

New Hope Group's Peer Support Program: Mates Helping Mates

Abstract

Many organisations make use of counselling services and "Employee Assistance Programs" to assist workers to deal with stress. These initiatives are valuable and often have high success rates for the workers to make use of them. However, it's well-known that many workers are unaware or avoid assistance provided by their employer. New Hope Group with the assistance of Gryphon Psychology has developed a Peer Support Program called "Mates Helping Mates". This complementary initiative uses low-key, collegial assistance, to take a more pro-active approach to increasing the help seeking behaviour of the workforce and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness.

The program has three key elements: the use of employees within the organisation, who are known and respected by their peers; an emphasis on the prevention of stress-related problems, with the use of stress awareness raising and short-term, low-key collegial assistance; and follow-up support, where those affected by stress are given assistance by a work-mate, who provides resource information and encouragement. Overall, peer support: encourages workmates to access early assistance; reaches workers who are unlikely to ask for help; complements other avenues of support and builds support skills across the work group.

Introduction

Mental Health is "a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" ¹

The mining industry is facing constant challenges and uncertainty caused by decreasing commodity prices that are driving budget cuts, organisational restructures, workforce reductions and increased pressure to produce more with less. This uncertainty has increased mental health issues amongst the workers in the industry. The Australian Psychological Society (APS) Stress and Wellbeing in Australia survey 2013 found that:

- Financial issues remain the leading cause of stress amongst Australians with more than half of Australians (52%) reporting it as a source of stress.
- In addition to finances, the next four leading causes of stress were family issues (47%), personal health issues (43%), issues with trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle (41%) and issues with the health of close ones (38%).
- 34% of all Australians identified issues in the workplace as a source of stress.
- Almost one in four Australians (24%) reported mental health issues as a source of stress²

See figure 1 for prevalence (%) of sources of stress in 2013 compared with 2012 and 2011

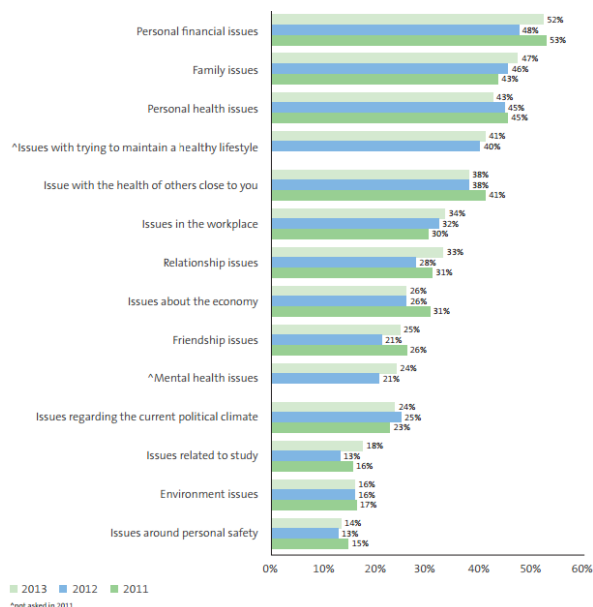


Figure 1 - figure 1 for prevalence (%) of sources of stress in 2013 compared with 2012 and 2011

The Survey indicated that the most effective strategy for managing stress was to spend time with friends and family (85%)³.

With 34% of all Australians identifying the workplace as a source of stress, then more needs to be done in the workplace to address this challenge.

New Hope Group's Resilience Framework

Historically, our focus has been the identification and mitigation of safety risks, and promotion of a workplace culture that aims to protect the physical welfare of the individual and their workmates. Over recent years that focus has widened to include the

¹ World Health Organization "Investing in Mental Health: Evidence for Action"

² & ³ APS Stress and Wellbeing in Australia Survey 2013

wellbeing of employees working within our organisation and more recently the focus has shifted towards mental health in the workplace with the advent of the inquiries associated with mental health issues of FIFO operations and the Mental Health Blueprint published by the Minerals Council of Australia.

The establishment of New Hope Group's Core Values has necessitated a more structured approach to the area of Resilience given that Resilience is a Core Value. This has led to the establishment of a Resilience Framework that brings together all the discrete elements of employee wellbeing and mental health. The elements of the Resilience Framework are:

- Resilience Core Value
- Health and Wellbeing Programs
- EEO framework
- Business Competencies
 - Collaboration
 - Communication
 - Problem Solving & Decision Making
 - Change Management
 - Driving Performance
- Peer Support
- Employee Assistance Program

Peer Support Program

Peer support is often described as a support program in which *members of a workgroup are trained to assist workmates to deal with stress*. The main purpose of peer support is to give workers another avenue for assistance where direct communication with supervisors and EAP providers around stress issues are low.⁴

Peer Support Officers (PSOs) are volunteers from the workforce who are trained to recognise the indicators of stress. A peer support officer provides support and where appropriate referral to our EAP provider Gryphon Psychology. They do not provide counselling or advisory services outside of their expertise.⁵

Implementation of New Hope Group's Peer Support Program – Mates Helping Mates

New Hope Group engaged Gryphon Psychology to assist with the implementation of the Mate Helping Mates program. The process consisted of:

Establishment of Program Name and Logo

The Mates Helping Mates program name reflects the intent of the program where assistance is of a collegiate nature. A logo (fig 2.) was designed to reflect the nature of the program.



Figure 2 Mates Helping Mates Logo

Badges for shirts were produced for mine based PSOs and Lapel pins for office based PSOs.

Recruiting of Peer Support Officers

Prior to the Peer Support Program, New Hope Group had an established EEO Contact officer program. On establishment of the Mates Helping Mates program the Contract Officers were automatically selected for the role. Others in the business were encouraged to apply for the role and those that applied were interviewed to ensure they had the traits required to become an effective PSO.

Training of PSOs

Training of the PSO's was conducted by Gryphon Psychology. The training extended over two days and the objectives were to:

1. To provide an understanding how people are affected by various forms of stress in the work environment.
2. To give an overview of the goals and principles of peer support.

⁴ & ⁵ Gryphon Psychology - 12 Common questions about Peer Support as a mental health initiative

3. To ensure participants understand the peer support role and where this fits with other programs used by the organisation (e.g. EAP)
4. To assist participants to develop the basic skills of peer support.
5. To develop the skills required for an effective “supportive listener”.
6. To give methods of effective communication and stress problem-solving.
7. To assist in the development of an effective peer support program.
8. To have participants understand how to make appropriate referrals for workmates who may require further assistance.
9. To have participants fully understand the limitations and ethics of the peer support role.

At the conclusion of the training, participants were able to:

1. Outline the types and sources of stress which can affect workers.
2. Use practical assistance, active listening and problem-solving strategies to assist workmates affected by stress.
3. Outline the basic signs and symptoms which indicate a worker may benefit from specialised assistance and appropriate ways to discuss support options with their workmate.
4. Use appropriate procedures for referring on to specialised support.
5. Detail the important DOs and DON'Ts of the peer support role.
6. Explain the peer support role to workmates.

PSO Support Mechanism

The Mates Helping Mates program is well supported in the business. The Program has an Executive Sponsor and a Program Coordinator.

If a PSO required assistance regarding a situation they can contact the Peer Support Line which is provided 24/7 as part of the existing EAP program, also run by Gryphon Psychology. This is a cost neutral support mechanism utilising the current EAP resources and significantly reducing costs of running and supporting a Peer Support program.

Confidentiality of Information

All information associated with a contact between a worker and a PSO is strictly confidential unless the person is at risk of harming themselves or others and there is an apparent duty of care. The Program Coordinator supports the PSO's and is another

avenue of support if they encounter any situations they are unsure of how to handle.

New Hope collects the following non-identifying basic information regarding the program. The following interaction card is used to assist with data collection and guides other areas of focus within our overall Mental Health strategy.

Mates Helping Mates Interaction Card	
Peer Support Officer:	
Date:	Time:
Location:	
Stress Issues:	
Personal Relationships:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Family Issues / Parenting	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Workplace Conflict	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Fatigue / Sleep Problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Depression / Mood Problems / Anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Job Dissatisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Alcohol / Gambling	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Financial Problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Other: _____	
Comments:	
<p>Stress Level:</p> <p>Just keeping head above water 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Walking On Water</p>	

Program Statistics

Since the program commenced in March 2016 the PSO's have been contacted XX times. EAP referral rates have increased x% since the program's inception, a positive result that demonstrates that the program is assisting to bridge the gap between the accessing of support services.

A breakdown of the issues being dealt by the PSOs are:

Personal Issues	Workplace
5	5

Conclusion

Due to an increase in mental health issues in the workplace across Australia and the increasing need to manage this risk, New Hope Group has implemented a Peer Support Program with the assistance of Gryphon Psychology.

The Peer Support Program:

- encourages workmates to access early assistance;
- reaches Workers who are unlikely to ask for help;

- complements other avenues of support; and
- builds support skill across New Hope Group.