

# Case study: TD Direct Investing launches Mental Health Awareness programme



It is estimated that 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. Furthermore, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in its recent 2014/2015 Labour Force Survey, has found that alongside musculoskeletal disorders, stress, depression or anxiety accounted for the majority of days lost due to work-related ill health, (9.9 and 9.5 million days respectively).

## Mental Health Awareness programme at TD Direct Investing

TD Direct Investing (TDDI) has recently launched a Mental Health Awareness programme in order to establish a culture of openness where colleagues can talk freely about their mental health. As stated in the organisation's internal newsletter:

**'It is important to understand the effects of a mental illness so we can guide and support people sensitively and appropriately. This does not mean we need to have a detailed medical understanding of each condition. We want to create an environment at work where we proactively support those with mental health conditions and prevent illness or reoccurrence where possible.'**

TDDI's Mental Health Awareness initiative was launched in May 2015 during Mental Health Awareness Week. Working in collaboration with Business Disability Forum (BDF), TDDI ran a series of workshops, videos, events and digital campaigns designed not only to raise awareness and understanding of mental health in the workplace, but also to support employees in building resilience against mental ill health and informing colleagues of the extensive support available to them.

TDDI and BDF delivered a series of eight half-day mental health workshops for all line managers and interested colleagues at TDDI's offices in Leeds, Manchester and Luxembourg. The content of the sessions was validated through a dedicated Steering group at TDDI and a pilot session was undertaken in April 2015 with the organisation's Persons with Disability (PWD) Pillar Group.

The training sessions were advertised through a variety of internal communications, one of which included a series of videos featuring TDDI employees discussing their own experiences of mental health.

The training sessions were delivered by [Christopher Watkins](#), Business Disability Consultant at BDF (pictured) and featured a variety of practical based learning activities including group discussion around real-life scenarios, an awareness quiz and opportunities to explore the experiences of colleagues at TD. Attendees were also given advice on how to handle sensitive conversations and given examples of some of the more common challenges that may arise when supporting someone with a mental health condition. With up to 25 employees attending each session, the workshops encouraged colleagues to work together to further their understanding of the causes of mental ill-health, its effects, the wide range of help available and their own role in supporting colleagues as managers.

Speaking about the mental health awareness workshops, Christopher said:

“TD Direct Investing has demonstrated an exemplary commitment to supporting colleagues with mental health issues or experiencing mental ill-health at work. It’s been a pleasure to meet every manager through the training, who without exception showed an impressive eagerness to support their colleagues in the most effective and appropriate way, making TDDI a fantastic place to work for everyone, including those with mental health conditions.”

Over the course of eight weeks between October and November 2015, Christopher delivered practical training sessions to over 150 line managers throughout the organisation.

## **Mental Health Allies programme (MHA)**

TDDI’s MHA programme forms a core part of the 2015 mental health awareness programme. Having already raised awareness throughout the company, the allies are key to making a practical difference to the lives of employees and also sustaining the culture of openness and support that has been established throughout the year.

The MHA are a group of volunteers selected from across the business to provide informal support to colleagues who may be experiencing mental ill-health and signpost those in need of help to the more formal support available within TD. The Allies are complimentary to the existing support available at the company – including HR, line management, and the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

The MHA programme is open to volunteers from across the whole organisation and was advertised through a series of internal communications asking interested parties to apply.

As outlined in the role description, TDDI describes an Ally as:

- Someone you can call if you need some support on a mental health issue, whether it’s you who is feeling unwell or if it is someone else you know.
- Someone who is comfortable to be identified as a MHA.
- Someone who can listen well and can draw upon their knowledge, experience and judgment to support others.
- Someone you can trust and confide in.
- Someone who can help you think through things and help point you to the appropriate support.
- Someone who can respond promptly and give their time when people need it.

For clarification, TDDI also explained what an Ally is not:

An Ally is not:

- A mental health expert.
- A counsellor or therapist.
- A career mentor offering long-term support.
- A substitute for HR or a good manager.

Individuals were recruited on the basis that they had an interest in people, a good ability to help

others work out their options, were trustworthy and genuinely wished to support people and give their time.

Continuing its collaboration with BDF, Allies were trained by Christopher Watkins with sessions taking place across 2 full days in mid November 2015. Training sessions involved a combination of practical based learning and workshops designed to prepare the Allies for their new role. Allies were also encouraged to explore how they will work together as a team to ensure the sustainability of the programme.

The sessions focussed on:

- The common issues a colleague may wish to talk to an Ally about.
- How to listen and express the empathy you feel.
- How to look after oneself and being aware of the emotional and practical support available to the Allies.
- How to effectively signpost colleagues to other sources of support available within the business.
- Understanding where the responsibilities of the Ally begin and end to both individual colleagues and the business.

In order to support the MHAs moving forward, TDDI is currently working with Christopher and BDF to create a supervision programme for the network. The MHA will meet regularly to support each other and ensure the ongoing success of the programme and each individual Ally will receive on-going telephone support from the EAP and BDF.

Speaking about the role of the MHAs and the training sessions provided, Christopher said:

“We have made so much progress in the last few years on the mental health agenda, with awareness-raising programmes becoming commonplace and businesses waking up to the importance of mental wellbeing to their culture, people and bottom line.

“TD’s Mental Health Allies programme is a fantastic example of the next step; moving beyond initial awareness-raising initiatives to achieve tangibly improved outcomes for those of us experiencing mental ill-health as well as business performance. The Allies themselves have been a joy to work with, and I look forward to seeing their success and the development of the programme.”

**For more information about TDDI, visit:** <http://www.tddirectinvesting.co.uk/about-us/>

**To view Business Disability Forum’s mental health awareness publications, visit:** <http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/advice-and-publications/publications/line-manager-guide-mental-health-at-work/>

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