

The Lancashire Well-Being Programme

Dept. of Work and Pensions and Dept. of Health Dame Carol Blacks report. Dec. 2009

“Working our way to better mental health: a framework for action”

Main summary and points of interest from the document.

Dame Carol Black's recent review of the health of Britain's working-age population identified that over £100 billion is lost to the economy because of working-age ill-health and associated sickness absence. Of this, it is estimated that between £30-40 billion can be attributed to mental ill-health. United Kingdom (UK) employers annually pay an estimated £9 billion in statutory sick pay and occupational sick pay, of which around £2-4 billion is likely to be paid because of mental ill-health. The paper emphasises that *“positive workplaces will benefit all employees. In addition, there is significant benefit to employers and the economy in general in providing supportive workplaces that promote well-being.”*

The framework for action has a dual approach; it is designed to

- improve well-being at work for everyone
- deliver better employment results for people with mental health conditions...helping them to stay in work and assisting them to return to work more quickly after sickness absences.

The framework identifies six key areas. They are:

- action to change attitudes to mental health
- action to improve health and well-being at work for the whole population
- swift intervention when things go wrong
- co-ordinated help tailored to individuals' needs both in and out of work
- action to build resilience from early years and throughout working lives
- co-ordinated action across government to ensure we deliver success.

Well-Being People have a sense of well-being when they:

- feel good about themselves
- have a sense of purpose
- feel capable of fulfilling their personal goals.

Well-being has been defined as *“a dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community”.*

Promoting mental health, well-being and resilience We all have a responsibility to look after our own mental health and well-being, develop our confidence and capacity, and learn to respond with resilience to life's changes and challenges in work and beyond.

The five steps to mental health.

- 1. Connect with people**
- 2. Be active**
- 3. Be curious**
- 4. Learn**
- 5. Give**

Some interesting points

One in six adults of working age in Great Britain experiences symptoms of distress, such as sleeplessness, irritability or worry that can affect a person's ability to function adequately. One in six of the working-age population experiences symptoms that because of their nature, severity and duration would meet the criteria for clinical diagnosis such as anxiety and/or depression. Estimates suggest that up to half of the total working time lost to sickness absences is attributable to mental ill-health. Stress, depression and anxiety are together the largest single cause of work-related sickness absence. A workforce that enjoys good mental health and well-being can improve job performance, productivity and creativity. ***Investing in the well-being of staff is therefore also an economic issue for business.*** **Positive workplaces** Positive workplaces will both prevent work-related harm to individuals' well-being, and promote resilience and good mental health. Whatever the size of the organisation, there are key features that are common to those which have achieved success in promoting mental health and well-being at work. These include:

- senior, visible leadership
- accountable managers throughout the organisation;
- systems of monitoring and measurement to ensure continuous improvement;
- empowering employees to care for their own health;
- attention to both mental and physical health improvements;
- consulting and engaging staff to develop a simple menu of activities and options with wide appeal
- job design that recognises 'good work' principles such as strong relationships.

Effective and supportive managers Workplace relationships are crucial. People who report poor relationships with managers or colleagues are more likely to experience mental health conditions or distress.

Managers should be sensitive to changes in behaviour that may indicate distress, and know how to open a potentially difficult conversation, agree actions, and resolve issues early.

Early intervention

Whether due to work pressure or distress from events outside of work, there will be times when people struggle to cope but remain in work until the impact on work performance becomes an issue for their manager. Without help people often become less productive in work or take sick leave.

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Comment: This document is a very worthwhile read for all well-being facilitators and will give you a rationale for your work in schools. The document also recommends that organisation consider completing a survey so if you are subscribing to the Lancashire programme you are already following best practice. For those schools not yet subscribing but would like more information please contact me on the email below or attend one of the head teacher briefing sessions which are being advertised on the Learning Excellence web site and via fliers. Marion Waddington