

connecting across the miles

Grief, injury and disease can all be very isolating. Threads of Life family members cope with the realities of emotional and physical distance every day. In this issue we explore how distance has affected Threads of Life members' experience of tragedy, and how we can reach across distance to connect and support one another.



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Bill Stunt

These past months we've all developed a new appreciation of distance. We've been forced to be apart from friends and loved ones, but distance has helped keep us safe from illness. Technology and conscious effort have helped us stay connected. The realities of distance are nothing new to many Threads of Life members. As the

stories and reflections in this issue reveal, distance is ambivalent – it can be a positive or a negative force. What we do know is that human connection is vital for all of us. In these difficult times, let's each make an effort to help ourselves and to help others by reaching out – get involved in the new National Virtual Family Forum, call your Volunteer Family Guide, write a letter to that family member you met at a Forum years ago. It's time to connect.

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A lesson in perspective

Space, time and emotions play a role in recovery from serious injuries.

by **Russell Claus**

There are many ways to think about and understand the concept of “distance.” It can speak to measurable things like space and time, but also more abstract concepts such as emotion.

Our relationship with distance, too, is as varied as its forms. Sometimes we wish for less distance, sometimes we need more; an inch can be the threshold between life and death; a hundred miles may separate you from salvation. For me, ten years ago on a hot day in July, distance played all these roles.

The first thing that comes to mind when I think back to my accident and the role that distance played is obvious. Because we’d been travelling down a logging road with posted kilometer markers, I know that it was at exactly the 56.5 km mark on the Babine Lake forest service road in northern BC, that I was run over by a work truck, shattering my pelvis. That meant it was 56.5 km of logging road, plus a further 7 km of highway, for a total of 63.5 km, from where I lay broken and bloody under a truck, to the nearest hospital in Smithers, BC.

The distances related to my accident were not only agonizingly long, but also miraculously short. It was only by a matter of inches that the truck tire, centred on my hips as it rolled over my body, missed my spine and organs such as my liver and spleen, which could have left me paralyzed or dead in the back of a truck from internal bleeding, somewhere on that 63.5 km drive to the hospital. Distance can have a sense of irony too, as I couldn’t possibly have been closer to our designated emergency transport vehicle (which contained all the rescue equipment necessary to evacuate me), as it was in fact



Russell leads the crew in an evacuation drill not long before his own injury;

the vehicle that ran me over.

Importantly, surviving a workplace accident takes more than medical care; it also requires emotional and mental support. My greatest source of emotional support at the time was my fiancée, who was back at our home in Victoria, BC, over 1000 km away. I can’t clearly recall exactly when she showed up at my hospital bedside, bringing with her a sense of relief I could never put into words, but I do vividly recall how painfully lonely I was before she was able to cross that distance.

And then there is distance as in time. There was a long way for me to go to get back on my

Distance can have a sense of irony too, as I couldn’t possibly have been closer to our designated emergency transport vehicle ... as it was in fact the vehicle that ran me over.

feet: seven months of recovery including two reconstructive surgeries, and dozens of smaller procedures before I was able to walk and to work again.

Although this may seem like a meaningless jumble about how distance – be it near and far, short and long, or quick and slow – can

be good, bad, or ugly ... there is meaning in the chaos and, perhaps, a lesson. After tragedy strikes, like my accident, and the accidents of so many other workers and workers’ families, we often find ourselves agonizing over “what ifs,” and distance can play a central role in that.

What if I had been a few feet to the left, what if there had been more space for the truck on the logging road pullout where I was crushed, what if we had been closer to town? But as we have seen, there is no clear way to tell for certain how distance may help or hinder. Maybe if I had been a few feet to the left, a different part of my body would have been run over instead, with a much worse outcome. Maybe if the time it took for me to recover to my new normal was shorter, I would have been left with more permanent limitations. Just like in reality, in the “what if” fantasy world, it is impossible to know in what ways shorter or longer or nearer or farther could have changed the outcome.

And so, the lesson I have taken from the seeming randomness of how different forms of distance played positive and negative roles in my experience with workplace tragedy, has been one of acceptance. It is a lesson in perspective that has helped me come to terms with what happened, how it happened, and to recognize that even if I could go back and change things, like the distances involved, I could never be certain in what ways that ultimately would have made things better or possibly worse.

Distance brings heartbreak and gratitude

Jordan was working 3,000 km away from home and family

by **Leica Gahan**



Jordan loved racing and built his first racecar when he was 17.

On Friday, March 14, 2014, the most terrible thing happened to my beautiful family. My 21-year-old son Jordan Gahan died in a workplace accident in Firebag, Alberta. He left behind three brothers, mom and dad, grandparents, family, and friends. Most of these people lived in Fredericton, NB, over 3,000 kilometres away.

As a mother all I could think of was my son was all alone. He was on a worksite with people who became his family, but he fought for his life alone and he was lying deceased all alone. We were told that his body would remain at the Northern Lights Hospital in Fort McMurray for the next two days and would be transferred to a funeral home on Monday morning. He was alone when he died, and he was alone now. I had to put my faith in other people to tend to my son and to his needs and I was thousands of miles away broken to the core.

We contacted our funeral home in Fredericton, and they coordinated all the arrangements to have my son transported to Fredericton. He was flown home in the belly of an Air Canada jet and arrived late Thursday afternoon in Halifax, NS. His body was picked up by our local funeral home and brought to Fredericton. I saw my son that night for the very first time.

Jordan and I had talked daily, and we had our last conversation the afternoon that he died. I never dreamed that this would be our last conversation but as with all my conversations with him, I always told him that I loved him, that I was proud of him and to always work safely. He was looking

forward to coming home in just a few days.

Jordan was operating an excavator at the bottom of a borrow pit when the excavator suddenly fell through the ice. With 12.5 feet of frigid water between the cab of the excavator and the surface, Jordan got out of the vehicle, but was not able to reach the top in time. His hard hat floated up to the top and then his body. Jordan drowned that dreadful day.

... as with all my conversations with him, I always told him that I loved him, that I was proud of him and to always work safely. He was looking forward to coming home in just a few days.

The shock of losing my son was unbelievable. Friday, March 14, 2014 will always be the worst day of my life. There will never be a more terrible day for me. The next few days were consumed with preparing for his arrival from Alberta, preparing for his visitation and funeral and visiting with thousands of people that were around our family to console and comfort us during the most difficult time in our lives. We were so blessed with so many people to help us and comfort us. Jordan's employer coordinated the transportation of his personal belongings from his camp room to

Fredericton and his roommates took care of transporting his belongings from his apartment to Fredericton. His personal belongings were very important to me, but it would have been heartbreaking for me to have to retrieve them myself. I will always be grateful for those that helped us during that time. His personal belongings were stored for many years but over the last year, I have organized them, and they are in my new home and bring comfort to me.

When I reflect on the impact distance had on my son's death, I have mixed emotions. I am thankful that my son's body was brought back to his home in New Brunswick safely. I am thankful that his employer helped with his personal belongings and provided support to our family. I am thankful to the lead investigator for keeping me informed of all developments in my son's case every step of the way. She treated me with compassion and love. I had documented every milestone in his life, and I would not stop until I had all the details of his death as well. I am thankful and grateful for Threads of Life and my family support person that called me faithfully every Wednesday. She reassured me and helped me so much. I am thankful for Alberta WCB for their compassion. I am thankful that I could attend the sentencing hearing in Calgary, Alberta two years after my son died.

Distance was very difficult in the beginning, but I am thankful for the gracious and kind people in Alberta and New Brunswick that helped us during a very difficult time. Their kindness and love extended to our family will never be forgotten.



Participants connect at the first Family Forum in 2005.

Reaching out across the distance

by **Shirley Hickman**, Executive Director

‘Physical distance’ and ‘social distance’ are two terms we have been hearing a lot about lately in reference to the pandemic.

Our Threads of Life family members are quite used to both kinds of distance, in different ways. When Tim died, our family felt very alone. We had read about other industrial ‘accidents’ but didn’t know where those folks were. We felt the strain on our friends and there developed a social distance between our family and their family. They wanted to provide support, but as time went on, many didn’t know how.

As many of you know there is distance from the time of the incident, through the investigation and the legal process. There were times during those early years it felt like I was standing still in time, yet our friends had many things happening in their lives and that too became a loss.

Then with a lot of community support, Threads of Life came to be. The physical distance between each of our families is evident and I wondered how, with the geography of Canada, would we be able to learn from each other, support each other and become one organization? It truly did not take long. At our very first Family Forum, a dad from near Victoria, BC attended. His son had worked in the logging industry in British Columbia. At the same event a mom

from Cornerbrook, NL attended. Her son worked as an ironworker in Alberta and Northwest Territories. The two parents met during a session on parent grief and realized that while they lived on opposite sides of this great country, the deaths of their children affected them similarly and yet differently. In the session, they discovered both sons were named Greg. What is that chance? Over the next number of years, these two parents found comfort by being able to share stories not just of their sons, but of their family and their lives.

Volunteer Family Guides provide this long-distance support to family members regularly. We try to match these volunteers to family members with a somewhat similar situation: widow to widow, dad to dad, sibling to sibling, or sometimes the match is by workplace sector. It’s always a good match if the two individuals live within driving distance and can get together, perhaps over a coffee, to share experiences of the tragedy, the challenges and frustrations of the investigation or the legal system, and what else is happening in their lives. But often, we match people who live far apart, and these connections happen by phone and email. Whether in person or by phone, many of these relationships move beyond peer support to friendship.

When they attend a Family Forum, I get to witness that bond. That hug when they greet each other – maybe in person for the first time – provides so much support without words. The physical distance of

their daily lives melts away. It is as if they always knew each other. And for a moment in time they are able to laugh, cry and know that despite the pain they are both feeling, they will enjoy this companionship. I see it over and over – despite distance in age, gender, and socio-economic settings. What is the one thing that bonds them together?

Now 2020 brings new meaning to ‘physical distancing’. It meant that Threads of Life can not hold our traditional Family Forums. It was so difficult for me to come to terms with cancelling those events. We had to have something we could do to support our members. Some of you may not know that our staff already work from home offices, scattered through the time zones from coast to coast. We had learned over the years how to work well as a team and we came together to create the opportunity for our family community to support each other through a virtual Family Forum, with a series of web-based sessions. It will not be the same for sure, but certainly an opportunity to remind ourselves we are not walking alone, but with hundreds of others hoping for similar personal healing and avenues to decrease the number of workplace tragedies.

Many Threads of Life family members connect via the phone, text or Facebook through the year. They send notes, photos and messages to each other, click a ‘like’ on a photo shared, post a birthday or an anniversary of the tragedy date, or share celebration of a birthday, wedding, new babies being born. They have become a community of support. Many have their Volunteer Family Guide, the newsletter, participate in Steps for Life – Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy, look forward to seeing each other at Family Forums or training events.

They have developed a community of support – like an extended family. Many say it is ‘a new family’. They have a listening ear no matter where they live. What is missing? That in-person hug. How can we re-create the hug? We reach out and say ‘I miss you’, ‘I am here if you want to talk’. We stand at a distance or in front of a webcam and extend our arms.

Physical distance is something Threads of Life is used to working around, although the pandemic certainly pushes it to new levels. As a community of support we know this pandemic too shall pass and we will look forward to seeing each other and continuing the community that works together for the prevention of workplace tragedies. In the meantime, the pandemic has not stopped us from providing care and comfort to each other. I invite you to be intentional in reaching out to the family members you have met over the years. Let them know you are thinking of them, the stories they have shared, and we too shall meet in the near future.



Shirley Hickman

2019 Volunteer Awards

At the Closing and Next Steps session during the National Virtual Family Forum, we will honour the recipients of our Threads of Life volunteer awards for 2019:

A COMMUNITY BOARD MEMBER OF THREADS OF LIFE

Wally Power

A PARTNER OF THREADS OF LIFE

Infrastructure Health and Safety Association

A FRIEND OF THREADS OF LIFE

Wes Mazur - Grand River OHS
 Roger Tickner - Tickner & Associates
 Halifax Water
 EACOM
 OPG Pickering

PROGRAM ADVANCEMENT IN FAMILY SUPPORT

Tami Helgeson
 Donna Van Bruggen

PROGRAM ADVANCEMENT IN COMMUNITY ACTION

Donna Jorgenson
 Dermott Barrett
 Bill Bowman
 Shannon Kempton
 Alex Tuff

Threads of Life
 volunteers gave



8,200+
 hours in 2019



Coming Together even when we're apart

NATIONAL VIRTUAL FAMILY FORUM, OCTOBER 17-NOVEMBER 21, 2020

This year's Family Forums take place online; a blend of the new and the familiar. Our virtual Family Forum will begin as always with a Reflections Ceremony – a chance for each participant to honour their experience of workplace tragedy. Learning sessions will include Diving into Grief and Loss, Supporting Mental Wellness Through Grief and Trauma, and Giving Gratitude and Finding Your Hope in Loss, plus a closing session. Register for free online, and participate via Zoom. No matter where you are in Canada, we've tried to provide sessions that will fit your needs and schedule.

by **Karen Lapierre Pitts, Family Support Manager**

Elisa Kilbourne, a Threads of Life member from London, Ontario, tells a lovely story about her first trip to a Family Forum (see her volunteer profile in this issue).

"The moment I arrived in the parking lot I sat and cried," she says, "trying to figure out if I could really handle this emotional situation, let alone in the presence of strangers. Then, I heard a knock on my window and a woman was standing there who was also attending the Forum. She asked me if she could sit with me and then we went in to register together."

I don't know who that family member was, but this moving story doesn't surprise me one bit – Threads of Life members are always there for each other. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken many things away from us, but it has not taken that – we can still be there to listen and support each other, even when we have to be apart physically.

That's why I'm excited about our new project this fall – our first national, online Family Forum. As the limitations of the pandemic continued through the spring and summer, we decided that in-person Family Forums just didn't make sense. We couldn't risk having people travel and meet together in person, even with precautions in place. Instead, we're doing our very best to move the Forums online

and still offer the things that our Family Forums always do – chances to learn new coping skills, share experiences, honour our lives as injured or ill workers and our loved ones, and be there for each other.

You can read more in these pages about how the Forum will work, or go check out the web site at www.threadsoflife.ca/forum2020. We'll make it easy for anybody to join in – you don't have to be a computer whiz; you just need to have a computer or phone and internet access.

I wasn't at the very first Family Forum Threads of Life held in 2005, but I have heard some of the stories. It was a national event, and as the events grew larger and became regional, I know some of the families who met at that national event kept in touch even though they lived thousands of kilometres apart. Maybe the National Virtual Family Forum is a chance for them to see each other – via Zoom – once again. Even more exciting, the virtual Forum is an opportunity for people to participate who could never attend an in-person Forum because of personal or work commitments. It doesn't matter which corner of Canada you live in; everyone will have a chance to take part in the learning and support.

So, please have a look at the schedule and go register. We might not be together in person, but we can still go in to the Forum together.



NATIONAL VIRTUAL FAMILY FORUM (NVFF) HOW-TO

How to learn more: On the Threads of Life web site you can find the full agenda, descriptions of the sessions, biographies of the facilitators, and the link to register. Go to www.threadsoflife.ca/forum2020.

How to register: When you visit the web site, you'll see a button that says "Register to attend now". Click and you'll go to a form that will ask your name, contact information, and a bit of background about the tragedy that has affected you. You can also register other people in your household who will be attending. After you submit your registration (click the "Submit" button at the very bottom of the form) you will receive a confirmation by email.

How to choose your sessions: You can decide to attend only one session, or all of them. It's all free for Canadians affected by workplace tragedy. We will send you an email with more information, and a form to help you choose. Two sessions – the Reflections Ceremony at the beginning and the closing session at the end – are only offered once. All other sessions are offered at three different times to try to suit people's schedules and time zones. You can just click buttons on the form to tell us which sessions you plan to attend. Once you have registered for a session, please make sure to write it on your own calendar! *We have limited space, so we ask everyone who registers to please be sure to participate at their chosen time.* Let us know if you become unavailable as we will have a wait list.

How to prepare for the NVFF: When you attend a Family Forum in person, you have to take time away from your regular life. We try to build time for rest and reflection in to the schedule as well. With the NVFF, while each session may only take a couple of hours out of your day, we recommend you build in some self-care if you possibly can. Be mindful that the discussions can take an emotional toll and we

suggest you leave time for reflection afterwards.

How to prepare for the NVFF part 2: The National Virtual Family Forum is being offered through an online app called Zoom – it has become very popular these past few months and Threads of Life has been using it for staff and board meetings. To participate fully, you'll need a desktop or laptop computer or tablet with camera and microphone, and reasonably reliable internet. A cell phone can work, but the small screen makes it hard to see the workshop visuals. You can download Zoom in advance.

How to join a session: After you have chosen your sessions, we will email you a specific invitation, containing a link and a meeting ID number. The link will be different for each NVFF session. We recommend leaving yourself 15 minutes before the session starts to get online, particularly if you haven't used Zoom before. Click the link in the email. A box will appear that asks something like "Do you want to allow this page to open "zoom.us"? Click "Allow" and then click to allow the program to access your video and your microphone. You'll be placed in a virtual waiting room and the Threads of Life host will let you in before the session begins.

Once you're in the workshop, you can see other participants, talk to them, and use a chat box to type in comments. The facilitator may mute everyone's microphones during the session to limit background noise. We recommend your microphone be muted at all times unless you're talking.

It may sound complicated, but you can take it step by step. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Threads of Life by email at contact@threadsoflife.ca or by phone at 888-567-9490. We look forward to seeing you at the Forum!



Elisa Kilbourne

Elisa Kilbourne

She is a traveler.
She is a helper.
She is a lover of people.

by **Zaria Cornwall**
Content Specialist

Elisa is also a mother. One of her children, her son, Jeremy Bowley, died Aug. 1, 2013. He was working with a crew setting up a wedding tent on the rain-soaked lawn of a farmhouse, when a pole for the tent contacted an overhead power line.

We have the honour of telling her story and her journey as a volunteer with Threads of Life.

HOW DID YOU FIRST COME TO KNOW ABOUT THREADS OF LIFE?

I was talking with the Ministry of Labour about their package of information and brochure about Threads of Life. I was not in the right headspace as Jeremy was killed Aug 1 and we moved on Aug 31. I desperately needed help, someone I could talk to who would fully understand what I was going through, so I filled in the questionnaire. I immediately got a one-on-one match with a Volunteer Family Guide (VFG) and found out about the November Family Forum. It was coming up quickly so I signed up for that too.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR LOSS AND HOW FINDING THREADS OF LIFE HELPED YOU.

Jeremy died in a workplace tragedy, something that was 100 per cent preventable. Nothing made sense to me, and I had so many mixed feelings. My brain was foggy at that time, so learning about Threads of Life could have easily fallen through the cracks. I knew I was desperate for help and Threads of Life became my second family.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES IN THREADS OF LIFE.

When I decided that a VFG match would be helpful, the coordinator advised there was another mom whose son had died, that lived not far from me. I knew we would talk by phone so it provided privacy and the space I needed.

The first phone call was longer than intended and I did so much

crying because this mom and I understood one another. We connected instantly and that was such a relief. It felt like someone else, a mom, knows what I am really going through, and I could share all my emotional struggles with her. My family and friends are amazing, however they are not a mother whose son died; I shouldn't expect them to understand.

After a couple of months I attended the Family Forum. I hoped my daughter might come along since she lost her brother, however she was not ready, and I could not make her ready. My husband Karl is very supportive, but was unable to attend, so I went alone. The moment I arrived in the parking lot I sat and cried, trying to figure out if I could really handle this emotional situation, let alone in the presence of strangers. Then, I heard a knock on my window and a woman was standing there who was also attending the Forum. She asked me if she could sit with me and then we went in to register together.

That instant I realized this stranger wanted to be there for me during this difficult time. Initially I tried to protect myself but during the Forum I began to open up because I felt safe. The best part was being able to meet my VFG, and we finally got to hug.

A memorable moment for me at that Forum was when I heard the keynote speaker on the Saturday. It was so impactful, and I knew that I wanted to become a Speakers Bureau member. I was fortunate to meet Shirley Hickman this weekend, and since I was so lost with the legal side of things, Shirley offered to e-mail me information along with contacts following the Forum. It was amazing, I got more out of that one weekend than the three months since Jeremy's death.

WHEN DID YOU START VOLUNTEERING?

My volunteer journey began as the Family Spokesperson at the 2014 London Steps for Life Walk. This organization became my passion, so it was a no-brainer for me to help with London's Steps for Life and join the committee.

I quickly learned that Threads of Life has a support system for not only its family members, but also its volunteers and this was important to me. This led me to complete the Speakers Bureau training in 2016 and the Volunteer Family Guide Training in 2019.

WHY DO YOU VOLUNTEER FOR THREADS OF LIFE?

A few reasons -- Help, Impact and Educate. In 2014, I was the spokesperson who shared our story for the first time while Members of Parliament, along with my family, and walk participants listened. I could tell from the MPs' tears, they understood the anguish I was trying to express, and I hoped it could help lead to changes. This was a big moment for me. That same day, a gentleman told me his grandson had also been killed in a workplace tragedy and he said more people needed to hear my story so these deaths would end. The seed was planted, and I trained with the Speakers Bureau in January 2016.

I may never know if people are impacted by my talks, but I want to give Jeremy a voice and let people know about this organization. My goal is to speak with high school students to educate them; and although students might think I'm too passionate, they will be given the chance to hear they have rights and can refuse unsafe work I only wish Jeremy could have heard a similar message.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY ABOUT YOUR WORK AS A VOLUNTEER?

Oh my! I did VFG Training in February of 2019. I was matched soon after with a mom whose son had died, however she lives in a different province and I was concerned as to how this could work. The first call was heart-wrenching and the mom said to me that people will listen for the first bit, but after time, they get tired of hearing you talk about your dead child. This mom appreciated being able to talk to me about her son and as someone who knows the journey that lay ahead, I happily listened. Even more than that, I learned that we had a deeper connection as our boys share the same birth date and they were involved in similar career paths. It was an uncanny moment that assured me that I would be okay to support this mom.

HOW MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE HAVE YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP AS A VFG?

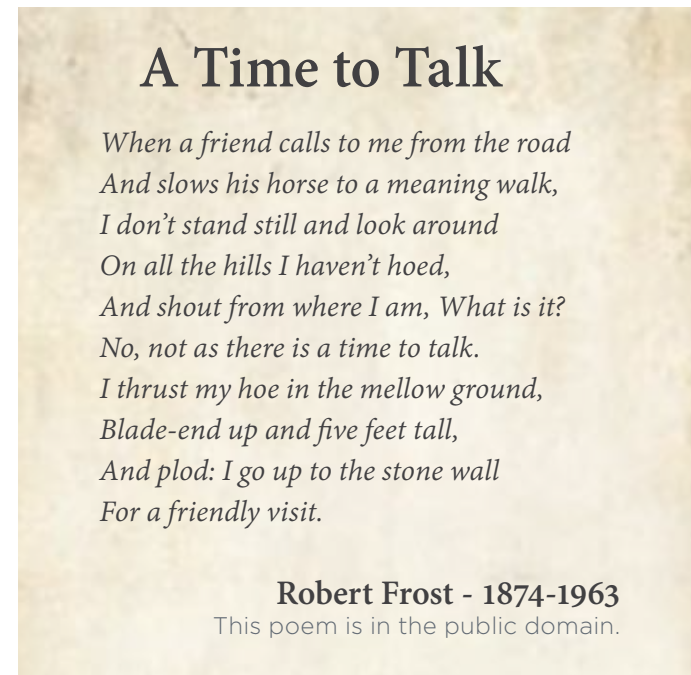
This is my first match since receiving training. I was worried at the beginning about who I could be matched with, however this mom and I are connected in so many ways. She knows I am just a message away.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES AND ADVANTAGES WITH TRYING TO SUPPORT SOMEONE FROM A DISTANCE?

It was not as hard as I thought. I still allowed myself to cry even though it was easy to hide behind the phone. I am a people-person so helping is not negative but rather quite therapeutic for me. The negatives never presented themselves like I thought they would. My hope is to one day meet this special mom.

WHAT OTHER COMMUNITY/VOLUNTEERING DO YOU DO?

Threads of Life is my main volunteering. But I have volunteered with the Canadian Cancer Society's Relay For Life; Ark Aid Street Mission; Salvation Army; Isaiah Project Mission trips and in various capacities with Western University.



Need a pair of work boots? Consider Mark's

If you're looking for a pair of antislip footwear, you might want to consider checking out Mark's. This large Canadian retailer will donate a portion of proceeds from the sales of the antislip Tarantula line of work boots. Look for our logo on the boot tag.

A portion of your boot purchase will be donated to Threads of Life.





The Newfoundland and Labrador Construction Safety Association (NLCSA) has reconfigured training rooms to allow physical distancing, and put in place other safety protocols as it re-opens

Every responsible business or organization has an emergency plan. Before March, probably few plans listed “pandemic” high in their risk assessment, but the practice of planning – identifying risk and finding ways to mitigate it – placed these companies in a good position to respond quickly when the COVID-19 emergency arrived. Threads of Life asked three of our board members – also business leaders – how their organizations handled the emergency and continue to manage health and safety in the time of COVID.

As emergencies were declared at every level across the country in March, businesses had to respond quickly. As a national organization, CannAmm Occupational Testing Services needed to juggle varying standards and restrictions in different jurisdictions. “We had our business continuity plan to rely on for guidance,” says CEO Peter Deines, “but ... we had to try and assess and analyse a tremendous amount of information that was changing rapidly, and make critical decisions.”

Jackie Manuel, CEO of Newfoundland and Labrador Construction Safety Association (NLCSA), was on vacation in Florida when the pandemic emergency was declared. She cut her vacation short and hurried back to manage the situation while in self-isolation at home. NLCSA was an essential service, but immediately ceased all in-person operations like safety training, auditing and general meetings.

At Leduc Group, a diversified North American construction company, employee groups were affected differently depending on the industry, geography and client expectations, says Senior Vice-President of Corporate Services, Sean Alger. Staff in corporate or branch offices moved quickly to home offices. “We used to be 99 per cent office based, and moved to 99 per cent work-from-home over night,” Alger says.

All three businesses worked to maintain continuity with staff working from home where possible, smaller teams where necessary, and some employees moving to the federal CERB (Canada Emergency Response Benefit) program at least temporarily.

For all three leaders, communication was top priority. “We focused on constant communication with all our employees, salaried and hourly, across North America, and daily meetings with our board of directors to ensure they were informed and aligned with our crisis response plans,” Alger says. Technology played an important role for all, including recorded video updates, group instant messages, conference calls and video meetings, intranet and email. But technology alone isn’t enough in an emergency. When faced with dramatic change,

Expecting the unexpected:

How priorities and planning helped three organizations manage the COVID crisis

employees need to know their leaders are responding and that people are their main concern. The three organizations took steps to protect not only employees’ physical health and safety, but their mental wellness too.

“Because I travel frequently for business, I had the tools and processes to serve many key functions of my role from home,” Deines says. “However, leaders need to be accessible and visible within their organizations, and that’s been more difficult. I believe that more frequent communications, and more casual communications helped bring some balance and levity within our environment.”

For NLCSA, staff were on rotation to work a shift each week in the office, to ensure the office could stay open but limit peoples’ exposure there. In addition to virtual meetings with those who were working and regular updates to those who were not, Manuel made sure to be in the office to spend time with each person “so I could physically see to their wellbeing.” In this stressful and anxious time, she adds “I think key was to acknowledge what people were experiencing, that it was not business as usual and there was no expectation of normal productivity.”

Many of the practices put in place to cope with the pandemic will continue or even be enhanced. At CannAmm, Deines says, “We’ve talked about anxiety, depression, and isolation, and promoted the resources for people to access if they need it. On an individual level, we’ve had open conversations with staff members about their wellbeing and provided customized supports where we could. Under the emerging ‘normal’, we’ll endeavor to maintain and, ideally, further our communications.” At NLCSA, on top of stepped-up communication – formal and informal – every employee had a mental health day in June. Meanwhile at Leduc, “we continue to communicate and provide training around mental health and encourage our leaders to virtually touch base and talk to their direct reports to understand how they’re coping and how we can better support them in these changing times,” Alger says.

As the economy re-opens and organizations resume operations, the three are adopting the highest standards they can to protect both employees and clients, including enhanced cleaning, minimized contact, physical distancing, PPE, barriers, and more.

The pandemic emergency has been unique, and yet having clear priorities in place, and understanding how to manage an emergency helped these businesses make thoughtful, timely decisions. It has pointed out, Alger says, “the value of having a crisis response plan, team, and training to set folks up to handle managing a crisis and supporting the business.”

#WeWalkTogether



Community means so many different things: it means the physical place where we live – whether that’s a rural route, a town or a street in a huge city. And it can also speak to people who share something, whether that’s related to work, family or life experience. Most of us belong to a few different communities.

Steps for Life - Walking for Families of Workplace Tragedy taps into all those definitions of community. You can participate in an event in your physical community, join together to raise funds with your work community, or gather your like-minded support community to get behind your Steps for Life efforts.

In 2020, we watched a national community blossom online as people from East to West shared their personal commitment and fun activity to support Steps for Life’s COVID-19 version. For 2021, we’re ready for anything: some communities may be able to have traditional in-person walks, while others may need to stick to smaller get-togethers or individual activities. Some people may not have a community walk close by, or may simply prefer to do Steps for Life their own way. All the options are open and welcome. No matter how we participate in 2021, #WeWalkTogether.

Mark your calendar today for the first weekend of May 2021. And watch for registration to open in February!

Put your commitment into action

Threads of Life held its first fundraising and awareness walk in 2005 (Fifteen years! We can’t believe it!) Those who’ve walked with us over the years will see a change for 2021. There will be no registration fee

to participate in Steps for Life next spring. Instead, this year we will ask you to register by donation. We hope this will allow more people to participate, and we also hope it will encourage more of you to fundraise as part of your Steps for Life experience.

Your personal donation at registration time can be the first in your own fundraising campaign. Funds from Steps for Life provide close to a third of Threads of Life’s annual budget – they make a major contribution to services like family forums, Volunteer Family Guides, our quarterly print newsletter, and training for volunteer speakers. When you register for Steps for Life, you make a powerful statement about your commitment to health and safety, and to families affected by workplace tragedy. And when you fundraise for Steps for Life, you help Threads of Life turn that commitment into action.

A little or a lot – it all goes to help families.



#WEWALKTOGETHER

Getting involved in
STEPS FOR LIFE 2021
EASY AS ONE-TWO-THREE

1



CHECK THE STEPS FOR LIFE WEBSITE TO SEE IF THERE IS A STEPS FOR LIFE EVENT SCHEDULED IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

2

IF YES, THEN REGISTER YOURSELF OR YOUR TEAM WITH THAT COMMUNITY.



Whether you will be going to the community walk or participating from home, all your support will be reflected on your town’s tally thermometer.

3



IF THERE’S NO WALK NEAR YOU, NO PROBLEM. REGISTER WITH OUR NATIONAL VIRTUAL COMMUNITY IN THE "WALK YOUR WAY" EVENT.

STEPSFORLIFE.CA

Coming Events

Visit our web site to register or for more information:

National Virtual Family Forum
October 17 - November 21, 2020

SHARE THIS NEWSLETTER!

Pass it along or leave it in your lunchroom or lobby for others to read.

How to reach us

Toll-free: 1-888-567-9490
Fax: 1-519-685-1104

Association for Workplace Tragedy
Family Support - Threads of Life

P.O. Box 9066
1795 Ernest Ave.
London, ON N6E 2V0

contact@threadsoflife.ca
www.threadsoflife.ca
www.stepsforlife.ca



Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support

Threads of Life is a registered charity dedicated to supporting families along their journey of healing who have suffered from a workplace fatality, life-altering illness or occupational disease. Threads of Life is the Charity of Choice for many workplace health and safety events. Charitable organization business #87524 8908 RR0001.

MISSION

Our mission is to help families heal through a community of support and to promote the elimination of life-altering workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths.

VISION

Threads of Life will lead and inspire a culture shift, as a result of which work-related injuries, illnesses and deaths are morally, socially and economically unacceptable

VALUES

We believe that:

Caring: Caring helps and heals.

Listening: Listening can ease pain and suffering.

Sharing: Sharing our personal losses will lead to healing and preventing future devastating work-related losses.

Respect: Personal experiences of loss and grief need to be honoured and respected.

Health: Health and safety begins in our heads, hearts and hands, in everyday actions.

Passion: Passionate individuals can change the world.

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Yes I will, help bring hope and healing to families

Gift Payment Options

- I'd like to make monthly gifts
 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____
- I'd prefer to make a one-time gift
 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____
- I've enclosed a void cheque to start direct withdrawal for monthly giving
- You may also donate to Threads of Life online at www.threadsoflife.ca/donate
- Please send me updates about Threads of Life events via email at: _____

Visa MasterCard

_____ expiry
account number

NAME ON CARD _____

SIGNATURE _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

ADDRESS (for income tax receipt) _____

Threads of Life, P.O. Box 9066 • 1795 Ernest Ave • London, ON N6E 2V0 1 888 567 9490 • www.threadsoflife.ca

All donations are tax deductible. Charitable Registration Number #87524 8908 RR0001