

GOOD WELLBEING IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS



Michael Graham, Business in the Community Board Member and Executive Chair, GRAHAM

In today's society, we are facing a modern day 'pandemic' of poor mental wellbeing. The statistics are shocking and speak for themselves.

In any year, one in four people will suffer from a mental wellbeing issue. That means that right now, you, a colleague or someone close to you is likely to be suffering, usually in silence. Suicide is the number one killer of men over 40 in the UK, and what's more the construction industry consistently ranks as the highest in the UK's mental ill-health league table, due to its traditional macho image of 'manning up'.

However, at GRAHAM we are working hard to change that trend. We believe that employers are in a unique position to positively influence mental wellbeing, and we want to open up the conversation, so that everyone knows that 'it's okay not to be okay'.

We want our industry to be a place where employees can feel comfortable talking about their issues, and where they can get support from their manager, fellow employees and wellbeing experts to get back to full health.

That's why we have become recognised as leaders within wellbeing through our innovative approaches that help to tackle these issues head on.

Furthermore, they are simple to understand and are adaptable to any size, or type of organisation.

Our mental wellbeing 'service' includes:

- **A defined process:** We have established a bespoke mental health process, which outlines a step by step roadmap when an issue has been identified or has been raised
- **Manager awareness training:** Managers receive formal training that helps them to identify mental health issues, how to manage mental health on site and where to get help for affected employees
- **Mental Health First Aiders:** Selected staff across the business undertake additional externally accredited training, and are available to provide confidential, localised support

- **External support:** We are partnering with Health Assured and other specialist mental health partners. We are also active members of Mates in Mind
- **Communication:** We have developed innovative communication platforms to educate employees about mental wellbeing issues and to signpost them to the appropriate support. These include videos, internal social media, a dedicated wellbeing portal and a handy on the go APP
- **Simple initiatives:** From 'Tools Down Friday' through to weekly five-a-side football for those working away from home, we aim to ensure no one is isolated which can easily sow the seeds for future problems
- **Confidential assistance:** We provide confidential assistance to employees through our external Employee Assistance Programme and make a Mental Health Specialist available for individualised counselling

However, mental wellbeing is more than just a series of direct initiatives. It's about good work and satisfying our deepest needs on why, how and where we work. So, we are focusing just as much on how we structure work, build teams and recognise and reward individuals.

On top of all of this, it's important to understand how the different facets of wellbeing - the physical, the psychological and the social - interact. We call this the 'Holy Trinity' of wellbeing because focusing on one area directly influences the others, creating a 'gestalt' effect that impacts people and the business.

As an example, we recently concluded our '100 Day Challenge' programme. The Challenge, which has already received the NI Health and Fitness Innovation Award, required participants to be physically active for at least ten minutes every day and encouraged employees to focus on getting fit for summer.

Indeed, for one of our inspirational employees it played a major motivating role in helping to put his Type 2 diabetes into remission.

While the challenge was primarily focused on physical wellbeing, its team-based structure meant the creation of positive social connections between staff, with the physical exercise itself enhancing the mental wellbeing of employees.

Similarly, CONNECT PLUS, our innovative whole person development programme, has been designed to influence mental, physical and social wellbeing.

Based on cutting-edge research across performance, health and wellbeing, CONNECT PLUS has already produced eye-catching results, including reducing absence to 400% lower than the UK average, and employee turnover for participants falling to just 1%.

Fundamentally, we know that when a person has a balanced and healthy lifestyle, they feel great and reap the benefits in every aspect of their lives, including their work.

Against this backdrop, we often get asked the secrets of our success. It really is quite simple:

- We ensure that every activity is what employees need, and we use the 'common voice' so that people understand what is available
- Leadership is key - our leaders participate in our programmes and this commitment to 'vulnerability' has been a catalyst for change
- We ensure managers and employees are involved in the design of programmes through regular feedback and dialogue
- We partner with experts who share our values and will challenge us to continuously improve
- We focus on results at the individual, team and business level - there has to be a benefit for everyone

Overall, we have learnt a simple lesson on our journey - we don't know it all. That's why collaboration is key if we are going to develop a sea change around mental wellbeing.

It's not just a problem for the construction industry. We need to open up the conversation, so, collectively as UK PLC, we get to grips with the issues, share innovation and develop programmes that ultimately will make work an

environment where people can maximise their potential by having the right skills backed by the right mental wellbeing and resilience.

Fundamentally, we need to harness the power we hold as employers, working collectively so that we build on each other's strengths to achieve success.

The reward for this collaboration will be a new work landscape that will be transformational for individuals, business and society.

In the end, the message is simple - good wellbeing is good for business.

Business in the Community's recently released report 'Time to Take Ownership' highlights the stark reality that it is time to prioritise mental health in the workplace even more. As such, Business in the Community is calling on businesses to do three things:

1. Create good work that enhances mental health. Good work is created by elements including security, fair pay and professional development.
2. Acknowledge and support employees experiencing poor mental health, whatever the cause.
3. Publicly report your wellbeing performance.



The 'Time to Take Ownership' report, produced by Business in the Community in partnership with Mercer Marsh Benefits, is now available - www.bitcni.org.uk.

