meet David

David was the Senior Health Safety and Environment (HSE) Advisor for ten years at Hitachi Rail. In 2011 he moved to Australia from the UK with his wife and two children, bringing extensive experience in both manufacturing and rail industries spanning safety advisor, project advisor and FIFO roles. Prior to this he was a corporate lawyer specialising in litigation and personal injury. David's understanding of the struggles that come with being a rail worker, as well as his own personal challenges, have made him passionate about creating supportive work environments and encouraging colleagues to check in with one another.

David: Many rail workers work in remote areas. It's common for them to be away from their family and loved ones for two weeks at a time. **Missing out on special moments or not being able to be there when your family needs you can take its toll.** That's why it's so important our workplace is supportive, and colleagues are willing to check in and be there for one another.

Within the first year of joining Hitachi Rail, I lost someone close to me from suicide. After completing Mental Health First Aid training, I knew that this was a skillset required across the business, so I made it my mission. By the end of 2023, we had trained sixty people and had twenty-five Advisors all over Australia. We also established a Health and Wellbeing Committee which staff volunteered to sit on. Two great initiatives to come from the Committee were; quiet rooms in every office for staff to chill out, make private calls or just have some unquestioned space, and Morning Connections which were our regular check ins where staff were asked how they are feeling and could put a thumbs up or down in response. The wellbeing team followed up with a conversation.

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During the ten years that I was with Hitachi, there was a huge shift in staff comfort and confidence when it came to checking in and talking about mental wellbeing. I experienced this firsthand in my last year with them. My Mother passed away, so I spent some time in the UK with family. Shortly after I returned to work it suddenly hit me that I didn't have any parents left. It's a heartbreaking realisation. Nearly a dozen people noticed I wasn't myself and checked in with me. **I was blown away but so grateful that they took the time to ask, rather than waiting for me to outwardly say I wasn't OK.**

I believe the training, initiatives and genuine organisational support has played a major role in the positive change we are seeing. That said, you can't just appoint advisor roles or deliver one off training to tick a box – it needs to be embedded in the business and dialect – it's an ongoing commitment to your people.

Rail R U OK? Day is an opportunity to reinforce that everyone goes through ups and downs in life, and you don't need to be a professional to check in, provide a listening ear and direct a colleague to more support.

> **There's an amazing ripple effect that happens when you embrace the simple steps of R U OK? as a business. One by one people feel more comfortable checking in with others, and eventually it becomes the norm. Because of that, employees who are struggling seek help earlier and lives are transformed, and sometimes saved.**

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