

## FIT FOR SPRING – WELLBEING AND SAFETY

with Sue Hutchinson, Syngenta

Earlier this week I had the most awful dream.... My son is in his third and final year at University and I dreamt that he was finding it difficult and had turned to drugs to help get him through. In my dream he was not in a good headspace at all. I woke up feeling really upset. That day I received an emotional call from my son telling me that he was not in a good place and was finding his third year very tough with deadlines that he felt he couldn't meet. He told me that he was dreading waking up each morning and physically being sick, that he wasn't eating and that he was feeling huge waves of panic. As his mother I wanted to get in my car and drive to Nottingham straight away. However, as a Mental Health First Aider for Syngenta, the training I received two years ago provided me with the tools and techniques to talk to my son and offer all the support that I could and also to calm him down at that particular moment in time.

I have worked for Syngenta for almost four years now and when they asked for volunteers for employees to complete the training and become certified Mental Health First Aiders I jumped at the opportunity. I had received certification as a Wellbeing and Lifestyle Coach a few years prior to this so I knew that this additional training that Syngenta were offering would enhance these learnings even further.

My career in the farming and agricultural industry now spans over thirty years in a predominantly male oriented environment. Talking about mental health early in my career was quite taboo. That has changed significantly. Farmers face ever increasing challenges such as isolation, loneliness, changing technologies, changing laws and regulations, climate crisis, long hours and keeping their livelihoods sustainable. And in the past year alone, we have all had to deal with BREXIT as well as COVID-2019.

I am proud to work for a company who recognises the impact that mental health can have on our daily lives. So many initiatives have been introduced to support employees and to raise awareness of what provisions there are and tools available for us.

The training and workshops that I have attended have provided me with the tools to support my colleagues and outside of the working environment. I also appreciate that in order to provide support I must nurture and take care of myself too. You can't pour from an empty cup, right?

Throughout the past two years I have delivered several mental health workshops either on my own or with another colleague to many other employees, not just in the UK but around Europe also. Last January I delivered a workshop to European colleagues in relation to working at home and in isolation and how that can affect mental health. Little did I know then that two months later we would be in a lockdown situation and most of us suddenly working from home.

As a business Syngenta has implemented lots of initiatives to support employees such as Pause2Talk and Check-Up & Check-In. They also continually promote other resources that available. We have an Employee Assistance Programme which is available 24/7 to all employees. Last year several employees, including myself, from all the sites around the UK volunteered to come together to form a UK Mental Health Forum. We have regular meetings to discuss ideas that we can roll out to employees and as a result of this so far there have been workshops and webinars on resilience, building mental wellbeing and parenting in anxious times. I am confident that there will be many more to follow.

For now, I will keep raising awareness of mental health throughout the organisation and 'looking out' for my colleagues to ensure that they really are ok.

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