

New Journalist of the Year

Megan Kelly – reporter, *Construction News*

In her first six months as a working journalist, Megan has demonstrated skills and tenacity that any experienced pro would be proud of. She has managed to win the trust of key contacts in the construction industry and developed a knack for uncovering off-diary information. She has produced several highly impressive exclusives, including two scoops about the failures of well-known construction contractors.

Shaylor set for administration as staff made redundant

Megan exclusively revealed that Midlands contractor Shaylor was going into administration. When the *CN* office learned of the potential administration, Megan picked up her phone and quickly uncovered what was going on. She rapidly earned the trust of subcontractors and Shaylor employees alike, allowing her to break the news that the contractor's work on the Silverstone Experience attraction was at risk. Although she was supported by a more experienced colleague in her reporting, Megan drove this story in way rarely seen by those new to the profession. It received 2,890 views.

Sites in lockdown as £60m-turnover firm enters administration

Having learned the ropes on the Shaylor story, Megan was ready to spring into action unaided when similar events began to unfold one morning in August. Megan and another member of the team both received direct tip-offs that contractor Pochin had unexpectedly closed one of its sites. Within hours she had spoken to both sources and written a detailed story about Pochin's administration. Her article not only rapidly revealed the core news, it also delved into the human impact of the closure – neither an easy thing to achieve in just one morning's work. The online version of the story quickly gained more than 6,000 views and triggered an approach from BBC Radio. Megan developed the story further and in a series of follow-up articles revealed how some of Pochin's projects were restarted under new contractors.

Construction and mental health: CN's Mind Matters 2019 survey

Megan impressed so much in her first few months that she was trusted to write a flagship feature, analysing *CN's* third annual mental health survey, *Mind Matters*. This goal was part of her career development.

Megan demonstrated that the trust placed in her was due, as she confidently tackled a complex and demanding piece of work.

She eagerly delved into the raw numbers from our wide-ranging survey of 1,500 people within the industry, working directly with *CN's* senior editors to ensure the conclusions she drew were statistically sound and within the survey's margins of error.

Her insights brought fresh angles to a report that might otherwise have flagged in its third year, drawing out important topics underplayed in previous years, such as workplace bullying. To energise the analysis, she interviewed a range of people with responsibility for mental health, from charities as well as construction firms of different sizes. She also sensitively interviewed people about their own mental health experiences.

Megan is currently working on a follow-up feature, based on numerous reader responses to her article, which will look more specifically at what the industry can do to prevent bullying.



Shaylor set for administration as staff made redundant

🕒 16 JUN, 2019 | BY CONTRIBUTOR

Exclusive: Shaylor Group is filing for administration, *Construction News* has learned.

In an email sent to staff on Sunday morning, the firm's directors announced they will be putting the company into administration after “unsuccessful attempts” to raise additional funding.

The email said that an administration appointment is likely to take place on Monday, and cited “project delays, payment disputes with clients and the failure of several key subcontractors” for a severe impact on the group’s finances in recent weeks.

Staff were told that their contracts were held with a separate entity, Shaylor Management Services Ltd, and that the intention is to place this company into voluntary liquidation over the next week.

Until then, all staff have been made redundant.

Directors have told staff that claims for payment and arrears of wages will be dealt with by liquidators once they have been appointed.

A few are “likely” to be retained on a consultancy basis to assist administrators, the email said.

The board said that directors had been in discussions with prospective investors to raise additional funds, with final discussions taking place on Saturday, but that these were unsuccessful due to “concerns around the industry as a whole”.

Access to the offices has been revoked, and arrangements for staff to collect personal belongings will be made by the administrators

Company car contracts have been cut off as the group's insurance policies have also terminated.

[Workers were sent home from Shaylor's Birmingham headquarters last week](#), and it emerged that the company had filed a notice of intent to appoint an administrator at court on Thursday 6 June.

Shaylor had been working on the renovation of the Silverstone Experience, a museum located next to the famous Northamptonshire racetrack, and a 156-apartment, mixed-use development for Black Swan Property in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter.

CNspoke last week to several subcontractors working on the Silverstone job who complained of late payment and, on at least two separate occasions, different suppliers went in person to Shaylor's headquarters to demand money that was owed.

[Shaylor's profit halved](#) to £2.4m in its most recent accounts, while turnover increased to £152m for the year ending 30 September 2018.

In April, Shaylor said it already had 80 per cent of its target forward order book secured and has several other "strong prospects under consideration".

The contractor, ranked 92nd on the [CN100](#), is also on Pagabo's new £1bn National Medium Works Framework.

By Megan Kelly and Zak Garner-Purkis



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Byrne Group has bounced back from a loss in 2018 to report...



Sites in lockdown as £60m-turnover firm enters administration

05 AUG, 2019 | BY MEGAN KELLY

The administration of Cheshire-based contractor Pochin has sent its projects across the UK into lockdown.

Grant Thornton was today appointed administrator for the £60m-turnover firm, which employs 120 people.

Administrators said the group had “legacy issues from earlier contracts” that became “too great a burden leading to difficult trading conditions”.

Pochin's board explored "a number of options" to preserve the group in recent months, including injections of significant levels of capital from shareholders and the sale of the group's property portfolio, the statement added.

Despite this, the challenges proved insurmountable and the directors have placed a number of entities of the group into administration, including Pochin's Ltd and Pochin Construction Ltd.

A source at Midland Brickwork, a subcontractor at Pochin's project for the £15.3m Smithfield Hilton Garden Inn in Stoke-on-Trent, told *CN* that the Staffordshire site was closed this morning.

Gates were locked and the site is being guarded by a security firm with dogs, the source added.

Subcontractors on the project have been told to contact administrators regarding retrieving tools and equipment left on site.

The Midland Brickwork source alleged that the Pochin owed the business around £150,000 and that others on site were due hundreds of thousands by the contractor.

Pochin staff were called into a meeting at the company's head office in Middlewich, Cheshire, today, according to Genr8, the Manchester-based developer of the Smithfield project.

A spokesman for Genr8 said: "We understand that Pochin has closed the site at Smithfield today and has called its staff into a meeting at the company's head office in Middlewich.

"At this stage we have no further information. However, as the developer for Smithfield, it is Genr8's responsibility to ensure the delivery of the Hilton Garden Inn and [neighbouring development] Clayworks build-to-rent projects, and we will continue to ensure that this happens."

The £15.3m hotel was due to be completed this summer, and was set to deliver a 140-bedroom hotel and 60,000 sq ft of retail and leisure space.

Another subcontractor, who did not want to be named, said that it was also turned away from a Pochin site in Southport this morning, where work is ongoing on the construction of 30 flats worth £11.2m for care home developer Belong.

The Middlewich-based contractor is also currently working on an £11m asset management facility for BAE Systems in Lancashire, a 72-bed care home for Belong Care Village in Chester, and the City Gardens Project in Manchester.

In its most recent accounts for the year ended 28 February 2018, Pochin's construction arm suffered a £6.3m pre-tax loss, and its turnover dropped by £12.6m, from £63.1m in 2017 to £50.5m.

In the accounts, director J W P Nicholson stated that the contractor suffered a "sizeable loss" on one contract in Manchester.

The strategic report statement said: "The contract has now been completed and a substantial claim has been compiled against the architect given significant design failings."

"Since the year-end, a new managing director, Jon Adams, has been appointed to the business and changes made to ensure that we do not have inappropriate professional teams imposed upon us on other contracts, along with a host of other measures to restore sustained profitability to the business."

Joint administrator Sarah O'Toole said: "Whilst it is very early days, this may result in a number of redundancies and the companies ceasing to trade. The joint administrators will continue to review options to ensure the best possible outcome for creditors."

Calls this morning from *Construction News* to Pochin's headquarters went unanswered.

Mental health: An industry improved?

Construction News' annual Mind Matters mental health survey reveals progress has been made towards tackling the stigma, but also highlights that the sector is still at the beginning of a journey to safeguard employees' wellbeing



MENTAL HEALTH
 MEGAN KELLY

When Construction News said "we need to talk about mental health" to the industry in 2017, it's fair to say the sector responded.

Two years on from the launch of CN's first mental health survey, the conversation has developed; industry leaders have publicly revealed their own struggles, businesses have trained mental health first-aiders and a host of initiatives have been launched by firms large and small.

The progress made is reflected in this year's Mind Matters survey, which found seven out of 10 respondents (72.5 per cent) believed mental health awareness had improved in the past 12 months - a big improvement on the 33.7 per cent recorded in last year's survey.

Speaking to CN about how the mental health agenda has progressed in the industry, Mace head of health and safety Martin Coyd believes there is still some

SURVEY EXPLAINED

CN's survey on mental health in the industry was conducted online via SurveyMonkey.com between March and July. The questionnaire was completed by 1,580 construction industry employees.

way to go to overcome the stigma. "Over the past three years we have really embraced the mental health initiative," he says. "Although people in the industry now feel like they have permission to talk about mental health, it remains a very sensitive subject, and we have a fear of saying and doing the wrong things."

Confiding in colleagues

The survey showed construction workers feel most comfortable having conversations about mental health with fellow workers on site; a third of all respondents (32.6 per cent) agreed that they felt comfortable talking about the issue with colleagues and line managers. More notably still, 41.5 per cent of respondents felt satisfied with the support their colleagues gave them after raising issues, compared with just 30 per cent last year and 27 per cent in 2017. But despite greater levels of awareness, there is still a lack of support for those with mental health conditions: almost 90 per cent of respondents still believed that not enough support was being provided for those struggling with mental health issues.

According to Francis Construction managing director William Barrett, the younger generation of workers entering the sector is putting mental health "on the agenda now more than ever".

"There has been a cultural change within construction and now we are becoming more aware of how to create the best working environment," he says.

At a national level, awareness has also been raised; tackling the problems of mental ill-health was one of the main achievements cited by new prime minister Boris Johnson when he praised the "great legacy" of his predecessor Theresa May in his opening address to parliament.

This year, CN's survey sought to go further - to not only examine industry attitudes on the subject, but also to interrogate the factors contributing to poor mental health. For the first time, the questionnaire was also taken directly to workers on site using tablets, helping to reach 1,580 responses.

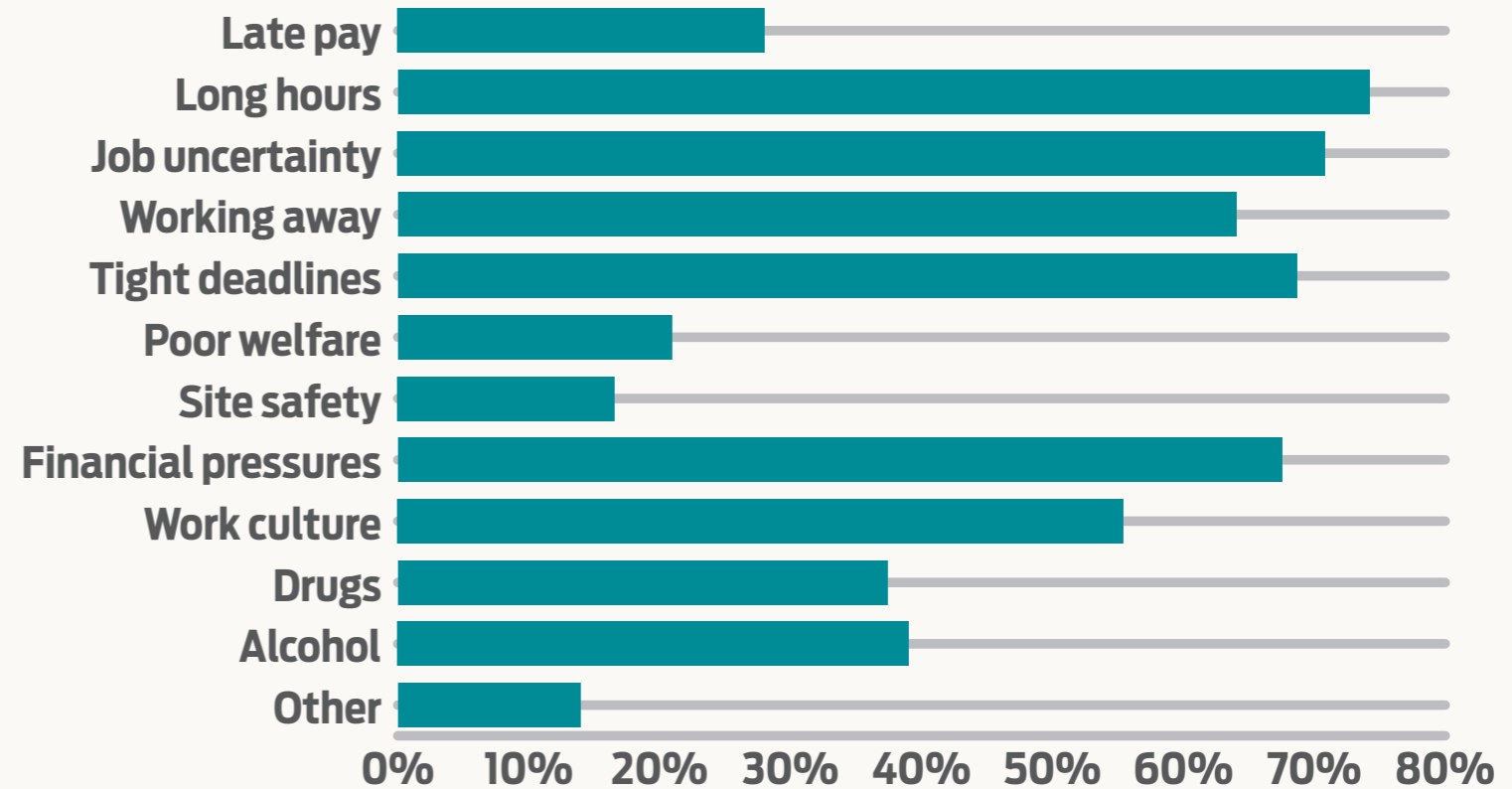
With more conversations about mental health taking place across the sector and in light of our biggest-ever survey response, it's clear that this critical agenda is gathering momentum.

Reluctance to talk

Although there has been a great deal of effort across the industry to raise awareness, the results show there is still work to be done to dispel the stigma.

Almost half of respondents (48.3 per cent) had taken time off work because of unmanageable stress and mental health issues, which represents an 18 percentage-point increase on last

CN ASKED: WHICH FACTORS DO YOU VIEW AS A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO POOR MENTAL HEALTH?



SOURCE: CN'S MIND MATTERS SURVEY 2019. NOTE: RESPONDENTS WERE ABLE TO CHOOSE MULTIPLE ANSWERS

year. Of this total, a third said that stress was the reason for their absence (16.5 per cent); a third said it was due to poor mental health (15.4 per cent); and the remaining third (16.5 per cent) said it was due to a combination of both.

But not everyone who took time off felt comfortable enough to talk to their employer about the reason for their absence. In fact, only 28 per cent told their employer why.

One anonymous survey respondent said that they made up excuses for their time off due to the lingering stigma attached to mental health.

"It would affect how they [the employer] rated me," they said. "I would not be given the same work to do [in future], and I don't want

to be seen as weak. I can still achieve, but some days are too bad [for me] to work."

Mr Coyd believes the stigma comes from a lack of awareness and has its roots in the failure of many schools to broach the topic with pupils.

"When I speak at a mental health training session, I always start by asking workers to raise their hands if they ever learned about mental health at school, and no one ever does," he says.

"Then I ask if people have ever had problems with their mental health, and everyone raises their hands. We need people to feel safe and that they won't be laughed at for talking about their issues; it's not [a sign of being] weak - it takes bravery and a very strong person."

The survey results show that 78.3 per cent of respondents believe a stigma still exists despite the work that has been done to improve awareness and communication about the topic.

On top of this, 38.7 per cent said they felt they had to hide their mental health issues.

Admitting the truth

Over the past three years, the percentage of people being honest about their absence from work has not improved.

In 2017, almost a third of respondents (32.2 per cent) had told their employer that their absence was due to mental wellbeing issues, and just 29 per cent did so in 2018.

This year, CN asked if mental health-related absences should



59%

of people said they had not received an appropriate level of support from their employer

► be treated the same way as physical conditions on construction sites. More than two-thirds of respondents (68 per cent) said both types of absence should be treated the same. This would mean that if an employee had to take more than 24 hours off work due to their mental health, it would be recorded as a Lost Time Injury.

Jessie*, a planning manager who works at a SME, told CN that such a move could help people struggling with their mental wellbeing. "If you ask for time off, it's seen as a bit of a weakness and that you're not able to cope with your job, whereas in reality, if you get some time off, you can actually do your job better," she says.

Other anonymous respondents agreed that stereotypes regarding the need to take time off for mental health were still commonplace. One left a response stating that they felt ashamed to admit "weakness" given their senior managerial position. Another said the support offered by companies was "just a box-ticking exercise – to highlight that you have issues just gives your employer a stick to beat you out of employment with".

Twelve additional respondents reached out to CN to say that they did not want to raise their mental health issues with management for fear of jeopardising their positions within their organisations.

"People are afraid to ask for it in case they lose their job or [for fear of] not being considered for a promotion, and then employers wonder why they have a high turnover of staff," Jessie says.

"It's like having a cold: you need to take some time off to get over it and get better."

Contributing factors

For the first time, we asked respondents about factors, both



inside and outside of the workplace, that contribute to poor mental health. The biggest factors were found to be those that arose within the workplace.

Three out of four people (74.2 per cent) said long working hours made the biggest difference to their wellbeing, closely followed

"We need people to feel safe and that they won't be laughed at for talking about their issues"

MARTIN COYD, MACE

by job uncertainty (70.8 per cent), tight deadlines (68.7 per cent), financial pressure (67.5 per cent) and working away from home (64.1 per cent).

Long working weeks, respondents revealed, can exacerbate problems because they leave people with no time to arrange appointments with a GP or counsellor to get help.

Paul*, who is a tendering manager at a major tier one contractor, believes that without more flexible working hours, there will be very little positive improvement in the industry's mental wellbeing.

"If you're working long, inflexible hours and you're already struggling with your mental health, it's only going to make things worse," he tells CN.

"If you do manage to hold it together while you're at work,

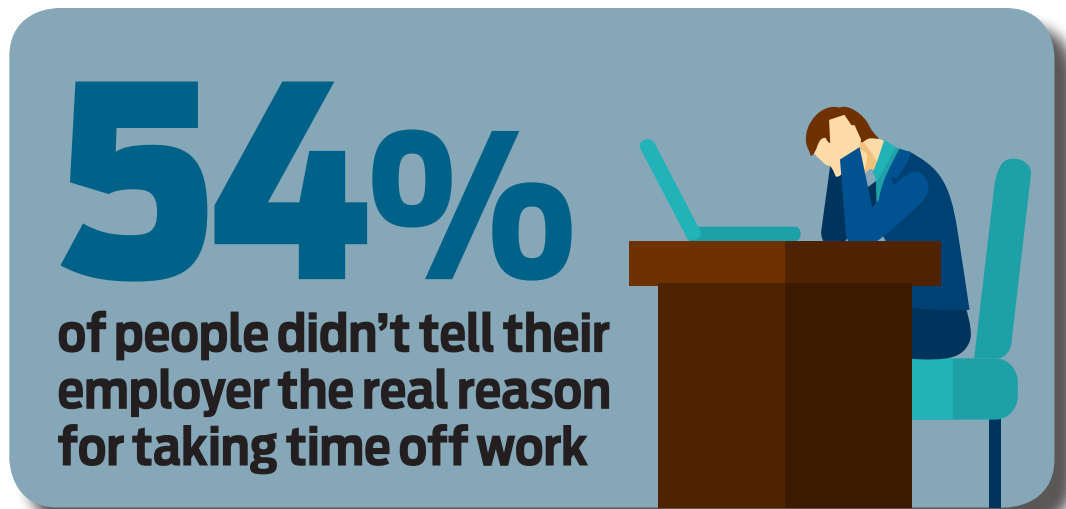
it's then very hard to take the time off you need. We've ripped the plaster off as an industry and we know there are problems, but if companies don't try to do something regarding working hours then nothing will change."

Paul thinks that although many firms claim to have a thorough mental health initiative, sometimes it's only for show and to keep up with other contractors.

"There is a disconnect between aspiration and reality," he says. "We all want flexible working hours, but the mental health campaigns that seem to be the latest fashion just kind of offer everyone a cup of tea and that's it, there's no follow through."

"Companies now need to step in and help in practical ways instead of just acknowledging the issue."

An anonymous response from the survey noted that long ►



▶ working hours had become an issue not just in construction, but in society in general.

They said: "Austerity has hollowed out a lot of the [social] support that used to be in place; the cost of housing means that both parents in families often have to work, so the pressure to keep your job is high.

"Transport infrastructure is poor, so you have to leave early and stay late to avoid being in a traffic jam. Britain seems to just be a generally miserable place to live at the moment."

Financial pressures were revealed to play a major role: almost a third of respondents (28 per cent) found late payment to be a major contributing factor to their mental health, and two out of three (67.5 per cent) agreed that financial problems increased their levels of stress and anxiety.

Supporting the supply chain

In a market with thin margins and constant financial pressures, finding the resources to tackle the issue of poor mental health can be a challenge for some companies.

"Austerity has hollowed out a lot of the [social] support that used to be in place; the cost of housing means that both parents often have to work, so the pressure to keep your job is high"

SURVEY RESPONSE

Fit-out specialist TGM Contractors managing director Sean McCullagh spoke to *CN* about smaller firms such as his, that have a willingness to engage with the topic, but are struggling to find the cash to support mental health initiatives.

"It's more difficult for subcontractors to put money and time into research and support, because often they just don't have the manpower or the funding," he

says. "But when subcontractors work with contractors that are leading the way, it makes all the difference."

Mr McCullagh adds that when his firm was recently working on a Laing O'Rourke project, the contractor invited everyone on site to get involved with mental health training and seminars. He says that this not only benefited his workers, but also encouraged other subcontractors to start becoming more aware of mental health in the industry.

After this positive experience, TGM Contractors decided to bring in its own mental health first-aiders and set up a training session with a therapist for the company's management team.

"Some subcontractors can be quite dismissive of taking on these initiatives, but once someone leads by example, they start to listen," he says. "More people need to stand up and talk about it."

Bill Hill, chief executive of construction industry charity Lighthouse Club, tells *CN* that employers have a responsibility to give people "the best possible place to work".

"We can't be responsible for what happens to you outside of

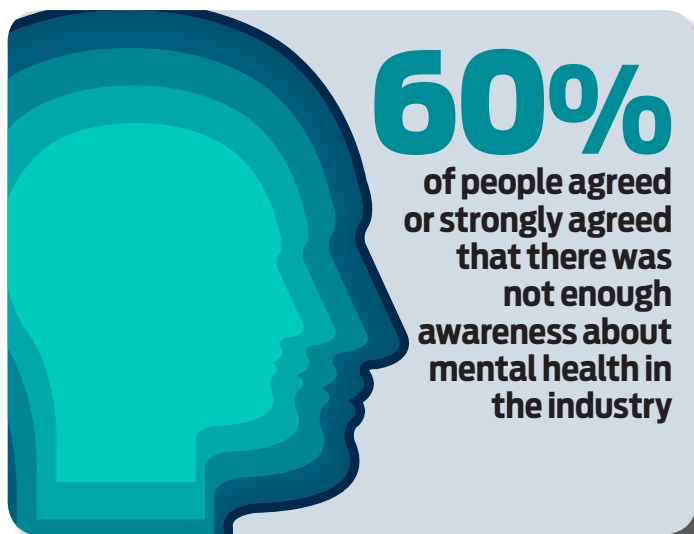
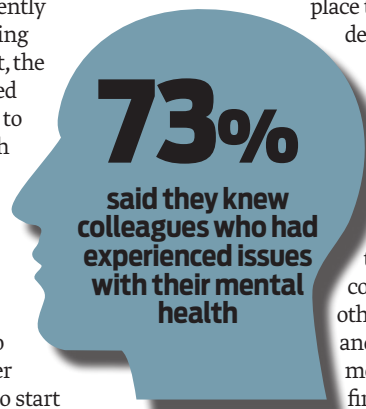
working hours, but we can be cognisant that whatever goes on outside working hours will affect you during working hours, and we need to have support systems in place to help people deal with this, or to show them where to get help," he says. "Management is still quite lightweight in terms of training compared with other sectors, and aside from mental health first aid, there's never really much else there."

Emily*, from tier one contractor Kier, thinks that if more tier one contractors supported their supply chains, there would be a domino effect throughout the industry.

Speaking to *CN*, she says: "We've seen a push, but different companies have different agendas, so we need the right people to push the same agenda. The NHS is underfunded and stretched, so I think there is more of an onus now on big companies to support the workers in the supply chain."

What's next?

Support for colleagues has improved alongside the growth in awareness since *CN* launched ▶



"Some subcontractors can be quite dismissive of taking on these initiatives, but once someone leads by example, they start to listen"

SEAN MCCULLAGH, TGM CONTRACTORS

41%



of people agreed that they felt satisfied with the support given by their employer after raising a mental health issue

► the survey in 2017. According to this year's data, almost 70 per cent (67.8 per cent) of respondents said that their employer would be supportive if they asked for help. And almost half (48.2 per cent) said that they had seen support for colleagues who were struggling, which represents an 11 percentage point increase since our survey began.

Mr Hill says that such an improvement within such a short timeframe is heartwarming, but added that much more needed to be done.

"A lot of construction companies are embracing education on awareness with open arms, and education has been extremely important to the mental health agenda," Mr Hill says. "But the question now is, how do we entrench this education into the culture of the industry as a whole?"

Kier health and safety manager and mental health first-aid trainer Mark Starling believes that the next step will have to focus on chief executives and senior management.

He says to CN: "We need to

train the CEOs of all the large construction firms. We sort of began to tackle this from the middle management rather than the top. If we could train more senior people, it would trickle down much quicker and it would really click then."

Mr Coyd, Mace's safety chief, agrees that better leadership on the issue could help to build on the progress already made. "What I'd most like to see is more leadership," he says.

"I don't necessarily mean CEOs when I say leadership. It can mean that one person in a team of colleagues [is able to] influence the mood. If people who have that ability start a conversation about mental

health, it gives others the permission to do so as well."

The blind spot

Mr Starling also highlights that while mental health first-aiders and 'time to talk' group coffee sessions can be beneficial to those who are struggling, they may not be as easily accessible to more isolated individual workers who do not always have the benefit of support from colleagues.

He says that this is a blind spot that has been overlooked.

"We need to use social media more to reach people who are more isolated in their work and offer them support," he says. "Painters, decorators and workers who aren't as involved in teamwork with colleagues need to

be reached out to in a way that is accessible and still personal."

Broader nationwide efforts have also been made; the Construction Industry Training Board is planning to train 2,500 onsite workers in mental health first aid by 2020. While the departments for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Work and Pensions, and Health and Social Care have opened consultations regarding the enforcement of employee rights on mental health at work.

The onus is now on the construction sector to continue the conversation because, as CN said last year, we still need to talk about mental health.

*Names have been changed to protect the identities of interviewees

90%

of people believe that there needs to be more support for employees



GET SUPPORT

Construction Industry Helpline
0345 605 1956
Managed and funded by the Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity

Mind, the mental health charity
0300 123 3393
Provides advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem

The Samaritans **116 123**
Confidential 24-hour support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts