



Welcome to the September 2023 edition of LGSC Ezine...

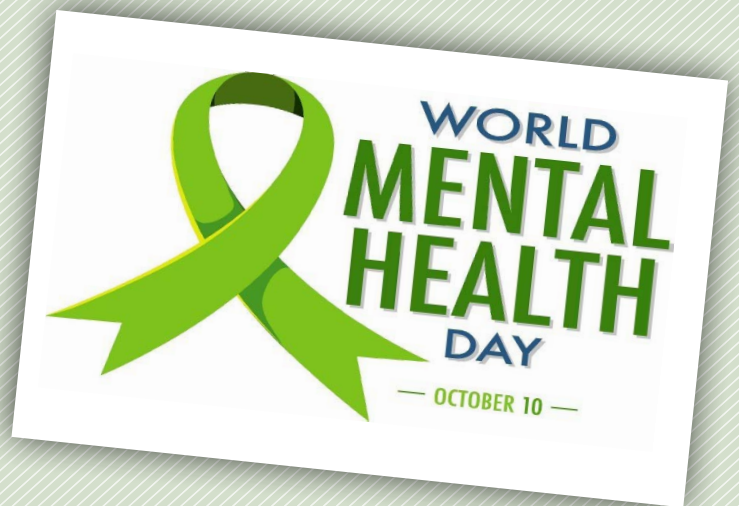
The focus on this Ezine is on Mental Health to mark World Mental Health Day on 10 October.

The overall objective of World Mental Health Day is to raise awareness of mental health issues and to mobilise efforts in support of mental health.

This Ezine contains the following articles:

- *How to Support Mental Health at Work*
- *Championing Mental Health in Ards and North Down Borough Council*
- *Ongoing Mental Health Awareness in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council*
- *Mental Health Charter*

Bumper Graham,
Chairman



Inside...



How to Support Mental Health at Work...

Everyone has 'mental health', just as we all have 'physical health'. And like our physical health, there are times when our mental health is better than others.

Good mental health means being generally able to think, feel and react in the ways that you need and want in your life. It strongly affects our daily lives, including work, study, getting on with colleagues and looking after ourselves and others. When our mental health is good, we feel good inside, when our mental health is not so good, life feels more of a struggle. We all know prevention is better than cure and we all go through tough times, and colleagues help us through them.

How do I know if someone has a mental health problem?

Sometimes it will seem obvious when someone is going through a hard time, but there is no simple way of knowing if they have a mental health problem. Sometimes you don't need to know.

Talking to someone is often the first step when you know they are having a hard time. This way, you can find out what is troubling them and what you can do to help.

How should you respond if someone is suicidal?

If someone tells you they are feeling suicidal or can't go on, it is very important to encourage them to get help. You or they should contact a GP, go to A&E or contact the nearest crisis resolution team i.e. Samaritans. These are teams of mental health care professionals who work with people in severe distress.

Our top tips for Line Managers on Building Relations with your Employees at Work

We know that work that is challenging, rewarding and validating is one of the most valuable ways to improve our mental health. We also know that work-related stress, poor line management, badly managed change, bullying and discrimination quickly take a toll on employees mental health.

Work gives us a purpose, a role, financial means and status. It also gives us social relationships, and social contact may be as important a mediator of health outcomes as obesity or smoking. Luckily, the principles of good management and good business practice are, by and large, principles which contribute to the development of a mental health workplace. So how do the five top tips for healthy relationships apply to working life, and in particular to the line management relationship?



Top tips

- **Make time in your diary for staff to come to you or you to go to them - and chat.** You'll be able to spot any problems earlier.
- **If you have an open-door policy,** people who have concerns will feel more able to engage and sort problems.
- **Have regular, brief staff meetings with clear agendas.** Everybody likes to feel the pulse of the organisation and to feel connected to the work others are doing and the successes and challenges the team faces.
- **Make time for networking.** Keep a coffee slot free each week and use it to meet business contacts you haven't seen for a while, to mentor others or be mentored.
- **Imagine supervision and appraisal processes not as a chore, but as a gift.** Authentic feedback is one of the best things you can give a member of staff. Set times in advance and never, ever deprioritise this in favour of another meeting.
- **Practice self-care.** Give time to yourself and time to your friends and family, no matter how committed to work you are.

Further Advice and Guidance

[Mental Health Foundation in Northern Ireland](#) / [Good mental health for all](#)

[How to support mental health at work](#) / [Mental Health Foundation](#)

Did you know?

Northern Ireland in numbers

£3.4 billion

Mental health problems currently cost the Northern Ireland economy £3.4 billion each year.

One in five

One in five adults in Northern Ireland has experienced a mental health problem.



Championing Mental Health in Ards and North Down...

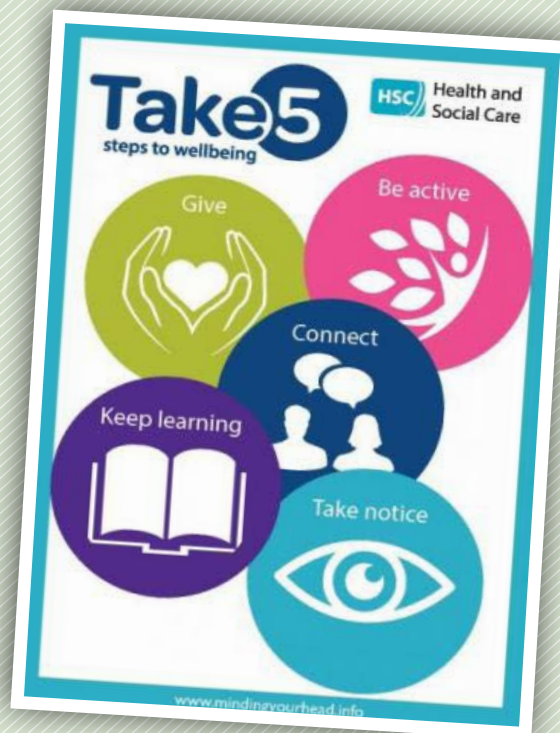
“Your mental health is everything – prioritize it. Make the time like your life depends on it, because it does” Mel Robbins

The statistics for mental health illness in Northern Ireland make grim reading. The latest mental health strategy¹ highlights that we have the highest prevalence of mental health problems in the UK. It is estimated that *one in five of the population* at any one time have a mental health need. Absenteeism for anxiety, stress and depression costs the local economy over £720 million per year, which equates to a lost productivity costs of between £480 to £720 per employee per day².

As a Council, we have an outward and inward facing role when it comes to tackling mental health, and as the Environmental Health Manager (Health and Wellbeing), I am involved in both. In my work, I have witnessed firsthand the impact socio-economic and environmental factors have on health and mental health in particular. In my private life, I have, like so many others, contended with the direct or indirect impact of anxiety and depression, bereavement, addiction, serious illness and suicide. I have seen how little real understanding there is about mental ill health; the lack of support available; and most concerningly, how often there is a lack of compassion for those with significant mental ill health issues as compared to those with a serious physical illness.

I lead an Employee Health and Wellbeing (EH&W) Group in Ards and North Down Borough Council, which is attended by representatives of as many service areas as we can get our hands on! The Group devises an annual action plan of events and activities that are based on the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing model – Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give. We encourage staff to look after their own mental health and provide them with opportunities and tools to do so. We try to highlight the relevant ‘step’ applicable to each of our activities and remind staff of the importance of preventative/early detection measures - facilitating health checks, mammograms, flu injections, etc. We try to emphasise the importance of taking care of mental health too – following the Take 5 steps and being kind are probably the most important life lessons to be followed.

Undoubtedly the provision of the StayWell website through the Local Government Staff Commission has been a big asset, making it easier to advertise



and book our many EH&W activities. It also provides numerous articles and signposting to trustworthy, reputable support services. There are over 1,500 different search results for Mental Health, all available at the touch of a button, including one to our own corporate statement on Mental Health and a list of our qualified Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA).

In 2019 Ards and North Down Borough Council signed up to the Equality Commission’s Mental Health Charter. We wanted this to have practical application so, working with colleagues in Human Resources and Equality, we developed an action plan based on each commitment within the Charter. Our Elected Members fully supported this work and appointed two Mental Health Champion Councillors to advocate for these commitments and for better mental health awareness and support in the community.

A key action is to increase our own staff awareness and support and so we offer various opportunities to undertake SafeTalk training, online awareness training and Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) training.

A MHFA is very much like an ordinary first aider – they deal with the individual crisis until the professional support is in place. MHFAs are trained to identify, understand and help someone who may be experiencing a mental health issue. They are not therapists, but they can listen, reassure and signpost people to appropriate resources and services.

Championing Mental Health in Ards and North Down... *continued*



As a MHFA I am available to anyone in my workplace. I have received numerous direct phone calls and meeting requests, and even contacts from concerned staff members asking me to reach out to a colleague that they are concerned about. All discussions are completely confidential. Most of my conversations have thankfully been only of moderate concern – the person has reached out and has been open to signposting to support services. We are strong advocates of the Here2Help App, which provides instant easy access to a raft of information covering everything from loneliness to addiction, money worries to stress. I actively encourage everyone to download it from the App Store or Google Play. I also signpost colleagues to Westfield Health, our Council healthcare provider, who can offer free counselling should it be needed.

I have however had conversations where colleagues have indicated that they had thoughts of suicide. This is very difficult and emotionally challenging at the time and afterwards. My training enabled me to probe and recognise there was no immediate danger and with their permission I referred them on to support services. With the right professional support, they are still in work and now thankfully doing well.

As a Mental Health Champion my role is more about advocacy and identifying, by talking to individual staff, where the Council as an organisation could help them by being more supportive in terms of their mental health and wellbeing. No organisation is getting everything right and we are always trying to learn more and to feed the insights into our action plans.

I also liaise with our Economic Development team to support local businesses to support their staff. We run a Mind, Body Business project with funding from the Public Health Agency and share many of our internal initiatives with the businesses that have signed up. They get a health and wellbeing box containing games, 'Take 5' leaflets, Here2Help App information and lots of other useful resources to develop their own health and wellbeing programmes. We have provided talks and training, including MHFA, and most recently offered a small grants scheme to allow flexibility in what Take 5 activity is most desired by the business.

Working with Community Planning provides an opportunity to continue the mental health advocacy role into the community. The impact of poor mental health is associated with many of our workstreams – obesity, age friendly, poverty etc. We have Chatty Benches in our parks, signs with the Here2Help App QR code, business cards of support organisations (Samaritans, Lifeline, Domestic Violence, etc) provided in the bathrooms of Council buildings, etc. Wherever possible, we make links to provide help and support.

Mental Health is just as important as physical health, yet we are all guilty of not putting enough effort in to look after our own health and wellbeing. Put simply, my role is to firstly try and encourage people to take steps to look after their mental health and provide them with tools and opportunities to do so; and secondly, to help them learn to recognise when they are struggling, provide a listening ear and signpost them to support services. The more success there is with the first part of my role, then hopefully there will be less demand on the second.

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Environmental Health Manager (Health & Wellbeing) Ards and North Down Borough Council**

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Council.

¹ *MHS Early Intervention and Prevention Action Plan Dec 2022 (002).docx (live.com)*

² *Mental Health Statistics | Hope4Life (hope4lifeni.org.uk)*



Ongoing Mental Health Awareness in Mid and East Antrim Borough Council...

Mid and East Antrim's most valuable asset is its 800-strong team – and ensuring their positive mental health and wellbeing is a priority for the organisation.

The Council has created, developed and delivered a suite of resources and support channels to promote and support mental health and wellbeing among staff all year round. For example, staff are signposted to readily available help and support via the organisation's dedicated Mental Health Champions, as well as critical Counselling services for those in need.



The theme within the organisation this year is the importance of taking time out for some 'Me Time' and 'Self-Care'. A 'Be Kind to your Mind' initiative took place during this year's Mental Health Awareness week (starting 15 May) and the focus was on identifying and addressing anxiety, and arming colleagues with the coping skills required to mitigate the impact of mental health challenges. During the week, staff in MEA were encouraged to take "time out" and get involved in a range of activities.

These included:



Getting outdoors and connecting with nature, exploring some of the walking trails or beaches on their doorstep, and meeting up with family and friends. They were also encouraged to enjoy lunch breaks outside with colleagues. go for a walk or join the Council's cycle to work scheme or leisure centres.

Learning something new, either through one of Council's online eLearning modules or trying something different, such as Mid and East Antrim's self-care workshop.



Participating in the programme of events facilitated by Council during Mental Health Awareness Week. Staff were offered a guide on how to cope with feelings of anxiety, including signposting information and a webinar on Money Worries and the Workplace was also offered to staff, along with a supporting Financial Wellbeing guide.

Breathing techniques were taught and a 30-day Challenge entitled 'Time to Unwind' included tools such as the creation of a self-care jar so that staff could embark on and continue their self-care journey.



Staff were invited to come along to a dedicated self-care workshop on mental health and wellbeing. The interactive workshop invited staff to explore their unique story and discover how many of the experiences and challenges faced are shared by colleagues. This session

taught those taking part how to look at how we self-care, not only for our body but for our mind, our will and our emotions.

Finding their 'happy place'. A competition was held for staff to submit photos of their 'happy place' with a winner picked at random. The 'happy place' for our winner shows the connection to nature and the great outdoors, reinforcing messaging promoted as part of the wider programme of events and activities.



Keep on Talking MEA

During the year, Council also ran a number of staff chatty cafes as a great way to catch up and bring people together. The chatty cafes took place across civic buildings and operational depots, encouraging staff to take time out and meet up for a coffee and tray bake.

Next steps

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council will be acknowledging World Suicide Prevention day on 10 September and World Mental Health day on 10 October with information and interactive sessions taking place for mental health champions and staff throughout the organisation.



Mental Health Charter...



The Equality Commission (NI) launched a Mental Health Charter for employers and service providers. The Charter, jointly produced by the Equality Commission, Action Mental Health, Disability Action, Mindwise, Mental Health Foundation and Niamh, provides a framework for working towards mentally health workplace.

The Mental Health Charter works towards putting 5 Charter Commitments in place. The Mental Health Charter is not a set of quality standards or an accreditation but is a voluntary commitment to developing best practice in the workplace.

Charter Commitments

1	Create an open and inclusive workplace culture which displays respect for those with mental ill health
2	To promote equality of opportunity and challenge discrimination in the workplace
3	To promote equality of opportunity in recruitment and selection for those with mental ill health
4	To identify and provide sources of information and support regarding mental ill health
5	To adopt Every Customer Counts recommendations – working towards taking positive steps to make services accessible to people with mental ill health

Belfast City Council is signed up to the Mental Health Charter and is committed to achieving the 5 Charter Commitments by providing a programme of support:

Through its Health and Wellbeing Strategy it is committed to providing the following support:

- *Mental Health First Aid training*
- *Positive Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing training*
- *Stress Management for Managers training*
- *An employee counselling service and*
- *Ongoing awareness raising and signposting to further support on mental health issues and*

guidance through internal comms and the Staywell portal.

The Council also aims to support people who face barriers to employment, for example, people with long term mental health issues, through its extensive employability outreach programme.

For further information on the Mental Health Charter, please click link below:

[ECNI - Mental Health Charter \(equalityni.org\)](http://equalityni.org)



Up and Coming Webinars...



Managers Promoting Mental Health on 9 October and 14 November 2023

The webinar will cover:

- *An understanding of the mental health continuum*
- *Recognise signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression*
- *Managing during a global health crisis*
- *How to support your staff who are experiencing mental health issues*
- *Flourishing Mental Health tips*
- *Signposting for support and self-care*



Managing Work-Related Stress – The Line Managers Approach on 18 October 2023

The webinar will cover:

- *The Positive Health Triangle*
- *Stress vs pressure*
- *Signs and symptoms of work-related stress*
- *An Introduction to the Management Standards*
- *The individual risk assessment approach*
- *Self-care*



Fatigue and Burnout – 15 November 2023

The webinar will detail:

- *Understanding Legal/Moral/Financial duties*
- *What is Fatigue?*
- *Why manage Fatigue?*
- *How to manage Fatigue*
- *What is Burnout?*
- *Elements and effective management of Burnout*
- *Impact on employer/employee*
- *Supporting Worker Well-being*

To register for these webinars, please contact your Health and Wellbeing officer.

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