

Learning from experience

Evaluating our Blue Light Programme in Wales



 mind cymru
for better mental health
o blaid gwell iechyd meddu!

About this report

Emergency services staff and volunteers are more likely to experience a mental health problem than the general population, but less likely to seek support. Almost nine out of 10 have experienced stress and poor mental health while working for blue light services.

Since 2015, Mind's Blue Light Programme has provided emergency services staff and volunteers with information and advice, so they can better manage their mental health and support their colleagues. We also work with employers, equipping them to better support their staff and change the way they think and act about mental health.

In 2017, we expanded our Blue Light Programme into Wales, to improve mental health support for teams across ambulance, fire, police, and search and rescue services. This report shares what we've learned so far, following an evaluation by Mind in partnership with Work2Health and the Work Research Centre.

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We're Mind Cymru, the mental health charity. We're here to make sure anyone with a mental health problem in Wales has somewhere to turn for advice and support.

Contact us at bluelight@mind.org.uk

mind.org.uk/BlueLight

 @MindBlueLight #mybluelight

 [mindforbettermentalhealth](https://www.facebook.com/mindforbettermentalhealth)

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Making mental health matter

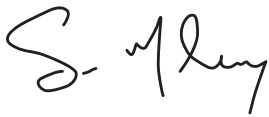
Everyone involved in the Blue Light Programme in Wales can feel proud of what's been achieved so far.

Emergency services staff and volunteers, Blue Light Champions and local Minds have come together to put mental health firmly on the agenda, so more staff and volunteers in 999 teams know about the importance of taking care of themselves and seeking support when needed.

Our evaluation has shown a strong interest in the Blue Light Programme within emergency services. In many, we've achieved top-level employer support as well as grass-roots engagement, involving over 215 volunteer Blue Light Champions, supported by local Minds.

There's a lot to celebrate and build on, as you'll see in this report. We also know there are areas where we can improve our approach. We've set these out here, along with steps we're taking to address these findings.

The challenge now is to build on these strong foundations, to do more of what's working well, and make improvements where needed. We want every 999 team across Wales to feel able to talk about mental health and get the support they need, both now and into the future.



Sara Moseley

Cyfarwyddwr / Director
Mind Cymru



Our successes

Emergency services staff and volunteers, Blue Light Champions and local Minds throughout Wales have come together to ensure mental health is a priority for everyone involved in blue light services.



Emergency services

Demand for the Blue Light Programme has been high overall, as services have understood the programme's value in addressing issues around poor mental health and wellbeing.

All police, ambulance, and fire and rescue services in Wales have now signed the Time to Change Wales employer pledge – a visible commitment to changing the way we think and act about mental health in the workplace. Many Champions say they've received strong support from their employers and trade unions.

Some emergency services in Wales have made Mental Health in the Emergency Services training mandatory. Services have also taken steps to assess the quality of their mental health support. For example, the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust signed up to the Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index, a benchmark of best policy and practice, achieving a bronze in their first year.

We have to deal with and see things that nobody ever should, often on a repeated and sometimes quite intense basis.

Officer, Gwent Police



Champions

There are now 215+ Blue Light Champions in Wales – emergency services staff and volunteers who have taken on the role within their workplace of promoting the importance of mental health and tackling stigma. Recruitment has far exceeded our original targets.

Our Champions have been busy within their services changing the way people think and act about mental health by delivering presentations and disseminating information to colleagues.

By the end of May 2018, local Minds had held 31 Champion Training events, including peer support training and Speaking Up, Speaking Out workshops, which help Champions consider whether and how to share their mental health experiences while looking after their own wellbeing.

Local Minds

Local Minds deliver Blue Light Programme training, and were praised in the evaluation for bringing an independent, approachable and knowledgeable presence to the training sessions. They understand the needs of their community and tailor their services to match. Other services provided by local Minds include talking therapies, peer support, advocacy, employment and housing support.

Champions say they've received strong support from local Minds and Mind Cymru.

Our workforce are the lifeblood of this organisation. It's really important we look after their health and wellbeing.

Director, Wales Ambulance Services Trust

Our resources were delivered directly to emergency services and disseminated at events including the Mental Health and Policing conference, Unison conference and Pride Cymru. Training, promotional and information resources were all well-received.



Support in action

Sergeant Nicky Collins learned about the value of mental health peer support at a course run by Mind, and has since become a trained peer supporter at North Wales Police. She says:

The training provided us with a greater understanding and awareness of mental health, stress, and other common mental health problems. It covered the signs and symptoms to look for, tips for talking to people about mental health, and how to signpost.

We moved on to the role of a peer supporter and how we can help and support colleagues, by sharing our own experiences and by

offering genuine understanding based on the shared experience of mental health problems and emotional distress.

As an organisation, we are starting to talk openly about mental health. This is a positive step and should allow people to feel that they can talk about it; it's not a taboo subject, and there is help and support out there.



Image:
Wales Ambulance
Services NHS Trust



Making the most of our learning

Our evaluation found some challenges that emergency services and local Minds can address to improve how the programme works and help further embed it.

Communications

There was uncertainty among some emergency services about what the programme involved and its benefits, in terms both of their own role, and the role of Champions. Services were not always able to find out the identity of Champions due to confidentiality agreements. We've taken steps to encourage clearer communications on the benefits of the programme and closer working between Champions and services to promote change.

Employer commitment

Where top-level support was absent or weak, even having committed individuals was not enough to secure robust delivery of the programme. In some instances, staff were required to attend Champion training in their own time. Our approach to tackling this includes promoting our Blue Light Programme Blueprint Pack, which helps employers understand why and how to embed staff wellbeing support.

Partnership working

Cross-organisational networking has been a challenge, in part because of the rural nature of some parts of Wales, with search and rescue organisations especially difficult to reach. Because training was delivered at a local level, some services felt this made it harder to build relationships with emergency organisations in other parts of Wales. We're working together with stakeholders to promote closer working and increase networking opportunities.

Culture

There were some cultural barriers to engagement, including fear of disclosure. This is likely to be down to the stigma often associated with mental health problems. We all need to create a more open environment, where people feel able to speak up about their experiences, and services are continuing to work with Champions and local Minds to improve workplace culture.



Next steps

These are our recommendations for emergency services and others involved in supporting the mental health of 999 teams in Wales, to further embed staff wellbeing activities within services and ensure they are sustainable.

For emergency services

- ❶ Create or strengthen a network of Champions, ensuring role clarity, adequate training and peer support.
- ❷ Ensure managerial commitment to mental wellbeing and the Blue Light Programme, especially senior management support, line manager engagement and budget for implementation.
- ❸ Develop a strong corporate policy framework for mental health and wellbeing, upon which initiatives like the Blue Light Programme and Time to Change Wales can be built.
- ❹ Develop links to other programmes such as Healthy Working Wales, Health at Work: The Corporate Standard, and Occupational Safety and Health initiatives.
- ❺ Work with your local Mind to build relationships and gain support to keep improving.
- ❻ Use Mind's Blueprint Pack, which helps services understand why and how to embed staff wellbeing support into core business practice.

For anyone supporting the mental health of emergency services

- ❶ Develop clear strategies for accessing and engaging with emergency services in your area.
- ❷ Develop intra- and inter-organisational networks of Champions and employers.
- ❸ Use existing internal and external contacts, structures and programmes to promote initiatives like the Blue Light Programme.
- ❹ Use our Blueprint Pack, which shares learnings from the programme to help services further embed staff wellbeing support. There's also a guide for local Minds.
- ❺ Share your experiences and learning from the Blue Light Programme with others involved in supporting blue light mental health.

We've also launched 10 actions we can all take for better mental health in 999 teams, based on learnings from the Blue Light Programme in England and Wales. Read more at mind.org.uk/bluelightdayone

