

1. 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.

2. What is the LifeQuilt?

The LifeQuilt is a work of art 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.

3. 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.

4. 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. It is a growing group of volunteers drawn from public and private sector organizations, united in their belief that injuries in the workplace are unacceptable and completely preventable. To date LifeQuilt partners include the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 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, 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."

5. How can others support this project?

The Friends of the LifeQuilt are asking the public and other concerned organizations for their help in building this remarkable memorial. This project is relying on volunteer support plus financial and in-kind donations. To date the Friends of the LifeQuilt have 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 website. But the job is far from complete.

Affected young workers and their families are invited to participate in the quilt, either by offering their own name and injury for inclusion in the focal piece, or by honouring the life of a loved one in one of the commemorative blocks. Further promotional efforts will be needed to reach out to them. Valued added concepts are also being explored. Topping the list is the creation of an interactive software program that will accompany the LifeQuilt and help communicate the stories of each deceased young worker honoured in the quilt as well as ways to prevent similar tragedies. Then there is needed funding for a national tour of this important new teaching tool. And finally, the Friends of the LifeQuilt hope dearly to be in a position to bring together all the families of the fatally injured workers involved for a dedication ceremony of the completed work.

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

- ⇒ Joining as an official 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 website at www.youngworkerquilt.ca or call 1-800-669-4939, ext. 458.

