



ABOUT **MATES IN CONSTRUCTION**





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ABOUT **MATES IN CONSTRUCTION**

MATES in Construction (MIC) was created by the BERT Pty Ltd welfare fund to support individuals within the Queensland construction industry by addressing mental health and wellbeing related issues including suicide and self harm.

The BERT Pty Ltd Welfare Fund funded the initiative:

to provide proactive support to prevent workers developing mental health problems and early identify workers who have already developed mental health problems and suicidal thoughts. This will ultimately create a more resilient and healthier building construction industry workforce.

When a worker dies and still has money in the Building Employees Redundancy Trust the family is entitled to claim this outstanding amount by producing a death certificate. In the period 1999 to 2007 a total of 399 families claimed such death payments. It was estimated that in 88 of these claims the cause of death could be attributed to suicide. This amounts to around 22% or one in five! In addition to these 88 deaths an alarming rate of motor vehicle accidents were reported - some of them single vehicle accidents.

The Mates in Construction program was developed through reference to industry forums; the LIFE frameworks (Australian Govt. suicide prevention framework which has received global recognition as best practice), The AISRAP report into suicides in the QLD construction industry; The Living Works material from Canada which is also recognised as best practice in suicide prevention through building capacity in the community. It is also widely used by Lifeline and Armed Forces to mention a few.

MIC Queensland was formerly known as Ozhelp Queensland and was aligned with the national Ozhelp organisation but in late 2010 moved to be an independent body with a new name – MATES In Construction or MIC.

- MIC provides suicide prevention support and encourages mental health and well-being
- The BERT Welfare Fund established MIC Queensland
- In late 2010 Ozhelp Queensland became MATES In Construction



FAST FACTS

Mates in Construction was built on industry consultation and draws its principles from world's best practice



ABOUT SUICIDE

In response to the high number of death claims the BERT board, in conjunction with a range of other industry funds, commissioned the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP) to conduct a major study into suicides in the Queensland Construction industry.

AISRAP studied a population of 167,103 workers working in the industry between 1995 and 2001 and reached the conclusion that 40 out of 100,000 workers on average might suicide in a year. These rates were even higher for young workers, between the ages of 15 and 24, where the suicide rates were 60 in 100,000 workers*.

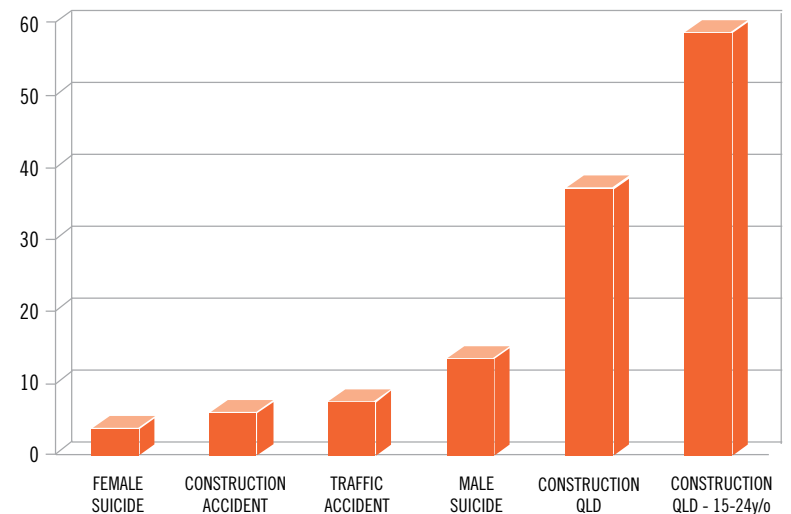
For comparison, overall female suicide rates in Australia in 2008 was 4 in 100,000; construction accident rates 6 in 100,000; transport accident rates 8 in 100,000; and male suicide rates in Australia 14 in 100,000.

Workers in the Queensland Construction industry, according to these statistics, are six times more likely to suicide than to die from an industrial accident.

The average age at the time of suicide in the construction industry was 34 years of age compared to a national average of 40. Suicidal thoughts are more common, and may be an early warning sign. Conservatively, one in 20 workers in the construction industry will consider suicide during a year.

Is there a problem?

(MORTALITY RATE PER 100,000)



* NOTE - AISRAP qualified this number due to a relatively small sample size.

FAST FACTS

- Up to 1 in 20 workers will contemplate suicide during one year
- Construction workers are 6 times more likely to suicide than to die from an industrial accident
- More than 22% of BERT death claims could be attributed to suicide

ABOUT PREVENTION

Most suicide occurs with warning signs.

Amongst young workers who suicided, more than half had communicated a suicide intention within 12 months of suicide. However, amongst these construction industry workers, a disproportionately low percentage (less than 7%) had actually sought help.

It is rarely a single event or situation that causes a person to suicide, more likely a culmination of major life events where several things pile up finally causing them to reach a tipping point. There may be problems either at home or at work, but usually it is a combination of both.

Relationship problems are a major factor in suicides, as is substance abuse. These factors, for some reason, are more common in the construction industry than in the national average. With the high construction industry suicide rate, it is our duty as part of that industry to lower these statistics to at least the national average.

Effective suicide prevention strategy may save as many as 30% of suicides. On an industry basis, an effective suicide prevention strategy may save even more lives than are lost through workplace accidents each year.

Symptoms of suicidal behaviour and thoughts include; drug and alcohol abuse, lack of concentration and sleep, risk taking behaviours and carelessness. Improving mental health and wellbeing on site therefore not only saves lives, but also improves workplace health and safety and production.

MATES in Construction seek to exploit the fact that most people who intend to commit suicide would rather live than die but simply find it impossible to manage the pain they are in. The MIC project will identify the behavioural signals exhibited from a suicidal worker and provide the workers with alternatives. MIC will also work towards changing the culture within the industry to make it more acceptable to discuss personal issues at work.

People who suicide generally do not really want to die - however, the pain of living simply becomes too great!



FAST FACTS

- Suicidal persons often display warning signs
- People who suicide generally do not really want to die - however, the pain of living simply becomes too great!

ABOUT RECOGNISING **THE SIGNS**

Suicide is not usually an impulsive act. Persons with suicidal thoughts will often have planned the event and method for some time.

This planning period is a good opportunity for intervention. Humans are survivors and most people contemplating suicide will give out signs or 'invitations' that all is not well. MIC provides training and awareness in recognising these signs so that we don't ignore them; rather we assist a mate to get proper help.

It is rarely one event that causes individuals to decide to suicide, most often multiple life events will contribute to the decision.

These events include:

- Relationship problems
- Recent marriage break up
- Child custody issues
- Conflict
- Work problems
- Recent/pending unemployment
- Financial problems
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Pending legal matters
- The anniversary of or recent exposure to suicide or some other important loss
- Unresolved bereavement

Unfortunately we often do not know enough about one another to be able to determine when these events affect a colleague. MIC General Awareness Training (GAT) highlights the importance for workers to talk more to each other.

People contemplating suicide often change their behaviour and appearance in subtle but noticeable ways. Be aware and pick up on a recent change in a mate:

- Declining personal grooming
- Increasing use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Recent loss of interest or enthusiasm
- Increasing days off due to illness
- Emotional outbursts for no obvious reason
- Risk taking behaviours
- Social withdrawal in someone usually very friendly
- Putting his or her affairs in order as if planning
- Enquiring about death benefits from superannuation and bank balances

These symptoms are not only an indication of personal or individual risk. In an industrial workplace such as a construction site they can create a risk to other workers on site.

A person contemplating suicide may in subtle ways talk about his or her emotions and the despair felt. Focus groups with construction workers have revealed that most workers felt that bullying onsite was an issue in the industry and that the culture in the industry did not allow open discussion of problems with peers.

The MATES in Construction General Awareness Training makes it clear to the industry that to some workers this culture is life threatening. Workers need space, opportunity and permission to discuss personal issues while at work.

The type of emotions expressed could include:

- Hopelessness
- Feeling numb
- Feeling defeated
- Worthlessness
- Loneliness
- Despair

A photograph of two construction workers in safety gear talking on a site. The worker on the left is wearing an orange shirt and a red hard hat. The worker on the right is wearing a yellow shirt, a white hard hat, and sunglasses. They are standing on a construction site with a concrete structure and a crane in the background. The text 'MEN ACTIVELY TALKING TO EACH OTHER ON SITE' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

MEN ACTIVELY TALKING TO EACH OTHER ON SITE

FAST FACTS

- Suicidal persons will often give out signals or 'invitations'
- Suicide is rarely an impulsive act and is often planned in detail
- Others can recognise suicidal behaviour by knowing circumstances, noticing changes in appearance and behaviour by listening to the feelings expressed and by helping a mate to make contact with support and help

ABOUT HOW THE MIC **PROGRAM WORKS**

MATES in Construction in its simplest form is just mates looking after mates.

We spend many hours a week at work and in many cases we spend more time with our workmates than anyone else including our family. Mates can often notice or can sense when we are doing it tough because we send our sign or invitations telling them. The Mates in Construction program conducted on sites through General Awareness training (1hour) teaches workers what these invitations or signs look like in our mates (or our family) when they are doing it tough. Through training Connectors (a mate who can keep you safe while connecting you to help) we provide a pathway for workers to connect their mates to help. The Connector training (4hours) has SafeTALK embedded into the training. SafeTALK is an internationally recognised suicide prevention program. We also provide workers with a 24/7 help line 1300MIC 111 or 1300642111. This line connects workers

to trained counselors or psychologists who can work through issues on the phone and set up future appointments. During work hours, this number comes to the MIC staff that is trained to assist workers. In addition to this, some sites choose to send workers to a two day course called ASIST (applied suicide intervention skills training) which gives site a worker with advanced skills in putting together safe plans for workers with suicidal thoughts.

All of these programs are about helping workers look after their mates and ensure they can easily connect to high quality help. The MIC case manager ensures that all help is appropriate for the worker and follows up to check it has been worthwhile.



ABOUT WHY THE **PROGRAM WORKS**

Does this approach of raising awareness on site with workers, and giving them clear pathways to help work?

At Mates in Construction we have been collecting statistics for over three years with regards the key outcomes of the program. We have delivered General Awareness Training to over 10,000 construction workers in Queensland; we have over 1000 trained Connectors with over 100 ASIST trained workers. We have delivered the training to over 30 companies on more than 130 sites. This gives us a breadth of exposure to construction industry to see if what we do works. This is what we have found;

“We connect workers to help on average 2 or 3 per day and we intervene in a worker with thoughts of suicide 2 or 3 per week”

In 2009 and 2010, Mates in Construction was awarded the national LIFE award for the best business/industry suicide prevention program in Australia and in 2010 we received a special commendation during the Premier's Mental Health awards for our work in suicide prevention.

Mates in Construction is a genuine industry initiative; its industry helping industry.

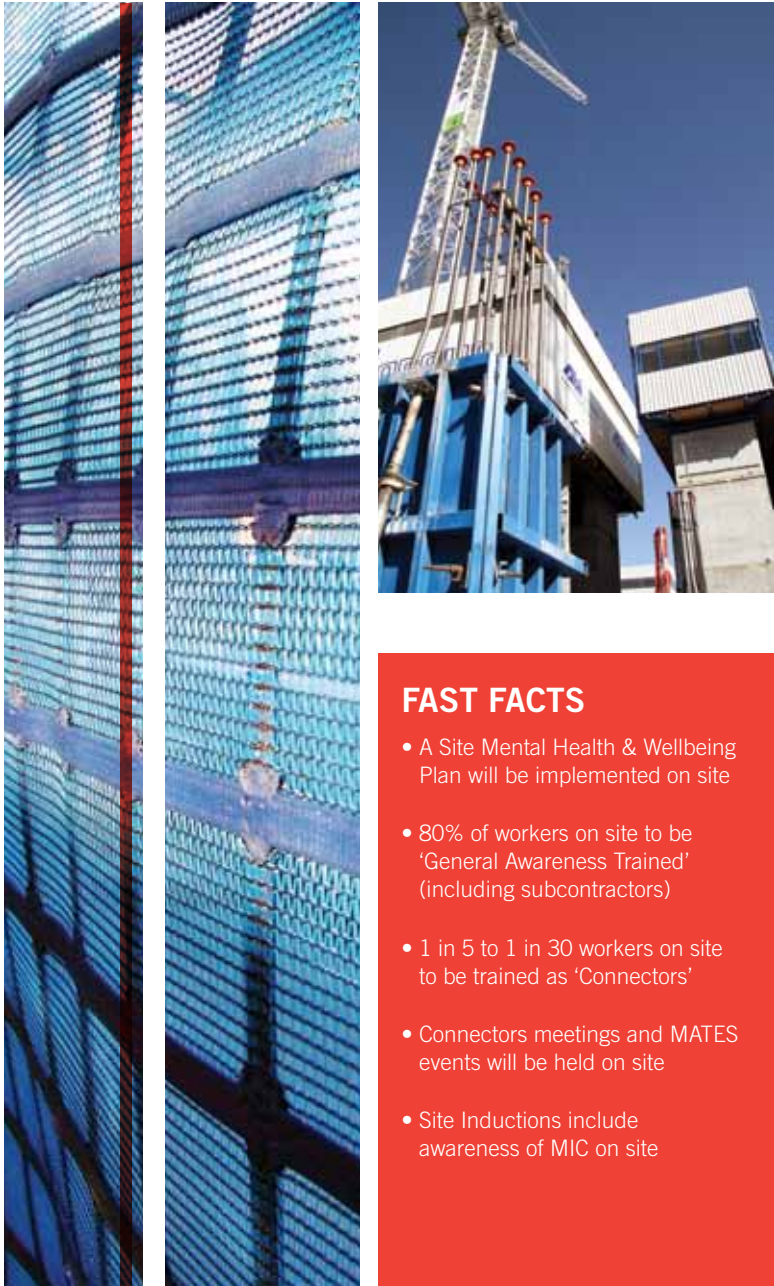
Yes it does work because of the companies and unions support, and workers know that help is as easy as talking to a Connector or ringing the 1300 number.

MIC accredited (80% general awareness and 20% of site as Connectors) are more aware of mental health and how it affects safety; are more aware of issues affecting apprentices and are likely to implement the life skills toolbox; have mates events through toolbox talks that focus on being healthy as men; and have a security of knowing if they or their family need help, it is easy to access.



FAST FACTS

- MIC raise awareness about suicide and makes it simple and easy to action warning signs
- Suicide can be confronting and scary causing people to avoid, miss or dismiss warning signs
- There are simple steps to helping a mate



FAST FACTS

- A Site Mental Health & Wellbeing Plan will be implemented on site
- 80% of workers on site to be 'General Awareness Trained' (including subcontractors)
- 1 in 5 to 1 in 30 workers on site to be trained as 'Connectors'
- Connectors meetings and MATES events will be held on site
- Site Inductions include awareness of MIC on site

ABOUT APPRENTICES

It has been proven that Life Skills are a significant resilience factor in protecting young people from suicide.

Mates in Construction has been running the Life Skills Tool Box for apprentices since 2008. The Tool Box is accredited training mapped against the National Employability skill set for construction apprentices.

The program was first developed by the OzHelp Foundation in Canberra in response to a cluster of suicides amongst apprentices.

The course in Life Skills covers a number of topics relevant to apprentices over 32 hrs. This course is delivered by qualified trainers. The mode of delivery is flexible. It can run on sites over 11 sessions or can be an intensive week. Some organisations have apprentices do five days of Life Skills over the life of their apprenticeship. It is conducted in RTOs, companies and in TAFE.

The external evaluation into the course showed a very high approval rating amongst employers, and a high level of acceptance amongst apprentices. However the most important factor from the evaluation is that one in four apprentices who participate in the Life Skills course ask for some form of personal assistance.

The course covers such topic as;

Suicide awareness, financial literacy, drug and alcohol awareness, communication, anger management, health and well being, nutrition, leadership, conflict management, workplace rights and responsibilities, work / life balance, managing emotions, goal setting as well as a number of other topics.

The program is designed to support and integrate apprentices through the Mates in Construction program.

ABOUT SUPPORT

MIC Queensland Ltd field officers will support community development on site as part of the implementation on site.

The field officer will help site management provide an environment conducive to good mental health and wellbeing which ultimately will provide better productivity and workplace health and safety.

MIC Queensland Ltd will organise ongoing opportunities for MATES Events on site allowing important health and wellbeing information to be provided to workers on site.

Workers on site will have access to a 24 hour crisis line and through this have access to immediate help and counselling. Workers experiencing difficulties will be offered Case Management by MIC Queensland Case Managers who will network workers into the most suitable and available assistance with the issues faced by the worker. As most workers have a multitude of issues at once, MIC Queensland will focus on using a number of different resources to tailor-make the best intervention and assistance program for the individual.

Where site management and/or employer has an effective Employee Assistance Program in place MIC Queensland will work with the program as far as is appropriate to the needs of the individual in question.

MIC Queensland Ltd will however not participate as part of any disciplinary program involving an individual, but will assist on the request of the individual only.

MIC Queensland Ltd has gained funding from the Queensland Department of Health to offer life skills training to 500 apprentices in the Queensland construction industry.

