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# **First Language Health & Safety Training for Newcomers**

**a project of the MFL Occupational Health Centre (OHC)**

## **FINAL REPORT**

**2015-2017**

*Supported by a grant from the Research and Workplace Innovation Program of  
the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project “*First Language Health & Safety Training for Newcomers*” delivered a Train the Trainer Program and first language workshops on Workplace Health and Safety for newcomer workers in the food processing industry in Brandon and Neepawa. The goal of the project was to increase knowledge, understanding and awareness about workplace health and safety among Temporary Foreign Workers and other newcomers in the food processing industry.

Fourteen (14) trainers from five language/cultural groups completed an in-depth Train the Trainer Program to equip them to deliver workshops on *Health & Safety Rights & Resources* to their coworkers in the food processing industry in their first languages. Trainers subsequently delivered 16 workshops over the duration of the project in five different languages, directly reaching a total of 160 workers. Overwhelmingly positive post-workshop evaluations clearly and convincingly demonstrate the usefulness of the workshops for participants. Many newcomer workers in our workshops told us that they do not learn about health and safety rights, workers compensation, or resources available from any other source. The number of newcomer workers reached indirectly through this project is estimated to be a significant number of the newcomer workforce in the region’s industry.

Workshop participants repeatedly expressed concern over line speed, a poor job rotation system, and harassment in the workplace. Participants gave many examples of being discouraged from making workers compensation claims by their employer. A very significant number of workers do not report injuries or concerns at work because of their fear of being terminated, fear of retaliation, or fear of harassment. In addition to language barriers, the reality of their precarious employment in Canada prevents newcomer workers from speaking up. In the case of temporary foreign workers, they risk deportation if their employment relationship breaks down for any reason. Many newcomer workers are skeptical of unions, the Workers Compensation Board and other organizations often because they have reported their concerns to the appropriate organizations, but no actions were taken to correct them.

A number of workers have already benefitted from attending one of the workshops provided through this project. These workers have now received necessary medical

attention, made workers compensation claims or appeals, and received assistance from their union and other resources.

Training in their own language by someone with experience in the food processing industry is an effective approach according to many of the workers who participated in this project.

This project proposes a number of recommendations to address the health and safety of newcomer workers in the food processing industry including: continued and multi-year support for training initiatives with newcomer workers; the need to address issues that have been repeatedly brought forward in this industry in order to build the trust and confidence of newcomer workers in existing health and safety organizations and systems; continued improvement and expansion of interpretation and translation services at Workers Compensation Board; a multi-lingual awareness campaign to inform workers of their right to report injuries and the role of the Compliance Unit at WCB; and the development of methods of investigation around claim suppression that do not involve the need for workers to make complaints.

## INTRODUCTION

Through this project, “*First Language Health & Safety Training for Newcomers*”, the Occupational Health Centre (OHC) worked in partnership with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Training Centre to deliver a Train the Trainer Program and first language workshops on Workplace Health and Safety for newcomer workers in the food processing industry in Brandon and Neepawa.

The goal of the project was to increase knowledge, understanding and awareness about workplace health and safety among Temporary Foreign Workers and other newcomers in the food processing industry.

In Manitoba, large food processing plants in Brandon and Neepawa employ a large number of newcomer workers, including hundreds of Temporary Foreign Workers, usually with limited English language ability and with limited rights and protections under the current Temporary Foreign Worker Program. Work permits tie Temporary Foreign Workers to a single employer, leaving them vulnerable to employer abuse and likely to stay in jobs even when the job might be causing injuries or illness. Temporary foreign workers face a number of barriers to enforcing their rights (Faraday, 2012). These barriers include: lack of knowledge about rights, including the right to refuse unsafe work; lack of training; and according to the report prepared by Tony Dean, Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health & Safety in Ontario, “being unable to exercise rights or raise health and safety concerns for fear of losing one’s job, or in some cases, being deported.” (Dean Report, 2010).

Workers in the meat and poultry processing industry suffer a high rate of many types of injuries and illnesses, most often musculoskeletal disorders due to the repetitive motions involved with processing meat (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005). In this industry workers are pressured to work as fast as possible to process the largest volume possible. Long hours with repetitive tasks lead to high rates of injury. Many workers report working in constant pain.

This project “*First Language Health & Safety Training for Newcomers*” trained and coordinated the work of 14 trainers from five language/cultural groups to

deliver workshops on *Health & Safety Rights & Resources* to their coworkers in the food processing industry in their first languages.

## **PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

### **Recruitment of Trainers**

In consultation with the UFCW 832, the union representing workers in the food processing industry in the Westman Region, the Project Coordinator recruited trainers from the following five cultural/language communities with large numbers of workers in the industry:

- Chinese (Mandarin-speaking)
- Indian (Hindi-speaking)
- Latin American (Spanish-speaking)
- Ukrainian (Russian-Ukrainian speaking)
- Filipino (from Neepawa Tagalog-speaking)

The Project Coordinator interviewed potential trainers and selected three trainers from each of the above five communities for a total of 15 trainers. All of the trainers were individuals that speak English and one of the newcomer languages, but they also were currently employed or had been employed at meat processing facilities. This gave them a very in-depth understanding of the issues that workers face in these facilities.

One trainer dropped out of the Train the Trainer Program after the first session, leaving a total of 14 trainers who successfully completed the program.

### **Train the Trainer Program**

The Train the Trainer Program on Workplace Health & Safety consisted of series of five Saturday full day sessions on the following topics:

#### **Introduction to First Language Health & Safety Training for Newcomers in the Food Processing Industry Program**

Participants were introduced to the Occupational Health Centre as an organization, the structure and content of the Train the Trainer Program, as well as their role and responsibilities as future Trainers for the program. Delivered by OHC Project Coordinator.

#### **Workplace Health & Safety Rights**

Participants learned about health and safety rights and responsibilities provided by Manitoba's Workplace Safety & Health Act, including the employer's

responsibility for health and safety, the role of workplace health and safety committees, and how to refuse unsafe work. Delivered by OHC Health Educator.

### **Identifying Hazards in the Workplace**

Participants learned about the different types of occupational health hazards in the workplace: physical, chemical, biological, work design, and stress. Participants completed hazard maps, a visual tool to help identify the types of hazards in their own workplace/work area. Participants also learned about a basic framework to control hazards: at the source, along the path, and at the worker, and discussed examples of these types of controls and the advantages and disadvantages of each. Delivered by OHC Occupational Health Nurse.

### **Common Repetitive Strain Injuries**

Participants engaged in body mapping to help identify their aches, pains and discomfort caused by work. Since all participants work in the food processing industry, it provides a group portrait of body parts affected in this type of work. Participants learned about the common types of repetitive strain injuries and how they are caused. Delivered by OHC Physician & Ergonomist.

### **Ergonomics**

Participants learned about ergonomic hazards: force, repetition, awkward posture, static work, vibration and contact stress. They learned about ways to use ergonomics to prevent repetitive strain injuries, using the hierarchy of controls discussed in the Identifying Hazards section. Delivered by OHC Ergonomist.

### **Mental Health**

Participants learned about mental health in the workplace, symptoms of poor mental health and strategies for maintaining positive mental health. Delivered by staff from Mental Health Program, Prairie Mountain Health.

### **Role of the Union in Workplace Health & Safety**

A representative from the participants' union discussed the role of the union in dealing with health and safety in the workplace, how workers should bring health and safety concerns forward to their union, and how the union works towards addressing these concerns. Delivered by UFCW 832 Health & Safety Director.

### **Community Resources**

Participants learned about the resources available on workplace health and safety in the community, including government resources. Delivered by Project Coordinator.

### **Workers Compensation System**

Participants learned about the workers compensation system, how to report injuries and common difficulties encountered by newcomers making compensation claims. Participants also learned about resources to assist workers making or appealing claims. Delivered by staff from Worker Advisor Office & Worker Advocate Centre.

### **Human Rights in the Workplace**

Participants learned about discrimination and harassment as well as about the protected characteristics covered by the Manitoba Human Rights Code. Participants also learned about how to deal with sexual, racial and other forms of harassment in the workplace. Video presentation by staff from the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

### **Role & Importance of Interpretation for Newcomer Workers**

Participants learned about the role and importance of interpretation for newcomer workers as well as local resources available to access interpreters. Delivered by staff from Brandon Community Language Centre.

### **Adult Education**

Participants learned about how adults learn and the principles of adult education. Delivered by staff from Westman Immigrant Services.

### **Workshop Planning**

Participants developed plans for the workshops they will deliver to their coworkers in their first language. They also had the opportunity to practice delivering a workshop and received feedback about the delivery. Delivered by OHC Health Educator & Project Coordinator.

Evaluations of the Train the Trainer Program were very positive:

All 14 trainers reported that the training program greatly increased their knowledge of workplace health and safety (all rated it five on a five-point scale).

All 14 trainers reported that the information from the program will be very useful for their community (all rated it five on a five-point scale).

Some evaluation comments included:

*“All the information that I got will be useful for my community because I know that there are so many people at my workplace that don't know the right information.”*

*“I have learned more than I expected.”*

*“Thank you so much for letting me be a part of this wonderful experience.”*

*“You guys are awesome for taking the time and the effort to find ways to help every community.”*

One trainer suggested that we add a session on conflict resolution to the Train the Trainer Program.

### **First Language Health & Safety Workshops for Newcomer Workers**

Workshops for newcomer workers delivered by Trainers in first language were designed to be in small groups with a number of interactive activities, allowing participants to explore the complex issues related to health and safety in the food processing industry in some detail. Workshops generally last for two hours and include the following topics:

- Workers' Health & Safety Rights and Responsibilities
- What do if you are injured at work & the Workers Compensation System
- Community Resources Available on Workplace Health & Safety

In Brandon the workshops were held at the UFCW Training Centre and in Neepawa, some of the workshops were held at the Neepawa Settlement Services Office and others were held at the Viscount Cultural Centre.

Trainers delivered 16 workshops over the duration of the project in five different languages, directly reaching a total of 160 workers.

In her other part-time position as a translator with UFCW in Brandon, The Project Coordinator shared information from the workshops with approximately two workers every day in that role. We estimate that to be an additional 272 workers who have benefitted from this project. In addition, the Project Coordinator had many workers who did not attend workshops approach her after the workshops to report that they had heard about the information covered during the workshop.

Due to this feedback, we can confidently estimate the numbers of workers indirectly reached through the workshops to be significant. The combined newcomer workforce in the food processing industry in both Brandon and Neepawa is approximately 2,185. Based on evaluations of our similar workshops in Winnipeg, workers normally share the information from the workshop with approximately five other people in their family, workplace or wider community. This would result in reaching an estimated total of 800 newcomers with information on workers' health and safety through this project, a significant number of the combined newcomer workforce in the region's industry.

In post workshop evaluations, participants reported the following:

- 100% of all workshop participants reported that they learned new information about their health & safety rights at work.
- 96% of all workshop participants reported that they know where to go for help if they have a health & safety problem following the workshop.
- 99.5% of all workshop participants reported that they feel more confident to protect their health and safety at work following the workshop.

These overwhelmingly positive evaluations clearly and convincingly demonstrate the usefulness of the workshops for participants. Many newcomer workers in our workshops told us that they do not learn about health and safety rights, workers compensation or resources available from any other source.

### **Promotion of Project**

The project was initially promoted on OHC's website and in both OHC's newsletter and the UFCW Local 832 news magazine. Following the completion of the Train the Trainer Program at the end of June, OHC posted a project update on our website and both OHC and UFCW Local 832 published articles in our fall 2015 newsletters.

The Project Coordinator has worked closely with settlement facilitators at Westman Immigrant Services as well as with representatives of the United Food & Commercial Workers to promote the Health & Safety workshops and recruit participants. The Project Coordinator also met with Klinik staff in Brandon and has

started sharing information from Klinik about mental health services and counselling phone lines in the workshops.

OHC has also promoted many of the project activities on our Facebook page throughout the project.

The Project Coordinator made a presentation about the achievements of the project to date at the Occupational Health Centre's Annual General Meeting on June 29, 2016.

In addition, the Project Coordinator was invited to participate on a Community Advisory Board for a study out of the University of Saskatchewan entitled "***Social Determinants of Health among Migrant Workers in Saskatchewan***" to share our experience with migrant workers in Manitoba. The Project Coordinator offers the Advisory Board the experience of Temporary Foreign Workers in Manitoba in regards to access to health, housing, working conditions, and support services. To date the Advisory Board has met twice.

A Celebration and Community Report Back was held on November 19, 2016 in Brandon to share and celebrate what has been achieved through this project with the Trainers, health and safety committee members, union, community partners, and funders of this project. Those in attendance expressed their appreciation and support of the project and encouraged the Occupational Health Centre to continue this work. One of the trainers in attendance at the event thanked the OHC for taking the time to report on and to celebrate the work they did with this project. According to this trainer, "*Working in the food processing industry is like working for a big monster. Our contributions and efforts are rarely acknowledged. Thank you for including us in this event. We feel very proud of the work we have achieved through this project.*"

A final article on the project's achievements will be published in the upcoming March 2017 edition of the OHC newsletter, as well as the UFCW newsletter.

## **CHALLENGES**

### **Weather/Season**

In the summer, many workers in the Spanish-speaking community play organized soccer so the Trainers had to ensure that they scheduled workshops at different times that did not conflict with soccer matches.

Workshops in the winter also presented challenges for most of the communities as newcomer workers preferred not to attend extra activities during the winter months due to cold weather.

### **Overtime**

While the Project Coordinator and Trainers tried to plan workshops on weekends where no overtime was scheduled, at times the schedule changed and workers were required or chose to work overtime instead of attend the workshop. This had a serious impact on the project and resulted in the need to cancel workshops on two occasions.

### **Community-Specific Issues**

The Russian/Ukrainian trainers were not able to successfully organize workshops with their community members for this project. Some of the reasons offered for this appear to be particular to this community and may involve a lack of trust and confidence in their coworkers and in community organizations in general.

### **Workshop Venue in Neepawa**

It was a challenge to find a venue for the workshops in Neepawa. In Brandon workshops were held at the UFCW Training Centre. In Neepawa, workshops were held at Neepawa Settlement Services offices but since they are closed on Saturday, they were not always available. For the other workshops the project rented a classroom at the Viscount Cultural Centre.

### **Lack of Confidence in Organizations**

Many newcomer workers are skeptical of unions, WCB and other organizations often because they have reported their concerns to the appropriate organizations,

but no actions were taken to correct them. This also created challenges in recruiting workshop participants from some of the cultural groups.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY CONCERNS OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

During the workshops participants often mentioned their concerns over line speed, a poor job rotation system, and harassment. Workshop participants in Brandon report that they are treated disrespectfully by the nurses at the company health unit and nurses and supervisors discourage them from reporting their injuries to WCB because they say that it is a long and complicated process. They also discourage them from going to their family doctor. Instead they encourage them to find other ways to address their injury through offering workers light duties, different rotations, or even time off the lines. Participants in the workshops also express frustration that when they report a health and safety concern to their employer, it is not resolved.

Workshop participants in Neepawa had questions about their health and wellness benefits with their employer and the Trainers were able to provide this information.

Throughout the project, the Project Coordinator has also provided one on one support to 10 newcomer workers that have a work-related injury, including helping them access workers' compensation.

## **SUCCESS STORIES**

A number of workers have already benefitted as a direct result of having attended one of the health and safety workshops provided through this project. For example (names changed to protect confidentiality):

**Pedro** was injured due to the repetitive nature of his job. Even though he had worked for over seven years in the same job, he didn't know how to report his injury and when he did, his claim was denied. Pedro has now appealed the WCB decision with the assistance of the Worker Advisor Office in Brandon and is also being assisted by one of the doctors at the Occupational Health Centre.

**Marta** has been in Canada for over 11 years and has worked for the same employer the entire time. She had an accident at work and injured her shoulder.

Even though there were several witnesses, the employer denied the injury was work related. WCB also denied the claim. Marta was unaware that she could appeal the decision or apply for Employment Insurance while she was out of work and without WCB coverage. When Marta attended one of the workshops in Spanish, she asked many questions. Trainers referred her to the Worker Advisor Office and she is now waiting for the appeal decision. She was also referred to her union and is now back to work with restrictions.

**Ana** has been working at a meat processing plant for the last three years. She suffers from back pain that is not work-related and she did not know that she could be accommodated for something that is not work-related. Ana needed to take some time off work to deal with her health problem, but she didn't want to take the time because she knew that she could not receive workers compensation for something that is not work-related. After attending a workshop in Spanish through this project, she was referred to her union representative and to Service Canada where she could apply for Employment Insurance.

**Boris** had been suffering with a back ache for a long time but did not report it right away to avoid problems with his employer. He took a few days off work but did not report it as work-related. An OHC Trainer heard about his case and approached him. She explained to him about workers compensation and the importance of reporting it as work-related. She referred him to the Workers Compensation Board. After several questions from WCB and his employer, his claim was approved and he was paid for the two weeks he was off work. Boris returned to work with restrictions and after a couple of months he was back on regular duties.

**Juan** was not feeling well for some time but was unsure if his condition was related to work. Juan was referred to the Occupational Health Centre where he was seen by one of the doctors and continues to receive assistance with his health issue.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Many of the workshop participants expressed their support of having the workshops delivered by someone who has experience working in the food processing industry and can better understand and relate to their work and the challenges.

Training in their own language is extremely effective for newcomer workers. It allows workers to grasp the complex information involved in workplace health and safety to a much greater extent. It also helps newcomer workers express their own issues, questions, and concerns more extensively.

Newcomer workers in the food processing industry, especially temporary foreign workers lack information about health and safety and their rights. Many did not know important acronyms such as WCB, MSDS, WHMIS, and EI. Most newcomer workers did not know the importance of reporting injuries to WCB.

A very significant number of workers do not report injuries or concerns at work because of their fear of being terminated, fear of retaliation, or fear of harassment. According to union representatives interviewed, newcomer workers are far less likely to make a health and safety complaint than Canadian born workers in this industry.

It is important to stress that it is not just language barriers that prevent workers from speaking up, but the reality of their precarious employment in Canada. In the case of temporary foreign workers, they risk deportation if their employment relationship breaks down for any reason. Most of these workers have made exceptional efforts to come to Canada; most of them financially support their families in their home countries; some of them had given up lifelong jobs or their education in order to offer a better life for their families. The reality for these workers in their home countries is difficult, thus to be terminated and deported is something that impacts their whole family.

## **REFLECTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS**

The following statements have been submitted to OHC from various stakeholders involved over the two years of this project.

*"Health and safety should always be one of the most important issues for all workers. Having the program delivered in their first language helps the new workers better understand their rights and where and when to ask for help. Many newcomers fear that if they speak up about safety issues they will lose their job. By having their rights explained in their language and not lost in translation also benefits others who may not*

*have had the opportunity to have the training as the informed trained worker will be there to help."*

Susan Norman  
Brandon and District Worker Advocacy Centre

*"In May 2015 I was pleased to facilitate a workshop for the program participants on some specific skills and strategies for teaching adults. The participants were all very responsive, and I thoroughly enjoyed being even a small part of this project. I believe that empowering people by furthering their knowledge and being able to transmit that knowledge in first language is an incredible opportunity that should be undertaken as often as possible. This program allowed the participants, who went on to be trainers, and those whom they trained, to better understand their rights and responsibilities as workers. The fact this could be done in first language by the trainers participating in this program increased understanding and a sense of responsibility and self-efficacy in the workplace. I feel the First Language Health and Safety Training for Newcomers in the Food Processing Industry was a valuable program for everyone involved."*

Angela Mowbray  
ESL program coordinator  
Westman Immigrant Services

*"I am glad to see the First Language Health and Safety Training for Newcomers program successfully complete in February this year. The program aims to improve Manitoba workplace health and safety among newcomers workers in the food processing industry.*

*It is also exciting to see a monumental step to achieve the Occupational Health Centre's goal of increasing the health and safety knowledge and educating on prevention for vulnerable workers in their first language."*

Lin Lin  
UFCW Local 832  
Westman Training Coordinator

*“It is very important for newcomers to have information on WCB, Workplace Health and Safety, Occupational Health Center. In their workplaces they only tell them the bare minimum. Most newcomers think that WCB and their STD benefits are the same thing and don’t understand they need to report all accidents whether big or small because it may come back on them later in life. Newcomers need to know that there are the resources to help them through their injuries or hurting bodies. Awareness is a good thing in the communities and this program has done that and then each person can share with their families.”*

Brenda Brown  
Union Representative  
UFCW L  
Local 832

*“Hundreds of newcomers are working in the food processing industry. Delivery of the Health and Safety training/workshop in their first language is very beneficial to newcomers, in ensuring that they gain full understanding of the content of the workshops. Participants are also made to feel comfortable asking questions in their own language. Technical terms may be new to them, even symbols used in signs. Having presenters/facilitators who speak their first language make learning easier, and retention of learning greater.*

*Also, this workshop sends a positive message to newcomers that organizations care for their health and safety, and are with them in their goal of becoming successful in their new community. All that they learn from the training are not only useful in the workplace but also in their safety in their personal life, and when shared with friends and families, could impact the lives of more people.”*

Joy Escalera  
Manager, Settlement Services  
Westman Immigrant Services

*“Having the opportunity to work in this project has been a tremendous learning opportunity for me; I now have a better understanding of the way each of these communities deal with the issues at work and how they support each other. I learned that newcomer workers lack information on Health and Safety and community resources that are available to them and that the fear of being terminated and deported prevents workers from exercising their rights. For newcomers the information is particularly crucial because they are indeed an extremely vulnerable sector; we must educate them to stand up for their rights, but we must also ensure that workers feel supported by our organizations and that they feel safe. This project has not only provided important information to the workers, but has also allowed them to network with their own community and to strength their support circle. It has sent a message to the newcomer community in the Westman region: they are not alone, there are organizations that care about them and their wellbeing. Thank you for such an amazing project that will impact our entire community.”*

Claudia Colocho  
OHC Project Coordinator

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In our experience, community-based organizations are in the best position to reach vulnerable groups of workers. Through this project, and with the support of the Research & Workplace Innovation Program of the Workers Compensation Board, OHC has been able to expand our work with newcomer workers outside of Winnipeg in the food processing industry. However, this work requires a multi-year, sustained approach and RWIP projects are limited to two year periods. OHC presents the following recommendations connected to and arising out of our work in this project:

1. The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba’s Research Workplace and Innovation Program should maintain a strong focus on training for newcomer workers.

2. Multi-year funding for community organizations, such as the Occupational Health Centre, should be provided to deliver training and other services to newcomer workers.
3. Unions, the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba, Workplace Safety & Health, OHC, and other organizations must work toward building trust with newcomer workers by addressing the issues that they bring forward. Many of the health and safety issues in the food processing industry have persisted for several years without being resolved.
4. The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba should continue to improve interpretation and translation services provided for newcomer workers and ensure that newcomer workers who need interpretation are accessing it. The Workers Compensation Board's translated informational materials and forms should be distributed well beyond the WCB website, in workplaces and community settings with large newcomer populations.
5. The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba should develop methods to investigate reports of claims suppression, and workers being penalized and/or dismissed due to injury claims, that do not involve the need for workers to make complaints. This could be modeled after the Manitoba Employment Standard's proactive Special Investigations Unit that identifies industries and workplaces at risk of non-compliance and conducts detailed investigations that do not rely primarily on worker complaints.
6. The Workers Compensation Board should implement an awareness campaign to inform workers of their right to report injuries, what to do if they are penalized, the role of the Compliance Unit and how to contact it. This campaign and its materials should be delivered in multiple languages.

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