



Youth employment program builds a legacy of safety

More than 500 young people have participated in Dexterra's OYEP program to date.

When safety is truly woven into a company's way of working, it can create benefits and opportunities that spread beyond the workplace. That's the case with Dexterra's Outland Youth Employment Program (OYEP), a gold medal winner for young worker safety in the 2019 Canada's Safest Employer Awards.

OYEP facilitates training and employment for Indigenous youth in communities across Canada. It was launched in 2000 as a forestry training initiative, and continues to provide six weeks of hands-on work experience every summer. At this point, Dexterra's Vice President, Health & Safety Lee-Anne Lyon-Bartley reports, the program claims a network of more than 500 graduates from 103 communities.

Lyon-Bartley is a Steps for Life participant and volunteer, a member of the Toronto walk committee. Dexterra works in forestry operations, facilities management and remote workforce accommodations. The company's safety culture is founded on its values: accountability, diversity of thought, empowerment and being highly responsive, Lyon-Bartley explains. Health and safety are integrated from the senior leadership team to every worker.

The youth employment program "fits into this culture no differently than any of our other projects," she says. To ensure the participants are "engaged and enthusiastic about our safety culture," OYEP staff "host morning tailgate meetings with the entire camp to reinforce the safety culture for the day and to discuss any

potential hazards of the day. There is a safety committee established—led by a Safety Officer—which meets weekly to re-cap the week's events, if any and discuss how they can be mitigated in the future ... They also offer a safety mentorship program through our safety committee. Youth are paired up with management for safety-specific training. This includes camp walk-throughs, vehicle inspections, site inspections, filling out paper work and re-stocking safety supplies. Each pair is responsible for specific tasks, which later get audited by the camp supervisor. This creates a culture of accountability and ownership."

The youth come away from the program with paid job experience, certifications and life skills. As a result of OYEP, a number of former participants have been hired for permanent positions with Dexterra. In addition, graduates contribute to their communities, creating benefits for band leadership, administration, social services, local industry and entrepreneurship. For the participants themselves, Lyon-Bartley says, there are social, economic and educational benefits.

"Ultimately," she says, "we are setting the foundation for youth to have a productive and happy adult life, whether in their communities or elsewhere."

For more information about the annual Canada's Safety Employer awards, visit safestemployers.com.

For more information on Dexterra, visit dexterra.com.