

# THINKING OUT LOUD

A Newsletter from the RAF Mental Health Network



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Never miss a thing by  
joining our MS Teams Site  
[HERE](#)

# An Introduction to the RAF Mental Health Network

By Adam Staincliffe

## What is the RAFMHN?

We are a diverse group of volunteers who care about the mental health of our community. Our representatives across the RAF are the drivers of cultural change with a shared goal: End mental health stigma. Each member brings a wealth of personal experience and commitment to the network, applying it to help others around them.

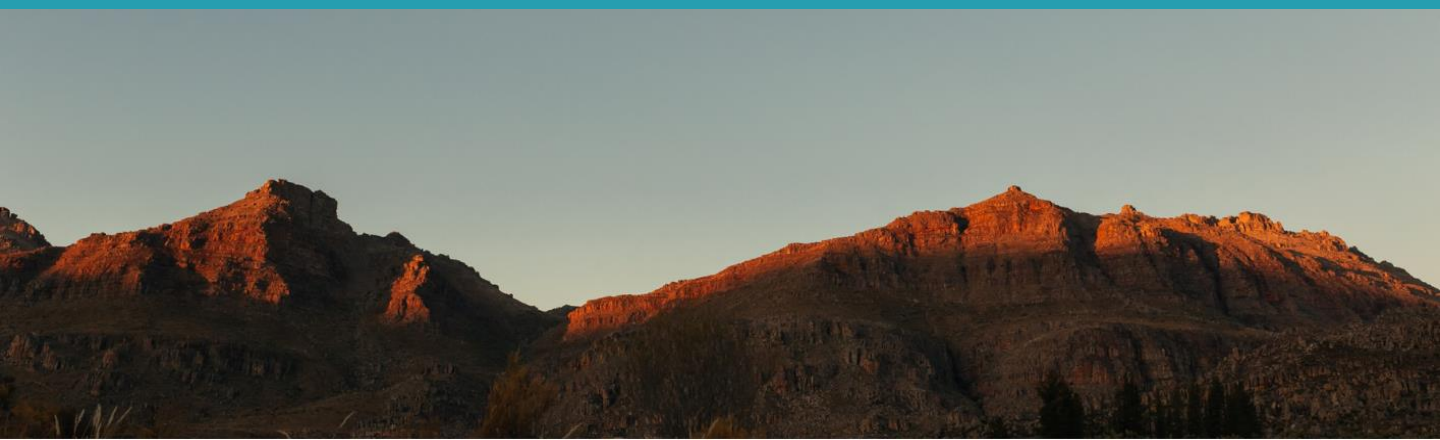


## How does it work?

Each person in the RAFMHN is a point of connection between other members and the rest of the RAF community. Some of us work directly at the unit level, passing on information about MH initiatives, news and updates. Others help to organise and promote events locally or across the service.

We encourage innovation and information sharing so that we can all learn from our experiences, whether that's an admin order template or mentoring in the creation of a new unit network.

We represent a wealth of information and viewpoints and will readily give feedback on courses, activities and policy where appropriate. Anyone can join and participate at a level to suit them.



# An Introduction - Continued

## Is there a structure?

Unbelievably- yes! Our committee forms the hub, with each station representative linking in from a unit network via our MS teams site. Those reps should have a place on the Station Health and Well-being Committee, ensuring they are connected to the right people to enable events and local initiatives. Local networks then provide coverage to their unit in a way that best suits them.

The committee speaks with HQ Air Well-being & Resilience policy directly and via the RAFMHN governance board, where Policy, D&I, Media and comms, Primary healthcare, DCMH and the RAF MH champions sit to advise and assure the network. We also connect to charities like the RAFA and RAFBF to help support service wide MH goals or support unit level activity.

As a network we also support the Time to Change network, a dedicated group of RAFMHN members who share their lived experiences of MH directly with the RAF. By telling their stories they aim to challenge stigma and help start conversations about MH for everyone's benefit.



## What have you done already?

Last year we got stuck in with loads of great stuff. We managed to: Help organise a week long timetable of digital events for Mental Health Awareness week, recruit 5 new RAF Mental Health and Well-being champions and share their stories for World Mental Health day, wax lyrical about men's mental health with the CEO of Aston Martin, a Defence Entrepreneur Forum with industry and charity leaders as well as sharing countless updates on upcoming events, webinars and of course lived experiences from our Time to Change team. Phew!



## Where do I sign up?

If you'd like to join this frankly awesome group of humans, please contact us via the team site [HERE](#).

We can then put you in touch with your local rep or if you'd prefer to help the committee we can discuss available roles. For more info check out the want ads in this newsletter.



# RAF HALTON – WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2020

By Andrea Culley

*“The feedback on these talks has been amazing, and hopefully enabled people to gain the strength to come forward and talk”*

For the week leading up to World Mental Health Day on 10 Oct 20, a Mental Health Discussion Forum was organised and held in St. George’s Church at RAF Halton on 5 Oct.

Approximately 35 Whole Force personnel across the Station attended the forum in a Covid-19 secure environment. It was an absolute privilege to have AVM Jennings open the Forum as the newly appointed RAF Mental Health Champion. Also, WO1 Glenn Haughton (Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chiefs of Staff Committee) is such an amazing advocate in bringing Mental Fitness and Resilience to the fore; his address to the forum was both engaging and thought provoking.

The RAF Time to Change Champions is a new network of Whole Force personnel who volunteer to talk about their own lived experiences; FS Gav Sayer and Sgt Francis Porter gave powerful and emotional addresses.

The feedback on these talks has been amazing, and hopefully enabled people to gain the strength to come forward and talk. Our work continues. In the same week the ‘Recipes to Make You Smile’ booklet was launched. Personnel from across RAF Halton, including the Station Cdr and SWO, contributed to the booklet by providing the recipes and photographs of their ‘go to’ food when needing a lift. With 100 copies distributed they raised a fantastic £201.71 for MIND.



# SPOTLIGHT – MICHELLE SAGE

## TIME TO TALK – BEING IN YOUR COLLEAGUES CORNER

Michelle Sage is a member of the RAF Time to Change Network was integral in organising the RAF events on Time to Talk Day 2021

You can watch Michelle's speech from the day [HERE](#)



*"No one should have to fear being treated differently because of a mental health problem"*

Hi, I am Shell, and I am here to talk to you about My Story, and why Mental health is important. I joined the RAF Mental Health Network, Defence Mental Health Network and the Time to Change movement in 2020, after years of not feeling right.

There are different types of mental health problems ranging from Anxiety & Panic Attacks, to Depression, Eating Disorders, Psychosis to PTSD to name a few. You can find out more about all Mental Health conditions on the [Mind website](#).

I want to change the way we all think and act about mental health problems. Whilst challenging the stigma of mental health has reached millions of people, many still **don't consider mental health relevant to them**. They don't believe mental health problems are likely to affect them or people they know. You may be sat there thinking that Mental health doesn't apply to me.... – **I used to think the same. think again.**

### Let's start talking

Together we will end mental health stigma  
#TimeToTalk



Time to Talk Day was The RAF Time to Change Network's event, which helped spread the message through a number of online Skype sessions on 4th Feb 21, where members of the RAF whole force each told their own story of Mental Health.

By telling their stories of their own lived experience, this group of people showed how Mental Health affects us all. All stories will be shared [HERE](#), feel free to use these to have your own small conversations.



# WE WANT YOU!

## THE RAFMHN IS RECRUITING

### Media and events coordinator

Tech savvy, innovative person wanted to lead on RAFMHN events and media output. You will work closely with ACAS Media and DDC to ensure the network events and comms are coherent with defence and RAF strategies. Will need to integrate well with the existing comms team to establish new ways to reach service pers and their families. Good ~~riting..righting..~~writing skills preferred.

### Charities liaison

As the network improves its connections with external partners and charities we will need someone to work with them to get the best from those relationships. Someone with experience working with outside agencies or organisations would be ideal but enthusiasm and good diplomacy skills are essential.

### RAFMHN Co-Chair

Network Co-Chair wanted. We need someone who is willing to work flexibly with the existing chair to ensure the network gets the leadership it needs. Job will include liaising with the RAFMHN governance board, committee and various MH stakeholders as well as running meetings, editing the newsletter and generally showing up the current chair as the lazy know-it-all that he is.

**If you think you would make a great addition to the team in any capacity please contact:**

**Adam or Andrea**

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Adam Staincliffe

Have you ever had a moment where you feel as if someone is speaking directly to your most profound, personal experiences? It happened to me not long ago. It felt like a light came on that I didn't know was off (there may or may not have been a heavenly choir singing somewhere).

It surprised me because it happened as I listened to some cadets discussing mental health at the USAF Academy. There had been a recent suicide and in their shock and grief, they decided they would create something positive. They named it USAFA Strong: Bringing together technology innovators, charities, industry leaders and senior leadership to improve mental health at the academy. The cadets wanted an open, accepting culture towards mental health. They also wanted to improve the connections between themselves and the support they needed.

What humbled me was their realisation that this process needed to start with them. Even as the newest members of the military. They were the catalyst. By overcoming their difficulties sharing their vulnerability, they set an inspiring example. Following their lead, their Colonel shared his own experiences which in turn sent a clear message: "It's ok to talk about mental health no matter who you are." I learned a lot from what they said and how the strength of leading by example applies especially to us. So here it is: I'm not ok. I haven't been for a while and it's hard to write that down. It was harder to admit it to myself. I talk a good talk about "It's ok not to be ok." but I found it tough to take my own advice- I suspect I'm not alone.



I was worried that people would judge me. That they would be as hard on me as I had been on myself. In that context, of course I was afraid about what would happen if I showed I was vulnerable. Our culture is one of self-sacrifice, strength and resilience. We even reward these things with medals! It's right we should celebrate that but being kind to ourselves when we need it is essential too.

No one can help you if they don't know something is wrong and poor mental health is often invisible. When I finally summoned up the courage to ask for help it was worth it! I found that we are incredible at being kind to each other- much more than we are to ourselves.

It still takes effort not to judge myself. It takes effort to carry on trusting those around me. But, the reward is stronger relationships and a means to understand and cope better with my experiences.

# USEFUL LINKS

[RAF Mental Health Network MS Teams Site](#)

[RAF Health And Well-Being Portal](#)

[Samaritans](#)

[Togetherall](#)

[Combat Stress](#)

[RAF Association](#)

[RAF Benevolent Fund](#)

[Campaign Against Living Miserably](#)

[Mental Health UK](#)

[How To Stay Calm During A Global Pandemic](#)

# CREDITS

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[Have you got  
a story to  
share?](#)

Do you want to share  
your story?

Do you have an event  
coming up?

Do you have some  
useful info you want to  
share? To be featured in  
future editions please  
email:

[Chris](#)

