

FIT FOR WORK

Mental and physical health are extra important when you're a tradie. Here's how one electrician looks after his team with an onsite gym.

BY ANGELA TUFVESSON



ANDY FISHER

When Andy Fisher needed a fresh space for his business, Melbourne-based AIF Electrical Services, the fitness fanatic stumbled on an ideal set-up: a former gym already kitted out with floor mats. He added the equipment – including dumbbells, a Smith machine for weight training and a boxing bag for cardio – and the space now doubles as a training zone where his team of four enjoys a weekly workout.

Andy says regular training helps his sparkies stay physically and mentally strong. They perform better on the job, and they're better able to manage working in cramped spaces and hazards like live wires.

"Tradies are usually great at looking after the job, but terrible at looking after themselves. I want the workspace itself to send a different message – that their bodies and health matter," Andy explains.

STAYING ACTIVE OFF THE JOBSITE

Just two years after starting his business, Andy had hip surgery and was unable to work. He got into fitness as part of his rehabilitation.

"I fell in love with being able to move the body and how it can move in different positions," he says.

At the same time, he adds, "I was watching the boys grind through long days in ceilings, and up on

ladders and under houses. I soon realised that there was a different way to operate."

WEEKLY TEAM WORKOUTS

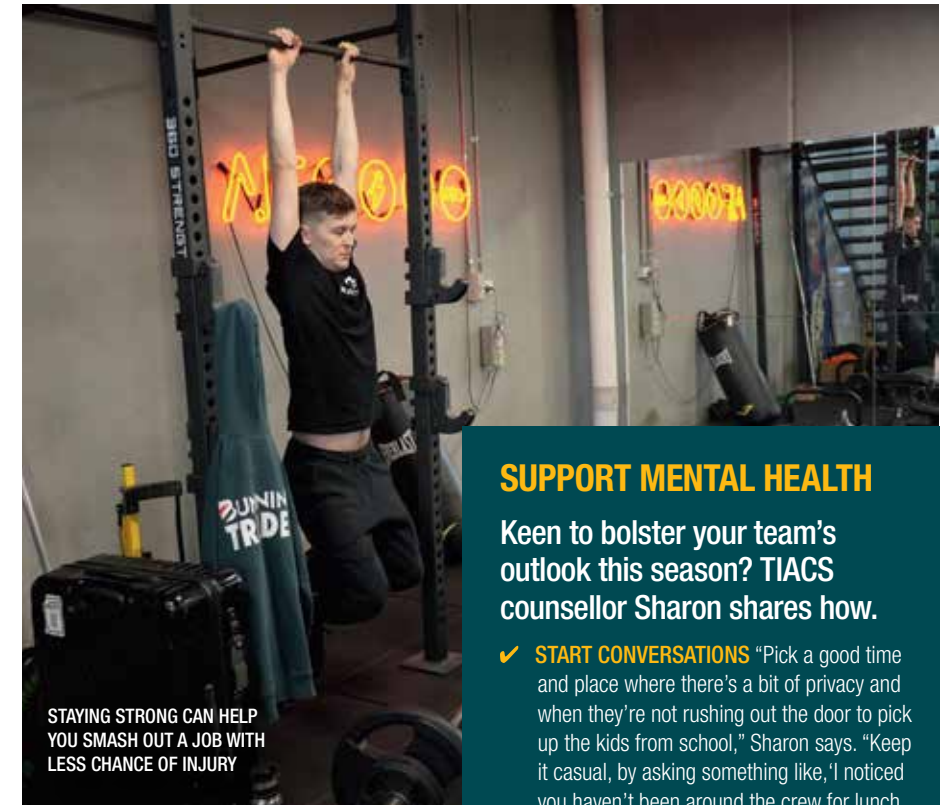
On Fridays, Andy and his team do a training session.

"We use the gym before or after work, depending on how the day's looking," he says.

Once a fortnight, they also hold a structured morning session that includes a mix of strength and circuit training, partner work and boxing.

"Then we go straight into our toolbox meeting with a coffee and bacon and egg roll. It's become a bit of a hub for the business," Andy explains.

THE TEAM THAT WORKS
OUT TOGETHER, ALSO
WORKS WELL TOGETHER



STAYING STRONG CAN HELP
YOU SMASH OUT A JOB WITH
LESS CHANCE OF INJURY

SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

Keen to bolster your team's outlook this season? TIACS counsellor Sharon shares how.

- ✓ **START CONVERSATIONS** "Pick a good time and place where there's a bit of privacy and when they're not rushing out the door to pick up the kids from school," Sharon says. "Keep it casual, by asking something like, 'I noticed you haven't been around the crew for lunch this week, is everything okay?'"
- ✓ **JUST LISTEN** "It's so important to listen to what people have to say instead of trying to solve the problem. Most of us are not good listeners because we want the other person to be okay and we want to feel okay ourselves, as listening to someone's troubles can be difficult."
- ✓ **USE TOOLBOX CHATS** "Talk about mental health with your team and cover what to do if you feel depressed or stressed, are having relationship issues or feeling demotivated. Five minutes is enough," Sharon says.
- ✓ **BUILD CONNECTION** "Host activities that build connection and belonging, like casual shared lunches, family Christmas picnics or quarterly karaoke, if that's your jam."



↑ **SCAN HERE** TIACS counselling service is available Monday to Friday 8am to 10pm (AEST) on **0488 846 988**. After support, but not sure what to say? Simply text 'Hi' and the TIACS team will take it from there.

IMPROVING MENTAL BENEFITS

Regular physical exercise is associated with better mental health and Andy says it shows in his team's focus and morale.

"The gym gives the team a healthy outlet for stress and a way to empty the tank that doesn't involve alcohol or self-destructive habits."

Plus, he says, working out together builds camaraderie and trust among them all.

"When you've seen a bloke push through a hard gym session, you feel confidence working beside him on a live board or in a tight space, or helping him hold something while he fits it off up high while you're on a ladder," Andy says.

BUILDING STRONGER SPARKIES

Being an electrician is hard on the body and there's a lot at stake if things go wrong. Andy says regular training builds greater mobility in the shoulders and hips, a stronger back and better overall fitness.

"For sparkies, it makes a big difference to grip strength, balance and being able to work overhead without strain," he says. "The gym gives us a place to develop that deliberately."

The business benefits of this are also significant. "Fitter, stronger sparkies move better onsite. They have more stamina and they make fewer mistakes under pressure," Andy explains.

KEEPING WELL IN WINTER

With darker mornings and colder days, it can be hard to get out of bed and stay motivated during winter – not to mention the extra challenge of colds and flu. Andy says regular workouts help his team stay well throughout the cooler months.

"Our Friday sessions in winter are a game-changer. Our team can roll straight into a warm, bright space, get the blood moving and hit the day already switched on," he says. "The sessions set the tone for the whole day and stop that sluggish, half-asleep feeling that can creep in when it's cold and grey outside." 🌍