



# member to member connection

Breaking through barriers for workers who have children with special needs

Nº 28 Summer 2014

*Time flies.* Cooper was a premature baby born 8 weeks early. It was a hard beginning for the three of us.

When he turned 2 years old, his paediatrician suspected some autism tendencies. It was very hard to hear that. We were living in Alberta at that time with no family support but had great co-workers and very understanding managers there. Thank God my request to transfer to Ontario went through and now we have family and friends to support us. Cooper is almost 3.5 years old now. Last August he started nursery school at a very good daycare. The teachers and other specialists told us it would be really beneficial for Cooper to start going full days but we could not afford it. My wife is still trying to find a sustainable job.

In January 2014, Cooper started to go three full days as my wife had found a temporary job (which ended in March). We were debating how we could afford to continue sending Cooper for three full days. Now with the help of Special Needs Projects he will continue going the three days. Our goal is that by September this year, my wife finds a sustainable job that will make it possible for Cooper to attend junior kindergarten five full days in the recommended private daycare where the teacher-student ratio is lower.



Overall Cooper has improved a lot, especially his social skills and speech. He is very active and loves the outdoors. We are still waiting for a developmental reassessment this year. In the meantime, we are working on specific targets with him like independence skills and how to interact with his peers.

Thank you Special Needs Project for helping Cooper receive the proper care. It is really appreciated.

**Class 3 technical services**  
Bolton, ON





**"We are very proud of our son because he shows a lot of perseverance day after day."**

### ***I would like to thank***

the appropriately-named "Moving On" project. My daughter Martine is moving on with her athletics team. At the most recent provincial games (Pointe Claire, July 2013), Martine won four medals:

- One Gold–shot put
- One Silver–100 metres
- Two Bronze–200 metres and long jump

With the help of the Moving On project, Martine can take part in many competitions. She is a 23-year old trisomic young woman. She is very dynamic and well-liked by her teammates and coaches.

She is currently the first alternate for the national games that will be held in Vancouver in July 2014. She would very much like to be able to take part.

On December 5, 2013, she will be recognized for her perseverance and determination at the Quebec National Assembly.

As Martine's parents, we are very proud of what she has accomplished so far.

Thank you for everything.

**RSMC**  
Beauport, QC

### ***We would like to***

congratulate our son, Fabrice, for taking part in his first golf tournament and receiving a medal for second place. Congratulations! Fabrice is successfully completing his last year in grade school. We are very proud of him because he shows a lot of perseverance, day after day, despite his ADD. Thank you to your entire team and, more specifically, Doris Tremblay and our counsellor, Jessica, who are both very patient and such good listeners. Thanks to your help and the funding, our son has been able to see an excellent remedial teacher, who supports Fabrice in his school work. The "Breaking Through Barriers" leaflet arrived at just the right time to let us know about this excellent program.

**Letter Carrier**  
Louiseville, Québec



***Being a member*** of Canadian Union of Postal Workers Special Needs Project has helped my family a lot. We are very grateful for all the support we've received. In times of need when we thought we would not be able to get through, you provided help that made a difference for my family and myself. We would like to thank everyone on this team for their support.

**PO-4**  
Etobicoke, ON





## **The Wish**

*It's hard to know where to start this story—with Lance or his mom, Lucy!*

*Lance is a creative and entertaining 17-year-old young man who has turned his love of video games into a contract job. Lucy, a letter carrier in Victoria BC, is his supportive and encouraging mom.*

### **This is their “Make a Wish” story.**

Lucy knew that Lance was entitled to a wish from the “Make a Wish” Foundation because of his medical condition (Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 2). But instead of planning a “Wish” when Lance was a child, Lucy decided to wait until Lance was 13. Lucy wanted Lance to choose the Wish that was right for him.

Meanwhile, Lance spent a lot of time playing video games. As he says, “when you’re in a wheel chair 24/7, you end up playing a lot of games!” But Lance wasn’t just playing games. He was learning everything he could about gaming, finding an expression for his natural creativity. As Lance says, “it’s not a game, it’s my life.” Lance began developing “Corruption,” his own video game.

Onward to Lance’s 13th birthday! Lucy and Lance began talking about his Wish. Lance decided that he wanted to go to EA Canada, a major studio of the American gaming software giant Electronic Arts, located in Burnaby BC.

### **Lance’s Wish was granted.**

But Lucy told Lance he couldn’t go empty handed to EA. So Lance put together an 11-page design document for “Corruption.” Lucy had it printed and put it in binders.

### **Lance was going to EA prepared!**

In April 2009, Lance arrived at EA where a full itinerary of events was planned. First he was going to meet with a Development Team. You can imagine what happened to the itinerary when Lance went into the meeting with his design doc for “Corruption,” copies for all! He blew them away – and the planned itinerary went out the door!



Lance then pitched “Corruption” to an Executive group. As one executive said “there are people worried about their jobs after this pitch!”

### **Lance was 14 at the time.**

Back home in Victoria, Lucy kept in touch with EA. There was talk about Lance becoming a games tester in the Quality Assurance Department. Lucy asked “Isn’t Lance too young?” Evidently not!

Lance was put on contract as a tester in June 2009. He became part of the team that developed SSX, a snowboarding video game recently released.

What has Lance learned? Despite all the creativity and fun, making video games is hard work. Marketing, budgeting and technology are all part of the business process that can take between 4 and 10 years.

What’s next for Lance? As he finishes Grade 12, he continues on contract with EA Canada in Quality Assurance. In the future, he would like to write stories for games and do voice acting.

And what can Lance share about his experience with others? “Get good at what you love and make it part of your life.”



**"She has a disability but her abilities are incredible!"**



***My daughter Amy*** was diagnosed with PDD-nos (Persuasive Development Disorder-not otherwise specified) on the Autism Spectrum at the age of 16. At birth we knew something was different. She screamed constantly like she was in pain, never crawled, had extraordinary fine motor skills, a lack of communication skills, and banged her head on walls and floors. She also had very severe sensory issues. None of the medical professionals were willing to put a label to what was going on in fear that would hold her back.

The younger years were very tough. She entered school being able to read extremely well. Art was her "go to" for comfort. At school she was bright and quiet and overlooked. The school system did not offer any support for her communication / social issues. By grade 7 the social issues were having a major impact on Amy.

During all the difficult times the artistic talent that she possessed always amazed us. Amy auditioned and was accepted at a local high school that specialized in the arts. I had a sense of relief thinking that being with like-minded people might help her gain the social/communication skills she needed.

It was in her Grade 10 year that our world was thrown into chaos. Feeling left out socially and not understanding the communication among her peers, Amy attempted suicide 3 times. Over the next

few years it was a constant round of hospital visits, counselors, parent group sessions, intervention / information sessions with her peers at the high school, psychiatrists, phone calls from the school, medication, fear and tears.

Finally another assessment was done and it all started to come together. Amy was on the Autism Spectrum. We started researching, happily assuming there would be outside help to get her on track to better days. Unfortunately the roller coaster was about to start up again.

The waiting lists for help were extremely long. Amy was 17 and most services stopped when she turned 18. It felt as if at 18 she should be all better. The feeling of disappointment and defeat was very taxing on us. Amy finished high school a term late but got accepted at Fanshawe College for the diploma photography program. We did our homework and felt the college understood and was prepared to offer the support she required. Again we were on a high. A month after school started Fanshawe realized they could not support her needs. They recommended a knowledgeable professional for her to speak with, at our cost, and with his support she was able to receive her diploma.

It only took Amy a short time to realize she did not have the social or communication skills to succeed at wedding photography. Since graduation she has been actively seeking employment but with no luck so far.

Amy does volunteer work once or twice a week at a health care center and has enrolled in a health administration program at our local college. Amy looks forward to the day she can be more independent. She has a disability but her abilities are incredible! With the assistance of the Moving on Project Amy is able to get the support to be on that road to independence.

**Letter Carrier  
Kitchener, ON**

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**“Although you may miss some steps you can succeed in climbing the stairs.”**



**My son Julien** has an average cognitive impairment and severe dyspraxia. With the financial support of the Special Needs Project, Julien is taking karate lessons, which helps a great deal with his development.

For some time now, Julien has been seen twice a month by a speech therapist named Isabelle. She has helped Julien make huge progress. After each session with Isabelle, when I get back home from work, using his own language, Julien shows me the words he just learned.

With the financial support of the Special Needs Project, my son is able to make progress, and he may, one day, be fully self-reliant. It's not easy. Although you can miss some steps, you can nonetheless succeed in climbing the stairs. When I see my son trying his best to speak and make himself understood with his own language, I'm happy and especially very proud of him.

While we are working very hard so Julien can make progress at his own pace, the Special Needs Project is helping us with the many opportunities it provides. A great deal of Julien's progress is attributable to this great project. Once again, thank you for making our lives a little easier.

A big thank you!

**Letter Carrier**  
Blainville, QC



**My story is about the success** of my 2 children. A beautiful 22-year-old daughter, Alanna and a handsome 18-year-old son, Samuel. Both of them have ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and learning disabilities. Thru the kindness, caring, compassion and generosity of CUPW (union) and the women of Special Needs Project in Nova Scotia my children have grown into amazing young adults. Alanna is completing 2nd year of college in a Culinary Arts Program and Samuel is completing high school. A successful outcome for 2 children diagnosed with severe learning disabilities. Special Needs funding helped pay for brain based learning program at a private school in Ajax Ontario (Wasdel Centre for Innovative Learning, phone 905-426-3241). Also the funding assisted with specialized summer camps. Medication and treatment has dramatically changed my children's lives for the better. I am extra grateful to the many women of this program: Jamie Kass in Ottawa for your dedication to such a cause; Gail, Cary and Dorothy in the office in Baddeck, Nova Scotia for assisting us with our forms; JoAnna LaTulippe-Rochon at Family Place Resource Centre; and my advisor Nancy B - an angel for listening compassionately to my situation.

**Letter Carrier**  
Scarborough, ON



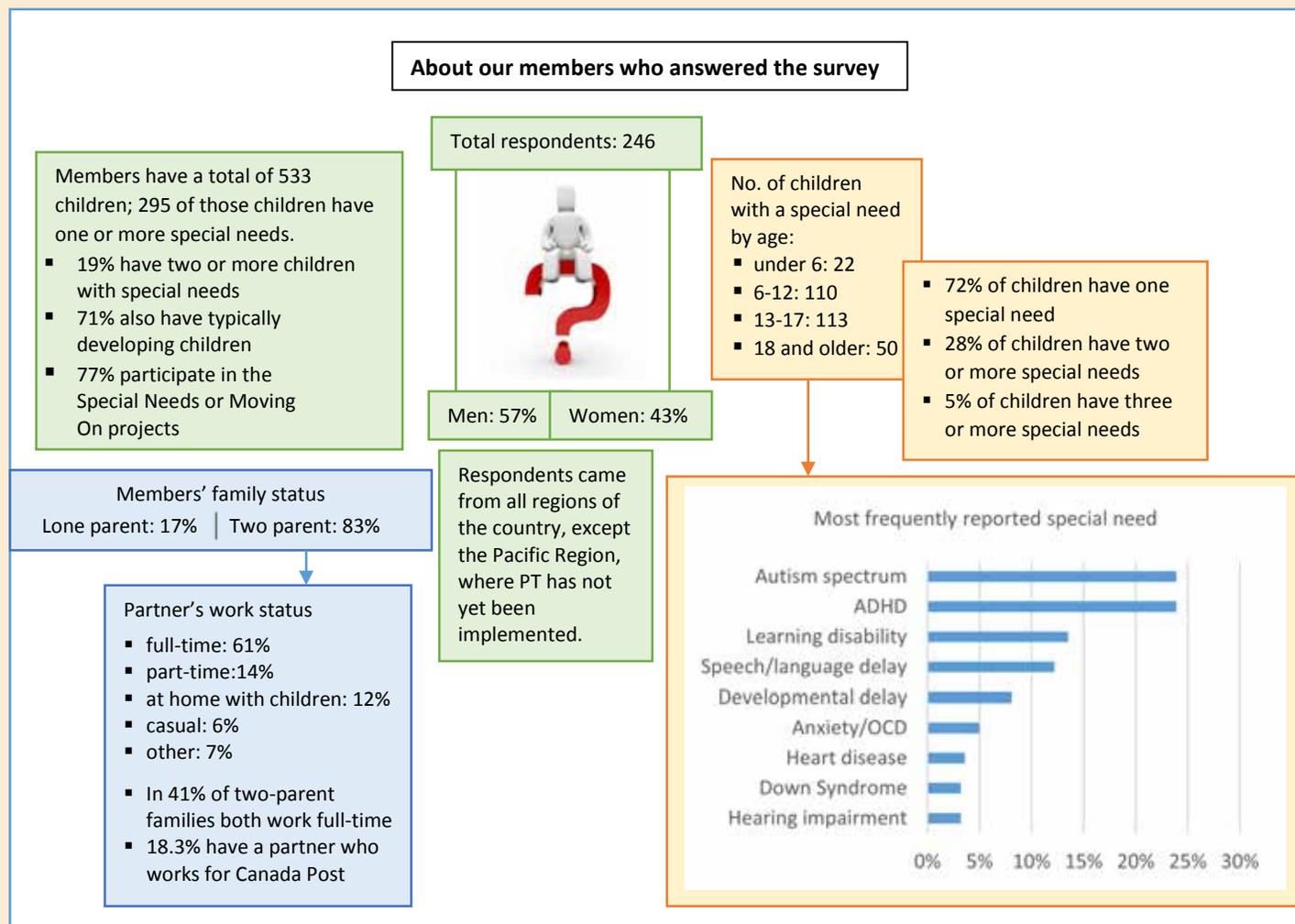
## Our Members Work and Family Balance After Postal Transformation

As Postal Transformation is implemented in different parts of the country, we have heard how our members are being affected. Forced overtime, changes in work hours, changes in work methods and increased workload have created challenges for many. Balancing work and family responsibilities has become increasingly difficult, and we have been hearing about the additional stresses experienced by members with children who have special needs.

Last fall CUPW launched a third party study to document and examine the challenges arising from the introduction of Postal Transformation (PT). The results will help provide the type of evidence we can use to negotiate improvements in the workplace, explore if and how we can help reduce work-life conflict, and minimize the additional challenges arising from PT for parents of children with special needs.

The study was conducted with five locals: Edmonton, Winnipeg, Scarborough, Montreal and St. John's. It included consultation with members through focus groups and a large scale survey that was distributed to all members in the five locals. Because we wanted to learn about the specific impacts on members who have a child with special needs, our advisors conducted the survey over the phone with all members who are part of the Special Needs project whose workplace has gone through PT. A number of members who have a child with special needs and who are not part of the Special Needs Project also answered the survey when it was distributed to the five locals.

**Following is a snapshot of the findings from our members who have children with special needs.** Further information will be available in the main report, which will be completed by the end of the summer. It will include the results from the more than 2,400 members who responded, and further analysis on the data from our members who have children with special needs.





**Life at Work:** The work status of members who have children with special needs were similar in many ways to those with children without special needs; however, a somewhat higher percentage of members in the special needs group worked full-time than others.

Member's work status	SN	No SN
Works full-time	87.8%	82.2%
Group 1	25.6%	22.9%
Group 2	69.3%	71.0%
Group 3	1.3%	2.3%
RSMC	3.8%	3.8%
Median years with CPC	14.5	12.5

Among members living with a partner, there were some differences between those with children with special needs and other families. A lower percentage of partners in the special needs group

Partner's work status	SN	No SN
Partner works full-time	60.7%	72.4%
Partner is at home full-time	11.9%	6.5%

worked full-time and a higher percentage were at home full-time.

Schedule changes since PT have affected most; however, the percentage was lower among the special needs group. In contrast, a higher percentage of members in the special needs group changed job classifications. It is possible that members in the SN group changed classification in order to keep the same schedule, or that more members in the special needs group were accommodated and did not have to change their work schedule.

Changes to work since PT	SN	No SN
Changed job classification	17.3%	12.8%
Had a schedule change	70.0%	81.6%

A much higher percentage of Group 2\* members were affected by schedule changes than those in Group 1.\* (see above for definition). Fewer than half of the Group 1s experienced a shift change, compared to more than 80% of Group 2s. More than 60% of Group 2s had a later end

**A note about terminology:**

Unless otherwise noted, in this report, the term "members" refers to CUPW members who have at least one child with a special need, and who responded to the survey on PT and work-life balance.

Due to space limitations, in comparative tables and charts, the term "SN" refers to a member who has at least one child with a special need and "No SN" refers to a member with children, none of whom has a special need.

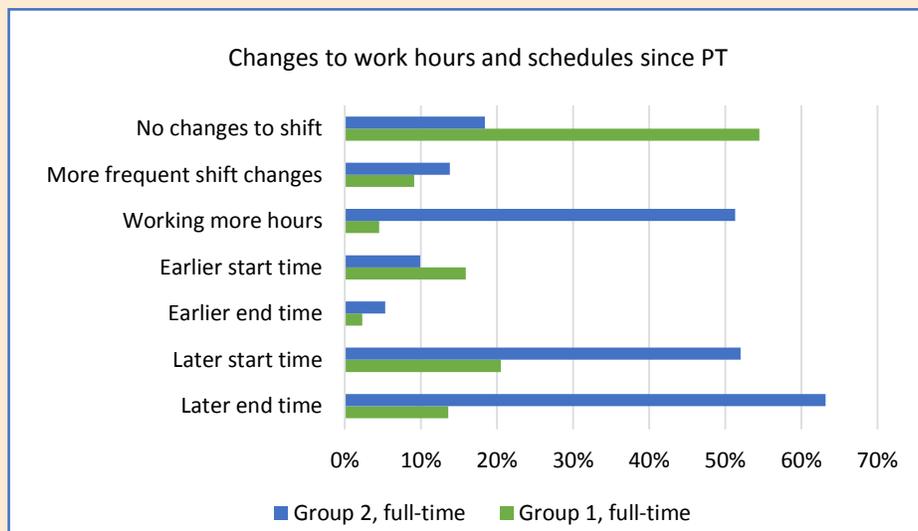
**A note about comparisons:\***

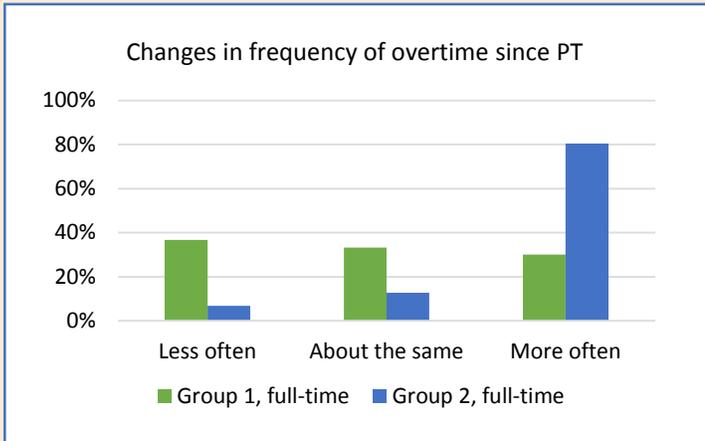
Comparisons are only possible between Groups 1 (inside workers) and 2 (letter carriers and other outside workers). The number of respondents who are RSMCs and in Group 3 (mechanics) are too small to report separately. Group 3 and RSMC data are included in all results that are not broken down by group.

time to their schedule after PT.

**Working additional hours**

Group 2s were also affected by overtime more than Group 1s. Even though Group 1s worked more hours beyond their shift than Group 2s, Group 2s worked overtime more times in the week. More of the Group 1s extra hours were counted as overtime, and the overtime worked was more likely to be voluntary than compared to Group 2s.



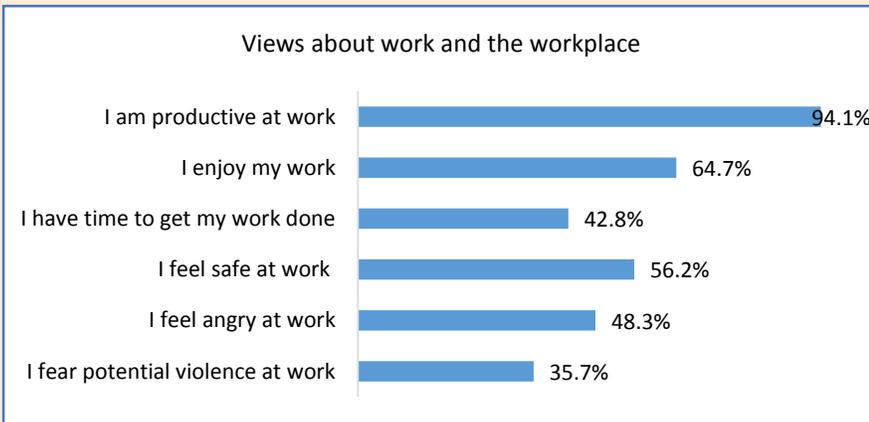


**Extra hours worked in the previous week**

	Group 1	Group 2
Average times extra hours worked	2.2	3.4
Average number of extra hours worked	8.0 hrs	7.4 hrs
Average hours counted as overtime	7.8 hrs	6.3 hrs
Overtime was voluntary	75.0%	27.6%
Overtime was forced	12.5%	40.2%
Some overtime was voluntary and some forced	12.5%	32.2%

**In the workplace**

Almost all members indicated that they are productive at work and almost two-thirds indicated that they like their job “most of the time”, even though fewer than half thought they had enough time to get their work done.



However, just over half felt safe at work and more than one-third feared potential workplace violence.

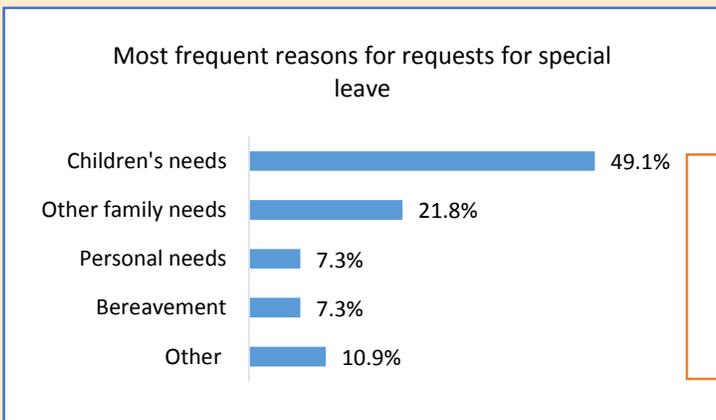
**Challenges to balancing work and family life**

Regularly working beyond scheduled hours, often without a choice, as well as later shift starts, makes scheduling medical appointments and meeting child care and school pick up times

more of a challenge. In 2013, 42% of members used vacation days to meet children’s needs, and 12% used vacation days to meet other family needs.

In the last contract, seven personal leave days per year replaced the sick leave entitlement. These days may be taken for any reason, but must be fully used before any requests for special leave may be made. Twenty-three percent of all respondents requested special leave in 2013. Almost half of those requests were for children’s needs. More than

60% of requests to meet children’s needs were denied.



**% of requests granted by reason for request**

Children's needs	37.0%
Other family needs	58.3%
Personal needs	50.0%
Bereavement	0.0%
Other	66.7%

In 2013, the average number of personal leave days and other kinds of leaves were slightly higher for members who

have a child with special needs. A higher



percentage of the special needs group requested both special leave and accommodation. Accommodation was granted to a higher percentage of the special needs group who requested it, but special leave was granted to a lower percentage.



	SN	No SN
Personal days	5.2	5.0
Unpaid days due to illness	3.0	2.6
Unpaid days for family reasons	2.2	1.4
Vacation days (annual leave)	20	15

#### Average incomes

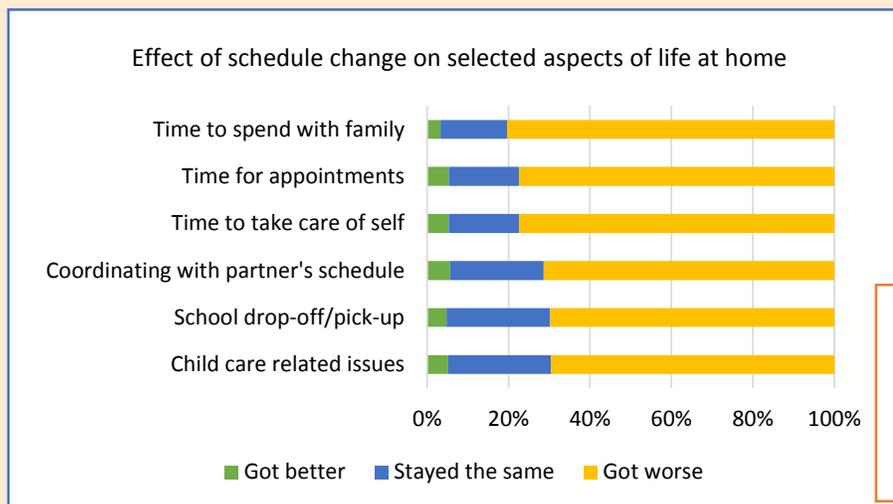
With more unpaid leaves and fewer partners working full time, the average annual household income for all types of

	SN	No SN
All family types	\$75,700	\$84,400
Couple families	\$90,800	\$81,200

families with a child with special needs is lower than families whose child does not have a special need.

#### Effects of PT on family life

Members indicated that the effect of schedule changes had a negative impact on life at home. Most areas of family life were reported to have worsened since PT, including time to take care of themselves.



The top three effects overall effects of PT reported by both men and women were on physical health, mental health and family life, but were reported by a higher percentage of women than men.

	Men	Women
Physical health	36.4%	41.5%
Mental health	28.0%	37.8%
Family life	29.0%	35.4%

In spite of the many challenges members face as a result of PT and changes to work schedules and work methods, as well as the increase in forced overtime, the picture is not entirely negative. Members who have children with special needs appear to be more positive than other members about some aspects of their work, such as relationships in the workplace. These aspects of life at work will be explored in the main report. Stay tuned for more information coming in late summer!

Many thanks to both the members and the numerous advisors who conducted interviews, for giving so generously of your time, and for the wealth of information provided.



"This success has given her a new outlook on life and hope for her future."

**Your help** and support have enabled me to help my daughter get her life back on track. Her self-esteem is improving and she is starting to be more self-confident. Thanks to your support, my daughter has been able to continue her studies, and we thank you!

For now, my daughter has finished her studies for 2014, and will return in January 2015. She can work part-time, which allows her to continue seeing her therapists. However, she has to stay in Quebec City for the time being.

**RSMC**  
Lac Baker, NB



**I just want to thank** the Special Needs Project for supporting Madison and me. Madison is flourishing because of your support. She finished first place in her medal division in the Ontario Riding Championship and received a trophy and a ribbon. This success has given her a new outlook on life and hope for her future in a career in the equine field. It has given her confidence and courage. She will be successful as an adult. She now has a bright future even though her disability is real. Madison is a happy energetic 15 year old who is looking forward to going to Kempwell college in a co-op program and caring for her horses. Thank you.

**PO-4**  
Brockville, ON



### **Want Ad**

I am looking for any suggestions of software that I can download for my son who is 25 and has a diagnosis of autism. I would like the games to be educational or games without violence, sex and drugs. He is very capable with the computer. Please contact me by phone or email. Thanks.

**PO-4**  
North York, ON

**“She helps parents understand they, and their children, can succeed.”**



## **Advisor helps parents see the possibilities**

Charmaine McIntyre’s passion is helping parents whose children have disabilities think about a vision for their son or daughter.

“It is a really great feeling to be able to help families understand there are possibilities other than those typically presented—to help them access resources they weren’t aware of.”

McIntyre, an advisor for the Special Needs and Moving On projects, is perfectly suited to supporting parents in their quest for better options for their children.

As Regional Coordinator for Inclusive Post-Secondary Education at Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL), she is currently working on an initiative to create more opportunities at the post-secondary level for young adults with developmental disabilities.

“It’s wonderful to see a lot of young adults—who maybe never thought it would be possible—come to university or college, and work towards reaching their dreams and career aspirations.”

The colleges that have an agreement with AACL support students with disabilities to study in a program of interest to them. They attend as auditors but participate alongside their cohorts. “It’s an avenue to have students with developmental disabilities attend class and have an individualized course of study that aligns with their learning needs.”

McIntyre was an Advocate at AACL prior to taking on her current position. She has been an advisor with the projects for the past two years.

“In my role as advocate I did lots of work supporting families to access an inclusive education in the



kindergarten to Grade 12 education system. I know the supports and services families are looking for and the Moving On Project is an especially good fit because I understand the transition from being a teenager to a young adult and some of the trials and tribulations the families go through.”

### ***Being there for families***

The best thing about being an advisor though is “just being able to be there for the families when they are going through some of their struggles. Families don’t often have a safe place to have conversations... They’ve experienced so much hurt and rejection in so many parts of their

lives in wanting the best for their son or daughter. I provide an opportunity for parents to be able to say when things aren’t good and not have to feel judged.”

McIntyre supports parents to understand they and their children can succeed, and is a firm believer in planning and looking for opportunities. For example, she helped guide a single mother of three through the system to obtain the right diagnosis for her child with special needs and access home support so she could work with peace of mind. She also assisted another family with a younger son interested in community sports to connect with community groups to see what was possible. “He has been successful and developed friendships and continued with them to the next level of hockey.”

When she’s not at work or on the phone with families on the projects, McIntyre and her husband are busy parenting a young son, Henry, aged 3. Like so many working parents, she doesn’t have a lot of time for herself, but when she does she enjoys reading, yoga and live music.



Thank you to the children at First Avenue School Aged Program at the Glebe Parents Daycare Centre in Ottawa for the drawings.

You can now submit your stories and photos to the Member-to-Member Connection newsletter by visiting our website at: [specialneedsproject.ca](http://specialneedsproject.ca).

Share Your Story new  
For CUPW and UPCE Members.

Go to our home page and click on the icon of the newsletter in the top right hand corner.



**Member-to-Member Connection** is the newsletter of the Special Needs and Moving On projects. It is produced by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Union of Postal Communications Employees–Public Service Alliance of Canada.

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