

Suicidal thoughts plaguing worksite

EXCLUSIVE
MICHAEL MADIGAN

UP TO 30 per cent of young Queensland apprentices are having suicidal thoughts, according to a report that also highlights a serious and often hidden problem of workplace bullying in the trades.

As Australia prepares to mark World Suicide Prevention Day this Thursday, the report out of Griffith University's Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention exposes the often hidden world of workplace bullying beyond our climate-controlled offices with their well-resourced human resources departments.

Jorgen Gullestrup, CEO of the Queensland and Northern Territory branch of the industry group which advocates for suicide prevention "Mates in Construction" - which commissioned the report - said there had been enormous improvements in workplace culture within construction and mining over the past decade.

"But this report highlights we have a way to go."

One young apprentice who was part of the study surveying more than 1483 apprentices across Queensland revealed the extent of the problem in a way generations of apprentices, working in an almost exclusively male environment, would relate to: "When someone is really harassing you, if he is going off his nut and calling you all these names and

stuff, just throwing tools at you and stuff like that, it gets to be extreme, but that is what you have to deal with I guess."

Of the 1483 apprentices more than 30 per cent said they had experienced bullying, which is high compared to the national figure of 9.6 per cent determined by the 2016 Australian Workplace Barometer project. The apprentices said the long hours of unpaid overtime, extreme heat on work sites and low pay were things that sometimes stopped them getting up in the morning. The report also showed 30 per cent had reported some thoughts of suicide in the past 12 months.

Dr Vicki Ross, senior research fellow and the main author of the report, said the latest research suggested most employers were doing the right thing in relation to treatment of apprentices.

"But there are still a significant proportion who are not," Dr Ross said. "Apprentices are in a vulnerable position, so it is important that these problems are addressed, particularly the culture within the industry which allows this to happen."

Mates in Construction, with rugby league's Darius Boyd as a patron, says around 55,000 people on more than 500 work sites around the nation are expected to down tools on Thursday to recommit to their efforts to end suicide, which has high rates among men in the construction and mining industries.

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MILYNDA SHOWS HER METTLE ON DESERT CANVAS

ON A long, lonely road through Queensland's outback, the remarkable scrap metal sculpting talents of bush artist Milynda Rogers have been entertaining locals and visitors for more than a decade. On a 205km loop of road that starts at Aramac in the central west and heads up to the iconic oasis Lake Dunn, Milynda has created 40 scrap metal sculptures depicting everything from local sheep and wildlife to rugby legend Johnathan Thurston and bushranger Harry Redford.

The artworks are absolute showstoppers - tourists, many of them grey nomads, who make the

journey from Aramac north, pull over regularly for photographs of each and every piece.

Milynda, who now lives in Barcardine and is in the process of setting up an art gallery in the historic town, began her sculpture trail 12 years ago when she lived on a property in the region. Her children and others in the area studied via School of the Air and she decided to position some scrap metal sculptures beside the road as a bit of light entertainment for local kids.

"We joked that we should make it a trail," she explained, and that's just what happened.

"Once I had 25 sculptures out there, the local council asked me if they could do a brochure." You can see more of Milynda's works at scrapmetal-sheila.com.au

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