



Safety and Young Workers

Harry Conik wrote that "It Takes a Village to Keep Kids Safe," a concept, a truth that we must all grasp firmly and clearly to ensure the future of not only our young people but our society as a whole.

The Ontario Ministry of Labor provides legislative support for the protection of young people in the workplace by ensuring that, by law, employers must hire according to age restrictions. As well, there are provisions, under the Education Act, relating to the legal age for leaving school in Ontario.

In addition, through the internal responsibility system imposed by the Occupational Health and Safety Legislation, all workplace parties are responsible for the Health and Safety including; the owner, employer, supervisor and workers.

And still, far too many young people are at risk while in our workplaces, many in perfect compliance with legislation.

Taking all of this into consideration, IAPA has produced and successfully promoted a Student Safety Awareness Program for many years, the most recent production being the "Young Worker Awareness Program" which was created and released in 1996.

Via our network of volunteers, staff and partners across Ontario, we have been able to continually offer in-classroom Health & Safety Education sessions to secondary school students. Our volunteers are dedicated individuals who are trained and ready to present the materials at schools within their own communities.

They are of course fully supported by their firms. Safe Communities activities further support this volunteer concept by partnering firms with schools.

The intent here is to provide, for young new workers, a valuable first look at health and safety issues they may face, to understand the basic points of law, their rights and responsibilities as workers as well as the responsibilities of others within the workplace. The program also coaches young participants to become aware of potential hazards, means by which to identify them, assess the degree of danger and understand the control measures to be taken to avoid an injury. We hope to communicate to young people what type of information should be provided to them during an orientation or induction process and to encourage them to participate in the health and

safety of the workplace by asking questions, reporting hazards, following the rules and by not simply doing whatever they are told to do, with little or no instruction.

Our main objective in providing the program is to assist in a smooth, well-informed and more prepared transition from the classroom to the workplace. At the same time we are aggressively working with our workplaces to encourage improved induction and ongoing health and safety training programs for all employees.

We must be reminded that any of the young people we reach will ultimately be the employers, supervisors and workers of the future. Through this awareness program we can also help set the stage for safer, healthier workplaces by cultivating more well-informed workplace participants. Relationships within workplaces must exist on a mandate of mutual respect. This can be greatly promoted and assisted through safe communities activities. For example, we expect young people to take their rightful place in society yet we do not always show them that everyone is of value. Through safe communities activities and other programs we can establish attitudes that allow youth to deservedly receive and also display respect in all of life's theaters: public life, family life, education and ultimately work.

Only this way will we set the stage for healthy and safe workplaces in the future. We have stopped sharing the responsibility for raising children, and we must once again show a unified community conscience. Young people need to understand that they have a proper role to play, they have much to offer and must learn to expect proper working conditions. In addition, young workers must learn to ask the right questioning order to receive the training needed. Our young people are tremendous individuals with enormous potential, excellent skills in decision making, problem solving, observation. These skills must be nurtured and developed, not discouraged or put-down.

They must "look out" for themselves, but not alone.

It is now, always has been, and will continue to be unconscionable to ignore the tragic reality of young people being injured, made ill or killed at work.

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