



Workplace Mental Health First Aider Employee Volunteer Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1. It is well recognised that a healthy and well-motivated workforce can have a positive impact on the efficiency and productivity of an organisation. Creating a supportive and healthy work place environment can also reduce sickness absence levels and turnover, improve work satisfaction and engender a stronger, positive commitment and loyalty with the employer.

1.2. Evidence demonstrates that a healthy workplace and a healthy workforce will assist to:

- Reduce levels of ill health and injuries within an organisation
- Reduce the incidence of absence levels and the duration of absence through bringing workers back to work more quickly
- Improve levels of work satisfaction and employee morale
- Improve staff retention and lower employee turnover
- Improve the effective and efficient delivery of services and a workforce that is more resilient and positively responsive to organisational change and development
- St Helens Council acknowledges the importance of supporting and promoting the health and wellbeing of its employees; this scheme forms part of a tailored programme of initiatives aimed at increasing employees' sense of value, supporting employees to manage their health and wellbeing, engender true work/life balance and develop personal resilience.

2. What is Mental Health First Aid?

- 2.1. First Aid is defined as “the first and immediate assistance given to an individual suffering an injury or illness until professional medical treatment is available”.
- 2.2. As with physical first aid, the Mental Health First Aid programme aims to provide the same offer of support and assistance to employees experiencing mental health issues or emotional distress in the workplace.
- 2.3. The scheme seeks to help reduce the stigma of mental ill health; encouraging employees to access help at an early stage, to prevent mental health issues developing or becoming more serious. The scheme also aims to foster and promote a workplace culture in which employees experiencing ongoing mental ill health feel supported and able to continue working or to successfully and confidently return to work after a period of absence.

3. What is the role of a Mental Health First Aider in the workplace?

- 3.1. Selected employees are trained and accredited as Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) volunteers, to recognise the signs of mental ill health and administer mental health first aid in the workplace.
- 3.2. MHFAs provide a first point of contact to employees experiencing mental health issues and/or emotional distress, which may involve:
 - telephone or 1:1 conversations with individual employees, or employees concerned about a colleague
 - signposting individuals to professional help,
 - crisis support for employees whilst awaiting support from professional emergency services
- 3.3. MHFAs also act as advocates for mental health awareness in their workplace, participating in initiatives and encouraging people to talk about their concerns and to listen to and support those that may be struggling.
- 3.4. Further details on the role can be found in the role description in appendix 1.
- 3.5. ***A MHFA is not qualified or expected to provide any form of diagnosis or treatment.***

AND

- 3.6. ***The MHFA role is a voluntary position to be undertaken in addition to your day-to-day job role.***

4. How to access a Mental Health First Aider

- 4.1. Contact details for all our workplace MHFAs can be found in the Staff Wellbeing Zone on the intranet.

- 4.2. Some employees may prefer to speak with a colleague they know and recognise from their own workplace, however others may prefer to speak with a MHFA from a different workplace location.
- 4.3. Employees can contact any of the MHFAs identified on the intranet page during working hours, either by telephone, email or in person. All conversations and communications are undertaken in confidence, in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy and Code of Practice
- 4.4. Basic details of each contact are recorded for monitoring purposes (see appendix 3).
- 4.5. All MHFAs can also be identified by their green coloured lanyard.

5. Suitable meeting locations / venues

- 5.1. The Council appreciates that it can sometimes be difficult to hold sensitive conversations in the workplace and does not want this issue to become a barrier to employees approaching the MHFAs for support. Therefore, meetings between an MHFA and employee do not necessarily have to take place in a Council Workplace.
- 5.2. If it is appropriate to take the employee out of the workplace, the MHFA can suggest meeting in a non-Council public venue i.e. a local café or coffee shop.
- 5.3. The appropriate lone working procedures must be followed in this event.
- 5.4. Any reasonable costs incurred during the meeting, e.g. a cup of coffee, can be claimed as expenses in accordance with the Council's Subsistence Policy.

6. How to become a MHFA

- 6.1. All MHFAs must undergo an initial 2-day training course and agree to the fulfilling the commitments set out in the role description. Training opportunities will be advertised on the Council's Training System, via the Council's intranet and weekly newsletter.
- 6.2. To access the training interested candidates must:
- 6.3. Discuss the requirements and time commitments of the role with their manager.
- 6.4. Complete and submit an expression of interest form (see appendix 2); once completed this should be returned to the MHFA Co-ordinator.
- 6.5. Attend a short informal discussion with the MHFA Co-ordinator to talk about the expectations of the role, why they wish to become a workplace MHFA and their suitability for the role.
- 6.6. The Council will monitor MHFA provision requirements to ensure all workplaces have access to support.

7. Mental Health First Aider Allowance

7.1. All designated MHFAs will receive a First Aid Allowance payment with their monthly salary, in accordance with NJC Conditions of Service.

8. What does the initial training involve?

8.1. MHFA is an internationally recognised training course, delivered over 2 days, which teaches people how to spot the signs and symptoms of mental ill health and provide help on a first aid basis. MHFA won't teach delegates to be a therapist, but just like physical first aid, it will teach delegates to listen, reassure and respond, even in a crisis.

8.2. The course covers the following :

Session 1

- Why Mental Health First Aid?
- The Mental Health First Aid action plan
- What is mental health?
- Impact of mental health issues
- Stigma and discrimination
- What is depression?
- Symptoms of depression
- Risk factors for depression
- Depression in the workplace

Session 2

- Suicide figures
- Alcohol, drugs and mental health
- First aid for suicidal crisis
- Non-judgemental listening skills
- First aid for depression
- Treatment and resources for depression
- Self-care

Session 3

- What is an anxiety disorder?
- First aid for anxiety disorders
- Crisis first aid after a traumatic event
- Alcohol, drugs and anxiety disorders
- Treatment and resources for anxiety disorders
- Cognitive distortions and CBT
- Personality disorders
- Eating disorders
- Self-harm

Session 4

- What is psychosis?
- Risk factors for psychosis
- Alcohol, drugs and psychosis
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Warning signs of developing psychosis
- Crisis first aid for acute psychosis

- Treatment and resources for psychosis
- Recovery and building resources
- Action planning for using MHFA

9. The role of managers supporting MHFAs

- 9.1. It is well recognised that managers can have a positive impact on their employees' health and wellbeing by acting as role models for healthier work habits and promoting a culture of respect and openness.
- 9.2. Similarly, positive and supportive line management is key to the success of the MHFA programme and reducing the stigmatisation of mental ill health in the workplace. By supporting team members to volunteer as MHFAs, managers are helping to foster improved health and wellbeing in the workplace, promoting openness about mental ill health and ensuring that employees have the opportunity to talk about their concerns in confidence.
- 9.3. Prior to confirming an employee's request to volunteer to become a MHFA line managers must satisfy themselves that:
- they understand the requirements of the MHFA role
 - they are able to permit the individual to take time out from their normal work duties as per the time commitments in section 10, Mental Health First Aid time commitments
 - they are confident that the individual is fit and able to undertake the MHFA role
- 9.4. Line managers are expected to provide ongoing support and encouragement to team members volunteering as MHFA and monitor the impact the volunteer role is having on their ability to successfully deliver their day-to-day work priorities.
- 9.5. Should a line manager have any concerns on this matter they should speak to the employee to make them aware of their concerns, discuss where volunteer may have impacted on the individual's work performance and whether the volunteer role is impacting on the individual's own health and wellbeing. These concerns should also be raised with the MHFA Co-ordinator.
- 9.6. Managers should also notify the MHFA Co-ordinator if an MFHA they manage has an unplanned absence from work for more than 2-weeks.

10. MHFA time commitments

- 10.1. Interested individuals and their manager should consider whether they are able to commit some of their working time to promoting and delivering the MHFA programme, this can include:
- the initial two-day MHFA training
 - impromptu conversations / contacts with colleagues which are expected to take approximately 30-mins per conversation / contact
 - attending the bi-monthly MFHA peer support network for approximately 2hrs
 - attending short training, briefing sessions to develop and maintain their knowledge of local services as appropriate
 - attending half day MHFA refresher training as required

- participating in employee engagement / workplace initiatives

10.2. In agreeing to participate in the MHFA programme the individual and their line manager are agreeing to the individual fulfilling the role description (see appendix 1) in addition to their normal duties.

11. The role of the MHFA Co-ordinator

11.1. The MHFA Co-ordinator is a trained MHFA responsible for:

- promoting MHFA training opportunities
- facilitating post training support
- facilitating the MHFA peer support network
- collating the records of MHFA contacts for monitoring and evaluation purposes
- co-ordinating MHFA provision across all Council Depts and the CCG
- promote access and use of the MHFA aftercare service
- acting as a central contact for line managers concerned about an MHFA
- acting as a central contact for MHFAs that have concerns regarding other MHFAs

11.2. Contact details for the MHFA Co-ordinator can be found on the Staff and Wellbeing Zone on the intranet.

12. Support for our Mental Health First Aiders

12.1. In addition to support from their line manager, the MHFA Co-ordinator and the MHFA peer support network, MHFAs will have access to an external aftercare support programme provider including:

- full access to Mental health first aid mentoring program;
- full access to 24/7 support lines;
- full access to Counsellors and therapists if required;
- access to MHFA online forums.

12.2. Contact details for the above will be provided following the initial two-day training.

13. Recording Contacts

13.1. MHFAs are required to keep a secure record of each contact (see appendix 3) for monitoring and evaluating purposes. Records will be anonymous and **will not** identify the names or contact of those individuals that have accessed the service.

13.2. This information will help us to monitor MHFA provision requirements across the Departments, identify needs for additional capacity and inform the MHFA training plan.

13.3. Please see appendix 3 for an example of a contact record.

14. Complaints and feedback

14.1. Should you have a complaint or wish to submit feedback relating to the MHFA programme please submit the details in writing to MHFA Co-ordinator. Where

appropriate, the MHFA Co-ordinator will investigate the issue and take appropriate steps to address it.