

Strength in being blue – a film to support mental health

A film showcasing officers and staff discussing their personal experiences of mental health challenges.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Leadership, development and learning Wellbeing
Organisation	Humberside Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Humberside Police
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Region	North East
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	January 2023
Scale of initiative	Regional
Target group	Workforce

Aim

The aim of this initiative is to:

- contest the cultural belief that mental health challenges have no place in the police
- give officers and staff of all ranks and levels confidence to ask for help
- encourage routine mental health conversations
- highlight support offerings available for mental health

Intended outcome

This initiative seeks to achieve the following:

- a raised profile for mental health across the force
- the normalisation of mental health conversations
- an increase in requests for support from officers and staff facing mental health challenges

Description

Historically, there has been fear across policing associated with acknowledging mental health challenges. The mental health team in Humberside Police wanted to start an initiative that addressed this issue.

The team came across a video posted by New Zealand Police on YouTube. In the YouTube video, officers and staff openly discussed mental health. After speaking to New Zealand Police about their experience of creating the video, the mental health team sought buy-in from their Head of People and chief officers to produce their own version for Humberside Police. The film created by

Humberside Police is called 'Strength in Being Blue'.

Aims

Strength in Being Blue aims to help officers and staff identify signs of poor mental health in themselves and colleagues. The video involves six employees of the force talking directly to camera about mental health challenges they have faced. The contributors predominantly describe work-related problems, but one story describes issues at home. Each contributor describes how their mental health was affected by the challenges they faced. The contributors talk about the support services they accessed and how accessing these services helped them start to feel well.

The seven employees involved in the film were three staff members and four officers. At the time of filming, the four officers were at the ranks of chief superintendent, superintendent, inspector and police constable. One of the contributors worked in a role with greater risk of experiencing traumatic incidents. The contributors were all known to the mental health team and were invited to join the project following checks that they weren't in the middle of treatment and were in positions of feeling psychologically safe.

The Humberside Police communications and mental health teams recruited an external film company to film, edit and shape the video, with the cost of filming shared between the budgets of the two teams. The mental health team were present at every filming session to have oversight of the product. Approximately a year after the idea first formed, a 25 minute video was finalised.

Once the film was signed off, the mental health team launched it at a Humberside Police Wellbeing conference where the participating officers and staff received a standing ovation.

The film has since been shown at national conferences and to other forces. It is also available on the force Intranet. A shorter (seven minute) version of the film is available on Youtube: [Strength in Being Blue \[short version\] - YouTube](#)

Overall impact

- The force mental health team has seen a rise in conversations relating to suicide, mental health, depression and other related topics since the launch of the film. The number of referrals the team has received for mental health support has risen from 280 in 2022 up to 516 in 2024. Although these increases can't be fully attributed to the film due to other ongoing wellbeing initiatives in

force, anecdotal feedback suggests the film has encouraged others to speak up about mental health and access support services.

- The film has also fed into other ongoing initiatives, including a new video aimed at encouraging mental health conversations for firearms officers. This new initiative, named “watch my six” after a military term, is currently being evaluated to identify impact.
- Humberside Police has been asked to speak at conferences and to other forces about “Strength in Being Blue”. The film has also been showcased by Oscar Kilo and the National Police Chief’s Council.

Learning

- Having police officers speak directly to other officers about mental health is hugely powerful. For example, one of the contributors talked candidly about feeling suicidal. This has been hugely impactful and has elicited honest conversations among colleagues. Having contributors in the film from different roles and ranks also helps convey the message that mental health problems can affect anyone.
- Humberside Police didn’t experience any real challenges in recruiting the film contributors - which is testament to the immense courage of the contributors. However, the force were careful to be very transparent about the potential reach of the film right from the outset. The force also offered robust mental health support to the contributors for as long as they needed before and after filming. The mental health team were present at every filming session to ensure the contributors were not triggered or disadvantaged in any way by reliving their mental health experience.
- When the film was shown in force, it was preceded with a 'health warning' to enable anyone who may be triggered by listening to some of the content to make an informed decision about whether to stay in the room. The force advise that it is important to have wellbeing teams attend film sessions so they can give immediate support to anyone who may need it afterwards.
- The force has started to evaluate similar initiatives to “Strength in Being Blue” and would recommend that organisations looking to create their own video run an evaluation alongside the product to measure impact.
- Finally, organisations looking to create similar products will need to consider that an anticipated outcome of this intervention is an increase in the number of officers and staff seeking health for mental health experiences. It is important to consider how such an increase in referrals will be budgeted and resourced.

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Tags

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