



ABOUT **MATES IN CONSTRUCTION**





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ABOUT BERT & MATES IN CONSTRUCTION

The Building Employees Redundancy Trust (BERT) Welfare Fund founded MATES in Construction (MIC) in 2008. MIC provides support through its MIC program of suicide awareness and prevention and other initiatives that support workers with mental health problems or prevent them from developing. This ultimately has been creating a more resilient building and construction workforce.



When a worker dies and has money in BERT, 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 with **one in five** or 88 deaths attributed to suicide! Over a 2-year period BERT decided to investigate the extent and nature of suicides in the industry further and set up the MIC initiative to prevent this unnecessary loss of workers and positively impact on Queensland construction workers.

BERT was the sole initial funding source and remains MIC's Principal Sponsor. Without BERT starting MIC on such solid footing it would not be the success it is today with a broad funding base and universal support from the construction industry.

Best Practice

The MATES in Construction program was developed in consultation with industry and with reference to global best practice in suicide prevention from:

- the Australian Government's national suicide prevention 'LIFE' (Living Is For Everyone) framework, which has received global recognition; and
- internationally recognised Living Works model. Living Works is widely used by Lifeline, Queensland Police and Armed Forces to mention a few.

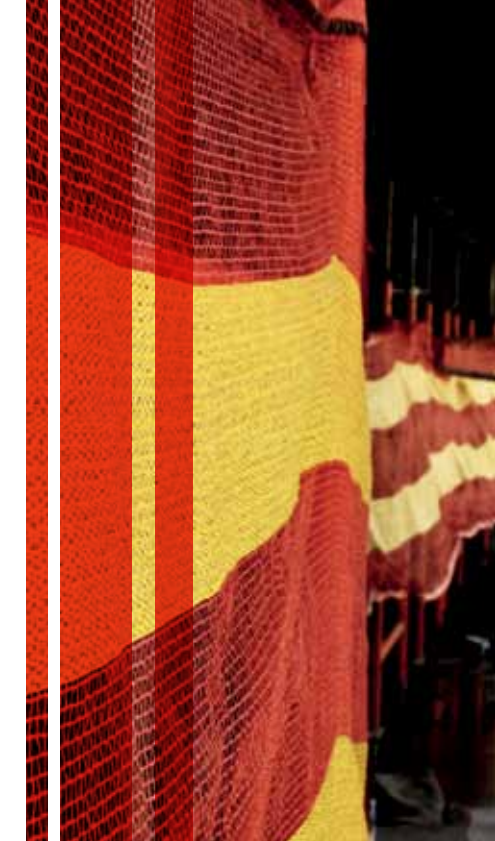
ABOUT WACIRF & MATES IN CONSTRUCTION

Just like BERT in Queensland, the Western Australian Construction Industry Redundancy Fund (WACIRF) noticed what appeared to be very high suicide rates within the industry.



WACIRF has for several years provided counselling services to workers, but with several suicide-related deaths in the industry in 2011, the board of WACIRF decided to go one step further and introduce a MATES in Construction (MIC) program to the state.

A pilot site was identified in WA and the MATES in Construction was officially launched at Brookfield Multiplex's Fiona Stanley Hospital building site in Murdoch. The launch was timed with International Suicide Prevention Day in September 2011 and provides a unique opportunity to test the program with over 1,500 construction workers and staff there.



FAST FACTS

- MIC provides suicide prevention support and encourages mental health and well-being
- MIC was formed in close consultation with industry
- MIC uses the Living Works model which is world best practice in suicide prevention



ABOUT **SUICIDE**

AISRAP developed the evidence base that underpins MIC on behalf of BERT. In 2006, AISRAP handed down the Suicide in Queensland's *Commercial Building & Construction Industry* report which conducted a major study into suicides in the Queensland Construction industry. MIC seeks to implement the recommendations within the AISRAP report.

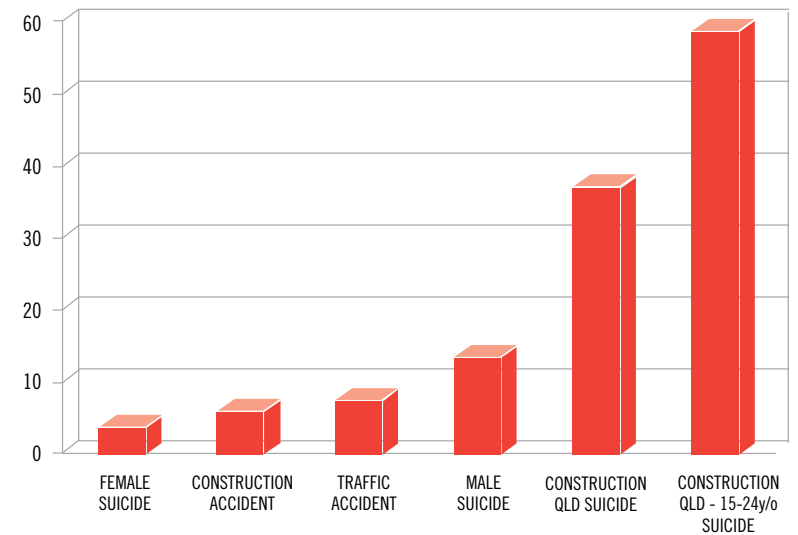
Workers in the Queensland Construction industry, according to these statistics, are six times more likely to suicide than to die from an industrial accident. Suicidal thoughts are common, and may be an early warning sign. Conservatively, one in 20 workers in the construction industry will consider suicide during a year.

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

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.

Is there a problem?

(MORTALITY RATE PER 100,000)



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

ABOUT PREVENTION

Suicide is a very real problem in the construction industry and most suicides occur with warning signs.

Among the workers who completed suicide, more than half had communicated a suicide intention within 12 months prior. However, among these construction industry workers, a disproportionately low percentage (less than 7%) actually sought professional help.

It is rarely a single event or situation that causes a person to suicide. It is more likely to be 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 are more common in the construction industry than in the national average. With the high suicide rate in the construction industry, it is our shared responsibility as part of that industry to lower these statistics to at least the national average.

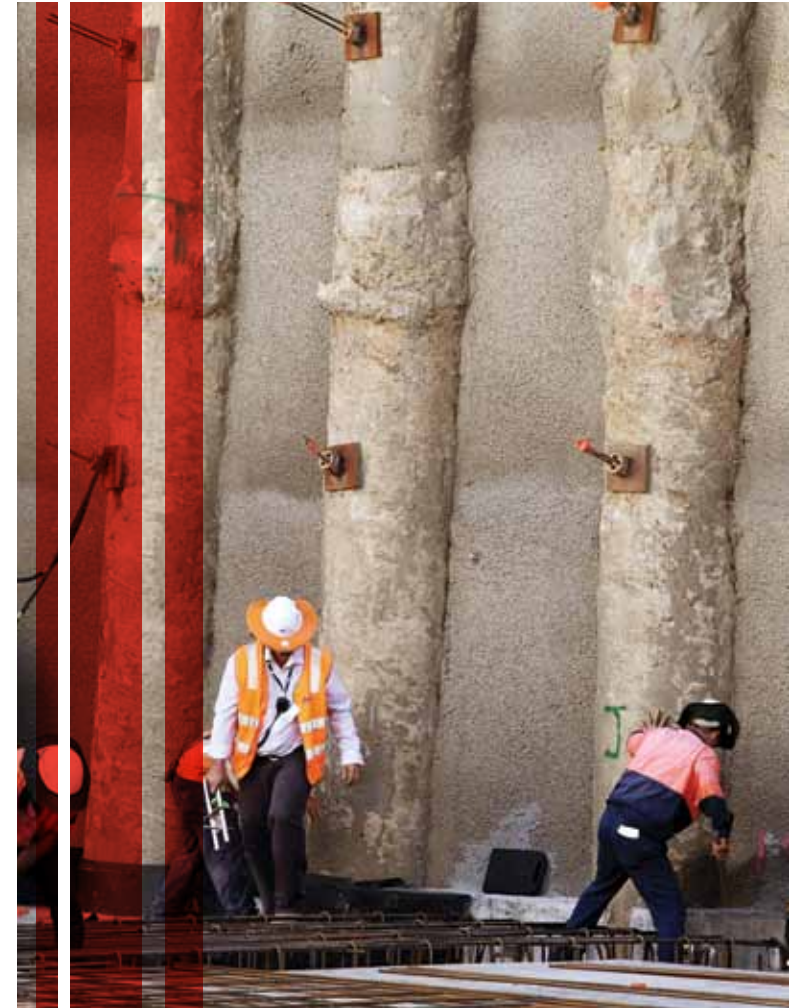
Effective suicide prevention strategy may save as many as 30% of suicides. On an industry basis, an effective suicide prevention strategy may save even more lives than are lost through workplace accidents each year.

MIC achieves three things when applied fully on site:

- raised awareness of suicide as a preventable problem
- making getting help easy
- ensuring the help is appropriate

MATES in Construction seek to exploit the fact that most people who intend to complete suicide would rather live than die, but simply find it impossible to manage the pain they are in. MIC will identify the behavioural signals exhibited from a suicidal worker and provide the workers with alternatives. MIC also works towards changing the culture within the industry to make it more acceptable to discuss personal issues at work. Improving mental health and wellbeing on site not only saves lives, but also improves workplace health and safety and production.

Among workers who completed suicide, more than half had communicated a suicide intention within 12 months prior.



FAST FACTS

- suicidal persons will often give out signals or 'invitations'
- people who complete suicide generally do not really want to die, but 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 and instead assist a mate to get proper help.

Life events

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

- relationship problems
- child custody issues
- recent/pending unemployment
- drug and alcohol abuse
- work problems
- the anniversary of or recent exposure to suicide or some other important loss
- recent marriage break up
- conflict
- financial problems
- pending legal matters
- 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.

Behaviour and appearance can change

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 like these:

- 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

Emotions

A person contemplating suicide may in subtle ways talk about his or her emotions and the despair felt. The type of emotions expressed could include:

- hopelessness
- feeling numb
- feeling defeated
- worthlessness
- loneliness
- despair



FAST FACTS

Others can recognise suicidal behaviour by:

- knowing a person's circumstances
- noticing subtle changes in appearance and behaviour
- listening to the feelings expressed

ABOUT THE **MIC PROGRAM**

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 out signs or invitations telling them.

The program

There are three parts of MIC's suicide prevention and awareness program. MIC's aim is for every construction site to be MIC accredited with the right mix of workers trained across these three areas of suicide awareness and prevention. All of the training sessions outlined below are about helping workers look after their mates and ensure they can easily connect to high-quality help. A MIC case manager ensures that all help is appropriate for the worker and follows up to check it has been worthwhile.

General Awareness Training (GAT) (1hr)

MIC aims to achieve 100% suicide awareness on-site by running this training on site regularly. The one hour session introduces workers to the problem of suicide and mental health in the industry and describes how some behaviours could indicate that a workmate may be at risk of suicide and how they may be able to help by following a few easy steps.

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

Connector Training (4hrs)

MIC provides training to a number of workers on site as Connectors. A Connector is "a mate who can keep you safe while connecting you to help." The Connector training has SafeTALK embedded into it. SafeTALK is an internationally recognised suicide prevention program. Connectors are easily identifiable on-site by a green hard hat sticker.

ASSIST Training: Suicide First Aid (2 days)

An ASSIST worker can be compared to a first-aid officer on site. Participants undergo a two-day Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASSIST) workshop. Using simple skills an ASSIST worker will listen to a worker's concerns and respond to them appropriately with the object of reaching a "contract" or "safe plan" for the suicidal worker involving extra help and safety. ASSIST workers are easily identifiable on-site by a blue hard hat sticker.



MIC Accreditation

To become a MIC Accredited site or employer the following standards must be met:

- all workers on site initially undertake General Awareness Training (GAT).
- one in twenty workers trained as Connectors.
- as the job progresses, follow up GAT is undertaken to ensure at any time at least 80% of the workers on site are GAT trained.
- the site has access to appropriate and available suicide first aid resources (ASIST).

MIC Accredited sites receive a number of promotional materials, access to other MIC programs and Field Officer & Case Management support.

The 24/7 help line 1300 MIC 111 (1300 642 111)

MIC also provides workers with this helpline which connects workers to counselors or psychologists who can work through issues on the phone and set up future appointments. During work hours, MIC staff answer this number with all staff at MIC 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 sites a worker with advanced skills in putting together safe plans for workers with suicidal thoughts.

Community development: MIC helps raise the awareness of issues mental health and wellbeing in the construction industry through on-site events such as toolbox talks, on-site BBQs or other events.

Life Skills Apprentice Support: Life Skills is a course delivered over the life of an apprenticeship/traineeship. The course aims to introduce young workers to a range of issues they will face in the industry and equip them with the life skills to deal with them. Life Skills teaches resilience skills e.g. budgeting, drug and alcohol awareness, communication, nutrition. Learning these skills can protect against suicide and are proven to improve employability and build resilience within apprentices.

Case management: MIC provides case management to workers in the construction industry and their families. It aims to provide a bridge between the person seeking help and a broad range of services available to members of the industry.

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

Yes it does work because of the support from the construction industry and from unions, companies, associations, workers, and their families. Support from other industries such as sports, mining, stevedores and trucking has also been forthcoming.

Workers know that help is as easy as talking to a Connector or ringing the 24/7 helpline 1300 MIC 111.

MIC accredited (100% general awareness and 5% of site as Connectors) sites 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.

MATES in Construction has been collecting statistics for over four years with regard to the key outcomes of the program. The MIC team has delivered General Awareness Training to tens of thousands of construction workers on hundreds of sites. This gives us a breadth of exposure to construction industry to see if what we do works. This is what we have found:

“MIC staff connect 2 to 3 workers to help every day and every 1 to 2 days intervene with a worker who has thoughts of suicide.”

MATES in Construction is a genuine industry initiative; its ‘industry helping industry’.





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 Life Skills for apprentices since 2008. Life Skills 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.

Life Skills Apprentice Support

This is a course delivered over the life of an apprenticeship/traineeship. The course aims to introduce young workers to a range of issues they will face in the industry and equip them with the life skills to deal with them. This will help them deal with life issues in a positive way and be a protective factor against suicide.

This course is delivered by qualified trainers and 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 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) like SkillsTech or TAFE and with companies privately. An external evaluation into the course showed a very high approval rating amongst employers and a high level of acceptance among 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 program is designed to support and integrate apprentices through the MATES in Construction program.

Topics covered:

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.

FAST FACTS

- Construction industry apprentices are the highest risk group for suicide
- Life Skills is a 3-day course over the life of an apprenticeship
- 1 in 4 apprentices who complete Life Skills ask for help

ABOUT SUPPORT

MIC Field Officers support community development on site as part of the implementation of the MIC program. The Field Officer helps site management provide an environment conducive to good mental health and wellbeing which ultimately will provide better productivity and workplace health and safety. MIC organises ongoing opportunities for MATES Events on site, allowing important health and wellbeing information to be provided to workers.

Workers on site will have access to a 24 hour, 7 day a week helpline and through this have access to immediate help and counselling. Workers experiencing difficulties will be offered Case Management by a MIC Case Manager who will connect workers with the most suitable and available assistance with the issues faced by the worker. As most workers have a multitude of issues at once, MIC focuses on using a number of different resources to tailor-make the best intervention and assistance program for the individual.

Where site management and/or the employer has an effective Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in place MIC works with the program as far as is appropriate to the needs of the individual in question. MIC will not participate as part of any disciplinary program involving an individual, but will assist on the request of the individual only.

Get Involved!

You can help provide life saving and life changing services to construction workers of all walks of life. MIC is open to all construction workers, employers and unions and the model works with other industries too. If you want to be involved it is as simple as calling us and asking for a visit from a MIC Field Officer who will explain the process of making your workplace MIC Accredited.

Anyone can get involved with MIC in a number of ways whether it be donating your time through running or attending an event or just spreading the word about who we are and what we do. You can donate to MIC, leave a bequest in your Will or become a MIC corporate sponsor like those on the back cover of this booklet.

A workers testimonial after completing Connector training on site in Brisbane:

This training has completely changed the way I would converse with people if they are opening up about things going on in their life.

Corporate Sponsorships

Our corporate sponsorships are based around the philosophy of strong relationships, mutual benefits, and collaboration. We focus on providing maximum benefits to our sponsors by fully

understanding how they operate. We offer a direct link to tangible materials or outcomes as much as possible so that our sponsors can see how their contributions are making a real difference. Your

support, whatever size, can help save lives and go a long way in improving the lives of Queensland construction workers. For more information, contact the MIC office or visit its website (details overleaf).



THANK YOU!

MIC is very appreciative of the industry support it has received. We are particularly grateful for the support from BERT and WACIRF and to the other sponsors and supporters appearing on this page. Among many other things, this funding and support has helped MIC to:

- provide General Awareness workbooks for all workers on site
- resource Connector and ASSIST courses as well as on site posters, pens and stickers
- continue growing our network of Field Officers

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