

Healthy Workers – Healthy Futures

Case Study:

Uniting Care Wesley Country SA(UCWCSA)

UCWCSA believes in compassion and respect, assisting them to meet their mission of ‘caring for our country people’. In order to achieve this they recognise that staff do their best work when they are at their best.

The Approach

Uniting Care Wesley Country SA is a community service agency of the Uniting Church in Australia and employs some 250 workers and more than 100 volunteers across the northern country region of South Australia. UCWCSA provides a wide range of services including youth, homelessness, financial support, counselling, training and a range of programs to bring families together.

In 2012 a need was identified for a wellbeing training program to build workers capacity to recognise signs and symptoms of stress in themselves and in their colleagues and to build overall resilience; enhancing workers abilities to cope during difficult times either at work or personally. With the support of the Board and CEO, and using a grant from Employers Mutual Ltd Member Benefit Fund, UCWCSA engaged the services of Let’s Talk Australia to deliver a mandatory training program, training every staff member in the Agency in the skills needed to recognise the challenges above.

The goal was to see cultural change and increase staff confidence to start difficult conversations that may lead to open acknowledgement of mentally challenging situations and circumstances, and ultimately provide the opportunity for staff to support each other.

In 2013 UCWCSA expanded this wellbeing focus and formed a Healthy Workers Healthy Futures (HWHF) Committee, which brings together staff from various levels and worksites. The committee, in

conjunction with the Human Resources department, has taken the lead in coordinating the Wellbeing Training and develops an Annual Wellbeing Plan that is based on the 5 principles of wellness; health, work, community/family, financial and values/beliefs

The Rationale

Due to the crisis nature of the work that UCWCSA staff undertake, the organisation acknowledges that staff are at risk of psychological injury arising from vicarious trauma, aggressive clients, burnout and fatigue. The training recognises that staff are the most consistent observer of their colleagues and their own behaviour and can provide each other with guidance and support.

The Wellbeing training was initially led by Human Resources as a direct strategy to decrease the risk of psychological Workcover claims. Research indicated claims would decrease if the workforce could be strengthened in the area of wellbeing and resilience.

Fit with organisational core values

UCWCSA’s mission is “Caring for Country People” and the organisation recognises that staff do their best work with clients when they are at their best themselves. To this end, the project has evolved into a mechanism that provides ongoing support and, whilst still led by Human Resources, Wellbeing Ambassadors will be critical in driving organic change across the Agency.

Amongst UCWCSA values are compassion and respect. A Statement of Non Negotiable principles helps to guide everyday respectful behaviours that are expected in the workplace. The Wellbeing training program enables all UCWCSA staff to demonstrate this not only to their clients but also to each other.



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The Process

The need for a program designed to build resilience and address workplace health and wellbeing was identified, as anecdotal evidence suggested that the organisation’s highest risk factors for Workcover claims were psychological in nature. This process was very informal. The research was carried out in 2012.

Approval was given by the CEO to make an application to Workcover insurer, Employers Mutual Ltd Member Benefit Program, sourcing funds to roll out a training initiative. In 2014 the Member Benefit Grant was approved and an outside facilitator, Let’s Talk Australia, was engaged to conduct the training.

The program was delivered in three phases:

- Phase 1: a one day training program for all staff to attend. This phase was mandatory and the skills obtained are now considered a core part of induction.
- Phase 2: a two day intensive training course delivered to a group of staff members who self-elected to become Wellbeing Ambassadors.
- Phase 3: a written resource designed to provide on-going tools and support to individuals once the initial learning phase had been completed.

The research for this initiative had been in process prior to the appointment of the Healthy Worker Adviser at the South Australian Council of Social Service. However, the support from the Adviser and subsequent appointment of an internal HWHF Committee, implemented as per the steps outlined in the Healthy Workers Toolkit, was a valuable vehicle for the training to gain momentum and maintain its profile.

This program will continue to be led by Human Resources. The future success of this training program will also rest with the Wellbeing Ambassadors who have been intensively trained to offer support and guidance to colleagues who may exhibit signs and symptoms of stress.

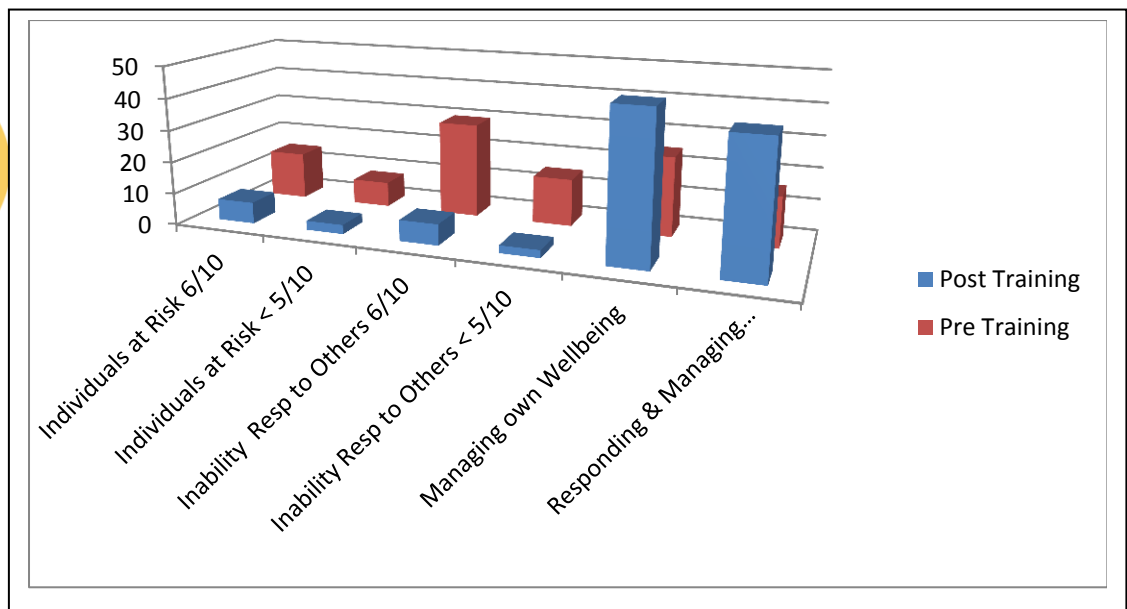
Positives and Achievements

Surveys pre and post training show this program has been very successful in raising self-awareness of individuals, assisting them to identify when they are experiencing signs and symptoms of stress. In addition this program has been successful in giving individuals the tools to broach a difficult conversation with a colleague if they notice that they might be struggling.

“It was exactly what I needed to manage myself at work”

“I will promise to put my own wellbeing first” Participant comments post training

The graph (over page) demonstrates a decrease in the number of individual staff members at psychological risk and an increase in their ability to manage their own wellbeing and to respond to the needs of others. This is a likely indicator of increased emotional resilience among staff and the ability for individuals and staff as a team to better cope with stress.



Overcoming the Challenges

One of the major challenges, as with any training program is to ensure that the learning lives beyond the training day.

Ensuring that all staff receive the training in years to come and that training outcomes genuinely form a part of workplace culture into the future are other identified challenges for the organisation. The successful implementation of Wellbeing Ambassadors, to embed this program, will be one way UCWCSA can meet these challenges. A written resource will be provided to all staff as a reminder of the tools available to them.

The Future

Early indicators are demonstrating some tremendous and positive results for staff in waging the battle against anxiety and stress at work and at home. The ongoing support provided by the HWHF committee will be vital to the future of this program. The committee will continue to meet monthly and develop an Annual Action Plan based on the 5 pillars of wellbeing to ensure that UCWCSA continues to support and promote staff wellness.

Ideally the Let's Talk training program will be recognised as a core competency for all UCWCSA staff. This would mean engaging the trainer approximately twice a year in an ongoing capacity to train new staff members.

Duration and resources

The training program took three years from the time the first application for funds was made to the date the training commenced.

There is no ongoing budget for the training, however, the HWHF Committee together with the Wellbeing Ambassadors will advocate that it be recognised as core to staff training needs and so allocate discretionary funds accordingly.

This case study was prepared and submitted, in collaboration with Uniting Care Wesley Country SA, by SACOSS under the Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Initiative.

Find out more about how you can create a healthy workplace; find a Healthy Worker Adviser for your sector, or to submit your own case study:

Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Initiative
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