

Heroes in the workplace

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The Canadian Mental Health Association's annual Bottom Line Conference brings together workers, employers and researchers to find ways of improving mental health in Canadian workplaces.

This year, HSA sponsored two members to attend the conference held recently in Vancouver.

Charlotte Nanalal, a radiation therapist at the Fraser Valley Cancer Centre and Brendan Shields, a music therapist at Richmond Hospital, were chosen to attend through their participation in an essay contest organized by HSA's Occupational Health and Safety Committee. HSA members were asked to write on the theme of this year's conference, which was "Heroes in the workplace: Stories from the champions of change".

Here are some excerpts from Brendan's and Charlotte's submissions.

BRENDAN

"There are other heroes in our midst that I call the quiet heroes. They are the ones that step up and do the hard work of making our workplaces psychologically healthy and safe every day...

They are the OHS stewards who keep bringing up the same safety issue at meetings, even though the employer minimizes it and pretends they do not see it. They are the members who see a fellow brother or

sister struggling at work and reaches out to them. They are the members who mentor a new graduate and take them under their wing through those first days of their working life.

...They see a need, they feel compassion, and they act. And no matter how small this action is it moves us all forward. Heroes are all around us, and the possibility of being one is just one act away..."

CHARLOTTE

"I believe that in its role of advocating for members, the labour movement will be bringing mental health issues to the forefront of discussion on labour relations. The presence of occupational health and safety stewards on the front line, at every site, provides unions with a direct link to their members. The ability of the steward to act as a liaison between members and staff ensures that best practices can be communicated and that members have advocacy that is accessible. It is this advocacy that will raise the standard of how mental health is supported in the workplace."

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