



Caring for seafarers
around the world

the SEA

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Addressing the shore leave lottery

By Felicity Landon

Seafarers have to overcome a myriad of hurdles to take advantage of shore leave

EARLY in February came the news that the Singapore authorities would no longer allow seafarers arriving from China to come ashore. Others quickly followed suit. While that measure had logic in the light of the Covid-19/ coronavirus crisis, not being able to disembark and join the ‘real world’ for a few hours is increasingly the norm for seafarers arriving in port.

Different countries have different rules – visa requirements, restrictions on nationalities, geographical limits, night-time curfews, and/or banning minibuses from driving on the terminal. But according to senior chaplain Stephen Miller, the Mission to Seafarers’ regional director East Asia, the biggest issue

preventing seafarers enjoying shore leave is the relentless drive for efficiency in the shipping and ports industry.

“The biggest issue about shore leave is actually: have the seafarers got time? As with any transport business, ships only make money when they are moving,” he says. “A ship in port isn’t making any money. So there has been a huge move to speed up turnaround times and make everything more efficient.”

He notes that when he joined the Mission to Seafarers 20 years ago, the normal turnaround time in Rotterdam, where he was working, was 18 to 36 hours and the largest container ships were around 6,000 teu. “Now we have ships carrying 21,000 teu and the

turnaround could be eight hours. When you consider that the seafarers are likely working three shifts, if they are in the terminal for eight hours the chances are that two-thirds of that time they are either working or sleeping.

“By reducing the crew on board, you heighten the issue. There used to be more seafarers on board and more opportunities for shore leave. Now, where we used to expect seafarers to go to the seafarers’ centre or go shopping, the reality is that if they need something they have to get it on the ship. And then there are the ports in the middle of nowhere. If you are on a tanker tied up 15 miles away on a buoy at the end of a long pier, it’s almost impossible to get off.”

Green complications

Even environmental considerations have an impact, says Helen Sampson, director of Cardiff University's Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC).

With ships now able to be notified of berth availability in real time, they can deliberately slow steam between ports to avoid arriving too early. No luxury of extra time alongside for the seafarers. "It is about making the port call as efficient as possible, saving fuel and avoiding hanging around in port," she says. "That makes sense from the environmental point of view but it doesn't help the seafarer. Efficiency is always regarded as an important thing, but everyone forgets about the seafarers."

SIRC published a report on mental health and wellbeing last year and Prof Sampson says that apart from the day they go home, seafarers reported the thing that made them happiest was going ashore with friends and colleagues.

"And yet, there are people who can never go ashore. If you are a chief officer in port, you are really pushed with work and it is rare that you have a chance to go ashore. If you are the captain, you are reluctant to go away from the ship. And in any case, if you arrive in a remote port at 2200 hrs, you are not going to get shore leave."

The second big issue she lists is nationality. "I was on a ship when a seafarer was from Myanmar; because of the political issues, he couldn't get off in any of the ports. My view was



Stephen Miller, The Mission to Seafarers' regional director East Asia

"The biggest issue about shore leave is actually: have the seafarers got time?"

– **Stephen Miller, The Mission to Seafarers' regional director East Asia**

that the company should not have put him on that ship – it was on a fixed route with fixed calls, so it wasn't a question of chance."

Cost and accessibility are key too. Prof Sampson relates how she was very struck by a visit to Rotterdam several years ago. The new terminals were so far from the city centre that it cost €60 to get a taxi to The Mission to Seafarers' facility in the city centre. There was no public transport. "If you are a seafarer, you are just not going to do that," she says.

And in any case, the unpredictability of the ship's timetable adds another pressure as seafarers cannot stray too far because they must not delay the ship if loading finishes up a bit earlier than expected. "Lots of seafarers feel under pressure in this way – they need quite a big window of time."

Heavy workloads

Philip Eastell and his colleagues have visited container ships where the master has simply stated: no shore leave at all, too much work to be done. He talks of ro-ro ferries where the seafarers are on board for six months at a stretch and not allowed to step ashore unless for a medical emergency or death in the family. Seafarers onboard tankers and bulk carriers might have a better chance at shore leave as their vessels are likely to be in port for longer – but then again, that depends on whether they can actually find a way to get from the vessel to the 'outside world'.

As the co-founder of the industry group Container Shipping Supporting Seafarers (CSSS), he says the issue of shore leave is a complex one.

"Shore leave is very much defined by which category of shipping you are in. On container ships, the nature of the business means being in port an average eight to 12 hours, which allows hardly any time, when taking into account that crew will be attending to the agencies and there are provisions to be loaded, rubbish to be taken off, spare parts to be taken on board.

"Most of the time, container ship crews find it very difficult to find time to go ashore. A lot of container ports have very strict controls on immigration, so it is difficult to get the documents signed, and there are also ISPS restrictions."

Seafarers often rely on charities with a minibus to ferry them back and forth to seafarer centres or into town. However, some ports are not allowing minibuses alongside – citing health and safety rules – so the only time seafarers can go ashore is when stevedores are being taken to/from the ship. Many ports are very unwilling to let crew go beyond the gates.

The reality is even harsher for seafarers with specific passports – particularly in US ports, "where a whole raft of nationalities are not allowed ashore", says Mr Eastell.

"Come ashore, we will welcome you? The reality of physically setting foot on land is far harder," he says. "Where we see most effect on mental health is in the working timeframe of the container ship. The fast turnaround in port means that the seafarer is working in an environment where they are basically captured. They can't have the shore leave they would have hoped to achieve even a few years ago. The pressure is always for the quickest turnaround; it is in the line's best interest to reduce the time spent in port and get the cargo from A to B more quickly. They are not going to say 'let's do a day in each port for the seafarers'. When the seafarers do have spare time, they are much more likely to be found in their cabins."

Room for improvement

How could things improve? Prof Sampson says ports could improve transport services for seafarers. "They have relied for so many years on the Mission to provide the only bit of transport. You would think ports could provide some sort of scheduled transport to the nearest shopping mall." Seafarers don't want much, she adds. Ports, therefore, could do better at providing some sort of service within the port or just



Under pressure to facilitate fast port calls, seafarers on container ships find it difficult to take shore leave

Wake up call for onshore workers

Non-seafarers don't understand the importance of shore leave, says SIRC's Helen Sampson. It's not just about getting off the ship and getting away from the noise and the smells and the confined nature of the ship – it is so wonderful when you can suddenly walk instead of being contained, and to see trees and wildlife again. "It is also that seafarers can't let their hair down at all on board," she adds. "When you think about how we are at work [ashore], we don't have the threat of being sacked at any moment that seafarers do, and we are able to play a different role when we are at home. Seafarers are never free of that work pressure. For up to nine

months, that is incredibly stressful."

Most ports will allow seafarers coming ashore to go into the port's local city or town area but travel beyond that usually isn't allowed, says the MtS' Stephen Miller. Some ports have a curfew – for example, where seafarers can't be off the ship after midnight. "America is the strictest in terms of rules – the seafarer has to have a US visa in his passport before he joins the ship and without it, he can't step on land, not even to reach a phone box just ten metres away."

Lack of shore leave time can lead to physical and mental health problems, loneliness and feelings of isolation, he

warns. While communication with home has improved vastly, he says that isn't entirely positive. "Seafarers used to phone home once a week; now they want data straight away and to be on the phone all the time while the ship is in port. More and more ships have broadband onboard, which means maybe the seafarer doesn't even attempt to get off the ship. He will just go into his cabin when free and be talking to his family." Mentally that isn't so great as it means the seafarer is only interacting with their workplace and home, and has no other social interaction. So if things are difficult at home, there is no release. 📶

outside. "Why not allow for a cafeteria/shop/bar combined to be built just outside the port?"

She also highlights the need for information. "It is no good providing a shuttle service or a cafe if no one knows about it."

Revd Miller echoes that. Technology should help in terms of accessing information and making the most of limited time available, he points out. Language can be a big barrier. When your ship ties up in another country, do you know if you can get a taxi or even whether you should? The Mission to Seafarers endeavours to provide information in the ports where it has a presence "but there are many ports where we are not present."

In terms of improvements, he would like to see the Mission be more respon-

sive to seafarers through the night. "Often our places are shut overnight but a ship might come in at 2200 hrs and be gone at 0600 hrs and perhaps someone may have needed someone to talk to or to be with."

There is, he acknowledges, a fine line between the 'commercial side' and the 'human side' of shipping. The ideal might be increasing automation on board, leading to fewer seafarers, who could (in theory) benefit from having more money spent on them. "But of course, people put up with the situation they are in because they get paid and they can't get jobs at home. The unions have to be aware that people are trying to provide for their families and they want to do the work."

The challenges, he acknowledges, are to do with the nature of shipping: "In a

perfect world, seafarers should be able to get off the ship. In reality, it is getting harder." 📶



Some restrictions on shore leave are valid – such as mitigating the spread of a virus – but others can be unreasonable

A voyage to hell and back

Seafarer Vikas Mishra, abandoned on the cargo ship Tamim Aldar for almost three years, speaks to The Sea about his ordeal

By Kate Jones

IN October 2016, Vikas Mishra boarded the *Tamim Aldar* cargo ship, moored in Bahrain and destined for Iraq, for a job as a second engineer. In March 2017, he asked the company employing him to relieve him. He was told to make one final voyage – one which, unbeknownst to him, would turn into a fight for justice and survival beset by desertion, squalor and starvation.

That autumn, one of the *Tamim Aldar*'s engines failed off the coast of the UAE. The crew were unable to manoeuvre the vessel, and they were instructed to drop anchor and wait for further orders. However, the firm that owned the ship, Elite Way Marine Services, didn't send anybody to repair the vessel. After months passed without anyone receiving pay, the crew realised they had been abandoned – along with seafarers on seven other vessels owned by the company, which had allegedly gone bankrupt. According to an International Maritime Organization and International Labour Organization database recording abandonment cases, 276 seafarers were abandoned on 23 ships in 2019.

Vikas is the sole earner for his family back home in India. He needed his full salary, and he initially didn't want to leave the *Tamim Aldar*. Vikas, now 35 and discussing his experience with *The Sea*, describes his and his colleagues' abandonment as one of a fight for life. In one Tweet sent while aboard the vessel, he said that life on board was "hell".

"We were just trying to survive somehow," he says of the abandonment, later adding: "We were waiting and we were praying that some miracle would come and somehow we would leave the cell [the ship]."

Halt to supply

In June 2018, things got even worse for the *Tamim Aldar* when Elite Way Marine Services stopped supplying the ship after the company was banned by the UAE's Federal Transport Authority – Land & Maritime

(FTA) from sailing any vessel, following complaints from various ships. The Mission and an Indian embassy stepped in to make up the shortfall of provisions and water, but couldn't supply fuel due to the high cost. With only three hours of electricity available on the ship per day, the boat was plunged into darkness at night.

During Vikas' ordeal, the vessel teemed with cockroaches, bedbugs and mosquitoes, and crewmate Arso suffered from rashes and skin allergies. Food and water were scarce, with Vikas losing over three stone during his abandonment. In the summer, the group faced temperatures of around 45 or 50 degrees during the day, with no air conditioning, and on the vessel, high temperatures during both the day and night left the crew unable to sleep regardless of whether the sun had risen or set. There were times when wood had to be broken up to use as fuel for cooking on the rusting ship deck. Mobile phone network availability was also low.

The seafarers spent their days trying

to attract attention from passing vessels, talking to one another to pass the time and fishing for food due to the lack of provisions. Someone would get a mobile phone charged so that people could communicate with their family and on social media, and during his time online, Vikas used Twitter to speak out about his plight, with his emotive posts generating attention.

"In our case, we got so much support from the Mission and Indian embassy, and the FTA also supported us," he notes.

Returning to land

By the time the seafarers on the *Tamim Aldar* left the ship for good in August 2019, they numbered just four. Nine people had originally been abandoned on the vessel, but with depression having set in, others had chosen to settle for less than their full salary and departed.

Vikas and the three remaining seafarers had already made a bid to come ashore in June after the ship began listing dangerously and the crew had no potable water, bunkers, lube oil or supplies. In a letter dated June 26, the seafarers said they had abandoned the vessel because of a "pathetic situation", claiming that the ship was a threat to their lives and that Elite Way Marine Services had given them no option



The Mission's The Revd Canon Andy Bowerman fought hard for the seafarers' repatriation

other than to abandon it. No electricity was available on board the vessel and “improper food” meant the crew were physically and mentally unwell. The seafarers, in their own words, were depressed and helpless.

The group set to shore in a lifeboat, but soon found themselves returning to the deteriorating *Tamim Aldar*. The seafarers told the charity Human Rights at Sea that once they were ashore and had had their case lodged as a criminal complaint with the United Arab Emirates Coast Guard, the possibility of them being imprisoned was suggested, greatly concerning and upsetting them. The crew therefore had to accept returning to sea with owner assurances that they would be resupplied shortly. The FTA subsequently reportedly said that no laws were in place to imprison abandoned seafarers and confirmed that they would not face arrest in such circumstances.

Some days after this ordeal, the *Tamim Aldar* was towed nearer to a safe anchorage close to Dubai in the UAE until the problem of unpaid salaries could be resolved and the crew permitted to go home. Then, at 2100 hrs on August 8, Vikas received a message informing him that he and his crew could finally come ashore. It was, he told *The National* (a newspaper published in the Emirati capital Abu Dhabi), “an amazing moment”. By 10pm that day, a boat had arrived to take the men to land, and the seafarers were subsequently housed in temporary accommodation on a barge in Dubai, under the care of marine and offshore services organisation Mubarak Marine. Vikas decided to come off the ship as he was under the impression that he was to receive 80% of his owed salary.

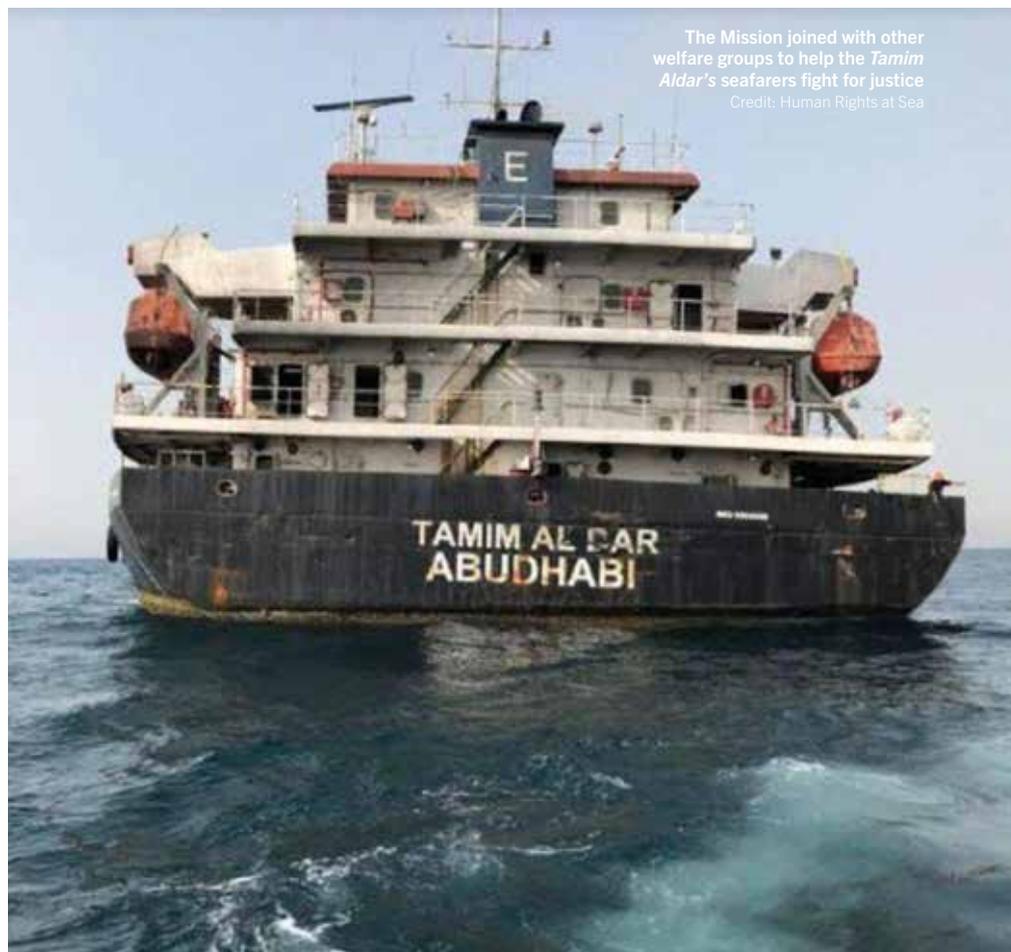
“We are still negotiating, as I have to support my whole family, but we are just glad to be off the ship at last,” Vikas told *The National* soon after leaving the *Tamim Aldar*.

At that time, the second engineer anticipated being back home with his wife and two children within days.

We were just trying to survive somehow

Further delays

However, it took until December to arrange visas and for the owner to come up with the funds to repay the re-



The Mission joined with other welfare groups to help the *Tamim Aldar*'s seafarers fight for justice
Credit: Human Rights at Sea

maining crew. And while the remaining seafarers made it home in time for Christmas, it is clear from speaking to Vikas that not everything can be compensated for. His nine-year-old son has been asking why he is not coming home, while his four-year-old daughter – having been just nine months old when he left to go to sea – doesn't know him.

“She knows me by face ... but she doesn't know exactly who is [her] father and why he is not coming,” he reflects.

According to Vikas, the father of one seafarer aban-

doned by Elite Way Marine Services died from throat cancer as the seafarer could not provide sufficient money for treatment. Another *Tamim Aldar* crew member reported losing his home, the vessel's captain saw his marriage break down, and there are other stories of



Vikas finally made it home in December 2019

how the company's desertion of multiple vessels has affected those left to pick up the pieces.

Now Vikas wants legislation put in place to deal with situations like his.

“It is very important to make strong law so we can tackle ... abandonment cases,” he says.

Given the hardship Vikas and others have suffered, it seems like a justified request. 🌐



Seafarer training can be a costly, but necessary affair

By Michael Grey

Challenges of baking “oven-ready” officers

A serious re-think is needed on the subject of seafarer training

WHY should it be such a struggle for cadets and other trainees to find berths aboard ship to give them the sea experience they need to progress? What sort of short-sighted owner cannot provide a berth for a couple of cadets, on account of the shortage of accommodation on his ship?

This apparent reluctance to provide the necessary facilities to train the next generation is a worldwide problem, with shipping companies citing the cost of training or the expectation that this should be the job of somebody else and not the shipping company. There are too many companies perfectly happy to poach officers trained by others and thus “oven-ready” for work, because training their own is just too much trouble.

It wasn't always like this. Go back to the days of sail and you would have found half a dozen apprentices aboard every deep-sea ship, serving four years' indentures, while learning their trade as deck officers. And it wasn't that long ago that most deep-sea ships would have two or even four apprentices, and a couple of engineer cadets all learning the “company way” of doing things and preparing them for the world of work as a certificated officer.

There were liner companies whose investment in their future staff included cadet ships, with training staff embarked to give their young officers the best possible grounding in their profession. And even in those countries where the training was ‘front-loaded’

with time in college prior to their sea time, there was no question about berths being available when the trainees finally went to sea.

It is difficult to know when the responsibility to train one's own staff was diluted by new attitudes which regarded training not as an essential investment, but an expensive additional and avoidable cost. In an era of tightening margins, with cost-cutting an essential part of keeping a shipping company afloat, training was an obvious target to prune the expenditure to more reasonable levels. It was also more than possible to merely buy in people trained either by other shipping companies, or who had emerged out of state systems.

Costs concerns

The training burden was also something that could be passed over to third party ship managers and it is fair to say that the biggest of these organisations now account for a major part of the training regime with their own training establishments, mostly in those countries where they recruit their seafarers. And yet even the biggest ship managers remain concerned about the shortage of berths for trainees aboard ships they manage. It was some years ago that the head of one of the world's largest management companies suggested to owners that if they would outfit a ship as a training vessel, the manager would operate it for free. It is believed

that there were no takers, even for this generous offer.

It is, of course, the owner of the ship who will decide whether there will be space aboard for trainees, and with ships being delivered with the bare minimum of accommodation, there is often no room for even a couple of extras aboard a vessel delivered by a shipyard against the tightest of budgets. It is a sort of industry-wide lack of generosity, which might be deplored, but can be understood, in an era where margins in shipbuilding, ownership and indeed management, remain so tight.

Shouldn't there be a requirement in law or regulation for all ships to carry sufficient accommodation for a few trainees? This, some years ago, was a proposal from the Government of India delegation to the International Maritime Organization, probably after some hard lobbying by their ship managers looking for sea time and berths for their cadets. Sadly, the proposal did not gain any traction, but maybe it should be taken up again.

Good training is expensive, as it involves college time, expert tuition and these days, expensive simulators. It is also disappointing when those who haven't spent anything on training swoop in and capture officers that others have lavished training time and a lot of money on. Maybe we need something of a new debate on the whole subject of training and the way the industry grows a new generation. [See Michael Grey's cartoon on pg 14.](#)

Encouraging camaraderie and a sense of belonging

New research proves that stable crewing strategies can be transformative for both seafarers and ship operators

ONSHORE there's a great deal of reliable data confirming the benefits of a stable work environment with limited turnover of staff. At sea, however, it has taken much longer for the idea to take hold that stable crewing might actually be safer, more efficient and effective, offer cost savings, and, crucially, help to improve the well-being and cohesiveness of crews.

The Effective Crew Project, led by Solent University, reached its conclusions towards the end of last year and shed new light on the benefits of stable versus fluid crewing within the shipping industry.

Dr Kate Pike led the cross-disciplinary team that undertook the research. Speaking to *The Sea*, she explains that one of the most significant findings of the project was the importance of developing good work relations on board through individuals returning to the same vessel for more than one voyage.

"This had so many benefits for the well-being of the crew – both their physical and mental health – and the impact that then had on safety on board. These benefits also had a knock-

on effect on improved cost benefits over time." The significance of the impact that leadership could have on board was also made very clear by the study.

Senior officers, particularly the Master, have significant influence over the onboard culture and were often the difference between the crew experiencing a good or bad voyage, Dr Pike adds. Those senior officers who lead well are responsible for setting a 'good' onboard culture that promotes a vested interest in the vessel and those that sail on it.

"Leadership is fundamental to any crewing strategy working well or not. If there is good leadership, a better reporting culture can be established when incidents occur. This is vital in terms of safety and for crew to be confident enough to speak up when things are going wrong, or to voice concern before things go wrong."

Stable supporter

From the research's findings, Dr Pike says she would recommend stable crewing, but with the caveat that it would not work for all companies or even for

all vessels within one fleet. She gives the example of a company going through a rapid expansion, where a stable crewing strategy is less likely to work as there will be new people joining all the time and stability would be difficult. The same is true if a company is shrinking.

"What does work well in these situations is a manning pool, where companies employ individuals and then rotate them around their own fleet," she adds. "This means that benefits of crew familiarity can still exist to some extent and that the crew can also learn from being on different vessels."

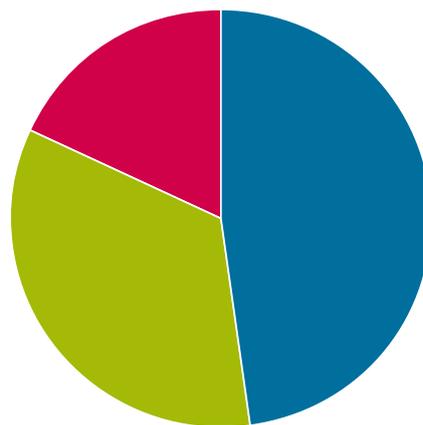
Since its publication, there has been great interest in the Effective Crew Project findings, partly because companies can see there are potential savings to be made. However, points out Dr Pike, financial gains should not be viewed in isolation: "Other areas where the research has shown clear benefits are around the crew's improved well-being and improved safety aspects for individuals as well as in terms of the vessel itself."

But companies need to help themselves before they can gain from stable crewing strategies. Reliable and consistent data is needed to inform crewing strategies, and this is currently in short supply. And even when consistent data is available, unexpected events, such as unscheduled maintenance and time in dry dock, can impact the statistics and make for unreliable data. Dr Pike stresses the importance of consistent data and reliable metrics to evaluate the success of particular crewing strategies over time. "Companies that change strategies really need to understand whether this has been a valuable exercise and why that is the case. Without this understanding it is difficult to accurately measure cost savings," she concludes. ☺

The Effective Crew Project report can be found at www.solent.ac.uk/effective-crew. Dr Kate Pike is Associate Professor Emeritus at Solent University and Director of Field-Research, a company specialising in maritime research.

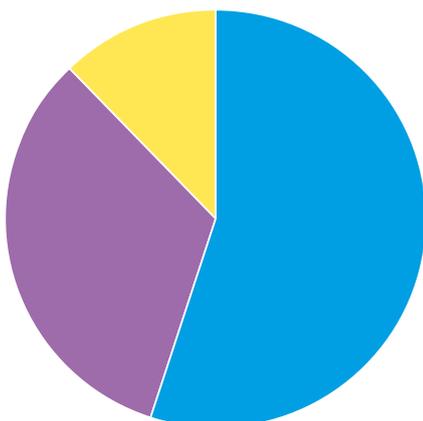
Safety impacts – multi-cultural crews

- Cultural relationships 48%
- Inexperience 34%
- Language/communication 18%



Mental health impacts

- Shore management 55%
- On board culture 33%
- Lifestyle and health 12%





By Katie Higginbottom

Eliminate the stigma around mental health at sea

Companies need to recognise the operational and environmental factors that affect mental health

MENTAL health in the maritime sector, as in other sectors, has been swept under the carpet for years and now seems to be enjoying its moment in the sun. This is not a bad thing since the stigma around discussing mental health is the first challenge that still needs to be addressed.

The recent ITF Seafarers' Trust sponsored research by Yale University's Occupational Health and Environmental Medicine Program confirmed findings of a number of existing research papers and shed new light on the issues of depression and/or anxiety, their causes and the connection with risks of accidents and illness. This is important since it adds a clear economic interest for companies to take the issue seriously. Some do, some say they do, and some couldn't care less. Seafarers suffering from depression and/or anxiety were around twice as likely to have injuries and illnesses compared with their happier and less stressed colleagues, which might even concentrate the minds of less enlightened employers.

There is nothing to suggest that seafarers are inherently more likely to have mental problems than others, but the specifics of their employment do have a significant impact on their collective state of mind.

In an ideal world, we would banish fixed term contracts and introduce permanent employment with full social security protections in place so that no seafarer need ever fear being black-listed or not re-employed if they made a complaint or admitted a weakness. We would ban companies that delay or withhold payment of crew wages and never allow them back to the industry so that no seafarer need ever fret over the financial security of their families. We would stop trading in areas of piracy, illegal trade, and corruption so that no seafarer need ever worry about being kidnapped or thrown into prison without charge. But, back in the real world we have to consider improvements to a flawed industry.

Looking forward

For companies, that means promoting a company culture that is committed to destigmatising mental health. For seafarers it means having an open mind to challenging a macho environment that keeps feelings locked up and limits people's ability to ask for help. One startling result of the survey was the number of seafarers who reported exposure to violence or threats of violence, which, not surprisingly, correlated with feelings of depression and anxiety.

It's all well and good to encourage seafarers to eat healthy diets, drink lots of water, take regular exercise and get enough sleep (all of which certainly do help with a healthy mind) but if you don't have control over who buys your food or any space or equipment for exercise on board this is easier said than done. And if you're being mentally bullied or physically threatened, more green vegetables are not the answer. In fact, there is no one simple answer but a range of preventative measures that can be put in place.

The study shows that seafarers are particularly vulnerable at the early stages of their careers. This would suggest that more needs to be done to prepare new recruits for the challenges ahead and set up structures to support them. This could be formal buddy schemes or something more informal between friends and crew members. Seafarers also cited a lack of training for the tasks they have to perform and an uncaring working environment – again these are issues of good management and organisation – companies need to recognise that these operational and environmental factors are much more important than telling seafarers to manage their own mental wellbeing. ☺

Katie Higginbottom is head of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, commissioning charity of the Seafarer Mental Health Study.



A buddy system can be an effective supportive system for new seafarers. Credit: Jamie Smith

Getting to the root of the problem

The Yale University Seafarer Mental Health Study drew on a sample of 1,572 seafarers who were representative of serving seafarers across the world, of different ranks, on different vessels, with different flags. It found that within the previous two weeks of completing the survey a quarter of them had suffered depression, 17% had experienced anxiety and 20% had contemplated suicide or self-harm.

The Seafarer Mental Health Study for the first time also found a link between depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (thoughts) and a greater likelihood of injury and illness on board.

The significance of the link to violence and bullying at work had not been previously drawn so clearly. Seafarers from the Philippines and Eastern Europe were four times as likely to report having experienced or witnessed violence as those from Western Europe.

The study's authors were Dr Rafael Y Lefkowitz, MD MPH and Martin D Slade, MPH, from Yale University's respected Occupational and Environmental Medicine Program. They utilised demographic, occupational, and work-environmental questions, along with ones assessing injuries and illness events, and mental health outcomes (symptoms of depression and anxiety). The final survey was the result of feedback gathered from seafarers over three months of ship visits. The survey was then actively promoted for three months, during which time it attracted 1,894 participants, from which a representative cohort of 1,572 seafarers was selected. ☺



Supporting seafarer mental wellbeing

SEAFARER wellbeing has been a focal topic for the Standard Club's Loss Prevention team, particularly in recent years. The club's 'people claims' statistics indicate a clear upward trend of mental health related illnesses.

Being out at sea for extended periods of time exposes seafarers to several factors that challenge their mental health. It is important to recognise when crew members feel overwhelmed by these factors.

Help is available. People have a lot of worries and seafarers are no exception – you are never alone; support is closer than you think. If you need help, talk to your fellow crew, or the mental wellbeing champion onboard. If you want to keep your concerns private, a professional organisation like The Mission to Seafarers can provide support; otherwise confide in your loved ones.

Standard Club has launched a series of posters focusing on seafarer wellbeing. Designed to grace the walls of communal areas on board ships, the posters focus on healthy eating, fitness, mental wellbeing and socialisation.

Support onboard
Only one call away

Support onboard
Connect with people

ISWAN: +44 207 323 2737
Mission to Seafarers: crewhelp@mtsmail.org
Sailors' Society: crisis@sailors-society.org

When you need support, you can call a formal organisation or speak to the mental champion onboard.

When you miss your family, you can either call home or chat with your fellow seafarers onboard.

Standard Club
By your side

Using a smartphone camera to scan the QR code on the posters, seafarers can access valuable advice and tips on how they can look after their wellbeing. Print and share the full set to encourage a healthy and happy crew! ☺



Chaplains have been trained to spot the warning signs of suicide
Credit: Jamie Smith



Empowering MtS chaplains to prevent suicides

The Mission's safeTALK training programme champions a community-based approach

By Verity Relph

It is a distressing fact that close to 800,000 people lose their lives to suicide every year. This is equivalent to one person every 40 seconds. Given that most suicides occur among those who are suffering from undiagnosed or untreated depression, it comes as little surprise that in the shipping industry, where mental health issues are particularly acute, there are, sadly, too many cases of crew members taking their own lives.

There is insufficient data on the rate of seafarer suicides globally. The UK P&I Club reported in 2017 that suicide rates among seafarers experiencing mental health problems had more than tripled since 2014, but precise figures for the industry are lacking.

There have, however, been recent studies on the mental health of those working at sea, which have produced some concerning results. The *Seafarer Mental Health Study*, published by the ITF/Seafarers Trust in October 2019, found a high prevalence of depression in seafarers. Of those completing a health questionnaire, 25% showed

indications of having suffered depression over a two-week period. More concerning still was that 20% of those surveyed had suicidal ideation, with 2% reporting that they had experienced suicidal thoughts nearly every day over the previous two weeks.

Seafaring is an intense environment. Social isolation, fatigue, money worries and work pressures are all common-place issues, and even factors such as the quality of food on board and access to physical activity, can have a negative influence on a seafarer's mental wellbeing. All ultimately have the capacity to put crew at increased risk of depression and suicidal thoughts.

So what does a seafarer do if they are feeling suicidal? A study carried out by international maritime charity Sailors' Society and Yale University in March 2018 across 1,000 seafarers, found that only 21% had spoken to a colleague about it, and nearly half (45%) of them said they had not asked anybody for help. These are very worrying statistics, especially given how much time seafarers spend with their fellow crew.

Taking action

The sad fact is that the vast majority of suicides can be prevented, but often it is down to others to spot the warning signs. This is why The Mission to Seafarers is working to train its chaplains in safeTALK suicide prevention training. Originally developed by LivingWorks in Canada, safeTALK champions a community-based approach and rests on four simple steps: Tell, Ask, Listen and Keep-safe. The philosophy is that anyone, regardless of background or experience, can learn skills to recognise when someone needs help and how to talk with them. If they identify a person with potential thoughts of suicide, they then have the tools to speak to them and connect them to specialised support.

The Mission's goal is to develop a global team of safeTALK trainers. As the Revd Lance Lukin, the Mission's regional director for Oceania and safeTALK trainer, comments: "Most people with thoughts of suicide do not want to die, they simply want the pain that is causing them to think about suicide to go away. By being aware of how others might be feeling, and having the skills to be able to identify the signs, we can save lives. And every life counts. One death by suicide is one death too many."

Port chaplains and volunteers are used to seeing first-hand the impact that long months at sea can have on the wellbeing of crew. Professionally trained in advanced mental health care and post-traumatic stress counselling, they are well-experienced in providing emotional support to seafarers. By undertaking safeTALK training, however, they have the added skill of being able to identify those at risk of suicide and ensuring that they receive the appropriate help.

Indeed, as the people who encounter seafarers on a day-to-day basis, port chaplains are ideally placed to look out for the warning signs. A great deal of work has been done over the past few years to break down the taboos surrounding crew mental wellbeing, yet the stigma persists and cries for help often go unheard. As Revd Lukin highlights: "In most cases, those who are having thoughts of suicide try to make others aware of how they are feeling. However, due to the stigma around suicide, these attempts at telling others are often subtle and are therefore often missed."

Worldwide reach

So far over 50 members of staff have been trained worldwide. Revd Lukin successfully delivered the half-day workshop at the Regional Directors' Conference in Brisbane last September and at the Africa Region meeting in Durban in

November. As he reports: "Within days of the training, staff have already used the skills and saved lives. Once people know what to look for, and then how to ask – they gain the confidence to help, and helping saves lives."

One of those who quickly put their new skills into practice was the Revd Canon Andy Bowerman, regional director for the Gulf and South East Asia. He received a call late one evening, about a week after receiving the training, from someone he had supported as a Chaplain many years ago. As Revd Bowerman recalls: "He was clearly very distressed and explained a little about his situation and how desperate he was feeling. This was apparent from the pitch and tone of his voice and from how agitated he sounded. The training that I had received meant that I was very direct with him, much more so than I would have been otherwise. After exchanging initial information, I asked him – are you thinking about suicide? He replied that he was and that he was driving to the coast for that purpose."

Revd Bowerman was some 3,500 miles away, but as the individual began to talk and became calmer, he used the information he had learnt to make sure he could be contacted by someone who was closer to him. "I listened for a long time and waited on the line until he was back with his wife at a safe location. I then called back a few hours later and found that they had already sought the help of one of the contacts that I had shared. I was so grateful to have received the training and they continue to receive the support that they need."

Talking points

The training has also given chaplains more confidence to raise the topic with seafarers, which can in turn lead to greater support for those affected by the loss of fellow crew members. As Mark Classen, port chaplain in Richards Bay, who attended the training in Durban,

reported: "Since the amazing course, my wife and I (who also attended) have gently broached this sensitive subject of suicide with seafarers. One example was one night here at the centre we were talking to a Filipino engine rating about it, and he told me about two

colleagues of his on another vessel: one committed suicide in Singapore. Another apparently jumped overboard on route from Brazil to China.

We shared that if he ever needs to talk about it, we are here."

Having chaplains who can identify and support those at risk is vital to the industry, now more than ever. As smaller crew sizes and greater connectivity lead to

fewer opportunities for social interaction on board, and faster turnarounds result in less time for much-needed respite ashore, seafarers are only becoming more vulnerable to mental health problems.

The development of an in-house programme is now underway, the aim being to have a course that can effectively be taken off the shelf and run locally in a region, thereby reducing travel costs. By rolling out the training across all regions, the Mission will soon have a global fleet of chaplains who know what to look out for and the steps to take. They can offer immediate help to those at risk, and ultimately save lives. 

Verity Relph is the project support officer at The Mission to Seafarers.

Anyone, regardless of background or experience, can learn skills to recognise when someone needs help and how to talk with them



The training has given chaplains more confidence to raise the topic of suicide with seafarers

Credit: Jamie Smith

A 'routine' task with a range of risks

Entering enclosed spaces might be just part of the job, but never forget the hazards such a task presents

By Phil Belcher

AS a first trip cadet, one incident is imprinted upon my memory when I badly messed up during a tank cleaning operation on a product tanker, sending two seafarers down an unventilated tank. Thankfully they were unharmed, but a combination of a lack of situational awareness, lack of experience and overconfidence had led me to miss several critical steps. Since then, enclosed space entry has always been of the utmost importance to me.

The entering of enclosed spaces on a ship is an essential activity and while it should be limited, it cannot be avoided. Unfortunately, it is also an inherently hazardous operation that is often regarded as a 'routine' activity – and so the personal hazards are frequently ignored. When you read enclosed

space accident reports you often find yourself asking why on earth the seafarer took the action reported. Lack of recognition of the risks, belief that they can handle the hazards and the desire to just 'get the job done' are all seen in these reports. Accounts of those rushing to the aid of someone who has collapsed and then becoming overcome themselves, are particularly depressing.

Entering an enclosed space must always be regarded as being one of the most hazardous activities that can be carried out on board a ship.

A great deal of work has been undertaken by the IMO and all seafarers should be familiar with the enclosed entry guidelines in A27/1050 and the compulsory drills mandated by SOLAS *Chapter III Regulation 19*.

While those instruments have had a positive effect, deaths continue to be reported so an even greater focus in this area is needed. INTERTANKO and OCIMF have published the *Behavioural Competence Assessment and Verification guidance*, covering soft skills. This guidance was the culmination of several years of collaborative work between our organisations and focuses on how seafarers undertake their work rather than on their technical knowledge.

Rounded skills base

Soft skills are vital as they are the key to ensuring that the technical skills are properly applied. In any hazardous operation, soft skills such as leadership, collaboration, communication and situational awareness are essential. Inherent in these skills are both the ability for the junior person to raise questions and, if needed, stop the job – and for the senior person to accept such an intervention and fully investigate the issue if the job is stopped. Having the moral courage to raise an issue and also the moral courage to step back and consider whether a mistake was made are vital soft skills.

It is best practice that the person in charge of an entry has the right documentation signed off by the Master and this should validate why the work is going ahead, who is involved and when the work should end. A tool box talk should then be arranged between all involved so that everyone understands the situation and their role. If the plan is clearly understood by all parties, any deviations can be challenged in a safe manner and the work completed without incident. The rescue procedures should also be reiterated to prevent anyone from running in, should there be an incident involving someone who has collapsed.

Enclosed spaces will always need to be entered on a ship. Associations such as INTERTANKO, working with other organisations like OCIMF and InterManager, must aim to reduce the burden of enclosed space entry. Seafarers will always be both the first and last line of defence, we just need to make sure they can work in a safe environment and give them all the necessary tools to deal with any unforeseen incident safely. 📍

Phil Belcher is marine director at INTERTANKO, www.intertanko.com.



Hazardous spaces present a host of risks that need to be understood and mitigated Credit: Shutterstock



Seafarers voice their concerns

Fuel scapegoating worries and rising racism issues have come to the fore

By Steven Jones

THE Seafarers Happiness Index allows crews to share detailed feedback on the challenges facing them at sea, and the ways in which life can be improved. The latest report looked back at the final quarter of 2019, with seafarers discussing a range of key issues. Unfortunately, these latest results saw a drop in reported satisfaction, with the overall average slipping down to 6.13/10 from a high in the third quarter of 6.59. Of all our standard question areas, only connectivity saw a rise in the figures.

The happiest seafarers, according to the data, were those on container vessels. Seafarers aged between 25-35, from Africa and serving as engine crew were statistically the best performing and happiest during the study period.

While such averaging may be useful from a data perspective, it tells us little about the actual problems and concerns which seafarers are dealing with. For this, we require seafarers to write about what they are experiencing, and to share their impressions and feedback. Of late there have been some key issues which have really leapt out as we have been processing the data and reading the responses. These relate to concerns

over criminalisation, and the rise of racism at sea.

The concerns about criminalisation stem directly from the IMO2020 low sulphur rules for marine fuels, which came into force in January. Seafarers expressed concern about the potential for them to be scapegoated, and indeed even criminalised in the event that vessels were deemed to be in breach of the new rules.

Thankfully it seems that is not yet a widespread experience, but the next phase could be far more stringently policed. As from March 1, 2020 there will be a total ban on the carriage of residual high sulphur fuel.

After this date port State control will check ships' bunker tanks for non-compliant fuel. This is where we will start to see real checks on compliance, and potential enforcement actions, which could be where we see seafarers caught in the cross-fire – especially where there have been perceived failings in fuel management.

Seafarers have said they do not feel adequately prepared, trained or experienced in issues such as co-mingling, compatibility and separation and they are also worried about the availability of compliant fuel.

Racism is an issue which is being

mentioned more often, and there were several seafarers in the latest reporting period who spoke in detail about their negative experiences. From entire crews riven across race lines, through to the effect of a single senior officer, sadly it appears that racism is making life at sea miserable for those seafarers unfortunate enough to experience it.

Seafarers who suffered racism reported drastically reduced happiness index results, as you might expect. It is something which is causing misery and impacting the quality of life for some crews. [S](#)

The Seafarers Happiness Index is designed to monitor and benchmark seafarer satisfaction levels by asking 10 key questions and serves as an important barometer of seafarer satisfaction with life at sea. Questions focus on a range of issues, from mental health and well-being, to working life and family contact. If you would like more information, see the data or read more in-depth reports, visit www.happyatsea.org for access to the latest results and to have your say.

We want to know how you really feel!

**Please take the survey at:
www.happyatsea.org/survey**

theSea Leisure Page

There are many health benefits to spending down-time solving puzzles. Lower stress levels, better memory, improved mood, improved problem solving abilities, and better work performance are just some of them.

Sudoku

The aim of Sudoku is to fill in the empty cells so that each column, row and 3x3 region contain the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once. Find the answers to both puzzles in the next issue.

EASY LEVEL

		1	7		9			3
6			8				1	7
				6	4			
7						5		
	4	8				2	1	
		9						4
			3	8				
8		4			7			1
9			6		2	3		

TRICKY LEVEL

	4		2				3		5
			1				2	9	
					3	6	4		
	5					9	7		
8				7					2
			3	6				1	
			4	7	6				
	6	8				1			
9		1				5			2

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

BEGINNER LEVEL

solution (issue 262)

3	8	4	2	5	1	6	7	9
9	1	7	4	8	6	2	3	5
6	5	2	7	9	3	4	8	1
5	7	6	3	2	9	1	4	8
1	4	3	8	6	7	9	5	2
2	9	8	1	4	5	3	6	7
8	2	5	9	3	4	7	1	6
4	6	1	5	7	2	8	9	3
7	3	9	6	1	8	5	2	4

EASY LEVEL

solution (issue 262)

5	9	1	8	6	3	7	4	2
6	7	2	1	4	9	8	5	3
3	4	8	2	7	5	6	1	9
7	3	9	4	1	2	5	6	8
2	1	5	3	8	6	9	7	4
8	6	4	5	9	7	3	2	1
4	5	3	6	2	8	1	9	7
1	8	7	9	5	4	2	3	6
9	2	6	7	3	1	4	8	5

Jumble

Can you correctly unscramble these anagrams to form four words? If so, send your answers by email to thesea@missiontoseafarers.org by June 30, 2020. All correct answers will be entered into a draw for a chance to win a Mission to Seafarers' Goodie Bag, containing a pen set, mug and handmade woolly hat. Please include your answers, name, the vessel you are working on, your nationality and finish this sentence: "I like The Mission to Seafarers because..."

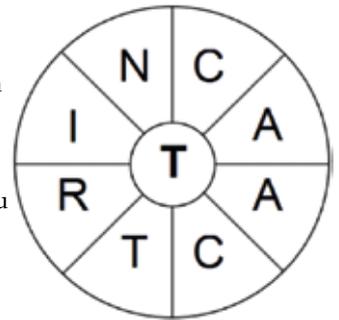
- 1) BLOBUSU 2) CHINW
3) ARBORFEED 4) ARGOENTRE

November/December solutions:

- 1) EMISSIONS 2) ENGINEER
3) TARGET 4) INSURANCE

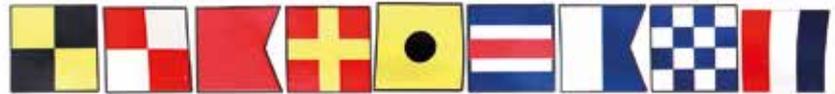
Word wheel

This word wheel is made from a nine letter word. Try and find that word, then make as many words of any length as you can from these letters. You can only use each letter once, and each word must include the letter T.



Flag code

Can you tell us what word these flags are communicating? Answer in the next issue.



See Michael Grey's feature on page 6



"I'm sure you will find your accommodation more than adequate"

Help for seafarers around the world

Are you one of the 1.5 million people around the world working at sea, or a loved one of someone who is?

The Mission to Seafarers is a great source of support for anyone working in the industry, and we've been helping people like you since the 19th century.

We work in over 200 ports in 50 countries and are available 365 days a year. We can provide help and support, no matter your nationality, gender or faith. Our network of chaplains, staff and volunteers can help with any problem – whether it's emotional, practical or spiritual help that you need.

Our services include:

- **Ship visits** – we carry out approximately 70,000 ship visits a year, welcoming crews to ports, providing access to communication facilities and offering assistance and advice on mental health and wellbeing.
- **Transport** – Our teams can arrange free transportation to the local town, shopping mall, doctor, dentist or a place of worship.
- **Seafarers' Centres** – We operate over 120 Flying Angel centres around the world, offering visiting seafarers a safe space to relax between voyages, purchase supplies, seek support for any problems they might have and stay in touch with their families.
- **Emergency support** – Our teams are trained in pastoral support, mental health first aid and critical incident stress counselling. We can also provide advocacy support.
- **Family networks** – We operate these networks in the Philippines and India where seafarers' families can meet, share information and access support.

Our mission is to care for the shipping industry's most important asset: its people.

To find out where we work, visit www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports. Here you can find information about all our centres, including contact details, facilities and opening times.



CREW HELP CONTACTS

SeafarerHelp

Free, confidential, multilingual helpline for seafarers and their families available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, provided by ISWAN.

Direct dial: +44 20 7323 2737

Email: help@seafarerhelp.org

Contact a Chaplain

Should you want to contact a chaplain before your arrival in port, you can complete the Contact a Chaplain form on our website: www.missiontoseafarers.org/contact-a-chaplain.

CrewHelp

The Mission to Seafarers can provide help and support if you have a welfare or justice issue. Please get in touch with us at crewhelp@mtsmail.org.

Get in touch!

Have you got news or views that you'd like to share with The Sea? Please get in touch with the Editor, Carly Fields at thesea@missiontoseafarers.org.

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Woolly hats offer comfort far beyond a warmer head

Knitters around the world take great solace in making items for seafarers

THE Mission to Seafarers, along with a number of its colleague societies, continues to give out very large quantities of woolly hats to seafarers, as it has done for so many years. We have an amazing army of knitters all over the world who rejoice in doing this as a sign of their care and concern for all who work at sea. They want you to know that you are not forgotten.

We box them up and send them to ports all around the world. Judging by how quickly they disappear, they remain very popular with seafarers who take them in huge numbers. I love seeing so many worn whenever I go on board.

However, a while ago we received some negative comment. It was



suggested that giving away woolly hats suggested criticism of the way in which companies looked after seafarers. This is absolutely not the

case. Of course, woolly hats are often very practical for seafarers, but we share them as an expression of love and care for the crew. They are simple and concrete reminders that many people ashore continue to recognise and value the work done at sea by so many.

You will be reading this in the season of Lent, a time when we are especially encouraged to think about the big questions of life, including the spiritual ones. So perhaps there is a 'theology of woolly hats' which can help our thinking.

Firstly, they are all so rich in variety and colour, reflecting the God who values every single human being in all our rich diversity. Secondly, each hat is the result of an act of thoughtful creativity, reminding us of the God who created land and sea, who we see reflected in so much around us every day. Thirdly, each is the result of careful attention to a pattern that turns a mass of strange wool into something magnificent. That speaks to us surely of the God who calls us to walk in his patterns, his ways, which can bring beauty in the midst of life – ways of neighbourliness, of faithfulness, of responsible living, of self-sacrifice.

And finally, as gifts of love from afar, these hats speak of the God of the universe who loves each of us without reserve – indeed the closeness of those hats as they fit snugly and warmly on our heads reminds us that the God shown in Jesus Christ is up-close, personal and always within reach. Here's to woolly hats! ☺

Every year, the Mission receives hundreds of hand-knitted hats



A prayer

God of land and sea, we thank you for your love. Help us to open our eyes to signs of that love in the world around us, in the beauty of your creation, in the eyes of family and friends, in the kindness of strangers.

Give us the strength and courage to love as you love us. Guide us as we seek to pattern our lives on the example shown by Jesus.

May we bring colour and warmth into the lives of all those we engage with.

Amen