

Mental Health and Safety // UK

“Most of us know of someone with a mental health issue and are aware it can happen to anyone,” says Jackie McDermott, Head of Engagement and Communication at Smurfit Kappa UK, “We all want to support, but often aren’t sure how to.”

Back in 2018, SK UK’s Human Resources and Health and Safety teams worked together to form the SK UK Mental Health and Well-being Strategy. Whilst there was some confidential provision from the Employee Assistance Programme (Lifeworks), more was needed to provide in-house support. Nigel Elias, UK Health Safety and Environment Manager, says: “In our lives today there is a genuine need. Managers can be faced with a serious mental health issue and be unable to help, because we’ve tended to focus on safety, not health.”

The strategy was launched in April 2019 with the full backing of senior SK UK managers. “People believed in it and wanted to be involved,” says Jackie, “Almost 200

colleagues volunteered to be Mental Health First-Aiders and were taught how to spot early problems, approach people, create safe spaces, and signpost to appropriate services. The volunteers chose the green ribbon logo, and we supported with information posters, identifying them.”

“As it’s a confidential service, our first-aiders need support,” adds Nigel, “So we set up a community site, and quarterly support calls to talk about issues.” The Mental Health First-Aiders also set up ‘Let’s Talk’ rooms on-site where people can talk about their problems in confidence.

The training, provided by ‘Everyday People’, started on International Labour Day 2019

and there are now 195 Mental Health First-Aiders, covering 90% of UK sites – with 10 sites having active Well-being Committees. Over 350 managers are now trained Mental Health Champions, focusing on how to spot problems and support staff.

“The initiative is already benefitting colleagues,” says Jackie. “From April to December 2019, a significant number had received support from a Mental Health First-Aider – it’s definitely helping to reduce stigma and allow colleagues to quickly access vital help.”