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INJURED WORKER POVERTY STUDY

The Ontario Network of Injured Workers’ Groups released its report “Impacts of Workplace Injury” today, revealing a picture of poverty that many would not have expected. More than 200 injured workers from across Ontario were surveyed. The data were gathered and analysed by members of ONIWG with the assistance of a graduate student from York University.

“Today we seek justice and dignity for injured workers in this great province of Ontario. Our study shows that many of these injured workers are living in poverty, many will be seeking out food banks for their next meal, many rely on family for support, many are divorced from family and friends, and many are on welfare because their worker’s compensation is so paltry. All because one day they went to work and suffered a workplace accident. They expected the workers’ compensation system would take care of them. We have found that for too many, the system has left them in poverty and despair.” said Peter Page, President of the Ontario Network of Injured Workers’ Groups.

History Professor Robert Storey of McMaster University explained that the workers’ compensation system is based on a “historic compromise” in 1915 where injured workers gave up the right to sue their employers in exchange for secure compensation. Prof. Storey said: “The system was set up in 1915 to “prevent injured workers from becoming a charge on their relatives or the community” in the words of its founder Justice William Meredith. Unfortunately for injured workers, the findings in this study suggest that in many cases we have turned the clock back.”

Marion Endicott, a community legal worker with Injured Workers’ Consultants Community Legal Clinic said the findings reveal high rates of depression, use of food banks, and loss of housing. Injured workers experience nearly 4 times the rate of poverty for Ontario. “We also found that 45% of the injured workers were not receiving anything at all from the workers compensation board. Many people with permanent disabilities fall through the holes in our workers’ compensation system and end up on social assistance or other parts of our social safety net. In the meantime, the Board has reduced the rates for employers by about 25% since 1996 and still protects them from being sued. Employers are getting a free ride while the cost of injuries and disease is passed on to the government and society, and to the injured workers themselves.”

- 30 -

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and see www.injuredworkersonline.org