PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Thousands of Scottish Workers Provide Answers on How to Tackle Mental Health Stigma, for Mental Health Awareness Week

THOUSANDS of workers from across Scotland have taken part in a new project, to discover the best ways to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination at work.

They've identified the three key elements needed to make a change; having leaders who are willing to speak openly about mental health, whether that is their own or in a way that encourages healthy and supportive cultures, ensuring that line managers have a good understanding and getting internal communications right.

The new findings have been developed by mental health organisation See Me, who have been working with ScotRail, Apex Hotels, engineering company Babcock and commercial law firm Burness Paull LLP, and their 8000 employees, to see what it takes to improve the cultures of Scotland's workplaces.

The eight month Workplace Equality Project involved the employers working with their employees, See Me and See Me volunteers to discover what issues existed in their organisations, and explore how to tackle them.

See Me volunteer Susan Falconer,52, from Galashiels said: "It has to be led from the top down, with the message that stigma will not be put up with.

"I had a really big break down and I felt terrible. I was made to feel I was letting the team down by being off.

"All they were thinking was about getting a bum in the seat and a job to be done. I don't think they realised how hard it was being that bum on the seat. However things have improved now.

"It is like that in a lot of workplaces, people are frightened to speak out, because there is an attitude that you're letting people down, or you're a failure.

"I think all managers should have some sort of mental health training. If management and leadership hear that discrimination is happening then they should be pulling people up for it."

Nadya Kuhl, occupational health and wellbeing manager at Scotrail, said: "At Scotrail, we want to end mental health stigma.

"We've got a culture at the moment where people feel it's not okay to say that they've got any mental health condition because of the stigma attached. We now need to take action, we need to do something.

"The most important thing is that this is coming down from the top. If members on the ground can see people from high up that are passionate about this, then they're not going to be scared about coming forward. If one of their managers comes forward and says I've got depression, anxiety or PTSD, then they'll maybe think, oh, it's okay, I've got that too. They've spoke out about it, so I can speak out about it as well.

Derek Cummings, director of HR and operations at Burness Paull, said: "The main thing is ensuring at a senior level there's much greater awareness and visibility of mental health and the importance of talking about that.

"Culturally, we've increased awareness, we've made it more acceptable, more comfortable to talk about mental health. We've put in place specific training to support managers and people across the business to feel better equipped to support people who are struggling with their mental health."

Tom Scott, See Me's workplace equality consultant, said: "Whenever leaders have stood up and talked about how they are successful, high flying professionals and they are also people who have struggled with a mental health problem then things have started to change.

"Communication is also vital, if employees are unaware of the existence of an Employee Assistance Provider they won't access that support. If they're unaware of the opportunity for mental health training then they won't attend.

"However the most consistent piece of feedback from employees of all four companies was that if you have a manager that gets it then you are going to have a good experience, if you have a manager who doesn't get it then it's going to go the other way."

You can find out more about making changes at your workplace at https://www.seemescotland.org/workplace/.

ENDS…

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. See Me is Scotland's National programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination, enabling people who experience mental health problems to live fulfilled lives.

We do this by:

- Mobilising people to work together and lead a movement to end mental health stigma and discrimination
- Working with people to change negative behaviour towards those with mental health problems
- Ensuring that the human rights of people with mental health problems are respected and upheld

2. Follow See Me on Twitter or Instagram @seemescotland or find us on Facebook: Facebook/seemescotland, or at www.seemescotland.org

3. See Me is managed by SAMH and the Mental Health Foundation and funded by Scottish Government and Comic Relief