

# You're Not Alone

*A mental health and suicide prevention blog for the construction industry*



## Help is on the Way

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*by Bob Swanson*

With untreated or undertreated mental illnesses, opioid and suicide deaths increasing, it's easy to become disheartened. Don't be. This is a big problem in our industry, but we can make progress towards change. Change can be accomplished when we: 1.) Acknowledge that opioid and suicide deaths are a problem for our industry. 2.) Become better informed on this problem. 3.) Collectively address the problem as an industry. Our industry has slowly acknowledging there is a problem (the construction industry has the highest rate of suicide and the most suicide deaths of any industry.) Our next step is to become better informed.

To that end, two unique programs have recently been initiated in the finishing industry. The first is [www.iupathelpinghand.com](http://www.iupathelpinghand.com), an educational and outreach website created by the IUPAT. The second initiative is a Train the Trainer Class developed by the FTI titled *Changing the Culture of Construction*. This is a two-day course being conducted at the FTI's training center in Hanover, Maryland. This initiative was the result of a work group consisting of FCA contractors and IUPAT members. The initial class was conducted in November 2018, and the most recent class was conducted this month. There have been a total of 35 attendees, including apprenticeship instructors, local training directors and local IUPAT representatives from 13 District Councils throughout the United States.

The class is being conducted by representatives of a well-established Allied Trades Assistance Program and myself. Attendees receive an overview of numerous topics, including a review of: how an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) works, the disease of alcoholism, substance use disorder and common drugs used, and treatment options. Attendees also receive an overview on mental illness and suicide prevention. After completing the course, attendees return to their local areas equipped to conduct training in their local training centers. Attendees are also able to better identify and reach out to an apprentice or union member who might need individual support.

The next class is scheduled for Sept. 24 and 25. To date, the following District Councils have had representatives attend this course: DC 4, DC 5, DC 16, DC 21, DC 35, DC 36, DC 39, DC 51, DC 58, DC 77, DC 78 and DC 82.

Please encourage a representative to attend if your area has not previously had an attendee. Contractors and their employees are welcome, reach out to your local BM/ST to learn more. Also, encourage training to be initiated at your local level. This is an industry issue and not solely the responsibility of either labor or management.



### About the Author - Bob Swanson

Bob Swanson is the past president of Swanson & Youngdale and the first Chairman of FCA International. He tragically lost his son Michael to suicide on March 13, 2009 at the age of 33. Bob now focuses his efforts on creating awareness of the impact of mental health and suicide in the construction industry.