



ConNetica
CREATING BETTER FUTURES

Mates in Construction

Qld 2019 Apprentice Survey
– Industry Consultation

December 2019

Acknowledgements

Mates in Construction, under the leadership of Jorgen Gullestrup is acknowledged for its foresight in undertaking research into the well being and mental health of apprentices employed in the construction industry. Dr Victoria Ross who completed the survey design, analysis and presentation of the findings on behalf of Mates in Construction is commended for the depth of available data and the concise and informative presentation of the findings.

The findings detailed in this report would not have been possible without the active support and commitment provided by workshop attendees, who jointly represented the leaders across the Qld Construction Industry, including the unions, employer associations, training organisations and government.

ConNetica wishes to acknowledge and thank all individuals associated with this research. Your combined experiences and insights have provided a useful reference document that can be used to inform the range of reform initiatives to improve the wellbeing and mental health of apprentices working in construction.

Consulting Team

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1. Workshop Overview

On 11 December, 2019 Mates in Construction (MIC) invited cross sector construction industry stakeholders to share the findings of the Qld 2019 Apprentice Survey and to gather their views on:

- the 2019 Qld Apprentice Survey, and
- provide input in future recommendations to best facilitate safe and productive workplaces for apprentices.

A total of 35 people from 28 organisations attended the breakfast meeting. The sectors that were represented included:

- Unions
- Employer Associations
- Training providers
- Government and Mental Health
- Mates in Construction & Bert

The agenda and list of participating organisations are included in the appendix.

1.1 Findings

Reflections - Qld Mental Health Commission, Ivan Frkovic.

- The Australian suicide rates are alarming, on average 8 people per day die by suicide and for every suicide there are 20 - 30 attempts
- 75% of people who die by suicide are men
- The increase in suicide rates is unacceptable given the level of funding that has been provided to improve the provision of mental health services
- Experiences of suicide are not always related to a mental illness
- There are multiple concerns relating to people feeling vulnerable and or experiences of suicide. These factors include:
 - Significant financial concerns
 - Excessive use of drugs and alcohol
 - Lack of job security, unemployment
 - Increased use of social media and the negative impact upon face to face communication
 - Stigma around mental health and a resulting unwillingness to seek help, especially for men
 - Generational change and the resulting mismatch between older and younger workers expectations of workplace behaviours and activities
 - Relationship breakdowns
- Relationship breakdowns that also include custody of children can be very distressing because of the financial cost of accessing needed legal services. There was an expressed need to review family law provisions

- The provision of services to support people with a mental illness and or experiences of suicide often encounter provision of siloed services. This significantly impedes service access.
- There is a need for more “soft entry” access to mental health services within the community that are not mental health specific.

1.2 Reflections - 2019 Qld Survey Presentation, Dr Vicki Ross

Thoughts

More Information

- There needs to be a better understanding of how “victims” of bullying are addressing the matter. Are they confronting the perpetrator or using social media to express their concerns.
- The reasons underpinning the perpetrators’ bullying behaviour need to be examined
- Need to better understand the reasons why apprentices are “out of employment” and how best to support this group
- Interesting to know the number of smaller employers

Workplace culture

- The culture of the workplace needs to be examined to better understand how apprentices are treated and the reason for various treatment. Often what is experienced in the workplace relates to historical practices “I did it that way when I was your age” or “that’s how I was treated when I was an apprentice, so that’s how I will treat you”. “The cycle of violence has not been addressed”. “We older workers need to accept we are part of the problem.”

Nature of construction work

- The construction industry is very sensitive to social changes/factors/pressures
- Once become a trades person, hard to work in another sector. People feel “stuck” in their trade

Alarming rates of bullying and experiences of suicide and the impact of social determinants

- The high rate of suicidal thoughts and exposure of apprentices to experiences of suicide is alarming
- Often these experiences of low well being and or thoughts of suicide are not about mental illness, but rather social issues.

Unique role of apprentices

- Early career position, for many apprentices this is their first experience in the workforce since leaving school and their work related and interpersonal skills are limited

Financial situation

- Money – “Many apprentices are financially struggling. If there is a loss of jobs, this further exacerbates their ability to pay the bills and they can’t manage – there is a need for financial counselling.”

Differences between categories of trades and employment status

- Those apprentices that are GTO employed are marginally better those employed privately, in relation to well being
- Those who are self-employed are especially vulnerable to social/economic changes

- Curious around the reasons for different experiences/levels of bullying/suicidation amongst different trade groups
- There is a lack of bullying polices in small business
- There is a lack of programs in smaller businesses and no mentors to help rectify inappropriate practices and support apprentices

Apprentices' resilience and understanding of role

- Need to review the resolve of young people – is there a difference between those employed, not employed and from different trade areas.
- Apprentices need to be more resilient

Lack of monitoring

- There is a lack of monitoring of well being and psychological distress in the workplace

Potential Solutions

- There is a need to support managers to improve their leadership practices. “There is a need to change from the top”
- Need multi level buy in to achieve improvements
- There is a need for third party advocacy providers to provide support to apprentices
- Support needs to be offered to both the victims and perpetrators of bullying practices
- Need to clarify and help apprentices understand the value and purpose of their job and associated roles. For example, their need to “dig holes” maybe because of the need to build up their physical strength
- DEET involvement with supervision of well being of apprenticeships would be valuable

Why

Nature of construction industry and existing work culture

- Entrenched culture, it's always been like this
- Construction related work is TOUGH:
 - Physically demanding/exhausting
 - Mentally and emotionally demanding/taxing
 - Potentially dangerous
 - Working hours can be long
 - Employment is not secure and often cyclical
 - Hierarchical “pecking order” amongst trades
 - Stigma around being a tradesman “failed to make it to university”
 - Power imbalance between tradesman and apprentices
 - Apprentices are treated as “cheap labor” by some employers

Lack of regulation and support

- There are not enough regulation checks to assess how employers are treating apprentices

- There is no support to know what to do when the money is gone
- There is no mentoring program for small business apprentices

Male dominated industry

- Construction is a male dominated workforce where there is a culture of not sharing one's feelings and "just getting on" with life, even if they are personally struggling

Broader social determinants

- Broad socio-economic pressures
 - Job insecurity
 - Costs of living (housing)
 - Financial insecurity is enormous
 - Apprentices live hand to mouth
- When people lose their job often, they isolate themselves and their happiness is impeded as they have limited finances. Isolation is very detrimental to good mental health
- The cost of living is high, so when people lose their job, they struggle financially
- The experiences of relationship breakdowns, family breakdowns – parents remarrying and not having a positive relationship with the step parent, financial pressure

Reluctance to speak up

- Apprentices are loathe to raise concerns about bullying, as this will impede their future employment opportunities
- Apprentices are vulnerable – they lack genuine rights to complain/self advocate

Financial pressures experienced by small business owners

- Many construction businesses are small businesses, where owners have limited time to address people related work issues and apprentices feel less inclined to raise concerns with their boss

Leadership expertise

- Inability of supervisors to effectively lead younger people
- There are often a lack of "human skills" at the supervisor level to effectively address "people issues"
- Older managers not equipped to manage younger workers
- Lack of supervisory skills for employers

Lack of awareness of support mechanisms

- Lack of knowledge of services within their Super Fund and domestic world

Impact of social media

- Negative impact of social media on mental health and the use of social media to access information

Low levels of resilience

- Apprentices lack resilience – high levels of resilience, poor coping strategies to manage how they are being treated

School education

- Schooling has shifted to a business model and this affects apprentices job readiness

Increased readiness to report

- Increased reporting as people have a higher exposure to bullying

What Now – Suggested Recommendations

Gather more information and review existing data

- Better understand the “not employed group” and wrap support services around them
- Explore how do people cope who are not suicidal, but are exposed to the same stuff
- Review the data to confirm the median and the average age

Legislation

- Legislative changes – review supports provided to apprentices and employer obligations in relation to well being of their apprentices
- DEET to provide more support for wellbeing of those impacted
- Increase employers’ obligations around appropriate workplace employment rights for apprentices and associated to access labor incentives for subsidised apprentices’ salaries – more checks and balances
- Consider the appropriateness of the apprenticeship structure/payment, given the average age of apprentices is now 25 years of age

Share the statistics

- Promote the findings to support others to better understand the seriousness of apprentices’ experiences of well being, mental health and suicide

Cultural Change and anti bullying campaign

- Address the culture that “allows bullying to occur” in the workplace – launch a campaign “it’s not ok to bully”
- Address the power imbalance, empower apprentices to speak up (like the #metoo campaign)
- Change the culture to ensure all involved know bullying is not acceptable
- Start a campaign – “**#it’s not ok**”
- Create and promote that strategies to get apprentice to report experiences of bullying, without fear of persecution

Promote best practice sites

- Acknowledge and promote those sites where good practices in relation to inclusive and supportive workplaces are everyday practices

Tailor solutions/interventions per work site

- “Unpack the issues” per workplace so that specific issues per workplace are understood and addressed

Support services

- Government funded mentoring programs through TAFE/Private RTO 4 The Trade and traineeship
- Implement Apprentice Peer Support
- Government funded program funded through high schools – Yr. 10
 - Life skills
 - Finances
 - Tax returns
 - Employment
 - Budgets

Training for apprentices and managers

- Provide leadership development for managers including how to better manage workers from different generations and create inclusive workplaces
- Workplace Mentally Healthy Workplace Training - educate the industry (managers and staff) to
- understand their legislative requirements/obligations in relation to enabling a safe workplace for workers
- Provide life skills/mentoring/support structures for employers and apprentices, potentially provided by a third party/government funded – need to be “on the ground/easily accessible”
- Educate about bullying versus banter

Gender balance

- Employ more women

Appendix A - Agenda

Qld Apprentice Survey 2019 - Participating Organisations

A total of 35 individuals attending, representing 28 organisations.

PTEU	1. Plumbing Trades Employees Union
CFMEU	2. Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union
ETU	3. Electrical Trades Union
QMBA	4. Queensland's Master Builders Association
HIA	5. Housing Industry Association
QMCA	6. Queensland Major Contractors Association
NFIA	7. National Fire Industry Association
NECA	8. National Electrical Contractors Association
MPAQ	9. Master Plumbers Association Queensland
AMCA	10. Airconditioning and Mechanical Contractors Association
BERT	11. Building Employees Redundancy Trust
BUSSQ	12. Building Unions Superannuation Scheme Queensland
	13. Australian Brick and Blocklaying Training Centre
STC	14. Services Trades College
	15. Busy at work
CTC	16. The Construction Training Centre
TAFE	17. TAFE QLD
	18. East Coast Apprenticeships
	19. BIGA
QMHC	20. Queensland Mental Health Commission
	21. Workcover Queensland
QBCC	22. Queensland Building and Construction Commission
	23. Queensland Training Ombudsman
CSQ	24. Construction Skills Queensland
AISRAP	25. Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention
OIR	26. Queensland Office of Industrial Relations
	27. Connetica
	28. MATES in Construction

Qld Apprentice Survey 2019 Results Preview - Breakfast Meeting Agenda

Aim:

“Safe and productive workplaces for apprentices”

Session: Objectives:

1. Share Apprentice Survey findings
2. Share reactions and thoughts
3. Suggest recommendations
4. Articulate next steps

Agenda

Time	Description	
Start 7:30am		
7:45am	Welcome Acknowledgement of country, acknowledgement of lived experience, Introductions	Jorgen Gullestrup
	<i>Session objectives and guidelines</i> <i>Overview of the session</i>	Marion Wands
8.10am	Guest Speaker - Commissioner - Qld Mental Health	Ivan Frkovic
8.30 Mix & Greet		
8.45am	Survey Findings & Questions	Vicki Ross
9.10am	Table discussions and report back <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thoughts and reactions 2. Why is this occurring? 3. Suggested recommendations 	Marion Wands
10.00am	<i>Next steps</i> Future industry engagement Closure	Jorgen Gullestrup