YOU MATTER®

Strengthening Minds, Building Resilience

Assoċjazzjoni Kunsilli Lokali
Local Councils' Association Malta

YOU MATTER

Strengthening Minds, Building Resilience

Contents

ASSOCIATION OVERVIEW

About Us

Local Councils' Association Malta plays a crucial role in facilitating effective collaboration, consultation, and coordination across all levels. Key interests include sustainable mobility, with guidelines emphasizing the importance of walkability, accessibility, and parking management, green living initiatives, support for programs like EkoSkola together with a focus on national political decisions regarding open spaces and support for healthy strategies.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Mental health in the Community

In a world increasingly shaped and dominated by digital systems, the significance of the support that communities can provide for mental well-being cannot be overlooked. While professional assistance and medication undoubtedly remain crucial, what emerges from human interaction facilitated in a community support context is paramount.

This project is about how the impact of a cohesive and tolerant community, along with experiences that can easily be shared among us, leads to establishing a foundation with a healthy level of emotional resilience. The Local Councils' Association is once again at the forefront of tackling such import issues in the local government sector.

The need for us to connect effectively

Human beings inherently have a need and a desire to connect and feel a sense of belonging to something or someone. When social bonds are strong, they fulfill emotional, social, and psychological needs and serve as a buffer against life's many challenges. In moments of stress, anxiety, or depression, knowing that there are members in the community where you live can give you courage and provide support independently of the obligations towards their own families. This support comes from immediate family and genuine friends who want to be there for you and listen to your words.

As members of the human race living in society, we should feel this connection within us and understand that one person with social problems can also lead to reaching out to more negative people if we cannot provide help.

Mr Mario Fava
Local Councils' Association
Presdent

Reducing stigma and isolation

Certainly, one of the biggest obstacles to seeking help for mental health issues is the fear of isolation and stigma. Therefore, communities must have platforms that facilitate discussions and exchange of experiences to overcome this barrier and encourage more people to seek help before it's too late. When people feel supported and realize they are not alone, they are more comfortable seeking help and talking about their problems. This leads to open, honest, and mature conversations so that the individual feels a sense of belonging to that community.

The sense of belonging

We've discussed the importance of a sense of belonging and how being part of a community contributes to one's self-esteem, ultimately enabling one to truly believe in their value. This understanding stems from the fact that others take an interest in how one feels and their challenges, and therefore, this sense of belonging sends a powerful message that even in the face of significant challenges, everyone is valid and capable of succeeding in the life they choose to live. When a person feels valued and accepted, it's more likely that they'll develop a conviction about the importance of self-evaluation and embracing and accepting who they are.

Experiences and empathy

The strength of community support emerges from the sharing of experiences and empathy that members of the same community can offer to one another. When individuals facing similar challenges and problems come together and talk, they provide immense support to each other, extending beyond mere sympathy. This leads to a sense of not feeling alone because more than just seeing a community "sympathize" with these individuals, we witness an empathetic community ready to listen, understand, and care. This sensitivity reinforces the belief that individuals seeking help are indeed those interested in them and that there are people in the community willing to provide all necessary assistance without passing judgment on their past or present. This also contributes to creating a more resilient and interconnected community, where one person's challenges are everyone's.

Emotion and resilience

Community support serves as a stable "anchor" during emotional upheaval, fostering a safe space for individuals to express their feelings and receive empathy. This exchange offers emotional relief and demonstrates resilience in action, as individuals navigate challenging periods. Such platforms are crucial in promoting empathy and showcasing practical examples of resilience. Moreover, sharing experiences allows for collective learning, contributing to a deeper understanding of resilience within the community and empowering individuals to tackle challenges effectively.

How can a Local Council involve itself in all of this?

To address stigma, which still permeates this sector, open and honest discussions at the community level are necessary to foster a general sense of acceptance of mental health. Through various platforms, local councils have a social obligation to the community to ensure space for this process. This can also be achieved through initiatives of diverse campaigns within society. When an individual feels comfortable speaking about their experiences on one of these platforms, it fosters a tremendous sense of acceptance and personal development. Local councils should not retreat from this responsibility by merely paying lip service, as doing so would only perpetuate the problem. Instead, they should act as catalysts to ensure they embrace the true meaning of inclusivity in the community.

Let's explore a welcoming environment

To support individuals facing these challenges, creating a welcoming environment where they feel safe to speak up and share their experiences is essential. This encouragement empowers them to become active community members, free from prejudice or stigma, rather than feeling excluded and isolated at home. Such an environment fosters confidence, enabling individuals to leave their comfort zones and contribute to the broader community. By reducing negative attitudes and discrimination, we can stand in solidarity with these individuals and collectively build a more inclusive society.

Resources

Communities can function as central hubs for mental health resources, bringing together various stakeholders such as professionals, experts, individuals with lived experience, and relevant organizations. When a Local Council effectively coordinates these parties, it optimizes resource utilization and increases awareness about mental health issues. This collaborative effort results in a wider array of tools available to support those seeking help, ultimately improving the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Activities

Once individuals have been equipped with essential information on accessing support, a welcoming environment has been established, communication platforms have been set up, and resources have been pooled, the focus can shift to facilitating direct engagement. Organizing community activities makes individuals feel valued and integrates them into the fabric of the community. These activities offer chances to connect with new people, potentially from diverse backgrounds, and promote collaboration within and across localities. This collaborative approach can extend regionally, strengthening the sector and enhancing support networks.

Digital communities

As local leaders, we must also consider the possibility that individuals may choose or prefer to seek assistance online. It is imperative to recognize this trend, as it may indicate a growing segment of our community who feel more comfortable seeking help in this manner. Moreover, it underscores the importance of ensuring that any platforms, activities, or environments we create prioritize virtual accessibility for these community members. This approach can also support those who may lack access to other resources. By implementing robust online support systems and fostering a secure digital environment, we can better serve our community and adapt to evolving needs.

Conclusion

As we can see, community support and engagement are crucial in addressing this mental health challenge. It's essential for interaction, understanding each other better, sharing our experiences, maximizing our limited resources, and affirming human dignity.

I believe that Local and Regional Councils play an essential role in all of this, and I hope that we can work together with experts in the field to establish a safe, supportive, and empathetic framework where more people feel comfortable stepping forward and seeking help. The Association of Local Councils will explore how it can facilitate and initiate these community services, with the assistance and involvement of experts in the field.

Mario Fava
President

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The guide acknowledges the growing and profound effects of poor mental health in the workplace. It emphasizes the crucial link between work and mental well-being. In turn, it recognizes that a positive work environment fosters confidence, purpose, positive relationships, and structured routines, all contributing to good mental health.

Within this guide, various risks to mental health are identified, which can in turn affect work performance. These risks can lead to adverse outcomes such as poor mental health and exclusion from employment, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as those with severe mental health conditions. Moreover, global crises like economic recessions and public health emergencies exacerbate these issues, increasing poor performance, further endangering mental health.

Addressing mental health at work requires a comprehensive approach involving government, the Local Councils' Association, and other stakeholders. Actions include preventing work-related mental health conditions by managing psychosocial risks, promoting mental health literacy and awareness, and implementing interventions to support individuals with mental health conditions.

Further contribution to enhancing mental health in the workplace is undertook through the following actions:

- Providing mental health support for all employees.

- Safeguarding and advocating for mental health in the workplace.

- Assisting workers with mental health conditions to engage and excel in their roles.

- Cultivating an environment conducive to fostering positive changes.

USEFUL DEFINITIONS

"Mental health"
is broadly defined as encompassing a spectrum of well-being, from good mental well-being to severe mental health problems.

"Mental well-being" refers to the ability to cope with daily stresses, work productively, interact positively with others, and fulfill one's potential.

"Poor mental health" indicates struggling with low mood, stress, or anxiety, potentially accompanied by restlessness, confusion, irritability, or preoccupation.

"Mental health problems" occur when difficult experiences persist, hindering enjoyment of life; they may manifest as specific diagnoses or prolonged periods of poor mental health.

"Common mental health problems" include depression, anxiety, phobias, and OCD, affecting one in four people annually, with symptoms ranging from mild to severe.

"Severe mental health problems" encompass less common conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, often requiring complex or long-term treatment.

"Work-related stress" is defined as adverse reactions to excessive pressure at work and can lead to illness, high sickness absence, turnover, and increased error risk. Severe and prolonged stress may eventually lead to diagnoses of depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues.

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Many hesitate to discuss their mental health openly due to concerns that it may hinder their chances of promotion or career advancement. Mental health remains a sensitive topic in many workplaces, with employees refraining from bringing up the subject to avoid potential discrimination. This prevailing culture of silence leads to undetected mental health issues escalating into crises, resulting in elevated rates of sick leave, and increased turnover among staff.

- Negative mental health issues can impact anyone regardless of age, personality, or background, with both direct and indirect effects through relationships with family members and colleagues.

- While poor mental health can significantly impair daily functioning, impacting relationships, work, and overall well-being, effectively managing it is possible with treatment and support, emphasizing the importance of personalized assistance and understanding in the workplace.

IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AT WORK

The impact of mental health is significant. Research shows that mental health problems often result from a combination of factors, including workplace stressors and personal challenges. For instance, someone facing severe anxiety due to financial difficulties may struggle with job demands that were previously manageable. Conversely, inability to manage work stress can worsen difficulties in managing responsibilities outside of work, creating a negative cycle that affects both personal and professional life.

Local Councils' Association is interested in supporting employees with mental health issues, as doing so can lead to significant benefits. With appropriate support and frameworks in place, individuals with mental health challenges can thrive in the workplace, underscoring the importance of proactive support regardless of the original cause or trigger.

DESTIGMATIZATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Mental health, like physical health, requires care and attention. It influences daily functioning and can be challenging during tough times. About one in four individuals experience mental health issues yearly, ranging from depression to more severe conditions.

Recognizing the complexity and diversity of experiences is crucial, particularly in addressing stigmas. In supporting employees, focusing on how their condition impacts work performance, rather than labelling based on diagnosis, is essential.

- Depression is a long-lasting feeling of sadness that affects daily life. It can cause hopelessness, guilt, and exhaustion, impacting how you think, feel, and function.

- Anxiety is feeling worried about the future, which can be overwhelming. It can cause physical symptoms like trouble sleeping or panic attacks. There are different types, but people can also feel anxious without a specific diagnosis.

- Panic attacks are sudden, intense episodes of terror characterized by symptoms like difficulty breathing, rapid heartbeat, and trembling. They can be triggered by the memory of a previous attack.

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a serious anxiety disorder involving obsessions (unwanted thoughts, images, or urges) and compulsions (repetitive actions to alleviate anxiety).

- Phobias are extreme fears of specific situations or objects, even when they're not really dangerous. They're called phobias when they last for more than six months and seriously affect daily life.

SERVICES OFFERED

Individual Psychotherapy

Individual psychotherapy services provide a confidential and supportive environment where you can explore your thoughts, emotions, and aspirations with a warranted psychotherapist. Whether you're grappling with anxiety, depression, or simply aiming for personal development, our experienced therapist is dedicated to guiding you towards improved mental well-being.

Group Psychoeducation Seminars for Personal and Professional Growth

Our upcoming psychoeducation seminars will provide a structured environment for participants to engage in discussions on various topics pertaining to mental health, personal growth, and well-being. Led by experienced facilitators, these sessions offer valuable insights, practical tools, and opportunities for networking with individuals aiming to enhance coping mechanisms, strengthen interpersonal relationships, or deepen self-awareness.

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Under the leadership of Mr Mario Fava, the Employee Mental Health Programme aims at supporting members of staff who are currently going through difficult personal challenges. Comprising the team are Dr Charles Cassar, former President of the European Association of Psychotherapy, Ms Shirley Galea, Geatalt psychotherapist and psychoeducator, and Mr Martin Cassar, environmental educator and Gestalt psychotherapist with specializations in transpersonal coaching and business coaching.

Mr Mario Fava
Local Councils' Association Presdent

Ms Lianne Cassar
LCA Executive Secretary and Project Coordinator

Ms Shirley Galea
Psychotherapist

Mr Martin Cassar
Psychotherapist

Dr Charles Cassar
Psychotherapist

YOU MATTER®

Strengthening Minds, Building Resilience

Assoċjazzjoni
Kunsilli Lokali
Local Councils' Association Malta