

EIP



Ten EIP staff qualify as Mental Health First Aiders

Mental health is now front of mind at EIP after ten members of staff qualified as Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs).

The group includes at least one member from each UK office and representatives from different departments and levels of seniority including attorneys and solicitors, paralegals, marketing, office and records.

Following completion of their training provided by [Mental Health First Aid England](#), the MHFAs are able to support anyone at EIP who is experiencing poor mental health. The group consists of leader Sharon St. Louis, Matthew Jones, Samantha Rogers, Paula Camp, Hamish Popplestone, Tom Goodfellow, Anita Vint, Aimee Hardman, Ali Dumigan and Donna Clancy.

As a former Samaritan and a qualified MHFA, paralegal manager Sharon St. Louis was acutely aware of the importance of mental health and the positive effects of sharing problems with another person. She said: "At my previous firm I was part of the diversity and inclusion team and headed up the mental health group. When I joined EIP in January 2019 I wondered how that might fit in here. We have physical first aiders so why not mental health first aiders?"

"I came across the charity [Jonathan's Voice](#), set up in memory of a patent attorney. I learned that because of the nature of the work patent attorneys do incidents of poor mental health issues can be quite high. I spoke to Phil Bedwell, our head of HR and one of the partners, Heather McCann and they agreed that it was definitely something we should do."

Any conversation with a MHFA remains confidential and is not disclosed without permission. The MHFA support network is intended to provide everyone with access to a colleague with whom they can talk openly about any issue they are struggling with.

Sharon said: "The problem doesn't have to be anything major, it can be someone who just feels a bit overwhelmed. Some may struggle to discuss their poor mental health, however, by talking and sharing an issue can make that person feel a lot better.

"There is still that stigma with mental health so we wanted to ensure that everybody was comfortable with who they choose to speak to. They have someone in their own office but they are also free to speak to whoever they like and that group includes people at all levels from junior members of staff to partners. We have a real mix."

Hamish Popplestone, who works in the marketing team, said: "The MHFA role interested me because mental health is as important as physical health. Unlike physical health, though, there are fewer resources available, and mental health issues often go unaddressed because reaching out to get help can be really difficult for someone. I think it's so valuable to have trained people who can recognise someone who is suffering and be the first step in getting support. Having gone through the MHFA course, I'm really glad I did. I now know a lot more about mental health disorders and feel confident in my ability to respond to someone struggling with mental health."