



Ken Rayner:

On April 28, we pause to remember. The National Day of Mourning is a time to honor lives forever changed by workplace tragedies. Lives lost or significantly altered, families shattered and futures rewritten. But remembrance is just the beginning. Beyond the grief, there's a mission, a commitment ensuring no more families experience this kind of loss, inspiration for us all to keep our promise to work safe and return each day to our loved ones. This conversation is more than just words, it's about lives. So stay with us as we explore how we can all turn grief into prevention and tragedy into change.

Announcer

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Ken Rayner:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. On this special National Day of Mourning episode we're honored to welcome back, Eugene Gutierrez. Eugene's association with April 28 is deeply personal, and today he's once again here sharing a story of resiliency, hope, and all the work that's being done across Canada to create safer and healthier workplaces. Welcome back, Eugene. It's great to have you here once again.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Thanks for having me, Ken. It's a pleasure.

Ken Rayner:

All right, Eugene, and I'm excited to have you here because lots has changed in your life, both personally and professionally since we had a last chance to converse on the podcast. So I'm going to lead in with the first question, Eugene, what exactly has changed in your life personally and professionally?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, it's a good place to start. I'd like to say that I now have a full head of hair since the last time we chatted, but sadly, that has not changed. But jokes aside, and apart from my daughters continuing to grow like weeds and getting older with each passing year, I'd say the biggest change since being on the podcast in 2023 is my appointment as the new Executive Director for Threads of Life, which I got to say, it honestly feels so surreal. So yeah, no, it's been amazing. But yeah, big, big shift.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. And that appointment as the new Threads of Life director, obviously filling huge shoes by Shirley Hickman in terms of an association that she not only founded, but ran herself with a very similar story to yours. So I'm really glad that that's the case and that you're the new executive director of Threads of Life. Fantastic.

So Eugene, what about sharing a story or a moment about your time with Threads of Life that's deeply impacted you? Because I think for people that haven't heard your story or not been associated with you the way I have, it's like how did you get here? So why is it something that's special that you are the Executive Director of Threads of Life? And what's something that deeply impacted you to get to where you are now?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, sure. Yeah, I guess for those who aren't familiar with my story, just the shorthand. In 2017, I lost my dad, Bot, to a workplace fatality. He was a mining surveyor of 30 years. And on a routine shift underground, he was tragically struck down by mobile equipment, which killed him instantly. And unfortunately, the operator of that piece of equipment didn't know that my dad was present in the space when he had entered to clear debris from recent blasting. And suffice it to say that moment really turned my entire world, my family's entire world upside down. And then on top of the grief and the trauma, there's the investigations and the processes that really felt just absolutely overwhelming.

So during that time in my life, I really struggled to find support until a WSIB [Workplace Safety and Insurance board] caseworker connected me with Threads of Life. And really from there through an amazing volunteer family guide, I finally felt like in that moment, "Hey, this person actually understands me." And that's when the healing began. And found other people who truly got it. And that connection that really ignited that spark in me. So in time I realized that, "Hey, this could be the way that I could honour my dad's memory while helping others like me." And so really from there, I started volunteering, helping out with my local Steps for Life walk, sharing my story with others, like yourselves at IHSA to raise awareness. I was facilitating at Family Forum events and then eventually became a volunteer family guide myself, giving back in the same way that folks at Threads of Life helped me.

So over the past seven years, that work has been deeply rewarding. And really that was the journey that really served to inform what I feel, "Hey, this is what I was meant to do with the rest of my life. This is what I want to commit the rest of my professional and, frankly, personal life to." And so when the Executive Director role had opened up, Shirley had announced her retirement the summer of last year, I really saw that as the opportunity to bring everything that I've learned over the course of my career and really channel it into something that truly matters. So yeah, so now I'm here. I'm the new Executive Director, so grateful for the opportunity to lead this organization that frankly found me in pieces and put me back together again. So that's kind of how I found my way to Threads of Life.

And as far as recalling a moment that really impacted me, I mean, my God, there's so many, but if I had to choose one, I would say it would be from the time when I was providing peer support as a volunteer family guide. The reality is that everyone's experience with workplace tragedy, it's different, different circumstances, injury, illness, fatality, whatever the case may be. But when you really listen to someone's story, when you hear the emotion in their voice as they share their trauma, you start to notice the parallels. And as a volunteer family guide, you recognize very familiar feelings, feelings of being lost, helpless, sad, angry, being frustrated.

And what's really powerful is that the connection goes both ways, that the person sharing their story senses it too, and there's that moment of like, "Oh my God, this person gets how I feel. It's like they're reading my mind." And that connection, that shared understanding is so incredibly powerful. Knowing you can relate to someone on that level is such a strong reminder that none of us are truly alone, that

there's a community out there that will stand by you and that feeling, that truth, that's what continues to drive me in the work that I do with Threads of Life.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. Wow. And I want to get into sort of the services that Threads provide because I'm sure some of our listeners aren't aware of Threads, hopefully many of them are. Some of them may not be and want to understand more. But that in itself, what you just shared in terms of that service, that ability to have a family and family members after they've suffered a workplace tragedy or something to their loved one that's been life altering, for someone else to understand and have empathy for their situation and to have gone through it before, wow, and to provide that sort of support, that in itself is amazing, Eugene. But before we can get into the sort of services that Threads provides, maybe I can just take you back because I'm interested in this, Eugene.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Sure.

Ken Rayner:

And I know you and I have known each other for a couple of years now, and I knew where you were working and what you were doing. So how is this time when you applied for this job different? You're applying almost for a mission rather than a position. So can you explain that? What is it like to apply for something like this that has such a deep tie and meaning to you personally, that personally and professionally all of a sudden comes together and more of a mission than a career or a job?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, no, that's a really good question. And I mean, I go back to what I said earlier, this feeling of it feels so surreal. So before coming to Threads of Life, the majority of my career has been spent doing advertising and marketing for essentially for-profit organizations. That's where I cut my teeth during my entire career. And again, very grateful for that experience, very grateful for that time, learned a lot of things. And a lot of those things definitely have application in the work that I do today. But where it's fundamentally different, it's like with Threads of Life, after losing my dad, it was the feeling of, "I hope no one ever has to feel this way because it's awful." And I mean, if I could do anything to get my dad back, I would. So just that feeling alone and learning that that's what Threads of Life is about, to ensure that you, your friends, your colleagues, your neighbours, that they don't ever have to deal with something as traumatic as someone losing a limb or getting very sick at work, or god forbid they die on the job.

So to be able to do this as my full-time job, I mean, because prior I was doing this in a volunteer capacity, and I always referred to my volunteer work with Threads of Life as my heart work, it's the passion work, it's the stuff that I could throw myself at this because I want to, because it served a larger purpose that was beyond... It was much bigger than myself. And the opportunity to really make a difference. I mean, as corny as that sounds, I mean in the previous jobs I held, I learned a lot, I worked with some really talented, fantastic people. But truth be told, after I lost my dad, there was a part of me

that was like, "What can I contribute that's really going to help people's lives?" And I always knew that deep down inside I wanted to help people.

So when the opportunity came to like, "Hey, instead of doing this in a part-time capacity," because it was so limited, to be able to do this day in, day out, I was like, "I have to shoot my shot. I got to see if I can land the plane on this. Because if I can, that's it. I will do this for the rest of my life." And I recognize where I am in my career, people are fortunate enough to kind of find... You hear that phrase, "Oh, I found my calling." I got to tell you, Ken, I can feel the hairs standing on the back of my neck, but it's like, this is it. This is what I was meant to do.

And when I look back on all the steps that lined up, it's just like, what did it cost? Unfortunately, it cost the life of my dad to find myself in this place. But if there was a way out of that, I could not think of any better way than to be in this role to honour his life. And like I said, it's like I want to make a difference. I want to keep people safe. And as well too, for those who are impacted, to let them know, "Hey, I did it. You can do it, and we can do this together." So that's the biggest change is that it's not part-time. Now I can do this full-time and throw my complete self at it.

Ken Rayner:

Yeah. Eugene, I love that. Your heart work. I love that, your heart work.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah. It's my heart work.

Ken Rayner:

Your heart work. I love that saying. Awesome.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, yeah.

Ken Rayner:

So Eugene Gutierrez is with us, the new Executive Director of Threads of Life, a Canadian charity. Threads, the services that you provide, and across Canada, Eugene, this is a Canadian supported charity, so you're doing work coast to coast.

Eugene Gutierrez:

That's right.

Ken Rayner:

Just for, again, those listeners that have either maybe just heard of Threads in passing or have not heard of Threads at all, maybe you could explain exactly the services that you provide as a charity.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, absolutely. At Threads of Life, we offer a range of free programs and services to support families and workers that have been impacted by workplace tragedy. And I got to stress that, it's at no cost to those people. And I remember when I first was supported by Threads of Life, I went in thinking like, "Okay, this must be a paid service of some sort." And to know that, "Hey, whatever you need, it's available to you," and so that was really heartwarming to hear.

So as far as programs and services, I mean, I'll kind of just run down the line. I mean, I mentioned volunteer family guides. What's up with that? It's a program where we offer one-on-one peer support. So those affected are matched with a trained volunteer who has experienced a similar loss, someone who understands what that individual's going through and can walk alongside them on their healing journey. So that level of support's very flexible. It can take the form of a phone call, it could be a video chat, it could be in-person meetings if it's geographically feasible, it could be texting or it could be email. The idea is that whatever feels most comfortable, we're there to accommodate.

We have something called a Family Forum. So these are annual regional events. It's another key way for us to bring people together. It's held in western, central, and Atlantic Canada. And these are multi-day events that provide a safe space for spouses, for parents, siblings, close friends to connect, learn, and heal. So participants, they're going to explore grief and coping strategies. They're going to experience activities around self-care, active listening, perhaps learn about the occupational health and safety system. They will also engage in other healing activities, and they could range from things like visual arts, music, there's some yoga if you're inclined, and more. And really, it's a great chance to step away from everyday life. For those people who've been impacted, it's a space where you can take off that proverbial mask and you can connect with other people without judgment, and at the end of the day, feel understood. So those are our Family Forums.

We also have virtual programs too. And so Families Connect is the name of those programs. It's a series of online workshops that cover practical tips, coping tools, and shared experiences. And so these workshops, they're led by grief counselors or staff or trained volunteers. And these sessions offer a supportive space where participants they can engage as much as they want or as little as they like. It's really intended to help build community and as well a toolkit for healing, right from the comfort of their own home. So there's that piece.

I would be remiss to not talk about our Speakers Bureau. That's actually how you guys came to get introduced to me. So our Speakers Bureau, we empower and provide opportunities for our members to share their stories publicly. And that's all about turning personal tragedy into a force for change. We know that there is real power, that there is real healing when we share our stories. And these volunteer speakers, they reach audiences in workplaces, in schools, conferences, businesses, podcasts like this, where it's all lined up to help promote that culture of safety. And at Threads of Life, we provide training and ongoing support so that those individuals can speak with confidence, purpose, and impact.

We also have our Steps for Life community walk. So those are another powerful expression of connection and awareness. It's a five-kilometre walk. It's held annually in communities across Canada, coast to coast, raising funds. And it gives a face to the lives behind the statistics. And we view it as a time to come together to share stories and walk in support of one another.

And then finally, we have a quarterly newsletter that keeps families and partners connected. For some family members, just to be able to receive that in the mail, sometimes that's all the support that they

need. It's available in print, it's available online on our website, and it features personal stories, updates, tips, insights from our Threads of Life community. And at the end of the day, it's just a nice reminder that no one is alone on this journey. So that's like the full menu of the services that we provide. And again, everyone's needs are different. So we always endeavor to ensure that there's options for everybody and meet people where they are along their journey.

Ken Rayner:

Thanks, Eugene. That's a great overview of the services. I've had an opportunity to be a part of a couple of them. I've had a chance to go to the Friday dinner at the Family Forum when we started out, and I was honored to be there as a guest and really take part in that. And I remember, I didn't have an understanding of why a bunch of the people at my table had photographs, like photo frames with their pictures face down until halfway through dinner. And it wasn't until that point that I realized that I was sitting with family members that had lost a loved one. It was the picture of the loved one that they go through the ceremony.

Eugene Gutierrez:

That's right.

Ken Rayner:

And boy, I wish I had brought more Kleenexes in my pocket because it was a tearjerker to say the least. Then also being a part of multiple times where we've had a speaker out from Threads to be able to talk about their experiences. And I can tell you, again, having gone through that, what an impact it is for myself. Because at the end of the day, I just want to go home and hug my family when I get home after hearing one of those, just to be grateful that I haven't gone through what they've gone through. And just to be a little bit more aware and attentive of my own health and safety and those around me at work. So it's a great reminder when you learn about the actual story of somebody who wasn't expecting to get up and become a speaker-

Eugene Gutierrez:

That's right.

Ken Rayner:

...wasn't expecting that this was going to be their life. And it is. And they tell you about it because these things can happen and they do happen.

Eugene Gutierrez:

That's right.

Ken Rayner:

So we have to be attentive. Let me go back to something, if I could, Eugene, that you talked about. You talked about when you first came in to Threads, and maybe just some of the common concerns or

emotions that families express when they first connect with Threads of Life after the tragedy, when they're just starting to come into contact with Threads of Life, what's that like?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, I mean, as I mentioned, I mean everyone's circumstance different, but it is so interesting to take stock of some of those universal themes and feelings. I know when families reach out to Threads of Life, and I mean I can attest to this personally, the most common thing that we hear is that people feel alone. It feels very isolating because you think about, well, so I'll use my personal experience as an example, going through something like a funeral. People will come out, people will give their condolences, "Hey, we're here for you." But the thing is, eventually people will go their separate ways. They're going to return to their life. But the reality is that your life has changed. That person that died on the job, they're not there anymore. Or you really critically injure yourself at work, it's like you're not the same person anymore.

So this thought of, "Well, I'll get on with life," it's like, "Well, how the heck do I do that? Where do I go?" So there is that sense of... And even people who are closest to you, I know in my life I am blessed that I had really close people that they made themselves available to support, but really because they hadn't walked in my shoes, there's always this barrier of they can't connect. So yeah, that really emphasizes that sense of isolation. And at the same time too, when we reflect on those early days, and this is very common with people who come to Threads of Life, those early days, they are filled with grief like, "What's that? How do I deal with grief?"

It's funny because I used to think in the beginning, "Oh, grief, it's something that lasts for a period of time, and then it'll go." Boy, that was such a naive view because, I mean, the reality is that grief that is a lifelong thing that will stay with you. But who knows how to deal with grief? And then there's the anger and there's the frustration and feeling helpless, and people want answers. That's the other thing too, especially depending on your circumstance. People are like, "I have questions. Who do I go to? If I go to this person," especially in an investigation, it's like, "Hey, we'd love to answer your question, but we're not done yet because we have to go through their different stages of the investigation process." So yeah, you're left in the dark and then you're wondering, "Will I ever be okay again? When am I going to hear back from people?"

So all that while you're going through that, you're just trying to get through your day. But then someone comes by and says, "Oh, hey, we have new information for you." And so that is so frustrating because you try to move forward and sometimes what happens is you get picked back up and you're thrown back to the start because you start to live some of those things. Yeah, I mean common feelings, it's all that. Like I said, they're just wondering, "How do I move on? Am I going to be okay again?" And that's why we really stress that point about we don't want people to feel like they're alone because they're not.

And when you hit that moment when you start talking to somebody, I'll tell you, words can't even fully articulate how much of an aha moment that is, when you start talking to somebody and they're like, "Yeah, you know what? You don't even have to finish your story. I totally get it." And it's like this flood of reassurance where it's like, "You understand, I don't even have to tell you the rest of my life story. It's like you stole the words right out of my mouth." And I can tell you, that's a pretty universal feeling for everybody.

Ken Rayner:

Wow. And I appreciate that, Eugene, because of all the times we've ever talked, one of the things that up until now I just really just clued in, was that time after the incident, and in some cases the investigation that's taking place, particularly since this occurred in the workplace, is involving the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. And that's not an investigation that's going to be done in one day.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Oh gosh, no.

Ken Rayner:

This is an investigation that's going to take a lot of time. So during that time when there are so many questions that are left unanswered, who can you go to for support? And so finding out about Threads, knowing about Threads even before something was to happen would be the best case scenario. So just like occupational health and safety information, you want to have that information before an incident takes place because you want to be able to know how to deal with it. And I think the next question I had for you, Eugene is very much aligned to this because I think ourselves, IHSA and Threads share this, which is what's some of the biggest challenges that you have in terms of getting this information out to families and spreading awareness about Threads so people are aware about your organization?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, no, for sure. It's one of those things where if I had to put my finger on one of the biggest challenges that we face, it's timing. It's timing. At Threads of Life, myself and the team, we know that the need for support, it can come at different points in the journey of someone who's been impacted by a workplace tragedy. It is such a moving target, and it's hard to predict because, as I mentioned, in those early moments after an incident, a traumatic event, what have you, it's often overwhelming. And that family member or worker, they may not be ready to hear about Threads of Life, what we do or, for that matter, they're just not in the frame of mind to accept help just yet. That's why it's so important that we keep the message out there in gentle, reassuring, consistent ways, right? Through conversations, radio ads, newsletters, social media posts, emails, posters on bulletin boards, or again, even podcasts like this, so that when someone is ready, they know we're here, that every reminder makes a difference.

Because the thing, someone could be ready... In my case, so my dad passed away November, 2017. I had reached out to Threads of Life early January of the following year. So it was about a month or two, give or take. That's how soon it was for me. But there's some folks that it might not be six months until they're ready, it could be a year, or we have family members, the incident that happened in their lives could have happened, seriously, eight to 10 years after the fact. And then all of a sudden, "Okay, you know what, I think I'm ready. I think I can be a part of a community that's like Threads of Life." And then all of a sudden they go on to become one of our biggest volunteer advocates, and they're out there and they're spreading awareness and they're helping people. So that's what I mean about it's such a moving target. It's really hard, there is no mathematical formula. So constant messaging, so vital. So that's one.

Then I would say another challenge that we're always mindful of is that we're ensuring that we have the resources, and that comes in two flavors, both financially and human resources. To support every family member and worker that needs us, but as well to grow our prevention message across the country, financial and human resources are important. And while we are blessed at Threads of Life we're in a financially strong position with a very committed volunteer base, we are never wanting to rest on our laurels and leave ourselves open to complacency. And so we're always constantly looking at obviously expanding our programs, improving our services, improving our capacity. We're looking out for new partners, new sponsors, donors, volunteers who believe in our mission, who believe in our cause. Because without all those things, we can't do what we do every day.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely. And what about some of those sponsors, and what about some of those corporate sponsors and donators. If you've got someone listening from an organization today to this podcast who wasn't aware of Threads of Life before, but says, "Hey, you know what? I want to be able to play a part in this," so what could an organization do who wishes to raise awareness regarding the critical importance of workplace safety and Threads of Life? What could they do, Eugene?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, I mean, so what we always tell people who are interested in, "Hey, we'd love to get involved," apart from I mentioned financial resources, so one of the things that we tell people, we're always looking for partners who could help us grow revenue because as I prefaced all, like 100 per cent, of our peer based support programs, they are offered at no cost to families and workers. Because from our view, in the aftermath of tragedy, we strongly believe that support should never be out of reach for those folks. So we're blessed that we can do this because of the generosity of others. So whether it's becoming a corporate sponsor or sponsoring a program or event, or organizing a fundraiser, participating in our Steps for Life events or simply choosing Threads of Life as charity of choice, that goes a long way for us that every contribution makes a difference.

Now, I mean, that's the financial side of things. But I mean, at the end of the day, it's not just that for us, that there are also many other ways that folks can collaborate, participate, work together with Threads of Life. So one of the biggest ones, and this is the one that I would say is at the top, is just helping raise awareness, right? Spreading the word ensures that more people impacted by workplace tragedy, that they know our support programs and prevention messages are here for them. And that simple actions like sharing social media posts on your networks, distributing our materials internally, or simply sharing our story with a client, a partner, friends, family, that makes a big difference.

The other thing that we tell people is you can help us grow our volunteer base. We cannot do what we do without our volunteers. And we are so blessed to have very dedicated, passionate volunteers. They truly are the heart of our organization, and they help us reach more people. So folks can get involved through our Steps for Life fundraiser either by you can join a planning committee, you can help out on the walk day. We hear from some it's also a great networking opportunity. So especially for your listener base, I mean, some of our committees, they're comprised of a very multifaceted group of health and safety professionals. So if you're inclined and want to meet folks in various areas, that's a great way to network. But otherwise, options include, you can help to be a trade show volunteer and represent

Threads of Life at a conference or in an event. Or you can be a community engagement volunteer where you can help raise awareness in local communities.

And then lastly, one of the things that we tell people if you want to collaborate with Threads of Life is support participation in our programs and events, we're all about building a strong safety culture. And organizations can help by simply just taking part in activities that help promote that. So again, I mentioned Steps for Life. It's like come to a walk, encourage people to come to a walk, either individually or as a corporate team, use it as a team building exercise. Or hosting a Threads of Life speaker to share a powerful personal story that, say, reinforces your own safety messages or safety campaigns internally in a meaningful way. So again, that's how I met you, Ken, and the rest of the IHSA team, where we kind of collaborated on an event where some folks came out for some additional training and being able to reinforce it with, "Oh, hey, we've got this speaker from Threads of Life. Let's put a face to these are real consequences if you are not safe on the job," right?

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely.

Eugene Gutierrez:

So that's what I would say, those four things. Raise awareness, grow our volunteer base, participation in our programs and events, and help us grow revenue where we can.

Ken Rayner:

Terrific. And you know what, Eugene, from my perspective, it's a reciprocal relationship when you work with Threads of Life, because I'll just speak to the example of IHSA and maybe you can let me know if there's any others that you're aware of. But IHSA, since we've been involved with Threads of Life, it has become integrated in what we're doing. We've produced five videos on the stories of different Threads of Life members, because we really felt that those stories need to be publicized and need to be showcased, and people need to understand what others are going through. And it's also been really the genesis of, or a big contributing factor to our Keep Your Promise Campaign that features See Something, Say Something. That really had to do with our association with Threads of Life families. And that's really how that started through that. So it's been very impactful to IHSA. I mean, it's been a reciprocal relationship. So have you seen other workplace cultures have that type of a shift when organizations have started to engage with Threads? Now, keeping in mind, I also want to preface this by you've been the executive director for all of about three months here, but I also know that you were keenly involved with Threads as a volunteer prior to joining as the executive director, right, Eugene?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah. Yeah. No, absolutely. And I'm glad that you brought up that reciprocal relationship. Because yeah, it is certainly not one-sided at all. And things that we always endeavor to tell people too, yeah, just as much as it's, "Hey, here's how you can help us," we also have the capacity to help in the other direction too, that we always remind people to kind of, "Don't forget that Threads of Life can be a part of your toolkit, to be a part of your toolkit to reinforce those safety messages, to help keep your people safe on

the job site." Because again, I have so much respect for health and safety professionals and the work that they do day in, day out.

But I get it, there's going to be some days where it's like you do your due diligence, maybe you're going through, "Hey, we've got a module, we're going to do some refresher training," and sometimes it's like, "Oh man, we got to do this again." And sometimes maybe it might be a little stale or maybe it's like, "Oh, I'm trying to find a different way to maybe really emphasize this point," and that's where we can come in.

So yeah, I mean, when I think about organizations that have engaged with Threads of Life and have we seen that shift, when I think about my time as a volunteer, and even a little bit into the role as an executive director, when I think about people I've spoken with, especially, say, workers that have heard a Threads of Life volunteer speaker share their personal story of workplace tragedy, the common thread, and no pun intended, is that these stories, they put a human face to the consequences. And because of that, safety becomes personal. That the message hits differently and it sticks because it makes the risks feel real, and there's a sense of empathy that really starts to take root. And then suddenly, conversations around safety carry more meaning. That's the shift that we see when we have these conversations with people.

So whether that connection with Threads of Life, whether that comes from hosting a speaker or attending a Steps for Life walk, because we hear comments from people who attend for their first time and they're just like, "I had no idea," or simply sharing our resources. What follows is often the same, more openness, more dialogue, and there's that stronger sense of shared responsibility. So that I would say is some of that shifting that happens after an interaction with Threads of Life where all of a sudden it's not safety because it's something that you need to do. It's safety through the lens of, "Oh my God, I can picture my neighbour, I can picture my daughter, I can picture my uncle, my mom, my dad." It becomes personal.

Ken Rayner:

Right. Excellent. All right, Eugene, so my final questions, some of these that I've asked you already have been to my friend Eugene, and I'm going to say that the rest of these questions are going to be to Eugene Gutierrez, the Executive Director of Steps for Life. So first of all, I'm going to ask, hey, is there anything you can share with us, maybe a sneak peek or something behind the scenes that's new, that's something that you're looking to do? You've talked a lot about the core programs, those programs that really have been running at Threads and have been a real key in terms of what you provide across the board. Are there some new initiatives or projects that Threads is working on that you want to share with us today?

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, sure. I mean, I'll just rhyme off some really quickly. I mean, coming up on April 28, we'll be hosting our virtual Day of Mourning ceremony. And so again, time to pause and reflect on lives forever change by workplace tragedy. And so we strongly encourage everyone if they can, to take part, whether at an in-person ceremony or virtually, we'll have details on our website at threadsoflife.ca. We have obviously our Steps for Life community walks that are coming up very shortly. So they kick off in late April and early May. And these walks bring us together to raise awareness about the importance of preventing

workplace tragedies. So really encourage everyone to go to our website, stepsforlife.ca to find a walk that's closest to you. And if there isn't one, then you can also still take part in our national online walk and walk your way any day in May. I'd love to take credit for that rhyming, that just ended up happening that way. But at any rate. But registration is free, and like I said, you can register on our website stepsforlife.ca.

We're also very excited to be sharing the results of our annual state of safety survey. And that was conducted in partnership with the Angus Reid Institute. And so it's a survey that explores the experiences and perspectives of Canadian business owners, hiring managers, and decision makers around workplace safety, as well as looking at beliefs and attitudes about health and safety and the prevalence of basic health and safety programs and policies. So a lot of really great insights. I don't want to share any right now because I have got to leave some intrigue. But again, it's a very insightful survey. Certainly look out for those results during Safety and Health Week in early May, we'll be posting on our social channels and also have it available for distribution.

And then as well, we have our Family Forum events that are coming up for 2025. For any listeners in the Atlantic region, we have our Atlantic Family Forum that takes place in late May in Nova Scotia, and then in Central and Western Canada, we have our Family Forums for those regions scheduled for September and October, respectively, Central and Western. And those details can be found on our website at threadsoflife.ca. And as well, for any updates on what we're doing, follow us on our socials on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

Ken Rayner:

Amazing. And I'm looking forward to the Steps for Life that I've signed up for. My wife and I have signed up for to do it in Toronto on April 27 down at Coronation Park. So we've been there for the past couple of years and we'll look forward to doing that again. Hopefully the wind's not too cold coming off Lake Ontario this year.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Fingers crossed. Fingers crossed.

Ken Rayner:

Fingers crossed. Always great to do that walk. All right, so again, Eugene, I'm going to give you a question that maybe now I'm asking, I may even have asked you this last time you were on the podcast, but now you're an executive director, so I think this would be a fun one to ask again. So if you could change one thing about workplace safety culture in Canada, you can wave that magic wand, what do you think that would be, Eugene?

Eugene Gutierrez:

If I could change one thing about workplace safety culture in Canada, I would say it would be to keep shifting that general mindset when it comes to safety from compliance to compassion. So let me unpack that, so too often safety is treated as like a checklist, something to either manage risk or avoid penalties, wherever the case may be. But behind every rule, every policy, every procedure, it's a human being. It's

a human being at the core. And if we truly rooted our safety culture in care for one another as people, not just workers, as people, I believe we'd see more than compliance, we'd see commitment, strong commitment to sending every person, every human being home safe and well every day. Because their life matters. The lives of members of our community, our neighbors, our friends, our family, our loved ones.

So that kind of workplace safety culture, that isn't something that you enforce, that's something that you live. And I believe that's where real change can begin. Because I think when we can start embracing that sentimentality of something I have to do versus, "I care about you, I don't want anything to happen to you," that to me, I feel like, that's when we'll get that shift, that looking out for one another together, that's what I would love to see.

Ken Rayner:

Whoa, that's a doozy. I got to tell you, Eugene, there's not too many times after working for IHSA for 15 years that I ask somebody a question, you completely surprise me with something. And I've really just written down that whole aspect of the shifting of thoughts from compliance to compassion to commitment. Because I don't think you can have commitment unless you have compassion, right?

Eugene Gutierrez:

100 per cent.

Ken Rayner:

So if you have that compassion for that individual, you're not just doing it because the law says you have to do it. You're doing it because you want to do it, and you have compassion for their health and safety, and you have respect for their families because you want to see them go home safe. And that you don't want to have the challenges that have been put on that we've just been talking about, that families are going through that have lost a loved one. And because of that compassion, you then make a commitment, which is a promise-

Eugene Gutierrez:

You got it.

Ken Rayner:

You make a promise and you say, "I'm not going to let that happen." Phew. That's a good one, my friend. Wow, really good. And so good I want to skip to the last question, which is just sort of closing thoughts from you and just sort of making sure that any last words on where listeners can go to get more information or what they can do or anything else just to wrap this very important episode up, Eugene.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I guess if I can close, I would love to tell your listeners again for more information, threadsoflife.ca, you can find all information about what we do, who we are there. But I'd like to leave two things for the listeners. First, help us continue raising awareness of Threads of Life. The more people

who know about us, the more likely those affected by workplace tragedy will realize that they're not alone. They are not alone. That support exists. That's a community who understands what they're going through. And lastly, embracing safety in all aspects of life. And that's the key part too, right? It's not just at work. 360 degrees, you got to practice it in your life. And so to truly eliminate workplace tragedies, safety, I feel, needs to be deeply ingrained in our mindset practice, both at home, on the job, every day, every way. And that safety is a shared responsibility that we must all take part in. Again, looking out for one another together, that's what I hope people can take away from all this.

Ken Rayner:

Eugene, I always enjoy conversing with you. We always have a lot of fun, and you certainly always bring to my attention the importance of family, the importance of working safe and being healthy at work. Every time I speak to you, you just raise that awareness even higher in my own mind. So thank you so much again for being part of the IHSA Safety Podcast and this very special episode today.

Eugene Gutierrez:

Thank you for having me, Ken. It's a pleasure.

Ken Rayner:

All right, and thank you to the listeners to listening to this special Day of Mourning episode with Threads of Life and their new executive director, Eugene Gutierrez. Be sure to subscribe and "like" us on your podcast channel and visit us at ihsa.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

Announcer

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