

New mental health organisation for rail industry is launched

May 12, 2022



UK Mental Health Awareness week in May 2022 sees the formal launch of Head-shunt (www.head-shunt.com) to support all rail staff and their families, and to work with rail operators, promote education, undertake research and operate well being activity. All efforts are aimed at helping the railway family be mentally well and reducing the stigma around mental health.

Rail staff whether on-train, tram or tube, or undertaking infrastructure or rolling stock work, face 24/7 working, peripatetic working, and are routinely out in all weathers. They can also be faced with dealing with irate customers on stations or trains and are often first responders to rail accidents which can be highly traumatic for all involved.

Rail work by its very nature can be lonely for people and it's entirely appropriate it's launched this week when the focus of Mental Health Awareness Week is loneliness.

With over 100,000 staff directly employed in the UK rail industry and another 200,000 in support functions, fitness mentally is key for staff whether working on a heritage railway, tram or metro operations or in UK heavy rail operations.

Speaking about the launch, lifelong railwayman Paul Stanford said: “With the strains and stresses on UK rail staff not just as a result of the day job, but the COVID crisis and the huge changes to the rail industry in the next few years, it’s key that staff in the railway family are well supported. We have received some great initial commitment from some of the UK’s largest rail operators including Network Rail, including their training of me as Mental Health First Aider. I’m delighted also that people ranging from signallers to train drivers and office based colleagues have volunteered to help our cause.”

Paul spent his life working on the railways since he was 16. He was diagnosed in Autumn 2020 with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from attending rail accidents in his 37 year railway career. Supported by his wife Fiona, as he recovered, they were motivated to do something to help others in the UK railway family and the idea of creating a mental health charity specifically for the wider railway industry was born.

Co founder of Head-shunt; Fiona Ewing-Stanford added: “With personal experience of supporting a rail worker who suffered mental health issues and knowledge of issues affecting women’s mental health in the rail industry I think this is a great initiative; we really believe something additional to current measures is needed to support people in the railway family. We look forward to working with the railway family going forward. The launch of Head-shunt in mental health awareness week 2022 see’s a website go-live as an initial resource to support and inspire people. Well being events are planned in the coming year in addition to working with colleagues in the railway industry.”

Head-shunt is currently pursuing charity status.