

Taking the strain for foresters

Julia Hayne, director of services at Perennial explains how the charity can help and guide workers through times of uncertainty, change and financial hardship.

When life takes an unexpected turn due to illness, injury or loss of income, the effects can be devastating and long-term.

Perennial is the forestry industry's trade charity. Originally set up 180 years ago to help retired gardeners, we now support people working in all branches of horticulture, forestry and arboriculture.

Our experienced team of friendly, professional advisers understands the challenges and financial pressures that forestry workers and contractors can face. We offer a lifeline, delivering tailored financial, practical and personal support and advice directly to people in trouble. People we help have often experienced a life-changing event, for example, serious injury, long-term illness, family bereavement, redundancy or family breakdown. They need help coming to terms with and navigating their new situation. In the wake of ongoing welfare support changes, and the continued roll-out of Universal Credit, the issues people face are becoming more complex. Many people simply cannot afford to

live on their regular wage but don't want to plunge themselves into debt to supplement their income. Our team has the knowledge and experience to help people through a whole range of issues and will support them for as long as help is needed.

If you are facing difficulties or are struggling financially, physically or personally, asking for help can be very difficult. People often tell us that making the first phone call to Perennial was the hardest thing to do but no one ever regrets it and in the vast majority of cases we are able to make a positive difference to someone's life.

Our online budgeting tool is a great place to start if you are concerned about money, or just want to get more organised this spring. It is free, completely confidential, and will give you the confidence to adapt your monthly budget throughout the year. However, we understand that, in most cases, financial pressures are very personal and often lead to other issues. Our team is ready to listen and we recommend you call or email us as soon as you feel you need some advice so we can talk things through and help you decide on next steps, before a situation may spiral out of control.

Some people want reassurance about a benefit application they are making, need advice about eligibility criteria for a grant they are applying for or want to know if Perennial can help pay for a training course they need to stay compliant. In these cases, telephone sup-

port may be sufficient, but in all cases Perennial's team will assess whether a home visit would be worthwhile.

In many cases, the issue that has prompted someone to contact Perennial (eg an unpaid energy bill they are worried about or a broken pair of glasses they need to drive to work but can't afford to replace) is just the tip of the iceberg and their overall situation requires more in-depth support. In these cases, Perennial will arrange to make a home visit, usually within 10 working days of their initial contact.

We help people both in work and retired from forestry, as well as their dependent family members, for as long as they need, even if that means a lifetime. Last year Perennial helped people access £2.9M in direct financial help.

We are here for anyone facing uncertain times - please don't be afraid to get in touch if you have any queries or concerns, you don't need to be in crisis to access our help, we're here for you whenever you need a listening ear. We also need your help in spreading the word to everyone working in forestry so if someone you know is struggling, please encourage them to contact us. If you tell just one other person, it won't take long to significantly increase the number of people in forestry who know they can turn to Perennial when life becomes hard.

GET IN TOUCH

If you or someone you know needs Perennial's help, please get in touch. All advice is free and confidential.
Helpline 0800 093 8543
Debt advice 0800 093 8546
General 0800 093 8510
services@perennial.org.uk
www.perennial.org.uk/help

CASE STUDY **Marek and Ann-Marie**

Marek was a tree surgeon and conservation manager working for a local golf course. He suffered a life-changing head injury while helping a friend at the weekend that required brain surgery with a long-term recovery period. Due to his injuries he is unable to return to work and still suffers regular seizures. We were able to help him, and his partner Ann Marie, overcome the many challenges that a life-changing injury presents. We helped them with financial arrangements, including navigating the benefits system, as well as being there to provide the support the family needs for the long haul. Marek's partner, Ann Marie, said: "They were like cuddly arms, giving a big hug and taking away all the pressure of everything else I had to deal with to survive. If it wasn't for Perennial, I just don't know how I could have dealt with it all."

▶ Watch Marek and Ann Marie talk about Perennial at perennial.org.uk/marek





Breaking the silence

“It’s ok to say I’m not okay”

Gillian Clark highlights the importance of breaking the mental health stigma in rural, male-dominated sectors.

The forestry sector is well known for demonstrating great resilience during adversity (and often awful weather). The relentless work ethic of forestry workers can at times come at a price and that price can be deterioration of mental health. The stigma surrounding mental health is still widely at large in rural areas. For many it remains still unspoken about, being ignored, often due to embarrassment. There are very few out there who cannot honestly say that they have been touched by mental health issues, either within their family or through their friends.

A New Zealand farmer, Doug Avery, recently completed a tour of Scotland, where he challenged Scottish farmers to open up and talk about their mental health concerns. There has been wide-spread reaction to his talks and this has delivered a clear message – that many in rural Scotland are ready and willing to start addressing their own mental health issues.

Through raising this issue, FISA hopes to keep the conversation going about mental ill health, through sharing experiences within the community on how they have coped with their own battles with mental health. As Mr Avery said: ‘it’s okay to say I’m not okay’. We hope this will help those who are facing similar challenges to realise they are not alone.

Mental health awareness and support for rural areas

We know that approximately one in four people in the UK will experience mental ill health each year. The National Rural Mental Health Forum aims to raise awareness of mental health in rural areas, bringing together more than 60 membership organisations, such as RSABI, SAMH and Samaritans, offering a range of expertise and guidance on different matters. The Forum has grown over the last 18-months under the guidance of Jim Hume, reflecting a commitment and willingness from our rural communities to tackle the stigma around mental health and wellbeing. The forum is run by the mental health charity ‘Support in Mind Scotland’, who counsel around 1300 people per week across Scotland living with mental ill health. Around 80% of those it assists are in rural Scotland. One project which is now progressing to the next stage is The Highland and Islands Connections project, for which Support in Mind are looking to appoint three additional support workers.

Mental ill health can be prevented and can be treated, especially with early intervention. The Forum and its members are keen to take action by raising awareness in rural communities and normalising talking about mental ill health.

Those who think they need help with their mental health need to do so as soon as possible. Neglecting wellbeing can lead to a deterioration in mental health and can also lead to more serious mental (and physical) health problems.

GETTING HELP

For further help and advice, get in touch with the following organisations:

SCOTLAND

The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RSABI) Helpline open seven days between 7am–11pm on 0300 111 4166 or rsabi@rsabi.org.uk

Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) Call the info service on 0141 530 1000 Mon–Fri between 9am–5pm or enquire@samh.org.uk

Breathing Space Lines are open are open Mon–Thu between 6pm–2am and from Fri 6pm–Mon 6am

Samaritans Helpline open 24/7, on 116 123 or 08457 90 90 90 or jo@samaritans.org

Support in Mind Scotland (NRMHF) Call on 0131 662 4359 Mon–Fri between 9am–5pm or info@supportinmindscotland.org.uk

If you need **urgent medical attention**, then please call NHS 24 111 or call emergency services on 999.

WALES

C.A.L.L Mental Health Helpline for Wales Freephone 0800 132737 or text ‘help’ to 81066

NORTHERN IRELAND

General Practitioner (GP) The first step can be to talk to your GP who can help you decide what level of support you need and will be able to refer you to other forms of help.

Helplines Network contact details for a range of Northern Ireland based helplines, offering free information and advice, are available at www.helplinesnetworkni.com

Lifeline is a crisis response helpline service operating 24/7. If you are in distress or despair, you can call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000 and talk to an experienced counsellor in confidence. Deaf and hard of hearing Textphone users can call Lifeline on 18001 0808 808 8000. Calls to Lifeline are free to people living in Northern Ireland who are calling from UK landlines and mobiles. Visit the Lifeline website at www.lifelinehelpline.info

Talking Therapies Well-Mind Support Hub offers advice and support on a range of issues that can impact on mental health and wellbeing. Ask your GP for details or contact the Hub directly at wellmind.hub@southerntrust.hscni.net about a referral.



Gillian Clark is CEO of the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA)

www.ukfisa.com