

Equity for our Midwives!

This year will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the first midwife maternity ward pilot project launched in Nunavik. 1986 was a watershed year in the Government's approach to pregnancies and births in the North. Rather than send Inuit mothers for extensive periods of time away from their families to give birth on Moose Factory Island (Ontario), the Government opted for a more community based, culturally sensitive and accessible maternity experience. A core group of midwives from the South lead the seminal stages of the new vision by training local Inuit women to become professional midwives at the Centre de santé Inuulitsivik in Puvirnituk.

Since the initial pilot project, the midwife services have grown to cover both coasts in four separate locations (Puvirnituk, Inukjuak, Salluit, and Kuujuaq), and Inuit midwife training was officially recognized by the *Ordre des sages-femmes du Québec* in 2009 by granting them full licences to practice.

The quality of the midwife services in the North has been a cornerstone of Inuit community development. It has been studied by international researchers from as far away as Australia and New Zealand as a pioneering and sustainable midwife program that fosters the Inuit culture and traditions.

Notwithstanding the enormous progress that the Inuit midwives have made over the last thirty years, there remains a number major obstacles to their full and warranted recognition as health care professionals. To this day, the job title "midwife" does not exist in the *List of job titles, job descriptions and salary rates and scales in the health and social services network*¹ and there is therefore no legally recognized job description or salary scale that properly reflects their work. The unionized midwives at the FSSS-CSN deserve to be respected as ambassadors of the midwife program and granted the job title "midwife" with the salary and working conditions that reflect their expertise.

A second major obstacle faced by the midwives in the North is the fact that they do not receive the same premiums. The midwives who work at the Centre de santé Tulattavik de l'Ungava (UTHC) who are affiliated with the *Regroupement Les Sages-femmes du Québec (RSFQ)* receive a \$20,000 annual attraction and retention premium that is not paid to those who work at the Centre de santé Inuulitsivik (IHC). The midwives on both coasts have the same working conditions and enlarged mandate (teaching, precepts to the midwife students, obstetric reference to doctors and nurses, etc.), and yet they



Photos : Michel Giroux

1. Nomenclature des titres d'emploi, des libellés, des taux et des échelles de salaire du réseau de la santé et des services sociaux

do not receive the same benefits. Furthermore, they all pay dues to the RSFQ whether or not they're represented by the Regroupement or the FSSS-CSN! These inequities are at the heart of the midwives' demand for respect and justice.

A third major obstacle is a lack of full time positions particularly for Inuit midwives. There are not enough full time positions at any of the midwife service points. The creation of full time midwife positions would greatly enhance the attraction and retention of the midwife personnel in the North. In order to do so, the Government needs to invest in full time positions with equal working conditions and benefits, and not just equivalent full time positions (ETC). Moreover, these measures would be in keeping with the Government's mandate as per The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA).²

The FSSS-CSN proposes to address and rectify these key issues in the following manner:

1. Request to create the "midwife" job title (February 2016) : The FSSS-CSN and your union will submit a request to create the job title "midwife" according to the procedure in the National Collective Agreement (article 31.03) and make all requisite representations to expedite the process;
2. Submit a Pay Equity Complaint (before May 18th 2016) : The Conseil du trésor posted their audit results on December 21st 2015 and the Pay Equity Act prescribes a strict timeline to submit pay equity complaint forms.³ The FSSS-CSN, your union, and select midwives will submit a pay equity complaint with the Quebec Pay Equity Commission. "Observations" will be sent to the FSSS-CSN to coordinate the complaint submissions. The objective of the pay equity complaint is to

obtain a pay scale that respects and reflects the work accomplished by the midwives;

3. Permanent National Negotiating Committee (As soon as possible) : The FSSS-CSN will communicate with the Comité patronal de négociation du secteur de la santé et des services sociaux (CPNSSS) to schedule a meeting of the Permanent National Negotiating Committee as per article 33 of the National Collective Agreement. The said committee meets several times a year to address problems related to working conditions. The FSSS-CSN will present the key issues in this privileged forum to advocate for the midwives' demands and ultimately reach an agreement with the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

The FSSS-CSN is firmly committed to obtaining the respect and full recognition of Quebec midwives in the North by the Government. The midwives of the North constitute a pillar of the community based approach that fosters the culture and traditions of the Inuit people. The FSSS-CSN will also consider meeting with local actors, and provincial politicians to sensitize them to the reality of our midwives who form an indispensable asset to traditional Inuit maternity and health care.

The perennity of the Inuit midwife approach very much depends on the successful resolution of the inequity and injustice that the midwives face in the North. The FSSS-CSN will be at the forefront of their cause and will lead the charge to better working conditions and their rightful recognition as health care professionals.



2. See article 15.0.21 b <http://www.gcc.ca/pdf/LEG000000006.pdf>

3. See Chapter IV.1 (Pay Equity Audit) of the Pay Equity Act L.R.Q., c.E-12.001