

EIP



One Year as a Mental Health First Aider

In 2019, EIP established a team of certified Mental Health First Aiders. Thomas Goodfellow, a patent attorney from EIP's Bath office, is one of EIP's first aiders. He shares his personal perspective as a first aider below.

This year has been challenging for many in the UK and around the world. Various social restrictions and changes to the working environment have brought mental health into the limelight.

Last year, prior to the global pandemic, I was pleased to volunteer as a “Mental Health First Aider” (MHFA) for EIP’s Bath office. Taking up this role involved attending a two-day training course provided by St. John’s Ambulance on behalf of MHFA England, where we covered various aspects of mental illness from addiction, depression, and suicide, to eating disorders, personality disorders, and psychosis. The training was extremely eye-opening and equipped me with the skills to recognise and better understand different mental illnesses.

While we are unable to provide any form of counselling—much as First Aiders are unable to provide clinical advice—we are able to act as a first port-of-call for any colleagues experiencing difficulties with their mental health, to address their immediate needs, and to direct them to further support where needed. We also provide a confidential ear for the day-to-day issues faced by those around us.

Aside from our function as “first aiders”, we play a wider role in encouraging our colleagues to be conscious of, and to take care of, their own mental health. We also encourage open discussion to break down any stigma surrounding the subject.

One of the first events the EIP MHFA team held was in February for the UK “Time to Talk” day. In the Bath office, we set up a whiteboard in the break-out room and asked people to

add to it throughout the day with ideas on how to maintain a healthy mind.

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We then hosted a brief lunch-time session (complete with snacks) which started with a quiz on Mental Health statistics and ended with a chat about the things we can do to stay healthy, using the whiteboard entries as talking points. The event was well-received and doubled as a networking session for colleagues to catch up and learn more about one another.

We have an internal social network on Yammer called "We are EIP", which was valuable for keeping in touch during lockdown in the UK. We had daily quizzes, regular video updates from one of our board members, and various other interesting posts which spurred interaction between colleagues.

The MHFA team also ran a series of short video blogs in which we talked about life from our different perspectives during lockdown, and discussed what we had been doing to "stay sane". I filmed my vlog while out on a run in the countryside surrounding the beautiful city of Bath. This generated a lot of engagement and resulted in other adventurous colleagues getting out of the house and sharing pictures of their own. This was a very positive moment as a MHFA. It was a great way to form closer connections with colleagues from all over the UK (and abroad!).

For me, being involved in the MHFA initiative is extremely rewarding. I am also fortunate to work in a firm which values the wellbeing of its staff and encourages open and honest discussion surrounding mental health. I would encourage anybody thinking about becoming a MHFA, or setting up such an initiative for their business, to do so. If you would like any advice, or would like to hear more about my experience, please do get in touch!