

What if we had a
Women's Advocate
in all Unifor workplaces?



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“All women need an Advocate at work.”

-Jerry Dias, Unifor National President

When we came together to create Unifor, it was with hope and optimism that when we are united we can be a strong force for equality and social justice. As part of our commitment to equality, it is essential that women have a strong voice in our union.

We can make significant gains for the women in our workplaces by making women’s issues a priority at the bargaining table. We must also work with community partners to make gains for all women, including the eradication of violence against women.

The issue of violence against women is very near to my heart. I have three daughters whom I adore, and a son who was raised understanding the importance of women’s rights and the need for men to take on the issue of violence against women.

I am incredibly proud of Unifor’s groundbreaking Women’s Advocate Program. These specially-trained, easy to contact workplace representatives have been instrumental in creating healthier workplaces and safer communities. They work closely with management ensuring strong cooperation to achieve this goal.

One of the best tools the union has to prevent violence against women and workplace harassment is the Women’s Advocate Program.

Make it a priority to negotiate this tremendous resource in your workplace and work to end violence against women. I want to see a women’s advocate in every Unifor workplace. Working together, we can make this a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry Dias". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jerry Dias

Women are five times more likely to speak to someone they know...

Advocates play a frontline role.



FAQs on the Women's Advocate Program

Q What is a Women's Advocate?

A Women's Advocate is a specially trained workplace representative who assists women with concerns such as workplace harassment, intimate violence and abuse. The Women's Advocate is not a counsellor but rather provides support for women seeking workplace and community resources. The Women's Advocate Program is an excellent example of a successful joint union/management workplace initiative that helps to create healthy, respectful and safe workplaces.

Q What role does a Unifor Women's Advocate perform in the workplace?

The most important role is to assist women who are faced with situations of harassment, violence or abuse in the workplace or in their personal lives. Women are five times more likely to speak to someone they know when they are looking for help. The Advocate is there to help women access workplace or community services and support them through this process.

Women who were helped had this to say...

"I like that I was not judged and was given options rather than advice."

"Because of the support and quick referral to counselling I was strong enough to carry on when I was in hard times: being at work was my only place of sanity and safety."



Q How does the Women's Advocate Program benefit the employer?

By affecting the bottom line. If a Women's Advocate can keep just one woman working who is experiencing violence, the employer will have benefited. Early prevention strategies minimize the effects of violence for women by providing avenues through which they can seek assistance. When women are provided with assistance and support from their Women's Advocate they are more often able to remain at work.

Q What is the role of the employer?

The employer assigns a female management support person to work jointly with the Unifor Women's Advocate from the bargaining unit. The role of the employer is to provide the Women's Advocate with training, support and adequate resources to effectively fulfill her role as Women's Advocate.

Q Why does a Women's Advocate have to be trained?

Women who are in abusive relationships risk further violence, even death, as they seek to leave or break contact with the abuser. The Advocate needs to be trained to recognize signs of abuse, make appropriate referrals and work with the employer to consider safety planning for the workplace if necessary.

Q What is the cost of training?

The week long training costs include lost time, travel, accommodation and registration.

Q Who are the victims of violence?

While some men do experience violence within an intimate relationship, the vast majority of victims are women.

According to Family Violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2011, family violence accounted for 26% of all police-reported violent crime in 2011. About half

(49%) of the nearly 95,000 victims of family violence were in a current or previous spousal relationship with the accused, including both common-law and legally married partnerships. As in previous years, the majority of victims of family violence were females. They represented 80% of spousal victims.

Q Does an employer assume added liability?

No. Although employers sometimes fear that they will expose themselves to added liability, in fact they have an obligation to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstance for the protection of a worker. Violence is a recurring issue and if not addressed through workplace violence prevention programs it can often end tragically.

By having proper tools in place in the form of a formal workplace violence prevention program employers can protect their employees and at the same time do what is required under the law.

Q Does violence against women have significant impact in the workplace?

When workers experience domestic violence at home the impacts are felt in the workplace. A recent study by Justice Canada highlights this fact by estimating that employers lose \$77.9 million annually as a result of domestic violence. But the costs, both financial and personal go far beyond that number.



Justice Canada estimates that employers lose almost \$78 million annually as a result of domestic violence.

3

REASONS

why every workplace should have a Women's Advocate Program



1ST REASON

It makes economic sense

A recent study by Justice Canada estimates that employers lose 77.9 million annually as a result of domestic violence.

A recent Canadian study called "Can Work be Safe, When Home Isn't?" (2014) reported that one-third of respondents experienced domestic violence from an intimate partner. Of those, 53.5% said domestic violence continued at work and 38% indicated it impacted their ability to get to work.

2ND REASON

A safe workplace is an employer's responsibility

Violence against women is a security and liability concern. An abuser's interference in the workplace or in the work success of his "target" is one of many ways that an abuser exercises and flaunts his power and control.

3RD REASON

It's our collective responsibility

Employers can make a difference in their workplaces and in the lives of employees who are facing abuse by sending a clear message that they are on the side of ending violence.

Recognizing it is the first step. Taking the warning signs seriously and being supportive can make a real difference. We all have a role to play.

"After what happened I wanted to curl into a little ball and die. The Advocate at my workplace was supportive and linked me to someone trained to help. She was a life saver."



“Programs like the Women’s Advocate Program raise awareness about violence and better allow women a way out of violent situations. The Unifor Women’s Advocate Program is a model program which should be implemented in all workplaces across the country.”

—**Barb MacQuarrie**, community director of the Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children , Western University

Role of the Women’s Advocate



In the workplace:

Listen, believe, validate and assist.

Respect confidentiality.

Respect a woman’s right to make her own decisions.

Promote access to community services.

When necessary help plan for future safety.

Work with leadership.

In the community:

Lobby for child care, housing and funding for women’s programs.

Promote women’s equality campaigns.

Network with coalition partners.

Speak out, take action!

Get involved. Be a voice.

Negotiating Women's Advocate Program language

To find out more about the Women's Advocate Program or view model language please go to www.unifor.org/women, email women@unifor.org or call 1-800-265-1891.

Women's Advocates are trained to recognise risks

"Sometimes women don't realize how much danger they're in. The six month window after the end of a relationship is the most dangerous time. As an Advocate I'm trained to identify risks and refer women to the appropriate agency."





Ending violence through equality

—Lisa Kelly, Director, Unifor Women's Department

Ending violence against women requires actions by all of us. As a union, we have many avenues to help address this issue collectively. One of those ways is at the bargaining table. The Women's Advocate program can let women know they are not alone; it is their right to be free from violence; and that there are community resources and support needed to leave a violent relationship. Women's Advocates can work to ensure women's jobs are protected when they need time off work to find safety.

Hundreds of Unifor women have contacted Unifor Women's Advocates and have felt supported, believed, validated and empowered. These were the first steps in living a life free from violence.

We know we cannot end violence against women at the bargaining table alone. The Women's Advocate Program provides women with support and resources when often there is nowhere else to turn.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Kelly'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Lisa Kelly

A Women's Advocate:

Someone who can listen and help when a woman is...

- facing violence or abuse in her relationship
- experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace
- in need of community resources

When there's nowhere else to turn, the Women's Advocate is there.



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