

2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



BCNU MEMBERS HAVE RISEN TO THE CHALLENGE OF THE GREATEST PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS IN A GENERATION

Whether supporting the public health response, caring for the most vulnerable in long-term care homes, treating patients in ICUs, or supporting the vaccination rollout, nurses continue to withstand ongoing hardship as the pandemic wears on. But the ability to remain resilient - to be capable of withstanding shock and to recover from misfortune or change - does not happen by accident. It is developed and honed over the course of a nurse's career.

Resilience is also much more than an individual skill. For even the strongest tree cannot endure a gale without the protection of the forest. There are layers of resilience. The stories in this report are a testament to resilience at the individual, workplace, organizational and community level.

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THE ABILITY TO WITHSTAND SHOCK AND RECOVER FROM MISFORTUNE DOES NOT HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT. IT'S A SKILL THAT IS DEVELOPED AND HONED DURING THE COURSE OF A NURSE'S PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE.

Every day, BCNU members continue to withstand ongoing hardships as they confront the greatest public health crisis in a generation. It has not been easy, and no one could have foreseen just how deeply this health emergency would affect members' personal and professional lives.

There is no question the COVID-19 pandemic has turned our lives upside down. But even before the outbreak, the nursing profession was fraught with physical and psychological hazards, and our members were routinely exposed to trauma, violence and human suffering on a daily basis.

The ability to withstand this crisis is a testament to nurses' resilience. Our members continue to adapt in the face of uncertainty, and we have done so because we have stood together. What better demonstration of workers' resilience than unions? Nurses have strength in numbers and when united in their purpose they have weathered the effects of adversity in ways that could never be realized by acting alone.

Now, as the pandemic nears the end of its second year, nurses are still working short-staffed and under extreme pressure, all while strategiz-

ing on how to deliver health care to vulnerable populations and advocating for health system reform. I want to thank each and every one of you for your unwavering courage and resilience in troubled times, for showing up for your patients, no matter how sick, and for reassuring those sad and alone. Each life that you preserve is an irreplaceable treasure.

The work that BCNU has undertaken with our research partners at UBC has revealed the additional psychological toll the pandemic has taken on nurses' mental health. So, I am proud to have seen the launch of a number of mental health initiatives for members this year, including new resiliency education options that are trauma-informed and mindful of our diverse histories. This is just the beginning of BCNU's renewed mental health strategy. We cannot allow this pandemic to mask the true cost of nursing, and we refuse to see an entire generation of nurses sacrificed to burnout, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue. I want you to know that all members are cared for and will be supported by their union.

The resilience of BCNU's Indigenous members must also be acknowledged this year as they confront the ongoing trauma of racism and colonial



Christine Sorensen
Past President

violence The devastating discovery this summer of a mass burial site on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, and the tragic news of the remains of 215 children reminds us all of the painful legacy of Canada's residential schools and of the countless Indigenous children forever lost to their families as a result.

The December 2020 report from Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond also shone a light on systemic racism in BC's health-care system and underscored the desperate need for radical change. It also advances a set of recommendations for addressing anti-Indigenous racism founded on the principles of decolonization and cultural safety, and it offers a blueprint for a more just and equitable health-care system. Inclusivity leads to resilience. As union members and health-care leaders, it's our job to advance these principles in our workplaces and in our own organization to ensure we build an inclusive future where everyone feels they belong.

This year is my last as BCNU president. As I look back on my years of union activism, I have nothing but gratitude for the support I've received from members and staff over the years. And I credit the collective efforts of leaders past and present for an impressive history of successes.

Our union passed a special milestone this summer. Forty years ago, a group of some 200 activists gathered in Victoria to tackle the problems facing nurses of their day. We should commend the resiliency and foresight of these early organizers in building a union that supports nurses and advocates for health-system change.

Their legacy lives on. Over the past two years, BCNU activists have worked

tirelessly to build a member-centric organization with a board grounded in good governance and solid values. I am incredibly proud of the work done by your board and our staff to keep building in the midst of a pandemic and improve our service delivery and outreach to our members.

It has been an honour to lead this amazing organization. And as I pass the mantle to others, I am reminded of the collective efforts of all the great BCNU leaders who served before me. It is because of their work that we have the potential to improve nurses' working lives and the lives of our patients.

The time has come for you to build on this work. The lessons from the pandemic must be seen as an opportunity to effect positive, lasting change. Learn from these experiences and help make BCNU the best union it can be.

I'M SOMEONE WHO'S USED TO SPEAKING WITH CO-WORKERS ALL SHIFT LONG WHILE DOING MY ROUNDS AS A SITE LEADER.

So, when COVID-19 hit, I certainly missed friends and colleagues as I worked at home by myself. It was a lonely time. And like so many of you, I have since been worried and concerned for the well-being of our colleagues and the wider community.

I want to acknowledge the enormous challenges BCNU members have faced over the past 20 months. However, I also believe it's important to look for silver linings. It's always possible for good things to come from hardship.

Last year, my elderly mother was part of my family bubble of three. I came to cherish every moment that I spent with her, and I reflected on the importance of helping all the seniors in our communities who've been shuttered at home for protection from the virus.

I also became more concerned for my mother's mental health. She was isolated from many of her loved ones, was no longer going out shopping and was missing important life milestones such as births, birthdays and funerals. I did my best to keep her spirits up with scenic drives or an occasional socially distanced outdoor visit with relatives.

The theme of BCNU's 2021 convention, and this annual report, is "Resilient Together." Much of our resilience comes from being able to appreciate the things in life we normally take for granted. The pandemic has certainly been a lesson in appreciation as we counted the days since we last saw family and friends, hugged, shared space or enjoyed meals together.

Like so many BCNU members, I miss

travelling abroad and visiting friends and family around the world. I dream of where I will go next and when I will see everyone again. I miss the birthday celebrations now turned into drive-by gift drop-off events or the holiday gatherings with friends that now take place over Zoom.

The world of Zoom has also blurred the boundary between our home and work lives. We've seen increased productivity without our daily drive to the office and challenges too as turning off our work while at home has become that much more difficult.

That's why maintaining our mental health and taking time for ourselves is so important.

At times I've been asked if a certain task or something taking place bothers me. How we respond to situations is all about perspective. I opt to remain calm, think or ponder and look for solutions. I've learned to look for the best in the situations I face. I've reflected on what I've been through in life, and having lived that life, I know I'm strong and able to take on new challenges because of my past experiences.

I also know that everything I do has a wider impact on those around me and helps bring us all one step closer to coming out of this pandemic sooner, and for the better.



Aman Grewal
Vice President
(President since Sept 2021)



Sharon Sponton
Treasurer

ORGANIZATIONS ARE MOST RESILIENT WHEN THE PEOPLE WITHIN THEM COME TOGETHER AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN DIFFICULT TIMES.

I know BCNU members are strong, and my focus is making sure our union is financially strong, and in a position to support you today and into the future. These are challenging times. There's no question the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and opioid crisis, along with an unprecedented nursing shortage, is making our members' working conditions increasingly unsustainable. We must demand more from our government.

During the past year and a half, I have been focused on maintaining my relationship with members through virtual connections. I'll confess that Zoom meetings don't compare to the face-to-face interactions we enjoyed before COVID, but it's imperative that I continue to understand the needs of our members as they respond to the challenges that confront them.

As provincial treasurer, providing funding for ongoing education to BCNU leaders and members is a critical priority for me. This year we've continued to promote important educational initiatives and opportunities. This includes the introduction of blended learning, with online resources now available to all members at all times and opening up new options for self-paced and remote learning.

This year I have overseen many technological changes related to union finances. We continue to expand and upgrade our internal systems to support our growing organizational needs and ensure we are optimizing processes for members. A great example of this work was seen in our 2021 college registration fee reimbursement process that

was more efficient and convenient than last year and got money back into the pockets of our members faster.

Building and maintaining our essential defence fund balance has also been critical as we prepare for focused bargaining in 2022. The current workplace challenges nurses face has further motivated me to ensure we have a strong strike fund if we need it. Members can rest assured that our defence fund provides us with the much-needed comfort of knowing that we are ready for whatever action members decide to take throughout negotiations.

Nurses are professionals; we are change leaders with essential knowledge, and I'm committed to supporting you in doing what's necessary to collectively accomplish our goals.

We must unite to face our challenges together. What makes this union strong is our essential belief that we are all sisters and brothers and that we are all connected through our passion and dedication to our profession. If a nurse is physically harmed by a patient, that matters to all of us. If you are working a 16-hour shift, caring for families while missing your own child's birthday, we are all concerned.

There are some who would have you believe there is a "them" union and an "us" union. But I strongly believe we are one union – our union, the British Columbia Nurses' Union working together to make this the best union for all members.

NURSES HAVE SHOWN GREAT RESILIENCE, BUT OUR CUPS NEED TO BE REFILLED. WE MUST BE TAKEN CARE OF AND VALUED FOR THE WORK WE DO.

The COVID-19 pandemic has really caused us all to take pause and evaluate what we have in this life. Appreciating the small things and seeking out personal purpose can help calm the anxiety that can feel so overwhelming in these very challenging times.

BCNU members who take care of our vulnerable elderly have shown remarkable resilience and determination by supporting British Columbians through this once-in-a-lifetime set of tragic circumstances.

BC's seniors' care sector is broken. The devastation of COVID-19 has exposed the dire need for major reforms, improved standards of care and real accountability. Nurses' voices are more important than ever as we push to shape the seniors' care landscape for the future.

For workers in this female-dominated profession, the pandemic has also brought longstanding concerns about gender pay equity and access to secure retirement income to the forefront. I'm proud to report that this year BCNU completed the negotiated Nurses' Bargaining Association pension governance review, and members will be able to cast their vote to determine how nurses' pensions are governed into the future. Statistics show that pension plan members have a longer overall life expectancy, and I'm hopeful we are now one step closer to setting up the framework we need to improve nurses' pension plans.

Member outreach and education have always fueled my passion as a leader and an advocate. Not being able to

connect with members in person during this pandemic and hear your voices has led to some of the toughest months I've experienced as a leader.

Despite the difficulties that come with virtual communication, we have received overwhelmingly positive feedback on our shift to online pension education. This unplanned change means we've been able to reach more members province wide via virtual workshops they can attend from the comfort of their own homes.

I so look forward to meeting members across the province in person again and hearing about your priorities as we head into what could be one of the most challenging rounds of collective bargaining we have seen.

Now is the time for BCNU members to come together and continue working to build a more inclusive union where every member's voice counts, and every member has the opportunity to participate. With all hands on deck, we can accomplish the much-needed change and innovation that nurses deserve!



Michelle Sordal
Executive Councillor

WHEN I THINK ABOUT RESILIENCE, I THINK ABOUT MY OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES AND THE MANY “LOOPS AND HOOPS” I HAD TO JUMP THROUGH TO GET WHERE I AM TODAY.



Aida Herrera
Executive Councillor

I grew up in a misogynistic and patriarchal society where women were devalued, and where psychological and physical punishment was the norm if we dared speak out. Making direct eye contact was considered disrespectful, and to this day I have difficulty looking people in the eye.

Men had an opinion on my life and career choices because I was a woman, and as a young adult, I had to listen to my father tell me I could not be an anesthetist, the profession I chose to pursue without his support.

When I came to Canada, I studied English and applied to a nursing program. The transition from one country to another did not come without challenges. I was diagnosed with depression from the culture shock and I later suffered from post-partum depression.

These are just a few of the loops and hoops I have jumped through.

My lived experience also means I cannot tolerate my nurse colleagues being disrespected and devalued by health employers or the government, just for being members of a female-dominated profession. The PTSD I experience following the abuse I endured earlier in life also drives my commitment to stopping bullying and harassment that is still far too common in health-care workplaces.

During my interview for the Douglas College BScN program, I was asked, “How do you deal with stress?” I remember answering, “I cry, and I talk to my friends or someone I can trust.” At that moment, I thought I had screwed up my interview, but somehow, that was the right answer.

Taking care of our physical and mental health, practising mindfulness, journaling, doing yoga, and engaging in outdoor activities are some of the things nurses

can do to deal with the stress of today’s health-care workplace.

This year BCNU introduced Embodying your Practice resilience education to give members more tools to manage the stress they are feeling. Our introductory course is designed to help participants experience calm and a sense of settledness in their bodies to help sustain them in these most challenging of times.

This resilience education is just the first phase in the reactivation of BCNU’s mental health strategy, and I look forward to providing more mental health support and advocacy for our members in the year ahead.

When I became an RN, I had many “bad days.” I would cry in the shower, and I would vent with my friends. I know many nurse colleagues who cry in their cars at the end of a shift, just to relieve some of the stress of a bad day.

And there are far too many bad days as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the opioid crisis, mask and vaccine mandates, forced redeployments and a nurse staffing crisis that is pushing nurses to the breaking point.

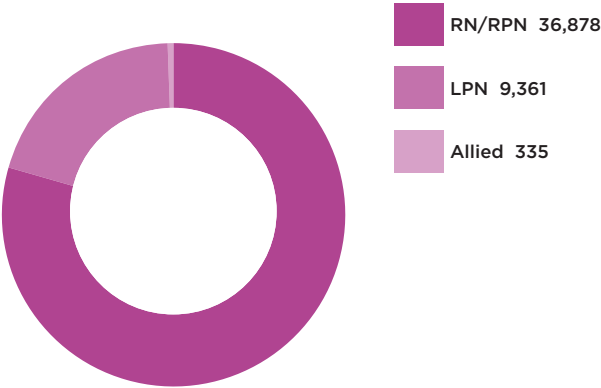
That’s why building connections is so important. We all need friends we can confide in and with whom we can share support. I value the support of trusting friends who practise attentive listening, offer authentic and heartfelt advice, help me validate my feelings and beliefs, and encourage me to keep on.

The truth is, if it weren’t for my mom and my closest friends, I wouldn’t be where I am today. They have all helped me be resilient and strong by listening and offering advice. And their care encourages me to believe in and value myself so I can fight for my rights and advocate for yours.

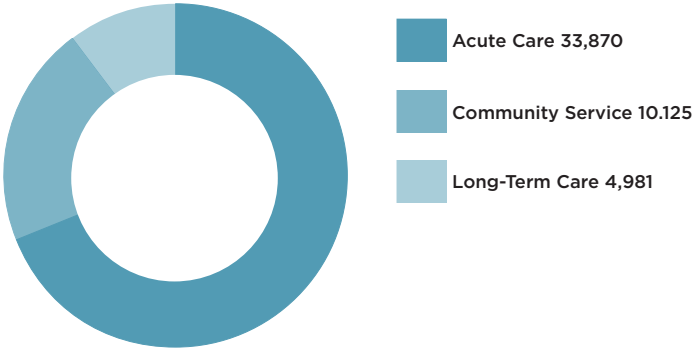
OUR MEMBERS

The BC Nurses' Union represents more than 48,000 professional nurses and allied health-care workers who provide care in hospitals, long-term care facilities and the community. We speak up and speak out for safe, quality, public health care. We value and respect diversity, and pride ourselves in providing protection, representation and services to all members.

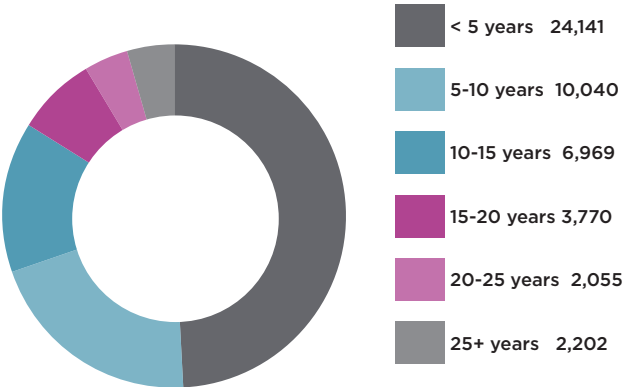
BY PROFESSION



BY SECTOR



BY SENIORITY



RESILIENT UNION

BCNU activists are committed to building resilient workplaces and communities. The work they do is critical for defending our health-care system and advancing our professional voice. But resilience is expressed in a variety of ways. Regional council members elected to represent members in each of the 16 BCNU regions are listed below, many of whom have shared what resiliency means to them.



MARLENE GOERTZEN
Central Vancouver
Resilience means persistence and staying positive.



JUDY MCGRATH
Central Vancouver



KATH-ANN TERRETT
Coastal Mountain
It's the ability to recover from difficult life situations. This is increasingly more difficult in nursing as we struggle with relentless short staffing, excessively high patient-to-nurse ratios and the pandemic.



DENISE WAURNCHUK
East Kootenay
It means setting boundaries and allowing myself to say no without feeling guilty. It's taking time to focus on my mental and physical health with nutrition and exercise.



PARVEEN GILL
Fraser Valley
It means testing one's capacity, having the courage to continue on and adapting to challenging situations. I choose to show up, stay positive, lighten the burden of life with laughter and surround myself with good people.



DANETTE THOMSEN
North East
It's about embracing healthy thoughts by practising gratitude. There is always something to be thankful for. A positive attitude is the difference between your cup being half full or half empty.



TERI FORSTER
North West
It means finding ways to respect my boundaries and recognizing how I respond to and recover from challenging situations. Every day this is something I work to improve.



CANDICE DESOUSA
Okanagan Similkameen
I build time for outdoor activity because it's all about the happy exercise endorphins. I use other council members as sounding boards for a sense of connectedness and support.



RACHEL KIMLER

Pacific Rim

It means fostering wellness through recognizing and adhering to boundaries. We need to advocate for ourselves, learn to say “No”, and be compassionate with ourselves and our needs.



SARA MATTU

RIVA

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls, the most massive characters are seared with scars.”
Kahlil Gibran



CLAUDETTE JUT

Shaughnessy Heights

Finding purpose through volunteering for a cause I care about has been something I’ve enjoyed doing for over 15 years. This community connection provides me with an inner drive that reflects self-determination and autonomy.



WENDY GIBBS

Simon Fraser



TRISTAN NEWBY

Simon Fraser

“You’ll get mixed up, of course, as you already know. You’ll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go. So be sure when you step. Step with care and great tact and remember that Life’s a Great Balancing Act. Just never forget to be dexterous and deft. And never mix up your right foot with your left.”
Dr. Seuss. (Oh the places you’ll go)



WALTER LUMAMBA

South Fraser



HARDEV BHULLAR

South Fraser

It involves fostering wellness by going to the gym, pacing yourself, keeping a healthy diet and enjoying hobbies such as playing the guitar and cooking. I’m starting to explore meditation.



LYNND A SMITH

South Islands

It means embracing healthy thoughts by keeping things in perspective, accepting change, maintaining a hopeful outlook and learning from your past experiences.



LEANNE ROBERTSON-WEEDS

South Islands

It’s about staying connected with my supports. I thrive on my tribe and count on family and friends. They’re my utmost priority and understand me even when I’m in the midst of challenging situations.



SCOTT DUVALL

Thompson North Okanagan

It’s reminding myself: one step/day/task at a time. I can only do so much. I am not alone. Ask for help. I focus on the endgame and know I am helping.



MEGHAN FRIESEN

Van Metro



SHALANE WESNOSKI

West Kootenay

It’s about giving myself time and space to feel what I need to feel and then move forward. I try not to label the feelings as good or bad. They just are and once they pass I can often move forward with a more positive perspective.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2021 ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITY: Strengthen our organization's outreach and member involvement through innovative and responsive delivery methods focused on members' health and safety and the implementation of collective agreements

MEMBERSHIP

By 2023 BCNU will have anticipated and responded effectively to member needs through:

- > increased activism using constructive engagement to optimize member influence
- > enabling robust and innovative education, mentorship and support of stewards and members
- > informed and empowered membership who are provided resources to understand and enforce contract language
- > supporting members to utilize their professional voice to address practice concerns
- > successful collective bargaining and implementation of agreements
- > timely resolution of member issues
- > recognizing and addressing systemic racism and the need for inclusivity and diversity through education, advocacy, and leadership
- > implementing and establishing healthy and safe workplaces (psychologically and physically)

GOVERNANCE

By 2023 BCNU Council will have effectively governed and fostered a member-centric culture through:

- > modeling our values
- > knowledge-based, inclusive and policy-driven decision making
- > effective, responsive, and clear communication
- > fostering the development of future leaders

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND CULTURE

2023 BCNU will have strengthened organizational capacity and improved culture through:

- > enhanced coordinated interdepartmental services
- > utilizing technology, innovation and evidence based best practices
- > supporting a learning environment
- > implementing Canadian Standards Association standards to support psychologically healthy and safe workplaces throughout the organization
- > continued outreach to potential members about the benefits of belonging to BCNU recognizing achievements and celebrating successes

PROFESSIONALISM, RELATIONSHIPS AND REPUTATION

By 2023 BCNU will have demonstrated it is the professional voice of nursing and a respected, influential health-care leader through:

- > ensuring BCNU values are the foundation of our decisions, policies, procedures, and actions
- > building relationships with nursing and labour organizations
- > exploring opportunities with external partners, including government, HEABC, health authorities, education, and research institutions and other health-care providers

- > addressing inequities in diversity and inclusivity
- > advocating for nurses to be involved in public policy
- > engaging external partners on health-care matters that impact nurses and the delivery of safe patient care
- > increasing public and industry recognition of the BCNU brand and image
- > increasing outreach and development to enhance relationships with schools of nursing and nursing students
- > lobbying for additional nursing school admissions and career laddering opportunities
- > being the key source of communication for nursing and professional practice

HEALTH-CARE SYSTEM

By 2023 BCNU will have remained a strong defender of a publicly funded and delivered health-care system through:

- > promotion and advocacy
- > challenging the government on deficits and lobbying for improvement
- > researching and publicizing methods of strengthening care delivery
- > recognizing and responding to public health emergencies
- > lobbying for improved health-care services for special populations

RESILIENT LEADERS

BCNU Leadership Awards

Congratulations to 2021 winners Maria Huertas and Danika Serafin



EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY AWARD

Maria Huertas

Simon Fraser region



NU LEADER AWARD

Danika Serafin

North East region

The *Excellence in Leadership & Advocacy Award* honours a BCNU member making a difference to the health and well-being of their community and profession through leadership, activism or social justice efforts.

The *NU Leader Award* honours a student member or nurse with less than five years of nursing experience for demonstrating outstanding achievement in BCNU-focused advocacy and who embodies union values.



Raven Steals the Sun

Award recipients received an etched glass piece featuring art by Erik Prytula, a Haida artist from the eagle clan Tsiits Gitanee, called *Raven Steals the Sun*. Inspired by the creation story where the raven steals the sun, the moon and the stars and puts them in the sky, creating life as we know it. The print is a representation of nurses bringing light to dark places.



EVERY DAY, JENNIFER SLADE REMINDS HERSELF OF THE THINGS THAT GIVE HER THE COURAGE TO FACE LIFE'S CHALLENGES.

The Vancouver Island resident is one of the many thousands of BC nurses who've endured the COVID-19 pandemic since the virus emerged almost two years ago. And she's grateful for the supports she relies on to help get her through, from friends to family and co-workers.

For the past 12 years, Jennifer Slade has worked for Island Health. She is currently a public health nurse on staff at the Saanich Health Unit.

Slade is reflective when speaking about the effect the pandemic has had on her life. Before COVID, she had never questioned her decision to become a nurse. But she says the pandemic's arrival and impact on the health-care system had her wondering about her career choice.

"That seemed a bit crazy to me because ever since I was a young child, I felt called to the work of caring for others, especially newborns," she remarks. "In my high school yearbook, I'm the student voted most likely to be a nurse

or work with babies."

Like many nurses, Slade has been profoundly affected by the pandemic.

"In the beginning, I remember asking, 'Is this real?' 'This cannot be happening' and 'Pinch me' – not in the storybook, fairy-tale way but 'pinch me' to wake me up from this awful nightmare," she recalls. In hindsight, Slade now sees that her body's fight-or-flight mechanism was triggered by the overwhelming sense of fear, disbelief and shock.

“I am thankful to work with exceptional nursing colleagues with hearts as big as Mount Washington.”

“At the start, there was little to no PPE and there were very few instituted COVID workplace protocols, procedures and parameters – and that was scary.”

Slade says she felt like the world was unravelling around her, but as an essential health-care provider and nurse, she also felt compelled to rally and present to work.

“Those initial weeks were trying, and I definitely experienced all ranges of emotion,” she reports. “It was like being stuck on an unending roller coaster. But we came to work at risk to ourselves and our families to attend to the needs of our patients.”

She says the demands of the pandemic, such as ballooning cases and exposures, and changing public health measures made her public health work an ever-moving target.

“One day you would present to work, have a morning meeting – if conditions allowed – and assign duties and prioritize the day,” Slade remembers. “Then, with little or no notice, COVID updates would revise the plan and bam, off you would go to attend to the new pressing situation.”

The conditions required an inordinate amount of patience, composure and flexibility.

“What I have learned, witnessed and experienced is that nurses are, bar none, the most incredible group of humans able to do all these things – on most days – to an immeasurable level. I have seen how COVID has challenged even the most seasoned nurses and the extremes it has subjected them to are almost impossible to describe.”

It is this sense of gratitude that’s key to Slade’s resiliency. Gratitude helps foster adaptive coping mechanisms and builds our inner strength to combat stress by managing positive emotions like satisfaction, happiness, and pleasure.



Slade’s gratitude was on display during National Nursing Week 2021. Every May, the week is an occasion for the wider community to acknowledge the valuable work nurses do. Needless to say, National Nursing Week has taken on a special significance on account of the COVID-19 health emergency and the opioid crisis.

In celebration of National Nursing Week 2020, BCNU encouraged members to take time to thank their colleagues and the nursing community for their ongoing efforts to provide safe patient care. We saw an outpouring of recognition and gratitude when hundreds of members wrote to tell us what their co-workers mean to them and to acknowledge the important work they do.

Slade continued the tradition in 2021 by sharing her own message of gratitude and hope in support of her co-workers and all nurses in the province who are doing their best under the most trying of conditions.

“I am thankful to work with exceptional nursing colleagues with hearts as big as Mount Washington,” wrote Slade. “When some needed to take a step back, others took up the call and went out to the front lines.”

Slade was also humbled by the



nurses who came out of retirement, like the one who administered her COVID shot. “I remember thanking her and she shared a bit about her nursing story and how she felt called to come back to assist in the pandemic crisis. She also showed me the steps to prepping a COVID vaccine as well as the new charting system for the clinics,” Slade wrote. “This nurse brought tears to my eyes by demonstrating the life-long role of the nurse as mentor, teacher and advocate for health, which extends beyond the lines of nursing practice and does not end with retirement.”

Slade also recognized everyone on her team at the Saanich Health Unit who continue to support her public health nursing work to this day.

“I’m privileged to work with an amazing crew of leaders: my clinical coordinator, manager and hiring manager – who came out of retirement to head up the COVID response team – as well as a stellar administration team, housekeeping staff and many others who keep the ship afloat,” she wrote. “Navigating the tumultuous waters that is COVID would not have been so manageable without the staff at Saanich Health Unit. I would not be where I am as a

nurse without the support of people who have been, and are present, in my daily work and life. For that, I am so very thankful, I praise you and I see you.”

Slade says the pandemic has allowed her to better realize her personal resilience and strength. “I

feel better at identifying when I need to ask for help, take a step back or recognize when that big ol’ wall is coming, and I am going to hit it full on.”

But she’s quick to note that personal resilience is no replacement for the structural changes that are desperately needed, and renewed investments in nursing and health care that would see improved staffing and working conditions.

Nurses have the answers, Slade argues, and their voices need to be heard.

“If you’re not listening to that nurse who’s been on their feet for four days and four nights and not bringing nurses to the table, then how can you effect positive change that ensures we don’t go back to the way it was?” she asks. “Because we cannot go back.” She says listening to those nurses who have been delivering care since day one of the pandemic is a really good place to start. “We cannot create policies and procedures based on what the higher ups think everyone needs – we need to listen to what is actually going on at the unit level.”

If there’s a silver lining, Slade sug-

gests it’s the greater awareness of the importance of mental health that has emerged through the pandemic. “I hope we see long-term initiatives, developments and supports for mental health,” she says. “We’ve all now felt the fear of isolation and loneliness that COVID imposes, but many people experienced that well before the pandemic began. Let’s continue to speak up, listen, reach out and be there for one another.”

What else keeps Slade working even when she’s feeling exhausted by a crisis nearing two years? She says it’s the support of the wider community, especially those people who have made the effort to get behind BCNU’s call for immediate and urgent action to address the nurse staffing crisis.

“The public support that vocalizes nurses’ frustration with the deficiencies in health care definitely gives us strength,” says Slade. “But it’s the camaraderie between nurses and their unwavering capacity that inspires me to stay committed to my profession.”



FOR NATALIE MAAS AND STELLA JACURA, FOSTERING WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE IS A TOP PRIORITY. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS GIVEN BOTH LEADERS RENEWED PURPOSE.

Natalie Maas is a labour and delivery nurse on the maternity unit at Abbotsford Regional Hospital where she has worked since starting nursing in 2010. She's been a BCNU steward since 2015 and has served as the occupational health and safety (OHS) rep on the BCNU Fraser Valley regional executive since 2019.

Stella Jacura started nursing in 2016 following a career as a care aide that

began in 2013. She's worked on medical-surgical units and in residential care. For the past two-and-a-half years, she's worked on the surgical inpatient unit at Chilliwack General Hospital.

Jacura has been a BCNU steward since she began nursing. She sits alongside Maas on the BCNU Fraser Valley region executive and currently serves as her region's mental health rep. "I'm learning as I go. I've known Natalie for about

two years, and we've really been able to mesh our portfolios together well," she reports. "I think we're doing great things in our region so far and really trying to advocate for nurses."

The OHS reps and mental health reps in all of BCNU's 16 regions are elected positions on every region's seven-person executive. They are responsible for supporting worksite stewards and Joint Occupation Health and Safety

“For us, members getting involved is the key to workplace resilience.”

Committee members in the work they do to ensure health employers follow workplace safety rules. They also encourage advocacy and activism around identified areas of concern, such as violence in the workplace.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought occupational health and safety concerns to the forefront. The shortage of personal protective equipment at the beginning of the health emergency saw Maas and Jacura coordinating support from the wider community to help keep nurses safe.

“Early on, people were scared of bringing COVID back to their families,” says Maas. “Stella and our executive team reached out to people who could sew and who were interested in donating fabric and materials, and we had hundreds of scrub caps and laundry bags made and I think we got a scrub cap or two given out to most of our members who needed them,” she reports.

“Fraser Valley region steward-at-large Meg McCusker has a sewing group,” says Jacura. “She reached out to us and did an amazing job providing masks for everyone.

“My mom’s a retired nurse and BCNU activist and she was crocheting ear savers,” says Jacura. “And we didn’t just give them to nurses, we gave them to anybody on the floor. It was ‘hey, you’re a unit clerk or you’re a care aide, grab one!’ We wanted to support everybody in the health-care team.”

Today, the need to protect nurses’ mental health is more critical than ever, especially in the face of an unending pandemic that has seen a growing number of members report increased anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion and moral distress.

“When COVID hit it really put mental health issues at the forefront,” notes Jacura, who says the challenging con-

ditions only serve to underscore the existing OHS concerns around burnout and stress members in her region were already feeling.

Prior to the arrival of COVID, Maas and Jacura had been planning in-person events and activities to engage and support members. But public health restrictions required them to get creative. “We worked together to put on a virtual annual engagement dinner,” Jacura reports. “We gave away a spin membership for a month and we really tried to do events that connected nurses on Zoom, like group yoga, because so many people were isolated going to work and not having that connection with each other that we used to get in person.”

As 2020 rolled into 2021, Maas and Jacura continued coordinating their support efforts. “We tackled things together as a team and approached challenges from all angles to figure



out how we could work best together.”

Those efforts culminated in a hugely successful annual regional education day that the two organized in April 2021. The event hosted 90 Fraser Valley region members.

“That was really a beautiful experience,” says Maas. “We had 16 registered counsellors come and provide small group therapy sessions. And we found that the support groups were essential to meeting nurses where they were at after spending more than a year of meeting the needs of the public during the pandemic.”

She says the counsellors created a non-judgmental, safe and warm environment where each attendee felt free to share their story. “One nurse told us that throughout the pandemic their feelings and concerns had been dismissed, but they now felt heard. They were feeling acknowledged, and they left the day feeling renewed, validated, lighter and encouraged. It was amazing.”

Maas says she and Jacura are planning a similar event for 2022. In the meantime, she’s grateful for the ongoing support of the wider health-care community. “Many of the counsellors donated their time for free and also provided free follow-up counselling services to education day attendees, which was awesome to see; they didn’t just come and drop in for two hours and then leave nurses hanging after they’d opened up to them, so that was really helpful.”



It’s clear that Maas and Jacura are helping to build resilient workplaces by advocating for nurses’ psychological health and safety. And both are well suited to the task.

“I’ve struggled with mental health both personally and within my family so it’s something that’s very close to home,” says Jacura. “And to be able to advocate for those nurses who are also struggling and connect them with resources is very important to me. I’ve overcome a lot of things myself and now I’m able to function and hold down a job, and I want other nurses to be able to do that as well and know how to find help when they need it

“In this career, it is too often ‘go go go’ and you take care of yourself

last. You carry on because you’ve got patients and your own health is always on the backburner.”

She confesses she struggled at first to make the role her own but says she was excited when Maas joined the Fraser Valley executive. “OHS and mental health go hand-in-hand, so it’s been great to work together with her.”

Maas says she’s motivated by the priority BCNU has placed on psychological health and safety. “I’m really excited by that aspect of the OHS rep role and its connection to mental health. And as Stella

noted, in order to care for other people, you must be able to care for yourself first.”

Looking to the year ahead, Maas and Jacura hope to continue promoting workplace resilience by calling on members to report all injuries to workplace health. That includes incidents of violence and mental injury. “We’re really trying to push education around reporting,” Jacura reports. “Natalie and I have an OHS-mental health presentation we give at meetings in our region.”

“Our goal is to foster a culture of safety where nurses feel that they can report so that we can focus on prevention and address workplace violence proactively,” says Maas. “For us, members getting involved is the key to workplace resilience.”



WHEN DEBORAH ROSE REFLECTS ON HER NURSING CAREER, SHE'S GRATEFUL KNOWING HER UNION IS COMMITTED TO BUILDING A RESILIENT ORGANIZATION TO SUPPORT MEMBERS TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE.

The veteran nurse is no stranger to the stress and sacrifice that come with the job of caring for people in today's health-care system. She recently participated in a series of personal resilience webinars that BCNU made available to all members this fall.

Deborah Rose works at Vancouver's Heartwood Centre for Women.

The facility's trauma-informed care approach benefits clients who struggle with dependencies. Heartwood nurses are part of an interdisciplinary team that includes doctors, acupuncturists, counsellors, social workers, dieticians, art, music and recreational therapists and yoga instructors.

Heartwood clients come from every

region of BC and are all dealing with substance use issues. Some arrive homeless, while others have been incarcerated or have violent histories. Many have been sexually abused. About 15 percent of clients are professionals, including nurses, doctors and bankers.

Rose was immediately interested when she first heard that BCNU had partnered

“Some of the techniques taught in the course are new to me and I’ll continue to practise them and share them.”

with renowned somatic educators Anita Chari and Angelica Singh to create new personal resiliency resources for members.

“I’ve always struggled with being strong, resilient and open when I’m nursing,” she says. “I studied transcendental meditation when I was younger and appreciated the ability to maintain my inner environment when I, or someone else, was in a state of crisis.”

The mental health of nurses like Rose is more important than ever given the especially challenging demands of providing care during a global pandemic and in the midst of the ongoing opioid crisis. BCNU responded to this need by enhancing mental wellness supports for members. It started with a redeveloped resilience education program that launched in the summer of 2021.

Embodying Your Practice includes a series of practical webinars based on trauma-informed practice and equity and inclusion principles. They are designed to cultivate personal resilience and give participants effective protocols for settling their nervous systems that they can incorporate into their daily lives.

“I knew that the *Embodying Your Practice* approach would be a great review for me,” says Rose, “especially at a time when I’m trying to tie my whole career all together and figure out what I should be doing next.”

Rose participated in all of the introductory webinars and is now enrolled in a self-paced personal resilience course that’s designed to help participants refine the skills taught in the webinars. The course is free to all BCNU members and Rose encourages other nurses to take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the practice of nervous system regulation by helping to build and sustain feelings of calm, even in the midst of the challenges nurses are facing today.

“As nurses, we’re very good at helping other people and listening to them, but we’re not doing enough to help ourselves,” states Rose. “The course material is very applicable and very helpful. Some of the techniques are new to me – I really liked them and I’ll continue to practise them and share them.”

“I’ve talked to some of my co-workers too, and I’m encouraging them to take the course because I see that more nurses are losing hope, losing energy and unable to keep up the pace.”

Embodying Your Practice is part of BCNU’s commitment to building a resilient organization. The union is now providing organizational leaders with advanced education to deepen their understanding of the new program and help all members access its resources and supports.

Rose’s own 47-year career is a testament to resilience. She graduated as

a licensed practical nurse in 1974 after completing a two-year nursing program in Oakville, Ontario. The program ran concurrently with Rose’s senior high school studies, which meant she entered the workforce at the age of 18.

Her first job was at the Penetanguishene Mental Health Center.

“I look back now and think about how, as the youngest on staff, I didn’t have a lot of skills as far as resiliency goes. But I was determined to be there to help others and determined to have them teach me how they heal, help them to identify needs and guide them along.”

Rose spent four years in BC in the 1970s, working at Lions Gate Hospital and at St. Paul’s in orthopedic and cardiovascular surgery before returning to Ontario when she became homesick. Her son was born in 1988. The single mom decided to return to school rather than put her baby in childcare and in 1990 she enrolled in Canadore College in North Bay, Ontario.

“There were no bridging programs at the time, so I entered the three-year program and completely enjoyed it,” she recalls. “I was glad I made that choice, as I was getting burnt out and questioning whether to continue working as an LPN. But I realized that, after 16 years of practice, I had all of the skills and experience at that point, and it was time to expand my scope.”



Unfortunately, upon graduation Rose discovered there were no jobs for RNs and employers only wanted to hire her for LPN positions. “That was quite discouraging,” she remembers. “So, I entered into the bachelor of science in nursing program at the University of Western Ontario.”

The lack of bridging options meant Rose spent another four years in school and graduated in 1997. “All told, I’ve got nine years in the classroom,” she remarks.

Degree in hand, Rose then spent several years in Windsor, Ontario expanding her practice and working in community mental health and public health.

“For seven years I was working on multi-disciplinary assertive community treatment teams to care for people with severe and persistent mental illness and making sure they were getting their needs met in their homes and in the community,” she says. “It was a really good approach to the delivery of health care – it was client-centred, and we considered all determinants when identifying clients’ needs.

“I learned a lot about nursing, about

listening to clients and accommodating them instead of expecting them to come to us and having to adjust to our environment.”

Rose also taught clinical and communication courses at the University of Windsor. “The work I was doing in the classroom and in the community

was really exciting and a definite period of personal and career growth for me,” she recalls.

Rose returned to BC when her mother passed away in 2009. “It was always my dream to return to the West Coast.”

She decided to accept a position at the Heartwood Centre when the program was starting up. “I’ve always liked to be involved in new approaches to the delivery of care and was able to bring the skills I had accumulated to the program.”

Rose is now Heartwood’s longest-serving staff member and works casual.

She’s reflective about her four-decade nursing journey. “My resilience and sense of autonomy certainly waxed and waned over the years,” she says.

Today, Rose is concerned about nurses’ ability to maintain control of their practice conditions.

“Last year I looked around and could see that things were deteriorating as far as being heard by management and having a sense of autonomy,” she reports. “That was frustrating consider-

ing the headway we had been making previously.”

She says the system is running on overtime and nurses are burning out. “I don’t think people appreciate the impact of that constant pressure to cover shifts. Here we are trying to stay resilient and strong and do whatever we can in the face of COVID and we’re being wiped out like it doesn’t matter.”

Rose believes nursing programs should be doing much more to address self-care. “Fostering resilience within ourselves is where it starts. In nursing school, we’re being prepared to take care of others, but when it comes to going home after a shift, that’s not quite as easy.”

She especially encourages young and new nurses to take advantage of BCNU’s resilience education and says it’s an investment that will help protect them throughout their careers. “I see a lot of brand-new grads coming on who are not being properly mentored and just thrown into situations on their own,” Rose reports. “I’m struggling even with all my years of experience so I can only imagine the disillusion of new nurses graduating from a four-year nursing program and finding themselves short-staffed in a world of chaos that is nothing like what they’ve been taught in school.”

She believes her union will be critical for effecting the change that’s so desperately needed.

“I commend BCNU for the work it is doing to help create safe and supportive work environments – it’s making a difference and I’m very proud to still be a part of the union at this point in my career.”



MINA SHAHSAVAR AND KATRINA TRAN EYE THE FUTURE WITH A MIX OF OPTIMISM AND CONCERN.

As young students on the cusp of graduation, they're excited about the opportunity to practise their chosen craft. They are fully aware of the challenges facing the nursing profession today. But they know that if career problems arise, their union will be there to help them.

Both are working for BCNU in the union's professional practice and advocacy and occupational health and safety departments. For many years BCNU has created part-time temporary support positions on staff to give students like Katrina Tran and Mina Shahsavar the opportunity to participate in and appreciate the union's role

in nurses' working lives. The program is just one of the ways BCNU is working to support and involve student nurses as active members of the organization.

Student nurses are the future of health care and the future of BCNU. That's why the union is committed to helping new nurses build a lasting and resilient nursing community that can effectively support individuals throughout their careers. This begins by helping students prepare for a smooth transition from school to work.

BCNU encourages all students enrolled in nursing programs in the province to

become student members of the union. This free membership offers student nurses access to a range of union supports and resources that are designed to better ensure that new nurses are set up for career success.

Student membership provides access to BCNU workshops and allows students to attend BCNU regional meetings, conferences and educational events focused on issues from human rights and equity to professional practice.

Tran is a fourth-year Douglas College student graduating this year. She says

“I have the word ‘resilient’ tattooed on my forearm as a reminder to myself that life isn’t always going to be perfect.”

nursing school is challenging enough without the added uncertainty of a global pandemic and public health restrictions that directly affect students’ ability to learn.

“Honing your actual clinical practice skills and being able to engage with the patient is where most of your learning is going to come from,” she notes. “So, when everything went online and we weren’t doing in-person classes with any labs, or we were at risk of getting kicked out of clinical due to COVID outbreaks, it was really difficult and many of us were really worried about being able to meet those competencies and be ready for practice.”

But she is grateful for the connections she’s been able to maintain with others in her cohort despite the restrictions. “We’re all very supportive of one another. We know we’re not going through this alone and we have other people who can talk to us and share their own challenges – that’s been very reassuring.”

Tran and Shahsavar have also benefited from the Employed Student Nurse Program. First launched 20 years ago following negotiations between BCNU, employers and educators, the program enables third- and fourth-year students to gain clinical experience in

health-care facilities in special paid part-time or part-year positions. These positions support a nursing unit’s normal staff complement and students work under the direction of a unit manager.

The experience has helped both students consolidate their skills and given them first-hand insights on their chosen career paths – insight that’s especially valuable given the COVID-19 pandemic and the daunting working conditions health-care workers are facing.

“Nursing is one of those professions that you have to be in for the right reasons, otherwise you’re going to get

burnt out really quick and you’ll probably hate going to your job,” says Tran. “And I feel very fortunate that I thoroughly enjoy looking after patients and I think it is such a privilege to be caring for people and their families when they are at their most vulnerable.

“I actually have the word ‘resilient’ tattooed on my forearm as a reminder to myself that life isn’t always going to be perfect and there’s going to be obstacles. When I was younger, I went through a lot and never in a million years would I have thought I’d be where I am today. So that experience keeps me going because COVID and the nursing shortage probably won’t be going away for a long time. But hopefully, there’s a silver lining in all of it.”

Shahsavar is in the third year of her program at the University of the Fraser Valley and plans on graduating next April. Like Tran, she believes a resilient nursing community is one that attracts and supports new members rather than breaking them or pushing them away.

“The nursing profession and society at large needs to do a better job of building people up rather than tearing them down,” she argues. “There’s been so much polarity as a result of COVID and we really need to be more open to others’ perspectives when





we tailor our nursing care or when we approach our co-workers or management and come not from a place of judgment but from one of openness and meeting people where they're at.

"These past 20 months have hit everybody differently so we really need to understand that peoples' ability to cope may have shifted, and we need to take this into consideration when approaching our work."

Tran and Shahsavar are both aware of the importance of psychological health and safety and confess that the recent research published by UBC in 2021 has made them especially mindful of the importance of their own mental health. The survey findings provide ample evidence to show how nurses are being impacted by the nursing shortage and suffering from significant burnout, anxiety and depression due to high workloads.

"I have had experience with depression and anxiety since I was 13 years old, so I was already very cognizant of mental health before going into nursing school," says Tran, who stresses the importance of regular self-care for

ensuring psychological safety.

"The plan that's worked best for me throughout nursing school has been exercise, whether that's walking my dog, running, lifting weights or any kind of cardio," she reports. "I walk my dog three to four times a day and during that time I really try to practise mindfulness and just focus on the walk. I also have a gratitude journal and I try to spend a lot of time with people I love.

"And we shouldn't feel guilty when we are doing anything that's not nursing related," she stresses. "In the long run, we can't take care of other people if we're not taking care of ourselves."

Shahsavar agrees. "Everybody who's been in clinical with me knows that my favourite expression is 'you can't pour from an empty cup.' I say that to all my clinical instructors and at all my group meetings."

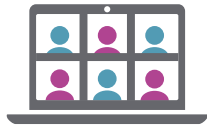
She says self-care must be seen as a necessity. "The stats on nurses' mental health aren't just numbers," she states. "You could very easily become one of those numbers if you don't do the things you're taught to mitigate the risk

of developing mental health issues, such as carrying trauma and then becoming disengaged and burnt out."

Already wise beyond their years, Tran and Shahsavar both look forward to being an active part of a resilient nursing community in the years and decades ahead.

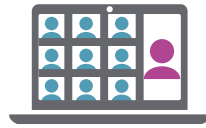
BY THE NUMBERS

CULTIVATING LEADERS



159

leadership assembly participants



400+

BCNU convention 2021 participants

FOCUSING ON RESILIENCY



342

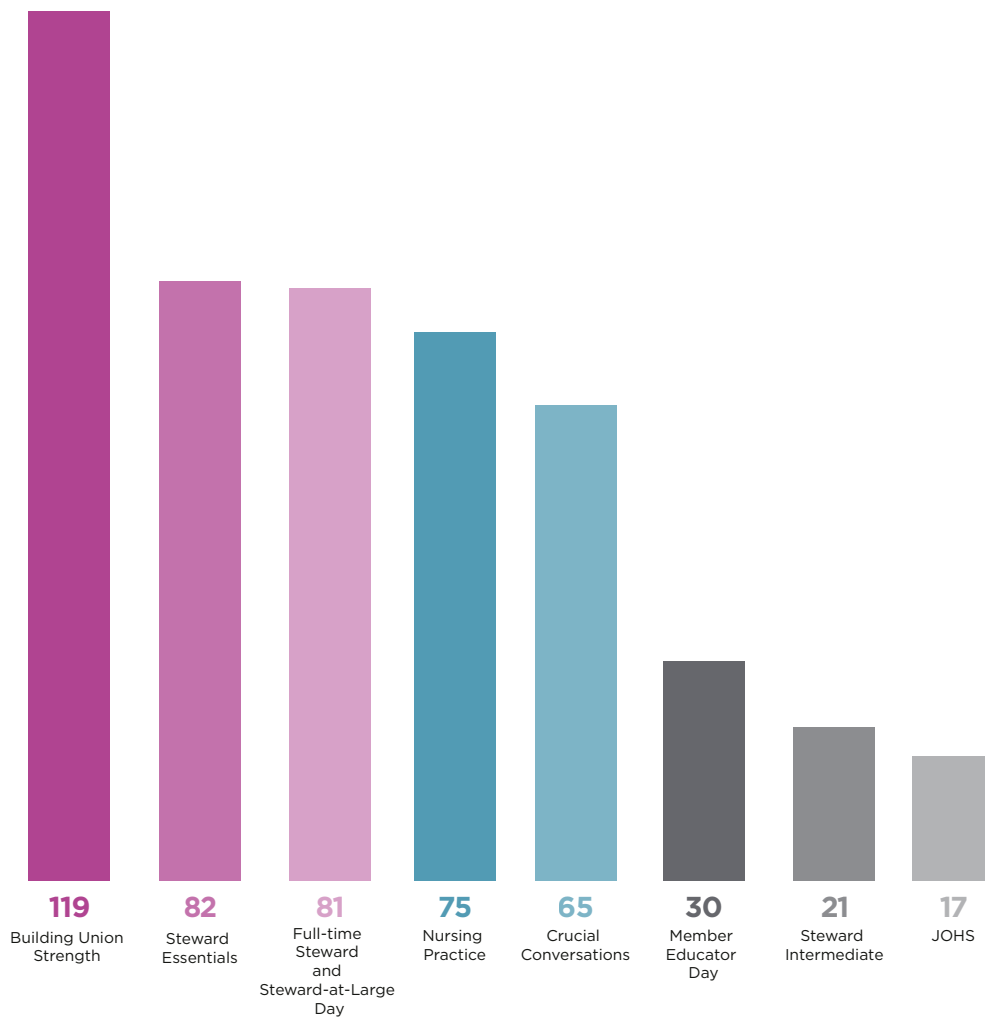
members attended personal resiliency webinars



385

members registered for personal resiliency course

COURSE ATTENDANCE



COVID-19 SUPPORT

2020



79

Member Safety and Support Line calls



1,034

responses to COVID safety concerns



37

Member Safety and Support Line calls



121

responses to COVID outbreaks



234

responses to COVID queries

SERVICING AND OHS



3,144

grievances opened



2,744

grievances closed



2,344

OHS support emails



441

WorkSafeBC cases closed successfully



71%

success rate on members' LTD appeals

INVESTING IN MEMBERS



2020

13,064

salary reimbursement days claimed by members



2020

45,441

payments issued to members



2020

\$7,903,615

licence fee reimbursements

2021

\$8,126,140



1,179

members approved for education bursaries

OUR SOLIDARITY IS OUR STRENGTH

We can weather the mightiest storm when we face our challenges as one. We are the members of BCNU, and we look to the year ahead knowing we are resilient together.

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