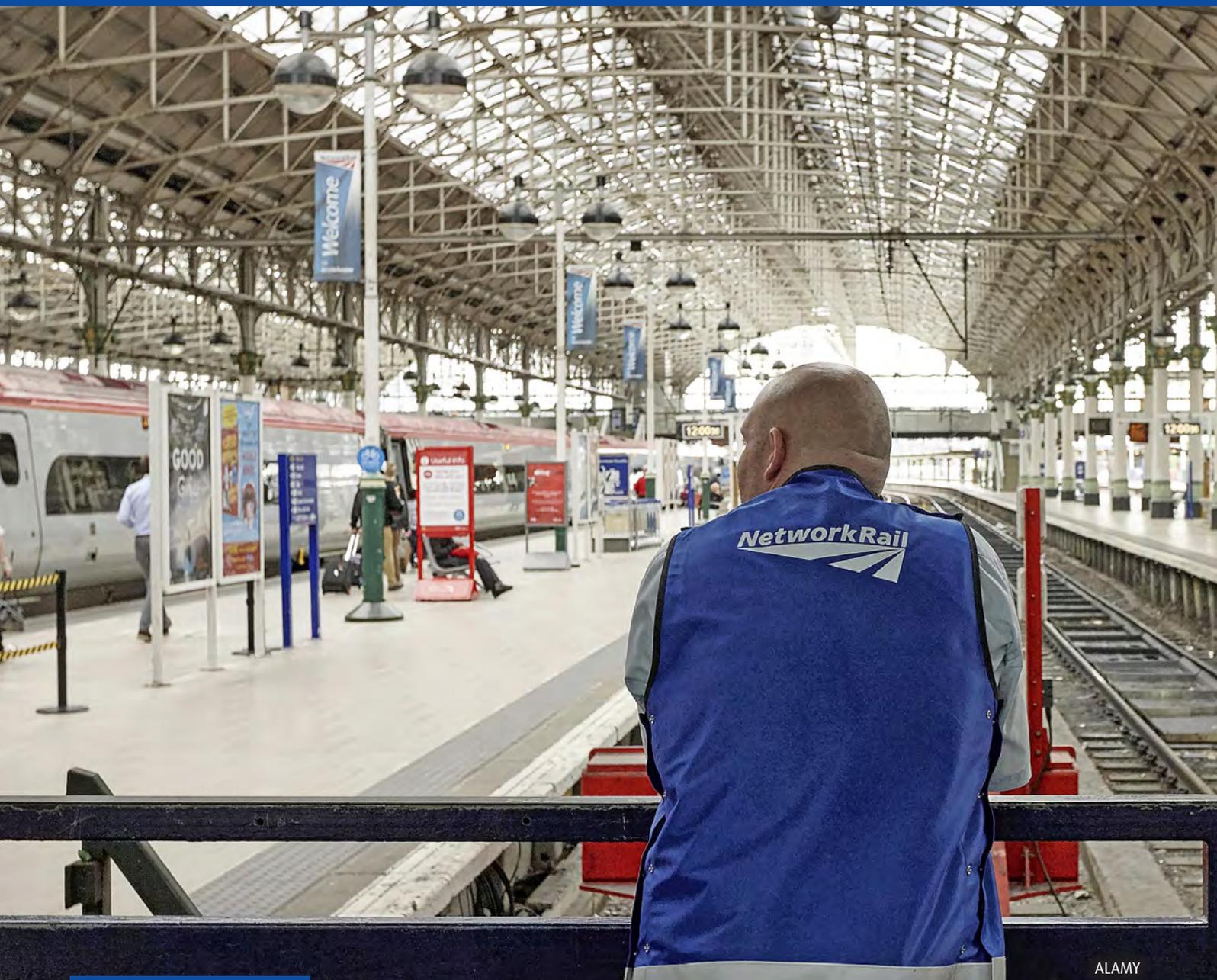


SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

mental health and the railway



ALAMY

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- Rail Minister's **EXCLUSIVE** foreword
- Why caring for staff is more vital than ever
- How you can help others on the railway
- Best practice from inside the industry

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Welcome

I am privileged to have been asked to write the first words of this special edition. I'd like to use them to ask a question: how are you feeling today?

It's a simple question, but in the fast-paced and frenetic world of our railways, there has never been a more important time to talk and listen - openly and honestly - about how we feel.

The facts are stark. In the rail industry, the rate of suicide in the workforce is 1.6 times higher than the UK average, and 60% of workers have experienced mental health issues.

This industry, in all its forms, is a fundamental part of UK life. Every single day, our country depends upon the people who work to keep our railways moving, and I know that this industry is defined by the dedication, professionalism and passion of its people.

But those incredible high standards and some of the unique challenges we face - long hours, shift-working, workplace violence, and the risk of exposure to traumatic incidents such as suicides - can have a real impact on our mental health.

As Rail Minister, I am all too aware of the huge sacrifices that frontline workers are making during this particularly worrying and uncertain time. I know that many of you are facing immensely difficult personal circumstances and have had your working lives changed beyond recognition.

That's why it is crucial that everyone in the industry - from the cleaners and signallers to the engineers, drivers and station staff - gets the right support for their own mental health now and in the future.

And I have never been more confident



that, as an industry, we are working together to set the standard for having those vital conversations.

This industry has been driving real change to improve the quality of wellbeing support for anyone who works in it. And I have heard so many truly inspiring stories of how the industry has also been helping others outside of it who are affected by mental health issues.

A few months ago, I heard about Kelly Holyoake, a train dispatcher at a south London station who saved the life of a man who was about to take his own life at the station.

She started up a conversation by simply asking him how he was, and then continued that conversation even after the British Transport Police arrived. Her courage meant she eventually talked him out of it - saving a life through small talk.

That conversation, between two individuals, was just one of thousands like it. Statistics show there were nearly 2,000 life-saving interventions on the railways last year - and that six people were saved for every one that took their life.

It is the kindness and bravery of people such as Kelly, alongside the efforts of the wider rail industry, charities such as Samaritans and CALM, the British Transport Police and emergency services, which helps keep people safe on our rail network.

It is clear that we all share a commitment to transforming the way we perceive and discuss mental health, helping to spark more conversations... and more stories like Kelly's.

There have been some fantastic initiatives to help aid this. I was delighted to support the Samaritans' 'Brew Monday' campaign with the Transport Secretary back in January, in an effort to turn 'Blue Monday' on its head and into something positive by encouraging people to get together.

Samaritans has so far trained more than 20,000 railway employees in prevention techniques. Hundreds of rail industry employees have donated their time to the Million Hours Challenge to support the Samaritans, whose Small Talk Saves Lives campaign has been running successfully since 2017. A new rail suicide prevention website has also recently launched.

I'm proud that the rail industry is upending expectations and transforming the concept of suffering in silence to small talk saving lives.

It is only by talking about these issues more that we can reduce the taboo and increase awareness of mental health issues. Let's all commit ourselves to having that friendly conversation and taking that opportunity to chat, - it might just make all the difference between suicide and being saved. ■

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS
Rail Minister

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VITAL CONNECTIONS

An initiative by HM Chief Inspector of Railways Ian Prosser CBE and former Network Rail Chief Executive Mark Carne CBE to reduce suicide rates and improve wellbeing couldn't have come at a better time, writes PAUL STEPHEN

283 suicides or suspected suicides took place on the rail network in 2019-20, representing approximately 4.4% of the total number in Great Britain. JACK BOSKETT/RAIL.

and organisations that took part.

Using the example of HM Inspector of Railway Karen Barnes, who has volunteered as a Samaritans listener (see pages 58-59), Prosser describes the benefits that the scheme has had on both her and ORR.

"I'm very proud of Karen and it shows what we hope will happen right across the sector as we go into this challenge across the next four years. Not only can we help Samaritans with volunteers like Karen and lots of fundraising, it shows what impact it can have on the organisation from which they came.

"Karen is having an impact at ORR simply by using the skills she's learned at Samaritans. Their training is absolutely second to none and it helps the individual to develop themselves immensely in key areas, which then rubs off on other people to help provide support to others who might be finding life tough going."

He adds: "There will be lots of people with similar skill sets to Karen and this will hopefully persuade others to take what is quite a big step. It will help the industry and other organisations to end the stigma around mental health and change the culture around being much less macho."

According to Prosser, who is himself volunteering with Samaritans as a trustee in his hometown of Cambridge (see panel), the sector has been slow in realising the financial benefits that placing greater emphasis on mental health and taking part in schemes such as the Million Hour Challenge can deliver.

This makes greater efforts to promote wellbeing and to look out for colleagues not just a moral imperative, but a financial one, too.

The cost of inaction was recently outlined in a report published by Deloitte, which estimated that poor mental health costs employers in the UK up to £45 billion per year (see pages 50-51).

Prosser adds: "I think we're gaining some momentum now, and it's important that we keep going with that as we come out of the present crisis. We've started a journey and have started the ball rolling, which I can see in ORR with people like Karen and the behaviours I now see among colleagues.

"But good health management is also good business, and that is so obvious I find it difficult to believe that people didn't put more effort into it many years ago. It's costing our industry hundreds of millions of pounds from poor management in both physical and mental health.

"If organisations can get a strong health management system, then across the sector as a whole we will also get positive staff engagement, because people start to realise you really care. Too often in this sector the frontline has been dislocated from management, and my inspectors see this a lot from staff who rarely see senior management.

"The industry is so dispersed, so it's very important to have that connection. We need people to be



On March 23, Prime Minister Boris Johnson addressed the nation to announce a near-complete lockdown of the UK in order to prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

Although aimed at preserving individuals' physical health, the confinement of people to their homes and the enforcement of strict social distancing measures left many of us struggling to maintain our mental wellbeing.

While some of the social distancing measures have now been gradually eased, isolation from friends and family, the continued threat of COVID-19 and the general upheaval it has caused to our normal daily lives have all had a profound psychological impact.

Meanwhile, financial concerns and the potential or actual loss of livelihoods owing to the pandemic, as well as the recession that is certain to follow, will have compounded widespread feelings of stress, depression and anxiety.

But amid all of its ill-effects, Coronavirus has served as a powerful reminder of the need to take better care of our mental health and that

of others. Social connectedness now seems more important than ever, with people placing greater value than before on face-to-face contact, and increasingly turning to technology to find alternative and innovative ways to communicate.

The pandemic has also created new outlets for people to volunteer and serve their local communities, such as through delivering food and medicines or befriending via telephone those in self-isolation.

A new appreciation has also emerged of our frontline staff and key workers for their continued hard work throughout the outbreak, sometimes at increased personal risk to themselves. This includes the army of rail staff that has helped keep vital supplies of freight and important passenger flows moving while the rest of the country has seemingly ground to a halt.

If we turn the clock back to almost exactly a year before Johnson's announcement, mental health and wellbeing were again being placed at the top of the agenda in the rail industry.

Standing on the mezzanine level in London

King's Cross on March 27 2019, representatives from the Office of Rail and Road, Network Rail and seven other leading organisations had gathered to launch the Million Hour Challenge.

Its premise was simple - to generate a million hours of volunteering for Samaritans during Control Period 6 (April 2019-March 2024) and to raise £2.5 million to support the charity's existing and future activities.

By calling on all 300,000+ people working in the rail industry and its supply chain to take part, it was estimated that each person would have to volunteer just three hours and 20 minutes of their time over the next five years for the Million Hour Challenge to be completed.

The initiative was the brainchild of HM Chief Inspector of Railways Ian Prosser CBE and former NR Chief Executive Mark Carne CBE, both of whom had noticed a fairly low uptake of the five days' volunteering leave that is offered each year to all NR employees.

Samaritans is a cause close to Prosser's heart, given his own experience of dealing

with the tragic suicide of a loved one, but first and foremost the decision to strengthen links with the charity seemed a natural one for an industry that experiences a relatively high number of fatalities.

Not only do more than 4% of all suicides in the UK take place on the railway network, but the rate of suicide within the industry itself is some 1.6 times higher than the national average.

The factors behind this disturbing industry figure are not fully understood, but they are believed to include employees' increased exposure to the stress of traumatic incidents, and the under-representation of women in the workforce (suicide is the single biggest killer of men aged under 45 in the UK).

Such a male-dominated environment is also likely to contribute to the lingering presence of an outdated belief that expressing feelings and demonstrating emotion is a sign of weakness, deterring some men from discussing their problems.

The Million Hour Challenge not only called on companies to encourage staff to volunteer as Samaritans listeners, but to consider bringing to bear their professional expertise in project management, IT and communications, and a host of other areas.

Rail staff could also enter into the spirit of the Million Hour Challenge through other actions, such as participating in fundraising events or simply asking colleagues how they feel.

The Million Hour Challenge was designed to increase the financial and human resources available to Samaritans, in its bid to provide support to those in emotional distress, but also to secure multiple benefits to the individuals



“ Good health management is also good business. ”

**Ian Prosser CBE,
HM Chief Inspector of Railways**

► more engaged if the railway is to meet all of its challenges over the next few years.”

One of those challenges will be how the industry emerges from a pandemic which has caused passenger numbers to plummet to historical lows and basic operating procedures to be rapidly revised to conform with social distancing.

With serious questions now being asked over when (or if) passenger numbers will return to pre-pandemic levels, there are some who fear that financial considerations may threaten to overshadow other industry priorities.

Prosser does not believe that mental health and wellbeing will slip down the agenda, however, adding: “It is my job and the job of others in my team to make sure that people stay focused. As I’ve always said, there will be financial strain, but this is good business, so why wouldn’t you pursue things that are going to help and support your business during these difficult times?”

“We need to face these challenges collectively, so the last thing we need is for this to drop down the agenda. It should be going up the agenda so that we can pull together and get through some of the challenges we face. There are some difficult times ahead, and the more we can support each other the better.”

Also keen to make more progress on mental health and wellbeing is Network Rail’s Programme Manager for Suicide Prevention Ian Stevens MBE.

Alongside Prosser, he was also at the launch of the Million Hour Challenge, as it builds on the long-standing partnership that the rail industry has enjoyed with Samaritans since 2010 (see pages 46–49).

By training more than 20,000 rail staff in identifying vulnerable people and in suicide prevention techniques, the partnership has been credited with potentially saving many thousands of lives over the past decade.

The Small Talk Saves Lives campaign has proved particularly effective, by empowering passengers to also intervene by approaching vulnerable people and disrupting their suicidal thoughts.

Stevens says: “We understand from data released by the Office for National Statistics that suicides in Great Britain increased by 12% in 2018, but only by 7.7% across the rail network. The numbers are still too great, but it does demonstrate that the work our people are doing is proving effective in managing what is a societal issue. They are absolutely playing their part in that, because you have to think of suicide on the rail network as being indicative of what is happening nationally.”

The partnership with Samaritans has recently been renewed for a further five years, so that more rail staff can be trained and to ensure that successful campaigns such as Small Talk Saves Lives can be continued.

The effect of Coronavirus has expedited a number of changes in key messaging,

however, including a slight move in emphasis from suicide prevention towards promoting mental health and wellbeing.

Stevens says that this had always been planned as part of a strategy to ‘move upstream’ from the railway and to increasingly reach out to people in emotional distress long before they get as far as the platform.

He adds: “We have opted to move away from purely talking about suicide prevention while COVID-19 has been ongoing, partly on advice from government because we are in uncharted territory. By stringing together the terms ‘suicide’ and ‘COVID-19’ alongside the means of taking a life [the railway], we are unsure what impact that will have, so we don’t



60% of rail workers have experienced mental health issues, while the rate of suicide within the industry is 1.6 times higher than the national average. ALAMY.

“ We need to face these challenges collectively, so the last thing we need is for this to drop down the agenda.”

Ian Prosser CBE, HM Chief Inspector of Railways

want to increase any risk.

“We have also downplayed Small Talk Saves Lives because it relies on people having a conversation and we need to respect social distancing, although people can obviously still have a conversation with someone in crisis.”

He adds: “Our thinking already was that we might undertake slightly different messaging. We’ve run with the suicide campaign for ten years, and we’ve now done a lot of research which is giving us a greater understanding of why people come to the railway to take their lives. This allows us to start using the concept of dissuasion.”

According to Stevens, the suicide rate has dropped on the network since March 23 from approximately one every 21 hours to one every 48 hours.

The reasons for this are not yet fully understood, but are thought to include a general decline in passenger numbers due to people being confined to their homes, and the improved ability of others to spot suicidal behaviour in those to whom they live in close proximity.

This is further evidence, he feels, for sticking with the new direction of the campaign.

Stevens explains: “There are lots of theories, but we probably can say that the message to stay at home has had a huge impact. We also think it’s easier for those around others who may be in crisis to notice if they are thinking about going out, because obviously the [lockdown] restrictions meant we weren’t supposed to.”

“We also think that less media reporting around those fewer suicide events and operators talking less about disruption may have influenced things, and perhaps communities are supporting each other far better than they used to, or families are addressing those issues before they become further in crisis.”

One sign that the tone and messaging has subtly changed is the use of advertising boards and digital display screens at stations to promote new national campaigns such as Our Frontline, which was recently launched by Samaritans and other mental health charities to provide a round-the-clock one-to-one call and text service to frontline workers.

NR is now looking to engage with more mental health charities in the coming months, as well as a number of advertising agencies, in order to develop ideas for the future.

“Because we have focused on suicide prevention we haven’t necessarily given enough attention to those individuals in a mental health crisis, so we’re looking to work with different charities to gain an insight into what we might be able to achieve.

“For example, last year at Waterloo we engaged with Mental Health UK around how to look out for someone’s mental health, and

we want to do more of that and look at training staff to have more meaningful conversations with those who may be in distress.

“We’ve always had this vision that you move upstream and away from the railway because by the time they get here they may already be thinking about taking their lives on the network.”

Looking beyond the pandemic, Stevens can see that the Million Hour Challenge will have a vital part to play in the industry’s renewed push to prioritise mental health and wellbeing.

He believes that more widespread adoption will come from the industry later this year, once the industry and society as a whole starts to return to pre-pandemic normality.

He hopes that the experience with Coronavirus will provide a tipping point, however, and that the new public spirit and neighbourliness can be captured on a longer-term basis.

If that can be achieved, then the success of the Million Hour Challenge and the wider mental health agenda will look far more assured.

“Coronavirus has taken its toll and we’ve taken a view not to heavily promote the Million Hour Challenge while our people are struggling to manage things such as home tuition, work and worrying about going to the supermarket.

“Obviously there is this groundswell of support within communities at the moment, and we see that in suicide prevention, too. I do wonder if there will be less time for that when we get into a more ‘normal’ state, but allowing people to take part in things such as the Million Hour Challenge will give people the outlet they had during COVID-19.

“If you look at any major event around the world, such as ‘9/11’ or the ‘7/7’ bombings in London, those sorts of messages of hope come from that and we do usually see a decline in suicides. We need to capture and build on that - and long may it continue.” ■

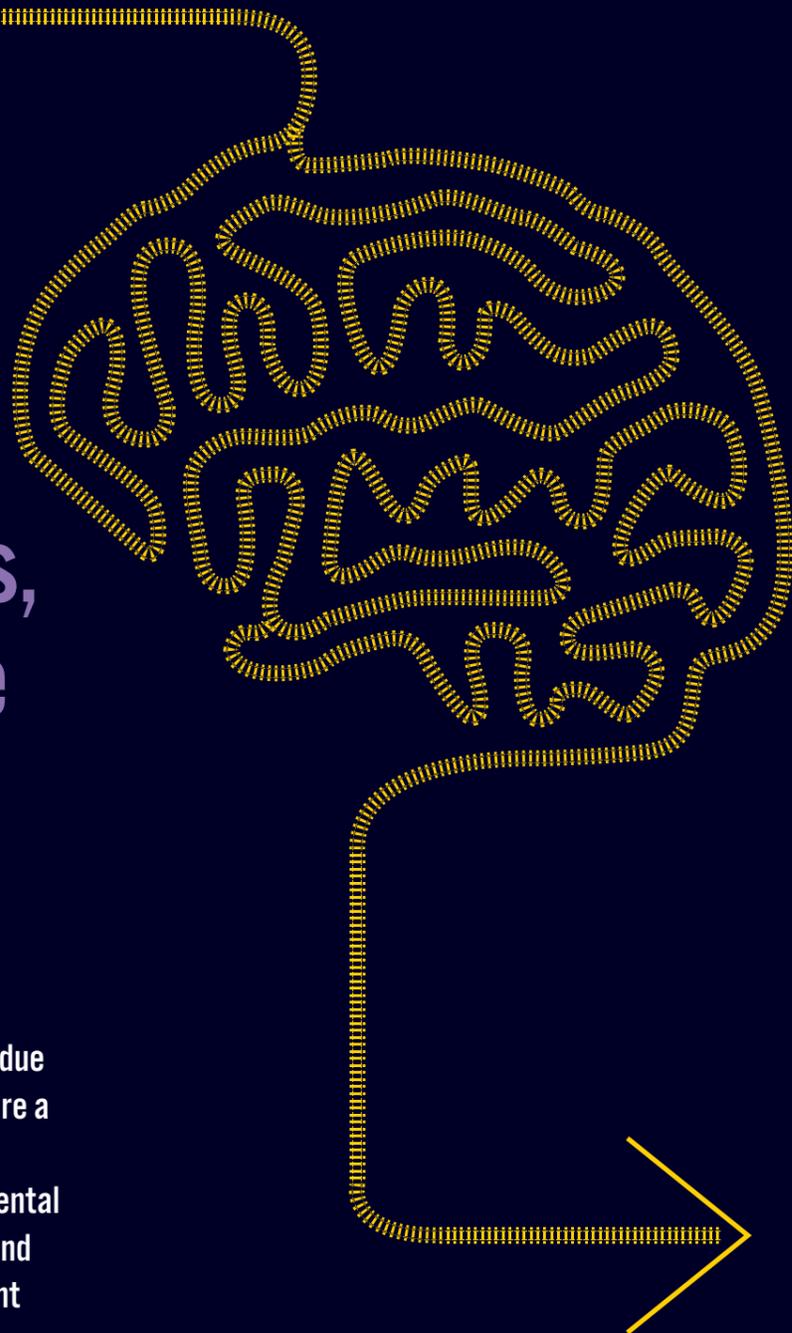
CAMBRIDGE SAMARITANS

On June 23, the Cambridge branch of Samaritans was due to hold its AGM at which Ian Prosser CBE was expected to be elected as a trustee.

However, with the Coronavirus pandemic putting paid to many of the branch’s usual fundraising activities, it has launched a crowdfunding campaign which is being supported by Aviva.

It aims to raise £10,000 by July 15, and you can pledge your support online at www.avivacommunityfund.co.uk/cambridge-samaritans

Will the rail workforce struggle with new challenges, or will we make their wellbeing a priority?



Every year, the railway loses 1.35m* days due to sickness. Stress and mental ill-health are a leading cause of long-term absence. At RSSB we take a holistic approach to mental wellbeing, with a range of tools, training and resources designed to manage and prevent mental ill-health in the rail industry.

*Source: The Costs of Impaired Health across the Rail Network, November 2019

Find out how we're
THINKING FORWARDS
www.rssb.co.uk/thinkingforwards/mentalhealth

Supporting mental wellbeing during the pandemic

The pandemic is changing the way we work and live, as well as making life difficult for the workforce. Things that would ordinarily have been easy to do may have become more challenging.

The railway needs to maintain high levels of safety around its workforce when moving through the different phases of the pandemic. We have created a range of resources to help industry keep the workforce safe and protect mental health and wellbeing.

Employees will be facing challenging situations. This could include public behaviour issues, such as the risk of assault or abuse. People's routines will change frequently and there will be natural concerns about their own health and wellbeing.

RSSB's guidance and toolkits offer many ways to help staff manage a range of issues affecting wellbeing, from fatigue to passenger conflict. Please do take advantage of our resources, which includes:

Mental wellbeing resource hub

MIND has put together information that can support people who may be feeling anxious about Coronavirus, practising social distancing, and self-isolation. Listen to RSSB's work psychologist Joana Faustino's podcast (<https://bit.ly/2BdWK05>) on how rail staff can take care of their mental wellbeing during the pandemic.

In collaboration with the industry Mental Wellbeing Subgroup, RSSB has published a briefing note (<https://tinyurl.com/y8wae99>) on how employers can support the mental wellbeing of staff during the pandemic, with example messages for staff as well as interventions ranging from



RSSB's Chartered Clinical Psychologist Dr MICHELLE O'SULLIVAN outlines a range of resources created by the organisation to help the industry keep the workforce safe during COVID-19 and protect mental health

social considerations and strengthening communities to specialist support.

Supporting staff following the death of a colleague

The loss of a colleague can have a profound impact on any organisation. To create the conditions for people to grieve as they need to, it's important that companies respond appropriately. Read our guidance to help the workforce cope (<https://tinyurl.com/y9npzv9d>).

Line manager's resource for promoting mental wellbeing

Line managers are responsible for and can influence team culture, workloads, control, support, roles, relationships and change, all of which can have an impact on employees' mental wellbeing.

Read and download our Line Manager's Resource (<https://bit.ly/2B67qOt>), which helps improve a manager's understanding of how mental wellbeing can be improved and maintained, for them and their teams.

Mental Health and Wellbeing training

We have partnered with MIND to create two cost-effective and expert-led elearning courses. The courses (*Mental Health Awareness*

at Work and *Managing Mental Health at Work*) are rail-specific and can help upskill the workforce on mental wellbeing remotely (<https://tinyurl.com/y74gafhr>).

Trauma Management Toolbox

We have published an updated Trauma Management Toolbox (<https://bit.ly/3frB3ZI>) with practical tools, checklists, templates and resources. This will support companies to review and make changes to their trauma pathway, consistent with RSSB's trauma guidance.

Everyone will respond to a traumatic experience differently. For some, returning to work shortly after an incident may feel right, for others more time and targeted support may be needed. With access to the right treatment and support, the majority will recover and be able to return to work.

PTSD can affect memory, concentration, sleep and social interactions, all of which could affect someone in the workplace. But PTSD is a treatable condition and there are steps companies can take to ensure cases can be detected and staff supported. ■

■ For more information on the above tools and resources, please visit rssb.co.uk/mental-wellbeing.



RSSB has developed a suite of tools to help protect the health and wellbeing of the 300,000+ people employed by the rail industry and its supply chain. JACK BOSKETT / RAIL.

Joana Faustino, RSSB work psychologist, adds: "The rail industry relies on the workforce to deliver high-quality, efficient and safe services.

"All of that is dependent on the health and wellbeing of our workers. Motivation, concentration and problem-solving skills can all be negatively affected by health problems that go unsupported.

"We all struggle sometimes, but the way in which companies react to workers' health problems has a massive impact in their ability to manage.

"To ensure we keep the country moving, we need to develop our understanding of health risks for rail workers, improve working conditions and effectively support our workforce when they are struggling." ■

Answering the call

Samaritans Chief Executive **RUTH SUTHERLAND** and Strategic Programme Manager **NEIL PETERS** reflect on the life-saving partnership that the charity has enjoyed with the rail industry for the past decade, and which is still going strong



RICHARD CLINNICK.

In January 2010, Samaritans entered the new decade by announcing the start of a partnership with Network Rail to reduce the number of suicides on the railway.

While the overall rate of suicide had been steadily declining in the UK across the preceding ten years, the new partnership was formed in recognition of the fact that railway suicides had remained fairly static.

The partnership was to be delivered in various ways. Samaritans was to deliver bespoke training to rail staff in dealing with suicides and their aftermath, while an integrated programme of activity was launched to place Samaritans posters and helpline

details at key stations.

Meanwhile, a national communications campaign was launched to increase awareness of Samaritans support services to high-risk groups, and more work was to be done with mainstream media to ensure responsible reporting and to further reduce the likelihood of suicides.

Samaritans Strategic Programme Manager Neil Peters recalls: "I joined the organisation in 2011 when the partnership was very much in its infancy. But it was new and groundbreaking - nothing on this scale had ever been done before between the charity and a corporate partner.

"It was very much a learning curve for all of us because suicides had not been decreasing in rail, and the industry very much wanted to arrest that trend. The training was a real game-changer because it was all about empowering staff so that they could do something about it and own the problem.

"Lots of rail staff already had the necessary skills in terms of providing customer service and that sort of thing, but we needed to give them the confidence to use those skills and the realisation that talking to a vulnerable person needn't be scary."

The partnership quickly evolved into a cross-industry programme, and from 2010-15

more than 10,000 railway staff at NR, train operating companies, British Transport Police and other organisations received specialist training.

By the time the partnership was renewed in 2015, action by rail staff to identify vulnerable people and then help them was thought to have potentially saved more than 1,000 lives.

Five years later and the number of trained staff has now surpassed 20,000, with more than 1,800 interventions reported in 2019-20 alone and an even greater number that have simply gone unreported.

Samaritans CEO Ruth Sutherland says: "We are so proud of the partnership. It was unique

when we started, but in the last ten years it has delivered above and beyond what we expected - not least the 20,000 people we've trained.

"It was a big leap of faith, but now we are contacted by people from all over the world to learn more about it. There were times on the journey when we asked ourselves 'why aren't the suicide rates going down?' But there are no quick wins and you can't bring about that sort of change overnight."

It's not only rail staff who have been targeted by the partnership. In November 2017, the Small Talk Saves Lives campaign was launched to encourage passengers and other members of the public to also support those who may be in emotional crisis.

The campaign aimed to give commuters the confidence to trust their own instincts and intervene if they spot someone vulnerable who may be at risk of suicide, and to talk to them to interrupt their suicidal thoughts.

This was followed up in 2019 by the launch of the Real People, Real Stories campaign, which was the fourth awareness campaign launched by Samaritans on behalf of the rail industry since 2010.

It is primarily aimed at men aged 20-59 (statistically speaking, the demographic most at risk of suicide), and features men who have overcome difficult times sharing their stories and encouraging others to seek help by contacting Samaritans.

Sutherland says: "Small Talk Saves Lives has been a runaway success as we were releasing an asset that we didn't otherwise know was there. Passengers are well positioned to help because suicide prevention should be everyone's business."

Peters adds: "Small Talk Saves Lives represented a real shift in emphasis in how we approached suicide prevention. We were no longer exclusively appealing directly to vulnerable people to seek help, but empowering the general public to get involved."

Following the success of the partnership, it was renewed once more in April following an extensive tendering process.

Training for railway employees will continue as before, as will work within the wider community to destigmatise suicide and promote help-seeking behaviour.

Mitigation measures will also continue to be deployed, such as fencing at high-risk areas as the partnership looks to support the Government's target of a 10% reduction in suicides by 2021.

However, all parties recognise that the partnership will need to evolve much further in order to meet several new and significant challenges.

These include a 12% rise in the number of

suicides or suspected suicides that took place on the network in 2019-20, compared with the previous year. This increase is unwelcome, although it should be remembered that the total number of 283 could have been far higher if not for the 1,800+ interventions that were made in the same year.

A second challenge is posed by the structural changes being made in the industry, with the devolution of Network Rail, in particular, providing an opportunity for local Samaritans branches to work more closely with NR's devolved route and regional businesses.

Peters explains: "We've just renewed the partnership, but after ten years it was time to evolve it. We didn't need to start from scratch, but to change the way we work, and in light of greater devolution we will be recruiting regional officers to work with NR's regions. They will be embedded in their offices so that we can work more closely with BTP and Samaritans branches in those areas.

"We're also going to recruit media managers who will have more time to share key messaging and to speak to comms teams. And we've created a new Head of Rail role to take a more strategic look at relationship building."

But perhaps the most serious threat to have emerged is the Coronavirus pandemic.

Although its long-term effects on mental health and suicidal behaviour are yet to be fully understood, it is clear that the threat of disease and the efforts made to contain its spread have proven stressful to many people.

Feelings of isolation, depression and anxiety are all known triggers for psychological distress and potential self-harm.

Sutherland explains: "COVID-19 brings a whole new territory, but we know that the various stresses and strains it is causing will heighten demand for the support we provide. We provide 7,000 contacts with people each day and one in three of them are now COVID-19-related, so we have noticed a big increase.

"We've also noticed a 171% increase in traffic to our website, so we've responded by bringing forward things we had in the pipeline, such as our self-help app and the Our Frontline campaign for key workers."

The Our Frontline campaign was launched on May 11 by a group of leading mental health charities including Samaritans, MIND, Hospice UK and the Royal Foundation.

Supported by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Our Frontline is aimed at supporting NHS workers, care workers, emergency services, rail staff and other key workers whose mental health has been put under pressure by going to work while many of us have stayed in the relative safety of our homes.

Frontline staff and key workers are able

“It was a big leap of faith, but now we are contacted by people from all over the world to learn more about it.”



Ruth Sutherland, CEO, Samaritans

SAMARITANS: KEY FACTS

- Samaritans responds to a call for help every six seconds
- 2,200 people support the running of 201 branches
- 20,000 people volunteered to help Samaritans in 2018
- Samaritans receives 5 million calls for help each year (600 each hour)
- Each day, 16 people take their life in the UK and Ireland
- It costs Samaritans £5 to answer each call

► to call or text a trained volunteer and access specially developed online resources, toolkits and advice to support their mental health and wellbeing.

“The Our Frontline campaign is responsive to the current situation and provides additional support to our key workers,” adds Sutherland.

“We were able to use advertising space on the rail estate due to our pre-existing relationship and [owing to the travel restrictions placed on all but essential travel] knew that we would be reaching our target audience.”

Meanwhile, the pandemic has also created some more practical and operational difficulties for Samaritans, which heavily relies on donations and fundraising events to finance its activities.

Typical fundraising events such as sponsored bike rides, marathons and charity bake sales have all but stopped as a result of lockdown measures, while face-to-face training of volunteers has also had to cease for the same reason.

But once again Samaritans has been flexible and is now delivering much of its training

online. The charity is therefore appealing to members of the public who may have been furloughed to get in touch and to use the rare opportunity of being off work to get involved in volunteering.

It is also asking train operating companies that are currently experiencing historically low passenger volumes to consider putting staff with excess capacity through its bespoke suicide prevention training courses.

Peters says: “We’ve had to adapt our ways of working because so much of what we do is face-to-face. Our training courses are now being delivered online, and so we encourage operators with staff at home or with less to do to put them through our courses.

“Our helplines remain open. We’re trying to carry on as well as we can and I encourage people to get in touch.”

Sutherland adds: “30% of our volunteers have had to self-isolate at one point or another, but our volunteers have been extraordinary. Lots of people have been emailing from home and we now have online training, so if anyone wants to volunteer, please just visit our website.

“Fundraising is a major challenge for us



Since 2010, Samaritans has trained more than 20,000 rail staff with the skills to help someone at risk of suicide on the network. JACK BOSKETT/RAIL.



Samaritans volunteers cheer on runners during the London Marathon in 2015. The cancellation of many annual fundraising events such as this, owing to Coronavirus, has prompted Samaritans to launch an emergency appeal. ALAMY.

at the moment. There is some government support but it’s nothing like the loss of major events such as the London Marathon. We’ve also had a good response from our emergency appeal, so I’m not too concerned for our immediate future, but as for the longer term... you can’t have an emergency appeal every year.”

Other ways to support Samaritans include signing up to its Feel Good Book Club, which was launched in May and is supported by award-winning authors such as Elizabeth Day. Each month, book club members will receive a bumper box containing a hand-picked uplifting book and carefully chosen gifts based on a specific wellbeing theme.

Once they have finished their book, readers are then invited to come together and review it on the Feel Good Book Club Facebook page.

Prices start at £16.49 per month for an annual subscription with all proceeds going to

Samaritans.

Looking ahead, both Sutherland and Peters are optimistic that the Coronavirus pandemic will also have some positive outcomes for society and its long-standing partnership with the rail industry - provided the greater sense of neighbourliness and community spirit that the lockdown has helped foster can be captured and retained when social distancing measures begin to be lifted.

The selflessness shown by those who volunteered to help people in their communities by delivering food and

prescriptions, combined with the appreciation shown by much of the population through the weekly Clap for Carers events, has demonstrated the sort of caring attitude which will go a long way in suicide prevention.

Peters says: “It will be interesting to see what social impact the pandemic has had, but I have certainly noticed more neighbourliness and a greater sense of who our key workers are and who we value as frontline staff.

“Although we talk about people in crisis, there is much we can do before it gets to that stage which involves making connections

and asking after each other. When you’ve had a chance to get out and about there’s been a real joy from people to see other people, when they’ve been stuck behind glass and closed doors. Hopefully we can retain that.”

Sutherland concludes: “I hope this will ignite volunteering again, because I think a lot of people have got a buzz from helping out one another. One thing people have definitely learned is the value of making connections, which is what Samaritans is all about.

“We can see that some people and key workers will be traumatised for a long time, so this isn’t going to go away. When the furlough scheme retracts, more and more people will become unemployed and the impact on mental health will be huge.

“But when you are in your darkest hour and life is tough, emotions can be overwhelming - which is why we are here to help and support people.” ■

“ The Our Frontline campaign is responsive to the current situation and provides additional support to our key workers. ”

Ruth Sutherland, CEO, Samaritans

Mental health in the workplace

The relationship between mental health and the workplace is a complex one.

But with positive rates of the former so closely linked to attendance, job satisfaction, performance and productivity in the latter, it's easy to see why enhancing employees' mental health and wellbeing should be seen as an investment rather than a cost.

One in six workers experiences a mental health problem at any one time, while stress is thought to be responsible for up to half of all working days lost in the UK.

Promoting mental health and the wellbeing of employees is undoubtedly a moral imperative for business leaders, but there is also a mounting body of evidence to support this as a smart financial strategy. PAUL STEPHEN reports

The cost of inaction has therefore been the subject of a number of studies, including a report published by Deloitte in January entitled *Mental health and employers: Refreshing the case for investment*.

Building on previous research conducted by the company in 2017, Deloitte concludes that poor mental health currently costs UK businesses some £45 billion per year. This represents a 16% increase since 2017 and means that employers can now expect an average return of £5 for every £1 they spend on tackling the issue.

But despite pointing to the need for decisive action to be taken now, the report also acknowledges the progress that has been made over the past two to three years.

This includes a greater openness to discussing mental health at work, increased staff training, the wider introduction of wellbeing champions, and a mass sign-up to anti-stigma initiatives such as the Time to Change employer pledge.

Meanwhile, separate research published by Deloitte in April 2018 showed that as many as 88% of business and HR leaders in the UK are actively working towards improving employee wellbeing, against a global average of 82%. Some 36% of UK businesses had

mental health counselling programmes in place, and three in five offered flexible working. However, only 5% claimed to offer 'extensive' wellbeing programmes which are actively tracked to measure their impact on workplace productivity and efficiency.

Despite these advances, Deloitte says that costs arising from poor mental health are moving in the wrong direction, due to changes in working practices that have presented additional challenges.

Rebecca George, Deloitte's UK public sector leader, explains: "While there are substantial benefits from the increased use of technology in the workplace, an 'always on' culture can have a detrimental effect on employee wellbeing.

"This also contributes to 'presenteeism', where people work when they are not at their most productive, and the newer trend of 'leaveism' where employees feel they must work outside of their normal hours."

The report points to young people being the most vulnerable demographic to these two trends, with employers losing an equivalent of 8.3% of the salaries of those aged 18-29.

Some 83% of employees aged 18-24 reported that they always or mostly go into the office when they would have benefited from having



Source: Deloitte.

time off, due to mental health problems.

This higher rate of 'presenteeism' among the younger generations is thought to occur for a number of reasons, including younger people being less likely to disclose mental health problems than their older counterparts.

They are also more likely to be on freelance or short-term contracts, which can contribute to feelings of financial insecurity and therefore a greater tendency for people to attend work even when they are unwell. Those in less secure roles will also have reduced access to employer support and occupational health provision.

Allied to this is the greater prevalence of 'leaveism', where employees are unable to disconnect from work because of the increased use of technology.

It occurs when staff utilise allocated time-off, including annual leave and rest days, to catch up on work obligations and to take work home with them that cannot be completed within normal working hours.

Some 70% of UK businesses which have observed 'presenteeism' in their organisation also observed 'leaveism', making the two problems firmly interconnected.

Elizabeth Hampson, Deloitte director and co-author of the report, says: "Our research finds that while an increased use of technology can enhance working practices, having the ability to work outside of normal working hours can add to the challenge of maintaining good mental health, and make it hard for some to disconnect from an 'always-on' culture.

"The costs of this are significant, for those with poor mental health and for UK employers, and we hope this analysis can help."

Deloitte estimates the cost of presenteeism to be roughly three and a half times higher

THE MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK COMMITMENT CORE STANDARDS

- 1: Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity.
- 2: Proactively ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes.
- 3: Promote an open culture around mental health.
- 4: Increase organisational confidence and capability.
- 5: Provide mental health tools and support.
- 6: Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting.

for UK employers than absenteeism, which suggests that far more must be done to engender a culture where staff feel better able to take time off when they feel physically or mentally unwell.

More must also be done to promote a better work-life balance and to encourage staff not to work during their allocated time off.

However, responsibility for all this does not just fall on businesses. The report also advocates changes by government to the way disability is defined under the Equality Act, and an increase in the rate of Statutory Sick Pay.

This would increase awareness among those with mental health problems of the rights and protections afforded to them by the law,

and hopefully reduce the potential financial penalties they may face when taking time off.

Paul Farmer, chief executive of the MIND charity, adds: "Due to the way disability is defined in the law, many people with mental health problems don't realise that they have a right to reasonable adjustments if they need them in work."

"Making improvements to the Equality Act and Statutory Sick Pay are key ways in which the Government can increase access to good work and ensure that more people with mental health problems are able to thrive in work."

The report also identifies greater scope for more investment from businesses in increasing awareness of mental health, tackling stigma, and providing adequate training.

Deloitte says that SMEs in particular have emerged as a lower-visibility but higher-risk category of company where employees could benefit from greater support.

UK businesses should also look to standards such as the Mental Health at Work Commitment, which was developed using the knowledge and expertise of mental health charities and trade organisations before being launched in 2019.

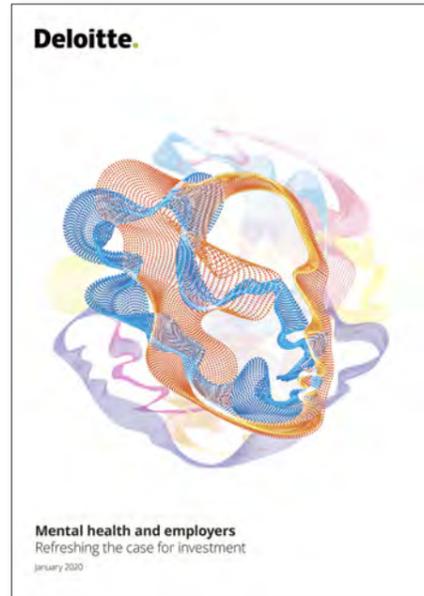
Outlining six standards in areas such as reporting and providing tools and support, making this commitment presents a good way for companies of all sizes to embed best practice into their organisations.

Current signatories to the Mental Health at Work Commitment include some of the largest public and private sector employers in the country - Lloyds Banking Group, Royal Mail, Unilever, Anglian Water, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

But in a separate survey of more than 150 senior finance and HR professionals, only one in ten employers had met all of the six suggested core topics. And a little over 15% had made no progress towards any of them.

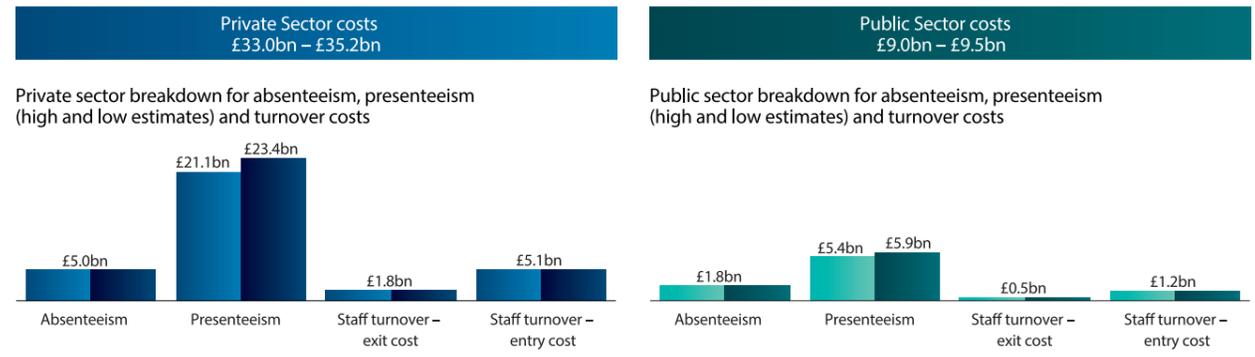
With rates of adoption so variable, it is incumbent on the business community to act now if they are to avoid further cost rises from poor mental health.

Farmer adds: "Now, more than ever, we need to move from talking to action. With the foundations already set, employers and government have a unique opportunity to make sure that the UK is leading the way globally." ■



PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR COSTS

Source: Deloitte.



“ Having the ability to work outside of normal working hours can add to the challenge of maintaining good mental health, and make it hard for some to disconnect from an 'always-on' culture. ”

Elizabeth Hampson, Director, Deloitte

The cutting edge of caring

LNER's Community Partnerships Manager CRAIG McNALLY tells RAIL how the operator is going the distance on promoting mental health

London North Eastern Railway is a name steeped in history. Established in 1923 as one of the 'Big Four' railway companies, it conjures up images of legendary locomotives such as *Mallard* and *Flying Scotsman* setting speed records while representing the cutting edge of long-distance travel between London, North East England and Scotland on the East Coast Main Line. LNER's modern incarnation is certainly no different, and the operator is currently introducing its futuristic Azuma fleet to increase capacity and improve reliability and journey times on all its iconic routes.

But since taking over the East Coast Inter City franchise in June 2018, LNER is looking to the future in plenty of other ways too,

including how it safeguards the mental health and wellbeing of its passengers, employees and other stakeholders.

Providing much of the driving force behind this is LNER Managing Director David Horne who was instrumental in the operator's decision to sign the Time to Change pledge in February 2019.

LNER is committed to tackling workplace stigma surrounding mental health and to encouraging employees across the business to talk about it more openly in the workplace.

LNER Community Partnerships Manager Craig McNally explains: "We wanted to show that we weren't just paying lip service to it and that this is now firmly embedded within the culture of the business. David is a huge



LNER staff including Community Partnerships Manager Craig McNally (far left) gather at York station in October 2019 to celebrate raising £100,000 as part of the operator's partnership with CALM. Despite the Coronavirus pandemic making fundraising more difficult, the amount of money raised has now doubled to £200,000. LNER.

Mental health and social media

LNER has earned plaudits from across industry for successfully utilising its social media platforms to tackle stigma surrounding mental health.

Ben Griffin, from LNER's social media team, has been singled out for much praise in particular, after consistently showing great empathy following incidents when a person has been struck by a train.

For example, a tweet he posted on March 2 attracted more than 2,000 retweets and 8,000 likes, for the way in which he humanised a heart-breaking and tragic situation.

He explains: "The language the railway uses around suicide often seems quite stilted and old-fashioned, and fatalities always used to come under the same wording as 'the train is late because someone has been hit by a train'. It's said in a clinical way so it's the same as any other disruption like a points failure, and people therefore view it as such.

"We wanted to use Twitter's informality to speak to people

on their level and to update the language we use around fatalities, because it's not a normal delay and someone has lost their life.

"It helps to reduce the negativity that surrounds delays because we'll ask people who complain to have some perspective.

"We'll say things like 'while you're delayed someone will be getting a really awful phone call because their loved one is not coming home'."

Since the start of the partnership with CALM, LNER's social media team has also been directing people to CALM in case they have felt affected by any particular incidents.

LNER London North Eastern Railway
Do we need to remind people that some poor individual has lost their life? Their suffering and that of their family and friends pales in comparison to your missed meeting. We'll get you to your destination, their family won't get them back. #Perspective #MentalHealthMatters.

Incredibly frustrated that I'm on an @LNER train to #London that's now facing a 'severe delay' near St Neots due to someone being hit on the line, meaning I'm likely to miss the meeting that was the purpose of my journey. Move the body and let's move on!

If it was their choice just shift them. No sympathy! The impact on other people's lives is a disgrace.

advocate of mental health and promoting positive wellbeing, and signing the pledge helped us to reinforce what things we have been doing internally to a wider external audience.

"We've always taken mental health seriously. The pledge allowed us to make a public statement to show our commitment to mental health and therefore making ourselves accountable to our customers."

Signing the pledge was also an acknowledgement of the progress that the operator has already made to embrace employees' mental health and wellbeing in recent years.

This includes the widespread introduction of mental health first aiders, all line managers enrolling on mental health training courses, and the provision of wellbeing clinics and independent counselling services.

LNER's 70 mental health first aiders have all been trained and received recognised qualifications from the two-day Mental Health First Aid England course.

They provide confidential advice and a listening ear to colleagues, but also help to signpost the various other internal and external help and resources that are available to them.

The mental health first aiders are embedded in different teams across the business and are not only available to their immediate colleagues, but have their details more widely circulated so they can also be contacted by others - who might feel more comfortable speaking with someone who isn't an immediate colleague.

The invaluable service that these volunteers

provide has perhaps never felt more relevant than during the current coronavirus pandemic.

Amid the widespread disruption that has been caused to individuals' personal and working lives, the first aiders continue to be available by telephone or online communications platforms such as Microsoft Teams to any colleagues who are struggling or need to talk.

Despite limited capacity for face-to-face meetings, the first aiders have reported an increase in contact due to the added emotional strain being posed by social distancing and other lockdown measures introduced by the Government.

Meanwhile, LNER has also worked hard to introduce a range of other initiatives to tackle the causes of poor mental health, such as feelings of isolation from those who might be homeworking and living on their own.

McNally adds: "The technology has played a massive part. Every member of staff has an iPhone loaded with Microsoft Teams and Office 365 so people can keep in touch with managers and colleagues. It's not quite face-to-face, but it's the next best thing so people can have those conversations and that contact.

"We've provided the technology and people have just run with it and come up with ideas

for things such as cookery classes, yoga, virtual quizzes, bingo and community cafes.

"We acted quickly to create new ways of keeping our people connected to one another in order to fill the void, as personal interaction is something that our teams really love about their daily roles at LNER. The feedback we've had has been overwhelmingly positive. It's a very challenging time at the moment and having that engagement has done the world of good."

To help keep up morale, and in recognition of the mental health benefits that volunteering provides, LNER also launched the LNER Reserves scheme in April to enable its employees to volunteer to help the NHS, emergency services, charities and other organisations.

More than 100 staff have already signed up and are making a difference in their communities by fulfilling important tasks such as distributing food and medicines.

As part of its ongoing commitment to promoting mental health and wellbeing, LNER also takes the issue of suicide prevention very seriously.

Since October 2018, the operator has been a proud partner of the CALM charity which is dedicated to preventing male suicide - the single biggest killer of men aged under 45.

"As a society we haven't always been very good at talking about it, but we're now approaching it in a much more humanised way."

Craig McNally, Community Partnerships Manager, LNER

Through the partnership more than 100 LNER staff have completed specialist training provided by CALM, while more than £200,000 has been raised by LNER and its customers to support the work of the charity.

This money has been raised partly by enabling passengers to donate Delay Repay compensation, and also from LNER staff volunteering their time to take part in fundraising events such as the Edinburgh Marathon and the Great North Run through to organised bake sales and raffles.

Last year, LNER supported the Summer of Pride LGBTQ+ celebrations by decorating stations in Pride colours and adorning one of its trains with a rainbow LNER logo and rainbow heart. CALM used the Pride events to promote the mental health support it offers and to ask for donations.

Meanwhile, other high-profile events including LNER's Let's Go Round Again four-day HST farewell tour in December raised further funds for CALM.

The Coronavirus pandemic has made fundraising more difficult and has reduced the numbers of passengers eligible for Delay Repay compensation, but LNER staff have volunteered more than 600 hours and the operator has just reached the impressive £200,000 mark in June.

McNally says: "We launched the partnership on World Mental Health Day 2018 and we were the first operator to offer customers the chance to directly donate Delay Repay compensation to charity.

"The partnership really complements all the internal initiatives we've been doing around mental health and suicide has always been a real issue for the railway, which we're beginning to tackle in new and innovative ways.

"As a society, we haven't always been very good at talking about it, but we're now approaching it in a much more humanised way (see panel). We wanted a partnership that would reflect that in addition to our industry partnership with Samaritans, and CALM has a similarly accessible way of addressing the issues."

LNER is continuing the tradition of the original LNER by not being afraid to innovate and break new ground in trialling new initiatives. One example includes the rollout of the mindfulness app 'Headspace' to all colleagues, after being piloted in the Communications team earlier in the year. This meant it could be quickly deployed to every employee to offer additional support during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Last but not least, supporting mental health is also a key aim of LNER's £500,000 Customer and Community Investment Fund.

The fund provides financial support to charities in the locations served by the operator and is targeted at improving areas such as education and employability skills, diversity and inclusion, the environment and sustainable mobility.

Applications for the next round of funding will be considered later this year, and potential applicants are asked to keep checking the LNER website for further details. ■

People power



Southeastern staff demonstrate social distancing at Sevenoaks station on April 9. SOUTHEASTERN.

Southeastern is making a sincere effort to make mental wellbeing a top priority, as ALYNA JONES explains

As an employer of more than 4,000 staff, Southeastern proudly claims that people are at the heart of everything it does.

Committed to being a responsible employer and to providing a safe, inclusive and welcoming workplace, the operator was pleased to sign the landmark Time to Change mental health anti-stigma employer pledge in October 2018.

But for Southeastern, it was just the latest step in a journey that had begun several years earlier to push mental health and wellbeing to the forefront of the agenda, most recently with the appointment of Alyna Jones as the operator's Head of Health and Wellbeing.

Colin Clifton, head of safety and environment, explains: "Five or six years ago our then Health and Wellbeing Manager Yvonne Campbell began to do some work on occupational health around stress and mental health issues and, when she got into the data,

she started to see that it was one of the biggest causes of sickness and absence.

"We soon realised that you couldn't really separate physical and mental health and they are intertwined around each other, and that neither should be treated as being more important than the other."

Southeastern responded robustly to these findings through senior management briefings, communications and a programme of mental health events led by Health and Wellbeing Promotion Manager Deborah Thomas.

Mental health first aid training was also offered to managers, and mental health information and support provided on the operator's employee intranet.

Southeastern also has a dedicated railway chaplain, runs monthly People Board meetings for its executive team to oversee the company's mental health agenda, and offers one-to-one counselling via its employee assistance

programme.

Meanwhile, the company also made public commitments to mental health by signing the Mindful Employer charter and by supporting the Mayor of London's 'This is Me' and green ribbon campaigns to raise awareness.

Clifton adds: "We started to recognise the huge hidden problem of mental health and we looked for things we could do to make a statement of intent. We took the decision in 2015-16 to sign up to the Mindful Employer charter, which placed a number of commitments on us to treat mental health in a particular way.

"We didn't do that just to get a certificate, we did it because it was something that we could make a commitment around and embed into our business. From that we brought in mental health first aid training and developed an objective to sign the Time to Change pledge.

"We didn't feel we were ready initially and still had some work to do and so, in 2018,

the LGBTQ+ community because it's about coming to work and being respected for who you are. As part of supporting wellbeing everybody needs to be able to be themselves, and we are absolutely committed to rooting out discrimination in all of its insidious forms."

Having begun to embed these cultural changes within the company and change attitudes towards mental health, the Southeastern executive team felt ready to make the next step and to sign the Time to Change pledge in October 2018.

A further statement of intent was made through the employment of Alyna Jones.

Southeastern also appointed author and mental health campaigner Lee Woolcott-Ellis as Mental Health Co-ordinator to bring together its mental health activities.

Jones says: "Coming in at this point in the journey, I could see that Southeastern already had a very good culture and was very open in terms of talking about mental health and tackling stigma.

"This was demonstrated by the launch of an expanded Colleague Mental Health Advocate peer-to-peer programme in 2018 when 170 employees applied for just 30 places. That's now one of the most talked about things at Southeastern, and Eurostar has now adopted our programme."

She adds: "We have great leadership right from the top. [Managing Director] David Statham gets very involved in initiatives across the network and regularly talks to colleagues to find out what the issues are. We had Brew Monday [in support of Samaritans] at the beginning of the year and he was walking around our London office handing out teabags and having conversations with people."

Jones and Southeastern's wellbeing team also play an active part in the RSSB's mental health and wellbeing groups to share best practice, such as its Mental Health Advocate programme with other operators.

Having worked in wellbeing for 16 years in other sectors including healthcare and financial services, Jones is enormously satisfied with the progress being made in the rail sector.

"I definitely wouldn't say that rail is behind the curve in anything," she says.

"While we adopt lots of other campaigns that go across multiple sectors like Time to Change, there's been a huge shift in attitudes.

"It's a journey and you can't suddenly stop and say that everything's been done. The work Southeastern has done has put it in a fantastic place where people come up and talk to you.

"It's not a box-ticking exercise and we now have a fantastic culture where people can talk about their mental health, get the support they need and colleagues support each other."

Both Jones and Clifton agree that the current Coronavirus pandemic poses significant challenges to safeguarding mental health and

wellbeing.

But Southeastern has shown a great deal of flexibility to keep communications open between colleagues who are now working from home, or under vastly changed operating conditions.

Virtual technologies are being utilised to ensure that the executive team and managers provide daily briefings and a constant flow of information and assurance to colleagues, either at home or working across Southeastern's commuter and regional routes.

A Mental Health Advocate text service has also been launched to make it easier to access support during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, Pulse surveys are being conducted on a fortnightly basis to help understand what the company is getting right, and what more it could be doing.

Jones says: "While we're all going through it, we're all experiencing the pandemic very differently and going through different challenges. We have frontline colleagues who are having to go into work and perhaps worry about their safety and then others who might be homeworking and face isolation.

"But we've upped our communications significantly with regular videos from senior staff including David Statham and Lee Woolcott-Ellis to talk about mental health. We also adapted the 13 events that we'd planned to do around the network for Mental Health Awareness Week (May 18-24) and picked key aspects that are particularly relevant now, such as how to get a good night's sleep and how to connect with colleagues that you haven't spoken to for a while."

Clifton is confident that with the firm steps already taken by Southeastern, the operator is in a strong position to negotiate this latest challenge to provide its employees with the help and support they need.

Its public commitments to mental health and wellbeing are being put to the test, but it is also an opportunity that the operator has snatched with both hands to demonstrate just how much it values its staff.

He concludes: "It's challenging at both ends of the spectrum for those still at work and people who have concerns about the environment they are going into on a daily basis, and those who are unable to come into work and are potentially suffering in isolation from colleagues and friends.

"We've tried to be sensitive to both groups, and the pulse surveys will help with that. But none of this is about getting good survey results. It's about supporting the people who need it, which is exactly what we're doing.

"Credit must go to everybody involved because while it's easy to think you're a great team when you're doing well, you only really find out when you're up against various hardships." ■

“None of this is about getting good survey results. It's about supporting the people who need it.”

Colin Clifton, Head of Safety & Environment, Southeastern

The power of giving back



The Million Hour Challenge volunteering initiative with Samaritans is giving rail workers the opportunity to promote emotional wellbeing. Network Rail's MHC Project Leader GEMMA HOWE and Samaritans' MHC Project Management Officer CAROLINE PEARCE explain some of the benefits and how you can get involved

Since 2010, the rail industry has been at the forefront of promoting good mental health, working with Samaritans - the only charity in the UK and Ireland to provide emotional support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year - to reduce suicide on the railways and to support everyone affected when suicides occur.

Now, the rail industry is coming together to support Samaritans through volunteering, to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the rail industry and beyond.

A million hours of support

Samaritans' 20,000 listening volunteers provide emotional support every day and night, all year round.

Samaritans respond to a call for help every six seconds. In an average year, Samaritans volunteers spend one million hours helping people who are struggling to cope.

In April 2019, the rail industry united to promote good mental health by taking on the Million Hour Challenge - to complete one million hours supporting Samaritans during Control Period 6 (April 2019-March 2024).

During the five-year period, the rail industry will help support people who are struggling to cope and to improve the mental health and wellbeing of rail industry employees, by taking on over one million hours of volunteering. And it couldn't come at a more important time.

HM Chief Inspector of Railways Ian Prosser CBE says: "We can build on the success of the existing partnership between the rail industry and the Samaritans further through the Million Hour Challenge, which will encourage volunteering from across the whole sector."

"This will not only help the Samaritans as they seek to cope with increased demand for their vital services, it will also be beneficial for the mental health of all of us in the sector who

volunteer our time - not least by encouraging us to talk with each other and the wider community about the issues involved."

The gift of giving time

Research has found that volunteering can help reduce stress levels and have a positive impact on relationships and self-esteem. There is also evidence to show that volunteering is related to reduced instances of depression among older people.

It also directly supports Samaritans, a charity which works to reduce the feelings of distress that can lead to suicide by offering non-judgemental human contact.

If you work in the rail industry, you are well placed to make an impact on other people's lives. There are a variety of ways to get involved - from attending a training day or completing online Samaritans training, to holding an afternoon tea with colleagues to get

people together and raise awareness of mental health.

This helps to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and illness within the rail industry, and beyond, while also improving your own mental health and wellbeing.

Ways to make a difference

Becoming a listening volunteer for Samaritans, helping to answer calls and messages from people who need some support, is one way of promoting emotional wellbeing, giving something back, and contributing to the Million Hour Challenge.

Being a Samaritans listening volunteer is a very rewarding role that makes a lasting difference, and which could change the course of someone's life.

Full training and mentoring is provided, and volunteers often find that learning the skills to become a listening volunteer has a positive

London Waterloo played host to Brew Monday on January 20, when Samaritans volunteers were joined by (left to right) Tfl Suicide Prevention Lead Simon Abernethy, NR Suicide Prevention Lead Ian Stevens MBE, NR CEO Andrew Haines, Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps, NR Wessex Route Director Mark Killick, RDG Regional Director Robert Nisbet and Samaritans Strategic Programme Manager Neil Peters. NETWORK RAIL.

impact on their relationships with friends, family and colleagues. Hours spent training and volunteering count towards the Million Hour Challenge.

Other ways to volunteer for Samaritans

Samaritans has 201 branches across the UK - in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each branch plays a vital role in the community.

With a range of roles that help the charity, you don't have to be a listening volunteer to support Samaritans.

Samaritans' Support Volunteers help with marketing the service, fundraising, organising events (virtual and otherwise), providing IT support, or helping out in the charity's shops.

Barry, a Support Volunteer, says: "I'm pleased to be able to contribute to the work Samaritans does and to help take some of the pressure off listening volunteers."

Volunteering opportunities, including branch support roles, will be available online in the near future. This means that as an individual or an organisation, anyone involved in the Million Hour Challenge can have a direct impact on the Samaritans branch in their local area.

Offering an incredibly rewarding experience, and representing an opportunity to support the charity at a local level, there is a wide range of volunteer support roles that many Samaritans branches require assistance with, such as:

■ **Branch fundraising co-ordinator:** Every branch needs funds to keep the services running.

■ **Social media and comms support:** Use your skills to write press releases, manage social media or update the website.

■ **Event organisation:** Your planning skills could help to raise awareness and funds.

■ **Community awareness:** Help branches raise awareness in your local area.

■ **Administration support:** Your skills could help to streamline processes.

■ **IT and web support:** It is essential to keep systems up and running.

■ **Rota co-ordination:** To help the branches run smoothly.

■ **Branch budget assistance:** Help the branch to manage their budget and plan spending.

■ **Grant writing:** Use your writing skills to obtain grant funding for your local branch.

During these difficult times because of the Coronavirus pandemic, some of these roles may be offered remotely so that you can continue to support your local community.

Hours that count towards the Million Hour Challenge can also include taking part in Samaritans' online learning, and hosting fundraising tea and coffee mornings such as Brew Monday.

Brew Monday, which can be held virtually

when observing social distancing, is a fundraising activity that encourages everyone to get together over a cup of tea or coffee and share life's ups and downs, while raising donations to ensure Samaritans can continue to be there for people who are struggling to cope. It can be held on any day, although lots of people hold theirs on Mondays.

Looking after yourself and others

The events of 2020 have made it more important than ever to take good care of your own wellbeing, as well as that of those around you.

Samaritans have a range of wellbeing tools, based on their decades of expertise, to support people working in the rail industry.

Completion of Samaritans' Wellbeing in the Workplace tool counts towards the Million Hour Challenge. Wellbeing in the Workplace brings Samaritans' listening and wellbeing expertise into workplaces, wherever they are. It teaches people the skills to look after themselves and the confidence to reach out to a colleague, friend or family member before they reach crisis point.

Of those who have completed Wellbeing in the Workplace, 93% say it has helped them to recognise the importance of looking after their own wellbeing, while 90% now feel more confident approaching someone in emotional distress.

Barbara Jay, senior talent specialist at Aon, adds: "We would recommend working with Samaritans for any organisation looking for a comprehensive online learning programme which suits the busy pace of work life."

Get involved today

There are lots of ways to take part in the Million Hour Challenge. The wide range of roles and commitment times means that there is something for everyone.

Giving up your time to help others can really make a difference. Find out more about the opportunities at your local branch by registering at millionhourchallenge.com and searching for your area. You'll be able to find volunteering opportunities as they become available.

Organisations interested in taking part will benefit from the wide range of materials made available - including digital and printed posters, leaflets and other promotional materials to get staff involved.

As an organisation, you can expect a truly collaborative approach, working closely with Samaritans and developing a strong relationship with your local Samaritans branch. Organisations that sign up will also receive access to the Wellbeing in the Workplace tool. ■

■ Anyone interested in participating should visit millionhourchallenge.com. Organisations interested in joining the challenge should email millionhourchallenge@samaritans.org.

CASE STUDIES

Taking part in the Million Hour Challenge and supporting Samaritans needn't be a huge time commitment or a journey into the unknown. Here are just five examples of the huge variety of opportunities that are on offer, and what benefits they can bring to you and others

Joanne Marrable

Joanne is a project planner in Network Rail's Capital Delivery Eastern (Signalling) team in Derby.

Having started her training as a listening volunteer for Samaritans in January 2019, she knows just how much a single act of kindness - such as lending a listening ear - can mean to someone.

She usually does one shift a week at her local branch in the East Midlands. It can vary between three and six hours and includes overnight duties.

She says: "I signed up to be a listening volunteer because I'd attended the Managing Suicidal Contacts training through work, which I'd thoroughly enjoyed.

"Then, as part of my day job at the time, I found myself having one or two impromptu conversations about wellbeing and being mentally fit or physically fit to carry out your work. After looking online, I dropped



an enquiry to Samaritans, and it went from there.

"I still feel like the new girl - some of the volunteers have been with the organisation for a very long time! The initial training was

in a classroom and it was a huge support to be with the same people as we progressed through the sessions.

"After some really challenging training, I was welcomed into the team under mentorship and moved to the operations room to begin to take calls - I was so nervous on my first duty and very thankful of the fantastic support of my mentor and duty partner. I went on to do a number of duties with my mentor and others before being made a full listening volunteer.

"I absolutely love being a listening volunteer with Samaritans, I consider it a privilege. There's something quite humbling about being granted access into a person's life and quite often in their darkest moments.

"Some callers can find it so difficult to pick up the phone and start a conversation. As a volunteer you're able to give them the time and space they need to share their thoughts and feelings and to really listen to them."

Karen Barnes

Karen is an HM Inspector of Railways at the Office of Rail and Road. Her day job involves holding duty holders to account, providing public and passenger assurance on health and safety, and striving for a better and improved railway through inspections and reactive investigatory work.

Karen became involved with Samaritans shortly after ORR helped launch the Million Hour Challenge in April 2019, when she had also recently suffered a bereavement in her family.

She volunteers for three to four hours a week as a listening volunteer at the Ware (Herts and Essex) branch.

"Having suffered a tragic loss, I received overwhelming support from my family, friends and colleagues at ORR, which got me thinking about what I would have done and who I would have spoken to if I hadn't had that support network around me.

"After looking at Samaritans website, I then attended a day session with a group of other applicants where trainers talked to us about what is involved, what services they offer, and to give us an opportunity to decide if it was something we wanted to do.

"I then went to the interview, was accepted,

and put onto the training programme, which was one of the best training courses I've ever done. The support was amazing - they were very upbeat despite the difficult subjects we deal with.

"Then you're issued with a mentor. Once you're ready, you then go up to the duty room to listen in to calls, and then when you feel comfortable and ready you start to take some calls - alongside your mentor who will offer advice and debriefs after every call.

"It's improved my competence at work and has given me a lot of skills, particularly when dealing with the bereaved and people who have suffered life-changing injuries. We all think that we listen, but actually when you do the training you realise that you don't listen as well as you think you do.

"I certainly have more patience now than I used to do. I'm a lot more empathetic and it's taught me to be open minded, non-judgemental and to stop and think about what I'm going to say next.

"I thought I would just be taking skills from work to Samaritans, but they have taught me far more than I can take back to my role at ORR.

"I was definitely apprehensive when I first went along, but it gives you such a sense of



fulfilment to be able to help someone. It really is an honour and privilege to be there during someone's time of need and to explore their options with them.

"It definitely isn't for everyone, but there are a lot of other things you can do in terms of fundraising and organising events, and Samaritans will welcome any other resource you can provide. I would always encourage people just to go along to the selection day to help you decide if it's for you or not."

Brew Monday

On January 20, some 106 Samaritans branches ran Brew Monday events at over 150 stations across the country, handing out teabags and sharing listening tips.

Brew Monday coincided with 'Blue Monday', which is considered to be the most difficult day of the year.

Passengers and station staff were encouraged to come together over a cup of tea, while awareness was raised for people to seek help if they need it and to check in with their family and friends.

These stations included London Waterloo (see main picture, page 56), Birmingham New Street (top picture), London Victoria and Milton Keynes.

Over the week of January 20-25, MTR Elizabeth Line held a series of events across its network to help mark the Brew Monday campaign.

On January 23, MTR Elizabeth Line held an office-based tea party at which colleagues were encouraged to donate home-baked goods (bottom picture). It provided staff with an opportunity to take time out of their busy



schedules and reminded everyone to take care of their mental health and wellbeing.

Pictured (left to right) at the tea party are Samaritans volunteer June Parker, Romford station staff member Tony Brindley, Samaritans volunteer Margaret Nice, MTREL

Safeguarding Manager Sultana Pasha and Head of Security Robert Gough.

Pasha says: "We were joined by two Samaritans volunteers who kindly gave up some time to speak to us about the fantastic work the Samaritans do. We raised £54.12, which was donated to the Havering Samaritans branch.

"We at MTR Elizabeth Line are very proud to have contributed a total of more than 2,000 hours to the industry's Million Hour Challenge. The hours were accumulated through safeguarding customer awareness sessions, training and work in the community, supporting vulnerable persons and promoting support avenues for those experiencing crises.

"Samaritans has helped us to train 319 colleagues since

2018, of which a portion are from our agency cleaning teams. The training and awareness pieces have helped our colleagues deliver 290 life-saving interventions since 2015, all of which are rewarded and recognised in our quarterly Heroes award."

Romford bike ride

On December 19 2019, MTR Elizabeth Line staff helped volunteers from Samaritans Havering branch to raise money from a static bike ride.

The annual event has taken place for the last five years with exercise bikes supplied by a local gym and schoolchildren supplying moral support by singing carols.

The event takes the form of a challenge with station staff and MTREL headquarters staff racing to see who could cycle 247kms (153 miles) in the shortest time (the distance being chosen to represent Samaritans being available 24/7).

It raised more than £1,500 for the Havering branch.



You are never alone

On November 21 2019, Freightliner joined forces with Samaritans and Greater Anglia to name one of its locomotives 66415 You Are Never Alone.

A naming ceremony at Ipswich station was attended by more than 50 guests and colleagues, with the nameplate unveiled by train drivers Steve Reed and Dave Bray alongside Samaritans Ipswich & East Suffolk Branch Director Judy Wright.

"We were delighted to hear that Freightliner wanted to partner with us for this naming ceremony and to raise awareness of our services," says Wright.

"We know people can sometimes find it really hard to admit they are having trouble coping and are reluctant to seek help, and we want to say that, at Ipswich branch, we do our best to make it easy to get in touch with Samaritans and talk to a volunteer."





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