

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**  
**THURSDAY 09<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2016**  
**MATES IN CONSTRUCTION**

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 12:38 ):** I move:

That this house notes—

(a) the exemplary work of MATES in Construction in its endeavour to prevent suicide in the construction industry and promote health and wellbeing;

(b) that MATES in Construction is a federation of independent industry-based MATES in Construction organisations throughout New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and here in South Australia;

(c) that MATES in Construction aims to raise awareness about suicide, making it easier to access help and ensuring that the help offered throughout the industry is practical, professional and appropriate; and

(d) that MATES in Construction has implemented the following programs to address the tragic rate of suicide in the industry:

(i) an individual case management program which aims to assist troubled workers with an effective plan to address their mental issues;

(ii) field visits, which involve field officers going from site to site to advise workers of the program; and

(iii) a post-vention program, which provides support where a worker or worker's family member has committed suicide.

I would like to give an exceptional amount of credit to my colleague the Hon. John Dawkins MLC for introducing this motion into the state parliament in the other place. MATES in Construction is well known for its award-winning suicide awareness, prevention and post-vention programs offered to the construction industry across a great deal of Australia. They value themselves on being proactive and responsive, supportive and non-judgemental, committed and dependable, honest and respectful.

MATES in Construction was established to decrease the level of suicide and progress the mental health and wellbeing of construction workers. The organisation was first established in Queensland in 2008 and, since implemented in South Australia, the organisation has executed general awareness training to at least 8,248 persons, connector training to 445, assist training to 114 people and, through case management, assisted with 441 instances. I would also like to note that MATES in Construction has trained over 90,000 people nationally in their program.

All this training is provided fee free to construction companies and their workers on building sites. This training is both vital and unique, and it provides simple tools and support structures to help educate workers in the industry to assist their mates and colleagues before seeking advice from a professional. The training is vital to the industry, and I commend the organisation for all that they do.

I would like to note that suicide levels in the construction industry are up to two times higher than in other workforces, and workers have six times more chance of dying from suicide rather than through a workplace accident. It is also suggested that apprentices in

the construction industry have a suicide rate 2.5 times higher in comparison to other young men in Australia. Along with their training, MATES also supply a national phone hotline for those experiencing suicidal thoughts or difficult mental situations. That support line can be accessed on 1300 642 111. I believe the perception of MATES in Construction throughout the industry is extremely supportive and positive.

Through watching the videos on the MATES in Construction website, I was made aware of a very confronting story which provided a true indication of how important the training provided by MATES in Construction is. The story involved a gentleman who seemed somewhat emotional at lunch one day. His co-workers noticed this behaviour and reported it to the safety and wellbeing adviser, who then took the initiative, began the conversation and spoke to the gentleman for three hours, where he admitted he was planning to suicide that very night. This adviser believes the training which they were provided through MATES was a significant contributor in somewhat saving this gentleman's life. Stories such as these provide a true representation of the significance and importance of these programs and training.

In relation to funding, MATES and the Building Employees Redundancy Trust are going to tackle the Kokoda Track. In 2015, the funds raised by those who conquered the 96-kilometre track were donated to MATES. Last year, \$137,000 was raised. For 2016, the goal is to reach \$150,000. I would like to inform the house that if you would like to register your interest in participating, you can complete this through the MATES in Construction website. It is my understanding that funds from the Australian government have also been provided to the organisation, which is truly fantastic to see.

A significant initiative which has come to light recently is the partnership with the AFL players' and coaches associations. MATES and the associations have instigated a project, also known as the STRIDE project, which is a digital campaign with the target audience being construction industries and AFL communities. The aim of the STRIDE project is to reduce the stigma we have around talking about matters which may be getting you down. It is important that we remember: conversations matter.

I have met with representatives from MATES in Construction, and we had great in-depth discussions regarding their involvement and future strategies for the industry. These conversations increased the appreciation I already had for the organisation, and I again need to commend MATES in Construction for all they do. When I last met with MATES in Construction, they talked about some of their counsellors working down through country South Australia, talking to farmers and rural people who obviously can get on the edge, just like construction industry workers. I was really pleased to hear about the work they were doing in that sector. MATES provides a great service to South Australia and beyond and has thousands of people involved within their organisation. My hope is that this motion will begin more conversations and enable MATES to receive even more support in the hope that some support be through funding from the state government.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge, along with the commendable work that the Hon. John Dawkins has done on this motion, the work that he does in relation to the whole suicide prevention network. Suicide prevention is extremely important and we need to ensure we continue to improve the systems we already have. In South Australia alone, in December 2015, suicide in the construction industry cost an estimated \$57.36 million annually and \$1.5 billion on a national basis, with an average of 169 construction workers losing their lives to suicide each year. Let's ensure we look after our mates and continue the conversation, because any life lost to suicide is one too many. I commend the motion.