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Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury: Challenges Workshop

ONIWG Plenary, October 17, 2008



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Workshop Agenda

1. Overview 10 min
 - i. Goals of the session
 - ii. Background of our partnership
2. Challenges from the community perspective 15 min
 - i. Injured/disabled worker presentation
3. Challenges from the community agency perspective 10 min
 - i. Community agency presentation
4. Challenges from the academic perspectives 10 min
 - i. University researcher presentation
5. Treasures found and lessons learned 15 min

Goals of the Plenary

1. To promote a greater understanding of the challenges facing community-university partnerships including the negative perceptions of research in some communities.
2. To encourage sharing our experiences in building partnerships between vulnerable communities and university-based researchers in order to strengthen future partnerships and build effective social movements.
3. To explore how to use a research partnership to build capacity in the community to address public policy issues.

Learning Objectives

1. To begin to understand the assumptions, attitudes and values that both university and community partners bring to a developing partnership.
2. To share the lessons learned building our community-university partnership and explore the process and dynamics of learning those lessons.
3. To identify ways to building sustained involvement of the community as an initiative matures and research intensifies.

Background of the Initiative

- approximately 350,000 workers are injured in the workplace each year in Ontario
- 13,000 of these injured workers become permanently impaired
- work from early 1990s based on Ontario data suggests that half are chronically unemployed several years post accident
- changing labour-market characteristics have altered employment stability and re-employment possibilities for injured workers
- little understanding of the labour-market re-entry success, long-term financial security, health and well-being of injured workers
- injured worker community often overlooked because they are not necessarily connected to unions or workplaces
- policy changes in workers' compensation in Ontario have changed the nature of compensation

Goals of the Initiative

Main question guiding the initiative:

How does the workers' compensation system help or hinder the protection of injured workers (immediately and over time) against the negative economic, social, physical and mental health consequences of injury?

Main goals of the initiative:

- to fill knowledge gaps about the consequences of work injury and illness
- to encourage evidence-informed policy decision making in workers' compensation
- to equip injured workers and their representatives with skills to continue their involvement in research and knowledge mobilization
- to increase sensitivity to and knowledge of injured worker experiences
- to increase awareness of the need to involve non-academic communities in research

Research Themes

We are seeking answers in four areas or themes:

1. Legislation

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of current compensation and disability programs?
- What would improved legislation, policies, programs and practices look like?

2. Financial Security

- What impact does an injury have on a worker's financial security?
- What are the employment experiences of injured workers?

3. Health and Well-being

- Does a worker's physical health continue to deteriorate after injury?
- How does injury affect mental health?
- What are the social impacts of work injury on workers and their families?

4. History and Political Activism

- What are the major struggles injured workers have experienced in the past?
- What are activists doing today?

Participating Organizations

- initiative emerged approximately 3 years ago from several brainstorming sessions hosted by the Bancroft Institute
- community partners represent the principal injured worker service and support organizations in Ontario
- academic partners from research organizations across the province

Partner organizations

Bancroft Institute
Injured Workers' Consultants
Institute for Work & Health
McMaster University
Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers
Office of the Worker Adviser
Ontario Federation of Labour
Ontario Network of Injured Workers Group
University of Toronto

Other participating organizations

Industrial Accident Victims Group of Ontario
Lakehead University
Toronto Injured Workers' Advocacy Group
Toronto Rehabilitation Institute
Trent University
United Steelworkers
University of Ottawa
York University



Current Activities

- received 5-year funding award of \$1M from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council for the period 2006 to 2011
- over last year set up infrastructure for management, research, knowledge mobilization, and capacity building
- recruited a coordinator, several students, and two post-doctoral fellows
- had a media release and held several meetings with key policy makers
- developed and launched our website
- released our first e-newsletter
- currently have 21 research projects underway
- developed an evaluation and monitoring framework
- presented at several conferences this spring