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# England's first and only membership body for Mental Health First Aiders launches

## **A beacon of hope amidst England's mental health crisis**

As England's mental health crisis shows little sign of declining, Mental Health First Aid England, the national authority on mental health first aid, has today unveiled a groundbreaking initiative poised to ignite a new era of action in mental health. The Association of Mental Health First Aiders is England's first and only membership body for MHFAiders.

MHFA England is the only organisation that offers ongoing support to MHFAiders as part of their training. Through the Association of Mental Health First Aiders, members will be empowered to transform how we talk about and support mental health in the workplace and beyond.

Recent statistics paint a stark picture of the mental health challenges facing the country, underscoring the urgent need for effective intervention and support. Suicide rates are **rising** and there are 1.9 million people waiting to access mental health services. The cost of poor mental health to individuals, business and state is enormous, with the Centre for Mental Health estimating it cost £110 million in 2022.

The Association will redefine the landscape of workplace mental health support. By creating the largest dedicated community of Mental Health First Aiders, we can support members long after they have completed their course. For the first time, members will have exclusive access to a wide range of resources, from ongoing training and qualifications to events and research, supporting them to fulfil their roles effectively.

**Speaking about the launch of the Association of Mental Health First Aiders, Sarah McIntosh, Managing Director of the Association of Mental Health First Aiders said:**

“Every day our MHFAiders are having life changing and lifesaving conversations. We need to support them to keep doing so. After many months of work and many conversations with our Instructor Members, MHFAiders, clients and staff, I am proud to launch the Association of Mental Health First Aiders today.

“Building mental health literacy has always been central to our training. The Association is the next stage of empowering a growing community of Mental Health First Aiders to tackle stigma and lead transformative change in our workplaces and beyond.

“The Association of Mental Health First Aiders offers a pioneering, human response to the pressing mental health issues we face as a society. Its launch represents a huge step forward in mental health support, one that prioritises prevention, early intervention, and support.”

**Hannah Creech, Member Experience Lead at the Association of Mental Health First Aiders said:**

“We know from our 16 years of experience of delivering mental health first training at MHFA England, support and connection empowers our Mental Health First Aiders to fulfil their roles with confidence, skill, and care. 92% of our MHFAiders say that the support and benefits provided by MHFA England help them to do this. The Association of Mental Health First Aiders strengthens this further.

“Launching the Association of Mental Health First Aiders represents a bold step in our collective journey towards a mentally healthier nation. The Association is a diverse, equitable, and inclusive space for all. Our members and their impact are at the heart of everything we do.”

Research carried out by MHFA England highlights the profound impact of MHFAiders across England. An overwhelming 94% of MHFAiders believe they are challenging stigma around mental health. 91% feel they are transforming the way society talks about and supports mental health. Moreover, 91% believe that MHFAiders save lives, affirming the critical importance of their interventions.

54% of MHFAiders say they use the skills they have learnt more than once a week. A further 29% use their skills at least once a month. With over 300,000 MHFA England trained MHFAiders trained in England over the last three years, this equates to thousands of supportive mental health conversations taking place each day.

**Sophie Bradfield, a trained MHFAider and policy officer for her local council, shared her experience of using her MHFA skills:**

“I use my MHFA training both in and out of work. With the training that my colleagues and I have had, we know how to spot the signs of poor mental health, provide support, listen without judgement and signpost to professional help.

“I’ve used my training to support many people including someone who we now know was experiencing a psychotic episode. One of the things that stuck in my mind from the MHFA training was not to challenge someone’s delusions or go along with them but acknowledge their feelings showing empathy and kindness. A person experiencing a psychotic episode can behave in ways totally out of character which can be distressing particularly to those that know them. It’s important to remember that they’re not experiencing the same reality as you and what they are going through is very scary for them too. Kindness, calmness, and empathy are so important.

“We managed to de-escalate the situation and I’m pleased to say the person was given the professional help that they needed. They were in a very volatile state, and I fear had I not been there as a MHFAider, the situation would have gotten out of control. Not because the other people present were unkind or unfeeling, but because they didn’t know the signs that someone might be mentally unwell or how to speak to someone experiencing what I recognised as psychosis.

“After the incident, I was also able to offer support to colleagues who witnessed the event. They were understandably upset and scared, so to be able to explain calmly what that person might have been going through was very helpful to them.

“We talk all the time about breaking down the stigma around mental health. I think we’ve come on leaps and bounds since the pandemic, but I think there’s still a way to go. Having training and people sharing their experiences of mental health conditions is paramount to improving our collective understanding.”

**Lexie Newlands, a trained MHFAider and Pet Nutrition Data and Analytics Project Manager at Mars, shared her experience of using her MHFA skills:**

“I was scrolling social media when I saw some alarming posts from someone who was displaying signs of crisis. I messaged them and offered to talk and suggested that they go to A&E if they were worried about their safety. I used my training to show that I was there to support them and show them where they could get professional help.

“In the end, I kept them talking, found out where they were and managed to get the emergency services to them. We talked through their options for help, and though it felt like hours it was only an hour from my first message to help arriving. Had this happened just four months sooner, I’d have had little idea how best to help. I really do think, had I not had the MHFA training, I wouldn’t have known the best way to support, and signpost them. It doesn’t bear thinking about what could have happened to them. I’m so pleased I could help.”

**Samantha Stapley, Chief Operating and People Officer at the Trussell Trust, said:**

“We know that 52% of people referred to a foodbank in the Trussell Trust network with a disability have a mental health condition and that one in four people has not had contact with any friends or family members in the last month. This means that every day, staff and volunteers across the Trussell Trust network are meeting people who are isolated and facing crisis.

“It is vital that the people who come to us for help can be supported by people who are able to provide them with the mental health first aid that they may need. This is why the training of staff at the Trussell Trust and in food banks across the UK has been crucial for our work. It allows us to provide an enhanced service to the people who need to access a food bank.

“The training received has equipped staff and volunteers within the Trussell Trust network with the tools to have the life changing conversations needed to ensure that people visiting food banks don’t feel alone in their struggles. We look forward to increasing our Mental Health First Aider capacity in the coming years.”

**John Fielding, Staff Manager at First Bus shared his experience of using is MHFA skills:**

“In the workplace, one experience really sticks with me. It was quite soon after I finished my training and a driver came into the depot one day and out of the blue, just asked if he could have a chat. Of course, I said yes, and he explained that he was struggling. So, we chatted about how he felt and what he was struggling with. I helped him to understand the support services that were available to him and off he went, and I didn’t really think much more about it.

“He was signed off work for a little while but when he came back to work, he came straight to see me. He told me that I had been his last hope and as he put it, he was ready to drive his car off a cliff. He said I had saved his life that day by giving him hope and showing him where he could go for support. I really didn’t feel like I did that much, but it just shows, a kind, listening ear really can make all the difference.”

Over the coming months, MHFAiders who have completed the MHFA course, or the MHFA Refresher, in the last three years will be invited to join the Association via a welcome email.

As part of the launch of the Association of Mental Health First Aiders, MHFA England has also redeveloped its MHFA Refresher course which launches today. The new course has been updated with the latest mental health statistics and guidance.

MHFA England recommend that MHFAiders take the MHFA Refresher course every three years to ensure their mental health knowledge, awareness, and skills are up to date. MHFAiders will now need to take the MHFA Refresher course, or repeat the

MHFA course, every three years to renew their membership of the Association of Mental Health First Aiders and continue to access their benefits.

For more information on how to become an MHFAider visit, [mhfaengland.org](https://mhfaengland.org). From 18 June, visit <https://aomhfa.org> to find out more about the Association. To watch a video on the impact of MHFAiders, please visit <https://youtu.be/hu3z3Mv> **FBE**

## **ENDS**

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

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### **About the MHFAider insight research**

Between January and March 2024, approximately 1,500 MHFAiders responded to MHFA England's insight survey.

### **About the Association of Mental Health First Aiders**

- The Association of Mental Health First Aiders is England's first and only membership body for Mental Health First Aiders and the largest community of its kind
- It empowers Mental Health First Aiders to transform how society talks about and support mental health
- As a mission focused not for profit organisation, members can be proud to know they are helping individuals, workplaces, and communities become more mentally healthy and productive
- The Association provides members with exclusive access to a wide range of resources, from ongoing training and qualifications to events and research. These exclusive benefits empower MHFAiders to fulfil their roles with confidence, skill and care
- Building on MHFA England's 16 years of expertise, the Association of Mental Health First Aiders gives us the opportunity to ignite a new era of action in mental health
- For more information visit <https://aomhfa.org>

### **About Mental Health First Aid England**

- Mental Health First Aid England is a social enterprise, established in 2009. It is the national authority on mental health first aid

- MHFA England’s vision is to improve the mental health of the nation by creating societal change so we can all talk freely about mental health and offer and seek support when we need it
- This will be achieved by its mission to train at least 1:10 of the adult population in mental health knowledge, awareness, and skills. To date more than 1:40 of the adult population has been trained by MHFA England
- MHFA England will extend its reach to the NHS and Black people and People of Colour, through subsidised training
- The organisation’s training, consultancy, and campaigning is paving the way for positive mental health in the workplace and beyond
- MHFA England offers consultancy as well as face-to-face, online, and digital training options to increase mental health awareness, knowledge, and skills, including the internationally licensed product, Mental Health First Aid
- Mental Health First Aid is the mental health equivalent of physical first aid training. It gives people the skills to spot the signs of poor mental health, the confidence to start a conversation, and the knowledge to signpost to appropriate support
- More information about MHFA England and its courses can be found at [mhfaengland.org](http://mhfaengland.org) or by emailing [info@mhfaengland.org](mailto:info@mhfaengland.org)