

Rail Wellbeing Live: Train driver involved in two fatal incidents speaks on the importance of speaking out

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It is just two weeks before the biggest free wellbeing event in the history of the rail industry takes place.

Rail Wellbeing Live will feature 140 speakers and 80 sessions, focussed on tackling the historic issues around wellbeing found among the 240,000-strong UK rail workforce.

It comes at a time when people are struggling through the coronavirus pandemic, and for an industry at which the absence rate is more than double the rate reported across the private sector and the suicide rate is 1.6 times higher than the UK average.

As part of our partnership with Rail Wellbeing Live, we are highlighting the importance of speaking out and not struggling alone.

Today we are featuring the story of Southeastern train driver Phil Brooks, 56, from Kent who has bravely spoken out about his experiences. Over his career he has been involved in two trespass fatalities, which

have both had a significant effect on him.

"It was 6pm one day in January 2001 and as I was rounding into a station platform I saw a woman stood on the tracks trying to retrieve a hat she had dropped. I hit the brakes but there was nothing I could do.

"When the train came to a stop I walked back to the station as the train had no guard. The woman's friend was standing on the platform screaming. I went to her, coaxed her away from the body and back to the platform and offered comfort.

"There was a woman working in the booking office, who had witnessed the trespasser on CCTV and had warned her to get off the track. My manager came to the station, collected me and took me home."

He had to have counselling for three months. Initially he was referred to a counsellor near to where he lived, but he found that didn't help and was then referred to a railway counsellor, who made a big difference.

"I suffered depression following the incident and had a nervous breakdown. It took its toll on all the family, especially my wife. My children were young and knew something was wrong. It especially affected my youngest. Her grades at school fell that year, which was attributed to the stress that she suffered at the time.

"I wasn't able to attend the coroners' inquest as I was too ill at the time. It's always stayed with me and I still don't know the woman's full name. I have never forgotten the look on her face."

Phil was given a commendation for service for his actions, especially for helping her friend, but never had any contact with the family or the friend afterwards.

Two years later, in 2003, he tragically suffered his second trespass fatality. On that occasion it was a man who had dropped £1,000 onto the track and jumped down to retrieve it. Again, he couldn't stop the train. This time there was a manager on the train.

"I was taken to hospital to be checked out – things had changed in the time between the incidents and the railway now had procedures in place to look after the wellbeing of drivers.

"I felt better able to cope with the effects of this incident and did attend the coroners' inquest. I found it really difficult facing the grief of the victim's family. The family sent me a letter afterwards, which greatly helped me as they told me they didn't blame me for the accident at all.

"After the second incident I was transferred to a different train route. For the first ten years following the first incident, I would get depressed in January, around the anniversary of the event.

"It doesn't happen now, but the incident will always be with me. One thing that has happened is that I feel I have become more hardened. I have changed and one of the more unexpected effects is that I'm a more confident person who's willing to speak up, especially about the incidents."

Phil is backing Rail Wellbeing Live and has urged everyone involved in the industry to take the time to take part in one of the sessions.

The two-day virtual event being held on November 4th and 5th features mental health advocate and entertainer Ruby Wax, BBC Breakfast's resident doctor Dr Rangan Chatterjee and Embarrassing Body star Dr Dawn Harper.

A full agenda is now available on the [website](#), with people not expected to join all the sessions, but rather 'pick n mix' the topics that interest them.

Phil said: "The incidents I was involved in were traumatising and had a severe impact on my mental health, and my family too, as I became withdrawn, reflecting on the impact of what happened. I decided to turn this into a positive and I'm now happy to speak out and share my experience for the benefit of others.

"We all need to talk about the issues facing us and I commend the Rail Wellbeing Live event for all it's doing in shining a light on occupational health in our industry."

Visit www.railwellbeinglive.co.uk for more details.

