



South Cumbria &
North Lancashire Branch

Joint Zoom meeting 21st August 2020



South Cumbria Occupational
Health & Safety Group

Topic: *Five ways to wellbeing in the aftermath of lockdown*

Speakers: Doug Dennison, Director, *Unmasked Mental Health*, Halifax &
Logan Smith, Director, *Unmasked Mental Health*, Halifax

Unfortunately, Gary McAteer, our chair had technical problems with his sound system so Dave Wilson, Secretary (Zoom meetings), took over as chairman of the meeting. He welcomed attendees to the joint meeting of *South Cumbria & North Lancashire IOSH Branch* and *South Cumbria Occupational Health & Safety Group*. He then introduced our speakers Logan Smith and Doug Dennison, Directors, *Unmasked*, based in Halifax, an organisation that provides practical mental health support and wellbeing advice.

Logan introduced the session by stressing that mental wellbeing is one of our most valuable assets that many people take for granted. He said that research has shown that nearly 50% of people in England are likely to suffer from some form of mental illness during their lives and that this can affect their ability to function adequately at home, at work and or in a social environment.

Logan explained that he and Doug decided to set up *Unmasked* after battling with, and overcoming, mental ill health problems caused by stressful home situations. Their experiences taught them that it was difficult to talk about mental health problems, especially for men, due to the stigma and the perceived need to be seen to be 'strong'. This meant that sufferers often did not know where to go for help. Doug and Logan realised that there was a need for non-judgmental support networks where people could remain anonymous if they chose to do so.

Logan said that he realised how inadequate mental health support services were when he and his wife were trying to cope with postnatal depression. Logan and Doug gradually realised that they had found practical ways of coping with 'bad things that happen in life' and that they wanted to share this knowledge and understanding with others and so, *Unmasked*, was born. They decided to share their experiences and coping mechanisms that have worked for them to help others improve their mental health and wellbeing. Their goal is simple - to remove the national stigma surrounding mental ill health and to get people talking and supporting one another. They offer mental health and wellbeing support to individuals and to employers:

- Through their charity.
- Via an App designed to provide support for people suffering from stress and mental illness where people can be anonymous if this is their preference.
- Through their *Unmasked* business - that provides bespoke workplace mental health and wellbeing training and counselling services.

Logan explained that they aimed to help others to come to terms with their personal stresses by using their own experiences to demonstrate that once you face up to your problems, with the right support, it is possible to rebuild a better life.

Doug then gave members a moving account of child bereavements that had caused him to seriously consider committing suicide. He explained that he had 'bottled up' his emotions and tried to be 'the strong man' so that close friends, including Logan, did not realise what he was going through. Eventually he plucked up the courage to talk to Logan about his feelings. He was fortunate. Logan and his network of friends helped him get the support that he needed.

They explained that a key part of this process was to help people to recognise when they were beginning to suffer from stress and to learn how the five ways to wellbeing can help people come to terms with the stresses of everyday living. They defined mental wellbeing as: “...the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, to work productively, to interact positively with others and to realise our own potential...”

They explained that research has identified five simple things everyone can do to build their resilience, to boost their wellbeing and, even more importantly, that will offer some protection against developing mental health problems. The five ways are:

1. **Being active** - getting physically active every day can improve mental wellbeing and lower rates of depression and anxiety. They recommend

- Finding a physical activity that **YOU** enjoy.
- That suits **YOUR** level of mobility and fitness.

For example: Go for a walk, or a run, cycle, do some gardening, take up dancing etc...

2. **Giving** – not money but kindness! Being kind to a friend or stranger increases an individual’s general sense of wellbeing, happiness, and life satisfaction. It can be something simple like holding a door open for someone, smiling at a passer-by or something more time consuming such as volunteering, or joining a community group.

3. **Taking notice** – taking time to appreciate ‘the moment’ is known to boost mental wellbeing. Reflecting on experiences also helps individuals to understand what matters to them. Personal wellbeing is enhanced by encouraging people to rekindle an appreciation of ‘now’ by:

- Being curious and interested, listening.
- Catching sight of and enjoying looking at something beautiful.
- Remarking on the unusual.
- Noticing the changing seasons.
- Savouring the moment - whether you are walking to work, eating lunch, or talking to friends.

4. **Connecting** – nurturing relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours improves mental wellbeing and helps to build a support network for when times get tough.

5. **Keep on learning** – brain work improves wellbeing and self-confidence. This can include looking at new ideas, seeking new experiences or improving skills. A way of achieving this is for individuals to set themselves a realistic challenge that they will enjoy doing such as:

- Trying something new. For example, learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food.
- Rediscovering an old interest. For example, cycling, running, model making, painting, sketching, writing etc...
- Signing up for an evening class – on a topic that interests you.
- Taking on a different responsibility at work if the opportunity arises.

Carol Stearne then asked Logan and Doug some of the questions that had been raised on the Zoom chat. In response to questions they explained that they had already established several *Unmasked* self-help hubs, in places such as Burnley, to give people an opportunity to talk about how they feel without judgment. They are run by local volunteers and supported by the *Unmasked* charity. Logan suggested that if anyone attending the meeting would like to set up a hub, in their area, they should contact him, and the *Unmasked* charity would provide the necessary support. He also said that he and Doug were undertaking a cycle ride, in September, from John O’Groats to Lands End to raise money for the charity.

Dave then thanked Logan and Doug for giving members such a heartfelt presentation that was much appreciated by members as could be seen from *Zoom* chat comments such as: “...I just want to say thank you for today's session. Great delivery and humbling to hear your real life stories. Good luck with your charity bike ride and hope you have a fantastic weekend...” and

“...Thank you for this session. It had been inspiring to hear your story and I can use a lot of what you have shared for myself and my colleagues. Keep doing what you are doing!!!...”

Dave then brought the meeting to a close after thanking Logan and Doug again for giving members tips about practical things that everyone can do to help boost their wellbeing and to combat the mental stresses of everyday life.

Further information about *Unmasked's* support for individuals and to employers can be found at: <https://unmaskedmentalhealth.co.uk/>

Related HSE web site links:

Case study featuring workplace wellbeing:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/casestudies/btgroup.htm>

Managing stress at work – resources and useful links:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/resources.htm>

Managing construction health risks - wellbeing:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/managing-essentials/wellbeing.htm>