Influencing the safety of young workers

Lisa Newland

[Refer to Slide 1.]

Facilitator:	Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to WorkCover Queensland's webinar and thank you for joining us today. Following the recent success of our webinar on Good Work Designs for Young People our guest speaker Lisa Newland will explore how the mind and risk profiles of a young person can influence their health, safety and return to work as well as what leaders and supervisors can do to influence their behaviour.
[Refer to Slide 2.]	My name is Naomi Mason and I'm a Customer Services Manager at WorkCover Queensland. I'll be your moderator for today's session.
[Refer to Slide 3.]	Before we start I would like to quickly take you through how this webinar format works and how you can interact during the session. On the current slide you will see an image of the webinar control panel. You can select 'audio' on the control panel and change between 'computer audio' and 'telephone' depending on your preferred method. If you have headphones and speakers connected to your computer, select 'mic and speakers' otherwise choose 'telephone' to access the dial-in details.

You can hide or unhide the control panel using the coloured arrow. This will make sure you can see the entire screen. If you have a comment or question for the presenter please type this in the bottom panel and press 'send' to submit. Your comments and questions will then appear in the middle section. We will try to answer your questions at the end of the session. If we don't get to all of your questions we'll collect them and publish the answers on our website afterwards.

[Refer to Slide 4.]	After the webinar a recording and copy of the presentation will be available on our website in the coming weeks. We will notify everyone by email when the recording is available. So we can continually improve our level of service we would appreciate you completing a short survey at the end of the webinar.

[Refer to Slide 5.]   Today's session will commence with reviewing young workers' trends within WorkCover Queensland's claim data. To help you understand the young adult brain development and their vulnerabilities our guest speaker will refer to one specific rehabilitation case study throughout the webinar. Our session will also discuss practical advice for employers to assist with influencing young worker safety within the workplace and optimising return to work goals.

[Refer to Slide 6.]   According to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland data young workers make up to 18 percent of the Queensland workforce. The retail trade industry employs the highest number of young workers of any industry with almost 80,000 employed in Queensland. Of the 82,000 claims lodged in 2013-2014 13,000 or 16 percent of these were for workers under 25 years of age. In some industries the proportion of claims lodged for young workers was much higher.

This pie chart outlines the industry breakdown for those claims lodged by young workers. The predominant industry for claims by young workers are manufacturing, construction, accommodation and food services as well as retail trade.

[Refer to Slide 7.]   This slide shows the most common injury types for young workers compared to all workers. Over a quarter of young worker claims were for hand and finger injuries which is significantly higher than what is seen across all workers who lodged a 2013-2014 claim for hand and finger injuries.

[Refer to Slide 8.]   This graph shows the most common injury location for young workers compared to all workers. Interestingly enough musculoskeletal injuries are less prevalent in young workers than across all workers who lodged a WorkCover Queensland claim in 2013-2014. This information shows that young workers sustained a higher incident of wounds and lacerations during 2013-2014. Overall young worker claims have lower claims costs. This is likely to be reflected in the nature and locations of injuries they sustain.

However research has revealed that young workers' accidents are less serious in terms of compensation cost and length. A study however showed the rate of physical injury or mental impairment among 15 to 19-year-olds is twice that of older workers. In other words even if the initial compensation length and costs are less for young workers the fact that they are left with a permanent injury undoubtedly has repercussions for their aspirations and future work life.

We will now launch a poll question to gauge whether you believe young workers have a better return to work outcome than all workers. If we could please ask everyone to select their answer on the poll question that's now showing on their screen? Thank you to those that have responded. We'll now close the poll and share the results.

So as you can see today's group believe that young workers have a better return to work outcome than all workers. Across the board the average return to work rate for all workers is 95.93 percent whereas young workers have a return to work rate of 97.92 percent.

[Refer to Slide 9.]   As I mentioned earlier this will be the case study our guest speaker will make reference to throughout this webinar. Sam is a 17-year-old Marine Mechanic who was injured when a spark caused a fire whilst he was transferring fuel from the under-floor fuel tank into a jerry can using a 12 volt pump. Sam had previously completed this task on numerous occasions without any concerns.

Following the incident Sam was transported to hospital where he was admitted for 11 days whilst being treated for superficial burns to his hands, wrists and legs. The employer visited Sam several times during his hospitalisation. After stabilising Sam was discharged from hospital wearing compression garments with the need to apply burn cream several times per day. Sam returned to work participating in suitable duties within the retail area of the marine workshop for a three week period then graduated to pre-injury duties within eight weeks of the accident.

Throughout his workers' compensation claim, Sam remained focused on a quick recovery as well as getting his tan back. With that I will now hand you across to our guest speaker, Lisa Newland.

[Refer to Slide 10.]   Lisa is a Principal Consultant at Sentis where she works with clients to design, implement and sustain performance improvement across the areas of safety culture, wellbeing and operational excellence. Sentis partners with its clients to deliver significant and substantial improvements in organisational performance. During her time at Sentis, Lisa has also designed the Impact Learning and Wellbeing Framework incorporating concepts based in psychology and neuroscience for adolescent learners.

[Refer to Slide 11.]

Lisa Newland: Thank you Naomi and welcome everybody to today's webinar. I wanted to start the presentation by sharing some common attitudes towards young people. You can see from the quotes there that while they're very old at this stage that they still really do have some prominent attitudes that would exist today. So the first one there "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words."

You can see that the period loosely termed "adolescence" or "young adult" has often been viewed with a fairly poor attitude by older people. By today's standards young people still get a pretty bad wrap in the media, stories that reflect stereotypical behaviours such as out of control parties, vandalism etc. They vastly outweigh stories about young people in terms of achievement, triumph and dedication.

These quotes and the attitudes they represent also provide us with an opportunity to check our own attitudes towards young people. How do we view them and how does this attitude reflect in our behaviours towards young people in the workplace? Interestingly what was once thought of as a difficult transition period of adolescence from 13 to say 18 years of age has now been found to extend from as young as 11 and as old as 23 or 25 mostly from their health before the young brain reaches adult maturity. If we can understand the young adult brain we can begin to see the capacity and limitations that they have which can impact their safety and performance in the workplace.

[Refer to Slide 12.]   So what is happening from a brain perspective? If young workers are defined as between the ages of 15 and 24 then the following general findings will certainly apply. Firstly in terms of young adult brain development emotions rule. So adult brains have the capacity for impulse control, planning and reasoning - the higher order thinking or executive functions of our brain. However, the young brain is less about reasoning and thinking and more about emotion – feeling things intensely and reacting emotionally.

Secondly the reward circuitry is highly active and this results in the behaviours of young workers being more likely to be driven by immediate search for sensations, rewards and novelty some of which can be associated with risk-

taking or recklessness. Reward payoff is often social. So peers have a massive influence as young people continually jostle for social status. Coordination is also still developing which is a surprise to many people. Young workers may learn new skills rapidly but they are still prone to coordination lapses particularly early in the day. Mixed-handedness or cross-dominance can have adverse effects from hazards involving complex tasks where both hands and more than one sense is engaged. So more than just sounds, visual and movement.

Young people while physically capable do not have the manual dexterity of an adult with experience and I think Sam's task reflects this situation. It may have contributed to his outcome in that he was using both hands at the same time and bending over. So there were a number of elements that contributed to that complex task. Mental imagery is still developing as well. The ability to visualise things as you think is a really helpful skill when you're explaining something. We often make assumptions with young people that they only need to be told once to understand but with a lack of life experience they have fewer reference points to draw from when making meaning particularly when trying to visualise something.

Now the last one there is pretty interesting – melatonin production – how it differs in young adults and for any parents out there I'd just like to ask have you ever tried to get a teenager out of bed? Well it seems a daily chore for many parents but it can be explained by an adjusting body clock due to changing levels of the hormone melatonin. This sleep hormone causes young people to want to sleep longer and stay up later which is why young people are at risk of injury earlier in the day when they are not as alert. It is interesting that schools and workplaces often have young workers starting earlier when they're not at their best. So a good one to take into consideration.

The last one there – perception of risk. Young workers can perceive hazards similar to adults but the ability to understand the full extent of the hazard could lag. There can often be a sense of frustration and errors in tasks involving decision making where there is potential for disorganised thought patterns and behaviours. They may take longer to process certain types of

information about dangerous situations and be able to visualise harmful outcomes.

[Refer to Slide 13.]

Next I think it's important for us to have a look at young adult specific vulnerabilities. So what are the things that contribute to them being injured in a workplace? So firstly workplace factors – things such as environment design, hazard exposure, the type of job, industry demands and supervisor attitudes to safety. So linking back to that first point I made.

Often a young person may have a role description like be the cashier or front of house at a restaurant but that doesn't mean that they won't find themselves in the kitchen or cleaning amenities. Young workers may be asked to multi task or be the workplace generalist - a jack of all trades – often given less desirable jobs by senior workers. The other interesting factor in the workplace is the attitude of other adults towards young workers who are tagged as "part time", "temporary" or an "apprentice". Inductions are an opportunity to connect and share experience but can often be overshadowed by negative attitudes to the inexperienced.

In a workplace young people have less autonomy or control over work tasks and work pace pressure or the ability to vary tasks and the frequency of rest breaks could allow the young worker some responsibility.

In terms of individual or demographic factors this is really referring I suppose as well to social support. So studies found that youth not in schools or in full time study reported lower levels of social support both in and out of the workplace. Fewer peers and social groups and inadequate supervision at work contributes to an 'at risk' profile. Also in terms of individual factors ergonomic factors play a massive part because there's a physical development issue. Tool design heights and dimensions are often designed only for the adult body.

You see there as well with Sam that his employer went back and visited him a number of times in hospital and there was quite a lot of social support during his rehabilitation. So that's something to take note. Mental health issues can often manifest between the ages of 15 and 25. These mental health issues often co-exist with physical injury sustained within the workplace. Rates of anxiety and depression are actually higher in teens and 20s than almost any other decade in life and change in uncertainty while exciting can be

overwhelming. And we need to consider the intensity of their feelings, that emotional tendency we spoke about earlier.

Binge drinking and drugs are particularly damaging to young brains. More than 20 drinks a week can result in decreased cognitive function, memory and attention which are all crucial thinking skills for keeping safe. It is also interesting to note the subtle influence of older workers on young people in terms of these habits as well and some of the habits within a workplace in terms of Friday afternoon drinks or – you know – celebrations and whatnot.

[Refer to Slide 14.]

So let's have a look at risk taking because from research we've discovered it's not exactly what you would expect. Young adults have a greater tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. So they engage more in unknown risks. This may stem from a biological feature that makes learning about the unknown less pleasant for adolescents than it is for adults because this is part of growing up and seeking out new experiences and leaving the nest. The interesting thing is that young adults carefully think about risks most adults would not even consider taking like say, playing Russian roulette. They would use quantitative reasoning and take twice as long as adults before responding but adults use a different part of the brain to assess the risk and this often draws on their intuition which of course is built through experience.

Young workers also process information differently. They often get lost in the details overly focused on rewards while ignoring the gist or bigger picture, so the ultimate consequences. Again this is something potentially that Sam has exhibited - looking at the details of the task and not looking at those long term consequences of what he was actually doing. Mature thinkers can also flip between gist and detail. So they can see the bigger picture and the steps to get there while younger workers may struggle to develop this skill. Reward circuitry in the brain is more activated with peers. So social motivation is far greater for young workers which makes them susceptible to social feedback, praise and rejection.

Young people do what their peers want them to do rather than what they may say is rational and this is particularly important in workplaces where shifts of workers contain a high number of young people. Impressing their peers and being very self conscious in doing so can be a workplace distraction and you'll note that at the end of Sam's case study he spoke about wanting to get his tan

back as a motivating factor which shows again that social influence. Once those compression bandages came off he wanted to get back into his beach wear.

The interesting one is around fatigue. It's definitely a factor of risk in the workplace not just for young people but for all workers. Because of the way young people process information they're using parts of the brain that require huge amounts of energy and young people can become fatigued sooner than you may think. In a hazardous environment in particular if a young person is trying to problem solve to assess risk they can become fatigued. We actually have quite a limited capacity to focus for sustained periods of time and to illustrate this point I wanted everybody to think about the time when they learnt to drive.

[Refer to Slide 15.] So here is my first car. It's a 1977 Ford Cortina, colour blue steel which is kind of funny these days. When my dad first taught me to drive I was awkward, clumsy. I couldn't believe that he and my mother seemed to do it so effortlessly. There were wipers, lights, foot pedals, mirrors and even a radio – high tech. So do you remember when you first learnt to drive because it actually felt like this to me.

[Refer to Slide 16.] But slowly we all learnt the coordination, multi-handedness, three pedals to work in unison. And why did we learn that? Due to focused attention and practice which is basically experience. Experts have incorporated the best routines into their brains to the point where they become automatic. Our brains use less energy.

[Refer to Slide 17.] But with experience can often come complacency and I'm wondering whether in Sam's case study this could also be referenced because it talked about him having done this task many times before. When we feel like we've done it 1,000 times before we can become very complacent. It's actually our brains which try to conserve energy at every opportunity. When tasks become so automatic that we stop thinking about them it poses a risk not just to young workers but to everyone.

In Sam's case he had done that task before. He may have possibly grown complacent and stopped putting in as much thought as he previously needed and not been particularly focused on the risks. So fatigue is an important

point. Fatigue from the sleep cycle adjustment and fatigue from trying to solve problems throughout the day that adults no longer have the need to do.

[Refer to Slide 18.] So what can employers do? How can we apply these understandings about young workers' brains in the workplace? Firstly we can include gist-based reasoning when teaching new skills. That is we can demonstrate that ability to flip between gist or the bigger picture, the ultimate consequences and the details if we use simulation scenarios and mental imagery to get young workers to connect with the material. Scenarios may be helpful if they have a strong emotional hook. It may be more memorable and work with their more emotive brain.

Autonomy or perceived control over work tasks – this can be granted in terms of things like break flexibility and the pace of work and giving them more responsibility may result in them being more responsible. Promotion of social interactions for safety can include buddy systems and also taking advantage of the fact that our young workers are digital natives. They are all over technology. Use of online forum - social media platforms where they can access or connect about issues in the workplace like safety and wellbeing could be beneficial. And a few that come to mind are the ReachOut apps like WorryTime and Breathe and also Dumb Ways to Die which was a global success actually, a viral campaign by Metro Trains in Melbourne, as well as a number of safer driver apps.

Adequate supervision includes providing performance feedback at timely intervals with further role modelling where required. Also we need to be mindful of the resilience of our young people if they are in the front line or in a customer facing role which may require emotional labour. How are they tracking and dealing with the sometimes difficult public? One of the greatest ways to influence young workers is to create a workplace culture where mistakes are seen as building blocks for learning not opportunities for public ridicule.

If young workers have the opportunity to try within a safe environment there can be wider gains for the business in terms of continual improvement. Individual differences can include work undertaken early in the day, work pace, break times and regular checks into general wellbeing. Using questioning to assess risk perception is also a valuable tool rather than just telling people.

Checking for the understanding at different parts of a process can be a valuable insight into their thinking as well.

Finally promoting safety attitudes by role modelling positive safety behaviours can be extremely influential. Make sure that it is 'walking the talk' not "Do as I say, not as I do." Pairing young workers with an experienced and well-respected older mentor can be beneficial and always be looking for opportunities to say "Good work," "You did that well," "Hey. I noticed what you did there." This can provide a nice boost of dopamine to a young brain and increase the likelihood of them repeating that behaviour.

[Refer to Slide 19.]   Finally, I'd like to leave you with one of the quotes around adolescence that is a little less negative or derogatory like the ones I showed at the beginning. But it's "Adolescence is like having only enough light to see the step directly in front of you," and this goes back to that details-oriented thinking patterns that they have.

So I'm going to pass back now to Naomi and we're going to address a number of the questions that have come through from today's session. Naomi.

Facilitator: So thank you Lisa. If anyone has any questions please provide those in the comments screen. We do have a few that we're going to go through. Lisa your practical advice tips is a good summary of today's session. There'll be further information on this topic available on our website within the 'injury and prevention safety' page. There is a 'young worker' section that provides information on managing risks for young workers and those who employ workers in their organisation. Also Sentis' website is a resource that provides a range of safety and wellbeing case studies and articles.

So Lisa some of the questions that have come through, one particular one is "As an employer do I need to consider gender differences between young male and female within safety or should I treat them the same?"

Lisa Newland: I think a common sense approach would be to look at males a little differently. When I talked about the areas of the brain that mature more slowly that is often they find with males. So girls' brains tend to mature into those and have the capacity for executive functions earlier. So when we think about adolescence not finishing at 18 but 23 and 25 that is actually often males. So

we do need to treat them differently to some point but there's still an enormous amount of research in terms of the gender differences in terms of their brains. So I'd rather just leave it at young males. Keep an eye on them a little further particularly as well if their peers are around that influence of the social group could be quite large for young males.

Facilitator: Thank you Lisa. You did mention some technology apps. Are you aware of any further digital tools or resources that will be suitable for a small employer to use to engage young workers with safety and prevention?

Lisa Newland: Some of the – and the reason in mentioning those as I said is because young people are digital natives. They are the people who've grown up connected 24/7 to technology. So they interact socially and collaborate online. I think there's a number of apps out there. I talked about the ReachOut ones and there's ones there around Breathe and a number of wellbeing apps. Also ones where people can actually measure and keep track of their own say, anxiety and depression. But more importantly the safety apps are actually very useful. There's a number of apps that can be used in conjunction with driving. So if that's a workplace task for a young person they can come in quite handy.

I think what we may be able to do is supply specific names of these at a later time on the website. I think the point I was trying to make is that technology can be particularly engaging for young people. So we should try to use it where we're trying to teach them something or have them engaged in a particular topic.

Facilitator: Thank you Lisa. We will collate those resources and have them available when we post the recording of the webinar and presentation. One of the other questions that has been posed is "Should we have any different training or induction methods to accommodate learning needs of young workers?"

Lisa Newland: Yeah. I think we definitely should think about our training differently to an experienced worker because with 20 years of experience in the workplace we can probably make a number of assumptions that you'd be a little bit across different topics but young people I think we have to allow for the fact that their learning is still developing, their capability. Scenario based learning would be appropriate where you're actually modelling again that difference between gist and details and also how are we going to reinforce the learning because

we don't want to just tell people how to do something. We want to give them opportunities to be hands-on. We want to provide feedback loops through that process. So coaching can be really useful.

I think in terms of an induction we've got to think about how we actually engage young people and that is possibly by using emotion. If their brains are a little more attuned to emotion then can we possibly tell a narrative to demonstrate some of the consequences maybe of unsafe behaviour? And as I mentioned earlier young people are very much attuned to novelty and they – you know – once they find something interesting or engaging and you have their attention then you have a great chance of them actually learning something. But I think too often inductions can look like a very compliance-driven checklist. "Okay, I've done this. I've signed that. Now you're ready to go." I think there's a lot more opportunity to look at staging the learning and making sure that they're engaged throughout all of the stages of that process.

Facilitator: Thank you. A little bit further to that one of the employers has asked "Do you have advice to get young workers to open up during that training and induction session because often they find that they remain silent or withdrawn during that session?" So you did mention a little bit there about engaging in their emotional side. Is there something further that you could expand on?

Lisa Newland: I think sometimes when someone's inexperienced and they may lack confidence they're not necessarily going to open up and say they don't understand something. They want to look like they're across it, they're learning quickly. They're trying to maybe impress their boss. I think there's a number of things we can do here. I think questions in the workplace are very powerful and the quality of your question is going to determine the quality of the response that you get.

But instead of possibly having sessions with someone where you're just talking with them or at them it's posing those questions and just waiting for that response giving them time to process that and having a further probing question at the end of it as well because what we want to do is drag out the information that they have to really see where they are rather than I suppose just say to them "Okay, we've told you that once. You should be right to go," because when it's maybe more authoritarian they're going to be less likely to actually have those conversations.

I think by opening up those communication channels in general, feedback loops as I've said, but checking in, showing them that yep, you'll pull them up or have a difficult conversation but also that you'll recognise good work. So by saying to someone "Hey that was great," pat on the shoulder, "Well done," "I noticed you did a really great job with that," "Please keep it up," "That's fantastic," those kind of behaviours open up trust as well and that's essentially what we need to develop between employers and young people because they don't want to be perceived as being inadequate workers in any way.

Facilitator: That's some great advice. Thank you. Some good practical tips. One of the questions have come through "In regards to an employer that employs school-based workers from the age of 15 to 17 who are interested to work but however they do not have any experience and/or risk management. So the reporting culture has not yet been developed. Do you have any way to engage them in regards to reporting any of the risks that they may come across within the working environment?"

Lisa Newland: Okay. So there's probably a couple of things there. Firstly as I suggested earlier if we can engage people with electronic reporting and I'm not suggesting people have millions of dollars to spend on really elaborate apps or whatnot but where there is a possibility to do the kind of reporting electronically I think workers of any age find a frustration when it's paper-based. Things are delayed. It's a bit of a tick and flick. So certainly if there's an electronic way to record that, that would be probably preferable for young people.

I think as well it's the role modelling of those kinds of things where an employer instead of having an instructional session to say "This is what risk is about," it might be more scenario-based. So they could be in the workplace and the leader or the boss could be going through and demonstrating what that actually means. So – you know – doing a risk assessment, showing them the steps, talking aloud so they can hear it and really role modelling those behaviours. And when we suggested earlier about the buddy system or a mentor that can really help people in the workplace that would be useful as well in that situation.

I think there's certainly an amount of teaching that has to take place but we've got to make sure that there's a level of engagement and interaction during that teaching phase so that they can actually not just see it being done, they

can experience it and they can be allowed to make different errors. And your feedback loops if they're really robust can address those issues really quickly so we can see continual improvement in those processes.

Facilitator: Fantastic. Thank you Lisa. We have a few employers that are looking for perhaps some tips where they're often working in conditions that are unpredictable. More so in the construction and agriculture industry where there's young workers who are not aware of what may happen in those unpredictable environments. Do you have any tips for those employers?

Lisa Newland: Again I think the power of narrative. For generations we've told stories and our brains respond really positively to narrative. I think recalling or recounting a story of a situation where there was some kind of risk or there was a hazard and there was some kind of consequence to that can be very powerful. So firstly I think – you know – as soon as we start mentioning statistics and things like that people's brains tend to turn off. So power of narrative to engage in that would be a suggestion for those obvious...

Facilitator: Okay. So going through some scenarios that may have happened within their workplace previously to help that young worker align with what could happen and showing them...

Lisa Newland: That's right.

Facilitator: ...that it's an unpredictable environment so be as prepared as possible?

Lisa Newland: Yep.

Facilitator: Okay. We have addressed all the questions that have come through today so thank you to everyone that has provided those. Lisa thank you for presenting throughout our webinar today and to everyone for attending our webinar. If you do have any further questions they can be provided and we can address them within a tip section of our webinar.

Finally WorkCover Queensland is committed to continuing improving our levels of service and we'd welcome any feedback on today's session or suggestions for topics or formats for future sessions. We would like to ask participants to complete a short survey which will pop up at the end of the

webinar. Thank you every one and we hope you enjoy the remainder of your day.

[End of Transcript]