

MEDIA RELEASE

26 February 2019

Alliance Group launches innovative mental health initiative

Alliance Group has launched an innovative mental health programme to raise awareness about suicide in the workplace and make it easy for staff to seek help.

The co-operative's *Mates at the Gate* programme encourages staff to ask for support at an early stage and also educates employees on the signs their colleagues might be depressed or distressed.

The programme, which is specifically tailored to Alliance's workforce, was launched at presentations to all staff across the company's eight processing plants and corporate offices in November.

The training introduces staff to the nature of mental health and provides practical advice about how they can assist and support their workmates. In addition, a number of volunteers from every site are trained as 'connectors', whose role is to link colleagues experiencing problems to the best source of help.

Since its launch last year, the co-operative has seen an encouraging increase in the use of its Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

Chris Selbie, General Manager People and Safety at Alliance, said the co-operative was committed to looking after the safety and wellbeing of its people.

"We recognise that mental health is an issue that affects all New Zealanders and we wanted to do something meaningful to ensure our people had access to the right support if and when it was required.

"*Mates at the Gate* is about raising awareness and encouraging people to seek help early. We can offer confidential professional help to support people who need it and fund that through our EAP. But it's also about mates helping mates and giving our people the tools to intervene early and link people to help.

"Most of our employees will have known someone who has experienced mental health issues. There is a lot of buy-in from them for this and we are seeing a significant uplift in people seeking help.

"People are now much more aware that our EAP covers a wide range of mental health and wellbeing issues from anxiety and depression, personal relationships and family, financial and children concerns to stress management, alcohol and drugs and grief and trauma."

Mates at the Gate was developed and delivered by Dave Armstrong, Health and Safety Manager at Alliance's Smithfield plant in Timaru, and Professor Annette Beautrais of the University of Canterbury, who has worked internationally developing suicide prevention programmes.

Mr Armstrong, who joined Alliance last year, said: "We have a lot of men working for us, many in physically demanding jobs, and some men are not so good at asking for help around mental health.

"This is about getting the message out that help is available through our EAP and that the earlier you get help the better. It's also about helping our people spot the signs of stress among colleagues and ensuring they know what they can do to help."

The programme has now been rolled out to staff at multiple sites across the country.

"We had groups of 150 employees listening to presentations for 45 minutes and you could have heard a pin drop at every one," said Mr Armstrong.

Alliance, New Zealand's only major 100 per cent farmer owned red meat co-operative, is now looking at how it can support its farmer shareholders and encourage them to seek early intervention for mental health issues.

ENDS

For further information, contact:

Sam Halstead

Telephone: 027 474 6065

Email: sam@latitudesc.co.nz