

ONA WINS



SUMMARY OF ANOTHER SUCCESS AS YOUR UNION STRIVES TO IMPROVE YOUR WORKING CONDITIONS

LEAP Helps Member through “Two Years of Hell”

The following story was relayed to Front Lines by one of our members. To protect her confidentiality, we have kept her name and other identifying features anonymous.

I graduated as an RN in 2003 at 22 years old. Immediately, I was hired full-time with [a long-term care facility] and fell in love with my role and my job. In 2008, I gave up posting with [my employer] to accept a full-time medical float pool position [at a local hospital]. As a float nurse, I was in a different place every day, always doing something different. With floating, I seemed to know a little bit about everything. Again, I more than loved my job and nursing. That would soon change.

In April 2012, I was fired from my position on an allegation of abuse of an elderly patient on a long-term care floor. My union, including my Local Coordinator and health and safety rep, were present. The allegation stemmed from a complaint from a personal support worker (PSW), whom I had sent home unpaid on March 10, 2012. The allegation was that during care of this violent, psych-geriatric patient, I elbowed him in his face and made ignorant comments to him.

I was devastated, and that was only the beginning. I had no idea what was coming or what my children and I were about to endure. Obviously, I denied the allegations, solid in the fact that I did not assault anyone. But no matter what I said, management wanted to hear none of it, and continued to pursue their attack against me.

On April 17, 2012, I was arrested for criminal assault. My world came crashing down. I was photographed, fingerprinted and humiliated. Stories about my arrest made the local newspaper and were plastered all over social media. My two children and I were subjected to various attacks and judgments. It was hell. Thankfully, ONA's Legal Expense Assistance Plan (LEAP) came to the rescue.

Unable to get a job due to the media involvement in this small-city case, I struggled to pay for my criminal defense. Here I was, an educated nurse who had done nothing wrong, but was being crucified in the public eye. The College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) put a flag beside my name on their website, stating that I was being referred to the Discipline Committee and why. My life seemed over.

Testifying against me were two PSWs, and on my side was an RN at the hospital, who ended up quitting her job after 32 years. I was found not guilty criminally on February 14, 2013, which lifted a small weight off my shoulders, but didn't make it any easier to obtain employment. All through the criminal trial, I worked part-time, cleaning hotel rooms at the local Holiday Inn. It was the most difficult part of my life. The financial hardship was intense. Here I was, a single mother making \$24,000 a year.

In August 2013, I faced the CNO's disciplinary panel. After hearing "evidence" from the same three people who testified in the criminal trial, as well as two other RNs and two expert witnesses (one for the College and one for me), I was found not guilty, with the statement being released March 14, 2014.

I lived this hell for two years, and I am beyond thankful that I had the LEAP Team to assist with my legal issues. Without LEAP, I would have not been able to afford my legal team. I'm not sure that prior to this event I was fully aware of what programs and assistance ONA offers. I am extremely grateful. I am still trying to put the pieces of my life back together and it hasn't been easy. My reputation was ruined, and my kids have been put through something they never should have endured. It's been crazy, but I'm so thankful that I am part of this union.

This member still has one more hurdle to jump. She recently headed back to arbitration for the third time and her Bargaining Unit President, who refers to her as "my hero, who, like ONA's motto, never, never, never gave up," vows she will fight to the bitter end to get her job back.

(*Front Lines*, May 2014 edition)