



Widows make mark

There was music, fabulous food, special guests and a sense of excitement that the Howard days were over. But in the end, the 2008 Construction Industry Dinner belonged to those who could not be there – the dead.

NSW State Secretary Andrew Ferguson brought that message home when he told the story of the first and latest deaths for 2008.

There was Gerry Murphy, who fell and died after being left alone on a Blue Mountains site in January, whose body was found more than 24 hours' later by a son wondering why his dad had not come home.

Then in April, painter Ivan Vega fell from his ladder and died in the arms of the son who worked alongside him.

For the more than 170 representatives at the dinner of families of workers who have been killed these were stories they knew

well. But, as Ferguson said, the night was not about sympathy, but action.

Federal Labor Minister Penny Wong was on hand to launch The Workplace Tragedy Family Support Group.

The brainchild of widow Cheryl Romer, Wong said it was important "for us to remember that behind every statistic lies myriad stories of those left behind".

"It's difficult to make sense of that loss and live with the belief that it could have been avoided [through better safety]," she said. "For the trade union and its members OH&S is not an abstract concept. It's part of their everyday lives."

Romer quietened the audience as she recounted the events of October 24, 1988, the day her husband Bob, then aged 43 and a father of two young children, was crushed at work.

Almost 20 years' later at the unveiling

of the CFMEU's Wall of Remembrance at its Lidcombe headquarters, she had been angered to hear the story of another widow Andrea Veigas.

"I realised after 20 years nothing had changed," she said and the idea of the national support group for people who lose a family member at work was born.

With her now two grown children watching, Romer told the dinner the group's first mission was to produce a kit for families of those killed to outline how to deal with the bureaucracy that follows a workplace death.

But more importantly she said the group would be a visible force campaigning for improved safety at work.

Its first target was enhanced right of entry to work sites by union officials.

"Union access to sites is a key part of ensuring other dads come home each night," she said.

Group hits ground running

The Workplace Tragedy Family Support Group aims include:

1. To develop a kit for families of workplace tragedy victims, to advise them on how to proceed through the legal and industrial minefields; a kit for workers who have witnessed such a tragedy; and a kit for employers to ensure uniform highest benchmark policies and procedures are carried out in the event of a major accident on site.
2. To assist families of those who have also been badly injured at work.
3. To increase workplace and public awareness about the extent and consequences of workplace accidents.
4. To campaign with other community groups, including trade unions, for improved workplace OH&S and workplace laws:
 - (a) Greater government monitoring of OH&S practices, particularly where the government is the client;

(b) Transparency in respect to workplace accidents, so that information about the death and circumstances surrounding it is provided to families by Workcover NSW;

(c) Protection from unfair dismissal;

(d) Enhanced right of entry laws for union officials investigating workplace safety; and

(e) Greater compensation to the victims of workplace accidents and their families.

The CFMEU has been the group's inspiration and motivating force, and it is through its input that it has been able to get up and running effectively.

There is now a website: www.workplace-tragedy.com, a committee to develop our aims, a bank account, and the group is in the process of organising speaker training for some family members so that they can attend job sites, employer and government meetings and other occasions to talk about the aftermath of workplace deaths.

The WTSG would like to thank those delegates and activists, as organised by the CFMEU, for their job-site meetings covering 2700 workers and particularly to those who provided the following donations to our new group.

Multiplex Site Erskine & Sussex Sts	\$ 965
Bruce Scott Abigroup	\$ 800
Denis McNamara Watpac	\$ 650
Lucas Stewart George St	\$ 635
Boss Civil Sydney Uni	\$ 500
Buildcorp Pyrmont	\$ 322.10
A W Edwards Darlinghurst	\$ 322
Laing O'Rourke Macquarie Park	\$ 309.60
Multiplex Pyrmont	\$ 306
Shell Rosehill	\$ 272
Whitehorse Fairfield	\$ 175.70
Baseline Hurstville	\$ 157.60
Baulderstone Wollongong	\$ 112.95
Hansen Yuncken Port Macquarie	\$ 80