

# **NAWIC** IMAGE

FOR TODAY'S WOMAN IN CONSTRUCTION

April/May 2016



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# Suicide Prevention in the Construction Industry

## *Why and How Lendlease Weaves Mental Health into Social Sustainability and Safety*

**S**uicide is a tragic social epidemic. There were almost 43,000 suicides in 2014 in the United States, which far exceeds the number of deaths from vehicle crashes. Suicide is an equal opportunity killer; the pain and devastation of suicide cuts across the spectrum of society. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), suicide is the tenth leading cause of death among Americans regardless of age. The CDC ranks suicide as the second leading cause of death among males 25-54 years of age.

### **Why Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Matters in the Construction Industry**

The construction industry consistently ranks as one of the high-risk industries for suicide in the United States. The construction industry has embedded risk factors such as the “tough guy” culture, chronic pain and relatively high rates of illicit and prescription drug use. In addition, there are demographic risk factors among the predominantly male workforce as well. According to CNA Insurance in a 2015 special report titled Construction Prescription Opioid Abuse, the construction industry is among the highest in terms of prescription opioid use. The New York Times reported in 2015 that between 1999-2014, there was a 22 percent increased mortality for white, middle-aged males between the ages of 45-54 years of age attributable to suicide, substance abuse and alcohol abuse.

### **Construction Industry Initiative on Suicide Prevention**

Despite these negative statistics and risk factors, the good news is that suicide is preventable. Mental health specialists know that communication and outreach is crucial to helping to build resiliency. Workplaces that openly address mental health and provide training on mental health first aid can succeed in breaking down barriers and reducing the stigma of mental health. There is a movement afoot in the construction industry to promote advocacy and action on mental health awareness and suicide prevention.

Through the Workplace Task Force, The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention has been addressing suicide risk in the construction industry. The “Blueprint for Suicide Prevention in the

Construction Industry” provides a framework for contractors to address mental health advocacy and suicide prevention in the workplace. Two leaders from the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention have been collaborating to increase advocacy and action in the construction industry. Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas and Cal Beyer, authors of this article, have been co-authoring articles for industry publications and presenting on this topic at industry events.

### **NAWIC and Suicide Prevention Awareness**

Beyer delivered a presentation on mental health and suicide prevention to the South Sound (WA) Chapter of NAWIC in November of 2015. He was also scheduled to present on this topic at the Pacific Northwest Regional Forum in April 2016 in Tacoma, Wash. The presentations addressed how to incorporate mental health and suicide prevention into safety, health and wellness programs. In addition, the NAWIC Chapter in Phoenix participated in the Regional Suicide Prevention Summit for the construction industry on April 7, 2016. The event featured Spencer-Thomas and Beyer as speakers.

### **Case Study: How Lendlease Incorporates Mental Health into Safety and Sustainability**

Lendlease is a global leader in the development and construction industry. Lendlease is based in Australia and has regional offices representing Australia, Asia, Europe and the Americas consisting of Mexico and the United States. Beyer and Spencer-Thomas recently interviewed Amanda Moorhead, Vice President of Social Sustainability and the Lendlease Foundation and a member of NAWIC’s Charlotte, N.C. Chapter, to talk about the mental health initiatives Lendlease has been promoting internally and externally for the construction industry.

*How does this initiative fit into your role as Director of Sustainability?*

“Sustainability begins and ends with people,” said Moorhead. “We believe that Social Sustainability or People Sustainability should be given as much attention and focus as Environmental and Economic Sustainability. It has been a huge cultural shift from past thinking: being able to consider the people and community impli-



cations of what we do throughout the entire construction and development process. My role as Director of Social Sustainability and The Lendlease Foundation specifically focuses on people sustainability—building healthy, safe, resilient places for our employees to work and ensuring we are creating sustainable and resilient communities.”

*Describe Lendlease’s commitment to mental health and suicide prevention as a leadership initiative for the global workforce.*

Moorhead said, “Lendlease’s vision is to create the best places. We know an important part of creating the best places is putting people’s wellbeing first. Our vision is driven by four core principles: safety, sustainability, diversity and customer-focus. Yet, the safety of our people, has always been our number one priority. We believe every person who works with us, and for us, has the right to return home in the same way they arrived at work. Therefore, it has made sense for Lendlease to evolve and extend our notion of caring for people to include their mental health.

*What was the impetus for Lendlease to make this a corporate workforce initiative?*

“Lendlease undertook a global health assessment which led to the organization’s development of the Health and Wellbeing Framework,” she said. There are four pillars in the Health and Wellbeing Framework: Supporting Healthier Minds, Developing Healthier Bodies, Building Healthier Places and Creating Healthier Cultures. The global health assessment revealed 9.1 percent of our people experience stress at work and 16 per-

cent are at high risk for developing depression. In order to truly promote health and wellbeing in the workplace we needed to address these employee statistics head on.”

*What challenges has Lendlease had to overcome to address this workforce development topic?*

“Openly discussing employee health requires a culture change,” said Moorhead. “As with any change in culture, we have had to prioritize the issues, educate our leaders, build awareness in our workforce, build wellness programming to support physical and mental health, and implement policy changes where needed. These steps demonstrate to all internal and external stakeholders this is an important issue to our organization. One of the biggest changes we made was incorporating a Wellbeing and Flexibility conversation into our performance review process. This puts the topic on the agenda during the review and takes away any awkwardness that could exist in bringing it up without that cue on the review.”

*Tell us about the Executive Roundtable Lendlease held on this topic in Chicago on February 4, 2016.*

“We hosted ‘Building Mental Health Awareness’ in Chicago in February 2016. This event was open to our employees, their families, contractors who work on our sites and our community partners,” Moorhead said. “The purpose of the event was to be able to speak openly and build awareness about mental health. Other key goals included building

awareness around mental health— what it looks like, what it feels like, the impact it has on a person, and to provide hope and help for employees through resources and support.”

“Speakers at the event included global mental health advocate, speaker, author and film maker Kevin Hines and Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas. Kevin shared his remarkable story of living and thriving with bi-polar disease. Dr. Spencer-Thomas provided industry related risk factors and statistics that helped everyone understand why this is important to the construction industry.”

#### ***What steps has Lendlease already taken to institute this as a workforce development initiative?***

Moorhead said, “Lendlease has implemented the following steps over the past two years to address mental health needs for workers and their families:

- Established a global health peer group—sponsored by our Group Chief Financial Officer and led by our Group Sustainability and Health and Safety teams.
- Created a ‘Mental Health in the Workplace’ guidebook available online for all employees.
- Published stories on our intranet from across our business on how mental health has affected the lives of our own people. Each of these shared stories has received an overwhelmingly positive response.
- Provided applied training and programs across the spectrum of mental health - covering a thriving, healthy mind through to understanding the phases of becoming unwell, active intervention, recovery and support.
- Incorporated healthy minds program as part of the standard performance management cycle, including mindfulness training, mind productivity, resilience, and health and wellbeing conversations.
- Provided all employees and their families across all our operations, with access to a 24/7, 365 days-a-year Employee Assistance Program.
- Prioritized active intervention, by training more than 400 Mental Health First Aid Officers globally.
- Added Wellness Leave to our current paid time off for employees. Wellbeing leave provides employees with time off to focus specifically on their physical and mental wellbeing. It can be used for a range of activities, such as a yoga retreat, a meditation course, or a preventative medical check-up.”

#### ***How is Lendlease integrating this initiative into the Corporate Safety & Health Program?***

“Recently, the company updated the Global Minimum Requirements (GMRs) which are the formal safety requirements for all of our projects,” said Moorhead. “Included in the update is a new GMR that requires all projects have access to mental health resources and support on site. This GMR recognizes the safety risk inherent within our industry around mental health and identifies steps for our proj-

ects to help mitigate those risks.”

#### ***What future steps is Lendlease planning to institute on this initiative?***

“Although our strides have been great in the area of total health and wellbeing for our employees, we still have a long way to go,” she said. “We will continue to review our health data, continue to monitor industry trends, and continue to implement programs that help our employee be the ‘healthiest’ they can be.”

There is a clear call to action for construction companies to address mental health and suicide prevention among their employees and for their families. Leading companies like Lendlease provide a positive example of why and how to address mental health as a safety and a sustainability strategy. Integrating mental health services and suicide prevention into safety and wellness programs is a first step to reducing stigma and creating a caring culture. As more companies adopt proactive and progressive mental health strategies a safety net of protective systems will help promote a true Safety 24/7 for construction workers and their families around the clock and on- and off-work.

For more information on suicide prevention, visit the following websites:

- Carson J Spencer Foundation, [www.CarsonJSpencer.org](http://www.CarsonJSpencer.org)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)
- The Kevin Hines Story, [www.kevinhinesstory.com/](http://www.kevinhinesstory.com/)
- Working Minds, [www.WorkingMinds.org](http://www.WorkingMinds.org). ⓘ

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*Cal Beyer is the Director of Risk Management for Lakeside Industries in Issaquah, Wash. Beyer has more than 27 years of professional experience in construction safety, insurance and risk management. He serves on the Executive Committee and Workplace Task Force of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. He is a frequent presenter at construction industry conferences and regular contributor to various construction industry publications.*



*Sally Spencer-Thomas is a clinical psychologist, mental health advocate, faculty member, and survivor of her brother's suicide. She sees the issues of suicide prevention from many perspectives. She is the CEO and Co-Founder of the Carson J Spencer Foundation ([www.carsonjspencer.org](http://www.carsonjspencer.org)), an award-winning organization leading innovation in suicide prevention. Spencer-Thomas is the Co-Lead of the Workplace Task Force with the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.*

