BEHIND THE SEEN PART B AWARDS APPLICATION

1. Additional description

Behind The Seen is one couple with a lived experience of mental health issues and a determination to heighten awareness of the impact of career specific and incident stress on first responders and their families. Starting in 2013 with the development of a short gatekeeper program for first responders, the impact of their work is now reaching beyond triple 0 first responders to the wider mental health community.

Today, growth and impact of the project continues, driven by the many partnerships Ross and Veronique have initiated and maintained, along with a passionate representation of “the voice of lived experience” in the first responder mental health arena. In early 2018 they were successful at acquiring a 3 year grant from the Elderslee Foundation to support new research projects with UNSW, create resources and continue their peer support work. Their funds are auspiced by a registered charity (The Epicentre) to ensure transparency, accountability and governance support.

As well as providing peer support, facilitating the mental health gatekeeper program they developed, presenting at conferences and advocating at higher levels for systemic changes to mental health supports for first responders, they continue to develop innovative resources which inspire conversations about mental health. The latest of these resources is one which has already initiated 3 significant partnerships in the last 2 months including one with a health service: outside the usual frontline first responder target group. Some key achievements include:

- Presented mental health awareness programs to more than 1000 current serving first responders and their families in several States across Australia.
- The most recent strategy Behind The Seen has developed is the Stress Less Conversation Pack which on first release (February 2019) received over 100 requests in under 24 hours from one social media post, and has already resulted in a partnership with the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, a partnership with SES Volunteers Association and a partnership with Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. This concept has reached beyond the original audience of first responders to the wider community of care in mental health.
- Currently partnering with UNSW: co-design and facilitation of an online physical activity program for first responders and their partners; analysis of survey of first responders with psychological injuries; continuation of partnership with Black dog Institute and WA Department Fire & Emergency Services conducting research on the help seeking behaviours of first responders
- Maintained a social media presence for first responders and their families Facebook currently >23,000 followers. Peer support for first responders and their partners is a key role with this online presence.
- Compiled a first responder family information booklet
• Developed a training package on first responder mental health for helping professionals in collaboration with the University of Newcastle

Behind The Seen was awarded a TheMHS (Australia and New Zealand Mental Health Learning Network) award in 2015, given in recognition of the achievement of excellence, innovation and best practice in mental health service, TheMHS Letter of Commendation 2017, nominated twice for an Australia Day Award and awarded Dobell Community Champions Award 2016.

Website: www.behindtheseen.com.au  Facebook page: behindtheseenaustralia

2.1 Evidence of a significant contribution to the field of mental health on a local, state or national level.

The initial 2 years of Behind the Seen involved the creation and implementation of face to face sessions for first responders and their families, plus a social media impact with their online posters and slogans encouraging help seeking in this population group. Receiving the TheMHS Award in 2015 led to a conscious decision to continue their efforts despite the personal challenges with Ross’s PTSD and inability to work, Veronique’s need to increase her paid work to support the household, and a lack of resources.

Today, Behind The Seen continues to have impact as representatives of the first responder lived experience at both State and National level, evidenced in part by mention in the final Senate Inquiry report into the Mental Health of First Responders but more significantly by the working partnerships they have developed with academic institutions (Black Dog Institute, UNSW, University of Newcastle, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health) and employing organisations (eg Department of Fire and Emergency Services, NSW Rural Fire Services, Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services)

Behind the Seen has highlighted the mental health needs of first responders nationally and internationally. Sensitive reporting and resultant stories to over 30 media outlets including 7.30 Report, ABC State and National media numerous times (articles and radio), NBN News, Illawarra Mercury, Daily Telegraph, several State newspapers and several State radio stations. Media contacts interested in highlighting the mental health needs of emergency services personnel (eg Four Corners) use Ross and Veronique as a connector to those with lived experience willing to speak out about their experiences. Additionally their continued writing and publication of articles from both lived experience and practitioner perspectives reach national and international audiences. (Social Work Helper, Grieving Behind the Badge) The willingness of Ross to share his story continues to have impact nationally – for example Ross’s story and the need for more research for first responders was the feature for the Black Dog Institute 2016 Christmas fundraiser reaching over 200,000 people. He has also been quoted in a book on organizational trauma collated by Professor Hasastanislav University of Economics Czechoslovakia, published in the USA.
Recent partnerships have also been developed with the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health in developing a part of the Stress Less Conversation Pack, SES Volunteers Association to distribute the packs to 200 SES units across NSW, Department of Fire and Emergency Services in WA to discuss distribution of the packs to all brigades and Wagga Wagga Base Hospital to use the packs as part of a workplace mental health workshop for health services staff.

From the above it is evident that from a national perspective, by utilizing novel strategies, a strong lived experience component and consistent collaboration with key stakeholders Behind The Seen is gaining significant traction in addressing a long standing gap in the delivery of preventative mental health education and support for first responders and their families.

2.2 Evidence of innovation and/or recognised best practise

Behind The Seen is innovative and utilizes best practice in a number of ways:

1) Behind The Seen is not a large organisation. It is just 2 people, one of whom has PTSD. They have limited personal finances and a restricted lifestyle as a result of Ross’s PTSD yet have managed to connect practitioners, academics, politicians and journalists to those with lived experience of first responder mental ill health and suicide, and establish long term working relationships.

2) Behind The Seen has proven longevity: they have been educating and advocating at individual, group, community and sector levels for 6 years. During those 6 years they have initiated (and notably maintained) partnerships and positive working relationships in an area where those with lived experience are often overlooked. Maintaining these partnerships beyond just one project or activity is evidence of their professionalism, reliability, ethics and best practice. Additionally most partnerships have an innovative component, for example the co-designed online physical intervention study with UNSW, the partnership with Black Dog Institute and Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the (very new but incredibly popular) Stress Less Conversation Pack.

3) Behind The Seen caters to police, firefighters, paramedics and rescue personnel as one group. Most projects focus on one service.

4) A combination of Ross’s lived experience with PTSD and Veronique’s lived experience as a first responder partner in addition to her qualifications and experience in social work combine true to life accounts with mental health first aid principles

5) Behind the Seen is external to organisations, removing any fear of judgement of being deemed “unfit for duty”, or “weak”, therefore allowing honest conversations to take place among crew members.

6) Families of first responders receive very little if any support from organisations, yet according to research they are “the most important
resource for a first responder” Regehrt C In the Line of Fire: Trauma in the Emergency Services Oxford University Press 2005

7) Behind The Seen actively seeks to heighten awareness of the value of first responder partners, and provides sessions and resources for family members to increase their resilience and ability to support the first responder.

7) Behind The Seen has an online page which has now grown organically to 23,000 followers which include helping professionals as well as first responders and families. The page consistently shares news and tips relevant to first responders and their families mental health and additionally provides a point of contact for peer support and appropriate mental health referrals.

2.3 Evidence of participation of mental health consumers in the planning, implementation and evaluation. There may be exceptions to the involvement of mental health consumers. If so, please address this when responding to this criterion.

Every aspect of Behind the Seen including sessions, awareness campaigns, research projects and the development of resources and other training sessions include the participation and feedback of mental health consumers. (first responders and their families) Behind The Seen view this as non-negotiable imperative for this population group due to the culture within which they work and/or volunteer for these reasons:

1) The culture of first responders is such that “outsiders” are often viewed with guarded caution as they are perceived to not understand emergency services culture.

2) There has been a tendency for those in the mental health sector to partner with employing organisations to make changes to mental health support. This is viewed by some consumers as a conflict of interest due to issues related to organisational culture. Behind the Seen committed from the start to represent the consumer voice.

3) As with other population groups, when someone who is or was in the services talks about mental health problems there is a greater element of trust, inspiring meaningful conversations around mental health. To some degree, what Behind The Seen has achieved is an extension to the “brotherhood” or “family”, bringing back the old values of supporting our mates, having honest conversations around struggles and combining police, firefighters, paramedics and rescue operators as one large “family” working together to reduce stigma and increase support around mental health issues.

Some examples are:

1) Behind The Seen was conceived and implemented by two people who had a combination of lived experience and mental health/community work experience which led to consumer involvement from the moment it started.

2) The concept was supported in the initial phase in 2013 by a crowdfunding campaign (Pozible) to obtain initial materials for session handouts. The
campaign reached double its goal, evidence of consumer participation and consumer desire to see the program develop.

3) Behind The Seen initiated a Central Coast Voice of Lived Experience reference group in Dec 2018, consisting of 6 people with both lived experience and community development experience. Work has started on an event and on pursuing funding to develop a Central Coast Lived Experience Network.

4) Black Dog Institute DFES BTS based on feedback from consumers including focus groups and collection of data by app following sessions

5) The help seeking behaviours survey conducted by Behind the Seen and utilized by UNSW was data obtained from 350 first responders

6) Facebook is primarily aimed at the consumers

7) Behind The Seen runs events aimed at consumers eg Stress Less Event for Mental Health Week 2018, Coaster Conversation Campaign and Triple 0 RAW Event.

8) Helping professionals training development initiated as result of survey responses which indicated low percentage of understanding of emergency service stress by psychologists/doctors/social workers

9) Family booklet developed as a result of feedback from first responder partners

10) Surveys of first responders and their families continue, the latest survey (of 340 first responders who have psychological injuries) is currently being analysed and reported on by UNSW.

2.4 Evidence of Partnerships and Linkages (collaboration for continuity between organisations).

BTS have active partnerships and/or collaboration in place with:

1. UNSW/ Black Dog Institute:
   ongoing partnership on several projects since 2014
   a) co-designed and co-facilitate study of online physical intervention activities for first responders and partners (first iteration 2018, ongoing)
   b) help seeking behaviours of first responders survey analysis and recommendations report to EML
   c) Evaluation of Behind The Seen program, results presented at various conferences 2017/2018
   d) regular survey design, distribution and analysis- most recent analysis relates to first responders with psychological injuries.
   e) co-presentations at conferences (TheMHS, CIMA, ACOTS)

2. Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health & RAMPH
   a) Stress Less Conversation Pack
   b) Currently planning joint activities for 2019

3. University of Newcastle School of Social Work
   a. creation of pilot helping professionals training/information package about first responder mental health (2017)
b. creation of program to enhance creative expression for those with a lived experience of suicide (2018)

4. WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services and WA Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (ongoing partnership since 2014)
5. Wagga Wagga Base Hospital Mental Health Unit (development of staff mental health workshop incorporating Stress Less Pack)
6. State Emergency Services Volunteers Association- distribution of Stress Less packs including follow up with units
7. Men Care Too, The Epicentre, Elderslee Foundation, Iris Foundation, The Glen: Behind The Seen initiated a Central Coast Voice of Lived Experience Reference Group December 2018 which is now meeting monthly and already working on a local This Is My Brave production.

Linkages established with the following organisations where regular conversations and sharing of information/referral occurs:

- WA Medically Retired Police Officers Association Inc (collaboration)
- Careflight (contributions to planning re mental health of careflight staff)
- Australasian Student Paramedic Association (ongoing conversations)
- Flashover Australia (content provided for first responder mental health section)
- Police Post Trauma Support Group (cross referral, collaboration)
- True Blue Line (collaboration, share BTS mental health information)
- The Epicentre San Remo (regular community development information exchange)
- Lifeline Hunter Central Coast (pilot sessions Helping Professionals program)
- NSW Volunteer Rescue Association (ongoing discussions)
- Invisible Wounds (ongoing discussions and information exchange)
- Morisset Rotary (planning for involvement of young RFS volunteers)

International Links where regular conversations and exchange of information occurs

USA
The Sweeney Alliance / Grieving Behind The Badge
Alaska Firefighter Peer Support Group
Firefighter Behavioural Health Alliance
Code Green Campaign
Canada
Ontario First Responders PTSD Support Group
Surviving The Shield

2.5 Verification and evaluation of the program’s effectiveness e.g. quality improvement activity, data collection and its use including graphs and tables, achievement of performance indicators, e.g. attendance figures, outcome measures, number of document downloads, page views, click through rates.'

Behind The Seen is a project with several components including:

- Mental health awareness campaigns and advocacy
• Development of innovative resources
• Events which bring current and part serving first responders and families together
• Partnerships to enhance and increase research of first responder mental health
• Peer support
• Development of programs to increase mental health conversations and improve help seeking behaviours

**Face To Face Sessions:** Researchers from the Black Dog Institute and UNSW worked in collaboration with Behind The Seen to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the BTS face to face mental health gatekeeper sessions. Content analysis techniques were used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Neuendorf, 2002) to assess 561 BTS feedback forms collected from 35 consecutive crews who attended a BTS session (participant response rate of 88%). The majority of respondents reported that BTS sessions were informative (98.2%) and clear (92.3%) e.g. “One of the most informative 40 mins I’ve ever had during my career”. About half (43.1%) of the feedback specifically referenced having developed a greater understanding of PTSD, its warning signs, the elevated risk of PTSD in first responders, and/or the potential for occupational exposures to serve as ‘triggers’ for PTSD in the future, despite no prompt or reference to PTSD in the questions. Many of the feedback forms commented on the perceived value of the sessions for other first responders (e.g. “Amazing! Should be compulsory for all first responders”). The lived experience of presenters was also often cited as crucial and underscored the authenticity of the program’s messages. The larger number of different crews from a range of different backgrounds that were engaged suggest that the BTS sessions had widespread acceptance amongst the first responder workforce

“Initiatives such as the BTS sessions, which have demonstrated high levels of acceptability, and which aim to answer the repeated calls for novel, acceptable and scalable solutions to improving the mental health of this group cannot be ignored. Programs such as BTS that are based on lived experience may be a promising component of a system-wide approach to prevention and treatment. Further research is required to investigate the long-term impact on clinical pathways, service utilisation and clinical trajectories.”

Results of Focus Groups conducted by researchers following BTS sessions (as reported in conference presentation by Dr Rosenbaum in Sydney/San Diego)

- Receptive to program – acceptability
- Good recall at follow-up – interactive, handouts
- Value of Lived experiences- Emergency service & PTSD
- Hope and prevention
- Seeing Ross & Veronique ‘come through the other side'
Social Media  The facebook page has had consistent growth and is now over 23,000 strong. Behind The Seen maintains the page with news.tips for mental health, messages on posters (which Ross and Veronique create themselves); and personal stories (their own and others who wish their story of hope to be shared) which inspire comments and conversations. The page also serves as a contact point for those first responders (and partners) seeking peer support.

Events  Behind The Seen ran 3 main events over the last year, the Triple 0 Stress Less Event, the Coaster Conversations Campaign and the Triple 0 RAW Challenge. (please see appendix)

Articles Written and Published


You Don’t Know Me Australasian Poetry Magazine and ABC Open

The Ripple Effect Of First Responder Stress- Anger in Relationships" published on a USA website “Grieving Behind The Badge”

5/12/2016 First Responder Stress and the Family Blame Game published Grieving Behind The Badge

3/3/2016 First Responder Mental Health: It’s Not All In The Mind Social Work Helper

Video:

Dec 2018 2 versions of “The Interviews” collection of those with lived experience of first responder mental health issues encouraging viewers to reach out for help.

18/11/2014 BANK OF GOODWILL 4214 views which is the highest number of views of the 32 videos posted by Bendigo Bank.

16/7/2015 Matt Piper’s song written for Behind The Seen: Broken Heroes video clip has involvement of consumers 5497 views, 398 shares, 128 comments

Print Media, Radio, Television, Coverage of Behind The Seen.

Behind the Seen prides itself on having established an excellent rapport with journalists. Ross and Veronique are regular trusted contacts for background on
media stories about emergency service responders mental health. The following are some of the articles/television reports/radio interviews which have been specifically about Behind the Seen:

“Emergency Services Mental Health” ABC Newcastle radio Interview (part of Mental Health Week)
ABC National radio interview Mental Health Pilot Program for Helping Professionals
“A Great Big Wall” ABC National online website article interview about BTS progress and collaborations with Black Dog and UON
ABC National News Article “WA Firefighters Take Lead In Nationwide PTSD Prevention Program”
Black Dog Institute Christmas Fundraising Campaign using Ross’s face and story. (print material sent to 220,000 people)
Daily Telegraph Former “Fireys Battle With PTSD Makes Him A Hidden Local Hero
NSW Mental Health Commission Ross’s Story
Illawarra Mercury Behind the Seen To Address Frontline Suicides
Lakes Mail Life Stories From the Frontline of Emergency Services
Illawarra Mercury Veteran Firefighter Teaches Others How To Cope With Psychological Scars
News.com.au Every Six Weeks An Emergency Services Worker In Australia Commits Suicide (note we did not share this article as the journalist did not comply with the agreement he made with us that he would not use triggering photos or language in his reporting)
ABC National News report in which Ross was interviewed was shared on the Behind the Seen page “Emergency Services Workers Suicide Crisis”
Hobart Mercury print media Help For Everyday Heroes
ABC Radio National Interview “Emergency Services PTSD”
NBN News

Posters Posters are designed and posted to social media to highlight key messages, spread awareness and inspire conversations. Over a hundred posters have been created since inception, below are the engagements for just some of them. The appendix shows these in picture form

Conference Presentations Conference presentations are utilized as a way to increase awareness and generate interest among helping professionals and researchers, and to foster collaboration and partnerships. These include Suicide Prevention Australia conferences, TheMHS conference, National Mens Health Conference, Department Fire and Emergency Services. We have been accepted as co-presenters with the UNSW team at the 2019 ACOT conference, Key speakers at a Mental Health Symposium for first responders in Albury in June, and approached to deliver a number of community and first responder presentations for the Suicide Prevention Network in Whyalla SA. (subject to funding)

Providing Accurate Information and Misconceptions A difficult area for Behind The Seen to work with has been trying to correct misinformation conveyed by mental health organisations and an unwillingness to listen when provided with evidence of misinformation. (this is partly the “lived experience” stigma – the presumption that
consumers couldn’t possibly know more than an organisation with many highly qualified people)

The most concerning of this has been the statement that Australia has “80,000 emergency services personnel.” This figure hugely underestimates the actual numbers in this population group – and of course discredits Behind The Seen because they have been quoting 340,000 since inception. As a result of being ignored, in 2016 Ross and Veronique spent many weeks tediously sifting through EVERY annual report from EVERY emergency service organisation, created a spreadsheet and kept copies of the relevant pages of the 2016 reports as evidence.

We are very pleased to report that our concern has finally been acknowledged this year (2019) by being noted in the final report of the Senate Inquiry into the Mental Health of First Responders.

3. Conclusion

From Veronique:

So often people will look at Ross and I in disbelief when we say “Behind The Seen is just the 2 of us” This particularly occurs when staff from larger organisations connect with us, often to ask us for resources, contacts or to “send a representative” to their area. The next question is always “how do you do it?”

1. Skills which Ross had before his diagnosis of PTSD did not “disappear”. He could no longer utilise them in an emergency response career, but once he learnt how to manage his PTSD, his abilities to lead, to motivate and be creative re-surfaced and became relevant (and useful) in another area- one where he still aims to save lives, just from a different perspective. Veronique had to be adaptable to adjust the family income, and ensure routines were in place to reduce stress levels for Ross, herself and the family. Her social work skills are transferable, so her skills in community development and motivation were able to be utilised from a different perspective - to advocate effectively on behalf of those with a lived experience of mental health issues. In mental health speak we might call this post-traumatic growth. In plain speak, it was turning struggle into strength. …PLUS

2. There is a massive (totally informal) peer to peer lived experience support network behind us. Whilst we are super proud of our many achievements, whilst we are acknowledged amongst our circles as leaders – we would not be doing this today if it were not for the many lived experience peers who informally support our wellbeing, who motivate us to keep going, who tell us when we need to hear it that we are in fact “making a difference”.

We are just 2 people. But what we achieve is thanks to the support and the inspiration of many others with a lived experience of mental ill health.
Hi, can you please send me a couple of coaster packs as I work across the Top End with Police Fire and Emergency Services as their Chaplain. Thank you so much. If you have any brochures or other info that we could use may we have some of that too please. I really appreciate what you and your organisation does. We lost an officer on Christmas Day to suicide  Thanks so much.

Would share with my team - we just lost a team member to suicide. We are having another team get together soon - we had a group counselling session last week - so thought I could use pack at meeting / is that the info you need. My team are spread across different agriculture Victoria offices.

Hi! I love the poster packs for identifying stress levels. If there are still some available I’d love to share them at my CFA fire station! I’ll make sure to get some snaps of them in use and I wanted to thankyou for the meaningful content you share and for helping to bring to light the affects of PTSD, depression and anxiety.

Would love a set of stress items for my workplace A juvenile justice centre in Western Australia.

Hi, I am interested in the stress poster and meter, do you accommodate in Asia? I am from the Philippines, working in a humanitarian relief org. I work for World Vision as a staff care specialist.

Hi! I work in a police department communication center and I’d love to get one of the “how’s your stress” packs to share with my coworkers.

I would love a set of your conversation coasters. We live in a dairy farming area that is really feeling the pressure of low milk prices and any help we can give would be great. We own a shop that allows us to talk to a lot of these farmers that are struggling at the moment. Thank you and keep up the good work.

Thank you so much. Will liaise with the PFES Chaplain when it gets here. I am also a peer supporter for PFES (Police, Fire & Emergency Services).

I would love one of these for my workplace. We have a new bunch of junior doctors starting next week it may help us manage fatigue and stress.

Hi there, I would love to obtain the stress meter Pack for Volunteer Rescue Squad. Just want to say what an awesome job you guys do with the page fantastic has been so informative and helpful. Thank you for all that you guys do.

Hi Rosco Hope you’re well see your post on FB. We have 6 bases now if that’s achievable. (Careflight)

Hi. I would love one of the packs for my work. We are in insurance claims and can deal with major loss and deaths which can be quite daunting. Thank you for all the work and awareness you do.

Thank you so much, mine is a consultant role that moves across WHS and Welfare with HR staff and client welfare and mental health.

Hi - I’d like a stress pack for my workplace- NGO with traumatised kids in out of home care. Foster Care.
BEHIND THE SEEN COORDINATED EVENTS:
STRESS LESS, CONVERSATION COASTERS AND TRIPLE 0 RAW CHALLENGE

First Response: Stress Less was an event organised by Behind The Seen for World Mental Health Day 2018, in conjunction with a Conversation Coasters campaign which ran throughout World Mental Health Week. The primary aim of both the event and the Conversation Coasters campaign was to encourage conversations about wellbeing and mental health on the Central Coast, with a particular focus on first responders, their families and those who support them.

- Wow i don't think i have felt myself at the edge of my seat for so long- each speaker brought themselves and the genuine connection was palpable! Every part of this event brought something unique yet the combination all wove together- the energy i feel now can't be described!
- Everything was incredibly worthwhile
- Funny & enlightening, great information
- Excellent, inspiring, thought provoking and informative!

This first trial of Conversation Coasters included 3 venues – Wyong Milk Factory, Wyong Rugby League Club and Wallarah Bay Recreation Club. All 3 venues reported the coasters and T-Shirts to work as a successful awareness campaign, one which is subtle yet inspires conversations about stress levels/mental health.

The Stress Less Coaster Conversation Campaign 2018, the success of which led to the Stress Less Conversation Pack 2019.

TRIPLE 0 RAW CHALLENGE APRIL 2019  physical activity and team building
HEIGHTENING AWARENESS OF THE NUMBER OF FIRST RESPONDERS AND THE FRAGMENTED NATURE OF THEIR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

February 2019 our concerns are finally noted:

Excerpts from Senate Inquiry Into the Mental Health of First Responders: The people behind 000: mental health of our first responders

2.2 There are over 38,000 full-time emergency workers in Australia. These professionals perform an indispensable function in the community, dealing with vulnerable people in urgent need who may be injured, in a state of heightened anxiety, shock or distress, in danger or deceased. They do this in circumstances where their own safety may be at significant risk. By definition, these jobs entail highly challenging working conditions and regular exposure to traumatic experiences, including both direct and vicarious trauma. They often work on irregular shift patterns, and long hours, fatigue and the need to make often critical decisions under constant time pressure. They do this almost every day, for years on end.

2.3 The subject of mental health conditions in first responders is garnering growing interest in Australia and internationally. It is now widely thought that first responders are at increased risk of experiencing serious, ongoing

\[\text{(1) Mr Grant Edwards, Submission 30, p. 2.}\]
\[\text{(2) Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Submission 22, p. 2.}\]

INITIATED OCTOBER 2018: ONLINE CO-DESIGNED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GROUP WITH BLACK DOG INSTITUTE EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGISTS/RESEARCHERS
WA firefighters take lead in nationwide PTSD prevention program

Western Australian firefighters are set to be among the first in the northern Hemisphere to trial a nationwide post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) prevention program designed to help emergency workers recover from the emotional trauma of the job.

The new program, called Black Dog, has been developed by mental health charity Black Dog Institute and will be implemented in Western Australia.

The program includes a series of workshops and support sessions designed to help firefighters cope with the stresses of their job, including training in mindfulness, breathing techniques, and other strategies to manage stress.

The program is being rolled out across Australia, with other states and territories set to follow suit.

New figures reveal high suicide rates among emergency workers: experts warn PTSD sufferers not getting needed treatment

The Australian Fire and Emergency Services Union (AFESU) has called for urgent action to address the high suicide rates among emergency workers, following the release of new figures showing that firefighters and paramedics are at particularly high risk.

The figures, which are based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, show that firefighters and paramedics have the highest rates of suicide among all groups, with a suicide rate of 2.6 per 100,000 people.

The AFESU is calling for increased mental health support for emergency workers, including access to skilled mental health professionals and ongoing support services.

Behind the Seen workshop to address frontline suicides

The Salvation Army’s Behind the Seen program has partnered with the Australian Federation of Mental Health Organizations to deliver a new workshop for frontline workers, including emergency services personnel.

The workshop will focus on building resilience and coping skills, with sessions on stress management, mindfulness, and other strategies to help workers manage the challenges of their job.

Every six weeks an emergency services worker in Australia commits suicide

A study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health has found that every six weeks an emergency services worker in Australia commits suicide.

The study, which is based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, shows that suicide is the leading cause of death among emergency services workers, with firefighters and police officers at particularly high risk.

The study calls for increased mental health support for emergency services workers, including access to skilled mental health professionals and ongoing support services.
Behind The Seen APPENDIX

Lifeline for those on frontline

Emergency work faces deadly crisis

Painting relay promotes support for firefighters

MORE PUBLISHED MEDIA STORIES

PUBLISHED ARTICLES WRITTEN BY ROSS AND/OR VERONIQUE

First Responder Mental Health: It’s Not All In The Mind

First Responder Stress and the Family Blame Game

by Veronique Moses

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF FIRST RESPONDER STRESS – ANGER IN RELATIONSHIPS

by Veronique Moses

Grieving Behind the Badge

by Veronique Moses

by Veronique Moses

TRIGGER WARNING – some readers may find this disturbing

You don’t know me...
2017 OVERVIEW OF RESULTS: BEHIND THE SEEN SESSIONS
INDEPENDENT EVALUATION BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

GENERAL OUTCOMES AS A RESULT OF THE SESSIONS

In a nutshell, participation in the BTS session improved communication, increased confidence in identifying warning signs and resulted in more effective help seeking behaviours following the session.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER A BTS SESSION: BETWEEN CREW MEMBERS

There was more confidence in talking honestly about incidents at the station, better skills at identifying warning signs and the sessions helped participants feel more confident that they could recognise warning signs and initiate discussions around these signs, especially in those who might not be aware in themselves that there is a problem.

“Sometimes like at the station, you’d see him like go off and yell and like the anger issues, that obviously now we realise was attached to that. But it was like you didn’t want to go near him because like oh, you don’t know what to say, I don’t know. And then these sessions come out and the penny’s dropped”.

There was also more confidence in requesting the assistance of organisational supports both for self and for other members.

Researcher: So you could spot it (warning signs) in somebody else?
Participant: Yes, and I did, And..we made the right decision..we had a person that we recognised there was issues. And we made those calls and we got the ball rolling..and we’ve made the right decision, the person is absolutely flying. And I don’t think we would have made the right decision, if we hadn’t had the awareness.
Researcher: From BTS
Participants: Correct. Trust me.110% agree.

The use of the trigger gifts and handouts were tangible reminders that many stored in easily accessible places, for example keeping the stress ball or pen in the locker – as a way of ‘future proofing’ themselves.

“I know the BTS thing for example, the toys and stuff that they bring along, so a couple of them were syringe pens and little balls, little cars and stuff. So I’ve still got some of them in my locker, and yeah coming to a job, look inside the locker and see those sort of things, it’s a reminder of the session and it gets us engaged”

WHO PRESENTED THE SESSIONS

- The fact that the presenter had emergency service experience meant that he could genuinely relate to the participants. The fact that he had PTSD and was in recovery gave hope and helped to reiterate the message that help seeking leads to recovery.

- The presenters coming from an external organisation reduced fears of breach of confidentiality and increased confidence in information being genuine. Recommendations to use organisational supports were viewed as unbiased and helpful.

- the partner’s perspective gave insight to the value of including family in discussions and support. Additionally the joint presentation signified hope that relationships can ultimately be strengthened

HOW THE SESSIONS WERE PRESENTED

- Demonstrations, trigger gifts and use of humour helped in remembering the main themes

- Trigger gifts were used many months later as a reminder for self care and early help seeking, plus they were used to explain key themes to new members and/or family members and friends

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER A BTS SESSION: WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

Family packs and trigger gifts encouraged discussion between members and partners and gave useful insight to family members. Participants were more willing to talk to family following the session, despite still stating a preference for disclosing to people who have been through the same experience (e.g. another crew member). Participants were generally more aware of the potential for discussions with family to be more productive or helpful.

“If you get back from a bad job, my wife she used to go, ‘why do you talk about it, I don’t want to hear about dead people’. But after her seeing BTS she’s gone, ‘now I understand why you do it.’… she just sits there and listens and helps me unwind as to what’s going on…”

Props and handouts were really valuable and these were often used at a later date as a discussion starter:

“That pack will help... because you’ll probably just go home tonight and then wake up tomorrow and forget. But you can be like, “Here, have a look at this. This is what we did”, and there’s something tangible to actually start the conversation”
EXAMPLES OF POSTERS CREATED FOR FACEBOOK TO INSPIRE CONVERSATIONS AND SHARING INCLUDING INSIGHTS

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