

Minnesota Teamsters Service Bureau Was Established in 1986

*To provide help and advice to members facing job, financial, family and personal challenges.
We recently visited the Bureau, and sat down with director Jean Shomphe for a chat.*



Teamsters Service Bureau Director Jean Shomphe and Local 320 Recording Secretary/BA Sami Gabriel.

Jean, what exactly is the Teamsters Service Bureau (TSB) – what is its purpose?

We are here to help in any way possible. We have done everything from helping a retired Teamster balance his checkbook to saving homes from foreclosure. We tell people –give us a call, give us a chance to help; we are non-judgmental, and people are always treated with respect and dignity.

We also provide re-employment and training services to dislocated workers (people who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own) and incumbent worker training programs



Ellie Schmeltzer

that assist employed workers in achieving new skills.

Both of our Family Service Advocates are skilled at helping people unravel difficult situations to determine just exactly what is at the root of the problem. The Advocates help people prioritize their needs. If more intensive professional assistance is necessary—personal or family counseling, financial counseling, and legal assistance—our Advocates will refer them into our broader network.

That network provides us with licensed professionals in every Minnesota county.

Who are the other members of the staff?

Ellie Schmeltzer is our Family Services Advocate and has been with the TSB for 20 years. She coordinates all the family services

The Teamsters Service Bureau is not a handout. It is a union benefit that union dues help provide.

activities and manages the office.

Judy Lindner is our other Family Services Advocate and **Sharon Almy** is our receptionist. The Dislocated Worker Program (DWP) is directed by **Mike Powers**. He oversees all the activities of the Vocational Counselors—**Dwight Snyder, Al Walk, Trish Daugherty** and **Raul Sanchez**; as well as our Employment Specialist, **Christine Chelstrom** and our intake and compliance monitor, **Carole Hipple**. **Doug Chasar** is our Finance Manager.



Mike Powers

Education, training and career development are big parts of what you do – correct?

Yes, over the years, the State of Minnesota has awarded us more than \$46,000,000, and we have served more than 25,000 dislocated workers.

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These grants provide vocational counseling and job search assistance, and can also pay for training and related costs for workers who need to train for new careers. There is also a small amount in these grants to help participants with emergency financial needs while they are seeking new work.

While these programs are important and helpful for laid off workers, Teamster leadership recognized early on that we also needed to play a more proactive role in actually reducing the number of layoffs for our members. To that end, we discovered we could be very effective by bringing advanced training directly to workers at the workplace.

For example, we have a grant from the State of Minnesota to help train incumbent workers to become Class A Commercial Driver Licensed (CDL) truck drivers. There is a huge national shortage of Class A drivers, and many of our Teamster employers wanted to cross-train their warehouse workers to become Class A licensed so that they can also drive the trucks when necessary.

Moreover, a little over a decade ago, we began working with school-aged kids to prepare them for the world of employment. Specifically we helped charter Skills for Tomorrow High School, a school-to-work high school based on the Robert Reich SCANS skills. The curriculum teaches students about successful

working relationships including leadership, problem solving, communication



and team building. All of the regular high school graduation requirements are also met.

What are the most common problems/issues clients face?

Work related issues stemming from mental health and chemical dependency, failed drug tests and inappropriate workplace behavior (absenteeism, anger, sexual harassment, etc.), and financial issues when there is a reduction in earned income.

Financial crises are a big part of the problems dislocated workers face. Pension issues sometimes arise when a person is laid off shortly

We always try to make people understand when they get here that everyone, at some time in their lives, needs help.

before retirement. We do our best to help them find a new job within the same pension system.

Are people sometimes too reluctant to seek help? Do they wait too long?

Sometimes yes. Pride and shame are reasons workers don't call for help. We always try to make people understand that everyone, at some time in life, needs help.

The TSB is not a handout. The Family Services Program is a dues-paid union benefit. And the DWP worker program is funded by a portion of their employers' unemployment taxes.

Some participants don't take full advantage of the DWP program because they aren't interested in,



or comfortable with classroom training. For them, we offer an On-the-Job Training (OJT) alternative, where an employer can provide the training instead of a school, and we help the employer pay the wages during that training.

Also, when workers receive a large severance package they sometimes lack motivation to participate right away because they want a little time off. But if they wait too long, they also risk feeling unprepared for a new job.

In terms of problems and issues, are you seeing changes these days? If so – why? The economy? More stress on families?

Yes to both. The rising cost of fuel has put a huge financial burden on households. Shrinking community resources mean the traditional safety net sometimes just isn't there.

Meanwhile, employers are demanding more work with fewer workers and tolerating less in terms of errors, lost production time and even worker interactions. The events of 9/11 have caused a great deal more stress for workers as employers more closely scrutinize worker communications and interactions.

In the public employment arena, workers are being squeezed by lack of funding for their programs.

Government services are being cut back and positions are being lost. Not only does this mean lack of supports for the general public, it also means public employees are losing their jobs.



Do you see patterns in your work - different kinds of problems spiking at different times of the year?

We see most problems all year round with somewhat of an increase in chemical dependency assistance in summer and during the holidays. In the dislocated worker arena we often see layoffs spike in the first as well as the fourth



Christine Chelstrom

quarter when some companies are trying to reduce labor costs.

Timing is sometimes an issue for dislocated workers when they are laid off

at the beginning of a semester and must wait a whole semester to begin training. We can sometimes get around this by offering a customized training program through a Community/Technical College.

Do you tend to see many of the same people over and over again as time goes on – or do most people come to the Bureau on, say, a one time or two time basis?

There are a few people who we see often for financial assistance—they are gainfully employed, but cannot meet emergencies. In our efforts



Trish Daugherty

to assist members with problems we try to teach them to become self-sufficient and give them tools to cope.

However, members are encouraged to use the TSB whenever a problem arises.

We also see some repeat participants in the dislocated worker program. When Honeywell closed their circuit board manufacturing plant we placed many of those workers with a company called Unicircuit. Two years later that company closed and we saw some of the same clients. When Fleming

Foods closed in 2003 we placed some of those workers with Lewis Trucking only to see them return when Lewis closed in 2007. We were able to improve some of their skills after that second layoff by training them to be truck drivers and earn their Class A Commercial Drivers License.



Al Walk



Judy Lindner

Any other advice for those who might be considering contacting you?

There is one other thing I'd like the readers of this newsletter to know. And that is that the TSB would not be here if it wasn't for Teamsters Local 320. It was 320 that lead the initiative to create the Service Bureau back in 1986. Many union employers have their own employee assistance program but our members are often reluctant to contact those programs because they fear their information will be shared with management. Coming to the TSB they do not have that fear.

What's the best way for someone to contact you and get started with help?

Just give us a call at 612-676-3700 or 1-800-979-9725.

The one thing that anyone receiving services from the TSB can expect is that they will be treated as an individual, that their dignity will be respected and their confidentiality ensured.

**MINNESOTA TEAMSTERS
SERVICE BUREAU
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**Phone: 612-676-3700
or 800-979-9725 (24-hour toll-free)**

**Hours: 7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.,
Monday-Friday
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