



Courtesy Mad Panda Photography

David South performing My Bro: the song arose from a Covid-forced separation.

SONG OF SUPPORT

David South took out the Mental Health Champion category at the 2023 Awards, in part due to a song he wrote and recorded to help spread the mental health message. **HEATHER WRIGHT** finds out more.

“NOT EVERY COMPANY WOULD SUPPORT THAT SORT OF THING. THEY’D THINK **IT WAS A BIT FLUFFY, BUT NAYLOR’S REALLY DO SUPPORT CULTURE.**”

*If you’re holding back the tears, let go,
If there’s something that you need, say so,
My Bro, I’ve got you.*

The chorus of David South’s song, My Bro, is a call to arms for his construction industry colleagues – and for the sector itself as it grapples with high suicide rates – to share how they feel and ask for help when it’s needed.

South, Naylor Love site manager at the Sylvia Park BTR project, won the Mental Health Champion category at the 2023 NZ Workplace Health & Safety Awards for his work at the commercial construction company, including implementing regular lunch talks with workers about health, safety and wellbeing, leading the project to get accredited through Mates in Construction, and writing and recording a song about mental health, along with a short film.

That song, gifted to Mates in Construction and used as the theme tune for their My Bro podcast and available on platforms (including Spotify and Apple Music) as My Bro by Davey Jo South, has made an impact throughout the Naylor Love business, helping people speak out on mental health.

“Looking back, it’s almost like I wrote it to myself,” South says of My Bro. Like many, he struggled during lockdown, with his wife and daughter away for months in the UK looking after his sick father, while he remained in New Zealand working and looking after his boys.

“I was trying to put on a brave face, but that really did give me quite a bit of mental distress and because I always write songs on whatever is at the forefront of my mind, I wrote this song.”

South saw potential for the song

and took it to Naylor Love, who provided funding for studio time to record it – the band members are all involved in the construction sector – along with some video footage. *The My Bro: The Journey* video includes impromptu interviews with colleagues and senior managers about suicide and mental health.

“Not every company would support that sort of thing. They’d think it was a bit fluffy, but Naylor’s really do support culture.”

GIVING VOICE TO WORKERS

South’s passion for health and safety, in particular mental health, was already on display at Naylor Love. He had instigated fortnightly ‘The Voice’ meetings where workers, rather than supervisors, at the Sylvia Park BTR project can talk openly about health, safety and wellbeing. The round table lunch chat has seen engagement in health and safety on the project pick up dramatically.

South says regular weekly health and safety meetings, attended by supervisors of all the subcontractors on-site, had been losing value and becoming stale.

“I decided to bring in The Voice meeting to give the guys on site a voice and an opportunity to come to the site safety meetings and talk about real issues, rather than it just being the same old reports,” South says.

Each company sends a different person each time, ensuring everyone’s voices are heard and the message and encouragement to look out for each other and watch for changes in colleagues – a key component of the meetings – spreads far and wide.

“If there is a change, there might be a reason, so just tap them on the shoulder and ask them if they’re ok.”

The Voice meetings, which are now being rolled out nationally, have provided deeper insight into worker

health and safety issues on projects, including on-site wellbeing – and extend beyond health and safety in the traditional sense.

“We might have the lads coming in saying the toilets aren’t up to standard because there are more guys on site and it’s getting more use.

“It’s little things like that – if you’re struggling and go to the toilets and they’re not up to standard, it’s not the nicest environment. We’re trying to give people the best environment they can work in.”

CHANGING INDUSTRY CULTURE

The effort to create a more open environment, where it’s ok to say you’re not ok, has also seen Naylor Love become accredited with Mates in Construction.

South is one of six Mates-trained ‘Connectors’ – easily identifiable on site thanks to stickers on their hard hats – who colleagues can tap on the shoulder if they need assistance.

“I’ve had quite a few people reach out to me and I’ve put them in touch with the right people,” says South. “I’m not a counsellor, but I have a good set of ears and I’ve managed to talk it through and put them in contact with professionals, but also then just checked up on them – a little call every couple of days to see how they’re tracking.”

While the stigma of mental health remains a challenge, and the attitude of ‘toughen up, have a concrete pill’ runs through the industry, South says change is coming.

“It’s a challenge to show a softer side, but also get the support in addressing those issues on site and making it a bit more acceptable.

“When someone feels confident enough to reach out and you manage to help them, that’s a massive result. The world is changing. The industry is changing. And we are trying to change it.” ■