

# altered lives project

## Les's story

Les is a maintenance worker and UFCW Local 175 Union Steward at a health care facility.

Les's older brother was a fit, active, and affable older worker who drove a lift truck at a non-Union manufacturing facility. His brother had submitted a written safety complaint about the number of close calls he had witnessed while driving the truck. The complaint cited overall congestion, pressure to produce, and driver inexperience, since many drivers were temporary employees. Despite his complaint, the problems persisted.

Life for Les's brother changed in an instant one day while he was standing by his lift truck, adjusting a load that had shifted, when another driver backed a lift truck into him crushing his leg between the two vehicles. After several failed surgeries to save his leg, doctors amputated it at the knee.

As his brother grappled with the physical and psychological effects of losing his leg, Les and his family were deeply worried for his well-being: He just wasn't the same. The injury took its toll. The ability for Les's brother and his partner to participate and enjoy in many daily activities had been forever changed.

Initially, the workers' compensation board provided assistance: That compensation ended when he turned 65 years old. But his mortgage payments were still due and his other bills kept coming.

He may still lose his home.

Under normal circumstances, he would be able to take a job to make ends meet, but at his age with his injury, the job prospects are much bleaker.

The extended family helps out whenever possible but they too have been extremely frustrated with the many failings of the workers' compensation system and the limited benefits available to their brother during his time of need.



"I wish my brother had been part of a Union and had their support," said Les. "Maybe things would have turned out differently."

Currently, WSIB loss of earnings benefits are paid on allowed claims until you are no longer impaired by the work-related injury or illness, until you no longer have a loss of earnings, or until you reach 65.

But many who have worked their whole lives able-bodied do not have enough savings to retire on and need to work past the age of retirement. WSIB does not take this under consideration when it stops all benefits at 65.

The accident motivated Les to become more active in the Union, and he is now a Union leader in his workplace. He is also passionate about improving the compensation system to provide greater dignity and fairness to injured or ill workers and their families, and so that workers don't get abandoned by the system at any age.

"It takes coordinated action to achieve any legislative improvements," he said. "But we have to do better. We have to protect vulnerable workers, and in particular, young workers."

His message: "Know your rights. Know what to do. Get educated and raise your awareness and understanding, and pass that knowledge on to others so we can all make a difference."