

Why focus on the issue of workplace injuries and fatalities among young workers?

Young workers, defined as workers between the ages of 15 and 24, are most likely to suffer serious injuries according to statistics gathered by the Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada. These statistics report:

- Each year, over 60,000 young workers are injured seriously enough to require time off work.
- Over the last two years, nearly one hundred young workers have been fatally injured as a result of hazardous working conditions.

This situation will not resolve itself. In addition to hazardous working conditions, investigations and inquests consistently find lack of proper health and safety training to be a major cause of this suffering. Over the next decade youth employment is expected to grow. Without dramatic intervention this major societal issue will also grow.

Moreover, by taking action to protect the most vulnerable in our workplaces, everyone benefits. If we create safe and healthy work environments for young workers, then we create safe and healthy environments for all.

What is the LifeQuilt?

The LifeQuilt is a quilt mural in progress. When complete it will be a unique and permanent memorial dedicated to the thousands of young women and men nation-wide who have been seriously or fatally injured on the job. It will measure an impressive nine feet high by 18 feet wide. The focal image showcases a figure crafted in iridescent gold fabric and holding its hands outstretched to the heavens — a symbol of hope. It will be overlaid with thousands of organza ribbons imprinted with the name, age, and type of injury suffered by a young worker. One hundred commemorative quilt blocks will surround the focal image. Each will include a silk-screened photo of a victim of a fatal workplace injury — those who lost their lives trying to earn a day's wage. These photos and the precious faces in them will rest against a background of two hands also outstretched, only in grief and then in solidarity. These hands represent the hands of those who remain behind, but they also represent the hands of those determined to prevent other such tragic losses.

What is the purpose of the LifeQuilt?

The LifeQuilt was so named because it represents what Life is truly all about. The LifeQuilt displays the humanity behind the horrifying injury and fatality statistics. Each statistic represents untold suffering and a young person, who is loved and missed by family and friends. As a society we also lose. The unfulfilled potential and future contribution of each affected young person can never be calculated.

The artwork is meant to inspire people to think about what they can do to prevent a family's loss of a son or daughter to a workplace injury. Health and safety awareness and education help to create safer and healthier work environments. Once aware, we must all commit to action. The LifeQuilt is a constant reminder to everyone that we need to protect future generations of Canadian workers while remembering and honouring those who have been seriously or fatally injured on the job.

Who is behind the development of the LifeQuilt?

In June 2001, Toronto visual artist Laurie Swim approached the Industrial Accident Prevention Association (IAPA) and the Workers Health and Safety Centre (WHSC) for support to create a permanent memorial to honour Canadian young

workers aged 15 to 24 who have died or been injured in the workplace. Taking a leadership role, the IAPA and WHSC set out to form the Friends of the LifeQuilt committee.

The Friends of the LifeQuilt Committee represents a partnership as unique as the quilt itself. We are a growing group of volunteers drawn from public and private sector organizations, united in the belief that injuries in the workplace are unacceptable and completely preventable. To date LifeQuilt sustaining partners include the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Fuel Advertising Inc., Industrial Accident Prevention Association, Laurie Swim, littleHawk e-communications, Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario, Office of the Worker Advisor, Ontario Ministry of Labour, Ontario Teachers' Federation, Siemens Canada, United Steelworkers of America, Canada, Workers Health and Safety Centre and the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

The Honourary Chair of the Friends of the LifeQuilt Committee is Rob Ellis. Rob's 18-year old son David was tragically killed during his second day of work at a bakery. Rob tells anyone who will listen: "We entrust our children to you, the employer — it is your responsibility to protect them."

How is the project progressing?

The project is also giving birth to a new organization, one founded by and for families and friends of workers affected by life-altering occupational tragedies like the Ellis'. This new organization is working to form a national community, supporting those attempting to cope with the aftermath of these tragedies and those seeking to voice their own message for health and safety awareness and accountability.

Meantime though, the Friends of the LifeQuilt Committee are asking the public and other concerned organizations for their help in building our remarkable memorial to young workers. Our project is relying on volunteer support plus financial and in-kind donations. To date it has received many generous donations and in-kind services such as: creative design, the development of all promotional materials and the development and maintenance of the LifeQuilt web site. But the job is far from complete.

As of October 2002 we have achieved approximately 40 per cent of our two main targets. We have secured the names of 45 fatally injured young workers and created commemorative quilt blocks for each of them. We have also raised 40 per cent of the total budget — some \$180,000 — necessary to realize this special project. Time remaining is short. We aim to unveil the completed project by April 2003. We need your help today.

Where do donations go?

All donations support either the creation of the LifeQuilt or its promotion. The vast majority of financial donations — 78 per cent — support the actual quilt production. A small percentage — 18 per cent — pays for expenses related to promotion, and not covered by in-kind donations, like postage and paper. Finally, only four per cent, or four cents of every dollar raised, go towards the project's administration.

How can others support this project?

To be specific, individuals or concerned organizations can help the LifeQuilt project by:

- ⇒ Joining as an official sustaining partner or sponsor of the project.
- ⇒ Making a financial contribution.
- ⇒ Helping to secure the name, age and type of injury for an affected Canadian young worker.
- ⇒ Spreading the word through a variety of media including newsletters, other mail packages, e-mail distribution lists, electronic chat forums, web site links.
- ⇒ Volunteering to help construct the quilt.
- ⇒ Providing other in-kind services.



To learn more about the **LifeQuilt** or the many ways to get involved, please refer to our web site at www.youngworkerquilt.ca or call the IAPA at 1-800-669-4939, ext. 458 or the Workers Centre at 1-888-869-7950, ext. 3039.