

# **Bridge to Immigrant Occupational Health:** Addressing health disparities by engaging workers as "promotoras" Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH)

A non profit organization that brings together workers with labor, community groups, legal and occupational professionals to promote safe, healthy working conditions www.masscosh.org \* 617-825-SAFE

### Immigrant workers and youth at risk

"When the new management at the

hotel took over, our workload

rooms a day. I struggle to get

– "Ilana", hotel housekeeper

skin and made me feel sick."

workload."

doubled. Now we must clean 30

in so much pain from the heavy

"We were given a demonstration on

using the products and then told to

product without dilluting it. It hurt my

– "Patricia", hotel housekeeper

sign a form. I was told to use one

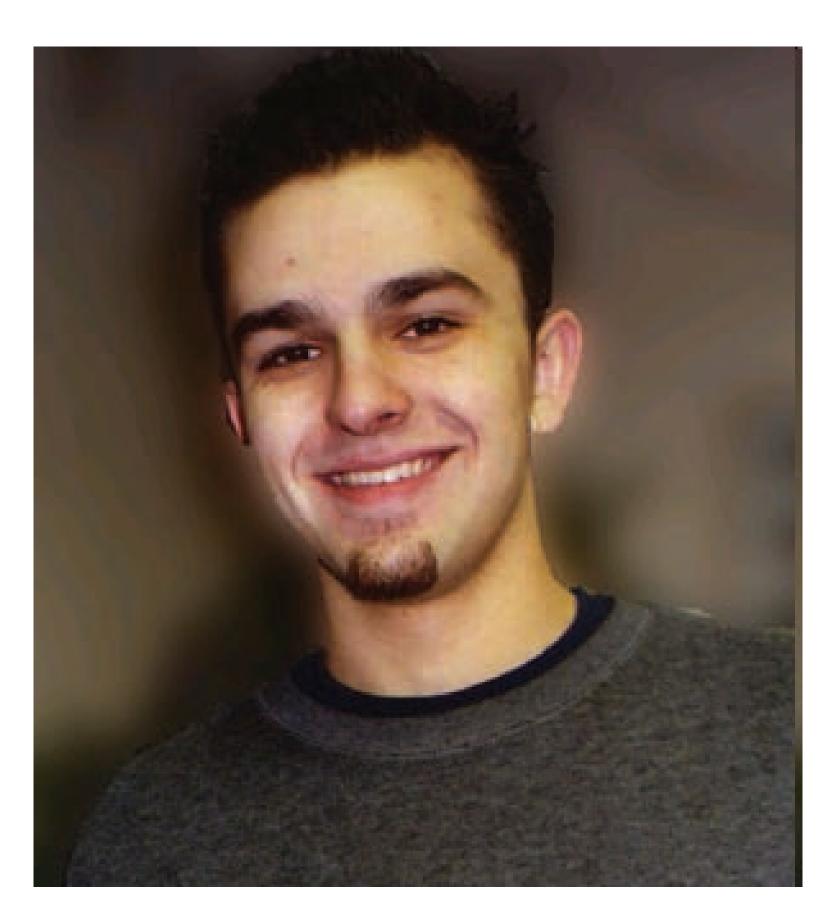
It engages people from within impacted communities as leaders who provide culturally appropriate health education, outreach, and advocacy.

Using a promotora or peer leadership approach makes it possible to:

- reach more people,
- immediately instill trust within the target population,
- identify priority concerns of the target population,
- connect people with similar experiences for peer support, • develop a permanent resource for the community.

#### "What angers me most is that my son's murder could have and should have been prevented. You don't need to be a rocket scientist... to understand that kids need more protection than adults."

– Taciana Ribeiro Saab, mother of Cristian Giambrone, 18 yr old store clerk stabbed to death by a shoplifter



# Some elements of an effective occupational health promotora model:

-Respect the promotoras' knowledge and experience (they know best: methods to reach peers, actions that would move their employers to improve conditions)

-Develop leadership capacities such as facilitation and public speaking to ensure their full engagement

- Use education as a means to build their toolbox so they know their rights, can prioritize problems and solutions

- Support them as they <u>document the problem</u>, <u>determine</u> <u>options</u> and <u>implement an action plan</u>.



# What is a promotora / peer leadership approach:

The MassCOSH Worker Center safety.

Teens Lead @ Work (TL@W) involves youth as peer leaders who educate and engage teens in promoting safety and health.

- support to:
- recruit and educate their peers,
- research hazards and identify
- take action in workplaces and in policy arenas.

The Worker Center reaches some of the most vulnerable workers: day laborers, temporary workers, workers employed in high hazard occupations.

TL@W engages immigrant youth and youth of color in low income communities.



# engages immigrant workers as leaders in promoting health and

In both programs, "promotoras" or peer leaders receive training and

issues of priority concern, and

## Through the MassCOSH Worker Center, hotel housekeepers took action to address MasscosH excessive workload and toxic chemicals

#### 1. Documenting the problem:

Housekeepers did hazard mapping and conducted surveys of conditions and injuries. They gathered information from cleaning labels. MassCOSH compiled their information into a report.

#### 2. Leadership training:

They participated in trainings on health and safety hazards, rights, preventive measures – and on skills such as facilitation and public speaking.

#### 1. Developing an action plan:

They reviewed options – meeting with local or national management; contacting local, state or federal agencies; public action.

#### \* Their decision \*

Workers with MassCOSH staff and members present workers' report to management from the national hotel.

#### **OUTCOME:**

- National management flew into Boston within one week.
- The workload was reduced from 30 rooms to 16 rooms.
- Management replaced toxic chemicals with safer products.
- Workers are now watchdogs at the hotel.
- Footnote: Workers initially experienced retaliation by local management but national management responded swiftly.











## Through Teens Lead @ Work, youth peer leaders mobilized to halt workplace violence.

#### 1. Documenting the problem:

Teen peer leaders conducted surveys of youth employed in retail stores about whether they had experienced a theft, were aware of safety policies and received safety training. They gathered preventive measures from a range of sources. They produced a report compiling findings and recommendations.

#### 2. Leadership training:

They participated in trainings on health and safety hazards, rights, preventive measures – and on skills such as facilitation and public speaking.

#### 1. Developing an action plan:

They reviewed options – focus on municipal policy, state policy and/or urging retail stores to change.

#### \* Their decision \*

Reform the outdated state Child Labor Laws, including requiring that youth under 18 be supervised after 8 PM. Meet with city officials to explore city policies.

Working with Cristian's mother, they hdld a memorial on the anniversary of his death, and released the report.

#### **OUTCOME:**

- After much advocacy, in 2007, the legislature passed a law putting teeth into the Child Labor Laws and requiring employers to provide adult supervision of youth after 8 PM.
- The peer leaders convinced a city agency to require that all city-funded jobs programs provide safety training (training provided courtesy of TL@W).





