



The Mental Health and Wellbeing Awards 2024



Nominate a Professional Entry Form

Tracey Hoult

Their role: On-site Counsellor at HMP Dovegate and HMP Doncaster

The organisation they work for: Serco as an external contractor at the two prisons

Provide a short summary (max 150 words) of the individual and their contribution for use if your nomination is shortlisted.

Working in prisons is challenging to say the least, which is why it is so important to give employees a safe space to talk where they can develop coping skills to support their mental wellbeing. Tracey Hoult, the on-site counsellor at HMP Doncaster and HMP Dovegate, provides just that to an exceptional level. In supporting circa 750 employees, her commitment and willingness to go the extra mile has in many cases changed lives.

She plays a key role in altering attitudes and breaking down the stigma around seeking psychological support, making it not just acceptable to 'talk to Tracey' but also normal to prioritise mental wellbeing as part of the everyday demands of the job.

"In 33 years of working in prisons, I have never come across an individual that has had so much impact on the care and wellbeing of prison staff," Mark Hanson, Justice Director, Serco.

Introduce them and their role in the space below.

Tracey Hoult has provided on-site counselling services for the circa 750 Serco employees running HMP Dovegate for 5.5 years and at HMP Doncaster for 4.5 years. Tracey is unusual within the prison environment because she is based on-site and provides face-to-face sessions, rather than virtual or off-site support.

Any member of staff can book in to see Tracey when she is on-site (1.5 days a week at HMP Dovegate and 1 day a week at HMP Doncaster) without having to join a waiting list.

Her knowledge of working within prisons and with prison staff is second to none. This combined with her highly professional approach, deploying techniques which really work for our staff, are what make her such a valuable part of the team.

Diane Marsden, People Services Manager at HMP Dovegate says: "Tracey's personal touch has a way of getting people to open up, even if they start a session quite guarded. It helps that she is a very bubbly, likeable person with a deep knowledge of working in the public sector, including prisons."

Tracey's interventions make a huge difference the lives of those working at the prisons, their families and colleagues. They also contribute to the smooth running of these establishments by creating a more engaged, motivated and effective workforce, able to perform the pivotal role we ask them to undertake with prisoners and on behalf of the communities they serve.

Tracey delivers 10 to 15 sessions for staff at HMP Dovegate per week and approximately 10 sessions at HMP Doncaster – the equivalent of 2.5 days a week. Any employee at the prisons are able to book appointments, or their manager can make a referral on their behalf.

Tracey offers staff a safe space to talk, where they can establish or improve coping skills, find a different perspective and better understand themselves. These services cover a range of emotional issues, such as anger and stress management, PTSD, depression/anxiety, relationship issues, suicide prevention and personal empowerment.

Tracey provides reactive crisis intervention sessions, without the need to join a waiting list. Also, she delivers group supervision, conflict management, anger management and meditation. She gets involved in training on creating a mentally healthy workplace, through the training of mental health first aiders and she provides workshops on emotional resilience, for new staff.

Although she is an external contractor, Tracey is regarded very much as part of the Serco team. The services Tracey provides really matter and they really work. She understands the challenges our staff face working in a prison environment and time and time again, her interventions have given our people the help they need to manage the pressures of the job and modern living in general. Tracey always goes the extra mile to ensure our people don't just manage but they build coping strategies to thrive, in what can be satisfying and rewarding roles, with a feeling that their contribution really counts.

When necessary, Tracey will see staff off-site in a neutral environment or provide virtual sessions, as well as her sessions on-site. Her emphasis is always to provide our staff with what they need, in a way which is appropriate for them.

Describe in the space below the mental health or wellbeing story.

Tracey's journey with Serco prisons started in 2016, when she was brought on board to help a staffing group that felt undervalued, uncared for and professionally exhausted at another prison. Her work was so successful that her role was expanded, and she now dedicates her time to supporting staff at two establishments – HMP Dovegate and HMP Doncaster.

HMP Dovegate is a Category B adult male prison near Uttoxeter in Staffordshire and HMP Doncaster is a Category B local resettlement prison in South Yorkshire. Without doubt for the 750 staff at both prisons, this is a challenging workplace environment with the potential to have a detrimental impact on their mental health.

Similar to other prisons, our staff at these sites frequently come into contact with complex individuals and are likely to witness and experience traumatic incidents at work such as self-harm, suicide and substance misuse. It is also extremely common for them to encounter violent incidents and to be required to apply restraint, which makes them susceptible to physical injury.

This is why it is particularly important for employees to have access, without having to wait, to high quality interventions, such as counselling services, so they can talk openly about their health needs and build coping strategies. The services which Tracey has been providing at HMP Doncaster and HMP Dovegate for the past 4.5 and 5.5 years respectively, do just that. It is different to the psychological support available to staff at most of the other 120 prisons in England because Tracey is based on-site and many of the sessions she runs are face-to-face. This means that she is particularly in tune with the needs of the individual prisons where she works and she tailors her support accordingly. We believe and she believes that she can provide a better service through face-to-face sessions, which she provides on-site or in a safe neutral space if required.

As well as the pressures of the job, Tracey helps staff to manage the many challenges of modern living such as grief, family and financial issues and historic trauma. Time and time again Tracey's interventions have had a positive impact, particularly on employees in crisis, often preventing or reducing sickness leave by helping them to manage their mental health more effectively.

Describe in the space below the impact they have had.

Only by providing top quality psychological support to our staff through Tracey, as well as a package of other interventions, are we able to create and maintain an engaged, motivated and effective workforce which delivers our objectives, such as providing the people in prison with structure in their lives, so they make positive choices and are supported during the rehabilitation journey.

To ensure prisons are run smoothly it is vital that we retain the best workforce talent and minimise levels of sickness and we firmly believe that a key element to this is through the support Tracey provides at HMP Dovegate and HMP Doncaster.

We believe Tracey's face-to-face sessions are the gold standard of support available and this has a significant impact on morale at the sites.

The following statistics demonstrate the take up of Tracey's services over the past 12 months.

HMP Dovegate	
Total number of sessions (12 months)	877
Total number of clients (12 months)	80
HMP Doncaster	
Total number of sessions (12 months)	636
Total number of clients (12 months)	70

Over the past five years, Tracey's input has without doubt contributed to a change in culture regarding attitudes to asking for psychological assistance at both prisons. For many years, there has been a reluctance around seeking psychological support because of the stigma associated with this, which has meant many conditions were unaddressed for a significant period of time, building up problems for later. Tracey's presence on-site, her reputation for delivering interventions which really work and her influence over the leadership teams have all contributed to a change in ethos at the prisons. Rather than hide issues, it is now normal for staff to talk freely about booking appointments for counselling and to openly discuss the coping techniques with colleagues. Rather than being optional, prioritising mental wellbeing is seen very much as part of the job, as is seeking help when you need to and providing support to colleagues who are struggling. This sea-change in attitudes is largely down to Tracey's influence. For example, it is not uncommon to hear somebody ask, 'which office is Tracey using today because I want to book a session', or to hear colleagues openly discussing and weighing up the benefits of different coping strategies for different situations.

What do other people say about this person?

Mark Hanson, Justice Director at Serco says:

"In late 2016, I inherited a prison as the Director that can only be described as being in crisis. At the heart of the issues was a staffing group that felt undervalued, uncared for and professionally exhausted. I recognised that to turn around this institution I would need to invest in staff support and care. Having worked with Tracey Hoult previously, I immediately realised that her skills, care and dedication to her role of counsellor would play a significant part of the prison staff recovery jigsaw.

"Within weeks Tracey had gained the confidence of the staff and management team - her service was fully subscribed within a month. I extended her hours and she then single handedly worked tirelessly with a staff group that had experienced trauma, personal stress and mental health issues. She again worked tirelessly both in clinics within the prison and outside of hours often taking calls in her own time. During my 6 years at the prison the person referred to simply as 'Tracey' was known and respected by staff of all grades- she carries real credibility for her care and compassion. In 33 years of working in the prison environment I have never come across an individual that has had so much impact on the care and wellbeing of prison staff.

"Tracey's role has now expanded across the Serco prison estate, where her care touches more staff. Prison work demands high levels of resilience, our staff often give so much of themselves to the role that it at times impacts on their health and wellbeing. Tracey Hoult has consistently and selflessly gone about supporting people who sometimes don't even realise they need it- such is her dedication she makes herself available in her own personal time to support others in crisis.

"I would highly commend Tracey Hoult for an award for services to Prison Staff in crisis and in need of someone to listen and most importantly genuinely care."

NOT TO BE PUBLISHED – three testimonials from clients

"I was in crisis and I was able to meet Tracey after only 24 hours of my manager speaking to her. Without a doubt I would have gone sick if I hadn't been able to speak to her so quickly. As a result of our sessions, I have remained in work and I have passed on some of the coping strategies Tracey has taught me to my colleagues, even though my sessions have now ended. I know that if I reach another crisis that Tracey is on site. I can't express my gratitude enough."

"I was grateful that Tracey provided consistent face-to-face sessions, even in the height of COVID. Tracey adapted the frequency of these sessions depending on how I was doing in myself. The sessions felt easy and comfortable and Tracey allowed me to bring whatever was needed at that time and be responsible and flexible with that."

"If it wasn't for Tracey, I wouldn't be here."

Please return the entry to awards@rootofit.com before 30th May 2024.