

Women in Rail

Rajinder Pryor



Make a stand and #ChoosetoChallenge domestic abuse

Rajinder Pryor, Women in Rail Trustee, Engagement Lead at Network Rail outlines why Women in Rail are encouraging the industry to make a stand against domestic abuse

Tussi kidan ji? That's one of the first things we ask others. A genuine enquiry more important now than ever. Translating from Punjabi to English 'How are you?'

Regardless of what language is spoken, the question is universal because we want to show we care.

Take a moment to reflect on how you respond. How often have you said 'I'm fine' when the reality is often the opposite? No matter how resilient we think we are, it is perfectly normal to have a wobble. It's so important to keep reminding our-selves that difficult situations will be overcome, and the associated feelings will pass.

During the last twelve months, fantastic resources for health and wellbeing have been developed – such as content from Rail Wellbeing Live – available to colleagues within the industry. There has been a noticeable shift in this area with the Rail Wellbeing Alliance, a cross industry group providing leadership for health and wellbeing so do continue to embrace Wellbeing Wednesdays.

Having restrictions in place, has impacted us all; but for some the situation is even more challenging. Due to the pandemic, domestic abuse has increased with many

victims finding themselves trapped in their own homes during lockdown. In response to this, rail operators in a joint initiative with Women's Aid are providing free tickets to travel to refuge services through the 'Rail to Refuge' scheme.

Recently Women in Rail, Network Rail, Southeastern and HS1 have taken the lead to install on their corporate websites a free 'Online Safe Spaces' portal. The discreet service helps abuse victims access support and advice, while leaving no internet history trace. This was developed as part of a collaboration between Royal Mail and Parcelforce Worldwide with the charity Hestia and its 'UK SAYS NO MORE' campaign. An initiative which it is hoped will be taken up across the rail industry joining other participants including Thames Water, eBay and several global law firms to name a few.

Organisations recognise the need to provide greater support in the workplace and are choosing to make a stand. With many signed up to the Women in Rail and Railway Industry's joint Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Charter, there is real opportunity, as a collective, to speak out against domestic abuse. The rail industry has a captive audience who can contribute

by engaging men in conversations which women have traditionally directed.

Alternatively, we can choose to turn away as individuals because it does not impact us. But then, whose problem is it? It's a concern we all need to take on as an individual commitment to wider societal change and as part of our corporate social responsibility.

This year's International Women's Day theme is #ChoosetoChallenge. It's not just about whether we choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequity. Nor is it solely about seeking out and celebrating women's achievements. It starts with us all doing our bit to keep women safe so they can thrive.

To quote Martin Luther King 'Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'

At Women in Rail, we invite the wider industry to make a stand with us and choose to challenge domestic abuse.

To find out more about Women in Rail, visit our website womeninrail.org or register to receive news from your local regional group at www.womeninrail.org/contact-us.