

Mates in Mining Pilot Mine

Clermont Coal Open Cut Mine

The Problem:

Suicide is one of the most common causes of premature death globally. The Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that in 2014 out of a population of approximately 24 million people, 2864 had taken their lives. This equates to roughly 55 people per week in the general community. Evidence shows that suicide is the leading cause of death for males aged between 25-44 years and females aged between 25-34 years with the rate being three times higher for men than women. Furthermore, it was found that men from blue collar industries (including the mining industry) are four times more likely to commit intentional self-harm.

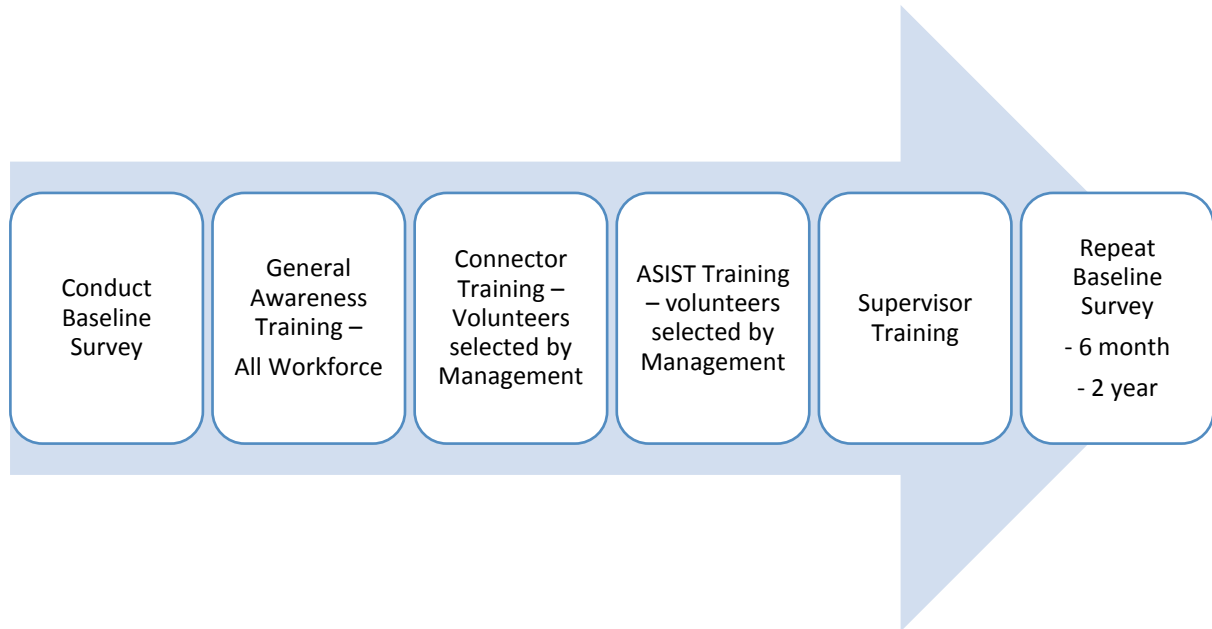
The Australian Bureau of Statistics stated that nearly 70% of all deaths were considered to be potentially avoidable with suicide found to be the leading cause, accounting for 97,066 years of potential life lost. For every death by suicide, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates three survivors will suffer permanent full incapacity and 12 will require time off work. The impact of this on the industry at large has been found to cost an estimated \$20 billion annually in productivity, with absenteeism rates attributable to 35-45% from mental illness, 18 days lost annually in presenteeism, and a higher risk of injury.

While a lot of research has been conducted into suicide rates within the construction industry, data for the mining industry has not been readily available. Given the tough economic climate that is currently plaguing the mining industry and exacerbating job security, the risk of suicide is undoubtedly real and mental health is highlighted. Unfortunately, like many mines situated in a small regional communities, Clermont Coal has not gone untouched by suicide and the impacts reach far and wide with flow on effects lasting indefinitely. Clermont Coal believe that suicide is preventable. With a workforce predominately male and aged between 25-44 years – many employed in semi-skilled occupations - they chose to actively invest in their strongest asset and commit to reducing suicide and addressing mental health problems within their workforce, and indirectly within the Clermont community.

The Solution:

To address the lack of data within the mining industry, raise awareness of the extent and impact of suicide and mental health, as well as show best practice towards suicide prevention, Clermont Coal volunteered to be the pilot mine for a new industry initiative called, 'Mates in Mining'. Developed off the back of the largely successful Mates in Construction, a committee was formed with personnel from various mining companies; the Resource Council; the Construction, Forestry, Mining, Energy Union (CFMEU); researchers from the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Institute of Mental Health; along with the Mates in Construction team, to develop the framework and to coordinate and conduct a site implementation trial.

The Mates in Mining program is designed around the idea that 'suicide is everyone's business' and in order to improve mental health and wellbeing of our workers and reduce intentional self-harm, everyone within the business must play an integral role. The framework is based on the following model of data collection and analysis, training and support.



The data collection is critical in determining the health and wellbeing of the workforce and establishing some solid information for the mining industry. A total of 395 employees participated in the initial baseline survey resulting in a 70% response rate, with 90% of participants found as male, reflecting the higher proportion of males within the mining industry. Out of those surveyed, 33.9% were identified as FIFO, 19.7% as DIDO and 45.3% were local. Furthermore, the survey demonstrated that the proportion of employees in each occupation category closely correlated with the total number of employees within those within the overall mining industry, indicating a strong cross-sectional representation of the workforce.

Researchers from the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Institute of Mental Health analyse this data after each survey is conducted before providing the statistics back to Clermont Coal and tailoring educational programs. These programs are then aimed at improving the workforce's ability to recognise, discuss and seek help for either themselves and/or someone that that is affected. This information will then be used to help better understand the mental health problems within the coal mining industry and how these problems may affect a person, including their impact on their work.

In order to lift the taboo associated with suicide and mental health and raise awareness, a series of training is conducted on site by qualified Mates in Mining trainers, which is as follows:

1. General Awareness Training – one hour training with entire workforce participation conducted after the initial baseline survey.

2. Connector Training – four hour training for management approved personnel that will act as the on-site support to connect individuals to help while keeping them safe.
3. ASIST Training – two day intensive training package for management nominated individuals that will act as specialised suicide support staff.
4. Supervisor Training – two hour upskilled training targeted at line management to effectively manage and monitor any affected individual/s.

Whilst the entire workforce will be trained to recognise warning signs in their mates and to provide support, the Connectors and ASIST personnel will provide a clear pathway to ensure those affected are connected to the appropriate help promptly with the utmost confidence and care. Clermont Coal actively encourages regular discussions on suicide and mental health topics and will engage Mates in Mining Field Officers to provide site visits on a needs basis. Further support is also available through Clermont's own Employment Assistance Program as well as the Mates In Mining 24/7 crisis telephone line.

Benefits/Effects:

By removing the stigma associated with suicide and mental health through increasing talk and supporting those doing it tough, Clermont Coal envisions a positive cultural shift towards suicide and mental health from the workforce using the educational tools the Mates in Mining program delivers. The skills learnt can be applied to anyone in any situation in or outside of work and can be passed directly onto family and friends. It is hoped that by changing negative thoughts, beliefs and attitudes it will increase the ability of anyone with problems to seek help early and for peers to recognise the signs to intervene and offer support more confidently.

The perceived benefits of improving and managing mental health and mitigating suicide through the program can be seen as risk reduction and recovery promotion. Risk reduction instils good support networks, reduces individual risk factors (i.e. reducing alcohol and drug misuse; encouraging healthy diet and exercise; improving financial skills; pain management) and reduces environmental risk factors (i.e. reducing occupational risks, fatigue, excessive stress, bullying, disharmony). Whereas, recovery promotion focuses on identification and early response, support for recovery and improving good health, and ensuring a good fit between the job and the person.

At the end of the two year trial Clermont Coal will fully examine the feasibility, acceptability and effectiveness of the program by conducting a thorough analysis of the baseline surveys to determine how personal attitudes towards mental health and suicide have shifted.

Transferability:

The Mates in Mining Clermont trial will enable any mining industry specific requirements to be included in the program, it will identify barriers to and support for, the most effective and efficient implementation in the industry and will seek to implement the program in a manner directly relevant to the industry. The program will set the foundation for the mining industry and can be easily applied universally.

Approximate Cost:

An approximate cost of \$80, 000 has been perceived for the full implementation of the Clermont Coal trial, this is not including any unforeseen additions for extra training and support that may become highlighted during the process.