

# Greater Anglia and region's Community Rail Partnerships get on board for brighter journeys amid return to workplaces

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*As the nation continues to readjust to life after lockdown, the rail industry joins Network Rail and Chasing the Stigma to encourage those who may be struggling with their mental health to seek help this World Mental Health Day (10 October).*

After a challenging 18 months for many and with more people gradually returning to the workplace, Greater Anglia and its six Community Rail Partnerships, together with Network Rail and the wider industry, have joined Chasing the Stigma to support passengers' mental health with the launch of Brighter Journeys.

Passengers in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire will see posters at stations and social media supporting the campaign, which aims to help make stations feel brighter and happier for passengers returning to the railway this autumn, whilst also helping those struggling to access support.

Community Rail Partnerships in East Anglia have worked for many years to brighten people's journeys through station improvement projects, special event trains, floral displays and gardens on platforms and

station murals, as well as working in partnership to support mental health and tackle exclusion and loneliness.

Manningtree station recently became the first in the country to receive a 'talking bench' thanks to the Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership. The benches, which have also been installed at Alresford and Braintree, provide a place for people to connect and chat.

While home working may have become a common part of pandemic life, a new survey from the rail industry<sup>1</sup> reveals the nation is now heading back to work as passengers readjust to life after lockdown.

The findings from YouGov show nearly half of UK workers (48%) travelled to their workplace for most of their working week in August, when lockdown restrictions were fully lifted across the country.

Meanwhile, almost a third (29%) said they are more likely to travel to the workplace on a regular basis from September onwards. Reasons include missing speaking to colleagues face-to-face (27%) and the boost it brings to team and work morale (21%).

As more people adapt their routines following the lifting of lockdown restrictions, over half (52%) of UK adults surveyed said a return to the workplace can boost their own and others' mental health and wellbeing, while 57% also said it provides a sense of human connection.

The Brighter Journeys campaign will visit a number of stations across the country to help welcome back passengers during the first two weeks of October. Inspired by the wellbeing benefits of spending time in nature, the campaign aims to bring the outdoors into the station environment and put smiles on passengers' faces in the lead up to World Mental Health Day (10 October).

Brighter Journeys will signpost people to share and download the Hub of Hope app if they are struggling with their mental health. The app – provided by Chasing the Stigma – is the only service of its kind that brings together all the mental health support options available to someone in any given area, from NHS support and national charities like Mind and Samaritans, to 3,500+ registered national and local voluntary, grassroots, private and third sector services, with the number listed growing daily.

Greater Anglia's Customer and Community Engagement Manager, Alan Neville, highlights the importance of looking out for one another and the support options available. He said: "We have some lovely community spaces in the form of wildlife-friendly gardens, community hubs in old station buildings, and things like talking benches and Men's Sheds across our network which contribute to human wellbeing through access to nature, social inclusion and helping to combat loneliness.

"In the lead up to World Mental Health Day it's so important that we continue to take care of ourselves and each other. That's why we're supporting Brighter Journeys and encouraging passengers who may be struggling to share and download the Hub of Hope app and offering training to our 280 strong team of station volunteers so that they can be there to offer help and support if needed."

Jake Mills, founder and CEO of Chasing the Stigma, developed the Hub of Hope following his own suicide attempt. He realised when talking through his own personal experience that many people didn't know

where to turn when living with mental health challenges and he wanted to offer support to others who found themselves in a similar situation.

Jake commented: "As we enter autumn, Brighter Journeys shines an important light on mental health. The last 18 months have been tough for so many people and it's essential that we continue to look out for one another. Breaking down the stigma around mental health, providing tools for early intervention and giving people access to the right support at the right time is vital – it's the reason why we set up the Hub of Hope and can make such a massive difference."

This campaign forms part of the rail industry's efforts to reduce suicides across the rail network alongside British Transport Police. Ongoing measures are being taken to prevent such incidents from taking place, including training thousands of industry staff and running campaigns such as Small Talk Saves Lives with Samaritans and British Transport Police, which calls on the public to trust their instincts and start a conversation if they see someone who might need help.

Brighter Journeys, however, has been created with the input of suicide prevention and mental health experts to signpost those struggling with their mental health to support services much earlier on in their mental health journey.

The campaign will launch with a sensory installation unveiled at London Waterloo on Monday 4 October.

Anyone struggling with their mental health can download the Hub of Hope app. The Hub of Hope can be accessed through the app, Chasing the Stigma website or at [www.hubofhope.co.uk](http://www.hubofhope.co.uk). The app also has a 'Need Help Now?' button that links straight through to Samaritans and Crisis Text Line's 24/7 messaging service.

*Photo credit: Greater Anglia*