

# TeamCaerphilly BETTER TOGETHER



**World Mental Health Day** Special Edition

Issue 4 - OCTOBER 2020



social distancing

ISOLATION

2020 COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS

Wash your hands





# Introduction

## World Mental Health Day 10th October

Special Edition



This edition of the Team Caerphilly newsletter sees us join together with the Trade Unions to raise the profile of World Mental Health Day, and it feels like there has never been a more important time to nurture our own mental health and support others who may be struggling.



The early part of lockdown saw us change the way we operate as an authority and adopt a remote working model, it saw us distanced from our families and the hobbies and activities we all loved.

That being said, we all believed that these restrictions would only be in place for a short few months, now we are still under restrictions it has become very clear that we need to mentally prepare for the winter months ahead with the potential of being under some local restrictions.

This edition has some personal stories from staff who wanted to share their journey over the past few months, and it is truly inspiring.

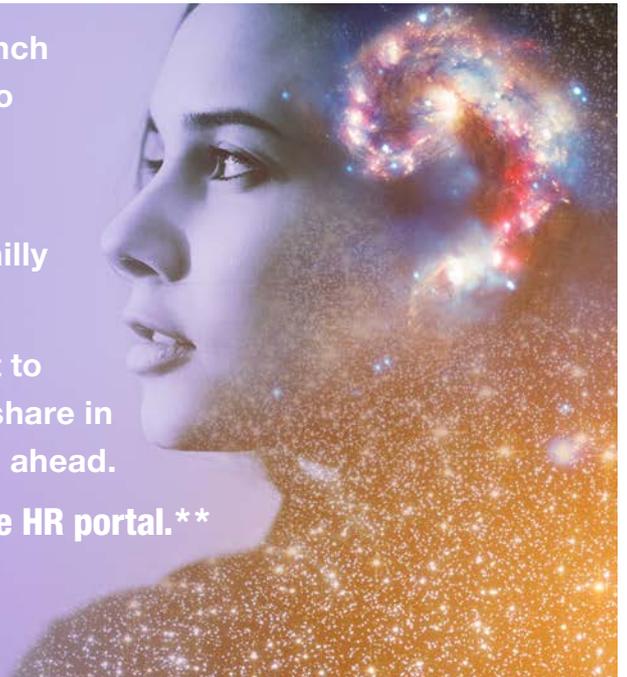
This seems like the perfect time to officially launch My Time and My Time Extra, a set of guidance to help support 1-2-1 and annual meetings.

The concept has been introduced as part of the wider workforce development and Team Caerphilly transformation programme.

1-2-1 meetings have never been more important to help us feel connected with one and other and share in the successes and work through the challenges ahead.

**\*\*The full guidance and forms are available on the HR portal.\*\***

**Christina Harrhy** - Chief Executive



I am so pleased that we have been able to officially launch My Time to coincide with World Mental Health Day; a conversation, a meeting, a one to one, whatever you call it within your team, it can make such a big difference to your mental health.

We recognise as an authority that we need to continue to work towards building our Wellbeing Strategy to continue to support the health and wellbeing of staff.

**Cllr. Colin Gordon**  
**Cabinet Member and Wellbeing Champion**

# Lee's story



I'm Lee Carpenter some might know me, I'm that little bit eccentric Environmental Health Officer, father, friend, and long-time mental health sufferer. Yes, I'm one of the one in four. I never truly believed or understood depression or anxiety or how it can impact on your daily life until it started to get the better of me. I spent many days not really understanding what was going on but I just couldn't get negative thoughts out of my mind and this makes it hard to get up and get on with life at times but I'm thankful my resolve never allowed me to give up.

Like many people, when the doctor first told me they thought I was suffering with anxiety and depression, I fell apart and I'm not afraid to say I cried a little but I believe now looking back it was in a good way. It was like a relief and for me the start of the road to recovery or mental wellness. That road was long and at times, a little rocky but by receiving the right medication and talking to others (professional and otherwise) about how I felt and reading a book called **Depressive Illness the curse of the strong** written by **Dr Tim Cantopher** really helped me and now I live day to day in a much better place generally. I promise I'm not on any kickbacks from retailers or Dr Cantopher but this book is a wonderful insight into sufferers of depression and why I recommend reading it even if you have a friend, partner or family member who suffers with depression; I promise you, this book which isn't very long will allow you to learn something about them you never knew before and why they are the way they are. For those of you who think you may have depression then I suggest you read the book because it might be the insight you need to understand the way you are and start that road to recovery.

My friends, family, work colleagues and the general public I deal with day to day in my Environmental Health role will tell you I can talk for Wales; however, talking about my feelings and feeling comfortable about doing that was extremely difficult. Unfortunately, it's no secret that us men don't like to talk about our feelings, preferring instead to put on the brave face as I like to call it so other don't see us as weak. I'm going to tell you right now lads that this never works and bottling things up inside only leads to those feelings often coming out in the wrong way. Therefore, anyone reading this who feels they might be suffering with their mental health please speak to someone and remember if that person is not helpful or says the classic's "what have you got to be depressed about?" or "pull yourself together!" then they are probably the wrong sort of people to be speaking to.

Since I have told people about my depression and anxiety the number of people who have come to me and said they are or have felt the same in the past has been shocking. Obviously, I always try to sign post people towards professional assistance but I'm always the sympathetic ear to sit and listen to people and to try to guide those through the worry and pain and help them to get the help they need. So, remember you might be the person who is being confided in, please don't use the classic phrases such as the examples above because I promise these do not work and can often make a person with mental health issues feel even worse.

Onto 2020, how has it been for me during a lock down and pandemic? Lockdown was a strange time for me, in the beginning I was recovering from the second of two operations which I had to have this year. This allowed me to watch the situation unfold from the comfort of my home. Whilst lockdown has been difficult for me, I'm sure many people have found themselves in a similar situation and in situations they have never been in before. Other than talking about how I feel, my coping mechanism since receiving the diagnosis has been spending quality time with family and friends which include things like weekends away, going on day trips throughout the year, spending time as a family with our close friends and family with regular get-togethers, parties and barbeques to name a few. Making plans and having regular breaks from everyday life allowing mindful rest and fun which I find helps me considerably and obviously when with friends and

family it's a good time to talk about things which might be getting you down. During lockdown this luxury hasn't been possible for us all, not just me. I also find working from home means that stressful day in work can't be left at the office when I clock out for the day and the drive home which even in traffic I found was good to wind down has also been taken away. In the beginning I didn't see this coming but it crept up and I've had to take measures to ensure I move well away from my work station and try to do something such as going out in the garden or watching something on TV as soon as possible after work and try my best not to think about things too much until the following day.

Not to be all negative; what have I done? Well I found that being in lock down with the children off school meant lots more immediate family time, walking locally, playing in the garden etc. Whilst like many I'm sure things like home schooling (which I must admit my wife took over the majority of) and dealing with children used to going out and doing things fairly regularly has been challenging but it also shows that even when the chips are down and you're not in the best place yourself you can come together and make the best of a bad situation. Which brings me to my very final point and that is my voluntary work as a Community Champion for Time to Change Wales, the work around its #TalkingIsALifetime campaign and the push for people, especially men, to talk more about their mental health generally. I often ask myself why I got involved and it comes to this really; I knew talking about my mental health and feelings (good and bad) helped me to recover and continues to allow me to stay relatively well (we all get bad days).

Talking allowed me to develop the tools needed to cope day to day, let me forgive myself for the way I often felt/feel, an insight that I wasn't alone in feeling this way and helped me to get the negative feelings and thoughts better controlled. I have mentioned it previously but I close here saying if you are in anyway feeling like I have, please speak to someone and keep speaking to people because it will make you feel a whole lot better and will help you down that road to recovery.

**Link to time to change website -**  
My video and recent audio bog is below:  
[www.timetochangewales.org.uk/en/personal-stories/mens-health-week-q-lee/](http://www.timetochangewales.org.uk/en/personal-stories/mens-health-week-q-lee/)

# Helping others to boost your own mental health

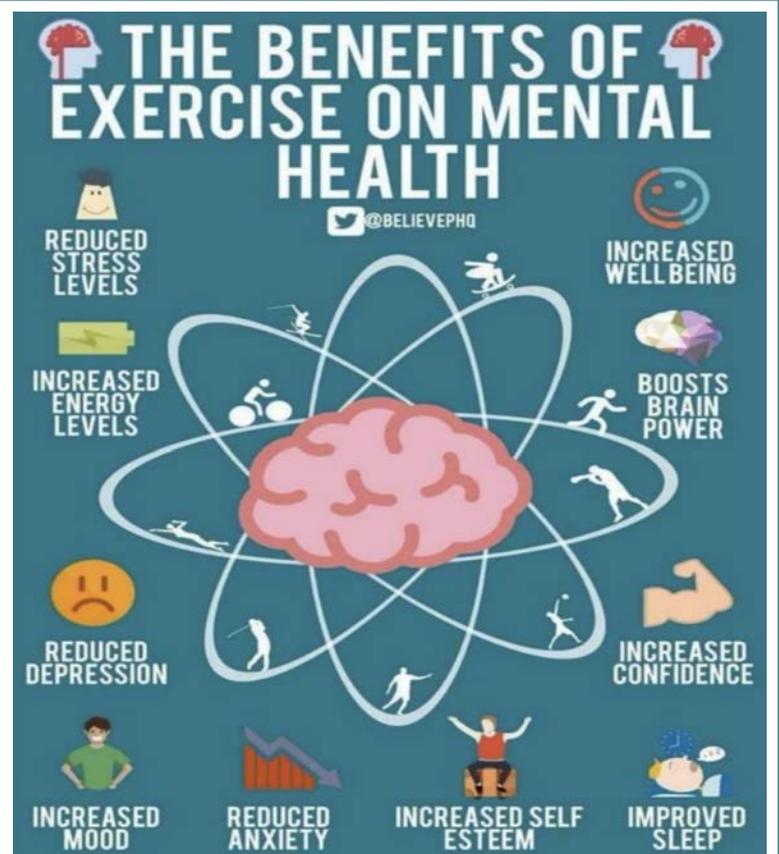
Kath Brown from the HR team has been busy during lockdown knitting teddies and baking cakes with her Mum for key workers. Kath even created an extra special design for our Refuse and Recycling Team.



## Set yourself a challenge

The Sport Caerphilly Team recently launched a step challenge which saw hundreds of staff join together with a common goal of walking as many steps as possible everyday for 7 days.

Whilst local lockdown restrictions prevent us joining colleagues on a walk the Team wanted to lay down the gauntlet to staff to set a personal goal of walking or taking part in exercise for 30 minutes each day.



# Hayley's story

The first lockdown was so hard, wasn't it? Feelings of powerlessness, isolation and anxiety gripped so many of us, and I was definitely no exception to this.

Like so many others I'd felt so powerless in so many ways for a couple of months, so at the end of May I decided that I was going to set myself a challenge – to prove to myself that with everything else going on in the world – that I'm still in control. I was going to give up alcohol for the WHOLE MONTH (thank god June only has 30 days, right?!).

***It might not seem that big a deal for some, but for me it really was. And so it began...***

Day one, day two, day three... 'Oh my god, I miss winding down with a glass of wine (or three) so much. I'm not sure I'm going to be able to do this'. I persevered though and before I knew it, I'd made it through a week. Then 10 days, two weeks and then three! I'll be honest, going alcohol free gave me a real buzz. I'm not sure why but it did, and the rest of June was a breeze.

And then came 1st July. The day I'd been waiting for all month. I'd

stocked my fridge ready and looked forward to it all day. But then when it came to it, I really just didn't fancy it. And if you know me well, you'll know that phrase really didn't feature in my vocabulary when it came to alcohol!!

As I write this it's 22nd September and we're in the midst of another lockdown, this time a local one. And I'm so proud to say that I still regularly go days and days at a time without an alcoholic drink in hand. I just don't fancy it and I realised that it was just a regular habit (and not a good one) that I'd got into. That month of abstinence did so much for me, in a positive way and the benefits of it will definitely stay with me going forward.

When I felt so powerless in so many ways with what was going on, I found a way to help myself and to prove to myself that despite these scary times, there is so much we can still control in our own lives and we can be more mentally resilient than we think. I really hope this helps any of my colleagues who may feel the same way at the moment!

***Shout if I can help at all*** 😊



Hayley - this photo was taken on 15th June, halfway through the month of abstinence.

## Care First

The Care First team have been creating articles each week to support staff in facing the challenges that Covid-19 has brought.



Sian Jones, Area Manager for Leisure Services, said, "I have found the Care First articles excellent; written in clear manner with easily understandable language, that would appeal to a wide variety of staff members, and certainly a great asset to have in your managers, toolbox, in these particularly strange and worrying times.

This information has been cascaded via email to my staff and sent using WhatsApp to a wide variety of staff members, including Centre Shift Supervisors, fitness instructors, pool attendants, swimming teachers and class tutors.

The weekly calendar allows you to have an overview of topics that maybe of interest to you or your team and I know that my team members have found them highly informative, very useful; and a kind of safety blanket in times of stress and worry."

In addition to the articles, staff who do not have access to the intranet can view some support pages on the website by searching Care First Wellbeing.

**You can access all of the support of Care First by logging on:**

**[www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk](http://www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk)**

**Username: ccb001 Password: ncil1234**

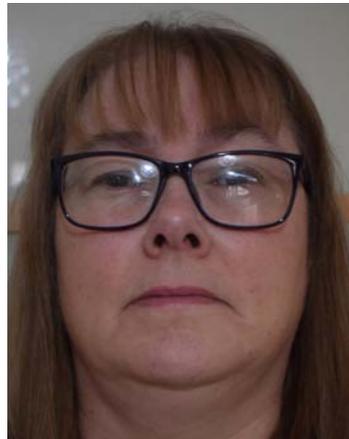
# ← Caroline's story



With the Covid pandemic forcing 130,000 people to shield in Wales, Steve Gardiner from Unison wanted to give an insight into how the shielding restrictions affected people mentally.



Caroline Jones who works in Social Services agreed to share her story with Steve about what her 'new normal' now looks like. Caroline has cerebral palsy and has been shielding since the end of March.



*Shielding ended in Wales on August 16th.*

 Hi Caroline, thanks for talking to me today – clearly a very difficult time for you. I wanted to go back to the very start of shielding and find out about your initial thoughts when you first received your shielding letter from the Welsh Government?

Even though I was expecting it, having followed the course of the pandemic in the UK on the news, I still had concerns around the isolation I would find myself in.



I'm quite a sociable person so I knew that not being able to mix with other people would have a significant impact on my life.

I would miss the camaraderie of being in the office and chatting to work colleagues around the coffee machine.

 So how does 'the new normal' look for you now, Caroline?

To be honest it's very restrictive – not seeing anyone all day and waiting for the phone to ring or an email to come through from work just to have some sort of interaction with people.



I can't wait to get back to normality even though I'm anxious about shielding pausing.

 Do you feel your mental health has been affected since you've been shielding?

Definitely, yes. As I am currently on restrictive duties I worry about not being as productive as I normally am.



I miss having a sense of purpose. I worry more now about the future and how long this 'new normal' will last.

As I say I'm a person who generally needs social interaction and I miss that so much - talking to other people face-to-face often puts your own problems into perspective.

 What coping mechanisms did you have in place to deal with shielding?

I try to deal with things on a day-to-day basis. I try not to worry about things that may not even happen but as this is such a new and frightening situation for everybody, that is difficult. I try to cope on my own as opposed to using any external organisations like Care First, for example.



I have a NVQ in counselling and I used to volunteer for CRUISE bereavement services so these have helped give me solid training for coping with a lot of situations that could affect me mentally.



The counselling qualification and the CRUISE work are two things that I never knew about you Caroline and we've been chatting over various things for a year now! I can imagine they did help in the situation.

On the subject of interesting things about you, your partner has an interesting job that I can imagine causes some anxiety for you and your family?



Just to add something else into the mix, my husband is a key worker and his role over the last few months has been to clean out ambulances that have been used to transport confirmed COVID19 patients to hospital!

As you can imagine when he first told me that's what he was doing my stress levels hit the roof!

Then when it became apparent the amount of PPE he'd be wearing and the risk assessment identified him as low risk because of all the equipment he'd be using, that did ease over time. I certainly don't do things by halves though!



The return to work.  
How do you feel about that?



Very apprehensive even though shielding is paused soon. I guess I wouldn't feel 100% safe until a vaccine has been found for Covid and has been offered to vulnerable people like myself first. I worry that I'd be going back into an environment that isn't safe for me. I can imagine my work routine being very different in terms of social distancing, keeping away from friends and work colleagues. I'll no doubt have a plentiful supply of anti-bacterial wipes and hand sanitiser for when I do go back although I would want to ensure I don't get too OCD about sanitising every two minutes...

I'm looking forward to normality and not just this false 'new normal'. I want to feel productive again and regain my independence. Basically I just want to talk to people on something other than a screen or via a phone call!



Definitely not Caroline – never a dull moment! On the news there's constant talk of a 'second wave' of COVID.

Do you feel you'll be able to cope mentally if you are asked to shield again?



When I think about it too much I'm dreading it as there's talk of this second wave being worse than the first. Then I use another of my coping mechanisms learnt from my counselling training – I try not to think of it as another day nearer to potentially a worse wave but another day nearer to the end of the whole process.

Of course I have bad days, that's natural for anyone in this situation who has been shielding for 16 weeks, but I do believe it's important not to fight it during these days. You will get a good day soon and on those days I try to rationalise my thoughts and reflect on the bad day I had. I consider myself level headed and I view the bad days as happening for a reason.

Oh, and I cry, a lot! I see it as a way of getting my frustration out – I have feelings of anxiety, of course, I think most people would in this situation, and I see crying as a way of getting those feelings out.

My husband and family have really helped me during shielding mentally by being there to talk to as well as the practical things like doing the food shopping. I think my mental health would've suffered even more if I'd been living alone.



On the subject of shopping Caroline I know my credit card has taken a hammering during lockdown with all the things I've bought online. What about you?



 Good grief yes! I miss going shopping but I've already bought a new work outfit online for the eventual return to the office!

# Buddy success

Carrie Davies signed up to the Buddy scheme back in April and she was keen to share how the experience made her feel.

“Being a part of the Buddy Scheme really helped me grow as a person, it helped me not take for granted the little things we do like go to the shop or pop to the pharmacy, as well as the importance of having someone to talk to. I have made some really good friendships and I have formed a real bond with those I was supporting. I feel really fortunate to have been able to take part in the scheme, and to be honest I think I have benefitted just as much as the people I was supporting. It has made me more confident talking to people and it really helped tackle my social anxiety going out and about to support my buddies. I didn't realise that helping others would make such a difference to me and the way I feel.”



“Being a part of the Buddy scheme really helped me grow as a person.”

## Digital wellness

### Yoga sessions

The EAS team take part in virtual yoga sessions once a week led by a relative of a member of staff.

The team were invited to join the Zoom session in comfortable clothes with their cameras and microphones muted until the end of the session. The team highly recommend this and have said that they really enjoy the sessions and doing it as a team.

Helen Farquharson ✉ [wellbeinghelen@gmail.com](mailto:wellbeinghelen@gmail.com)



# A true act of kindness



**Two colleagues have been thanked for their remarkable kindness in supporting a gentleman who was experiencing a life threatening crisis.**

Gavin Bates and Cheryl Cross, who are based with the Links service, noticed a person who was distressed whilst lying in a road. They stopped out of concern for the person, who had a knife in his hand with the intention of ending their life.

Cheryl and Gavin spent time comforting and reassuring the person who after some time handed over the knife and agreed that they needed help.

Gavin continued to sit with the person while Cheryl with the person's agreement, contacted the police.



During this time, the person's Partner or wife also arrived at the scene, and sincerely thanked both members of staff for the kindness they had shown. Cheryl and Gavin waited with the couple until the police arrived.

The Chief Executive, Christina has expressed her appreciation to both Cheryl and Gavin for their selfless actions in supporting this person who was clearly experiencing a life threatening crisis. A true act of kindness from two Team Caerphilly colleagues!

## What is 'The Links' service?

Gavin and Cheryl work within 'The Links' service which provides a community based service to people who have autism and behaviour that may challenge others.