

...and the London Underground response from Alison Dunn

London Underground staff were not only caught up in the immediate aftermath of the bombings, but they also provided the initial rescue response following the bombings on 7 July. They have been continuing to provide a service to Londoners despite the further attacks on 21 July, and the ongoing threat. The staff have been significantly affected by this, and it has been the role of the Counselling and Trauma Service to respond to their needs for trauma support. The support programme is still ongoing and it is too early to give a fuller report, however, has provided this summary of how the team responded.

On the day of 7 July, the team provided telephone counselling for anyone who wanted to speak to a counsellor. The following day a counsellor went to the site of each incident to talk to managers and staff. We discussed with managers the support that was needed and would be provided, and staff who wanted to speak to a counsellor were able to do so. In the meantime, other employees who were referred for counselling were offered telephone support by a team of counsellors. A large part of our work has involved liaising with and supporting managers. We have provided them with written guidance on how to support staff who are traumatised, and have continued to visit the stations affected.

The team set up a 24-hour telephone helpline so that any employee wanting to speak to a counsellor could do so – day or night. One-to-one counselling sessions have also been offered to all employees who wanted to speak to a counsellor face to face. These sessions have focused on normalisation, symptom management, and resource building – to help clients to understand and manage their trauma responses. Those employees in most distress have been offered ongoing counselling. The team have also written to those employees thought to have had some involvement, but who haven't come to the counselling service to offer our support if or when needed.

Another important part of our response to the needs of London Underground employees has been to offer group support

– sessions held at stations and depots to provide the normalisation and advice but also to support team work and to encourage peer support. We are still running the groups, but demand for them is lessening, now that the organisation is returning to more normal operations.

As the stations affected by the bombings were reopened, counsellors provided a presence on site to support staff on what was a very emotional occasion for some.

A really important part of our response has focused on our communications with the organisation as a whole – we've carried out a major communications exercise. Within hours of the bombings a bulletin went out to all staff to remind them of the support available through the Counselling and Trauma Service, and the bulletin has remained as a headline on the company's intranet site since. We've continued to send bulletins and reminders about the support on offer, and also sent the managers guide mentioned above electronically throughout the company. A guide for employees on coping with the effects of a traumatic incident has also been made widely available.

The counsellors in the team have worked extra days and hours to provide this response, and we've had great support from our consultants and colleagues in the counselling world. We used an EAP provider (ICAS) to provide the out of hours telephone response. Demand for the service is still continuing at a steady rate, particularly from people who have been working really hard without proper breaks and who are just beginning to react now.

Provided no further incidents occur in the short term, we expect to gradually scale down our response, and we are looking forward to having the opportunity to review what we have done, and what we have learned from it. This summary suggests that the process has been relatively straightforward and simple to provide, but it's been far from that. Providing this response has been the biggest challenge we've ever faced, and we've been working things out as we've moved forward – and we have a great deal to learn from the whole process. ■