

# SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

with suicide awareness and prevention  
training across South Australia



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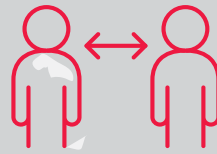


Our 'help-offering' model creates a stronger and more caring community of people who can recognise when another person is struggling and who have the skills to offer them help.



**1,683**

people trained in the northern country region over 128 session



**27%** of regional GAT participants volunteered for **CONNECTOR TRAINING**  
(the average in the metropolitan area is 8%)



I found that the MATES training comes in useful not just for preventing suicide, but also for helping work through everyday issues people have, it has made my awareness of peoples changes in life and armed me with tools to better help people in and out of the construction industry. Survey respondent

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late 2018 Country SA PHN (CSAPHN) agreed to fund a MATES in Construction (MATES) Field Officer to focus on the Whyalla, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Yorke Peninsula, and Eyre Peninsula regions as part of the National Suicide Prevention Trial. This partnership was formed to address the perceived needs and barriers in relation to suicide prevention in the regional hubs of South Australia that were identified through a survey conducted by CSAPHN earlier that year. **In line with this, our four main areas of focus were:**



**SUICIDE PREVENTION  
TRAINING  
OPPORTUNITIES**



**WORKFORCE  
COLLABORATION**



**STIGMA AROUND  
SUICIDE**



**FOLLOW-UP  
CARE**

The MATES program addressed each of these areas through our existing suicide awareness and prevention program. Our 'help-offering' model works by building a community of people who are equipped to recognise when another person is struggling and who have the skills to offer them help. This creates a stronger and more caring community of people who are able and willing to look out for each other, not just at work but throughout all facets of their lives.

The work MATES has done in the country northern region under the CSAPHN funding has provided excellent return on investment. Whilst it's not possible to put a dollar value on a person's life, we have demonstrated the following measurable results over the past two years:

- 1,683 participants trained over 128 sessions.
- 27% of regional GAT participants volunteered for Connector training (the average in the metropolitan area is 8%).
- 92% of respondents indicated the training had a positive or extremely positive impact on their workplace.
- 14% of respondents had sought help for themselves.
- 34% of respondents had used the skills learned in the training to assist a work colleague (55%), friend (38%), or a family member (25%).
- When asked if respondents would recommend MATES to a friend or colleague, the survey showed an extremely positive Net Promoter Score of 66.
- Wakefield Regional Council achieved MATES Accreditation status.

We have enjoyed collaborating with CSAPHN over the life of this trial and would welcome the opportunity to continue offering the program in regional South Australia and building on the networks we have established. The following report outlines the work we have completed up to December 2020 – including our learnings, challenges, and successes – and provides feedback we have gathered from participants through the trial.

The MATES program has raised broad awareness across the organisation and provided several of our staff members with training to support those who may be struggling. Having a program like this in place builds trust and confidence in staff who know they can get support when they need it.

Jhing Mojares, WHS and Risk Officer, Wakefield Regional Council



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# WHO IS MATES IN CONSTRUCTION?

MATES in Construction is the only Australian suicide prevention organisation that has institutionalised ongoing research through its governance framework. The research that MATES conducts directly feeds into program improvement and provides the evidence base for the expansion of MATES into new sectors and industries.

Associate Professor Allison Milner, BPsych(Hons) MEd PhD; Senior Research Fellow, Disability and Health Unit, Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne; Victorian Science and Medical Research Fellow

MATES is an independent charity that exists to reduce the high level of suicide in the Australian construction industry and other blue collar industries.

Our integrated program of training and ongoing support reduces suicide through creating a workplace community of 'mates looking out for mates'. Our program is based on the simple idea that suicide is everyone's business and provides ways for individuals to take an active role in improving the mental health and wellbeing of those around them. This means everyone plays their part, rather than leaving it to mental health professionals.

Our program was developed from a solid evidence base provided by the Australian Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP) in a 2006 report. We continue to be an evidence-based organisation that actively searches for information and monitors best practice, thinking and outcomes.

The fundamental components of our program are:



**SUICIDE AWARENESS  
TRAINING**



**ONGOING  
SUPPORT**



**CASE  
MANAGEMENT**



**RESEARCH AND  
INFORMATION**

Being able to offer most services free of charge is critical to reaching people in need as it means the help and support MATES provides is not only personalised, but also easily accessible and attainable when required.

MATES has trained over 25,000 people in South Australia since its inception in 2012, reducing the stigma around suicide and developing a community-supported approach to early intervention and suicide prevention. Despite being designed specifically for the construction industry, the program is applicable to all industries and easily adapted for any audience. The nature of the program has a ripple effect as the people who complete our training take the skills to their family, friends, and wider community.

## SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION TRAINING

The MATES suicide awareness and prevention training program consists of three levels of training to raise awareness about suicide, its contributing risk factors, and how we can all be part of the solution. We also offer resilience training to young apprentices through our Life Skills Toolbox training to support them as they start out in the industry.

**GAT  
(General  
Awareness  
Training)**

**45 MINUTES**

Onsite awareness training that outlines the problem of suicide and mental health, provides guidance to recognise the signs and signals of a person at risk, and explains how to connect them with help.



**Connector  
Development**

**3.5 HOURS**

Developing Connectors who have the skills to keep someone in crisis safe while connecting them to help. This training provides a deeper understanding of people at risk and trains Connectors in the use of SafeTALK, an internationally-recognised suicide prevention program.



**ASIST  
(Applied Suicide  
Intervention  
Skills Training)**

**2 DAYS**

This workshop provides Connectors with the skills necessary to assist a person at risk and work closely with them and appropriate professionals to create a SafePLAN for their ongoing safety and wellbeing.



## ONGOING SUPPORT

The services we provide support and help those at risk and those who have been affected. They include:

- 24 / 7 helpline
- raising suicide awareness
- apprentices' Life Skills Toolbox
- field visits
- critical incident support
- postvention
- MATES Accreditation
- undertaking and disseminating research
- connecting to employee assistance programs, local resources, and other services.

## EARLY INTERVENTION

The MATES program aims to capture people at risk early before incidents occur. Early intervention is important because it can have an extremely positive impact on a person's mental health by preventing the progression of issues and reducing any impact they may have.

We are also able to capture people at risk early through our training and feedback forms. For example, we offer workers attending every General Awareness Training session the opportunity to have our Case Manager call them to discuss any issues they may be experiencing. Our data tells us that on average 5% of workers take up this offer. With around 25,000 people having completed GAT in South Australia, this equates to over 1,200 people.

## CREATING A COMMUNITY

Research tells us that building support around individuals with thoughts of suicide is instrumental in reducing suicide deaths and suicide attempts, which is a key element of the MATES program. Through our 'help-offering' model, we build a community of people who look out for each other by being able to recognise when another person is struggling and who have the skills to offer them help. This delivers a deeper level of support than a help-seeking model that provides a service people need to seek out.

The skills people learn in the MATES training are directly transferrable to participants' private lives, as it equips them to recognise when a family member or friend is struggling and increases the likelihood that they can offer help. This builds a stronger, more caring community, far beyond the workplace.

2–3 students a week are seeking support for suicide ideation, completing the ASIST and safe talk training has given me the tools and skills to have conversations with these students and families. *Survey respondent*





# OUR WORK IN THE COUNTRY NORTHERN REGION

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

When we commenced work in the northern country region of South Australia, our start-up strategy was to target local government in the regions in order to provide:

- awareness in the community that the training is available and develop advocates that would recommend and promote our training in their local area
- a network of support in the community through council workers that are working in the local area every day
- links to contractors, local businesses and large employers within the local area.

Wakefield Regional Council was the first council to adopt our program and the first site to achieve MATES Accreditation as part of the trial. They became avid supporters and have actively recommended the MATES program to other councils.

As a result, the MATES program was delivered to the following number of people in local council areas:

Local government: Councils	GAT	Connector	ASIST
Barunga West	22		
Ceduna	32		
Northern Areas	24		
Port Augusta	77	10	
Port Pirie	17		
Streaky Bay	24		
Wakefield Regional	63	15	4
Whyalla	89	21	
Yorke Peninsula	87	33	7

It is not a training program that allows participants to 'tick a box' and move on: it provides participants with ongoing skills and abilities to look after themselves and each other ... We now have a network of people able to either keep an eye out for their mates, connect those doing it tough with an appropriately trained person or intervene when a workmate really needs a guiding hand.

Jhing Mojares, WHS and Risk Officer, Wakefield Regional Council

Training is delivered to all levels of the organisation regardless of their role, including executives, human resources, administration, and depot workers. This is important because we know a worker is far more likely to seek help via a peer than a supervisor.



**Wakefield**  
Regional Council  
achieved MATES in Construction  
Accreditation status

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## CONSTRUCTION

With several mines in the construction phase and significant civil construction in the regions we were able to deliver GAT to 379 workers and Connector training to 65 workers.

Employer	Location	GAT	Connector	ASIST
Goodline	Olympic Dam	112	31	
MADEC	Port Pirie	8	8	
OTM Civil	Clare	30	8	6
PW2PA	Port Augusta and Port Wakefield	43	5	
SRG Global	Eyre Peninsula	74		
Whittens	Carrapateena	112	13	

## OTHER INDUSTRIES AND COMMUNITY

We targeted significant employers in Whyalla, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, and Port Lincoln.

Nyrstar at Port Pirie was keen to roll out the program to their workforce and our Field Officers spent a total of two weeks delivering training to around 31% of their workforce.

The Maritime and Fisheries Academy and Sekol were also very helpful in gathering groups of workers from the fishing industry to complete the training.

We delivered Connector training to 25 teachers at Edward John Eyre High School at Whyalla, ASIST to 11 teachers at St Mark's College, and eight nurses at UniSA Whyalla.

We also gathered a mix of community members to deliver an ASIST in Kadina in early September 2020. These included local council employees, members of SOS Copper Coast, and members of the general community.

Other industries and community	Location	GAT	Connector	ASIST
Adchem	Burra	19		
BaptCare	Kadina		15	5
Edward John Eyre High School	Whyalla		25	
Maritime & Fisheries Academy	Port Lincoln	21	12	
Nyrstar	Port Pirie	219	40	
SEKOL	Port Lincoln	13	13	
St Mark's College	Port Pirie		70	11
UniSA	Whyalla			8
Community participants	Kadina			4
Community participants	Maitland		14	

## CONTINUED SUPPORT

The support does not end with the completion of training. Our Field Officers and Case Managers continue to support the workplace long after the training has been completed by sharing information and providing follow-up training for new employees, workplace visits, and support for Connectors.



Being a regionally based employer, we find that available mental health resources are often stretched, and the work done by MATES is not only supplementary but often the only available support, which can turn a potential tragedy into something that is instead worked through with family, friends, workmates and community help.

Boyd Elliott, Chief Systems Officer, OTM Civil Construction Group Pty Ltd

# POSTVENTION AND ONGOING SUPPORT



**We had a tragic accident in our workforce a while ago and MATES were there that day helping our people work through what was the toughest situation any of us have ever had to work through. We will forever be grateful for MATES. CEO**

In April 2020, during heavy COVID-19 restrictions, a worker was tragically killed at a quarry in Truro. Many workers onsite at the time were greatly impacted by the incident, as were workers at the organisation's other locations in regional South Australia and metropolitan Adelaide.

Immediately following the incident, the organisation contacted both their Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and MATES to provide support for their workers. As a long-term supporter of MATES, the organisation understood the value of postvention – the support a workplace or community may need after it has experienced a sudden death or suicide. The grief that follows can be complex, often with many unanswered questions and postvention is designed to help those grieving and to ensure they get the appropriate help and support.

While the EAP was not available to provide face-to-face support due to company policy surrounding COVID-19 restrictions, MATES Operations Manager Bob Clifford was onsite within three hours of the incident, providing the immediate support that is so important. Bob spoke at length with all the workers involved in the incident and provided support to the management team. The following day Bob returned to site with the MATES Case Manager Amanda Braddock to provide further support.

In the weeks following, the MATES team continued to provide support and visited all the organisation's worksites throughout the Yorke Peninsula and mid-north regions to offer support to all workers who were affected by the incident.

## BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

Feedback shows 34% of people who completed our training as part of the CSAPHN trial had used the skills they'd learnt to assist another person. Here is some feedback from survey respondents about how they've provided help to those around them.

*A friend of mine made several attempts at taking his own life over a divorce with kids involved. I spent a lot of time with him and talking about all the positives and now he's on a great road to recovery.*

*My friend knew I'd done the training and came to me for help after they had attempted.*

*My son has poor mental health and it assisted me in talking to him.*

*A patient came in to the hospital in obvious emotional distress and I felt confident to ask if she was thinking of killing herself. The answer was yes. She was admitted so we could keep her safe overnight.*

*I found that the MATES training comes in useful not just for preventing suicide, but also for helping work through everyday issues people have, it has made my awareness of peoples changes in life and armed me with tools to better help people in and out of the construction industry.*

*My work colleague advised that she was being bullied at work and needed someone to talk to and sit with her. After discussion I facilitated her talking with a higher level officer, with me sitting in as a friend / supporter.*

*I have reached out to one individual outside of my normal sphere of 'workmates' to check in with him a couple of times recently – he is doing it tough at present and I have checked in with him to see how he is travelling.*

*After the session I realised he was showing quite a few signs that you touched on and rang him after the session. I now ring him twice a week instead of once every few months.*


*The person was acting quite withdrawn and I felt confident to approach them and ask them how they were feeling and suggested options for the person to get further help.*

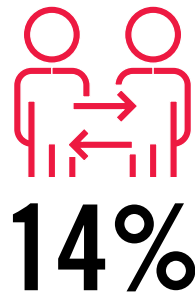


# FEEDBACK

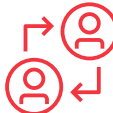
As part of an ongoing evaluation of our program and the satisfaction of participants, we ask everyone undertaking our training to complete a survey immediately following the session.


For participants in the country northern region, we also incorporate an anonymous online survey three months later. This online survey measures the ongoing effectiveness of the MATES program on the participants, their workplace, and community. Results have shown:


 **92%** of respondents indicated the training had a **positive or extremely positive** impact on their workplace



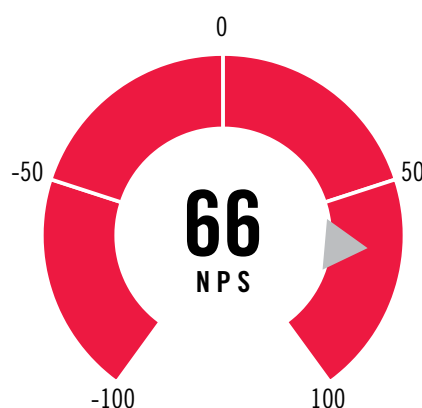
**14%** had **sought help** for themselves

**34%** of respondents had used the  **skills learned in the training** to assist a work colleague (55%), friend (38%), or family member (25%)

**93%**  felt confident they **could assist someone** who needed help

**92%**  agreed or strongly agreed **they had learnt the skills** to notice signs or invitations that a workmate might be struggling

When asked if respondents would **recommend MATES in Construction** to a friend or colleague, the survey showed an extremely positive **Net Promoter Score of 66**



I would recommend MATES in Construction Suicide Awareness Training be embedded in as many organisations as possible and that this training become available continuously.

Craig Shrubsole, Training Advisor,  
District Council of Yorke Peninsula

## RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Once COVID-19 took hold, we had to suspend some of our services, such as our training program, to conform with government advice and restrictions. We were mindful of how this might affect the mental health, anxiety levels, and general wellbeing of workers in our industry, so we not only continued offering support, we also introduced new ways to connect with people. Two key initiatives were video toolbox meetings and one-on-one video sessions.

We quickly developed our 'Look after you, look out for others' campaign with the assistance of Professor Nicholas Procter – Chair: Mental Health Nursing at UniSA, that focused on ways to help yourself and others through the tough times we were all facing. This campaign included a poster and flier that was sent to all active and prospective CSAPHN workplaces within one week of restrictions starting, an e-newsletter to all contacts and employers, a series of social media posts, a podcast, and a short toolbox presentation that we delivered online at the request of employers and site teams.

The campaign was based on the following elements:

Look after you	Look out for others
Social and emotional supports	Spot the signs
Switching off	Stay in touch
Get the facts	Share information
Stay healthy	Tell someone
Confide in someone	

The toolbox presentations were well received, and we reached 219 workers in the Whyalla and Yorke Peninsula regions across ran 22 sessions, 20 of which were via video conference.

This is another example of our continued support of workplaces well after the training has finished.

Look after you,  
look out for others  
**campaign**  
developed and delivered to  
**219** workers across  
**22 sessions**



During this last year of unprecedented challenges and hardship, OTM greatly appreciates the hard work MATES has put into helping us support our staff and their families – support which has shown real results.

Boyd Elliott, Chief Systems Officer, OTM  
Civil Construction Group Pty Ltd

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

As mentioned, COVID-19 has clearly been the greatest challenge. It prevented us from face-to-face training for four months of 2020 and slowed our promotion of the program within the regions.

Convincing employers that the program is a worthwhile part of their workplace training is also a large obstacle. The original CSAPHN survey indicated that stigma around suicide was still a major factor in people accessing services. This includes employers and workers. We often hear someone say, 'I don't want to sit around for 45 minutes talking about suicide', yet when they do adopt the program those barriers are broken down and they realise its benefit to the workplace and community.

The same problems occur when an employer makes the General Awareness Training optional amongst the workforce. Workers are reluctant to 'talk about suicide' so they don't participate. Those who do participate are surprised by the program content and find its overall value rewarding.



MATES in Construction have worked with our workforce and have developed a trusting integral relationship. Our staff's feedback has been extremely positive and team members have been grateful for having the opportunity to expand their understandings of such an important topic. From an administrative perspective MATES in Construction's entire approach to scheduling training has been flexible, responsive and highly professional at every step.

Craig Shrubsole, Training Advisor, District Council of Yorke Peninsula





## OUR VISION

To be Australia's leading industry suicide prevention organisation, focusing on raising awareness, building capacity, providing help and research.

## OUR MISSION

Utilising the capacity of our members and franchises, we achieve our vision by focusing on:

### Raising awareness

Effective and direct communication with all levels of the industries in which we operate through newsletters, general awareness, Connector and ASIST worker networks, MATES events, and toolbox talks.

### Capacity building

Actively engaging the industry in sustainable programs such as the MATES programs including General Awareness Training, Connector, and ASIST courses, which are aimed at building self-reliance and resilience, and developing networks, links, and communities within workplaces.

### Providing help

Case Management that connects workers to help by using existing services, ensuring that help is both practical and useful.

### Research

Gathering data and partnering with research institutions to provide useful, insightful and practical information for application in the industry.

I have undertaken significant research into the impact of the MATES in Construction program and played a role in the program's ongoing evidence-based improvement processes. It is undoubtedly saving many lives and delivering improved wellbeing for workers and their families.

Jacinta Hawgood, Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention, Master of Suicidology and Grad Cert in Suicide Prevention Studies, Griffith Uni

## OUR VALUES

- Proactive and responsive
- Supportive and non-judgemental
- Committed and dependable
- Honest and respectful

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**SAVING LIVES IN INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY**

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