



# How Rotherham Council built workforce resilience and wellbeing within its response team



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Technology enabled care has made huge leaps in recent years but the one thing that's remained constant is the critical role of call handlers and responders. Throughout the country, they are providing 24/7 support – responding to every situation imaginable and often dealing with extremely difficult and stressful situations.

TEC service organisations often have processes and services in place to support staff after the event, but what about the tools and strategies that empower them to manage these challenging situations effectively at the time?

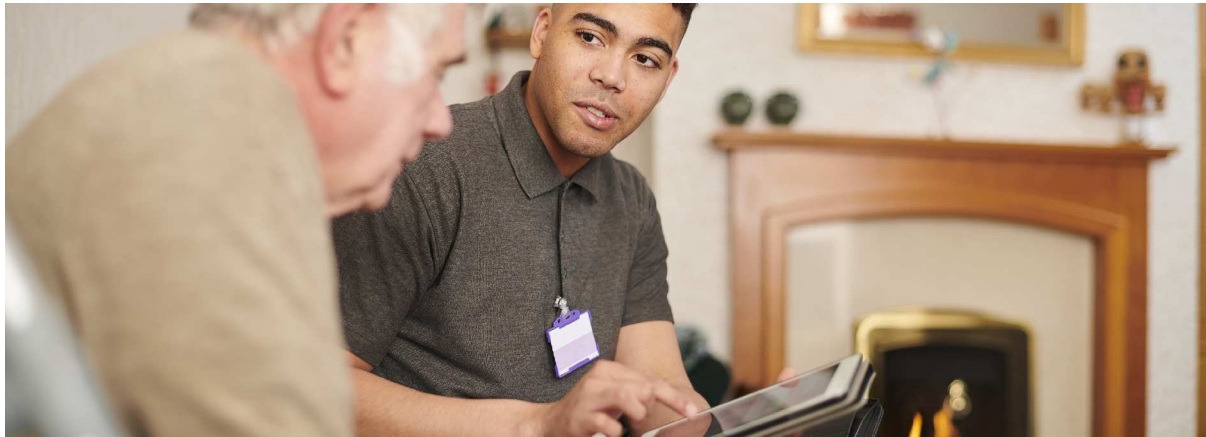
## Training against challenge

Rothercare, which is part of Rotherham Council, recently brought in TSA to deliver challenging calls training to bolster skills within its team of 36 staff.

On an average day the service can deal with up to 1,200 calls while its mobile responders typically deal with more than 20 emergency call outs. While staff are now taking fewer calls than at the peak of the pandemic, there's been a significant change in the nature of calls received, explains Sharon Barker, Rothercare and assistive technology manager.

“The calls are getting longer and more of them are from customers displaying mental health issues with more people threatening suicide. I think after COVID-19 a lot of people were left feeling isolated and in some cases scared.

“We’d wanted this kind of training for a number of years but we knew it had to be targeted and from someone who would understand the issues that we experience. Unless you are in that environment, it’s very difficult to understand what it’s like, for example talking to someone you can’t see who’s suicidal or being a responder who’s entered a property and is confronted by someone holding a knife.”



## Building confidence and understanding

The training was designed by Samantha Davies, TSA’s workforce development manager, who spent many years working in TEC services – including time as a call handler and responder. It was led by a TSA associate who delivered five online sessions to Rothercare staff plus a sixth session tailored to the needs of managers and supervisors. The content is designed to encourage staff to share their experiences, build confidence and develop a better understanding of how best to manage challenging situations.

“Like services in many places, Rothercare’s staff have rolled their sleeves up and mucked in during a very difficult period through the pandemic,” Samantha explains. “Physically and mentally it takes its toll. Even after working for 20 years in this area, some of the things people were describing took my breath away.

“So these sessions are designed to support them while also helping managers to spot the signs when staff are struggling. Creating this new programme has been a learning process for us and with Rothercare we kept tweaking and adapting it as we went along to get the right balance according to who’s in each group. One of key messages we try to get across is ‘you are not alone’.”

Sharon participated in the final session and believes there were many valuable elements to take away.

“One of the sections was on resilience, it’s key in terms of your team’s strength and wellbeing – it’s about recognising that and getting support before the elastic band snaps.

Overall, it was thought provoking and I know that the elements that were in all the sessions – such as around understanding the difference between empathy and sympathy – will have been useful to the team.”

The opportunity to come together and share experiences was invaluable, says Helen Snell, team leader at Rothercare.

"It's rare that we can get together. In some respects, the sessions highlighted to our call handlers and responders that they're working well as a team and are doing the right thing. Sometimes they just need that reassurance because they're dealing with life or death situations."

Investment in training couldn't have come at a better time, says Sharon, and sent out an important message to staff who have been on the frontline of Covid response for the last two years.

Providing this for your team makes them feel valued, shows the work they are doing is important and very meaningful as well. They do a very difficult job that saves lives..

"I would recommend the training. It was a good course and it was well targeted. Sessions like this strengthen the team, show them that they're going through a lot of the same issues and are doing an important job – and doing it well."

It's also brought some unexpected benefits, she says. "Since the sessions finished, I've noticed we've got more feedback and openness from staff about some of the calls they've dealt with and their fears about certain issues. It feels like it had an impact on them to open up about their work and perhaps has enabled people to talk about how they feel about things and the strategies they have used. That can only be a good thing."

## Benefits

- Call handlers and responders now have a greater range of strategies to draw upon when faced with challenging calls and responder visits
- Managers and supervisors are better equipped to support their team, spot signs of stress and safeguard the mental health and wellbeing of staff
- The sessions have served to remind the team that 'they are not alone' and has boosted morale at a critical time
- Overall, the team is even better placed to support service users who are dealing with a multitude of issues

## TEC 'champions'

TSA also delivered a session for 20 of Rotherham Council's **TEC Champions** – volunteers throughout adult social care who raise awareness among colleagues of how TEC can support residents. This time it was to provide an update of latest developments in the TEC industry and national policy so that the champions are kept up to date. Sandy Whiting, the council's programme lead for AT and OT, is leading a refresh of the TEC champions and says the session provided valuable insight.

## Need support?

Get in touch with the [TSA Workforce Development](mailto:training@tsa-voice.org.uk) team to discuss your training and workforce needs.  
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