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Case Study: Introducing Suicide Prevention and Mental Health in the Workplace

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Abstract

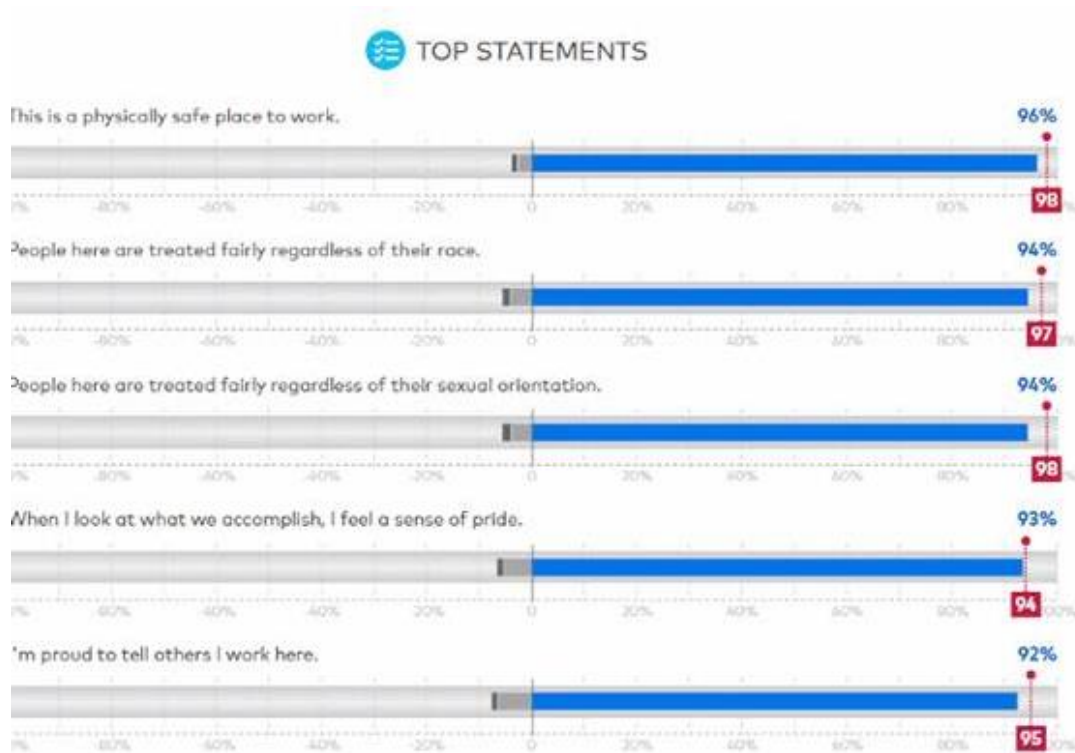
Fifteen construction workers die by suicide every day nationwide. This statistic alone made it evident to the researchers' organization that they could not take a passive role in reducing and preventing suicide in the workplace. The struggle was how to do this. There are organizations that researchers were able to learn from and receive guidance from, but it was found that there was no one size fits all program. Each organization is unique, and their needs reflect this.

This research maps out how researchers organized this information and implemented suicide prevention efforts within their own organization. The intent is to show what this process looked like for the researchers' organization so that others can follow some of the same steps and adapt them to their own organizational needs.

1. Introduction

Big-D Construction is a general contractor based out of Salt Lake City, Utah. There are approximately fifteen hundred employees we have offices around the country. This is a large multi-billion-dollar organization that uses these resources to provide great careers to its employees. Quarterly surveys are taken to gauge how employees feel about their workplace and a majority of the feedback is positive. The mission statement at Big-D is to be the most sought after, and according to these workplace surveys, that holds true among employees. Competitive pay, work-life balance, great benefits, and generous training opportunities all play a role in this work environment and culture at Big-D. With all of that being said, researchers found themselves asking the question of what we are missing. Why do we have employees who are facing challenges and experiencing crises that are leading them to take their own lives?

Figure 1.



In February of 2020, the Cory Hampton was offered a full-time position at Big-D Construction at the completion of a six-month internship. Hampton was hired as an assistant safety superintendent. Prior to this position Hampton served in the United States Air Force and suicide prevention and resiliency training were routine. Hampton noticed similarities and shared risk factors between members of the armed services and those working in construction. To Hampton's surprise, these suicide prevention efforts, that had become engrained in day-to-day work, were not present in his new career. After hearing some of the suicide statistics in construction, program implementation became Hampton's focus.

Around the same time, in 2021, Big-D hired a new benefits coordinator, Marissa Gallegos, who was given the unspecific task of creating a company wellness program. Gallegos and Hampton connected and began their suicide prevention and mental health awareness implementation efforts.

2. Theory

Knowing how to start implementing a suicide prevention program can be difficult, though other companies have done this successfully, there exists no step-by-step procedure. With a topic as significant as this, it is critical that an organization takes the time to plan and roll this out so that it can be easily received by the workforce. Through application researchers will discover and effective process for implementing suicide prevention and mental health awareness into the workplace.

3. Methods

Goals and vision

The first step was to determine what the goals were for this implementation. The priority was to prevent suicide in the workplace and expand those efforts to the community in the future. Another goal was to provide a workplace where employees felt a level of comfort when approaching the topic of suicide. This had to include having peers approach them as well as reaching out for themselves. A final area of focus was determined to be employee resources. It is important to not only have resources available but to have employees know how to navigate them.

To meet this goal, a multi-year plan was developed. Going into this it was clear that this plan would be subject to change but it would serve as a guideline. One of the concerns was rolling out too much, too fast, so the three-year plan helped to avoid that.

Figure 2.

2022 Solutions Created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kick-off of Do-Good Feel Good • SharePoint Site Created • Mindfulness Mondays, Wellness Wednesdays, and Benefit Education News Publications • Own My Health Roll Out • Personal Wellness Coaches for Every Associate • Biometric Screenings and Medical Surveys • 357 Enrolled in the 1st Quarter • 60% Completed their Quarterly Goals • Shaping the Conversation • Presentations During Quarterly meetings and Superintendent Meetings • Presence in Superintendent Steering Committee • Monthly Toolbox Talks • Stoplight Poster and Resource Guide • This easy-to-use tool outlines what resources can be used based on the severity of the situation. • Creates an easy to understand visual to start a conversation. • New hire orientation and onboarding • Resources and information are being shared and distributed during the onboarding process. • Community involvement • Members of the Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition Workplace Work Group • KSL Speaking on Business Radio Airtime Sponsored by Salt Lake Chamber • Instructor training
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Instructors (100% sponsored - \$0 Cost) • Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Instructors (100% sponsored - \$0 Cost) • Peer Support Group • Planned and Approved Peer Support Group • Sent out invites. • First peer support group meeting in August where we will conduct MHFA training. • Ongoing evaluations for measuring group success.
Goals for 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 2 QPR trainings will be conducted for managers (Executives, HSE, and Sr. Superintendents). • One will be offered for Utah offices and one for out-of-state. • Design and propose a mandatory training plan for both manager and field associates. • During suicide prevention month, we will offer 4 QPR trainings, doubling from the year prior. • Develop and implement a program audit that will allow us to analyze the program and make improvements as needed. • Continued Own My Health Engagement. • Continued Wellness Wednesdays, Mindfulness Mondays, and Benefit Education News Publications. • Resource Explanation Guide public and available. • Suicide Postvention Plan in place. • Make Resources available on public Big-D Sites for spouses and potential new hires. • New hire orientation hard hat sticker to be used as a QR code to our resource page. • Bi-Yearly Wellness Engagement Surveys.
Goals for 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All employees are participating in mandatory training. • Confidence and competence in approaching and assisting those with mental health challenges or suicidal thoughts. • Do Good Feel Good is another example of why Big-D is the most sought-after and leading industry. • Metric of positive impact on quality, production, and safety.

4. Assessment

It was evident that before a program could be implemented, it was important to identify which areas needed improvement. With the help of the Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition, Hampton and Gallegos were introduced to an assessment template built by the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention. Not only did this help establish needs and starting points, but it also provided a baseline measure for Big-D Construction.

Below is a sample of Big-D’s initial assessment. In order to gain an accurate assessment, this was distributed to individuals at different levels of the organization, and the averages were recorded on the assessment below.

Figure 3.

[Mental Health and Suicide Prevention for Construction Companies \(nahb.org\)](http://Mental Health and Suicide Prevention for Construction Companies (nahb.org))

NEEDS ANALYSIS	QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOT AT ALL	HAS BEEN DISCUSSED BUT NOT INTEGRATED	INTEGRATION IN PROGRESS	FULLY INTEGRATED	ACTION STEPS / IDEAS TO CONSIDER
MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION- CONSTRUCTION WORKPLACE	Do we discuss mental health in the workplace?		X			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask leadership to share lived experiences and stories of hope at company meetings • Hang up posters (www.cfma.org/suicidepreventionposters) • Include mental health and suicide prevention in toolbox talks and company newsletters • Have mental health screenings at wellness fairs • Conduct a policy review to ensure the recognition and treatment of mental health and addiction issues • When performance/attendance changes, consider underlying issues and assistance that could be offered before taking disciplinary action • Consider adding an EAP; if one is in place, evaluate it for ease of use, accessibility of care, and quality of resources • Communicate about the EAP and how to access mental health benefits within group benefits to employees during benefit review meetings • Ensure employees understand the full confidential nature of EAP services • UNION CONTRACTORS: Coordinate with locals regarding EAP/MAP benefits and communicate to union workers • Include discussion of mental health benefits and the company's attention to mental health during employee orientation and onboarding • Provide community resource information to employees for themselves or family members (e.g., National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Crisis Text Line) • Get the Prescription Drug Employer Toolkit at www.nsc.org • Consider who should receive gatekeeper training and evaluate the option that is best for your organization (e.g., QPR Institute) • Clearly communicate to employees who the trained individuals are • Make it well known that employees are encouraged to share concerns about a co-worker (promote "My Brother's Keeper" mentality) • Consider making other resources available (e.g., prepaid/discount legal services, financial counseling) • When forming and scheduling crews, consider that isolation and lack of a support system are major risk factors • Knowing what is going on in employees' personal lives (within reason) can help to ensure they are present for important events • Building bonds may make it easier to recognize warning signs and opens the door for employees to ask for help when they are in need • From the top down, mental health and suicide prevention must be normalized to remove the stigma and enable employees to feel comfortable asking for help • When the only focus is on performing, the fear of failure creates a pressure cooker that puts everyone on the project at risk and removes opportunities for showing care and concern • Consider the role mental health may have played in incidents • Pay attention to injury treatment and inform about the risks of painkiller addiction • Consider how jobsite incidents can impact employees with ongoing mental health issues and consider if counseling is needed
	Is mental health included in our safety programs?			X		
	Is mental health included in wellness promotion programs?		X			
	Is mental health considered in performance management?	X				
	Do our policies (attendance, performance, conduct, drug and alcohol testing) prohibit an employee from seeking assistance in dealing with a personal or mental health crisis?	X				
	Do we have an EAP or other resources available to employees dealing with personal struggles or crises?				X	
	Do we educate our workforce on how to access our EAP/resources?			X		
	Do we understand and educate our workforce on mental health benefits available through our group health benefit plan?		X			
	Do employees understand the confidentiality of EAP/mental health benefit providers?		X			
	Do we have a plan in place for assisting employees dealing with an opioid or other addiction?		X			
	Have we provided gatekeeper training to staff members?	X				
	Are managers and supervisors trained in recognizing warning signs of mental illness or suicide risk?	X				
	Is there a clearly communicated referral process for supervisors or co-workers who have concerns about an employee?		X			
	Do we have support systems in place for employees who are experiencing overwhelming life challenges?		X			
	Do we consider peer support systems when forming and scheduling crews?	X				
	Do we consider family needs and commitments when scheduling out-of-town or night work as well as odd shifts?		X			
	Are there processes in place that encourage managers and supervisors to get to know their crew members?			X		
	Have we addressed the fear of failure and/or removed the extreme pressure felt to meet every mark and hit every deadline?			X		
	Does company leadership promote a caring culture and support for those experiencing a mental health or personal crisis?			X		
	Do our post-accident/post incident/return-to-work programs and processes address depression or other mental health issues following a workplace accident or injury?		X			
Do we have a critical incident debriefing plan in place and a service provider to conduct it?	X					

4. Resources and Incident Management

Like physical safety programs, the intent of the suicide prevention program is to take a proactive approach and prevent suicides in the workplace. It was discovered that before researchers could get to that point, some reactive and incident management steps had to take place first.

The most known resource in construction companies is the organization's employee assistance plan (EAP). When talking to employees, it was discovered that few were familiar with EAP and its offerings. To better serve our employees, the EAP was assessed, and it was determined that there were more comprehensive options. These options included more available hours, virtual care, six free therapy sessions, guidance on picking providers, and no transfers when on the phone call. When vetting resources, including EAP, it is necessary to call these providers

and understand what the expected wait times are, what services are offered, and how user-friendly the services are.

Researchers also determined it was important to have multiple mental health and suicide prevention resources to serve a wide range of employees and situations. Establishing and vetting these resources can be time-consuming but this is a vital step in providing resources that employees will use.

At Big-D, the resources were tiered based on severity. To simplify these resources the resources were organized in a stop light system with green being the least severe and red being the most severe. The resources used included company specific such as the companies EAP, local resources such as SafeUT, and national resources like the suicide prevention hotline, 988. The company also reached out for supplemental resources, and we settled on Tava Health which provides free counseling sessions to employees and their families in addition to the ones provided through the EAP.

Figure 4.



Get Healthy in a BIG Way



Incentive

Employees and/or Spouses are eligible to participate in the health management program with Own My Health. All participants that remain eligible will be a winner and will have the chance to spin the Savings Account money wheel each quarter.

SETUP

You will receive an email once your account has been created with information on how to login and it will contain your password. If you did not receive this email, please contact our support team at 855.328.2376. To login, go to portal.ownmyhealth.life & use your credentials to login. Next there will be a clipboard with required actions to complete. After you have logged in, click on the register tab, and fill out the required information. **Click Save.**

Sign your HIPAA Form

Click on the Sign HIPAA Form tab on the clipboard Read disclosure & then click on the "Open Sign" pad. Using mouse or touch screen, sign the disclosure. When your signature is complete, press submit signature.

Medical Survey

Click on the **Medical Survey** tab on the clipboard. Read each question, & select the answer that best fits, based on your health history. At the bottom of each page, click "Save and Continue". Note: The answers only save once you click the "Save and Continue" button. Once you have completed the form click "Save" to submit all answers.

Schedule Your Health Check

You will not be able to schedule your health check until you have completed the following clip board items: Register, HIPAA Form, and Medical Survey.

New Hires will need to schedule your health check with your physician (Offsite health Check), request an at home health check kit from our support team, or complete a health check at the Own My Health offices.

Health Checks at Own My Health Offices

If you are in the Salt Lake City Valley, you have the option of coming into the Own My Health offices to complete your health check. To schedule a health check please call our customer support team at 1.855.328.2376 or email at support@ownmyhealth.life

At Home Health Check Kit

Click on the "Take a test at home" option, enter the address you would like your kit sent to, or call our support team at 855.328.2376

Offsite Health Checks

Call your preferred provider, tell them you would like a biometric screening, fast prior to the appointment, and bring the offsite screening form to the appointment for you doctor to fill out, and send back to the OMH team.





Keep On Moving


On your individual portal, your thermometer, and doctor review video; you will be placed in one of the tracks listed below. The goal is to reach and maintain a "Summit" level of only 0 to 1 health risks. Your point goal is based on the track of either Basin, Viewpoint or Summit that you have been placed in. Earn points by participating in activities on the portal. If you would like help, your health guide or our support line can help you choose activities.

 <p>SUMMIT 0-1 health risks 20 Points per quarter Speak with a Health Guide once per quarter.</p>	 <p>VIEWPOINT 2-3 health risks 45 points per quarter Required to speak with a Health Guide once per quarter.</p>	 <p>BASIN 3+ Health Risks 95 points per quarter Required to speak with a Health Guide monthly.</p>
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Life Elevated

Through the Own My Health Portal, you have access to a variety of our Life Elevated options.

1. All challenges are worth 10 Points and are in the portal under the "Challenges" tab. Search for challenges based on your goals, i.e. Nutrition, or look through the list of all available challenges. Click on the challenge to see a description. Click on "Start Challenge" button to sign up. Turn on the text tracking feature to receive nightly texts about challenges. On the main dashboard, you can check your progress and see how close you are to hitting the challenge goal and earning points.
2. Join Company Challenges and your name appears on the company leaderboard. This is a great option for those in the company who are motivated by competition.
3. Live! Events are where Own My Health will be onsite doing a presentation or demonstration. Subscribe to receive updates on the Live events.



Doc For Me Videos

Login to the portal and click on the "Doc for Me" tab. Watch a 2-3-minute instructional video and answer related questions correctly to be awarded five points. Under each video, you can download an informative sheet with a summary of the information that was discussed. Earn points by watching up to 5 videos per quarter (25 points max)

Nutrition Tracker

Track your meals through our Virtual Nutrition Assistant and every day that you stick to your plan, you will be awarded 1 point! Through this section you have the ability to download meal plans, shopping lists, look at nutrition facts for foods, and track your meals all in one spot!

Health Guides

Unlike health fads that come and go, health guides have strong evidence behind them backing their effectiveness for improving your health and lifestyle. Speaking to your Health Guide will award you 25 points per session.



Figure 5.

BIG-D
CONSTRUCTION

tava.

Get started with your free online therapy benefit

Get back to feeling like you! Your psychological well-being can affect your physical health, relationships, and work performance. Tava’s network of vetted therapists helps you step out of the fog and get back to a happier, more fulfilled you.

Tava is a free, confidential mental health benefit available to all full-time and part-time employees and their dependents (age 13-25). The benefit provides up to 6 free sessions annually with licensed clinicians through Tava’s secure, web-based technology platform. All you need for a live, video-based session is reliable internet access and a connected device with a camera (smartphone, computer, or tablet).

Free to Use No claims, no co-pays, no deductibles. You and your dependents will have 6 sessions (per person per year) completely covered.	Convenient Self-scheduled online video sessions means you get care whenever works best for you: days, nights, or weekends.	Confidential We don’t tell your employer who used the service. Your identity and anything you discuss is confidential.	Top Quality Quality care from quality therapists. Tava’s clinicians are licensed, vetted, and use evidence-based treatments.
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Whether you’re feeling stressed, stuck, or burdened with something else, Tava can help. Support is available for a range of issues such as:

Addiction	Grief and loss	Trauma
Anxiety	LGBTQ+ issues	Relationship issues
Depression	Life changes	Work pressure
Eating disorders	Postpartum issues	Stress
Family issues	PTSD	and more...

Schedule your first appointment today at care.tavahealth.com

Figure 6.

Hello,

At Big D, we are committed to creating positive and long-lasting changes for our community. That is why we are rolling out a new and exclusive benefit that will help you control and reduce your stress.

Why is this stress management better than others? Because it is the only one that help you train your brain to develop the tools needed to reduce your stress combining virtual reality (VR), mindfulness, and coaching.

Are you interested in receiving one of the virtual reality Kits at your place? [Complete this short survey](#), and one of the MindCo Relief Kits will be on your way. Did we mention the cost is 100% covered by Big D?



What are the benefits of the program?

The primary benefit of this program is that you may find it easier to learn how to reduce your stress. You will also learn more about yourself and how you think about stress, in addition to gaining new skills to manage your thoughts and emotions.

How do I start?

It only takes 3 minutes to register. [Please complete the form](#) to receive your stress management Kit.

Thanks!

After establishing and organizing these resources came the challenge of getting this information to our employees. Initially, posters were distributed to job sites, emails were sent out, and these resources were mentioned in the weekly toolbox talks. This was not sufficient, and spouses and family members were unable to access the company-specific website. To address this, we created a QR code that could be placed on hard hats and the link directs users to a website that can be accessed by employees, family members, and subcontractors.

Figure 7.

Wellness.big-d.com

BIG-D COMPANIES
MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS RESOURCES

At Big-D Construction, our associates' and their families' wellness and mental health are a top priority. Review the following resources to help in whatever stage of life you find yourself in.

Emergency

If you are thinking of suicide or are in an emergency crisis, consider the following resources:

FREE: Call the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988.

FREE: Download the [SafeUT](#) App to text or call a counselor.

FREE: If you are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, call 866-488-7386 for suicide prevention support with [The Trevor Project](#).

Mental Health Challenge

If you are dealing with a mental health challenge, consider the following resources:

FREE: Visit [care.tavahealth.com](#) and access 6 free therapy sessions.

FREE: 211 is a national hotline that connects you to a specialist that will direct you to local resources and assistance for finances, food, clothing, shelter, housing, health care, addiction, education, employment, parenting, and more.

COST: In-Network therapy is a more affordable option to help you find a therapist. Visit the [Samara Health](#) or [Meritain](#) provider search.

Just a Bad Day or Wanting to Maintain Good Mental Health

If you are just having a bad day, need a pick me up, or want to maintain good mental health, consider the following resources:

FREE: Visit [care.tavahealth.com](#) and access 6 free therapy sessions.

FREE: Call a wellness coach at Own My Health at 855-328-2376.

Needing Support?

Sometimes the best resource is a listening ear. If you are needing support, consider the following:

FREE: USARA Peer Recovery Support Services walk side by side with individuals seeking recovery from substance use disorders. [Click here](#) to learn more and connect with a coach.

FREE: Call the Utah Warm Line at 833-773-2588 to speak with a certified peer support specialist who has lived experience with mental illness or substance misuse.

FREE: Big-D has individuals trained in Mental Health First Aid who are ready and available to listen to you. [Click Here](#) to find a peer supporter, or review our list below.

If you need additional help finding resources or have a wellness crisis, please contact **Marissa Gallegos at 385-501-8742 or Cory Hampton at 801-891-6051**. If we do not immediately pick up, please text us and we will get to you as quickly as possible. In a true medical emergency, please always call 911 or for a mental health crisis call 988.

5. Training and coaching

In searching for the training that would best meet the needs of our organization, we found three that were the best fit. First, Mental Health First Aid. This is an eight-hour course that trains participants in challenges and crises, how to recognize signs and symptoms, how to have conversations, and how to get the appropriate care. Marissa and Hampton became trainers and started hosting this course. The course is open to employees, family members, and trade partners. To this date, 120 people have been trained in Mental Health First Aid by the researchers.

Employees enjoy the MHFA training, and it is efficient according to the post-training surveys, but its eight-hour length serves as a deterrent for many. Big-D brought on two other training

courses that are an hour and a half to two hours long. The first is, Question Persuade Refer Suicide Prevention (QPR). This course effectively demonstrates and allows participants to approach difficult conversations surrounding suicide and how to get someone help they may need. The final course introduced is VitalCog Suicide Prevention in the Construction Industry. This course is similar in its intent as QPR but uses construction-specific examples. For all of these courses, Marissa and Hampton are instructors.

With two people, reach through the organization is limited so Hampton and Gallegos developed the Big-D Peer Support Group. This group is made up of Big-D employees from a variety of positions who help spread awareness and provide support for the many projects. This is in addition to their normal duties. To become a peer supporter an employee must express their willingness to participate in the group, complete the MHFA course, and sign a confidentiality agreement to protect those they may help. There are sixty peer supporters in the organization.

This training effort serves to educate the workforce and prepare them to navigate conversations surrounding suicide.

6. Wellness Program

Prevention is the objective of the program implementation. To achieve this, it is important to take a proactive approach to wellness and encourage positive lifestyle choices. To do this, researchers started by partnering with Own My Health. Own My Health is a wellness platform that performs bio-metric screenings for employees to give them a baseline of their overall health and wellness. Employees are then paired with a personalized wellness coach who meets with them on a monthly or quarterly basis depending on their needs. Some of the areas of focus for these wellness coaches include physical health, mental well-being, stress management techniques, and mindfulness practices. There is a mobile app that is associated with this service in which employees view resources, check personal progress, and participate in monthly challenges to earn points. Participation in this program is optional for employees but Big-D motivates its employees to participate by doing quarterly prize drawings for those who participate.

In the first year of the Own My Health management tool, 60% of the participants completed their quarterly goals. In the second year, this number rose to 73%.

The next wellness initiative that Big-D utilizes is something called Wellness Wednesdays. This is a toolbox talk-styled bulletin that is distributed company-wide every Wednesday. The topics for this include financial wellness tips, stress management techniques, mindfulness strategies, self-care resources, etc.

Another wellness tool offered to Big-D employees is Mind-co devices. This is a virtual reality headset that is used to immerse users into an environment that promotes stress relief and decompression. There are various exercises and therapy sessions available with this device.

7. Community Involvement

Though the focus is suicide prevention within the organization, efforts are also made to impact the surrounding community.

To do this, researchers are involved in and co-chair the Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition and Utah Suicide Prevention Workplace Workgroup. In partnership with these groups, Big-D is able to mentor and advise companies, in and out of the construction industry, that want to implement suicide prevention in the workplace.

Hampton and Gallegos are often asked to speak at conferences and meetings on the topic of suicide prevention. Hampton and Gallegos work closely with the Live On campaign and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention which allows the company to stay up to date on new and developing information and allows us opportunities to give back.

In early 2023, researchers had the opportunity to visit the Utah State Capitol and meet with legislators to advocate for the construction industry on bills that affect mental health funding and resources in our community.

8. Analysis

Suicide prevention program implementation can seem to many, overwhelming or a large undertaking. If the proper planning and roll out is done, this task can be made much simpler. The financial impact can be lessened by reaching out to local and national suicide prevention agencies that have resources to sponsor and fund train the trainer courses and provide resources. Following the steps listed above; create goals and a vision, assess the needs of your organization, gather your resources, implement training and coaching strategies, develop employee wellness material, and become involved in your community, proven and effective strategy for researchers at Big-D Construction.

An area that could have been improved is the position that introduces the program implementation. In Big-D, Hampton (Safety Director) and Gallegos (Sr. Benefits Specialist), were the driving force behind the program. This works but if the company leadership (CEO, CIO, etc.) led these initiatives, there likely would have been much more buy-in, earlier on.

Suicide prevention programs must have support from leadership and executives to succeed. While researchers Big-D Construction had this support, the leadership team took a passive role in the program, and this contributed to a slower roll-out period.

Conclusion

Proper planning and strategy increase the effectiveness of program implementation. A successful approach to implementation is to create goals and a vision, assess the needs of your organization, gather your resources, implement training and coaching strategies, develop employee wellness material, and become involved in your community.

Further research is needed to see the effectiveness of these steps when implemented in other organizations.