of inclusion, Lori recognized that often one Teacher Assistant would spend the whole day with a child with the most needs, be it physical/intellectual or often, behavioural. This assignment was draining and as a result employee burnout and dissatisfaction were common. In her own school, Lori quietly lobbied the principal and special needs teacher to timetable TA’s with different children across the day so the workload could be shared among co-workers. This was so successful that it was soon followed by other schools in the school division. This is an approach Lori still believes in and lobbies for today.

As president of 3681 Lori spearheaded many bargaining sessions and was a calm and cool negotiator. She always backed up wage increase requests, language changes, workload issues etc. with facts that she would calmly refer to when questioned. Lori is not scared of a fight. In fact, when negotiations reached an impasse during one of the last round of negotiations held within Potashville. She and her executive, led members in an information picket in the rain in front of the Potashville School division office. This strategic move had a successful conclusion when the embarrassed director phoned Lori and asked the bargaining committee to come back to the table.

Lori's former local was an "all women" group and often it was felt that the employer considered its members as working for just a little extra "cash" or "pin money". This attitude infuriated Lori and she was constantly campaigning to educate anyone who would listen about "the pink ghetto" and the "one husband away from poverty" reality, advocating wage increases so that support workers could enjoy a decent living regardless of gender and location.

With the school divisions in Saskatchewan changed, the Good Spirit School Division was formed amalgamating 6 CUPE locals into one. Undaunted, Lori took a leadership role in this and once again went on the by-law committee spending countless hours to make one set of by-laws out of many. Lori's leadership abilities became apparent and she ran uncontested (and supported by the other former president's) for the position of president of newly formed Local 4784. A position she still holds today.

Throughout the growth process of the new local, with new classifications, many different personalities and the many rep changes, Lori maintained her equilibrium and also kept herself updated on the provincial changes affecting education workers. Becoming alarmed at the total lack of respect shown to education support workers by the current provincial government, Lori ran and became a member at large on the Education Workers Steering Committee. Now, besides holding down a full time job, being active in extra-curricular activities at school, being a wife and mother of two children and being the president of a very busy local, Lori became very involved in the campaign to educate the public about the reduction of educational assistants in the province. This took up a lot of her time and resulted in travel and a lot of time away from home. She also spent many hours in front of the computer tracking down documentation on government policy so that in any given situation she could refute any statement made by any politician at any time. That's just what Lori does and passionately believes in.

During the last round of negotiations in our local, talks had stalled. The school board refused to entertain any of the union's proposals, especially us asking for the provincial wage average in all classifications. Lori rallied our local members to a positive strike vote. Within 24 hours once again Lori was called by a director to be invited back to the negotiating table. At the first meeting after the vote...we got what we asked for: the provincial wage average, an increase ranging from 4% - 11% for our members.

The second definition of an advocate is “one that pleads the cause of another”. Lori has a soft spot for the underdog, but she always listens to both sides of a story and reserves judgement until she has all of the facts. She also doesn't file a grievance without doing all she can do to solve the problem first. As testament to that fact, in the 23 years Lori has been a CUPE president, she has only filed a handful of grievances. She has spent countless hours on the road driving to meetings between employees and employers as well as many, many hours on the phone calming people down and giving advice... and this doesn't include all of the e-mails that have come her way. This defines a true advocate; someone who listens, finds solutions and deeply cares about what she is doing.

Anyone who has ever had a conversation with Lori knows she is very eloquent. She is intelligent, with a keen mind and a thirst for knowledge. If she doesn't know the answer, she will say so... and you can bet she will research and ask questions until she does. She is stubborn and can be single-minded at times but these are great qualities in an advocate.

Lori is the proud daughter of an iron-worker and a true unionist at heart... just ask anyone who knows her. While doing an incredible job of being a full library technician and educational assistant at Esterhazy High School, as well as president of local 4784, she is the proud mom of Caitlyn and Alex, and the loving wife to Glen. They live in the beautiful village of Tantallon. Lori has continued her education all along and has enjoyed taking English, literature and law classes. She applied for and was awarded a temporary National Servicing Rep. job – while we at the local level thought it would just be a summer job, Lori has been extended a

few times and continues to work that role – while there is no doubt our local misses her; our loss has certainly been the other locals gain. We wish Lori all the best and by nominating and now presenting her for this year's advocate award we want to thank her for all she has done for 'her' locals! Congratulations Lori!!!

Respectfully submitted by,

Karla Sastaunik

Local 4784

Nominee's Name: Lori Sutherland

Local 4784