

The Injured Workers Speakers School

The Injured Worker Speakers School was initiated in Toronto in 2006 by Steve Mantis.

Steve is an injured worker advocate from Thunder Bay and also the community leader of RAACWI, the Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Workplace Injury, which has partially funded this project as part of their mandate to empower injured workers with tools to work in collaboration with academic researchers.

The Speakers School began weekly meetings in the Winter of 2007 in Toronto, with volunteer teachers (Kate Lushington and Orlando Buonastella) and a mission to share and develop speaking skills through group participation.

An impressive group of injured workers graduated that April. They gave 5 minute speeches about their personal experience using stories, images, and props.

At the same time, another group had been studying the specifics of injured worker history and activism in 3 all-day sessions (9am-4pm) spread over several months, with facilitators Orlando Buonastella and Marion Endicott using hands-on methods of skits, games and role plays to train informed leaders for the injured worker movement.

In the Fall of 2007, the two ideas merged to form the Injured Worker Speaker School.

Students learn together to speak out effectively on their experience as injured workers, and the rest, as they say, is history. Each course runs for 12-14 sessions and culminates in a graduation night where speeches are given at a public celebration, with feedback from a panel consisting of local MPP's, union activists, researchers and/or journalists.

Following this model, a Speaker School opened in Thunder Bay in 2008/9, broadening its base to work with allies in other communities affected by poverty and disability as well as local injured workers.

In 2010 an Injured Worker Speaker School opened its doors in Hamilton. This one is facilitated by three local injured workers, two of whom are graduates of the Toronto school. Two of their students gave speeches at the June 1st rally in Toronto at Queen's Park for Injured Worker Day, and two others started up a weekly local radio show dedicated to injured worker issues – the torch is being passed on.

Update: Fall 2011 Injured Worker Speaker Schools open in St Catharine's & Sarnia!

April 2011: students of Injured Worker Speaker Schools across Ontario will have the opportunity to make history as well as study it. Graduates will be among those appearing before Harry Arthurs and the WSIB funding review panel, making stirring speeches to reveal the human lives behind the faceless numbers, and to remind the decision makers of the founding call for "full justice, no half measures" in the compensation system. This is a historic chance for injured workers to speak out for thousands like them living in poverty and isolation because they were injured on the job.