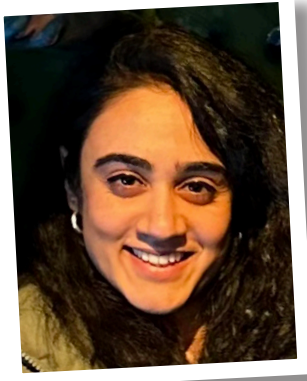




NUHW NEWS AND VIEWS

Richmond Area Multi-Services

MAY 2023



STEWARD SPOTLIGHT AVLEEN KAUR

Music has been an important part of Avleen Kaur since eighth grade.

She continues to play the guitar and some piano. She also loves to sing, and is currently exploring song writing. She's also big into poetry and has been recently attending a few open mic sessions in the Bay Area.

So she's not afraid to raise her voice in front of others. "I feel confident about my creative pieces and sharing them with the world," Avleen notes.

That confidence comes in handy as a steward, where she advocates for herself and others before management.

New to labor and RAMS—where she started in July 2022—the mental health counselor who is part of the CYF school-based clinicians who work with middle and high schoolers became a union steward after joining in the mid-contract bargaining that raised salaries to market-based wages last year.

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A FAIR TRADE IN MENTAL HEALTH NUHW contract includes language to assist members with immigration assistance programs

The pandemic, loss of loved ones, economic setbacks, modern life's hurried pace—all these factors have led to an increasing need for mental health therapy, at a time when there is a shortage of clinicians. One-third of California's population lives in a mental health professional shortage area. The dearth of bilingual, culturally competent clinicians is even worse.

Faced with this crisis, many facilities are looking beyond the U.S. borders to find new staff.

That's why NUHW included language in our contract so that RAMS can help foreign-born clinicians with their immigration paperwork. Some of our members are also creating a committee to make sure that if an employee reaches out to HR for help in this regard, they must receive a response within two business days, as dictated by the contract.

Worker receives help with TN Visa

This immigration assistance has been vital for Andrea Chan, a mental health counselor at Adult Outpatient, as well as clinical supervisor at CYF Outpatient, and the Training Program.

As someone who grew up both in Canada and Hong Kong, Andrea was studying in Hong Kong when she signed up to complete her internship at RAMS. She started her employment a year later, thanks to a TN

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OUR CONTRACT
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contract booklet, visit
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STEWARD SPOTLIGHT
AVLEEN KAUR

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“My major source of inspiration was seeing how much impact voicing our needs can really have,” Avleen says. “It was pretty liberating to see how we closed the gap between management and employees.

“I also noticed the power in numbers,” she adds.

At the time, her department (CYF) didn’t have a steward and Avleen decided to take on the role. “I care about my own and my colleagues’ sense of wellness as part of this difficult job,” she says. “We’re always taking care of others but forget to offer that care to ourselves.”

She’s found that the power to transform the hopelessness she and colleagues encounter “lies with ourselves and that there is change we can effect if we truly feel it in our hearts and translate it into action.”

For instance, when RAMS released new workload/productivity expectation guidelines, Avleen rallied her coworkers and brought to light a discrepancy between the actual output and what is visible to the management. She’ll continue to advocate on this subject in the upcoming joint Labor-Management Committee meeting.

“It’s satisfying to think that I’m giving my time and attention to our needs and wants as a collective,” Avleen says. “These efforts give me a sense of involvement in the community; it makes me feel more attached to my colleagues at RAMS and contributes to my professional wellbeing.”

Labor-Management Committee Meeting

We concluded the preparations for the Labor-Management Committee meetings, setting the community guidelines and ground rules for these sessions that will take place Tuesday, June 13 from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

One of the items that will be discussed and reviewed in this meeting is the Programs Caseload and Billable Hours Guidelines. However, The agenda is open for any member who wants to bring their concerns.

The meeting is on Zoom and open to all members. If you wish to participate, reach out to your department steward or NUHW organizer to get the link and other details.



IMMIGRATION HELP

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visa, an immigration program for professional Canadian and Mexican nationals that allows them to live and work in the U.S. RAMS can also help with H1B visas and green card applications.

RAMS sponsored Andrea’s TN visa and connected her with an immigration attorney to help in the process.

“I really like working at RAMS because of the clinical work we’re providing to underserved communities; it’s something important for me,” says Andrea, whose ability to speak Cantonese and Mandarin comes in handy when serving a large population of Chinese, monolingual immigrants.

“Being bi-cultural and sort of having the immigrant experience helps me in my work,” Andrea says. “It’s part of the therapeutic presence I’m able to provide.”

She adds that the immigration assistance RAMS provides employees is helpful, but she sees it as a fair trade: RAMS needs workers like her and she’s able to help the patients RAMS serves.

Andrea is also grateful for being part of a union. “Before we were unionized, the pay was so bad, to the point that it was insulting,” she says.



Andrea Chan

The contract improved pay and other workplace benefits, such as the employer partially reimbursing them for the licensure renewal fee clinicians pay every two years.

But most importantly, she notes, NUHW was able to show workers that there are paths to improvements in the workplace and that they don’t have to accept something that’s not fair.

That “you can pressure management to listen, at the very least. The very fact that we’re empowered to talk about it and ask for it makes a big difference in terms of morale.

“People feel that they can be heard. Employees want to feel that they’re not just a replaceable cog in the machine,” Andrea notes.



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