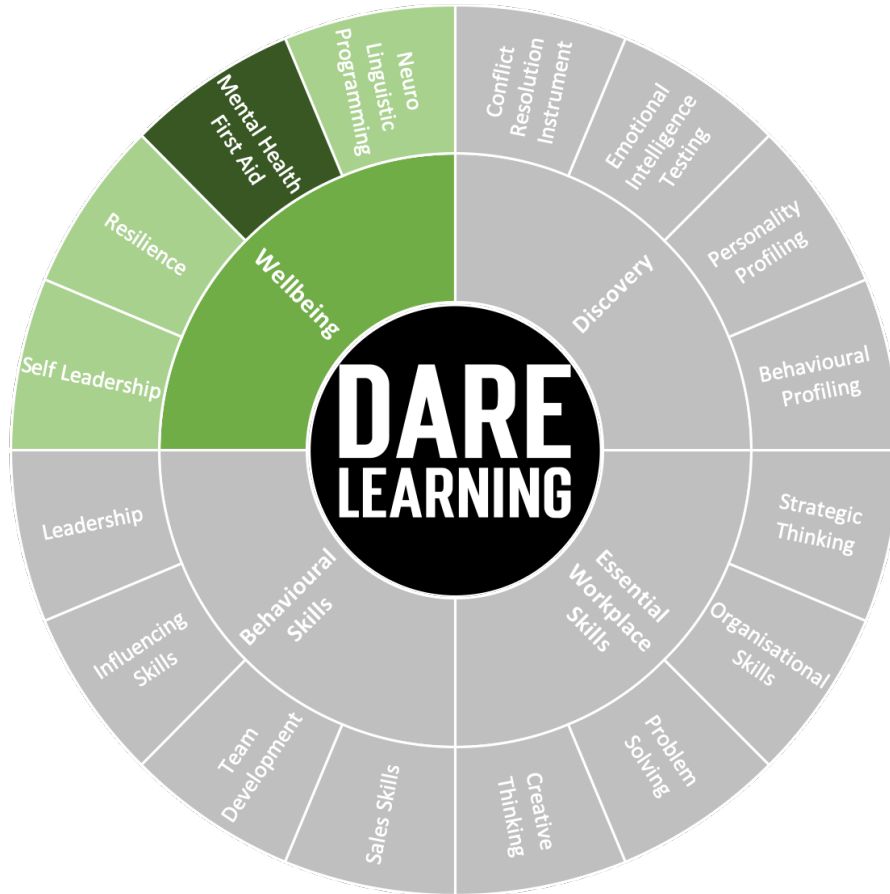


Implementing Mental Health First Aid with Dare Learning



‘Mental Health First Aid England has approved Alisdair Ross FCIPD to deliver Adult MHFA courses.’



What is Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)?

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a course where people learn skills and techniques in recognising mental ill health and to proactively approach people when they are concerned and be confident in what to say. More than 660,000 people in England have now been trained as Mental Health First Aiders, with 77,130 trained in 2020/21. Mental Health First Aid England are a consumer interest company who first set up in England in 2009. Mental Health First Aid England has approved Alisdair Ross FCIPD from Dare Learning to deliver Adult MHFA courses.

MHFA is evidence based and takes a holistic person-centred approach to mental health and it bridges both the social and medical models of mental illness. Recovery from mental ill health is possible and likely when a person receives appropriate professional support alongside other supports such as protective self-care, friends, family, support groups, etc. Wellbeing is often split into categories – mental; physical, emotional; spiritual; social; environmental and more. MHFA recognises wellbeing as a whole-self approach which promotes wellbeing across all the categories that work for any individual.

Recovery from mental ill health is deeper and stronger when a person has good self-care protective factors and these can include promoting physical wellbeing; health diet and nutrition; stable sleep patterns; regular exercise; etc.

The Aims of Mental Health First Aid are:

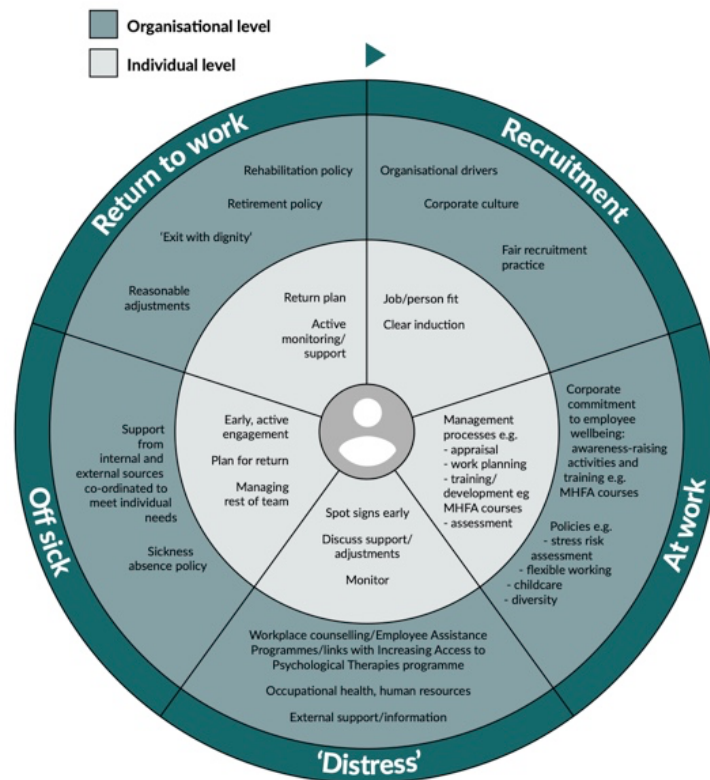
1. Preserve life where a person may be at risk of harm to themselves or others
2. Provide help to prevent the mental health issue from becoming more serious
3. Promote recovery of good mental health
4. Provide comfort to a person with a mental health issue
5. Raise awareness of mental health issues in the community
6. Reduce stigma and discrimination

Organisational Wellbeing Strategy and MHFA

What gap can MHFA fill in organisations Wellbeing Strategy?

Many organisations have implemented mental health awareness training as part of their wellbeing strategy and underpin this training with responsive support functions such as EAP's (Employee Assistance Programmes). I use the phrase 'responsive' as EAP's require people to have a level of self-awareness regarding their ill health and require those people to reach out to the EAP's themselves. MHFA adds a progressive layer to this support by putting in place a team of trained people who enable organisations to change the strategy from a 'responsive' one to a 'proactive' one. This means that people are more likely to be identified as feeling the effects of mental ill health sooner, prompting a deeper and quicker recovery, and a lessened impact on absence, presenteeism and low output.

A typical wellbeing strategy for an individual usually looks a bit like this:



I gratefully acknowledge the work of Heron and Teasdale and MHFA England which has informed this diagram.

An organisational wellbeing development strategy usually includes 4 pillars of wellbeing:

1. **Mental Wellbeing** – such as an MHFA strategy
2. **Physical Wellbeing** – Strategies and initiatives which encouraging health diet, sleep and exercise
3. **Social Wellbeing** – Strategies and initiatives which promote social interactions between people in the organisation; Employee Assistance Programmes
4. **Environmental Wellbeing** – Strategies and initiative which support a health workplace; when people work; where they work; how they work; etc. 'Hybrid working environments for example'. Employee Benefits fit here also.

Dare Learnings recommends a triarchic for an MHFA Strategy to fully support the first pillar, Mental Wellbeing.

1. **Mental Health Awareness** training made available to everyone
2. **Mental Health First Aiders** to make up to 10% of the population
3. **Mental Health Champions** training given to the leaders of the MH First Aiders to understand their roles and to support them accordingly

How does MHFA enable successful implementation of your wellbeing strategy?

MHFA is primarily focused on early intervention. Early intervention is more likely in an organisation that has implemented a MHFA strategy as there are people who are trained to spot the signs and symptoms of mental ill health who proactively approach people who they believe may be struggling and are trained on what to say. Most organisations also promote who their MH First Aiders are so that people can approach them themselves when they feel that they are in need of guidance.

The graph below highlights where MHFA is positioned:



As you can see there is a degree of prevention of mental ill health forming in the first instance. This is because that organisations that adopt an MHFA strategy have taken a step towards opening up a culture that removes stigma on the subject of mental ill health. With the effects and impacts of stigma being reduced the culture in the organisation becomes one that is open to such conversations and people feel able to open up about their feelings and emotions. The sooner that people seek help, the less likely that a mental illness is to develop. Furthermore, people who are trained in MHFA encourage protective self-care and positive wellbeing. When MHFA is employed as part of a whole wellbeing strategy it supports positive wellbeing in the first instance, again acts as a shield which supports prevention of mental ill health from forming in the first instance.

Evidence tells us that recovery is more likely and possible the sooner that mental ill health is identified and that a person receives the support and help that they need.

Dare Learnings recommendation is that organisations adopt the triarchic approach to implementing MHFA as the mental health outlined above

Positive Wellbeing and Productivity

The links between positive wellbeing and workplace effectiveness and productivity are strong. When people are in positive wellbeing at work their effectiveness and productivity is higher than when they are stressed and in negative wellbeing.

There are connections between mental ill health and physical ill health. Cultures of low wellbeing at work lead to all the downsides of presenteeism, leavism, absence, high people turnover, lower output, lower service levels, etc.

Productivity and workplace effectiveness come from people who are benefiting from the conditions of positive wellbeing – confidence, motivation, commitment, higher energy, increased creativity, can-do approach to problem solving, improved collaboration, persistency, openness to feedback and much more.

A Principle Centred Leadership Culture and a MHFA Strategy

MHFA is a strong indicator of an organisation with a principle centred leadership culture. Organisations with such a culture benefit from more highly engaged people who feel valued when they come to work. Productivity and effectiveness at work come when people feel valued and respected.

The culture itself forms many of the elements which act as a protective shield against mental ill health and instead create feelings of positive wellbeing and fulfilment.

Organisations which create a principle centred leadership culture have people who:

- a. Have a sense of achievement at work through having clear vision and specific goals, tasks and objectives
- b. Benefit from a coaching culture where leaders adapt their leadership style to specific situations according to the needs of individuals on any given task. This leads to reduced workplace stress and less negative tension in relationships
- c. Value diversity at work. People who seek feedback, new ways of working and personal development opportunities.

All of the above elements build a culture that gives individuals a huge sense of positive wellbeing. Workplace culture alone cannot prevent or eradicate mental ill health and people will always develop mental poor health and mental illness. A principled centred leadership culture supports people when they are in poor mental health and helps with recovery.

What MHFA is *not*

So far this article has focused on the benefits of adopting a MHFA strategy and positive wellbeing culture. It is important at this point to briefly touch on what MHFA is *not*. MH First Aiders do not diagnose mental illness. They are trained on identifying the signs and symptoms of ill health so that they can approach a person and help them by encouraging the person to seek professional support. MH First Aiders *do* give support in the form of empathy, information on mental illness and information on supports. They do *not* give advice and instead keep their support fact based and neutral. MH First Aiders are *not* counsellors (unless by chance they have also completed a certified counselling course). They *are* trained in supporting people.

Empathy and Hope

MH First Aiders do give hope. They give hope through their proactive approaches and through empathising with the person they are supporting.

Protective and Risk Factors

MHFA teaches MH First Aiders the protective factors which shield people from poor mental health and wellbeing. They are also taught the risk factors which may be factors in people developing moving into poor mental health and mental illness.

Stigma

Stigma regarding mental ill health is everywhere. It is in the behaviour of people around us in the things that they say and do. Stigma can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, it can come through well meaning loved ones and it is always prevalent in the media. MHFA are taught how to be non-judgemental and to use neutral and positive language to lower stigma.

Recovery

Recovery from mental ill health and mental illness is likely and possible when a person has the right professional support, the support of people who care for them and when the individual has good self-care. MHFA plays an important role as they are often the ones who are behind early intervention which enables recovery to begin sooner.

Self-Care

MHFA encourage regular positive self-care. Self-care is unique to each individual but always includes doing things we love, that we are passionate about. It is about healthy living and healthy wellbeing – from diet, exercise, relationships, sleep, mindfulness and much more.

Dare Learning's Added Value

Alisdair Ross FCIPD is an approved Mental Health First Aid England Instructor Member. Added to this, Alisdair also has many other professional qualifications which support organisations with creating organisational cultures which promote positive wellbeing, productivity and effectiveness at work.

Leadership – Alisdair can help you in developing a principled centred leadership culture

Emotional Intelligence – as a practitioner in Emotional Intelligence, Alisdair can work with you in developing emotional intelligence across the whole organisation

NLP – as a master practitioner in NLP, Alisdair can introduce NLP tools and techniques which support positive wellbeing at organisational and individual levels

Myers-Briggs – as a practitioner in Myers-Briggs, Alisdair can help you to understand more about your core personality and how this impacts on your wellbeing at work

DISC – as a practitioner in Everything DISC Workplace Profiling, Alisdair can support developing cultures where people value cognitive diversity

Conflict Resolution – as a practitioner in Conflict Resolution, Alisdair can support you with developing positive collaboration in place of compromise and avoidance.

Problem Solving – Alisdair can support you with implementing positive problem solving tools which reduce workplace stress

Creative Thinking – Alisdair can help you with developing creative thinking in the organisation, leading to richer and more fulfilling environments for everyone

Influencing – Alisdair can work with you to develop people's influencing skills, focused on listening skills and valuing one another

