



Who we are

Pulhams is a family owned and run coach and bus company based in the delightful village of Bourton-on-the-Water in The Cotswolds. Established in 1880, the company specialises in private coach hire, UK and European tours, bus services and home to school transport with onsite maintenance and ATF facilities at its main depot at Bourton-on-the-Water Business Park. With several satellite depots, Pulhams employ 125 full and part time staff headed up by husband and wife team Andy and Kathryn Pulham and their senior managers, James Baugh (Operations), Chris Adams (Engineering) and Sue Gregory (Business & HR).

Mental Health - Giving our employees the support they need

Overview and objectives

Mental health problems have been becoming more prevalent over recent years, driven in large part by increasingly contact-free ways of working and living. The role of social media has made a particularly devastating contribution to this trend, having been purposefully designed to exploit flaws in the human psyche. Layer on top of this an already worsening scenario as well as a global pandemic and it can be no surprise that professionals in the field talk in apocalyptic tones about a tsunami of mental health challenges ahead.

A large part of our industry workforce is made up of men (80%), many of which find it difficult to open up about how they are feeling. Traditionally men are the “strong” ones, the breadwinners and have not lost the need or to live up to the societal expectation, of being in control. These things make them less likely to reach out for help and support.

75% of all suicides are men.

At Pulhams, we wanted to ensure all staff had access to

- Regular discussion about mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Time to talk and be listened to without judgement
- Free access to support and signposting
- Free counselling for those who need it

Approach

Initially, this began with a simple noticeboard of who to speak to. Over time this has grown into a suite of support tools available for all staff including a health and wellbeing programme, trained Mental Health First Aiders, training in suicide prevention, wellbeing days, regular mention of mental health articles in company news, an employee assistance programme, and subsidised membership of TBF. The company will be delivering a driver CPC module on Mental Health in the next round of training.

Results

Success in this arena is very difficult to measure in quantitative terms; success can be a member of staff who's mental health has improved or it can be preventing someone from taking their life – both are good results! With 40% of our workforce (survey results 2019) experiencing mental health issues, we have a large number of this group accessing the support available to them either via the employee assistance programme or signposting through mental health first aiders. Staff in post say they “know that the company offers a platform for supporting positive health and wellbeing” and that they “feel they can talk to someone if they want to” (survey results 2019).

Recruitment and Retention - Many staff are attracted to Pulhams as they've heard about the company's commitment to wellbeing and no longer want to be “just a number” to their employer. A feeling of belonging in a supportive, family environment shouldn't be underestimated.

Absence – the support tools provided to staff not only encourage employees to access mental health first aiders through an open door policy but improve staff absence and give confidence to staff knowing they don't need to hide an mental health related absence.

Conclusion

Mental health and emotional wellbeing provision should be as normal as having a Health & Safety Policy in our company. It does not need to be overly expensive to set up or too onerous to manage (although planned investment shows staff how seriously it is taken) and there are many simple, cost neutral ways of ensuring staff feel valued, supported and empowered to look after their emotional health. We do not need to (and must not) be therapists – we need to lead from the front and talk about mental health, making it a golden thread throughout the organisation by providing a safe space to talk without fear of judgement.