



Mental Health Awareness Training

As the superyacht industry shifts its focus towards prioritising crew mental health and wellbeing, the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) has developed its Maritime Mental Health Awareness training to address an important knowledge gap.

The topic of mental health and wellbeing has been growing in visibility for some time now, particularly in the Western world. However, the international DNA of the maritime industry – with its varied influences of different cultures, attitudes, and beliefs from across the globe – has left it somewhat behind this curve. The rapid growth of the superyacht industry has unfortunately meant that formalising this area of crew management has sometimes been overlooked. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the influence of the wider maritime sector and popular culture, has prompted a visible change and ISWAN's training aims to meet this demand for greater mental health awareness.

ISWAN works to improve the lives of seafarers and their families worldwide through services, resources, strategies, and advocacy; such as its long-established helpline SeafarerHelp. The charity's 2018 research into the welfare of superyacht crew, in partnership with MHG Insurance, highlighted a need for accessible emotional support for crew. In response to these findings, in November 2020 ISWAN launched [Yacht Crew Help](#), its free, confidential, 24-hour, multilingual helpline service specifically for yacht crew, which has been widely welcomed by industry stakeholders and crew alike.

Mental health-related issues are the number one problem reported to Yacht Crew Help by crew (followed by employment issues, and abuse/bullying/harassment), and ISWAN has been working closely with the helpline's partners and supporters not only to raise awareness of the service, but also to establish longer-term strategies to tackle the lack of knowledge and understanding around mental health. Education is central to this and ISWAN's Maritime Mental Health Awareness training has been specifically designed to address the key problems and challenges faced by those working at sea.

The training was designed in collaboration with Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Dr Pennie Blackburn, who has a wealth of qualified experience and whose father was a seafarer. Dr Blackburn has worked closely with ISWAN for many years and authored ISWAN's [Good Mental Health Guides](#) and [Mentally Healthy Ships: Policy and Practice to Promote Mental Health on Board](#). The training combines Dr Blackburn's evidence-informed best practice, and ISWAN's expertise and experience in seafarer welfare, to deliver a robust introduction to mental health awareness for maritime audiences.

ISWAN offers superyacht-specific trainings for those working in this industry, which are suitable for all yacht crew – particularly those in leadership positions who have responsibilities towards others, such as senior officers, DPAs and crew managers. Two core modules offer a thorough introduction to what mental health is, how to talk about it, how to recognise signs and warning symptoms, and when to ask for help. The training also covers key topics such as diverse crews, language and terminology, and practising self-care.

One of the most important aims of ISWAN's Maritime Mental Health Awareness training is to address the common stigmas and fears surrounding mental health problems, which are usually heightened by a lack of understanding and awareness. Guided by the ethical expertise of Dr Blackburn, crewmates are encouraged to share their experiences and insight, and thus become more confident and comfortable with openly talking about mental health in the workplace.

The trainings are interactive and inclusive of different cultures and nationalities, and if required ISWAN has a network of Associate Trainers who can deliver the content in Tagalog or Mandarin. Sessions are held online via Zoom, which means that participants can join from different time zones and locations – including on board. ISWAN hopes that these trainings – alongside the Yacht Crew Help helpline service and the ongoing development of Yacht Crew Help as a long-term project – will help to address the key issues being faced by yacht crew now. The charity wants to continue working closely with industry stakeholders to develop policies, resources and services which protect the welfare of yacht crew and establish the industry as a safe, inclusive, and diverse environment for all.

For more information visit the ISWAN [website](#) or contact iswan@iswan.org.uk



Georgia is Project Manager at the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN). She is responsible for the strategic delivery of ISWAN's diverse range of projects related to seafarer mental and physical health and welfare; including their Yacht Crew Help platform, which provides 24/7 helpline support to superyacht crew in need. She works closely with the ISWAN international teams and a wide range of industry stakeholders, to ensure each project is informed by the latest research and findings.