

HS2 contractor enlists former marine to support employees with their mental health

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As the UK marks the 21st anniversary of Mental Health Awareness Week (9-15 May) Essex-based SME Kelly Formwork, which has secured a five-year contract with HS2's Greater London construction partner Skanska Costain STRABAG, is going the extra mile to ensure that its 150-strong workforce feel empowered to speak out about their mental health.

Managing Director Daryll Kelly, who set up the family-based business 17 years ago, is putting his passion for employee welfare first by teaming up with Ross Austen, a former Royal Marine, in a bid to encourage his workforce to recognise the importance of mental wellbeing.

Ross served with the Royal Engineers for 12 years and suffered life changing injuries following an improvised explosive device (IED) attack whilst on tour in Afghanistan. His injuries were so severe, that despite months of treatment and operations, he made the difficult decision to have his left leg amputated above the knee.

Coming to terms with losing his left leg and half his right foot had a detrimental impact on his mental health, but Ross' drive and determination to succeed led him to retrain and twice represent Great Britain in

the Para Powerlifting Squad.

Ross credits Kelly Formwork for supporting him financially to achieve his goal and he now combines his passion for adaptive Cross Fit with a new career as Kelly Formwork's Mental Health Ambassador. Ross supports employees to recognise the signs of mental ill health and talks openly about the difficulties he experienced and the positive change that can be achieved by speaking out and taking action.

Managing Director of Kelly Formwork, Daryll Kelly explains: "In construction, supporting the mental wellbeing of your workforce is just as important as having excellent site-safety practices in place, and for me the two go hand in hand.

"I've personally suffered with stress, which led to depression, so I know this is something that anyone can experience. Ross and I want everyone at Kelly Formwork to understand that it's okay not to be okay, and there's support in place for anyone that needs it."

Managing Director of Skanska Costain STRABAG Joint Venture (SCS JV), James Richardson adds: "We're passionate about creating a project where everyone can thrive, and their health and wellbeing is supported, and we are extremely proud of the work Kelly Formwork is doing in this area.

"Working with our partners, like Kelly Formwork, we have created a fantastic health and wellbeing team, including a network of mental health ambassadors who can support colleagues and signpost them to a 24 hour Employee Assistance Programme which is available to all staff and their families."

Daryll and Ross joined forces to create a [short video](#), in which they talk openly about their own mental health experiences. It forms part of Kelly Formwork's employee induction programme and is followed up with regular visits to construction sites from Ross to check in with employees and encourage them to speak out if they're experiencing any difficulties.

The family-run firm, which employs Daryll's brother Ray as Health and Safety Director, has also set up a dedicated 24-hour helpline as part of its 'Fit for Life' programme so that staff can seek help with their mental health at any time. Daryll and his brother credit the positive mindset of their workforce for helping them to achieve over 2.5million working hours RIDDOR free and hope this is a trend that long continues into and beyond their work supporting the construction of HS2's Euston tunnels.