



International **Men's** Day

Q&A Spotlight on SCRA's male employees - **Staying Well**

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What's it like working for SCRA?

I took up the post of Principal Reporter/CEO at SCRA in April 2010 and I'm really fortunate in that my job brings me into contact with dozens of different people every week. Whilst every day has multiple pressures and deadlines – just like everyone else in SCRA – being able to meet lots of different people, think about the world from their perspective, be challenged by their ideas and different ways of thinking (sometimes very challenged!!) and have insights into the things they know, that I don't is a great counterbalance to the humdrum of day to day work like emails and reports and all that aspect of work.

And, of course, genuinely believing that SCRA and its staff do hugely incredible work for children and young people in Scotland. I think it's really difficult to get up and started in the morning if you don't believe in what you are doing is making a difference. It's the power of working for an organisation like ours – no matter what your role – you are contributing to something meaningful and relevant I think and helping to protect others in society from harm, abuse and exploitation. Sometimes it's easy to lose sight of that – our work has real world meaning for people.

What do you do to stay well?

I suppose in recent years I have been cycling a lot – to work and for pleasure. It's a great way to start (and end) your day – you can really make your mind drift into other things.

There are mornings I look out and it's dark and pouring and windy and I think I should jump in the car – but I try not to. At the end of the day – if I'm leaving Ochil or Bell Street or wherever and it's still dark and pouring I wish I had driven – but getting home at the end of the day is a real achievement. I suppose living in the city it's getting easier to junk driving for cycling or cycle/commuting – but just don't let your mind drift too far or you can get a fright from some of the crazy drivers we have in Glasgow! The downside of the pandemic has been not cycling every day to work or to Queen Street to get the train.

Psychologically and emotionally, it's really easy to get things out of perspective when you are working at home, pretty much on your own. I've certainly found that. The early days of the pandemic when we were reacting to everything that was going on around about us was probably the most disorientated I've ever felt. I had a regular weekly rhythm – meeting up with some pals on a Thursday night – doing stuff with my daughter during the week – and then nothing! – Just endless days in the house – at the laptop – meetings after meeting – not really knowing whether the decisions you were making were the right ones – but just trying to do the best you could in the circumstances. I like sitting in the sun (who doesn't) and last year was particularly hard – it felt like we had missed all of that glorious summer.

I suppose what I learned during that period was how reliant I am on the people round about me – my team and others who have expertise and knowledge that I don't have and had to rely on and trust our group discussions, look at things from every perspective and coming to collective decisions. I got a real sense of solidarity from that – everyone was motivated by the same thing which was ultimately trying to do the best for the organisation, the service we provide and the staff who deliver it every day. I think having a sense of knowing your own limits, trusting others and having some humility – particularly when you are the head of an organisation, I think that's been the most important thing for me – being able to have people around who I can rely on and whose judgement I can trust.

What advice would you give?

I was on the train the other week (for only like the third time in a year) going to Stirling – and it was just great to get back into some kind of routine. I don't mind working at home – but I can't do it all the time – getting into an SCRA office is really good for me. I learn a lot from being around people, tuning in to what's being discussed across the room, what are the things that are working for people – and what's not.

On a personal level I've been trying to lose some weight – been using a great tracker app which has helped me change my diet a lot.

Some scary stuff too – like how many calories in beer! The truth is I've been overweight since I was a child and I knew the pandemic was a really risky time for me and maybe even a point of no return (if there is such a place!). I've done ok so far – got a good bit to go – but I'm feeling better about myself than I have for a long time. The way the app works is a kind of balanced scorecard – so if have a bad day (like say on a Thursday night) I can try and use the rest of the week to offset it and it counts your exercise too – so I've been going out big cycles on a Saturday – round the canals in Glasgow, or out into the countryside.

I think some men struggle more than ever to do simple things that they really enjoy – with friends, with family, with colleagues – whatever. We have been programmed just to keep going, to appear strong and always in control, not to rely on others, always to know the answers – it's all front sometimes and leads to pressures becoming unbearable at times. We find it difficult to talk about how we really feel because of it – I'm as guilty as anyone else. I was brought up in a really supportive, loving family – but nonetheless an environment where raw emotion was common – to do with serious mental ill health and substance use in the family. It could and often does, lead to us wanting to bottle things up, not talk about feelings because they are so associated with pain and distress. In a strange way it made me want to know more about feelings and emotions and how people work and behave.

I was lucky that I was interested in finding out more – as I say – for a lot of folk it just drives feelings and emotions underground and it can all become really difficult and corrosive. I ended up working when I was bit older with people who were affected by substance use and mental health – because I think of my experiences when I was younger. I encountered some of the most inspiring, talented and creative people I have ever met in this work – sometimes hugely disadvantaged, traumatised and stigmatised people – but they really introduced me to the value of sharing, searching for the fragments of our lives in order to rebuild them and the concept of hope – always hope.

I suppose this last year and a half I've really enjoyed being outdoors more than I used to. I had a great, but very simple summer of camping in Scotland and England – I loved it – loved being back in the tent, just gazing at nature, having a fire at night – just really simple things that keep you going – keep you hopeful – and such a contrast to the day to day of work sometimes. Keeping in touch with people, with friends in particular has been really important to me. Close strong friendships are built, for me anyway, quite often on shared ideas and shared values, trust, openness and honesty – but having someone to laugh with, to share absurdities about life – particularly now – to have that pint with – to just talk about what's happening – and laugh – always laugh – as much and as often as you can – that's the most important thing of all for me about being with friends.