Executive Summary .......................................................... ................................................... 4
Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 7
Scope ................................................................................................................................... 9
Approach ............................................................................................................................ 10
Alignment with Queensland Government Strategies .............................................................. 12
  Queensland Health .............................................................................................................. 12
  Department of Education and Training .............................................................................. 18
Summary of Achievements .................................................................................................. 20
Table of findings relating to overall performance of Life Skills Course .............................. 21
Program Content ............................................................................................................... 22
Table of findings relating to Life Skills Tool Box Content .................................................. 22
Program Delivery ............................................................................................................... 23
Table of findings relating to Life Skills Course Delivery .................................................... 24
Impact of the Program ........................................................................................................ 25
Program Challenges .......................................................................................................... 26
Conclusions ....................................................................................................................... 27
Recommendations ............................................................................................................. 28
  1. Plan for expansion of the program ............................................................................... 29
  2. Establish capability to measure results ....................................................................... 30
  3. Increase visibility of, profile of and focus on the program ......................................... 31
  4. Consider the extent to which the Program can be integrated into education as well as mental health .................................................................................................................. 32
  5. Investigate extended delivery options ......................................................................... 33
  6. Investigate alternative/additional recurring funding options ...................................... 34
  7. Complimentary training provided to staff involved with apprentices ...................... 35
  8. Maintain passion, connectivity, earthy quality, smartness of delivery ....................... 36
Appendix A: Interview List ................................................................................................. 37
Appendix B: Table of Ratings ........................................................................................... 39
Life Skills Course – Pilot Project Evaluation                                             2
Appendix C: Modules Reported by Participants as “Key Learning”.................................40
Appendix D: Modules Reported by Participants as “Most Helpful”.................................41
Appendix E: Anecdotes........................................................................................................42

Disclaimer

This report was prepared for Mates In Construction and is based on the work described on Pages 8 and 9. It is to be used by Mates In Construction and the funders of the Pilot Project to assess the success of the Project to date.
Executive Summary

The “Course in Life Skills”, previously known as the “Life Skills Toolbox” ("the Course") is a program aimed at increasing basic life skills and thereby improving resilience in Construction Industry apprentices. The Program is a major initiative of the Construction Industry in Queensland to address the comparatively high level of suicides in the Industry, particularly among younger men. The Tool Box was originally developed by OZ Help Foundation and has been adopted by Mates In Construction ("MIC"), previously known as OzHelp Queensland.

A project to pilot the Course in the Queensland Construction Industry ("the Project") was funded by Queensland Health and commenced in 2008. This pilot project is to assess the most appropriate ways to deliver the Course. The pilot project consisted of delivering the Course to 500 apprentices over a three year period as part of their apprenticeship.

ArkAeon was engaged to undertake an evaluation of the pilot project. An interim review was undertaken of the first 12 months of the project, and the final review was completed in February 2011. An interim report was issued in February 2010. This report sets out the overall findings of the evaluation and encompasses both the interim and final findings.

The approach to the evaluation was to conduct a series of structured interviews covering major stakeholder groups including management, facilitators, participants, unions, employers, funders and the training colleges.

In addition, key documents, reports and other information relevant to the Project and the Program were examined.

A recent Senate Reference Committee report entitled “The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia” concludes that “at least six Australian lives are taken by suicide every day, however there continues to be a lack of public awareness about the impact of suicide on the community”. Among the Committee’s recommendations are that groups at increased risk of suicide should continue to be targeted with specific programs.

It is clear the program aligns with Queensland Government strategies, particularly those of Queensland Health and the Department of Education and Training. It contributes to the stated mission and objectives of the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017, and the principles under which the Course operates are in alignment with the plan. This alignment is also evident through the priorities, actions and desired outcomes prescribed by the plan and the actions and outcomes delivered through the program.

The evaluation found that the pilot project has been very successful. Feedback from participants, employer and unions is overwhelmingly positive. On a scale of 1 to 5, the interviewees rated the overall success as 4.25.
Executive Summary

The Course has been delivered to 637 apprentices to date through the Project. It has been delivered in the following key ways:

- At colleges
  - JIST
  - TAFE
- Through employers
  - Evans Harch
  - Laing O Rourke
- At specific sites
  - Mirvac
- Via a group scheme
  - Electro Group

The Course was delivered using several different structures. These included:

- 15 sessions of 3 hours each, delivered every two weeks
- 10 half-day sessions
- Two half-weeks
- One week intensive

The evaluation found that the outcomes of the Course in terms of the ratings given for the course overall, for its content and its delivery, were consistent across the differing delivery settings and approaches.

Course Ratings

The key outcomes achieved so far include:

- Building resilience in the apprentices (and therefore building their capability to resist suicide)
- Identifying apprentices in need and connecting them with help
- Uniting the Industry

It is estimated that approximately 150 apprentices have approached MIC for assistance since the commencement of the Project, and of these 37 have been formally connected with additional assistance and are formally case managed by Mates In Construction. In some case, these people presented with significant suicidal ideation.
The Future

Our overall recommendation is that the Course in Life Skills be delivered to all apprentices as a core element of their apprenticeships. Also, consideration should be given to adapting the Course for other industries.

Recommendations

- Plan for expansion of the program, considering the integration of life skills training into core apprenticeship training programmes.
- Continue to maintain relationships with all stakeholders and communicate key outcomes achieved.
- Establish a process to continually review delivery options and implement any changes deemed appropriate.
- Seek appropriate funding to allow the Course to be enhanced and more widely delivered.
- Consider user pay options.
- Continue with the strategy of implementing life skills on sites that have agreed to establish a supportive environment (known as “Mates In Construction Sites”).
Mates In Construction ("MIC")

Mates in Construction was established as “OzHelp Queensland” in 2008 by the Building Employees Redundancy Trust (“BERT”) as an Industry response to the comparatively high rates of suicide in the Queensland Construction Industry, particularly for apprentices. MIC’s focus is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of people working in that Industry.

A report issued in 2006 by the Australian Institute for Suicide and Prevention noted that the Queensland Commercial Building Construction Industry young employees (15 to 24 years) had very high suicide rates (58.6 deaths per 100,000 head of population). This figure was reported as being 2.39 and 1.93 times greater than the working-age male population in Australia and Queensland respectively.

MIC is undertaking two major initiatives as part of its response to the high rates of suicide. These are:

- The Course in Life Skills (previously known as the Life Skills Tool Box); and
- Mates in Construction.

The Course in Life Skills

The Course is a training package designed to provide life skills to young workers in the Construction Industry and therefore build resilience. It was originally developed as the “Life Skills Tool Box” in 2004 by OzHelp Foundation in Canberra, a similar organisation to MIC. Since 2005 it has been delivered in both the ACT and Tasmania.

The Course consists of 12 modules. Each module is designed to be delivered in 4 hours. The topics covered include:

- Communication
- Financial management
- Belief systems
- Depression and mental health
- Drugs and alcohol
- Understanding and managing emotions
- Conflict
- Stress
- Suicide awareness
• Leadership and team building
• Resilience
• Mentoring and support networks

The Course is generally delivered in a classroom environment. The modules can be delivered in an intensive week or spread out over the apprenticeship. The delivery can be through a Registered Training Organisation (typically a college), a group scheme, to a particular employer, or at a specific site.

An initial three-year pilot project (“the Project”) was established in 2008 to deliver the Course to approximately 500 apprentices. The pilot project was funded by Queensland Health and BERT.

Mates In Construction

Mates in Construction is a program aimed at raising awareness and providing networks on site that provide help and link workers who are at risk of suicide through to professional help.
An independent review was commissioned to:

- assess the relative success of the Project, in particular any conclusions that can be drawn in respect of the delivery options trialled during the pilot; and
- identify key learnings and make recommendations for the future of the Course.

The review was performed in two stages:

- an interim review for the period to February 2010; and
- a final review covering the period to February 2011.
Introduction

The diagram below describes the review process followed at a high level. This approach was taken for both the interim and final stages.

Respondent perceptions of the program were gathered through interviews against a standard interview questionnaire. A combination of quantitative and qualitative questions was asked.

Interviewees included program facilitators, participants, management, board members, training organisation representatives, co-ordinators, employer representatives, field experts and associated medical professionals. A complete list of respondents can be found in Appendix A.

The evaluation was also supported by reference to relevant documents including:

- OzHelp Policy and Procedures – Life Skills Tool Box
- Application for Funding by BERT Pty Ltd
- Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention Report 2006
- OzHelp Student Handbook
- OzHelp Progress Reports
- OzHelp Promotional Material
- Life Skills Tool Box Participants Workbook
- The “Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017”
• The “Fourth National Mental Health Plan 2009-2014”
• The “National Action Plan for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health 2000”
• “Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health: A Monograph 2000”
• Department of Education and Training Strategic Plan 2010-2014
• “The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia”, The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee (June 2010)
• OzHelp Tasmania Foundation: “Transition Project, The application of a model of transition to the experience of apprentices”, Martin Harris Consulting

Members of the review team also attended several modules of the Course to provide context for the evaluation.
Alignment with Queensland Government Strategies

Queensland Health

Mental illness (and wellbeing) is regarded as a significant health challenge and priority both nationally and for Queensland - “It is estimated that 16.6% of the Queensland population is affected by mental disorders in any one year (excluding dementia and alcohol and drug-related disorders, except where co-existing with another mental disorder). The figure rises to about 22% when alcohol and drug-related conditions are included.” Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017.

The diagram below (from the Fourth National Mental Health Plan) illustrates the whole of government approach to mental health. This section primarily examines the relevance of the Life Skills Course program to the relevant state mental health plan (in this case the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017) and makes reference to the National Action Plan for Mental Health and the Fourth National Health Plan where applicable.
As Queensland is a signatory to the COAG National Health Plan, the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017 is highly aligned to the National Mental Health Plan (as illustrated in the diagram above) and the National Mental Health Policy.

**Areas of Alignment to the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017**

The Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017 “provides a blueprint for reform and will inform future investment in mental health services across the State.” The following section explores the general alignment between the plan and the objectives and outcomes of the Life Skills Course Program.

The plan states a clear intention to support collaboration of the kind established between the Life Skills Course Program and Queensland Health: “The mental health sector needs to build stronger partnerships with consumers, families, carers, and government and non-government services to achieve better outcomes for Queenslanders.” (p2)

**Plan Mission and Objectives**

The stated mission is: “To provide a comprehensive, resilience and recovery-based mental health system across Queensland, with emphasis upon promotion, prevention and early intervention.”

The Life Skills Course targets development of “resilience” and effectively aligns with the objectives of “promotion, prevention and early intervention”. The plan also acknowledges the role of programs such as the Life Skills Course: “There is growing recognition that a whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach is necessary to reduce the prevalence and impact of mental health problems and mental illness.”

The diagram below identifies the key areas of alignment between the program and the mission and objectives of the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017 and indicates several objectives to which the program closely aligns and contributes.
Figure 2: Alignment of Life Skills Course with the objectives of the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017.
Plan Principles

Alignment is also evident between the program and the principles underlying the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017, as highlighted in the diagram below:

Figure 3: Alignment of Life Skills Course with the principles of the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017.

The above analysis indicates significant alignment between the program and the stated objectives and principles of the plan.

Alignment between the Program and Plan Priorities and Outcomes

The Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017 directs the allocation of resources by establishing priority areas with associated key actions and short and long term outcomes.

The key area of alignment between the program and the plans stated priorities is evident in Priority 1 “Promotion, prevention and early intervention” described as:

Life Skills Course – Pilot Project Evaluation
Life Skills Course – Pilot Project Evaluation

Introduction

“...PPEI addresses the health and wellbeing of the entire population, including all levels of mental health need within the community, and requires the cooperation of a wide range of government and non-government agencies... Building supportive and inclusive environments, and resilient individuals and communities are also important tasks...”

(Emphasis added.)

Key actions highlighted under Priority 1 in the plan show high levels of alignment with the program actions including:

“Reduce suicide risk and mortality in Queensland communities, within high risk groups such as young people.” Specifically "to support the ongoing development of cross-sectoral strategies, partnerships and agreements targeted and reducing suicide risk and associated mortality including:

**Dedicated strategies to reduce suicide risk and mortality with a focus on high risk groups.**

Establishing programs that build individual and community resilience and capacity...”

(Emphasis added.)

The alignment of the program to the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017 flows through to the expected outcomes for Priority 1 of the plan.

With stated outcomes for the near term of: “Implement a range of targeted, evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention programs across government, non-government and community sectors.”

“Improve the capacity to build community resilience to mental illness.”

“Improve the response to suicide risk behaviours and the management of suicide risk.”

“Delivered whole-of-population mental health PPEI initiatives across government, non-government and community sectors.

Developed collaborative initiatives to address the mental health needs of specific communities and targeted populations.”

It is clear the program aligns with the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017 through contributing to the achievement of the plan’s stated mission and objectives and aligning with the principles under which the program operates. This alignment is also evident through the priorities, actions and desired outcomes prescribed by the plan and the actions and outcomes delivered through the program.

Alignment at the National Level

The importance of promotion, prevention and early intervention is reinforced by the Fourth National Mental Health Plan 2009-2014 which lists PPEI as a priority with associated outcomes and actions.
Department of Education and Training

In addition to the links the Life Skills Course has with the strategic direction of Queensland Health, links can also be identified with that of The Department of Education and Training.

The Department of Education and Training Strategic Plan for 2010-2014 states that the Department’s purpose is:

“To provide Queenslanders with the knowledge, skills and confidence to maximise their potential, contribute productively to the economy and build a better Queensland.”

The plan goes on to outline the Department’s key values, two of which directly relate to the objectives of the Life Skills Course:

**Productive relationships**

“We achieve our objectives through productive partnerships with families, community, and industry and collaborative relationships in our workplaces, schools and TAFEs.”

**Healthy, safe and sustainable environments**

“Our practices focus on supporting the health and well-being of our staff and students and creating safe and environmentally sustainable work and learning environments.”

Within the strategic plan there are also highlighted contributions to the whole of government initiative *Toward Q2: Tomorrow’s Queensland*. The stated ambitions in this document are:

- Strong: We want to create a diverse economy powered by bright ideas
- Green: We want to protect our lifestyle and environment
- Smart: We want to deliver world-class education and training
- Healthy: We want to make Queenslanders Australia’s healthiest people
- Fair: We want to support a safe and caring community

The Department of Education and Training is primarily concerned with the Smart ambition: “We want to deliver world-class education and training”. The Life Skills Course aims to run in parallel with apprenticeship training and education, intending to provide a broad range of life skills to the next generation of workers effecting long-term shifts in attitudes in the industry.
The Department also contributes to achieving the other “Towards Q2” ambitions which further link with the Life Skills Course’s own objectives. The strategic plan states the following:

“We also contribute to achieving the other Q2 ambitions:

HEALTHY – making Queenslanders Australia’s healthiest people by giving children the knowledge and skills to live healthy lifestyles, by skilling the health workforce, and through encouraging healthy workforce practices.”

The Life Skills Course aims to create a healthier lifestyle within the Construction Industry by providing instruction and support in living a healthy physical and mental lifestyle. From the training provided to the support networks created, the program also aims to change the face of the Construction Industry by changing the attitude towards mental health Wellbeing and thereby “encouraging healthy workforce practices” and promoting “training system enhancements for skills and workforce development”.
Summary of Achievements

The Life Skills Course pilot in Queensland was reported as very successful by all interviewees. Generally speaking, the evaluations by all clients and other stakeholders were excellent.

The key achievements to date can be summarised as:

- Building resilience in apprentices by giving them basic life skills;
- Identifying people in need and connecting them with help; and
- Uniting the Industry which was evident in the positive responses by representatives of unions, employers, government and apprentices.

The findings supporting these conclusions are summarised in the following table.
# Table of findings relating to overall performance of Life Skills Course

## Key statistics

- Since the project's inception there have been 637 attendees of the Course
- Estimated about 25% of attendees seek some form of assistance
- Of these 37 have been case managed to appropriate professional help whether that be medical or other

## Interview Question

"How do you rate the overall performance of the Life Skills Course?"

| Average Rating (Out of 5) | Interim: 4 | Final: 4.5 | Overall: 4.25 |

## Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The program is successful</td>
<td>The program is perceived as a positive, successful program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The program has achieved results</td>
<td>Outcomes indicate that the program is producing positive results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The benefits of the program extend beyond the target audience</td>
<td>The benefits of the program extend beyond the benefit to the target audience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Individual interviewee comments by Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The program is successful</td>
<td>Program is seen as successful and invaluable to all apprentices involved. Students now talk about suicide. They feel they are not alone. Apprentices are sceptical at first but come to see the benefit of the program. Although QH has only a peripheral role in the project, QH is very supportive. Overall awareness and exposure of project will be the greatest measure of success. Course has been fantastic. Have been surprised at the positive comments. Cannot rate this program highly enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The program has achieved results</td>
<td>Majority of apprentices are “a pleasure to deal with” and it is felt that this is in no small part due to the program. Have noticed changes in the way the apprentices “hold themselves. They have increased in confidence. Apprentices are using the Course when they require advice, both during and after the Course. Generally a positive response from employers. Some employers are looking at introducing the Course in their own induction package for apprentices. Unions are extremely supportive of the program. Course is creating a new breed of apprentices, thereby creating a new breed of tradespeople. Program is teaching apprentices valuable life skills that have sometimes been missed by previous education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Program delivers against Government strategies</td>
<td>This is an innovative program funded by Queensland Health as an early intervention/prevention measure in the mental health field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program Content

The program content was rated as very beneficial by interviewees. However, there are opportunities to revise and enhance the content based on the experiences from the pilot project. This is a process currently being undertaken by Mates In Construction.

The findings supporting this conclusion are summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>How do you rate the contents of the Life Skills Tool Box?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Rating (Out of 5)</td>
<td>Interim: 4 Final: 4.5 Overall: 4.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Themes**

1. **Demand for greater detail in some modules**
   - Participants responded that there would be benefit in having greater detail in some modules.

2. **Demand for “consequences” module**
   - Demand for an additional module focussed on the consequences of actions.

3. **The content is beneficial**
   - The Course content is generally regarded as beneficial.

4. **Some course content is confronting**
   - Some of the course material is perceived as confronting by some participants.

**Individual comments by Theme**

1. **Demand for greater detail in some modules**
   - More time allocated to the time management module.
   - Addiction module has received good feedback and it is believed some extra focus on this section would be a positive step.
   - Extend financial/budgeting modules to contain more information on credit cards, mortgages, investments etc.

2. **Demand for “consequences” module**
   - Include a module that focuses on consequences of actions, such as drink driving, drug addictions etc.
   - The Predominant opinion is that the financial and budgeting modules are extremely beneficial to apprentices.
   - Overall the content throughout the Tool Box is seen as imperative to the apprentices’ ongoing learning.
   - Provides resilience training that apprentices are not receiving elsewhere which is seen as very valuable.
   - Dealing with drugs, alcohol and depression is particularly important.
   - Communication content feedback is very positive.

3. **The content is beneficial**
   - Some negative feedback about the suicide module, specifically the rates of men against women, due to the “macho” environment within the industry.

4. **Some course content is confronting**

**Anecdotal Findings**

On completing the budgeting exercise, one participant realised that he was spending $300 per week over his income as opposed to the $20 per week he had previously thought. He also realised he was in serious financial trouble. Financial counselling was obtained for him and he is now sorting himself out. See Appendix E, Case Three.
Program Delivery

During the pilot project, the Course was delivered in a number of different scenarios. These are summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Apprentices</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFMEU</td>
<td>Sponsorship</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electro Group</td>
<td>Group Scheme</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans Harch</td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laing O’Rourke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirvac</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIST</td>
<td>Training College</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Tech</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Plumbers</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Includes some prevocational students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plasterers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Painters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>637</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The delivery of the Life Skills Course was reported as excellent by interviewees. The key learnings are:

- High quality of delivery is paramount to the success of the Course.
- MIC is delivering the program extremely well.
- Some key factors identified as important contributors to high quality delivery include:
  - Facilitators being able to connect with apprentices
  - Facilitators with passion for the program
  - Facilitators using an “earthy” style of presentation.
- There is not a significant difference in outcomes when comparing the differing methods of scheduling the modules (i.e. intensive against modules spread out over time).
- It is important to offer as much flexibility as possible in the delivery options available to increase the accessibility of the Life Skills Course to apprentices.

The detailed findings supporting these conclusions are summarised in the table below.
# Findings

**Table of findings relating to Life Skills Course Delivery**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key statistics</th>
<th>How do you rate the delivery of the Life Skills Tool Box?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Question</td>
<td>Average Rating (Out of 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% of respondents rated the quality of teaching as very good or excellent (source: Life Skills Course Training feedback).</td>
<td>Interim: 4 Final: 4.75 <strong>Overall: 4.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Themes

| 1. Current program facilitator is regarded as a critical success factor | Facilitators are regarded as a critical ingredient in the program that is critical to the program success. |
| 2. Course delivery scheduling flexibility | There is demand for flexibility in the delivery of the course content and the existing flexibility is valued. |
| 3. Course delivery style | The suitability of the delivery style to the audience is regarded as an influencing factor in the course’s success. |

## Individual comments by Theme

### 1. Current program facilitators are regarded as a critical success factor
- Perhaps the strongest positive message received from interviewee’s, and certainly the most consistent, is that the quality of the deliverers is absolutely imperative to the continued success of the Program.
- Presenters are passionate and believe in the course.
- Deliverers create a bond or understanding with the apprentices, ensuring they feel they can open up and share.
- Presenters are both competent and have rapport with the apprentices.
- Success is due to the facilitators’ ability to relate to apprentices.
- When times and dates have been confirmed as possibilities, it would be valuable if they remained the same.
- Some employer’s prefer the course delivered in modules over a period of time (12 months, 2 years).
- Some employer’s prefer the course delivered in one hit at the start of their apprenticeship.
- There is a view that the course should not be an isolated exposure.
- Course should be in core curriculum.
- The overall message is that the flexibility of style and time of delivery is very beneficial to all involved parties, i.e. MIC being able to deliver in various places, times and methods.

### 2. Course delivery scheduling flexibility
- One employer believes that delivering the course to 10-20 students at a time is the preferred option.
- A direct, hands-on approach appears to be most effective with apprentices.
- Apprentices enjoy it.
- Delivered to small groups is the best method.
- Apprentices must be engaged quickly and directly.
- Success of program is entirely dependent on the delivery.
- Consistent use of language and method of delivery needs to be used when program is being delivered over a longer period of time.
Impact of the Program

The impact of the Course through the Queensland Project has not yet been formally measured.

However, the Life Skills Tool Course has been implemented in ACT and Tasmania by OzHelp Foundation since 2002. Formal reviews have been carried out, and the following significant impacts were noticed:

- Over 15% more 1st year apprentices knew “where to go for help” than 2 years previously
- An increase of 7% of all apprentices “who indicated some intention to talk about their feelings” over the 2 years
- 2nd year apprentices became more likely to talk to a “teacher involved with the apprenticeship” than previously
- The likelihood of both 1st year apprentices and apprentices as a whole contacting a professional counsellor also significantly increased over the 2 year period
- 1st year apprentices also indicated a greater likelihood of contacting a “telephone counselling service” than at the original time of survey
- The program has strong acceptance by apprentices and employers

The strong message perceived from these impacts, is that the program has provided apprentices with:

- An overall greater awareness of where they can contact help if required to (for both their own and their friends benefit)
- An overall greater likelihood to actually contact help if required

Given these messages, there is a strong indication that the Life Skills Course will build resilience in the attendees. On this basis, it can be concluded that the delivery of the Life Skills Course to apprentices in the Queensland Construction Industry should reduce the rates of suicides in the Industry in the long term
Program Challenges

Challenges revealed through the evaluation are explored in further detail in the recommendations section of this report.

Key challenges facing the program include:

- Ensuring adequate delivery capacity whilst maintaining quality of delivery
- Ensuring continuity of staff involved in the program
- Securing ongoing recurring funding
- Ensuring ongoing apprentice employer support (both for attendance and the principles of the program in the workplace)
Conclusions

The pilot project to implement the Life Skills Course in the Queensland Construction Industry has been very successful. Apprentices, employers and other stakeholders report an extremely high level of satisfaction with the overall course, its content and delivery.

The Life Skills Course builds resilience on Construction Industry apprentices in order to reduce the number of suicides in that industry. It is clearly aligned to Government priorities.

In terms of delivery, offering a variety of options will result in greater access to the Life Skills Course for apprentices. Flexibility appears to be a key factor in the early success of the Course.
Recommendations

This section explores recommendations developed through the evaluation process. The recommendations below aim to address the priority recommendation, namely planning for the program to continue beyond the pilot.

These recommendations were originally raised at the interim stage, then further explored during the final review stage.

The recommendations are:

1. Plan for expansion of the program
2. Establish capability to measure results
3. Increase visibility of, profile of and focus on the program
4. Consider the extent to which the Program can be integrated into education as well as mental health
5. Investigate extended delivery options
6. Investigate alternative/additional recurring funding options
7. Complimentary training provided to staff involved with apprentices
8. Maintain passion, connectivity, earthy quality, smartness of delivery
1. Plan for expansion of the program

Interim Findings

- *The majority of interviewees believe that the program needs to be expanded to reach a wider range of people. This may include, but is not limited to:*
  - other apprentices
  - qualified tradespeople
  - other industries and professions
  - the general public.
- A number of respondents proposed making the program compulsory to all apprentices.
- Respondents favoured extending training into later years of apprenticeship.

Actions Suggested at Interim Review

a) Complete the Pilot Project, formally review effectiveness, and make any enhancements in response to learnings.
b) Consider mechanisms to expand the program audience (as part of the program plan).
c) Consider options for expansion and develop a strategic plan for the future of the Program.

Challenges

- In expanding the program the factors that have contributed to the program’s success need to be identified, managed and retained.

Update at Final Review

- Pilot project has now been completed with significant successes noted (see section on impact of program).
- Options have been considered and preferred path is to expand by delivering life skills course as an integral part of an apprenticeship course.
- Submission has been made to the Department of Education to integrate the life skills course into the core training courses for apprentices.

Concluding Recommendation

- Pursue the integration of life skills training into the core apprenticeship training programmes.
## 2. Establish capability to measure results

### Findings

- *Some participants believe that regularly collecting feedback from parents and employer’s is a quantifiable way of gauging and measuring the success of the Program.*
- *Funders have indicated that they value quantifiable evidence of the benefits of the Program.*

### Actions

a) Establish Key Performance Indicators to measure the program implementation.
b) Establish Key Performance Indicators to measure the program outcomes.
c) Collect data on the above, regularly report and review (such as the number of apprentices approaching MIC for assistance).

### Challenges

- Establishing reliable measures of program success (particularly in the short term).
- Establishing cause and effect relationships between the program and population outcomes.

### Update at Final Review

- Some limited measurement has been implemented using feedback forms and pre and post testing via key questions.
- Course has been accredited based on outcomes. Consequently, the Course has been mapped to 91 outcomes.
- Measure help-seeking behaviour.

### Concluding Recommendation

- None
# Recommendations

## 3. Increase visibility of, profile of and focus on the program

### Findings

- **Encourage employers by providing them with more information about the program and demonstrating the benefits of the Course.**
- **Achieve a wider government endorsement.**

### Actions

- **a)** Develop measures (quantitative and qualitative) of the value provided by the Program in consultation with relevant stakeholders.
- **b)** Report frequently to employers on both the progress of the Program implementation and the results attributed to the Program.
- **c)** Maintain relationships with relevant government bodies and continue to demonstrate the success and relevance of the Program.

### Challenges

- Program benefits may be intangible in nature (and therefore difficult to quantify in economic terms).
- Program benefits may be long term and therefore may not be obvious to some employers.
- There may be difficulty in establishing causation between the Program and outcomes.

### Update at Final Review

- MIC has written to all JIST employers to raise awareness.
- A number of articles have been written and have appeared in such publications as: the Courier Mail, Skills Tech Bulletin, CFMEU Journal, CBUS Journal.
- MIC has had speakers at a number of events and conferences including the International Suicide Awareness Conference and Comcare.
- MIC hosted an Industry Charity Lunch.
- MIC is the corporate charity of choice for Skills Tech.

### Concluding Recommendation

- Continue to maintain relationships with all stakeholders and communicate key outcomes achieved.
### Recommendations

#### 4. Consider the extent to which the Program can be integrated into education as well as mental health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Course should become an integral part of an apprentice’s training and it definitely has a future within the industry (this was supported by all interviewees).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was suggested that the course become a core component of Apprenticeship Schemes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to facilitate the large scale growth of the project it was generally agreed that integration with learning institutions such as TAFE and group schemes would be beneficial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Continue to influence apprentice training programs to include Life Skills Course Training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Lobby to have the course become a compulsory part of Apprentice Schemes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Continue to investigate potential of integrating with learning institutions such as TAFE and group schemes (initiatives currently underway by MIC).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing evidence to demonstrate the outcomes of the Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition with other aspects of apprentice training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining the independence of the Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining quality of training if training is provided by external facilitators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically, within a structured trade apprentice training program, some established teachers may consider life skills a “soft” subject compared to more traditional trade skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Update at Final Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Options have been considered and preferred path is to expand by delivering Life Skills Course as an integral part of an apprenticeship course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission has been made to the Department of Education to integrate the Life Skills Course into the core training courses for apprentices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concluding Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pursue the integration of life skills training into the core apprenticeship training programmes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Investigate extended delivery options

Findings

- **Life Skills should be introduced as an important concept to apprentice’s during their induction process.**
- **Participants saw some potential value in the possibility of delivering courses outside standard working hours. However, there is a high risk that providing an out of hours option will result in:**
  - Diminished value of the Life Skills Course
  - Greater demand on apprentices time
  - Higher likelihood that the apprentices will be tired and therefore will not gain as much benefit.
- **Participants saw value in providing supplementary self help readings online.**

Actions

a) Investigate opportunities to have Life Skills Course Training introduced in apprentice induction processes.
b) Investigate the value against the potential risks of presenting courses outside standard working hours.
c) Investigate the provision of supplementary readings and support online.
d) Investigate providing singular vacancies to employers.

Challenges

- Presenting courses outside of standard working hours may devalue the course and give rise to industrial issues.
- Provision of online materials may devalue the current method of presenting the course.
- Materials viewed in isolation may have unpredictable negative consequences.
- Administrative issues for learning institutions.

Update at Final Review

- Course has now been piloted at three TAFE sites (Skills Tech Acacia Ridge, Yeronga and Bracken Ridge)
- Course has now been piloted on employer sites (Laing O’Rourke, Evans Harsh and Mirvac)
- The types of apprentices attending the course have been widened to include pre-vocational, school age and migrant apprentices.

Concluding Recommendation

- Establish a process to continually review delivery options and implement any changes deemed appropriate. Note that a key finding is that stakeholders believe that offering flexibility in the delivery of life skills training is key to the success in preventing suicides (as more apprentices will have the opportunity to be exposed to the training).
### 6. Investigate alternative/additional recurring funding options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Respondents suggested some funding of the Life Skills Tool Box Program by the Department of Education and Training would be appropriate.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Investigate alternative funding sources (one-off and recurrent) for the Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Investigate “user-pays” funding of courses where employers fund training (wholly or in part).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Establishing funding relationship with alternative government departments may be time consuming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government funding is often grant based or of a non-recurrent nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alternate funders may require input to content and/or delivery of the Program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Update at Final Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Some funding has been obtained from Construction Skills Queensland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intending to apply for a Mental Health pilot project extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intending to apply for funding from the Department of Education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concluding Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Appropriate funding should be sought to allow the Life Skills Course to be enhanced and more widely delivered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• User pay options should also be considered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 7. Complimentary training provided to staff involved with apprentices

#### Findings
- **Provide training for staff involved with apprentices in various fields (such as administrative staff) to know how to effectively apply the principles of the Program particularly identification, referral and prevention.**
- **It would be particularly helpful to be able to effectively raise employer awareness of the issues relating to suicide, the life skills materials and the benefits of the Program.**
- **Raise awareness with other potential funders and supporters (such as Government departments).**

#### Actions
- a) Develop and deliver supplementary awareness and training other stakeholder groups.

#### Challenges
- Funding within existing framework.

#### Update at Final Review
- Awareness sessions were delivered at Skills Tech TAFE covering about 800 staff.
- More detailed sessions were presented to 100 TAFE staff. Also “connector” (more detailed) training was provided to 44 TAFE staff and “assist” (even more detailed) training was provided to a further 24 staff.
- Provided “connector” training to Electro Group staff.
- Booked to deliver awareness training to JIST staff.
- Laing O’Rourke and Evans Harch to undertake staff awareness sessions.
- Strategy is to deliver the Course to organisations that agree to establish a supportive environment (known as a “Mates In Construction Site” containing staff that have attended awareness training, and where there is a minimum number of those that have attended connector or assist training).

#### Concluding Recommendation
- Continue with the strategy of implementing life skills on sites that have agreed to establish a supportive environment (known as “Mates In Construction Sites”).
8. Maintain passion, connectivity, earthy quality, smartness of delivery

Findings

- *Delivery quality by MIC was reported as exceptional in terms of the way that the facilitators relate to the course participants.*
- *It was suggested that course should continue to be delivered by facilitators who are external to any involved education body to maintain passion.*
- *Others suggested additional facilitators be accredited to expand delivery capacity whilst maintaining current approach, style and formats of delivery.*

Actions

a) Understand and document the current factors critical to the Program’s success.
b) Develop guidelines for the course presentation.
c) Develop a training program for the education of additional facilitators (including examinations).
d) Develop a screening process for potential facilitators.

Challenges

- Trainer selection to ensure appropriate experience, knowledge and skills.
- Ongoing monitoring of delivery quality.

Update at Final Review

- Second facilitator has been appointed
- Feedback on second facilitator was very positive
- Key attributes of a MIC facilitator have been identified as:
  - Can easily relate to apprentices
  - Is fully conversant with the content of the life skills course
  - Makes themselves available to apprentices
- New facilitators are closely supervised in the early stages.

Concluding Recommendation

- None
## Appendix A: Interview List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendee</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Life Skills Course Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alistair Campbell</td>
<td>Trainer- J.I.S.T</td>
<td>Direct contact with apprentices attending course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Wallace</td>
<td>CEO- B.E.R.T (Building Employees Redundancy Trust)</td>
<td>MIC Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad O’Carroll</td>
<td>Qld State Secretary- Plumber’s Union</td>
<td>MIC, J.I.S.T, S.T.I.F Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenton Tainish</td>
<td>Training Manager- Oz Help Foundation Canberra</td>
<td>Oz Help Training Manager for ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Parker</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
<td>Deliverer of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Marshall</td>
<td>Business Manager, Construction Trade – Skills Tech</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Owen</td>
<td>Workplace Health &amp; Safety Officer – Mirvac BLF representative</td>
<td>Employer &amp; union representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Graham Martin</td>
<td>Director of Child &amp; Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Queensland</td>
<td>Board Member of MIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janine Horrocks</td>
<td>General Manager- Fire Pro</td>
<td>Apprentices attending course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Brady</td>
<td>Training Coordinator- Mates In Construction</td>
<td>Deliverer of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Van Den Ban</td>
<td>Trade Teacher – Skills Tech</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorgen Gullestrup</td>
<td>CEO- Oz Help</td>
<td>Responsible for governance aspects of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Maxwell</td>
<td>Organiser - Plumbers Union</td>
<td>Has attended/completed course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Cochrane</td>
<td>Case Manager- Mates In Construction</td>
<td>Case Manager for MIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Cooke</td>
<td>Training Manager – Laing O’Rourke</td>
<td>Employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Blowers</td>
<td>Human Resources – Skills Tech</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Nair</td>
<td>Human Resources – Skills Tech</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Stabbback</td>
<td>Operations Manager- Electro Group Training</td>
<td>A number of Electro Group apprentices have attended course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob Cameron</td>
<td>Training Supervisor- CFMEU</td>
<td>Union members are participants of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone Caynes</td>
<td>Manager - Queensland Health MHPPEI (Mental Health Promotion Prevention and Early Intervention)</td>
<td>Queensland Health are a major funder of the Life Skills program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendee</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Life Skills Course Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Lord</td>
<td>Workplace Health &amp; Safety – Mirvac CFMEU representative</td>
<td>Employer &amp; union representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Shaw</td>
<td>Industry Mentor Support Officer- Employed by S.T.I.F, based at J.I.S.T</td>
<td>Provides a mentoring role for apprentices to contact for advice and help Case worker for apprentices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wally Trohear</td>
<td>Chairman MIC</td>
<td>Chairman MIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Smith</td>
<td>Executive Officer NFIAQ (National Fire Industry Association of Queensland)</td>
<td>Board Member of J.I.S.T.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B: Table of Ratings

### Interim Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>Average**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Final Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>Average**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Overall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Average**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Some interviewees felt unable to rate some aspects.

**Averages given to the nearest 0.25,
Appendix C: Modules Reported by Participants as “Key Learning”
Appendix D: Modules Reported by Participants as “Most Helpful”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Styles</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience/Emotions</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring/Support Networks</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work R/R</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental ill</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead/ship</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D and A</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Set</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. App</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pie chart shows the distribution of modules as reported by participants as “Most Helpful.”
Appendix E: Anecdotes

Case One: Everything I Touch Turns Rotten

These were the words spoken by a young construction worker who had reached breaking point. In the down turn, the company he worked for closed shop and he could not find another placement so was unemployed, two years into his apprenticeship. This pressure caused major stress in his relationship so he and his girlfriend separated. This involved sorting out furniture, rent, bills, phones and the list goes on – more stress. He did what many apprentices do when they can’t cope – he went out on the grog with his mates. On the way home he was involved in a car accident with him driving. He was breath tested and blew over the limit. He had no insurance and no job so the only place that would lend him money for the car repairs charged an interest rate of 27%. In a short period of time he ran out of cash and was under pressure from the loan company; he had his phone cut off because he couldn’t make payments and consequently found it hard to even keep contact with his mates. This young guy had a good supportive family but he felt too ashamed to go to them to ask for help because he felt like a failure and he had disappointed his parents.

I received a call to call in on him because he was struggling. When I asked him how he was coping, he said;“John, everything I touch turns rotten.”

This was a good young guy who lost his job through no fault of his own. One thing lead to another until eventually he had one big mess and he didn’t know what to do – everything looked rotten!!

I don’t think this is an unusual or isolated story in our current times. The good news for this guy is that we were able to help him and put his life back on track. The MIC approach is a very simple one – help the worker see clearly where the difficulties lie by breaking down the “mess” into manageable chunks, and then connecting them to appropriate high quality help through a simple and achievable plan.

The challenge for us as a construction industry is to look after the mates we are working with, and not forget those who are still part of the industry, but have been put off, stood down or retrenched. Even those on sick leave for extended periods of time can struggle. Lets commit to keeping contact even if it’s just a phone call to let blokes know they are not forgotten – and if they are doing it tough, give them the 1300ozhelp number or connect them to us yourself.

John Brady, Training Co-ordinator, Mates In Construction
Case Two: Just Ticking the Boxes

I was delivering the suicide awareness module of the Life Skills Course to a group of apprentices at JIST. One apprentice was particularly animated during the session. I approached him after the session to see how he was going and to see what animated him. He said, “I was just ticking the boxes John.” I asked what he meant and he replied, “I’ve got a mate who is showing most of those signs of a person at risk of suicide.” I asked him how he and his mates were supporting him and he said, “We just told him to get his shit together otherwise you’re not coming out with us.” I asked him what he thought now and he replied with an ironic response; “I think we will be standing around his grave saying if only we had known.” I asked him did he want to give his mate a ring, and he said he didn’t have the guts to ring him. He then paused and said; “would you come with me and we can give his parents a ring and tell them what we think is going on.” We rang his parents and told them that we believed their son was showing signs of being suicidal. They confronted him with this information – he admitted he had made a decision to kill himself and had already chosen the date and the method!

The lad was diagnosed with depression and is making a steady recovery and has reconnected with his mates.
Case Three: Financial Issues

“I thought I was only spending $20 or so over my income, not $300. I didn’t realize it was so much – I am in deep shit – what am I going to do?”

This was a recent response from an apprentice who was working on the Life Skills Course unit on budgeting and financial literacy. The apprentices were asked to fill in a budget based on their current financial situation. When I asked him how he was surviving, he said he had borrowed money from his dad and had a credit card with a large limit. Left as is, this apprentice was about to experience a financial nightmare of his own making. Does he have the skills or attitude to deal with the looming crisis and will he ask for help?

We know from the research into suicide that financial difficulties are a trigger in 10% of suicides, and are a significant trigger in relationship troubles. The largest trigger to suicides is relationship breakdowns!

Many of us, not just apprentices, are taking deep breaths in the current fiscal crisis affecting the world economies. What do we do when our money woes are more than we expected?

The good news to this story is he did ask for help. Through MIC we were able to hook him up to financial advice, give him a strategy to talk to his Dad and help him identify a financial mentor in his place of work. Things will work out for this apprentice but what about the many others who have not learnt financial literacy at school or home and are confronted with the temptations of a consumer mad society. Do them a favour and talk with them and if necessary connect them to wise help or ring 1300ozhelp

John Brady, Training Co-ordinator, Mates In Construction
Case Four: Feedback from CEO

We attended a Zero Harm at work leadership forum recently with the CEOs of many of the major building companies and most of the major unions and we were the main agenda item.

Two companies gave case study reports – one was Mirvac and they spoke about the program from the company’s perspective. Their CEO, Adam Moore, gave three stories from the course that were hitherto unknown to Chris or myself.

1. A father of one of the apprentices rang Adam out of the blue and said he wanted to say thank you to the company for putting on the Life Skills program. His son was running off the rails and had a dreadful attitude – since he has participated in this course he is a noticeably changed boy – for the better!!

2. One of the apprentices told Adam that because of the course he was able to identify one of his mates who was exhibiting the signs that he might be suicidal. The apprentice approached him and said he could see his was struggling and helped his mate hook up to help.

3. One of the sub contractors objected initially to his apprentices going to the Life Skills program – waste of time when they should be working and he is losing money sending them. He came to Adam, unsolicited, and said he had noticed a marked change for the better, particularly in their attitude, in his apprentices as a result of attending the Life Skills course.

John Brady, Training Co-ordinator, Mates In Construction