

# WELLBEING WORKS FOR HUON VALLEY COUNCIL

## A NEW FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

*"From a work health and safety perspective the physical risks are easy for us to manage, but the mental health risks are hard to identify..."* Manager Human Resources, Huon Valley Council.

Mental health issues in Australia are common, with one in five Australians experiencing a mental illness in any year. In light of this, Huon Valley Council recently expanded their work health and safety focus to extend beyond physical health to include mental health and wellbeing. The council are committed to supporting their 180 staff to thrive at work, whether they are experiencing mental health issues or not.

*"As we introduce this new area of focus we've been careful to emphasise mental health and wellbeing as a national issue – it's not that Huon Valley is a bad place to work. The challenges are replicated everywhere,"* Manager Human Resources.

The workplace provides an ideal setting to promote mental health and wellbeing, but knowing where to start can be challenging. In August 2017 Huon Valley Council's association with their super fund, Tasplan, enabled them to undertake SuperFriend's Wellbeing Works program. The program was a game changer.

## GETTING STARTED

Huon Valley Council turned to SuperFriend's Wellbeing Works to kick start their mental health and wellbeing journey. The council welcomed the opportunity to have experts on-hand to guide them through the new and unfamiliar area of mental health and wellbeing, with a workshop that could be tailored for their organisation.

## HAVING THE CONVERSATION

**Huon Valley Council** is a local government area in Tasmania. The local government area is responsible for a range of services and facilities, including planning, waste, youth and children services, health and wellbeing, parks and reserves, and sport and recreation. The organisation has approximately 180 employees dispersed over 10 work sites, with a mix of blue collar and white-collar workers.

*"I was hoping for a baseline audit where we would take a sample and I would actually see what people knew and understood about this subject and what they perceived was the help that we offered and also what we could do in the future."* Manager Human Resources, Huon Valley Council.

SuperFriend's Wellbeing Works workshop was organised by Huon Valley Council's Human Resources (HR) department. Ten people from across the organisation attended the 120-minute guided conversation, which Council felt was an appropriate number based on their organisational size. Individuals identified as 'key drivers' were selected by HR. Roles in attendance included: Sports Centre Operator, Risk and Safety Officer, Corporate Governance Officer and the Economic Development Officer.

HR staff did not participate in the workshop as Council wanted to create an open and honest conversation where everyone was confident to speak up without fear of repercussions.



*“We made a deliberate decision to remove HR involvement – as sometimes people say what they think you want to hear,”* Manager Human Resources.

Following the Wellbeing Works program, Huon Valley Council received a comprehensive report summarising the organisation’s overall mental wellbeing strengths and possible areas for development. The report covered the five fundamental domains of a thriving workplace: leadership, connectedness, policies and practices, capability and culture. The report findings validated much of what Council’s HR staff suspected, and the report findings were further validated by a staff survey conducted after the workshop.

*“It was a well written report. It informed key guidelines of what we needed to achieve and where we were at; good recommendations of what we could implement. From there we have drafted a Wellbeing Policy and we’ve also conducted our own staff survey. A lot of the recommendations (from the survey) we could link back to the Wellbeing Works report which had already been highlighted there,”* Manager Human Resources.

## TAKING ACTION: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

*“The program advanced us as an organisation about 18 months,”* Manager Human Resources.

Since completing Wellbeing Works in August 2017, Huon Valley Council have responded to a number of the recommendations in the Wellbeing Works report. They have focused initially on the development of policies and practices to support good mental health across the organisation, as they are cognisant that if mental health and wellbeing is not embedded into the organisation “it can drop off”.

Huon Valley Council’s action to date includes the following:

- Developed a Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Conducted a staff survey to explore current understanding and identify gaps and opportunities for improvement in the organisation
- Established a Health and Safety Committee.

## KEY BENEFITS

*“Having an expert third party come in and deliver the program helped give it credibility and showed staff we were sincere,”* Manager Human Resources.

Having a third party support the Huon Valley Council to review their mental health and wellbeing activity gave their renewed focus on the subject extra credibility and provided Council with the manpower needed to kick start their journey.

*“We have a strong relationship with our super fund and this made it even stronger. Tasplan’s relationship with their workplace wellbeing partner, SuperFriend meant Wellbeing Works could be delivered in our organisation without a cost to us. It would have been harder to sell if it wasn’t funded,”* Manager Human Resources.

Huon Valley Council’s HR Manager believes the program has been a game changer for the organisation. When asked if he would recommend Wellbeing Works to others, he responded with confidence: *“Yes and I have”*.

**Wellbeing Works** is a 120-minute interactive workshop run by workplace wellbeing organisation SuperFriend. It assesses your current activities contributing to positive mental health and wellbeing so you can gain an understanding of your organisations’ strengths and opportunities for improvement. Wellbeing Works is available to all employers and those associated with SuperFriend’s Partner Funds do not incur any out-of-pocket costs for the recipient.

**For more information about Wellbeing Works visit SuperFriend’s website or call (03) 9615 8600.**

