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 **Happening for GTAs right now!**

# A Letter from Your President



Welcome to Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Local 610, the labour union for graduate teaching assistants and postdoctoral associates at Western University. As a member of this union, you are part of a collective of nearly 2,500 academic workers across Western University, over 300,000 workers in PSAC and over 4.8 million unionized workers across Canada who demand better working conditions for all of us.

This academic year '23-'24 we will be renegotiating the Collective Agreement for Teaching Assistants (TAs) with Western University.

In Canada, unions have legal power. As a strong union, we can collectively fight our employer (the University) and the government whose policies don't always work in our favour. This includes, but is not limited to, improving working conditions, increasing wages and benefits, and most importantly, making sure we are not doing extra work for free.

Many of the benefits and rights that we have today has been through the effort of unions. Throughout history, unions successfully gained shorter working days/weeks, abolished child labour, improved occupational health and safety, and fought for human rights and equity laws.

Canada is in the midst of a housing crisis and suffering from high rates of inflation. These are issues that affect us workers, directly. The union also recognizes that racialized and international students are affected disproportionately. Increasingly, the labour movement is being attacked by those whose motive is profit. They gain by the exploitation of worker's rights.

As Teaching Assistants get into bargaining, we require every worker in our union to be aware of their rights and be an active member. We have to show that we will stand and fight, as a collective, for a dignified existence with a livable income.

To help learn more about your union as well as the broader labour movement, your local executive has put together this handbook. It will help you to understand the structure of PSAC, union history, your collective agreement, and other rights.

We, as members of PSAC 610, have marched alongside academic workers and the broader labour movement to fight the government's cuts to education and healthcare.

The union is only as strong as its membership, so please take some time to look through this handbook. Being informed and active makes for a stronger union. And each one of you adds strength to the union.

In Solidarity,  
Karuna Dsouza,

President  
PSAC Local 610

# FAQ

## **What is a union?**

A union is an organized group of workers who come together with the employer to make decisions about the conditions of their work. It protects the economic and social interests of workers.

In Canada unions are legally protected and anyone working in Canada, regardless of citizenship, has a right to unionize their workplace or join a union.

## **What do unions do?**

Unions organize, represent, and negotiate better working conditions for employees within a workplace. They also help fight for improved working conditions within their communities and across society.

Rather than employers negotiating piecemeal contracts with individual workers, which gives employers a lot of power, unionizing allows workers to have one strong voice negotiating working conditions, which is written into a Collective Agreement.

## **What is a Collective Agreement?**

A legal agreement between the members of a union and the employer that is negotiated every three years. It is accepted only once the union's members feel their demands have been met, and voting to ratify the agreement.

It outlines worker and employer rights, such as wages, hours of work, benefits, harassment and bullying procedures, and more.

## **What is a grievance? If I file one, what happens?**

A grievance is any work-related dispute involving the interpretation, application, administration, or violation of the Collective Agreement.

Grievances can also be filed if the employer violates any federal or provincial laws, such as the Ontario Labour Relations Act.

It is your right to file a grievance. By the Ontario Labour Relations Act, you cannot be disciplined for filing a grievance. It doesn't matter if you are a domestic or international student - this is **every** worker's right.

## **What are my union dues?**

In return for a wide range of services, protections, and benefits, PSAC members pay dues to the union. We have a fair system that is based on a percentage of your earnings.

Based on the 1945 Rand Formula, all union members and nonmembers within a workplace must pay union dues. Non-members pay dues because they benefit from having a union in their workplace, such as earning higher wages.

## **How do I become a member?**

If you're a TA or Postdoc, you are a member of this union!

You can fill out a membership card by visiting the PSAC 610 site:  
**[www.pvac610.ca/become-a-member](http://www.pvac610.ca/become-a-member)**

# The Collective Agreement

The Collective Agreement (CA) is a legally binding, collectively bargained contract that is renegotiated every three years. In this contract, it outlines the rights and responsibilities of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows as well as the employer, Western University.

Some of the rights outlined in the CA for **GTAs** include: **Overtime Pay, TA appointments, Benefits** (physical health benefits, mental health fund, employee assistance plan), **Personal leave** (sick days, pregnancy/parental leave, bereavement leave), **Improved Extended Health Plan** (a rebate system that covers both physical and mental health costs up to \$1000/year), **Summer Support Program** (to provide support to members who will not be receiving funding from their program during the summer term), etc.

Some of the rights outlined in the CA for **Postdocs** include: **Overtime pay, Paid expenses** (travel and research), **Benefits** (life and accident insurance, employee assistance plan), **New EHP and Professional Allowance** (replaces Flex Credits), **Personal leave** (sick days, pregnancy/parental leave, bereavement leave), etc.

The latest CA can be found on our website  
[www.psac610.ca](http://www.psac610.ca):



## **The Letter of Offer (GTAs)**

When UWO offers you a position as a TA, you are presented with a Letter of Offer. The Letter of Offer verifies that the conditions of your employment are governed by the CA; it is important that you keep a copy of the letter for your records.

## **Duties Specification Agreement (GTAs)**

A TA requires an average of 10 hours of work per week, with a maximum of 140 hours per term or 280 hours per year. Unless agreed to, an employee cannot be required:

- To work more than twice the set average In any one week during the work period.
- To work 'unused' hours from a prior term in a new term (no 'transferring' or 'carrying over' hours).
- To work outside of their set term of employment.
- To work more than 8 hours per day.

At the beginning of each term your TA supervisor presents you with a Duties Specific Agreement (DSA), that divides the hours of your contract among the various duties you and your supervisor agree you will perform. The DSA functions as a contractual agreement between you and your supervisor. It also functions as a description of the employer's expectations that both you and your supervisor have agreed to that you can easily reference. If your workload conflicts with the DSA, contact your Departmental or Chief Steward.

# Bargaining

Bargaining is a big part of being in a union. Each Collective Agreement has an expiration date, requiring the employees and the employer to renegotiate. PSAC Local 610 has two bargaining units: **Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)** and **Postdoctoral Associates & Fellows**. Bargaining, and preparing to bargain, begins before the Collective Agreement expires.



In preparation for bargaining, it is important that members make their needs and working conditions known, by coming to union events, talking to their Steward(s), or filling out surveys. This ensures that your needs are clear to your bargaining team, and will appear in the the next Collective Agreement with members' ongoing support. The union needs to show a strong message to the employer to get a strong Collective Agreement, and this requires solidarity, support, and communication, with members.



**Postdoctoral Associates & Fellows** made significant gains in their last round of bargaining. Postdocs won a **15% raise over the next three years**, with more than **8% to be seen in the first year**. We are confident we can get similar gains for TAs!



Photo Source: <https://globalnews.ca/news/9468141/graduate-teaching-assistants-western-university-rally-better-pay/>

✨ The **Graduate Teaching Assistant** Collective Agreement expires August 31, 2023. **That means we're in bargaining now!** From what we have already heard from members, we know that a livable income, improved healthcare benefits, and a housing benefit are top priorities. And based on the success of Postdocs earlier this year, we believe we can achieve a lot this round. But only with your support!

Keep a look out for surveys and events, and consider joining our mobilization team!

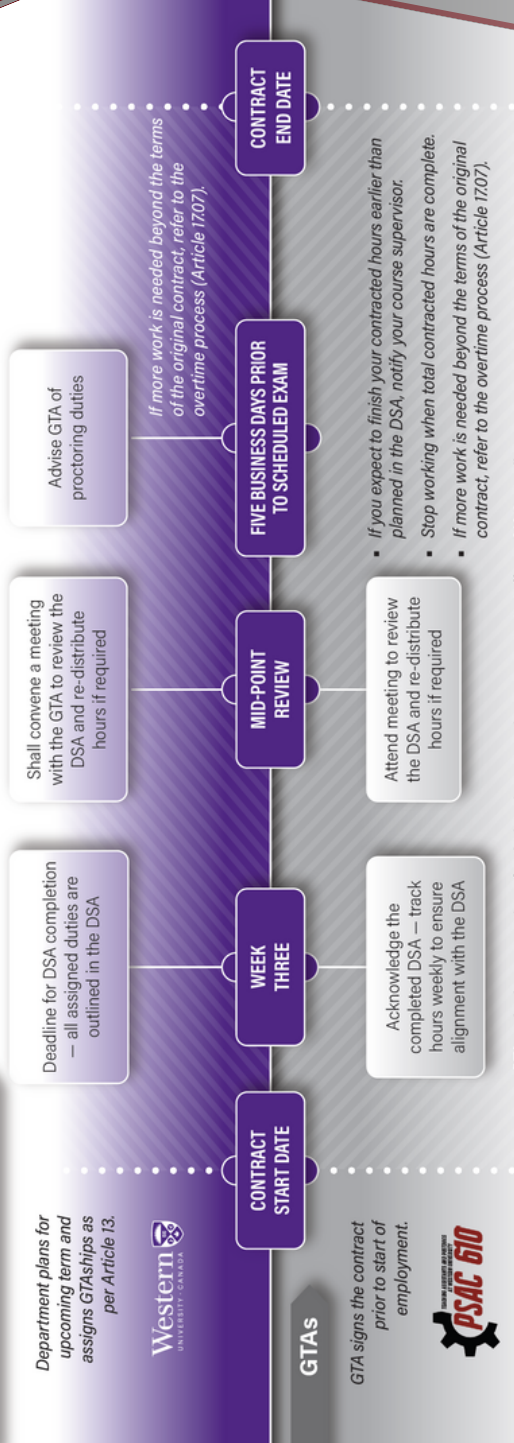
# GTA TIMELINES

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Department must issue contracts at the beginning of the term or prior to the start of employment.
- ▶ Duties Specification Agreement (DSA) must be completed by the third week of the term.
- ▶ It is expected that there will be ongoing communication between the course supervisor and the GTA, including performance feedback, and evaluation if requested.

## COURSE SUPERVISORS

Department plans for upcoming term and assigns GTAships as per Article 13.



## GTAs

GTA signs the contract prior to start of employment.



- If you expect to finish your contracted hours earlier than planned in the DSA, notify your course supervisor.
- Stop working when total contracted hours are complete.
- If more work is needed beyond the terms of the original contract, refer to the overtime process (Article 1707).

GTAs who have questions for their union executive can contact [staffpsac610@gmail.com](mailto:staffpsac610@gmail.com).

# Labour in Canada

Canada's labour movement has a long history of improving the lives of workers. Unions have fought and won labour rights that are now enjoyed by all Canadians. This includes minimum wages, overtime pay, workplace health and safety, vacation pay, maternity and parental leave, as well as protections from discrimination and harassment.

These gains were only won by workers showing solidarity, which is why the history of the labour movement is important to understand. By understanding how we've achieved past gains, we can learn how to mobilize for the future! What follows is a brief history of these achievements.

## The 1872 Toronto Printer's Strike

In the 1870's many Toronto printers worked shifts longer than 10 hours a day. The Toronto Typographical Union walked off the job - an illegal act - after they were refused a 9-hour work day.

Over 10,000 people joined the striking workers on the steps of Queen's Park, resulting in their employer giving them a shorter work day. This also contributed to new legislation, such as the Trade Union Act.



Photo Source: <https://www.tvo.org/article/a-few-reckless-lads-when-ontarians-fought-for-a-nine-hour-workday>

## The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike

The Winnipeg General Strike was the single biggest labour action in Canadian history to date.

Private sector workers walked off the job to strike for better wages and working conditions. They were soon joined by public sector employees including police, firefighters, postal workers, and utility workers. More than 30,000 workers in total took to the streets.

On what became known as 'Bloody Saturday', police charged a crowd of striking workers resulting in dozens of casualties.

## Windsor Ford Strike of 1945

After Ford announced 1,500 layoffs, the United Auto Workers demanded mandatory membership for all workers employed at the auto plant. After a massive strike, Canada's federal government eventually bent to pressure and appointed an arbitrator.

The arbitrator, Supreme Court Justice Ivan Rand, would issue a historic ruling, which declares that in a unionized workplace, employees are free to join or not join the union, but they must pay union dues. This is because non-unionized workers also gain from the collective bargaining of members.

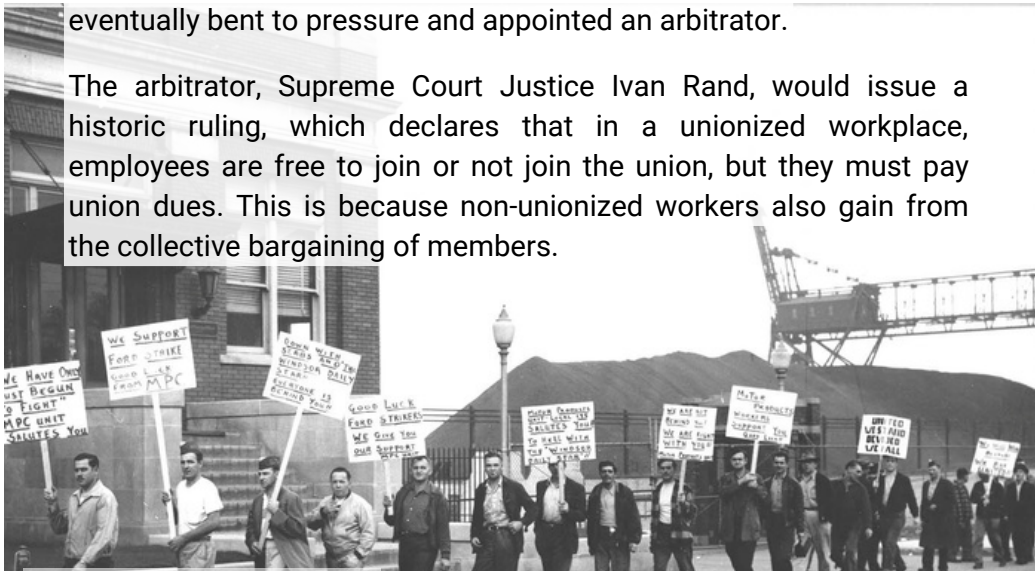


Photo Source: Windsor Public Library

## **The 1981 Postal Strike**

In the 1980's, paid maternity leave was rare. Only a single union in Quebec had secured that benefit at the time.

In 1981, following a successful 42-day strike, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers won their members across Canada 17 weeks of paid maternity leave. This achievement has consequently become mainstream throughout the country.

## **Response to the 1992 Westray Disaster**

In 1992, twenty-six miners were killed by an explosion in the Westray Mine in Plymouth, Nova Scotia.

The Government introduced Bill C-45 due to the protests initiated by supporters of the labour movement. Bill C-45 created a legal duty for managers to ensure the safety of all workers and members of the public. It also established new sections of the Criminal Code under which corporations and managers can be charged for negligence.



Photo Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/westray-remembered-explosion-killed-26-n-s-coal-miners-in-1992-1.1240122>

# The Ontario Labour Relations Act

Most employees and employers are also legally bound by the Ontario Labour Relations Act. All employees are encouraged to read this act. The purpose of this act is to:

- Facilitate bargaining between employers and trade unions that are the freely-designated representatives of the employees.
- Recognize the importance of workplace parties adapting to change.
- Promote flexibility, productivity, and employee involvement in the workplace.
- Encourage communication between employers and employees in the workplace.
- Recognize economic growth as the foundation for mutually beneficial relations for employers, employees, and trade unions
- Encourage co-operative participation of employers and trade unions in resolving workplace issues.
- Promote the expeditious resolution of workplace disputes.

# Public Service Alliance of Canada

PSAC represents over 230,000 employees in every province and territory in Canada and in locations around the world. Union members work for federal government departments and agencies, Crown Corporations, universities, casinos, community service agencies, Aboriginal communities, airports, and the security sector, among others. PSAC is headquartered in Ottawa with 23 regional offices across Canada.



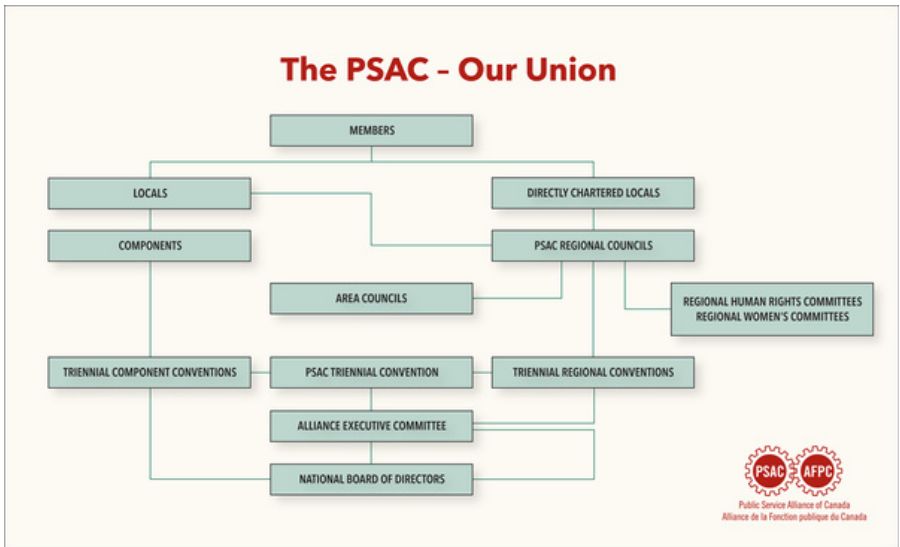
Public Service Alliance of Canada  
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

As Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows, we are members of a Directly Chartered Local within PSAC.

The Local is members connection to the union. It is where they go for help, meet to discuss workplace experiences and concerns, elect local representatives, and vote on proposed contract settlements.

# Structure of the PSAC

Locals are the foundation of the union. Locals are either a part of a component or a directly chartered local. Components bring together members who work for the same government department. Locals are otherwise directly chartered, meaning they are represented directly through PSAC rather than a component.



The PSAC National Triennial Convention is the unions governing body. Delegates to the convention are elected at their respective component conventions, by area councils, and by directly chartered locals with more than 100 members. At the convention, delegates can move motions to make changes to the PSAC Constitution.

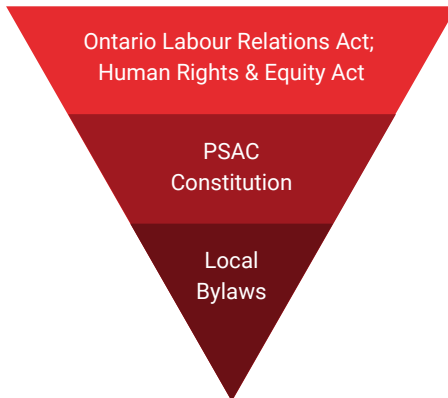


# Structure of Local 610

## PSAC Constitution and Bylaws

PSAC Local 610 is governed by federal and provincial laws, such as the Ontario Labour Relations Act. It is also governed by the PSAC Constitution, and the local's own bylaws.

The bylaws and policies define how union officers are selected, what they are responsible for, and how they decisions of the local are made and implemented. Periodic amendments to the bylaws can be made if approved by the members at a General Membership Meeting.



Policies are annually reviewed by committees, and are endorsed or amended if necessary by the Executive Committee. For more Information, you can review the PSAC Constitution and the local's bylaws on our website.

## **The Executive Committee**

The executive committee is comprised of elected representatives that help to maintain the smooth operation of your local union. The President and Chairs maintain the local's committees, and assist with the administrative tasks of the local. The Chief Stewards help to organize and mobilize members within their division, as well as assist with grievances. The executive committee meets bi-weekly.

## **Chief and Departmental Stewards**

Local members elect six Chief Stewards that represent each division within the union. Four Chief Stewards represent each division of GTAs: Arts and Humanities, Bio-Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences. There are two Chief Stewards that represent Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows.

The Chief Stewards are tasked with maintaining Departmental Steward networks within each division. Stewards are elected or appointed within each department. Departmental Stewards solicit information from members of their departments to assist with the work of their Chief Steward.

Stewards play an important role in the union, as they assist with the union's communications, organize solidarity events, and serve as a voice for their department's needs. Please consider becoming a Steward for your department!

Learn more on our website:



# Committees

Committees are open to all members with the goal of facilitating the union's ongoing projects, as well as assisting with the allocation of benefits to members such as financial assistance and scholarships. There are several standing committees that are always active, as well as ad hoc committees that become active when necessary, like during bargaining.

Look for committee calls in your emails! What follows is a list of standing committees.

## **Bylaws Committee:**

Reviews and proposes amendments to the local's bylaws. Reports recommendations during General Meetings.

## **Finance Committee:**

Assists the finance chair with their duties, such as the spending of the local.

## **Communications Committee:**

Assists the communications chair with coordinating and evaluating communication strategies.

## **Food Support and Resources Committee:**

Provides assistance to members who require food support, and allocates resources.

## **TA Financial Assistance Committee:**

Reviews members' applications for financial assistance on a monthly basis.

**Postdoc Financial Committee:**

Reviews Postdoctoral members' applications for financial assistance three times a year.

**Mobilization Committee:**

Works to mobilize members to respond to labour and social justice issues.

**Gender Equity Committee:**

Advocate for improved rights, resources, and support systems for women, trans, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals at Western and in the broader London community.

**Public Action Committee:**

Addresses concerns in three contexts: locally, federally, and internationally; and work with progressive groups and coalitions to promote policies which benefit workers, their families, and communities.

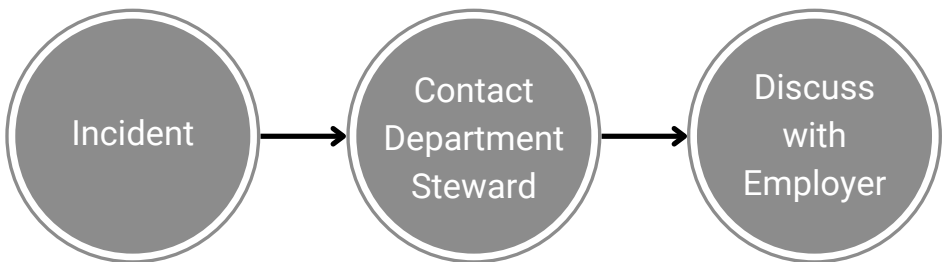


# Resolving Workplace Issues

One of the most important services the local provides is advice, support, and legal assistance if a member experiences a workplace issue or violation of the CA. The first person you should contact if you have a workplace issue is your Departmental Steward.

Workplace issues can usually be resolved informally, in a conversation with the course supervisor or department, without filing an official grievance. Even if your specific concern is not a grievance-able offence, it is still important to raise concerns so that it can be better addressed in the future.

It's important that you raise any concerns you wish to address as quickly as possible. **Any potential employment violation must be brought to the attention of the employer within 21 days of its occurrence, or from the date you became aware of the occurrence.** The issue will then be informally addressed within 5 days of informing the employer.





**Don't know if you or your co-workers experience(s) could be a violation? It's ALWAYS better to ask and learn!**

# Grievances

A grievance is any work-related dispute involving the interpretation, application, administration, or violation of the Collective Agreement, federal law, or provincial labour law. Both the local and the employer should address grievances as quickly as possible.

If your matter is not resolved informally, you can file an official grievance to the Dean of the faculty within 10 days of the informal discussion. The Dean will set up a meeting with up to 2 union representatives, and 2 employer representatives to discuss the grievance within 10 days, and then respond within 7 days.

If the grievance is not resolved it will move to the vice-provost or School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS). SGPS is required to respond to the grievance within 7 days. If it is still unresolved the grievance may enter arbitration within 30 days. An arbitrator will make the final decision on the grievance.

Given these time constraints, it is very important that you come forward with your concerns as soon as possible. Even if you may have doubts, it might still be worth it to seek out the union's assistance to ensure that all workplace issues are dealt with.

If you are interested in filing a grievance, or would like to know whether your complaint can constitute a grievance, please reach out to the Grievance Chair by sending an email to **[grievance.psac610@gmail.com](mailto:grievance.psac610@gmail.com)**

# Benefits

## **Extended Health Plan:**

The EHP is a supplement to your existing health insurance. If you were a TA during at least one semester of the current academic year, you may be reimbursed for eligible procedures. You can find out more information about how and when to apply and what is covered. Postdocs receive some benefits directly from the employer and can contact Western University's Human Resources for more information.

## **UHIP Assistance Fund:**

The local has a fund available for TA members who pay UHIP fees. The forms are usually submitted around June, and can be found on our website.

## **Food Support and Resources:**

The local maintains a budget to help TAs who experience an unexpected financial emergency that diverts income from their food budget. Those who qualify receive monetary benefits to help cover the cost of groceries. Learn how and when to apply on our website.

## **Financial Assistance Fund:**

This fund is to support members who experience unexpected financial need. The following expenses can be funded; medical emergencies, personal emergencies, academic/conference travel, and childcare. For TAs forms are due by the 1st of every month, and are adjudicated by the appropriate financial assistance committee.



### **Employee Assistance Plan:**

Members have access to professional counselors that can assist with a broad range of personal and work-related issues. The service is confidential and available 24/7, just call 1-844-880-9142.

### **Mental Health Fund:**

TAs fought and won funding to support mental health during the 2017-2018 round of bargaining. This fund will help members afford vital mental health services such as licensed therapy, and medications.

### **Summer Support Program (SSP):**

The SSP exists to provide support to members who will not be receiving funding from their program during the summer term.

**Information and forms are  
available on our website:  
[www.psac610.ca](http://www.psac610.ca)**



# Contacts

## The Executive Committee

President	prespsac610@gmail.com
Communications Chair	commmpsac610@gmail.com
Grievance Chair	grievance.psac610@gmail.com
Racial Equity Chair	racialequitypsac610@gmail.com
Administration Chair	admmpsac610@gmail.com
Postdoc Chair	postdocpsac610@gmail.com
Gender Equity Chair	genderequitypsac610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Arts & Humanities	artschiefstewardpsac610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Bio Sciences	bioscchief610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Physical Sciences	physcchief610@gmail.com
Chief Steward Social Sciences	socialscchief@gmail.com
Chief Steward Postdocs	postdocchief2@gmail.com

## Staff

Office Manager	staffpsac610@gmail.com
Bookkeeper	staff2psac610@gmail.com

## Elected, Non-Executive Officers

Occupational Health & Safety Officer	postdocpsac610@gmail.com
Chief Returning Officer	cropsac610@gmail.com