

On the cover



Dealing with depression — mental health initiative drives change

By Sarah Ripplinger

When Scott Construction launched its mental health committee in 2016, the company didn't yet know how impactful the program would be. From helping workers access resources for depression to hosting morning meditation, the committee has made a positive impact on worker's lives. The company is now sharing its tips for success.

To everyone else, Mike Haley appeared to have a successful life and a successful career: he started in construction as a woodworker in the late 1980s, moved up to an assistant superintendent, and then to manager of program services at Scott Construction Group. But inside he was depressed, suicidal, and using alcohol to self-medicate.

"I was wondering if life was worth all this trouble," reflects Haley. "I probably lost two marriages out of it over the years because, you know, you sit there, and you don't care. You go through the motions during the day — you're smiling and carrying on — but when you go home, you shut down."

Then, through a newly launched mental health initiative at Scott Construction, Haley learned how to get help for his depression and began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Today, he leads talks on mental health and recently won a community leadership award.

Throwing workers a lifeline

It all started around three years ago when a worker at Scott Construction shared his wife's struggle with depression. The story hit home, and the company of around 100 employees launched a mental health committee to proactively put mental health supports for its workers into place.

The committee of 12 volunteers — which includes Haley, and other workers from Scott Construction's British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario sites — meets quarterly to discuss mental health-related topics. They have lunch and learns with special guest presenters, which are videotaped and shared with workers all over Canada through an online portal and quarterly newsletter. They also plan and lead themed monthly activities in the workplace.

Happiness was the topic for July and August, says Donna Grant, marketing manager with Scott

Construction and a member of the mental health committee. "Everyone sent in their favourite summer photos of something that feeds their mental wellness and brings them joy or peace."

Last year, the committee put together a photo slideshow that became a piece of company memorabilia and a bridge between employees, notes Grant. "You might see a photo of somebody bungee jumping and all of a sudden you have something to talk about. There's this bonding and team building that is also very good for mental wellness."

Other recent themes include "suicide awareness," "stresses of parenting" and "laughter is the best medicine," the latter of which involved bringing in a certified laughter yoga instructor; laughter yoga involves prolonged laughter mixed with breathing exercises.

The theme "mind-body connection," from November 2018, was particularly memorable. It included 10 minutes of guided meditation and five minutes of tai chi daily at 7:30 a.m.

"At the end of November everyone said: 'is there any reason why we have to stop doing this?' and I said, 'well, no,'" recalls Grant. "So we still do meditation every morning. And one participant said he found that he wasn't experiencing road rage on his commute to work anymore, and said: 'I really think it's the meditation.'"

A connection between suicides, overdoses, and construction

The data of the past decade has shown that mental health, suicide, and construction have correlated links. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the second highest rates of suicide occur in the construction and extraction industries.

Hear it from the source

Scott Construction has educational videos on how to talk about mental health. Find Mike Haley and Donna Grant's videos by searching for Scott Construction on [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com).



Committee members in the Lower Mainland meet: (L-R) Mike Haley, Donna Grant, Aaron Jackson, John Loop, Kellyann Williams, Louise Doctor, Theresa Tran.

A 2018 BC Coroners Service report found that 55 percent of illicit drug overdoses were among people employed in the trades and transport industries. Scott Construction recently took the initiative to offer naloxone training to its workers, enabling them to administer the potentially life-saving overdose medication.

Workers who turn to drugs and alcohol to self-medicate and manage their depression, anxiety, or pain can be creating a dangerous mix in an industry that often involves heavy machinery, power tools, and long hours, warns Haley. “If you’re not 100 percent at work, you’re going to put yourself or somebody else in danger.”

Laying the groundwork

Scott Construction’s role in spreading the word about mental health in the construction industry extends beyond its worksites. Grant and Haley speak at conferences such as the British Columbia Construction Safety Alliance’s annual safety conference and the Vancouver Regional Construction Association leadership conference. They have created and presented an hour-long talk titled “Mental Health and the Construction Industry” for British Columbia Construction Safety Alliance regional breakfasts in Prince George, Vancouver, Kelowna, and Victoria.

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—Donna Grant, marketing manager,
Scott Construction

In early 2019, Haley received a community leadership award from the British Columbia Construction Association for his mental health outreach efforts and for candidly sharing his personal experience with depression.

“Scott Construction is leading the charge when it comes to mental health in the construction industry,” remarks Jessica Berglund, senior manager in Prevention Field Services at WorkSafeBC. “They’ve also been proactive in sharing their approach and successes with others.”

One of the key reasons for this, says Grant, is because speaking out about mental health in the workplace not

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—Mike Haley, manager of program services, Scott Construction Group

only protects the health and safety of workers, it also makes good economic and forward-thinking sense.

“We have to make sure that we’re an attractive place for people, including young people, to work,” she asserts. “We need to show how great the construction industry is and part of that is showing that employers care for the physical and mental well-being of their workers.”

Paying it forward

After Scott Construction launched its mental health initiative, Haley learned about counselling services available to him through the company’s extended medical plan. He now sees a counsellor when he needs to. That support, he says, has made a world of difference in his life, and brought him out of his former depression.

“It just turned my life around,” says Haley. “Just knowing you can go out there and talk to people to make you feel better.”

Still, Haley knows that a lot of work remains to be done to help more workers struggling with mental illness.

“It’s about getting rid of the stigma; and I think we’re doing that slowly but surely,” he says. “If we can help one person not hurt themselves, then we’re doing our job.” ☺

Five tips for launching a mental health program at your workplace

- 1 Proactively let employees know about the mental health supports that exist at your workplace and through extended health benefits and community resources (such as the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) and [BC Bereavement Helpline](#)).
- 2 Plan and implement mental health outreach and supports for workers, including making the workplace a safe space to discuss mental well-being and mental health concerns.
- 3 Launch a mental health committee to gather information and implement mental health initiatives and outreach at your workplace; offer mental health first aid training to committee members.
- 4 Don’t be afraid to start small, and learn what works best for your company by asking for feedback.
- 5 Check in with workers who have expressed an interest in mental health supports to see if they are okay.



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