



Protecting young Communication can

Every year around this time, young workers start summer jobs. While a new job can be an exciting prospect, it can also present new hazards. Studies have shown that young workers, particularly young men, are most at risk of injury in the early days of a new job. Micheal Fisher was one of those young workers who got hurt. He was 22 years old.



Micheal's Story

It was January 19, 2006. After returning to her desk from lunch, Johanna LeRoux got the worst news any parent can get—her son had been in an accident. Micheal had fallen from the roof of the house he was working on and suffered a traumatic brain injury. After Johanna received the phone call from police, her supervisor immediately drove her from Barrie to Sunnybrook hospital in Toronto to meet her son. He was being airlifted there as they drove.

“Micheal’s ambition was to join the military, but his girlfriend at the time didn’t really want him to go off to basic training so soon. So, Micheal decided to look for a job. It was kind of a time-filler for him,” explained Johanna. Micheal had some experience working as a framer. He was looking for another job in construction when he came across a small roofing contractor who was hiring. “It was a mom-and-pop business. I think they had less than ten employees,” said Johanna. She recalls Micheal receiving the standard “watch a video, answer a few questions, here’s your card” type of fall protection training before starting work. “It was a package that a lot of small businesses were using at the time.”

After several surgeries, Micheal went into multiple organ failure. It was a direct result of the brain injury. His heart was not able to pump enough oxygen to his organs. “They asked us for permission to turn off the respirator. Within a couple of minutes, Micheal stopped breathing,” said Johanna. “He was in a coma for six days before he died. It’s been a long, hard road for our family. For ever and ever, Micheal will be missing from the table. It never leaves. He’s never far from our minds,” said Johanna. “My greatest coping mechanism has been working with the people at Threads of Life.” Threads of Life helps families heal through a community of support. Their staff and network of volunteers work to promote the elimination of life-altering workplace injuries, illnesses, and deaths.

According to the Ministry of Labour investigation, no one actually saw Micheal fall. Co-workers reported that he was having problems with his nail gun, so he climbed down from the roof to fix it. Once on the ground, he took off his harness. “We think he probably took it off to use the bathroom,” said Johanna. “Then he climbed back up the ladder to test the nail gun. He slipped at the top and fell.” EMS workers found Micheal’s harness lying on his tool box in the garage of the house they were working on. “The wording that



Workers: save lives

came out of the coroner's inquest was that he likely forgot to put it back on before going back up to the roof to test the nail gun," said Johanna. "There was nobody on that side of the building, so no one saw him start to climb the ladder."

Johanna has one piece of advice for young workers: "Always wear your personal protective equipment. It's there to protect you. It's there for a reason."

Communication is key

When you hire young workers, you can't always treat them the same way you treat regular employees. Young workers have different experiences, different values, and may have fewer basic skills than your regular workers. Often, young workers don't approach the work the same way you do. They don't think about what could happen to them. They need you to tell them—over and over again if that's what it takes.

Clear and effective communication can save a young worker's life. Here are some tips to help you ensure that your young workers stay safe.

- Provide detailed orientation and training before work begins. Demonstrate how to do specific tasks and then observe the young worker doing them.
- Make sure young workers know what personal protective equipment to use, how to use it, when to use it, and why it is important to use it.
- Pair young workers with safety-conscious mentors. Ensure that the mentors are patient, can communicate with young people, and are familiar with the safe work procedures on the jobsite.



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- Identify and explain the hazards young workers will be exposed to and the controls they will use to protect themselves.
- Make sure young workers understand their basic rights: the right to know, the right to participate, the right to refuse unsafe work, and the right to a workplace free of violence and harassment. Assure them that they should have no fear of reprisals for bringing up safety concerns and clearly identify to whom they should speak about it.
- Support supervisors by providing them with information and training on how to deal with young workers. Supervisors must provide young workers training and guidance at all times, not only during orientation.
- Even if things seem to be going well, have your supervisors follow up with young workers each week to keep in constant communication.
- Ask young workers to repeat instructions back to you or have them demonstrate the task for you to make sure they understand what you are asking them to do.
- Remind everyone that young workers may not understand industry terms and acronyms.

For more tips and resources on how to protect young workers, visit the New and Experienced Workers section at ihsa.ca

To find out more about Threads of Life and the important work they do, visit threadsoflife.ca

