

Danny Sullivan Group Mental Health programme: FIR case study

Background

Established in 1986, the Danny Sullivan Group (DSG) currently directly employs around 1,500 people and deploys them to civil engineering clients, as temporary labour. Roles range from labourers to senior general foreman and works managers. Sectors include air, civil engineering highways, nuclear, rail, security, tunnelling and utilities.

DSG's Mental Health programme promotes positive mental health, encourages better physical health and supports overall wellbeing, which in turn makes sites safer. It aims to provide the workforce with:

- the skills to recognise symptoms of common mental health problems
- support to prevent the problem from getting worse and guide a person, effectively, towards the right support services.

DSG have presented the programme to many clients and industry colleagues, sharing knowledge to assist people should they wish to set up similar initiatives within their organisations.

The company was awarded a Costain Health & Safety award 2017, for the work to date.



Why address mental health?

During 2016, key individuals within DSG became aware of news stories and studies about stress and mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and industry statistics around the issue. For example, according to [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS), between 2011 and 2015:

- Suicide was the leading cause of death for men under 50
- The risk of suicide among low-skilled male labourers, particularly those working in construction roles, was 3 times higher than the male national average.
- For males working in skilled trades, the highest risk was among building finishing trades; particularly, plasterers and painters and decorators had more than double the risk of suicide than the male national

- Those working as process, plant and machine operatives had a risk of suicide higher than the national average

It was recognised that DSG people are at risk of mental ill health and could benefit from support programmes. The support available, however, varies between clients and sites, and is not always offered to all workers. Normal deployment practices would result in inconsistencies in the support available to different DSG people. DSG decided, therefore, to act on behalf of its own people.

At the same time, DSG representatives had begun attending “Introduction to FIR” workshops hosted by their clients. They were becoming increasingly aware of the business case for promoting inclusion in the workplace, and how FIR that contributes to people’s health and wellbeing.

DSG committed, from the very top, to act to promote FIR and mental health and wellbeing.

“Our business is the supply of people to high profile projects throughout the UK. Embedding FIR into our organisation is key to completion of such projects. This is achieved through successful partnerships and being a fair, inclusive and respectful industry”

Timothy O’ Sullivan, Managing Director.

What did DSG do?

DSG developed its own Wellbeing Policy. This commits to provide free medicals to all employees and aims to:

- Create a workplace environment that promotes and supports the mental wellbeing of all employees.
- Ensure that the working environment promotes the mental health and wellbeing of employees, clients and visitors.
- Ensure employees are aware of the support that can be offered through the Health & safety and Human Resources departments.

A network of Mental Health Champions began to be created.

38 DSG people have taken part in Mental Health training (provided by [MIND](#) and [MHFA](#)), so that they have become Mental Health First Aiders and are available to help others in their workplaces. This includes the company’s 10 Operation and Labour Managers. Mental Health First Aiders on sites are clearly identified by stickers their hard hats, so that they can be easily approached by anyone on site for support, not just DSG workers

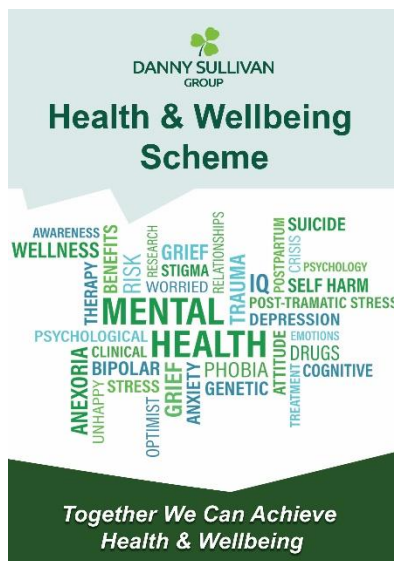
Mental Health First Aiders and Champions make particular effort to offer assistance to any worker involved in an accident, in case mental ill health has been a causal factor and/or result.

A DSG Health & Safety team has created a short presentation to raise awareness about mental health issues, and has delivered this at sites across the UK, to (by end March 2018) over 600 people. The presentation explains the symptoms of mental ill health and where people can go for support. Its key take-away message is ‘even if you don’t need this support, now, be there for someone who does’. The presentation has also been given to leadership and client meetings, so that there is awareness of the issue, and support available, from ‘the top’.

For information about mental health support to be as easily accessible to people as possible, DSG:

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- Publishes a [list of helplines](#) on its website
- Issues tips for wellbeing through its social media channels
- Publishes and distributes leaflets on sites



The Health & Safety team liaises with client safety teams, so that they are aware of, and can help people access, DSG’s mental health support, as and when needed.

DSG client Costain plc made its Employee Assistance Programme available to all DSG people, as it has to all its supply chain partners.

DSG made the services of [Validium](#) available to its workers and their families.

Alongside this, a cohort of DSG people have become FIR Ambassadors and more plan to do so. They are using the FIR Toolbox Talks on projects such as the A14 highways upgrade, to promote inclusion and help tackle bullying and other behaviours that can harm mental health.

Impact & Benefit Realised

Anecdotally, DSG believe that their work around mental health and wellbeing is helping the company to attract and retain employees, because people perceive they ‘get more’ working for DSG than for other employers.

Also, DSG perceive that the work is raising productivity, because people can speak out and get help if they are feeling troubled, rather than working on regardless, when they are unwell and not able to perform their best.

Promoting an inclusive workplace culture promotes wellbeing, and this makes a happier workforce. Conversely, an issue such as bullying affects mental health and so needs to be tackled. FIR strengthens relationships as it allows people to talk more easily.

DSG’s business is the supply of people to high profile projects throughout the UK. Embedding FIR into the organisation is perceived as key to completion of such projects, as it enables successful industry-wide partnerships and collaboration.

One person at acute risk of suicide has been supported. Following a presentation on mental health and wellbeing, the team around this person became concerned they might be in difficulty and alerted their site manager, who in turn passed a message on to a Mental Health Champion. The Champion spent time on site with the person and persuaded – and arranged for – them to see a general practitioner, where an immediate referral for treatment was made. The Champion liaised with the person’s family about the referral and arranged for the [completely innocent] workplace circumstances that might have triggered the immediate distress to be investigated and explained to the worker so that they ceased to worry about them. The person was away on sick leave for several months, but subsequently returned to work and has been supported to successfully reintegrate into the workplace. The value of DSG’s intervention to this person, their family and their colleagues is almost impossible to quantify.

Leadership

Managing Director Tim O’ Sullivan and the DSG Board Members have signed a FIR commitment.

FIR and Health and wellbeing is reported back to Tim and the DSG Executive board on a regular basis. They are seen, by their business, to have driven the initiatives from ‘top down’, which has enabled them to become embedded and remain high on the corporate agenda, on an on-going basis. DSG feels it’s their collective duty to promote fairness inclusion and respect across our industry.

Investment

DSG have invested some cash in Mental Health training.

The main investment has been in the time of people; taking part in mental health and wider FIR training, creating and delivering presentation and talks and share key messages around teams and clients and, of course, supporting others.

Tips

Use the School FIR programme resources, such as its Mental Health & Wellbeing toolbox talk. Taking part in FIR workshops is a great way of meeting people who are on the same journey - they will provide inspiration.

Involve senior management in mental health and FIR training. When they, themselves, understand the issues they are more willing to help find solutions.

Provide an Employee Assistance Programme.

Get out on site and around offices. Talk to people. Be frank and honest about the challenges that people face. For example, if you are talking to a group of four people, explain that one of them is likely to have a mental health problem.

Remember that Mental Health Champions need support, themselves. For example, the strain of intervening and supporting a person who is at risk of suicide can be immense and, itself, needs to be managed.

Build a team to support mental health and wellbeing. Everyone can then support each other. Involve people who *want* to do it. Don't assume that everyone will; some people can't or won't, perhaps because of difficult past experiences.

“The presentation we created and the talks we organised did not cost us and were most impactful. Starting the conversation and breaking down barriers were key to ensuring that mental health was no longer a taboo. The positive changes that we have seen across our organisation have been phenomenal. This is because we consistently drive and reinforce the message which makes people feel more comfortable about speaking up.”

Eibhlin Flynn, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, Danny Sullivan Group Ltd