

Workplace Wellbeing

SERCO

Working in prisons can be highly rewarding but it is also challenging on both mental and physical health. The reality is that this workforce is more likely than most to experience trauma and risk sustaining physical injury because of the demands of the job. This is why Serco, which operates five prisons in England, has developed a sector leading programme of wellbeing support for our prisons workforce. We believe it is vital that our staff have psychological support, such as access to ground-breaking counselling services, physiotherapy and other professional support that provides early access to intervention, and that they are willing and able to talk about their health needs openly. By putting the wellbeing of employees first, this is helping to create a more engaged, motivated and effective workforce, able to perform the pivotal role we ask them to undertake within prisons and on behalf of the communities they serve.

Each of Serco's five prisons focus on health and wellbeing of employees through three key priority areas.

Prevent: We aim to remove, prevent, or mitigate risks or challenges to colleague wellbeing wherever possible. Senior leaders embed a positive culture of wellbeing, including reducing stigma and challenging behaviours which are counterproductive.

Care: Investment in manager training to increase capability in identifying and managing staff wellbeing issues.

Support: Ensuring support is available and barriers to accessing support are overcome.

We have a sector leading, universal programme of support across all five prisons, which builds on the standard Serco corporate offer to address the key issues staff are likely to face. This includes:

- Specially trained staff in the TRIM team who conduct assessments for trauma 72 hours after a potentially traumatic event, helping to normalise the experience and signpost to relevant support.
- Immediate support provided by the Care Team - specially trained staff who offer emotional support immediately following incidents as well as for anything impacting from outside of the workplace, as we know that

external factors can be significant in impacting employee wellbeing while they are at work.

- A Health and Wellbeing Lead at each site who takes ownership of employee health and wellbeing including the development of consistent dissemination of wellbeing information.
- Bespoke counselling provision available at all prisons – mixture of delivery on-site, on Teams or via phone.
- Partnership with Shout – a text mental health support service for immediate crisis support and signposting to Serco intervention.

In addition, all our prison staff have access to a range of support which is available to all Serco staff:

- Wellbeing Allies who are trained to promote and support a culture of wellbeing.
- An employee assistance programme which offers free confidential 24/7 emotional, legal and financial support, with information available on a variety of health and wellbeing topics. This includes a dedicated hotline for line managers.
- A mental health app which helps individuals understand if they are suffering from anxiety or depression, as well as tools to manage common stressors.
- BUPA's anytime helpline, allowing staff to speak to a nurse 24/7 and get health advice for themselves, and immediate family.
- MyHR portal which has information and advice about employee benefits and support, as well as assistance for managers on how to support employees.
- Serco Reward Gateway which has on demand health, wellbeing and fitness information to support staff to make healthy choices, as well as benefits and discounts which can help facilitate financial savings.
- Serco People Fund is a charity for current and retired employees for times when they face extraordinary financial challenges.

Individual prisons, or groups of prisons, run a number of tailored initiatives to meet the specific needs of their workforces. The examples below summarise a selection of these initiatives.

HMP Ashfield is a category C adult male facility near Bristol that holds 400 convicted prisoners serving sentences for sexual offences, with around 200 staff on site. HMP Ashfield was the first prison in the world to achieve ISO 45003, an accreditation which specifically recognises the successful management of conditions, circumstances and workplace demands with the potential to impair the psychological health and wellbeing of the workforce. Serco is extremely proud of this achievement.

The profile of the prison population at HMP Ashfield means that the challenges faced by staff differ from those at our other prisons. While staff are required to deal with fewer violent incidents, they are at increased psychological risk due to the nature of those in custody and their exposure to intelligence/ offence related material which can be traumatic.

At HMP Ashfield, staff are trained to recognise threats and identify issues to their own psychological health. They have quick and easy access to a range of professional services when they need support, so they have access to tools to help them manage their psychological health.

The prison management works hard to create and maintain a culture where staff feel they are able to prioritise general care, welfare and to offer support to colleagues. They operate an open-door policy with colleagues and encourage any member of the team to seek advice at any time. They encourage open conversations about mental health and wellbeing.

There are professional services available, several of which are based on site. These are over and above the universal wellbeing offer available to Serco employees and recognise the specialist nature of the prison. They include:

- Mental health support from a counsellor.
- Trained Allies, for those who prefer to speak to peers in the first instance and also with knowledge to signpost to other services.
- Colleague Wellbeing Risk Assessments conducted by a People Manager which inform action plans.
- A calendar of initiatives such as awareness days/weeks including a recent Zero Harm Week.
- Mental Health Awareness training for all managers.

- Gym on site.
- Recognition of good practice on wellbeing through Pulse Awards and an Employee of the Month programme.
- A Health Kiosk where individuals can assess and monitor their own health needs through metrics.

HMP Dovegate and **HMP Doncaster** share the services of an on-site counselling service. This enables staff to access a trained therapist without joining a waiting list, offering a safe space for employees to talk, 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.

The on-site counsellor, Tracey Hoult provides approximately 25 sessions across both sites every week. These sessions are delivered on-site in a dedicated space.

As well as reactive crisis intervention sessions, Tracey provides regular supervision for specific teams. She gets involved in regular group supervision, conflict management, anger management and meditation sessions. Having a counsellor on-site has changed the conversations about mental health at both prisons, breaking down the stigma of asking for help.

HMP Thameside, HMP Ashfield and HMP Fosse Way also benefit from the provision of remote counselling sessions provided by a company called Room To Talk who have experience of working in a prison environment and so are able to relate to staff better than more generic services.

Data is collated for both counselling services regarding utilisation, presenting themes and user feedback which enables us to react to emerging trends and provide more sessions where there is increased need following a particularly significant event.

Musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders are a common cause of sickness absence within the prisons workforce and if they go untreated can impact mental health. Mental health conditions can also manifest as MSK symptoms due to the stress put on the body. The prison environment is physically demanding,

given the frequent need to manage violent incidents and use restraint. Given the length of many NHS waiting lists, it is particularly important that prisons staff with MSK disorders have quick and easy access to physiotherapy services to avoid prolonged sickness absence. Although employees have access to occupational health services through Serco, waiting times can be long and delays in accessing treatment can have a more significant impact on staffing levels and operational delivery than in other areas of the business, as staff need to be physically able to complete their duties.

To address this problem, to ensure staff receive earlier intervention, and to prevent the risk of conditions becoming chronic, HMP Thameside and HMP Doncaster recently piloted a physiotherapy service giving staff access to earlier intervention for a variety of conditions including MSK, breathing difficulties, pain management, women's health, and pre-post-op guidance. The long-term plan is to roll this service out to other sites.

As is the case for the general population, the **cost-of-living crisis** continues to impact our staff and according to the 2023 Wellbeing Survey, financial worries were the aspect of life giving the greatest cause of worry for most respondents. As a result of this feedback, we now offer a free hot meal once a day in the Staff Bistros.

Health and Wellbeing Kiosks have been installed at five prisons and provide the opportunity for colleagues to monitor their own health metrics and take positive action to maintain or improve their health. By monitoring the aggregated data, we now have a better understanding of the health of our staff and are able to provide targeted interventions.