



**Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service (SOHAS)**  
*Working to Prevent and Alleviate the Effects of Work on Health*

# Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service

# Annual Report

# 2020/2021

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## What we do

**We provide Sheffield's job retention services; if you believe that your work is affecting your health, we can provide you with advice to help you stay at work or return to work after a period of sickness absence.**

We are a preventative service. **65% of people we give advice to are at work, not off sick.** We target people who live and work in the most deprived areas of Sheffield who are vulnerable to the loss of their job. Over the last year, we have provided job retention services for people with mental and physical health issues as well as working carers and cancer patients.

**If you are worried about going back to work, we can help you. Either contact your GP and ask to be referred to a SOHAS Adviser, or contact us via phone on 0114 275 5760, via our website, or email us directly at [sohas@sohas.co.uk](mailto:sohas@sohas.co.uk)**

## Our work during the pandemic

**We have worked hard over the past year to adapt our advice services during the pandemic to ensure that we continued to give people excellent advice and to help them to stay in work.**

By developing new referral routes, we have increased the number of organisations who refer to us by 50%. One of these new referral systems is the Long Covid Support Unit at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Many of the people referred have complex health conditions which have resulted in them being off work for long periods. We have used our many years of experience to help them return to work.

## What are the outcomes of our work?

- **We lower workplace stress**
- **We reduce visits to the GP**
- **We improve people's working conditions**
- **We reduce presenteeism, leaveism and sickness absence at work**

### Case study

Sam was referred to us by his IAPT worker, as they hoped that we could offer some support with his work situation. Sam works in a senior technical position in a large open plan office environment, he had treatment for cancer five years ago and has suffered from anxiety, especially health anxiety since his diagnosis and after his treatment had finished.

During the start of the Covid pandemic, Sam was able to work from home, he felt safe working in this way and also felt that he was much more productive than when he was office based. When the government advice about returning to the workplace changed, Sam's employer was keen to encourage everyone back to the office.

Sam felt that some of his colleagues were not taking the Covid rules seriously outside and inside the workplace. He felt they were standing too close to him and each other and not following the one-way system, and this made him feel very anxious. He raised this with his line manager, who said he could remind everyone about the rules but could not make them follow them. Sam was also under pressure to continue to work from the office.

Sam and his employment adviser (EA) talked through what might help him in this situation and agreed that a flexible working request based on a hybrid working proposal (time in the office but also time at home) would be a compromise and would help Sam manage his anxiety, whilst also exposing himself to the situation to ensure he wasn't avoiding it completely.

The EA helped Sam to make his request and gather the evidence that this would be a positive move for both Sam and the business. Sam's employer agreed and put some reviews in place to check the agreement was working.

Sam has not felt a need to get in touch with his EA since then, as he is managing his anxiety in relation to work, but Sam has the EA's contact details and can ask for help going forward.

"There has **never** been a greater need for **SOHAS**. The Covid pandemic has altered working lives hugely, whether having to work face to face with Covid patients or working from home. Working environments can have their physical dangers as always, but now stress takes a significant toll. **SOHAS** has been supporting patients facing these pressures for over 30 years at Birley Health Centre. **It's an invaluable service.**"

*GP quote*

If we use the CIPD figures for the cost of recruiting new employees, we will have saved businesses approximately **£750,000** over the last year

**96%** of people who used our services, would recommend us to their work colleagues

"SOHAS has been **invaluable in providing a supportive service** to our clients who have sustained a brain injury. Our staff members have liaised with SOHAS employees via email, over the phone and in person, and have always found their advice and recommendations to be **timely and helpful**. Their expertise in the employment sector and knowledge around the intricacies of employment rights and law have been **beneficial to our clients**, especially those who require advocacy. Their input has enabled a number of brain injury survivors to **map out a realistic return to work and to retain their jobs**. We cannot recommend their service highly enough!"

*Clinician quote*

"If it wasn't for SOHAS and their **calm and confident advice**, I would not be back at work. They have supported me during a very difficult and complex grievance/workplace bullying issue while I was suffering from severe anxiety. I have only just returned to work but my employment adviser has supported me every step of the way; they remained flexible with their time, **always returned my calls or emails, and have always been consistent and supportive**. An amazing person. Very impressed."

*Patient quote*

**80%** of GPs said that their patients' sickness absence reduced after being given advice by SOHAS

Jane sent this message after we carried out an occupational health assessment for an employee:

"Thank you carrying out an assessment and for sending through your report. It is clear to follow and helpful for us going forward. **We are now confident that we can support our employee on their return to work.**"

*Occupational health assessment quote*

**Employers: We carry out non-medical occupational health assessments that give you practical advice on how to return someone to work after sickness absence. Ring us for more information.**

## How we are run

SOHAS is a charity, No. 1085464. The Board of Trustees are responsible for managing the business of the organisation, safeguarding the charity's assets and managing its funds.

The Board is made up of people who bring a range of experience and skills to help the organisation achieve its objectives. The Trustees, who are volunteers, are elected at the Annual General Meeting.

We would like to thank our staff, Trustees, GPs, stakeholders and funders who helped us to give work and health advice.

## Contact details

SOHAS, 4th Floor Exchange Brewery, 2 Bridge Street, Sheffield, S3 8NS



0114 275 5760



sohas@sohas.co.uk

If you want to get online advice, go to our website [www.sohas.co.uk](http://www.sohas.co.uk) and use the ask the expert form to tell us what sort of help you need.

We are currently working only on-line and by telephone. We are happy to arrange an online face to face meeting.



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@SOHASHealth

## Funders

SOHAS received funding from the following organisations:

Sheffield  
City Council



Sheffield IAPT  
working together to improve your wellbeing