

RetailNI

Standing up for
Independent Retailers

The Wellbeing Plan

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Introduction

Retail NI in association with our colleagues in ACS is delighted to publish this, our Wellbeing Plan for retailers & their staff in Northern Ireland.



The plan sets out practical steps for independent retailers which will help both staff and their businesses as we begin to chart a way forward from Covid-19.

The plan is also a call to the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure a co-ordinated approach across all Government departments regarding the importance of wellbeing in the workplace. We have set out several policy priorities for inclusion in the next Government term.

Even before the Pandemic, Northern Ireland was in a mental health crisis. With successive lockdowns we now need to urgently take stock and do all we can to help those who are struggling.

A Wellbeing recovery from Covid-19 is just as important as an economic recovery. It is vital that the Northern Ireland Executive ensure complete implementation of the “Building Forward – Consolidated Covid 19 Recovery Plan.

In this, the first of two major reports, Retail NI sets out its Wellbeing Recovery Plan, with the second to be published in early 2022 on the physical and economic reconstruction of our High Streets.

Glyn Roberts
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Chief Executive



What does the NI Executive Need to do?

Some excellent work has been published by Carnegie UK, *Embedding a Wellbeing Framework in Northern Ireland*, which sets out nine recommendations for the NI Executive in this area. The report rightly defines societal wellbeing as comprising 'Social, Economic, Environmental and Democratic outcomes' and goes on to say "to us, societal wellbeing means everyone having what they need to live well now and in the future'.

Creating attractive and vibrant High Streets are as much a wellbeing outcome as an economic one. The dereliction and closed shops in our villages, towns and city centres has a clear negative impact on people's mindsets.

Retail NI is a leading member of the Northern Ireland High Street Taskforce and is contributing to a shared co-designed plan for post-pandemic high streets that are clean, green, fun and family friendly destinations.

Our Recommendations:

- The 2022 Programme for Government must have Wellbeing at the heart of its agenda. There must be a multi-year budget to align societal outcomes and agreed indicators across all Executive.
- Retail NI welcome the appointment of a permanent Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion and the recently published ten year Mental Health Strategy. Retail NI call for all political parties to support the full funding of the Mental Health Strategy in upcoming election manifestos. The private sector should also be represented as a stakeholder in the operationalisation of the Strategy
- Given that Wellbeing is a cross departmental responsibility we propose that a Minister for Wellbeing be created in the Executive Office to ensure a co-ordinated plan is delivered as part of the 2022 Programme for Government.

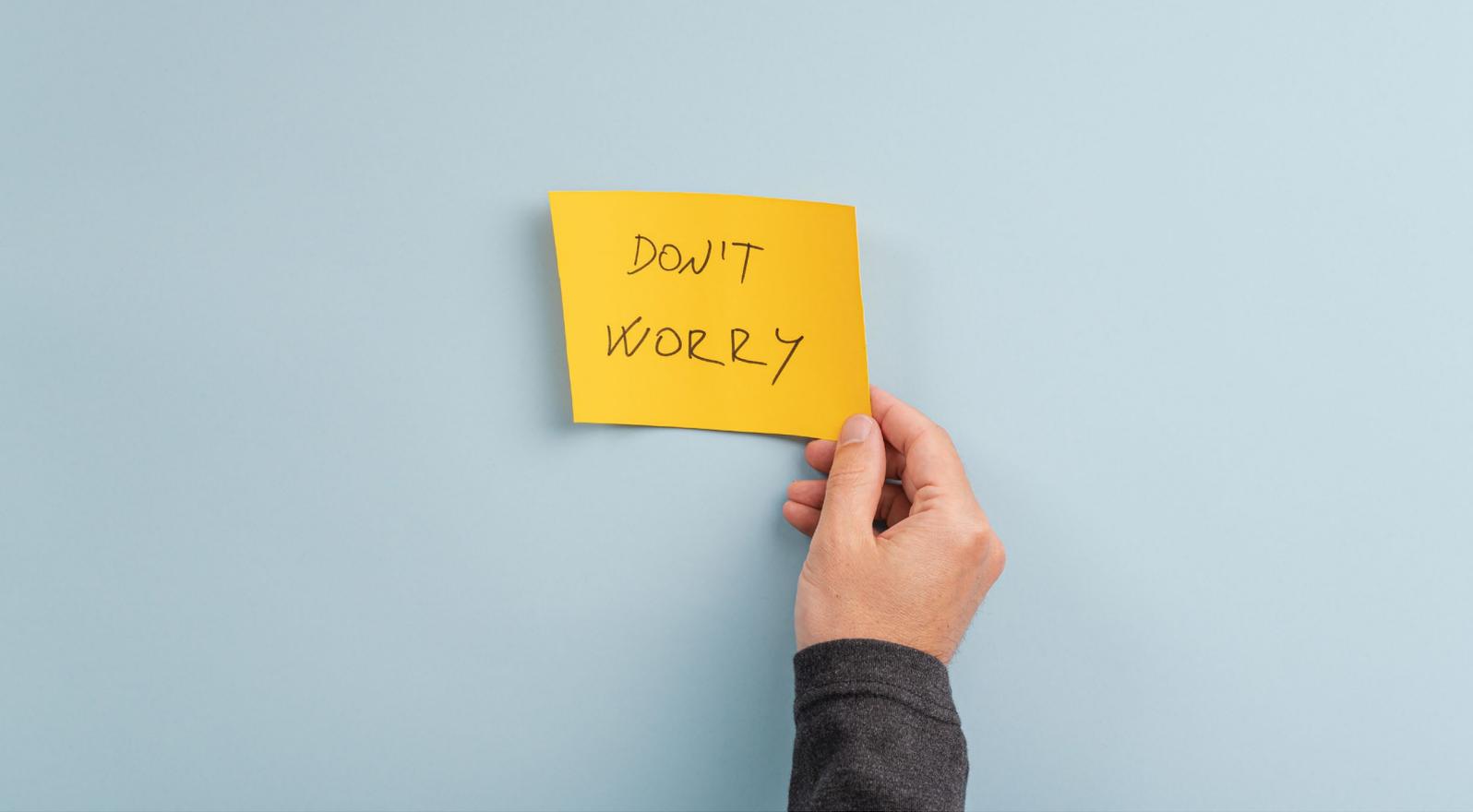
What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing doesn't offer one meaning. One way of understanding wellbeing is how well people can flourish, including within the workplace. Wellbeing is 'how we are doing' and "how we feel we are doing" as individuals and as groups, and how sustainable this is in the future. Factors that most affect wellbeing change over time as our lives and relationships change, so we have to think of wellbeing as responsive and dynamic.

The health of the population is one of the important Recovery Accelerators coming out of the "Building Forward: Consolidated Covid 19 Recovery Plan" published by the NI Executive. The wellbeing of a person is an important part of the population's health. Good mental wellbeing doesn't mean a person is always happy it means they are more able to cope with daily life. Effects on our mental health start during childhood, if we can get the childhood right it reduces the likelihood of someone becoming mentally ill.

Anyone can suffer from poor mental health. It affects more people than you'd think - at least one in five of the population. When we think of poor mental health we often think of certain conditions such as schizophrenia or depression. However, the most common mental health problems result from difficulties in coping with stress, and a build-up of overwhelming pressure which can result in anxiety and changes in feelings and behaviour that stop us from functioning in our roles and leading a life that is satisfying and meaningful.

Having a mental health problem is no different to having a physical health problem. It's a matter of recognising the symptoms, finding a way of treating them and taking steps to prevent the problem happening again by looking after your mental health. Mental health is one of the biggest strains on a person's wellbeing. Currently people don't openly talk about their mental health problems which makes them and others afraid of it. If you see the signs in others encourage them to talk about it. Ignoring mental health problems in yourself or in others won't make them go away.



The biggest trigger on mental health is stress. If we can reduce the level of stress felt by an individual, help them learn to process it and then work on what the workplace needs to do in conjunction with the individual to manage it then it can reduce absenteeism and the cost to employers.

Good mental & physical health goes beyond individual wellbeing. It has previously been proven that health & wellbeing have the strongest relationship with Job Satisfaction.

The NISRA Continuous Household Survey shows that there has been a general decline in wellbeing especially in Females, young people, those with caring responsibilities along with those who live in less affluent areas.

Poor mental health is nothing to be afraid of, or embarrassed about. If you feel you have a problem, open up and talk about it.

Mental health mustn't remain a taboo subject. Talk to a friend, talk to someone in your family or talk to your doctor.

Why is wellbeing important for retailers?

Independent retailers operate physically and emotionally at the heart of communities. We have seen countless times when they went the extra mile for their customers during the Pandemic.

Good wellbeing is good business. Supporting colleagues wellbeing beyond health and safety concerns not only addresses common staffing issues but creates opportunities and business growth.

A proactive approach to managing wellbeing is good for employees and good for your business. It reduces staff turnover and associated recruitment and training costs, as well as absence and sick pay: which costs the average store £4,280 per year. A healthy and engaged workforce will be more productive and deliver outstanding customer service to drive loyalty and increased spend.

The UK Government's recent 'Thriving at Work' report found that

- 300,000 people lose their jobs because of mental health problems each year, equivalent to the population of Belfast.
- You are 30% more likely to lose your job because of mental health problems.
- One in four people would not disclose a mental health problem to their work colleagues.

Not surprisingly, at work, people will often conceal their mental health problems from colleagues because of stigma and a fear that they will be treated unfavourably. The report found that there is a significant annual cost to employers of between £33 billion and £42 billion (with over half of the cost coming from presenteeism – where

individuals are less productive due to poor mental health in work) with additional costs from sickness absence and staff turnover. The total cost of poor mental health to the economy as a whole is between £74 billion and £99 billion per year.

The report concluded that “At a time when there is a national focus on productivity the inescapable conclusion is that it is massively in the interest of both employers and Government to prioritise and invest far more in improving mental health. The UK can ill-afford the productivity cost of this poor mental health.”

The return on investment of taking a proactive approach to wellbeing in the workplace are clear. A recent Workplace Outcome Suite report which involved 26,000 respondents found that proactive workplace counselling had a marked improvement on performance, reduced absence, sickness and presenteeism.

Organisations that invest in employee wellbeing have staff that are;

- absent less and if they are off work, return to work earlier.
- more productive improving business performance and innovation.
- have stronger resistance to stress/emotional health concerns, making them more likely to have less long-term sickness absences.



RESOURCES FOR YOU

[Covid Wellbeing Info](#)

[Inspiration Point Campaign | Inspire](#)

The Law

Of course you have legal obligations to your staff and your customers, but operating to good normal standards as a retail business will keep you comfortably on the right side of the law. Focus on the many positive benefits of promoting wellbeing rather than fearing prosecution, because doing the right thing will make you legally compliant anyway.

The Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 contains a general 'duty of care' to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all employees at work. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 add further duties on workplace risk assessments while Disability Discrimination Act 1995 creates a duty to make reasonable adjustments for colleagues with mental health issues, for example depression, anxiety, stress or panic attacks. NI Direct has produced [**guidelines**](#) on the Disability Discrimination Act.

Key to complying with these legislative requirements is whether an employer took reasonable steps to avoid harm caused by the workplace. Mishandling mental health issues in a way which leads to resignation could also lead to constructive dismissal claims. Colleagues are undoubtedly valued by retailers and the law supports action on wellbeing too.

Ways to Wellbeing at Work

The PHA NI have produced a 5 Step Guide to looking after your wellbeing. It includes tips to help people look after their mental health during the pandemic and post pandemic.



Most of us know when we are mentally and physically well, but sometimes we need a little extra support to keep well.

Take5

steps to wellbeing

There are five simple steps to help maintain and improve your wellbeing. Try to build these into your daily life – think of them as your 'five a day' for wellbeing.

- Connect**
Connect with the people around you: family, friends, colleagues and neighbours at home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these relationships as the cornerstones of your life and spend time developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.
- Be active**
Go for a walk or run, cycle, play a game, garden or dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity that you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.
- Take notice**
Stop, pause, or take a moment to look around you. What can you see, feel, smell or even taste? Look for beautiful, new, unusual or extraordinary things in your everyday life and think about how that makes you feel.
- Keep learning**
Don't be afraid to try something new, rediscover an old hobby or sign up for a course. Take on a different responsibility, fix a bike, learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy. Learning new things will make you more confident, as well as being fun to do.
- Give**
Do something nice for a friend or stranger, thank someone, smile, volunteer your time or consider joining a community group. Look out as well as in. Seeing yourself and your happiness linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

The five ways to wellbeing were developed by the New Economics Foundation. Artwork designed in association with Belfast Strategic Partnership.

Public Health Agency, 12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS. Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

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RESOURCES FOR YOU

PHA [Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing](#) Lifeline **0808 808 8000**

Working Environment

One of the critical factors that influence employee motivation, happiness, productivity and efficiency is the working environment. Independent retailers must be friendly and attractive places for customers and staff alike. A positive working environment also requires taking measures to protect the physical safety of colleagues and the adoption of safe working practices.

Taking Action

- Conduct regular health and safety risk assessments and bring these to life with staff briefings and training; this isn't just about ticking boxes, it's about making sure you have a safe place for people to work and shop.
- Consult colleagues on comfortable lighting, ventilation, temperature controls and noise levels. Colleagues should be aware they can suggest changes and it's good business to listen to their practical ideas.
- Follow our colleagues, ACS' Crime Prevention Guidance to keep colleagues as safe as you can. This includes sharing the guidance with your team and making it clear that everyone in the business has a role to play in keeping each other safe.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

ACS [Crime Report 2021](#)

Health and Safety Executive [Risk Assessment Templates](#)

Relationships & Connection

The quality of our relationships and feelings of loneliness significantly impacts wellbeing. The New Economics Foundation and Co-op find the annual cost of loneliness is £82 per employee. This includes loneliness-related sick leave, care, productivity loss and increased staff turnover. Workplaces which foster trust, and a sociable but inclusive culture are key to higher employee wellbeing.

By virtue of their senior positions, a line managers behaviour can have particularly strong effects on employee wellbeing. Managers should be aware of the importance of job quality on wellbeing, know what staff see as important for improving the variety and quality of their work, be committed to improving jobs, listen to feedback and act where required. Loneliness at work can be difficult to identify, so you need to be proactive in asking and allowing colleagues to come forward.

Taking Action

- Give this guide to your store managers, area managers and others in positions of trust and authority. Put wellbeing on the agenda for upcoming board, management and store team meetings, using this guide as a template for covering these issues.
- Instigate shared activities that are available to all colleagues. These social opportunities should be sustained, not one-off, and do not need to be complex or costly; they could link to local community activity like litter picking, tree planting or other improvements.

- Make sure every team is inclusive and welcoming. This includes thinking about hiring a diverse team to prevent largely homogenous workforces from allowing any colleagues to feel isolated.
- Reach out to colleagues who might be bereaved or grieving, by offering a supportive voice while not trying to 'fix' negative emotions and directing to Grocery Aid resources.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [Employers and Loneliness Guidance](#)
ACS [Loneliness Guidance](#)

Health

We all carry a collective responsibility on public health – this includes physical and mental health. Mental health, like physical health, can fluctuate on a spectrum from good to poor. Investing in mental health returns £5 for every £1 spent and 91% of managers noticed an increase in mental health concerns amongst colleagues during the Covid-19 pandemic.

50% of retail workers cannot recognise the signs of someone needing emotional support and 25% would not feel confident approaching an upset colleague. This is despite Deloitte also finding that 30% of the UK workforce has been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their life. It is therefore important that everyone working in retail take steps to promote positive mental health, recognise the warning signs and support affected colleagues. Mental ill health is considered a disability under the Equality Act.

If colleagues feel they can talk openly about mental health, problems are less likely to build up. This could lead to less time off and improved morale in the workplace. Where possible, retailers should be open to discussing the impact of changes to physical health on wellbeing and work too.

Taking Action

- Monitor the signs of poor health, using the guidance below to learn more about spotting the signs of mental ill health which are often more difficult to detect, and tailor your management styles to individuals.
- Create a supportive environment via regular one-to-ones with colleagues and explicitly treat mental and physical health equally.
- Encourage a culture of acceptance by becoming or developing a Mental Health Champion to lead on changing attitudes to mental health.
- Become Disability Smart and understand how to manage workplace adjustments with colleagues, for example amending working tasks or equipment.
- Maintain colleague contact during any absence caused by mental ill health to be supportive.
- Consider using occupational health services, especially when long-term sickness absence or returns occur.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

ACAS [Managing Staff Experiencing Mental Ill Health Using Occupational Health at Work](#)
[Menopause at Work](#)

Business Disability Forum [Learning & Development](#)

NI Direct [NI Direct Support for People with Disabilities](#)
[Mental Health NI](#)

Aware [Mental health First Aid](#)

Samaritans [Contact a Samaritan](#)
www.mindingyourhead.info

Learning

People's self-perception of their skills and education is key to shaping their 'social identity' and framing self-understanding and relationships with other people. Individuals with a positive social identity experience increased wellbeing and social trust.

Learning is good for wellbeing. People who keep learning report greater self-esteem and sense of purpose. Learning can also offer colleagues the space to think about and discuss what is important or problematic in their role. Taking a part-time course for work gives wellbeing benefits equivalent to £1,584 of income per year. Training also benefits retailers via more engaged, skilled and productive colleagues.

Taking Action

- Incentivise and reward quality work.
- Understand the working and career aspirations of individual colleagues.
- Understand and act on any barriers to colleague progression, such as skills, ill health or working hours.
- Promote awareness of informal and formal training opportunities.
- Test different approaches to delivering training, to understand what is most effective.
- Continue to monitor wellbeing after changes in the workplace, for example following a promotion which involves a colleague taking on additional responsibilities or workload.
- Encourage team bonding through skills sharing and using time-bound 'buddying' when onboarding new colleagues.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

Wellcome Trust [Buddying at Onboarding](#)

Future Learn [Free Short Online Courses](#)

Reed.co.uk [Free Online Courses](#)

Work & Life Balance

The relationship between life at work and outside work can have significant effects on colleague wellbeing, job-related attitudes and job performance. Setting appropriate expectations of working output and adopting flexible working practices can boost productivity, morale and staff retention.

The ACS' Colleague Survey found hours worked fit well around personal commitments for two-thirds (66%) of staff, while 79% have external commitments which restrict their working hours. 21% of retail colleagues are unpaid carers, providing unpaid support for another individual who has a disability, illness or needs support later in life.

Taking Action

- Understand what else is happening in colleague lives and how the workplace can support flexibility and inclusion.
- Provide reasonable notice of work rotas to colleagues and responses to holiday requests.
- Support unpaid carers to balance their caring responsibilities with work and feeling included.
- Adopt flexible working practices where suitable.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

ACS [**Unpaid Carers Guidance**](#)

ACAS [**Flexible Working Guidance**](#)

Health & Safety Executive [**Stress Management Standards**](#)

Personal & Purpose

Personal wellbeing relates to overall life satisfaction – including whether colleagues feel the things they do in their life are worthwhile and their balance of positive and negative emotions. How we feel about where we work fundamentally shapes this.

The ACS' Colleague Survey finds that two-thirds (65%) of colleagues are satisfied with their job and 82% agree their work in retail 'is important to my community'. Community Barometer shows that consumers rank local stores as the service with the most positive impact on its local community. Community activity has a positive impact on social cohesion, civic participation and individual wellbeing. One-in-five (19%) independent retailers volunteer locally and 80% engaged in community activity over the past year, for example supporting local events, environmental campaigns and food banks.

Taking Action

- Be a visible and passionate advocate for your business' positive community impact.
- Involve colleagues in decisions that impact them and encourage engagement with the challenges of running the business. This could range from how the rota is organised to informing store planograms to working together to devise community programmes.
- Highlight the positive impact of stores within local communities during staff inductions.
- Consider how to diversify your community activity to reach different people and demographics.

Colleague Voice

Involving colleagues in how the business is run positively impacts wellbeing by demonstrating respect and trust. This requires a two-way dialogue in which all colleagues can communicate about and influence the matters that affect them at work. This helps build open and trusting relationships and contribute towards business success, while also boosting job satisfaction.

The ACS' Colleague Survey found that two-thirds (68%) of colleagues felt they were supported well by their immediate manager. 54% rate their employer positively for seeking the views of employees, 48% for responding to employee suggestions and 54% for keeping staff informed of management decisions.

Taking Action

- Explicitly encourage an 'open door' culture and psychological safety. 'Whistle-blowers' should know they can speak up about issues without personal detriment.
- Involve colleagues in running the business. This could range from how the rota is organised to informing store planograms.
- Provide opportunities for colleagues to 'have a say' in a supportive setting about how their jobs could be improved.
- Ensure line managers are committed to improving job quality.
- Communicate when changes are made for the benefit of colleagues.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

CIPD [Employee Voice Factsheet](#)
WWcW [Job Quality and Wellbeing](#)

Personal Finance

Personal finance here is best understood as household income and wealth, its distribution and stability. Research suggests that job insecurity – seen as an overall concern about the continued existence of a job into the future – is one of the most distressing aspects of work and can have significant impacts on employee wellbeing.

We are more stressed by money than any other area of life. But it is not the amount people are paid, but what they do with it, that determines financial wellbeing. A continual sense of almost running out of money creates a reduced sense of control and has a negative impact on financial wellbeing. Colleagues with unmanageable debt may be reluctant to share these struggles and not know what support is available.

92% of retail colleagues are on permanent contracts, compared to 78% of the total in-work population. Two-thirds (68%) are happy with the number of hours they work. 67% of entry level colleagues do not agree that their financial position has improved because of increases to the National Living Wage.

Taking Action

- Provide permanent contracts when possible, to colleagues who want them.
- Minimise over and under employment by understanding how many hours colleagues want to work.
- Tailor benefits packages to the financial needs of your workforce and understand how they are used.
- Lead the way by indicating understanding of the importance of financial wellbeing to tackle stigma around the topic.
- Signpost colleagues towards debt advice services. This could be a rolling promotion or around times of common financial pressure such as the start of the school year and Christmas.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

Salary Finance [The Employer's Guide to Financial Wellbeing](#)

Money Advice Service [Popular Tools & Calculators - Where to Get Free Debt Advice - Financial Wellbeing in the Workplace](#)

National Forum for Health & Wellbeing at Work [Financial Wellbeing Guide](#)

Wellbeing also matters for business owners:

Running a business carries risks and additional responsibilities. One-in-four (22%) of shop owners also work more than 60 hours per week and 24% take no holiday per year.

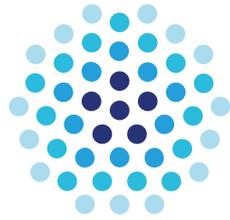
Taking Action

- Think about how to disconnect - establish your own boundaries and view relaxation as self-investment or recovery time.
- Assess your own wellbeing and take proactive steps to manage stress - have a look at self-assessment tools such as the [NI Direct Taking Care of your Mental Health](#).
- Take time to reflect on your own emotions and thoughts; acknowledge and act when you are becoming overwhelmed.
- Practice gratitude - there are many wonderful parts of being a retailer, recognise these and all the positive things in your life and be proud of what you have achieved.
- Remember that feelings of stress, anxiety and worry are normal reactions to difficult times in our lives.

RESOURCES FOR YOU

NI Direct [Taking Care of your Mental health](#)

Retail Trust [Wellbeing Workshops](#)



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Acknowledgements

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