

SHAL's Community Chat 2023-05

Anger, stress and frustration

We we're really pleased to welcome new faces to the Community Chat and welcome back familiar ones we haven't seen for a while.

Angela Gascoigne led a chat about how people are feeling at the moment and referred to an article in the featured in the Guardian newspaper in August 2022 titled ['Don't take it out on our staff!': How did Britain become so angry?](#) and it was written by Amy Fleming.

It focussed on the rise in abusive treatment to frontline staff since the pandemic began, including the fact that criminal violence in GP surgeries has almost doubled in 5 years.

The article referred to a "zero-sum psychological environment" where we move from being productive to destructive as people are on edge and under a lot of pressure. It used a car park as an analogy:

"Positive-sum environment"	"Zero-sum environment"
If there are lots of car parking spaces to go round you might be annoyed (but not angry) if someone takes one you find.	On the flip side if you're stressed and late for an appointment and there aren't any spaces left you're more likely to be angry if someone takes on you find after you've been looking for 20 minutes.

With the pressure everyone is under and with everything else going on in the world it's not surprising that people are on edge and reaching "tipping point" quickly. For example:

- Cost of living (including food and fuel) and shortages
- Energy prices and companies making huge profits while people are struggling to make ends meet
- Strikes and waiting lists
- War in Ukraine
- Political infighting

Poor mental health also plays a part. It's a struggle for many at the best of times but all of these factors have made it even worse. Sometimes it's just because people are tired and exhausted working hard to make ends meet. Sometimes organisations, processes and

procedures have a de-humanising effect and it's impossible to speak to a person and get an answer. We talked about how people don't seem to have much patience and aren't as kind anymore. The past few years have taken their toll and once commented people are "carrying a lot of baggage" for want of a better expression. Not meeting people face to face and social media have changed how people interact with one another. Someone commented one of her older customers feels angry and feels like she's living through World War II again with the shortages and having to go without things because they're either unavailable or unaffordable.

SHAL has also seen a rise in angry behaviour towards its staff. Given this backdrop we asked this there are things we do at SHAL (or the way we do it) that might make things worse rather than better. Someone commented the answer phone can be very frustrating if you really need to speak to someone but you can't and you don't get a call back if you leave a message. We talked about how some changes to SHAL's services (e.g. no longer replacing fences and re-charging for missed appointments) may have frustrated people.

We talked about 2 of our 5 Commitments that focus on relationships and how we are with each other:

Build strong relationships	Be transparent and accountable
<p>We will treat each other with respect and be open and honest with each other. Our relationships will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polite, friendly and mutually respectful • Understanding of differences • Honest, positive and helpful • Between people and not "positions" 	<p>We will be open and transparent and work together to develop our understanding. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be fair in our approach and help people understand our decisions • Share how we're performing, including when things go wrong • Ask each other how we can develop and improve • Learn from our mistakes and resolve differences by listening to each other

We had a chat about the importance of relationships and how best to maintain them even if we disagree. We don't always get things right. Sometimes we do everything we can to the best of our ability but it still might fall short of someone's expectations meaning they're unhappy with us and what we've done. That can be the case the other way around too. Some people commented SHAL does a great job and should continue "doing what you're doing" while others disagreed. Someone commented that fact that we're having this conversation was a good thing.

We have to find a way of making, maintaining and (where needed) mending our relationships that we can be happy with each other if we're not happy with a decision we've made or service we've provided. What are your thoughts?

