

18/3 – The Railway Mission: Supporting the industry during the coronavirus pandemic

March 18, 2020



There are widespread concerns about the threat posed by the coronavirus. This is particularly the case in the rail industry. This includes the thousands of workers who keep the industry moving, through to the millions who rely on the network to get around.

The latest government guidance advises against the use of public transport unless it is for essential reasons. Anyone suffering from the symptoms of COVID-19 – a high temperature and a new, continuous cough – is being told to stay at home.

But what about the impact on your mental health? The fear of catching the virus and anyone having to self-isolate could lead to stress, anxiety and depression.

Liam Johnston is an Executive Director at the Railway Mission. It is one of the organisations offering support and has set up a dedicated email and contact number for those struggling when it comes to coronavirus.

He has spoken to [railbusinessdaily.com](https://www.railbusinessdaily.com) about the services available, and the importance to seek help and

support and not to suffer in silence.

He said: “Nobody working in or connected with the railway industry needs to feel alone. Our trained chaplains offer support on the whole of life’s journey, especially during the bumps in the road.”

The Railway Mission is a group of specially trained people who offer friendship and a listening ear to anyone connected with the nation’s railway.

He said: “The chaplaincy is here to support railway staff and members of the public affected by railway operations.

“I am sure you will be as concerned about the current situation regarding coronavirus that is sweeping around the world as we are. More than 1,500 people have tested positive for the virus in the UK. But according to the BBC the actual number of cases is estimated to be between 35,000 and 50,000 (Tuesday, March 17th).

“As chaplains we wish to offer comfort and care to those who are concerned about the virus. There are a multitude of issues that the government’s advice will cause over the next few months.”

Two issues of concern

There are two areas Liam wanted to highlight. These are taking into account that people with the most severe underlying health issues and those over 70-years-old are being told to self-isolate for 12 weeks.

He said: “Firstly social isolation will cause, in some people, some mental health issues, with anxiety and depression perhaps being the most common.

“The second is that domestic abuse will also increase. Where there are issues in a home the extended period of time in a tense home can increase the occurrence of domestic abuse and violence.”

Contacting those at risk

The Railway Mission has mobile chaplains, based at strategic locations across England, Wales and Scotland, and through its affiliation to the International Railway Mission, has links with railway people as far away as New Zealand.

Its work aims to complement that of the welfare services provided by rail employers.

Liam said: “I have set up an email address for people concerned and wishing for some contact in relation to Covid-19. I have also set up a telephone number. I do not intend that these replace local chaplaincy contact details:

“This week I have been contacted by two separate individuals who have elderly parents in care homes. Both are concerned about not seeing their loved ones as the homes are preventing access, but one gentleman is quite distraught over the situation as his father has a number of issues including dementia.

We are offering support.

“While the country is not in ‘quarantine’ or ‘lockdown’ as it is being referred to, if as chaplains we know of people who are at risk of the above, we are endeavouring to make contact and ensure they have our phone numbers and e-mail addresses. At this time we want to ensure we can be the light in someone’s darkness.”

For more information about the Railway Mission, visit www.railwaymission.org

The contact details for those needing support about coronavirus:

Email – COVID19@railwaymission.org

Phone/Text/WhatsApp – 07903-505868.