



Constructing a Healthier Industry

What is OzHelp?

Award winning suicide prevention program

BACKGROUND

OzHelp Foundation was incorporated in 2001 after the Construction Industry in Canberra was shaken by the tragic death by suicide of three of its Apprentices. The mother of one of these Apprentices (David Alan O'Bryan) persistently lobbied the Industry for some action to address the suicide problems and prevent further deaths.

This resulted in an acknowledgment by key Construction Industry Stakeholders of the need to protect its Apprentices and Workers from the risk of suicide and other negative health outcomes. From this impetus, an important collaboration was born between the ACT branches of Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and the Master Builders Association (MBA), resulting in the formation of the OzHelp Foundation.



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WHAT IS OZHELP?

The OzHelp Foundation is a workplace based early intervention suicide prevention and social capacity building program. It is built on a vision to enhance the resilience of apprentices and workers in the Construction and Building Industry, while at the same time strengthens the leadership and support roles of the Industry leaders.

How do you implement a resilience building program within an Industry not known for its openness or familiarity with support type training programs?

This was the challenge that faced OzHelp. The aim was to develop a program that was work based in its organisational design and service delivery to its target group _ an independent yet Industry based model. A two year pilot program was initiated with funding from the ACT Department of Health and Ageing and ACT Health. The main activities consist of a 3-tier training & support for:- Apprentices, Workers, Industry Leaders and the wider Workplace Community. Field visits aid to establish a relationship with each of the target groups, counselling support (on-site and off-site, individual and group, as well as referral), and OzBBQ – a mental health promotion outreach for the whole of the Construction Community. Multiple OH&S and Training Awards attest to the success of the program and benefits to the Construction and Building Industry Community. Increasingly the 'OzHelp Model' is being recognised as potentially suiting other similar Industries where an apprenticeship-like training structure prevails.

Statistics show that suicide mortality rates from the Construction Industry are an alarming 75% higher than Australian male rates. According to internal figures from CBUS, from 1998-2004, the rate of possible suicides among their membership is 43 per 100,000. This is a staggering contrast from the national suicide mortality rate in Australia in 2002 of 11.8 deaths per 100,000 (De Leo & Heller, AISRAP 2004).


THE TRAINING MODEL

Possibly of most interest to Group Training Organisations, is the training component of OzHelp's service. The 'LifeSkills Toolbox' Training is geared to help build resilience in the Apprentices, and is generally implemented through Group Training Organisations. The Course covers 48 hours of Training over the 4 years of the apprenticeship. This innovative training is currently being mapped Nationally to the relevant Construction Training Packages. GTA and some State bodies have shown great interest in another of OzHelp's training products that is intended to provide mentoring and support skills to Industry Leaders and raise the suicide awareness in the workplace. This Training is entirely relevant to Group Training Organisation Field Workers and would equip them to more ably assist Apprentices in the pastoral care role they are often in. This is the best place to offer help because of the confidence they have won from Apprentices; but until recently have felt ill-equipped to provide assistance in cases of genuine crisis.

OZHELP TO EXPAND

A 12 month feasibility study of the potential to expand the 'OzHelp Model' was completed in 2006, this study showed overwhelming support from Industry and other Stakeholders in WA, QLD, NSW, SA and Tasmania. In late 2006 the Commonwealth Government announced seeding grants to the OzHelp Foundation to expand its operations to the utilities industry in the ACT, regional NSW and to establish OzHelp Tasmania. In addition to this OzHelp continues to work with steering committees in the other states and towards establishing a National Organisation.

OzHelp will commence a quarterly newsletter to keep information on it's activities up to date and relevant, for further details visit www.ozhelp.org.au



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