

Actor Rukiya Bernard at the filming of the *We Can Help* video. Bernard's message is to encourage industry colleagues to utilize calltimentalhealth.com when facing challenges with mental health or addiction.

B.C. film industry speaks up for mental health

By Helena Bryan

Workers in the B.C. film industry face demands and stressors that could impact their mental health and well-being. A recently launched website created by and for the film industry aims to remove the barriers that prevent people who face mental health and addictions challenges from getting the help they need.

From the outside, working in the film industry seems all glamour and no grind. But behind the scenes, the glamour can quickly fade to black.

The nature of the industry, with its long hours, inconsistent schedules, frequent travel, and work-hard, play-hard culture, contributes to health and safety risks such as fatigue, impairment, and overexertion. Managing these risks through proper training, orientation, and supervision is also challenging with the logistical realities of these workplaces.

"All of these challenges combine to put workers at higher risk of anxiety, depression, burnout, and addiction," says Gregg Taylor, president of FSEAP Vancouver, a national provider of employee and family assistance programs. Taylor is a clinical counsellor and

subject matter expert in mental health and addictions issues for the working group behind the website.

Taylor adds that it's not surprising that this tight-knit community has been rocked, like others in B.C. and across the country, by the opioid crisis.

Setting off alarm bells

"Many of us have worked with someone who has either died from a fentanyl overdose, or knows someone who has," says Lorrie Ward, secretary treasurer of Teamsters 155, representing film industry drivers, security, catering, animal handlers, and the marine division. Ward calls the deaths "a wake-up call" and one that spurred him into taking action.

He became a catalyst for the creation of the mental health and addictions working group, which met for the first time in May 2017.

With representatives from the five industry unions taking part, the group met every month for a year to discuss options for addressing the mental health and addictions issues facing their members.

Labour of love

The website, created by and for the film industry to

support and empower its members, launched at the end of April 2018. It's named, appropriately, calltimentalhealth.com, in reference to the call sheets created at the end of every shift, which include the next day's location and start time.

The website contains helpful resources for workers, employers, and supervisors, and links to where people from each of the five unions can get practical help. It also features a public service announcement (PSA) written and produced by working group member Enid-Raye Adams in collaboration with a team of film industry professionals.

The PSA features real people in the industry talking candidly about their experiences with mental health and addictions issues, as well as others who are inspired to share the message that help is out there. "The moment I talked about it was the moment I gave it less power," says a set decorator named Trevor in the video.

"The message is: talk about it, we can help, you're not alone, and there's no shame in this," says Adams.

Taylor is optimistic about the campaign's effectiveness. "For this kind of initiative to be successful," he says,

"your audience has to be able to see themselves in it. Otherwise, it's too easy to just say, 'Well, that's not me.' This campaign does just that. It really is amazing."

"The PSA was a labour of love," says Tom Adair, former executive director of the BC Council of Film Unions and chair of the mental health and addictions working group, "with many people volunteering their time, talent, equipment, and services. The message is, 'we're here, and we can help.'"

And this is just the beginning, Adair says: "We need to change the culture from one of avoidance to one where there's real dialogue, and where people feel safe having that dialogue. And that's a long-term proposition." 🍷

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—**Lorrie Ward**, secretary treasurer of Teamsters 155 and member of the film industry mental health and addictions working group

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