

altered lives project

Paul's story

A few years ago, on a late June summer day, Paul's life was forever changed by an event he will never forget.

Paul worked at a southern Ontario meat processing facility. It was an otherwise unremarkable day as Paul and his crew put in their last shift before the Canada Day holiday when suddenly workplace violence erupted as a supervisor was attacked by a knife-wielding co-worker.

Paul and his crew witnessed the unforeseen attack and heard the yelling and screaming as the supervisor fought for his life.

The supervisor was a father, a son, a husband, a co-workers, and a friend to many – and he was gone in the blink of an eye. Everyone at the facility grieved the loss and mourned his death. Since the attack, Paul has tried to make sense of the tragedy.

“It was like a scene out of a horror movie,” he says. Only months earlier, the co-workers involved in the attack had helped Paul re-shingle his roof. Now, one was dead at the hands of the other.

Workers received grief counselling, as well as workplace violence and harassment training, as everyone came to terms with the tragedy. Later, a monument was erected on the property to honour the memory of the man who lost his life.

All of the workers affected by the events of that day have now returned to work. For some, it took some time before they were able to step foot back to where the horrific scene had played out.

Paul recalls feeling an overwhelming sense of helplessness and how fragile life is as the events unfolded in front of him. He continues to have thoughts and nightmares about that day.

“The attack is never far from my mind,” he says. As a Union leader at work, he recalls trying to comfort others in the days that followed. “We were like a family.”



A 2004 Statistics Canada study titled “Criminal Victimization in the Workplace” found:

49% of violent workplace incidents occur in offices, factories & stores; 31% occur in social assistance & health care sectors.

“In hindsight,” he explains, “I realize now that I was struggling too.” Paul became distant, experienced sleep deprivation, and lapses in concentration and appetite. “My family was a big help during that time and I am thankful that I had their love and support.”

If he could give any kind of advice, he would say: “Respect the fragility of life, have more respect and consideration for others, and give a helping hand whenever you can.”

~ The Altered Lives Project promotes participation in the development of healthy, safe and supportive work environments and relationships.