

Press release: New Year, new lick of paint for local charity

With Christmas around the corner and it being the season of goodwill the group, who between them work in a variety of roles at Highways England in Guildford, wanted to help a local organisation which supports people with mental health issues.

The group of volunteers approached Oakleaf Enterprise, which is located nearby to their workplace, with an offer of help. With 1 in 4 people in the UK suffering from a mental illness every single year, Oakleaf's services have never been more vital.

The December timing was perfect as over Christmas one in ten people feel unable to cope, rising to a third of people with a mental health problem. And over a quarter of people feel the pressure to have the 'perfect Christmas', increasing to half of those with a mental health problem (48%).

Highways England Mental Health First Aiders at Oakleaf

Tom Briggs, from Highways England, said:

We wanted to do something practical and had originally thought about offering to do some gardening – recognising the positive link between physical exercise and well-being. But we found that the art room at Oakleaf was a tad uninspiring and clearly in need of a re-vamp.

It has been a real learning curve for those of us with no DIY skills and a great opportunity for us to build links with Oakleaf, a hidden gem whose staff and volunteers do such a fantastic job. We hope to continue to support them.

In the weeks leading up to D-Day (day of decorating) the team met regularly to organise a rota, delegate tasks and buy supplies. They also gained the support of the local B&Q at Ladymeade Retail Centre who kindly donated some paint and brushes.

Highways England staff painting the art room

Tom said:

Many of the individuals Oakleaf support don't have loved ones to celebrate with at this time of year and the charity needs donations to give as presents to their clients at their Christmas party. So we also collected donations from our colleagues for Oakleaf to give to their clients at their Christmas party.

Our volunteering is mutually beneficial as we are able to raise the profile of volunteer Mental Health First Aiders both within our organisation and the wider community. In the same way first aiders are called to help people with physical injuries we are here to offer initial support and guidance to those going through a difficult time or may be experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression, especially at times like Christmas when there is social pressure to be seen as having a good time.

Eli Beckett at Oakleaf Enterprise said:

We are thrilled to have the support of Highways England. Bringing our charity and businesses together is a fantastic way of connecting corporate organisations with the local community whilst raising awareness of mental health and reducing the stigma that is connected to this invisible illness.

We strive to work with businesses who take a genuine interest in the mental well-being of their staff – Highways England are a fantastic example of a company doing just that, with a wonderful, proactive team of MHFA trained employees based in the Guildford office.

Both the staff and clients here at Oakleaf are so grateful to Highways England for all their fundraising efforts so far and for coming down to help redecorate our slightly tired looking room! We look forward to growing this partnership with Highways England as we continue to support some of the most vulnerable adults in our local community live well with a mental illness.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.