RICHARD CROOKES CONSTRUCTIONS
Raising awareness of mental health in the workplace

Richard Crookes Constructions (RCC) began as a small family business in 1976. In 2019, RCC has grown to over 600 employees and 6,000 subcontractors in NSW and the ACT. The company prides itself on its heritage as a family business and ongoing commitment to its values. By sharing their story, RCC hope to encourage others to take steps to improve.

WHY IMPROVE?

According to Mates in Construction (MIC):
• Construction workers are six times more likely to die from suicide than an accident at work.
• Every year 190 Australians working in the construction industry take their own lives.


“45% of Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime. It’s a huge social issue and we recognised that we could do more to promote and support the wellbeing of our employees and their families.”
Laura Durkan, Head of HR, RCC

“Our employees are our greatest business asset so we’re taking steps to improve mental health and wellbeing.”
George Bardas, CEO

BASELINE INSIGHTS

First, RCC took stock of where things were at and set a baseline using the Black Dog Institute’s audit tool. They scored 26 out of a possible 80 overall. Improvements were needed in numerous areas. They felt raising awareness about mental health and equipping employees with some basic strategies was an important first step. This would help to start reducing stigma associated with mental health, and lay the foundations for broader change across the business.

CREATE A MENTAL WELLBEING PLAN

They then created a Mental Wellbeing Plan that set out clear responsibilities, goals and objectives for all parts of the organisation over the next 18 months. The plan focused on three areas - leadership, policy and processes; education and training; and support and risk management activities.

The aim of the plan is to educate and raise awareness of mental health conditions to empower RCC employees to recognise and refer to external support if necessary.
MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING FOR MANAGERS

RCC knew for the plan to succeed, they needed leaders to show their support for mental health and wellbeing activities in the workplace and lead by example. To get this support, RCC are rolling out mental health training for managers.

It made sense to kick off the training with its executive group followed by all leaders in the organisation. So far, they’ve trained 35 executives and senior leaders and will have trained all their managers by the end of August 2019.

The goal was to give managers the skills to recognise the signs and symptoms of poor mental health, the confidence to have a conversation about mental health and the knowledge of how to support and refer employees to the support services available.

RCC used a pilot approach to test courses to ensure they hit the mark before rolling them out more broadly. They formed a design reference group to get feedback from a cross section of participants and chose different providers to help them deliver different training programs over the 18 months.

TRAINING OUR TEAM

By December 2019 RCC will also train all their employees with ‘Healthy Minds @ Work’ mental health awareness training. By offering this training to everyone regardless of their role, RCC hopes to create an inclusive and supportive workforce. They also aim to reduce risk factors that may impact their teams’ mental health and wellbeing.

“Designing and implementing a plan of this nature needs to be done with sensitivity. It’s important to listen to your workforce as you start to raise awareness in this space.

One of our key success measures is increased uptake of our counselling (Employee Assistance Program) services, along with equipping our staff with the skills to help and support each other”.

David Sharp, CFO

Some employees feel more comfortable talking to a mate or colleague than a manager when they’re feeling stressed or down. So RCC has trained about 3,700 employees and subcontractors with General Awareness [mental health] Training, 120 Connectors and 30 employees in ASIST suicide prevention through Mates in Construction. A Connector is someone trained with skills to keep someone in crisis safe, and help connect them to professional support.

This program is based on the idea that “suicide is everyone’s business”. This means if the construction industry in Australia is going to make real change to reduce suicide then it can’t be left to mental health professionals but rather everyone in the industry must play their part.

RCC chose Mates in Construction (MIC) because their messaging and approach is tailored to their industry and extends support to subcontractors.

FAMILY BENEFITS

One of the other important initiatives RCC is looking to offer their workforce and extended family is a forum for parents on how to support young people’s mental health. RCC is teaming up with mental health education provider Batyr to deliver the forum.

Batyr focuses on reducing stigma around mental health issues and encourages young people to reach out for support by sharing the stories of young people who have experienced mental health issues first hand. The forum will focus on education and advice for how to proactively look after the mental health of children and teens.

BENEFITS

The training was delivered recently and the feedback has already been positive. Employees have also been more proactive in reaching out to managers and the wellbeing team. Our managers find it helpful to know when someone in their team is facing challenges because they can check in with them and support them more effectively.

MAKE YOUR WORKPLACE MENTALLY HEALTHY

go to mentalhealthatwork.nsw.gov.au and learn how.