



Case study

The Football Association (FA) – mental health guides

Project at a glance

- The FA identified an opportunity to lead the national conversation and raise awareness around mental health at all levels of the game.
- They worked with Mind to create a series of bespoke guides offering clear support and practical signposting for:



900
staff



120,000
licensed
football
coaches



28,000
FA-qualified
match
officials

The challenge

The mental health pressures professional footballers face are well-documented. But what about the referees, coaches and managers at grassroots clubs who are just as crucial to the fabric of the game?

With support from Mind, The FA set out to create bespoke guides ensuring these different groups got the support and information they needed. They also aimed to raise awareness and reduce the stigma around talking about mental health throughout football.

“Like any organisation we have a duty of care to our participants and to our staff,” says Funke Awoderu, The FA’s senior inclusion and diversity manager.

“Over the last five we’ve seen growing awareness about mental health. And we realised we wanted to be part of this national conversation. We want to get to a point where it’s OK for everyone to not be OK and feel free to talk about it. That should be part and parcel of what football is, whether you’re a player, referee or work behind the scenes.”

The FA's response

Funke says that one of the starting points was acknowledging The FA aren't experts in mental health. So they asked for support from Mind to work out exactly what advice and guidance needed to go into the guides.

“The main challenge was arriving at our core messages,” she says.

“We needed to create a framework that would engender and facilitate conversations around mental health. That meant getting these messages exactly right.”

Before writing the guides The FA surveyed 1,499 people involved in the game. They found understanding of mental health was strong, but this wasn't grounded in any formal knowledge or training.

The FA decided a 'Three S' approach was the best way forward. So each of the guides featured the information readers needed to 'Spot the signs', 'Support' and 'Signpost'. This included everything from guidance on how to talk to a colleague to links to advice online.



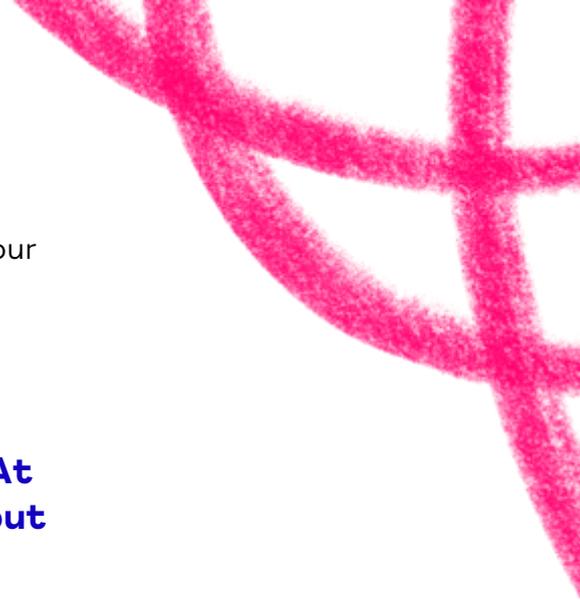
The results

“Mind were brilliant to work with,” says Funke.

“They helped us focus on the right messages and had the expertise to guide us in our journey and be consistent with our messaging.”

The guides have been sent out to 120,000 licensed football coaches, 28,000 FA-qualified match officials and 900 staff at The FA.

“Getting the professional help I needed was key to my recovery. At times the side effects of medication can be difficult to manage, but the benefits outweigh the negatives. Counselling and talking was also a massive help to my recovery. Seek help, talk about how you feel and you will be amazed about how many others have felt the same.” Referee Development Officer, Leicestershire and Rutland FA



Learning

- **Learn from your audience**

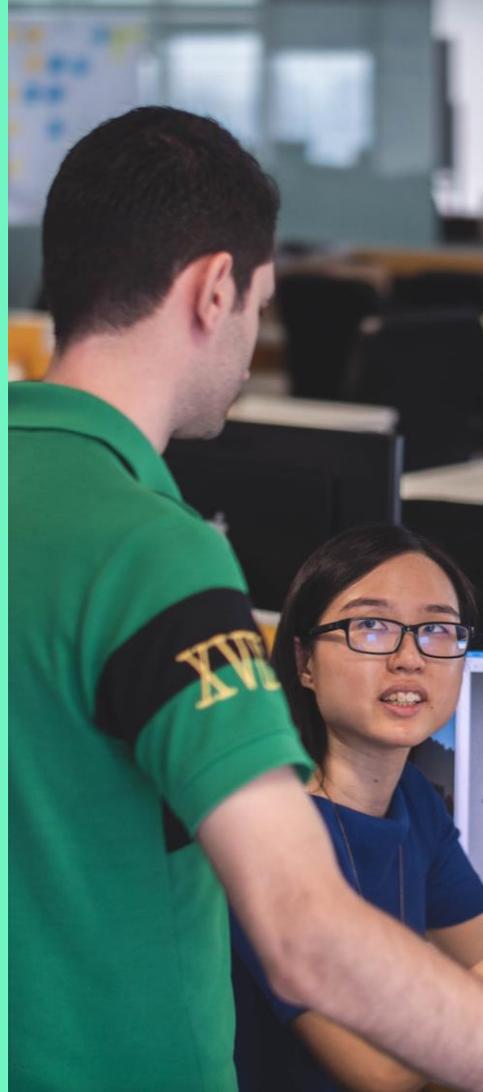
“We initiated a survey before we wrote the publications,” says Funke. “We framed the publication on what people told us from the survey. That’s why we focused on spotting the signs, how to support individuals and where to signpost.”

- **Be consistent with your messages**

“We worked with Mind on core messaging and then communicated those to different audiences with a different tone of voice,” says Funke. “However, though the tone of voice may have been different, the same core messages were communicated to everyone.”

- **Share learning with others**

“We’ve learned that sharing learning is very important with the many organisations that work across football,” says Funke. “That means having an open and honest conversation with people working in the same area so you can learn from others and they can learn from you.”



Relevant support available

The FA's mental health guide on mental health for coaches and managers

The FA's mental health guidance for referees

Thriving at Work: implementing workplace standards in the sport and physical activity sector

Mental Health Awareness for Sport & Physical Activity+ eLearning

