

# Employers Showcase – Case Studies

## Demonstrating accountability and recruit Employee Champions



Laing O'Rourke has around 80 workplaces in the UK, a mixture of construction and infrastructure workplaces, manufacturing sites and plant depots. The business stands out in the construction sector, with a 5,000-strong workforce employed directly, alongside 3,500 staff.

Having such a big workforce allows us to retain good people for longer. It also allows us to communicate key health messages very visibly – and constantly reinforce them. Health and Safety is one of our core values, our people are our greatest asset so it makes complete sense to make sure we look after their health and wellbeing.

In the UK construction industry, you are six times more likely to die from suicide than a workplace accident.

It's a startling statistic and sadly there are more.

- The rate of suicide among men is more than three times higher than women, with the bigger group being men aged 45-59
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for men between the ages of 20-34 in England and Wales

It's a global issue too. The World Health Organisation (WHO) says there are more than 350 million people across the world who suffer with depression. In both the UK and Australia 1 in 4 people experience a mental health illness in any given year.

With the demographic of the construction sector typically made up of men aged 26-55 it's an issue that cannot be ignored. It's imperative that we support our employees' health and wellbeing.

Working in construction often means working in a highly pressurised environment, where talking about how your feelings or your emotions can seem like a sign of weakness. In common with many parts of society, there is a stigma attached to talking about mental illness, meaning many who suffer do so in silence.

People often see mental health negatively, but by promoting the importance of having good mental health, when people are experiencing a mental health issue they are more likely to understand the symptoms they are experiencing and therefore seek help earlier.

In October 2015 Laing O'Rourke started its programme to raise awareness of mental health in the workplace. Part of this plan included forming a partnership with mental health charity, Mind.

In May 2016 we signed up to the [‘Time to Change’ pledge](#) to end mental health discrimination in the workplace. We launched our pledge and action plan at our spring senior leadership event demonstrating our commitment to supporting good mental health at all levels of our organisation.

In response to our programme and initiatives to raise awareness of mental health in the workplace we have had people come forward offering their help and wanting to get involved.

In 12 months we have trained **40 mental health champions**, these are all people that have volunteered their services. We originally used Time to Change to deliver our Champion’s Programme but we have now developed our own in-house version which we deliver ourselves.

All champions will go through the one day training course before officially becoming a champion, they can then do as much or as little as they wish. Here are some of the things we would expect champions to be involved in

- As an Employee Champion you will raise awareness of mental health and help to break down stigma in the workplace.
- Employee Champions have a leading role in ending stigma and the culture of silence.
- Normalising conversations around mental health this will have an impact on overall culture and perceptions among colleagues.
- Every activity, no matter how big or small, contributes to our collective goal of tackling mental health stigma, such as organising a stall in your canteen or starting a conversation about mental health with your team

We have put a regional structure in place so we have 3 regions, Scotland, North of England and South of England. These 3 regions have a Lead Champion that looks after and communicates regularly with the champions in the region. This support structure seems to be working well.

In October this year we will run our first Mental Health Champions Conference where we will review the progress we have made, develop plans for the next 12 months and give our champions some development opportunities and new tools they can use.

I would advise any organisation to let people come to you to volunteer for the role and support them with as much or as little as they want to do. Providing structured activities during the calendar year will give the champions visibility and time to look at what activities they have the time to support.

Providing training whether it is mental health champions training, MH awareness or MH First Aid, allows the champions to get a better understanding of how they can provide support.

## Further Reading

[Safety & Health Practitioner Case Study](#)

[Info Works Spotlight](#)

[Occupational Health at Laing O’Rourke](#)