

Workshop focuses on bike safety among migrant workers

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Every life matters.

That message was repeated throughout a special presentation for migrant workers at Community Church Flamborough in Millgrove on Sunday evening.

Mi Vida Importa, a workshop focusing on bicycle safety, was organized by Migrants Matter in memory of Andres Dominguez Moran. The Connon AVK farm labourer was struck and killed by a car on Highway 5 West last July. In the same accident his co-worker, Jesus Sanchez Feliciano, sustained severe injuries and remains unable to work.

"You can appreciate the impact that this tragedy had on our migrant worker community," noted Migrants Matter Flamborough co-ordinator Terry Hubbard. "The concessions and rural roads they must travel on bicycles have no provision for safe bike lanes. All workers who rely on bicycles for transportation know how vulnerable they are, and that they must do all that they can to protect themselves.

"We must do all that we can to protect these workers."

Approximately 75 workers from eight area operations – Josling Farms, Hortico, Cedar Field Greenhouses, Connon AVK, Connon CVK, Kraus Nurseries, E-Nature Greenhouses and Drummond Farms – attended Sunday's workshop. Volunteers from Hamilton Helmet Initiative (HHI), Hamilton Public Health Service, Brain Injury Services and the Hamilton Police Service outlined the importance – in English and Spanish through an interpreter – of wearing safety gear and how to use it correctly, the effects of a brain injury and how to prevent it and Canadian traffic laws. As well, the workers received helmets, which were fitted before they left, safety vests and front and rear lights for their bikes and bells.

"The helmets are to protect the best gift God's given them – the brain," said Tarick Mirza of Seven Star Sports, one of HHI's 30 community partners. Seven Star provided the equipment, along with the instructions for their use.

"We did a special Spanish manual so (the workers) understand how to do this properly,"



Above, Hamilton Police Services Sgt. Barry Mungar lends a hand as Zsuzsi Rety (left) and Kate MacNamara of Hamilton Public Health Services get reflective vests ready to hand out to migrant workers who attended the *Mi Vida Importa* session at Community Church on Sunday. At right, MacNamara fits Connon AVK worker Miguel Angel Vega with a bicycle helmet.

noted Mirza, noting that HHI's mandate is focused on educating children about bike safety at an early age.

"We want to create a mind set," he said of bicycle helmet use. "The same as using seatbelts; now using seatbelts is an automatic thing.

Hamilton Public Health Nurse Zsuzsi Rety, who also volunteered at the workshop, noted the migrant worker community is a good audience for the HHI message.

"Over the years, I saw the migrant workers riding their bikes on the rural roads," she said, adding that she was often concerned for their safety. "We are pleased to be able to reach another group and build links to be able to support them in the future."

Mirza added that the cultural differences reach beyond language, as some of the workers may feel they need to stay "low key" and not make waves while they are working in Canada.



Hamilton Police Service Crime Prevention Co-ordinator Sgt. Barry Mungar also touched on the difference in cultures.

"You come from countries where policing is different from the style of policing in Canada," he told the works. "In many countries, policing is militant, and they call the police forces. But in Canada, we are called police services because we understand the importance of serving the com-

munity.

"It's very important that you know that you can call the police for help."

Mungar also stressed that in Canada bicycles are considered to be vehicles, and must follow the same rules as motor vehicles – including all signs. He also outlined the responsibility of the cyclist for ensuring his or her own safety.

"When a cyclist is involved in an accident it often is not their fault," he said. "You could be driving your bike properly, following all the rules, and still get in an accident," he said. "Often drivers don't notice you. Sometimes they're tired, or distracted. It's easy to miss a bicycle.

"For these reasons, it's important to do everything you can to make yourself visible, to stand out and make sure drivers notice you."

Carol Naranjit, case facilitator for Brain Injury Services, used several visual aids to drive home the message about protecting the skill and brain from trauma.

"Once your brain is damaged, it will never be the same again," she stressed, demonstrating how the brain's soft tissue moves around inside the head and what happens when it comes into hard contact with the ground or some other solid object. "We work with people with brain injuries. A brain injury is an invisible disability. It impacts their lives in every area.

"I wonder how a brain injury would affect you," Naranjit continued. "You travel so far and you come every year. Will you be able to travel? Will you be able to work? Your speech, your language may be affected. You might not be able to take care of yourself, to bathe, to brush your teeth, to hold your child. How will it affect your family and all those people you come here for, to make a better life.

"We beg you, do it for your family."

According to Hubbard, the *Mi Vida Importa* presentation will take place again later in the season for workers who were unable to attend Sunday, as well as on site at several local farms that have a large number of workers.

And she hopes all of the workers take away at least one thing. "I ask that you promise to honour yourselves and your families by using the equipment you receive today.

"All of the guests are here today because they care about your lives."

A perfect fit

If a helmet is not fitted properly, it's like not wearing a helmet at all, Sgt. Barry Mungar of the Hamilton Police Service told migrant workers during the *Mi Vida Importa* bike safety workshop.

To fit a helmet properly, use the "2V1" rule.

- The helmet should not be worn too far back on the head.

Use two fingers to measure the distance above your eyebrows to determine if it is sitting properly.

- The helmet straps should form a "V" under the ears.
- The chin strap should fit snugly enough that there is room for just one finger between the material and your skin.
- Each person must use their own fingers to take these measurements while wearing their own helmet.

Maintenance ABCs

Each time a rider gets ready to take his or her bike on the road, they should perform a quick ABC test on their equipment, says Sgt. Barry Mungar of the Hamilton Police Service:

- A – check the air in both tires, as low pressure can lead to loss of control and a crash.
- B – check to make sure the brakes are functioning by rolling the bike backward and forward and squeezing the hand brake.
- C – the bike's chain needs to stay lubricated. If it is a rusty colour, add oil as rust will affect the strength of the chain.

Rules of the road

- Riders must follow all traffic signs and lights, including one-way signs.
- It is a good idea to wear bright colours, especially when the sun is down.
- Ontario traffic law states that cyclists must have white lights in front and red lights in back from 30 minutes before sunset until 30 minutes after sunrise.
- Bicycles are considered slow moving vehicles and are required to ride as far to the right as possible, in single file.
- Bikes must have a noisemaker – a bell or horn – that can be reached on the handlebars.
- Cyclists must use hand signals to indicate turns.