



Caring for seafarers  
around the world

# the SEA

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## Swapping the deep blue for dry land

*Many seafarers see a job ashore as the natural progression of their career, but is the grass greener?* **By Felicity Landon**

There is an accepted narrative around seafarers and the expected pattern of their careers: they serve their time at sea and then, when they fancy it, make the move into maritime-related shore-based employment. Or, from another perspective, the maritime industry depends on a flow of ex-seafarers to work in numerous key roles, across technical, operational and managerial, and in sectors such as law, finance and insurance, among many others.

It sounds straightforward – but what are the realities? Not every seafarer can

move effortlessly from a life on board into a dream job ashore. Making the transition, after many years at sea, to a career and more routine family life on dry land can be an immense upheaval. Paying for living expenses ashore can be a shock after years of having food and accommodation covered on board, and seafarers can be naïve about how much they will earn ashore. Coming ashore isn't for everyone; some stay only a few months before heading quickly back to sea.

In the UK, the issues were highlighted

through Project Ulysses, which aimed to identify the training and skills needed by officers to make a successful transition to shore “and so sustain the UK as the leading maritime centre into the future”.

Support for seafarers coming ashore was a key recommendation, and the Marine Society & Sea Cadets' (MSSC) Coming Ashore programme was one outcome. The programme provides guidance, mentoring and (if it wasn't for Covid-19) work experience opportunities for seafarers looking for a maritime profession on land.

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Darrell Bate, the MSSC's director of maritime training and development, says his own recollection of coming ashore was that "I had no idea what to do and I had to find my own way"; he was fortunate to find an opportunity as a junior ship operator, before progressing on to shipbroking and chartering.

Coming Ashore, launched in 2020, is aimed at people who are currently seafaring or have very recently left the sea. In mid-2021, about 70 people were on the programme, supported by a team of eight mentors.

"Primarily it is seafarers looking at the options," says Bate. "The first stage of mentoring is asking 'what do you really want?' and getting them to think through about coming ashore."

The whole purpose is to retain in the maritime sector the very transferable skills these people have gained at sea, he says. "It is about helping them find where they can best fit in and what roles maritime can offer."

A lot of people have "completely false expectations", especially on the money side, says Bate. Adapting to a (usually) lower income and an office environment can be tough. "A lot take a six-month contract and go back to sea afterwards. They haven't planned it through. If you don't do your homework, you can get disillusioned and simply go back to what you know."

## Climbing the ranks

Bjørn Højgaard, CEO of Anglo-Eastern Univan, came ashore twice. "I transitioned ashore not because I disliked what I was doing at sea but because there was an opportunity," he says. "I was working with Maersk and they had a number of jobs ashore which were earmarked for people with seagoing experience – in my case, as a stowage coordinator. That was my first foray into a shore job."

A couple of years later, he went back to sea. "I had come ashore as a chief officer and I felt it was important to get experience as a Captain, which would give me more options. My advice to those considering coming ashore would be get your last stripe and a couple of ships under your belt, because it opens up more opportunities for you."

Højgaard says there are plenty of opportunities for seafarers to use the skills they have acquired at sea in a shore role – for example, vessel manager, stowage coordinator, supercargo, ship design. "Depending on the company they work with, that may be more or less formalised. In Anglo-Eastern, more than 50% of our managers have sailed with Anglo-Eastern in the past. We manage ships – so if you have a seagoing background, you have a pretty good start. Also, generally in Anglo-Eastern we like to recruit from within; 80% of recruitment into roles should be from inside the company, and 20% from outside. That

is an indication of the value we put on people who come from inside, whether seagoing or not."

Anglo-Eastern has an appraisal system to identify high achievers and a well-defined training scheme, says Højgaard. "Seafarers who have an interest can get mentor trained to help them make the transition – for example, if they are interested in safety management, they can get guidance from HSQE, or for vessel superintendent/manager roles, they are given assignments with senior people in their fields to assist in drydocking and other tasks."

Anglo-Eastern also operates a buddy system to provide support for new people ashore for the first six months – "support from someone who has walked in those shoes", he says.

"The first few months after coming ashore are definitely the hardest, as you transition into a different working style, life and family life."

## Try before you commit

Seafarers working for Stolt Tankers are offered the opportunity to 'try out' working ashore through the company's Ship to Shore Pipeline Programme. Some take part in specific projects, while others can provide cover for summer holidays, for example.

"During their employment at sea, people can apply for these short-term positions ashore," says Igor Segeda, Stolt Tankers' global manager for sea personnel.



Credit: Thome



As ships and their infrastructure become more complex, the skill sets and competences required on board give seafarers a wider choice of careers ashore



*“Making the transition, after many years at sea, to a career and more routine family life on dry land can be an immense upheaval”*

“Our Ship to Shore Pipeline is a solid, structured programme with its own budget, and there are a lot of opportunities. A good example is a major project around ballast water treatment systems we are now working on. Many projects require support from sea personnel and typically we would have a couple of officers from the fleet coming ashore to work on them.”

Spending two months on an office assignment can help seafarers decide



Igor Segeda, Stolt Tankers

whether to come ashore, says Segeda. “Then, when there is an opening for a job, they are already known to the company, and they know what it’s like to work ashore. In a highly specialised shipping company like ours, a lot of shore jobs do require specific Stolt knowledge and expertise.”

Almost everyone in Stolt Tankers’ fleet management has a seafaring background, he points out, and there is a high presence in other areas of the business too.

He agrees, however, that the step from sea to shore is a complicated one. “You change your lifestyle and financial situation completely. It can be difficult to find the right moment for you and your family to make this transition. I know because I made that step myself.

“Through our pipeline programme, if they have at least tried it out a couple of times, they know how to do the different lifestyle. And it isn’t for everyone; some people decide it is better to stay at sea and others come ashore

for years and finally decide to go back to seagoing.”

Staying ashore brings the opportunity to see family every day; but others prefer the routine of being at sea for several months, then spending an extended period at home completely allocated to the family, he says.

In the end, people decide for themselves what is important, says Segeda. Some move right out of shipping. As ships and their IT infrastructure become more complex and sophisticated, the skill sets and competences required on board do give seafarers a wider choice of careers ashore.

However, money is a major factor, especially in the current global economy. “Working on board ships pays attractive money, and that is a holding point for many people.”

### Defined career path

Ship manager Thome encourages its seafarers, if they are considering a career ashore, to take up a position within the organisation, says Thome chief human resources officer Simon Frank.

“We have some earmarked positions to introduce seafarers into. By getting the seafarers in who have been on our ships and worked with our systems, we get an already known and introduced >>

employee into a position ashore and that is a great advantage for the company,” he says.

Thome has a career path that is well defined for the seafarer; he or she will know when they are promoted to the different ranks on board, that there will be corresponding positions open in the company if they mean to pursue a career onshore.

Frank says that at Thome, and typically across the industry, at least 80% of certain functions would be covered by seafarers – typically the vessel manager, technical superintendent and marine superintendent roles, which are very operational. “If we need a new superintendent and can’t get one from our own fleet, the second best is from another fleet.”

A technical superintendent would typically have responsibility for four vessels, he says – “i.e., becoming a manager of people in the position he was in before – so there is a natural promotion process in moving into that role.”

The topic of working ashore, the framework and what is required is always a popular feature for seafarers at Thome’s officer conferences, says Frank.

“My impression is that the seafarers that go ashore are typically the most ambitious and want to advance their career. At sea you can advance quite quickly to be a captain – then you hit a ceiling. Maybe you can be a senior captain but the job is the same. So some feel there must be more.”

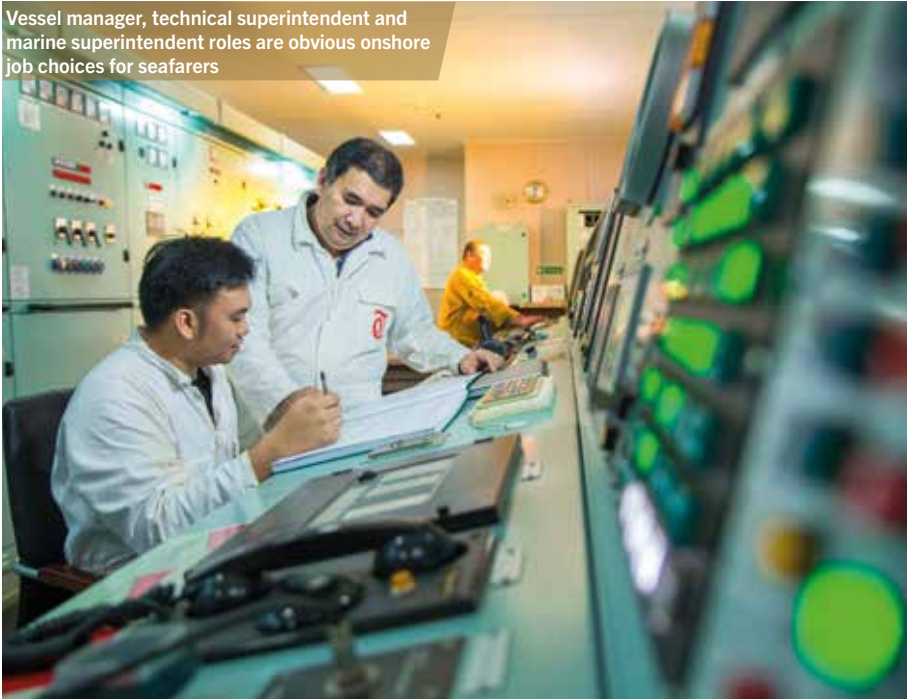
But there is a catch. Yes, there are opportunities to progress in a shore role, and some work their way up to the top, if they have the technical competence and also the personal skill. But not everyone can be promoted.

### Two-track approach

Different skills can take people on other paths and that has prompted Thome to create a two-track system.

“Some we want to develop in the managerial track. If they want to

Vessel manager, technical superintendent and marine superintendent roles are obvious onshore job choices for seafarers



Credit: Thome

advance from the position of technical superintendent, they would progress into a fleet group manager role, looking after a group of four or five technical superintendents, then into a manager’s position.

“However, we want to step away from everyone focusing on that direction. That is the way they look, but not everyone has the managerial skill sets required. We have created a different path for them – a professional path where they become specialists more than managers.

“From our perspective, there is a lot of specialism going on in our industry, across many technologies such as scrubbers, new fuel types, more diversified types of engines, etc., and there are a lot of qualification and competence pressures. If we don’t have specialists that develop skill sets in these different segments, then we don’t get the best of our people. It is about redirecting some of them.”

Mindsets may have to be changed, he acknowledges, but it could be a real positive for people who are frustrated when they don’t get promoted up the

managerial ladder. We are excited about this new framework. We are trying to have the conversation: ‘maybe you could reconsider and we can help you’.”

### Different options

He is also keen to emphasise that it’s not all about coming ashore.

“We benefit in our industry from having people who never could dream of giving up their job at sea. They have a personality and family life that fits the model of being a seafarer, which is very different from the model of working ashore.


“Typically when a seafarer is at home, they stay for three months and don’t work. They treasure these periods. I have spoken to many who have been shocked about the challenges and diversity of the shore job. Some go back to sea after a couple of years because the transition is too big.”

Højgaard agrees that life at sea is not for everybody, but likewise life ashore. “I have seen people come ashore for five years and then decide to go back to sea and have a long career as a captain. Many who haven’t been to sea pity seafarers and think it must be so difficult. But for many people it is a great opportunity – a good job where you are amazingly independent, the days are never the same, you earn good money and have long periods of time at home to spend on your own interests.

“Everyone has to find what is best for them. I would never say the only way to have a long and glorious career is to come ashore – that isn’t the case.” 📞

*“Staying ashore brings the opportunity to see family every day; but others prefer the routine of being at sea for several months, then spending an extended period at home completely allocated to the family”*





*“We are always worried about lone nationals of any sexuality or gender identity on board vessels”*

## Support for any and every seafarer

*The Mission is here for those at sea, whatever their sexuality or gender identity*

**By The Reverend Timothy Tunley**

**O**ver the years I have helped to support several lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBT+) seafarers; their issues and joys are not much different from those of other seafarers in terms of their job at sea.

As a volunteer organisation, our guiding principles put structure around the support we offer every seafarer, including those in the LGBT+ community. When I visit a ship, the most important question I want the answer to is: “What is it like being you today?” For me, the most important person on board a ship is the person I am speaking with. At the Mission, we treat the Captain with the utmost respect and treat every crew member as if they were the Captain.

For the ship visitors we have who are overtly Christian we have one further principle: the most important part of any visit is not the fact that you have been, but that you have left. This is because our vision is to leave Christ on every vessel we visit.

We are always worried about lone nationals of any sexuality or gender identity on board vessels. To be culturally isolated is a very difficult thing. If, for example, you are the only person from Cape Verde or the

only German person on board, your cultural references will not be the same as those of the crew around you. This might not be so bad for an afternoon but if you have a twelve-month contract, life can be bleak. A big part of what we do is to try and support those who feel isolated and alone for whatever reason.

With many issues – including those around sexuality or gender identity – many seafarers live in a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ culture, which may or may not offer them self-protection. However, it can and often does produce a deeper sense of loneliness.

### Difficult situation

Bullying can be an issue for any seafarer. The worst case of homophobic bullying I came across was several years ago when a large and aggressive Captain would get very drunk and beat up and abuse the Filipino cook. This caused a rift in the crew. If they defended the cook, they could be next; but on the other hand, how could they let this happen to a fellow countryman and a friend?

Working alongside the International Transport Workers’ Federation and the ship owner we managed to get the cook replaced and moved to another ship without a note on his permanent record. Note was taken of the Captain’s actions and his drinking and

the company then issued a warning. This was not justice.

We must never assume that the world is an easy, comfortable place for everyone. To be perceived as different in any way in a small ‘village’ environment of a ship is very different from living in a city.

There is a liberal myth that if we could only educate people to think as we do then everything in the world would be lovely. But for many non-European seafarers who are part of the LGBT+ community, life is simply not like that.

Many LGBT+ seafarers seek safety and peace at sea. One sees this most in the mess on a cruise ship. It is not unusual to find groups of seafarers of the same sexuality or gender identity coming together for mutual support and safety on board.

At the Mission we understand that offering chaplaincy to these groups needs to be done with sensitivity. The churches we are seen to represent have often been the instrument of their persecution back home. Our chaplaincy teams offer support and a friendly ‘ear’ to all, and we have always been met with a warm welcome on the ships we visit. For so many seafarers, home is not what they have left behind, but the life they find on board. ☺

*The Reverend Timothy Tunley is The Mission to Seafarers’ chaplain in Scotland.*

# Helping seafarers to help themselves

*The Mission's WeCare e-learning modules aid financial and social wellbeing*

By Verity Relph

**A**t a time when mental wellbeing is more of an issue than ever for seafarers, one of the many questions faced by the industry has been how to continue to provide support and training when face-to-face contact is no longer possible. One way in which The Mission to Seafarers decided to embrace this challenge was through the launch of e-learning versions of its WeCare educational courses.

Launched in Spring 2021, the two sixty-minute courses aim to help seafarers cope with concerns from home that can affect their mental wellbeing while at sea. The first course, Social Wellbeing, is about helping seafarers and their families communicate in a safe and meaningful way during long periods of time apart. Financial Wellbeing, meanwhile, seeks to empower seafarers to feel in control of their day-to-day finances, taking them through coping strategies and helping remove the strain that money issues can often cause.

Thomas O'Hare, project manager at the Mission to Seafarers, sees many advantages to the introduction of digital learning for the programme: "A great aspect of the e-learning format is that it removes the logistical constraints of in-person workshops, enabling much greater numbers of seafarers to take the courses. It also has the added advantage that seafarers can access the resources at their own pace or when they are feeling alone and vulnerable on ship."

Thomas is keen to point out that the courses are not for the benefit

of seafarers alone. "If a chaplain or ship visitor understands what a communication plan is or how to put together a budget or savings plan, they are in a much better position to promote and share knowledge when they are ship visiting. The courses firstly educate and secondly, they allow welfare personnel to share the learning with seafarers."

Michelle DePooter is someone who found the courses very pertinent for her role as lead chaplain for The Ministry to Seafarers of the CRC in Montreal: "I have been a seafarers' chaplain for 21 years and have been looking for resources like this for quite a while. Many resources are intended for people who work in 'normal' jobs and don't speak to the unique situation of seafarers who are often supporting multiple family members. There are some situations, such as how to navigate requests from family and friends for assistance, that many of us based ashore wouldn't necessarily have to deal with on any regular basis".

## A comprehensive approach

As well as sharing the learning, chaplains can signpost seafarers to the On Board Mental Health Champions resources, which are available for free to all seafarers (see 'A relatable mental health programme', page 7). The videos and downloads provide the foundation stone for further learning. "The resources are the first step for seafarers in understanding what wellbeing means to them before they go on to do the e-learning courses," explains Thomas.

*"The courses firstly educate and secondly, they allow welfare personnel to share the learning with seafarers"*

It is then up to companies to step in: "Seafarers can then ask their employers how they can access WeCare e-learning. This is the shift from pastoral support to employers taking responsibility to invest in their crew."

Once seafarers have completed the course via their on board learning management system, the Mission's global network of chaplains are on hand to offer additional support if needed. Crews therefore have access to a comprehensive support network, with space for discussion both before and after the course.

Michelle sees particular value in helping seafarers work through some of the issues around finances and communication themselves: "It is always better for someone to work through situations and learn how to navigate through them themselves, rather than an outside person coming in and telling them what they should do."

E-learning also puts emphasis on sharing between seafarers, either as a group or at a one-to-one level. As Thomas reflects, "the WeCare e-learning courses are not only about educating and providing support to seafarers, but also creating advocates for WeCare who will share knowledge and learning in social and financial wellbeing. This can in turn help others to feel empowered and able to thrive in their work and relationships." 📌

Verity Relph is a project support officer at The Mission to Seafarers and can be contacted on +44 (0)20 7246 2942 or [Verity.Relph@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:Verity.Relph@missiontoseafarers.org). To access the On Board Mental Health Champions resources, go to YouTube or visit <https://www.missiontoseafarers.org/on-board-champions>. To access e-learning, please speak to a member of your training department, or ask them to contact [jan.webber@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:jan.webber@missiontoseafarers.org).



The Mission's WeCare programme both educates and provides support to seafarers



# A relatable mental health programme

*The Mission's latest WeCare initiative supports seafarers in addressing barriers*

By Pam Kern

**T**he Mission to Seafarers has elevated its wellbeing resources with a series of free webinars and podcasts to address mental health at sea from a practical perspective. This is a seafarer-specific wellbeing programme with a different approach.

As a former seafarer, wife of a seafarer and a mental health professional, I have been responsible for curating the Mission's WeCare On Board Mental Health Champions programme. I am driven by passion to deliver seafarer wellbeing that is real and relatable and to cross over the stigma barrier that comes with speaking about mental health and wellbeing. Information is not always transformational. You can provide all the mental health resources to seafarers, but if you don't address the barriers such as stigma, how can seafarers access the resources without feeling stigmatised?

The programme looks through the lens of mental health and wellbeing as a natural extension of one's overall health and discusses how to overcome the barriers. Stigma can come from culture, what you were taught growing up, or from life experiences. On board, seafarers may experience a work environment where it is the norm to always appear strong. If you come from a culture where mental health is not openly spoken about, that can also be very difficult as you face multiple barriers to talking about how you feel and your wellbeing. The key mantra is: "It is ok not to feel ok and it is ok to ask for help."

I personally undertook many training programmes during my eighteen years at sea that were not maritime specific nor spoke of the unspoken: unpacking the stigma of mental health at sea. Yet there are so many social, emotional, work and home-related issues that directly affect seafarer wellbeing.

## Tailored approach

The WeCare programme brings these issues to the fore from both officers' and crew perspectives, using storytelling that is relatable to seafarers and providing a toolkit of resources specific to the dynamics of life at sea, at home and what's in between.



Former seafarer Pam Kern curated the On Board Mental Health Champions programme

The Crew series looks at wellbeing from a crew perspective. We encourage crew to ask important questions such as 'how do I define wellbeing?' and 'how can I maintain wellbeing at sea?' Through this series we promote practical methods to promote wellbeing from a personal and team perspective.

The Officer series discusses mental health and wellbeing using awareness from a cultural and work environment perspective, signposting how to spot the signs of poor mental with your crew. It examines what it looks like when officers take ownership of crew wellbeing, the benefits of a supportive work culture and the positive ripple effect for the entire crew complement. It's care in action.

Our Podcast series invites experienced seafarers and experts to focus on these key themes. They explore how we can all promote wellbeing and provide support for ourselves and others.

Key benefits of the programme are that it addresses the needs of seafarers based on their feedback and it is curated and delivered by a former seafarer who is also a mental health professional. The resources are filled with short, clear, and fun content, bespoke to life on board. Viewers can share on social media their experiences and thoughts on what was learned from the videos and podcasts to keep the skills alive, allowing them to thrive, not just survive. Check out the series – we look forward to your feedback on Facebook, Twitter or with a MtS Chaplain available through the Mission's live chat 24/7. 📞

*Pam Kern is a psychotherapist focusing on seafarer wellbeing and ex-seafarer who worked at sea for 18 years. To access the On Board Mental Health Champions resources, go to YouTube or visit <https://www.missiontoseafarers.org/on-board-champions>.*

*“Even among sections of the shipping industry, there seems to be an almost wilful blindness to the stresses under which seafarers live and work and the traumas they suffer when things go wrong”*



By Captain Terry Ogg

## When things go wrong at sea

*A trauma-informed approach to dealing with the aftermath of critical incidents at sea*

There is a saying that is sometimes used by English-speaking land-dwellers: “Worse things happen at sea.” They will usually say this phrase in response to some minor complaint or inconvenience.

The phrase originated in the early 19th century at a time when the population of so-called ‘seafaring nations’ still had an appreciation of the risks and dangers associated with seafaring. Given that land-dwellers had the upheavals of the industrial revolution to contend with around that time, it is remarkable that seafaring was nevertheless perceived to be the benchmark for disasters and tragedies.

These days, “worse things happen at sea” seems to have lost all connection with its original meaning and usage, which is likely a reflection of the way in which the public are largely ignorant of what modern seafaring entails. Even among sections of the shipping industry, there seems to be an almost wilful blindness to the stresses under which seafarers live and work and the traumas they suffer when things go wrong.

In addition to the constant attritional or chronic stresses they face – now hugely exacerbated by the disgraceful treatment of seafarers as a result of the

Covid-19 pandemic – they may also suffer peak or acute stress and trauma due to critical incidents such as piracy, abandonment, detention, criminalisation, and marine casualties. Front line organisations like The Mission to Seafarers deal with situations like these on a daily basis and are all-too-familiar with their effects on crew wellbeing and mental health. In turn, port chaplains and their colleagues can suffer vicariously through the relentless and cumulative effects of dealing with these critical incidents.

### Dealing with trauma

When things do go wrong, and result in a marine casualty, the seafarers involved may be both victim and first responder. They may then be required to deal with the aftermath, which can be just as stressful and traumatic as the casualty event itself. This layering of stress and trauma can be very harmful and if not identified and alleviated can result in distress and disruption and lasting personal problems over the longer term.

After 16 years at sea, I have worked as a marine investigator for over 30 years. I have probably investigated every kind of marine casualty on every

type of vessel, carrying every type of cargo. One thing that does not change is the crew. They may come from different countries and backgrounds, they may speak different languages, they may be different ages and genders, but they are all human beings with their individual experiences.

A large part of my work requires me to interview seafarers very soon after a casualty and to get them to tell me about their experiences, at a time and place not of their choosing, when they may not have had an opportunity to pause and process their thoughts, when they are concerned about colleagues and family, about losing their job, about being detained ashore by the authorities, about losing their ‘ticket’, in combination with all the other stress-creating worries that combine to sweep over them like a wave.

Over the years I have often wondered whether I have harmed crew members by not adequately addressing their wellbeing during the interview process. Many times, I have seen people in various degrees of stress and anguish and often felt I did not have the tools to prevent or alleviate it. Compassion and empathy are good building blocks, but they can only go so far.



## Removing stress

One aspect of stress that is not widely discussed, although it is well-understood by research and clinical psychologists, is the effect of stress on cognitive performance. Among other things, high stress levels during interview (which could have several different sources) can result in impaired memory recall in the interviewee. If the aim of the interview is to obtain complete, accurate and reliable information based on witness recollections, surely it is in both the interviewer's and interviewee's interests that, so far as possible, stress is removed from the process?

I recognised some time ago that I needed a holistic approach that put the wellbeing of the interviewee more to the fore. It was not until January 2020, when I teamed up with Dr Rachel Glynn-Williams, a clinical psychologist specialising in seafarer wellbeing and mental health, that I found what – and who – I was looking for. Dr Glynn-Williams introduced me to the concept of trauma-informed interviewing and this led us jointly to develop a new interview model for use in marine casualties that we call TIMS, which stands for Trauma-informed Interviewing in a Marine Setting. All marine casualty investigations seek to answer the central question, 'what happened?' but TIMS also addresses the witness's experience directly by asking 'what happened to you?'

The trauma-informed practice Dr Glynn-Williams and I have established acknowledges human responses to stress

## Seafarer demand outstrips supply

The joint BIMCO and International Chamber of Shipping Seafarer Workforce Report has warned that low training and recruitment levels could lead to a "serious shortage in the total supply of officers by 2026".

Looking at the expected growth in demand for STCW certified officers, the report predicts that there will be a need for an additional 89,510 officers by 2026 to operate the world merchant fleet. Currently, 1.89 million seafarers are estimated to be serving in the world merchant fleet, operating over 74,000 vessels around the globe.

The report also notes there is a current shortfall of STCW certified officers, calculated at 26,240, which it says is an indication that demand for seafarers in 2021 has outpaced supply. And while there has been a 10.8% increase in the supply of officers since 2015, the report puts this down to a reported increase in officers needed on board vessels, with an average of 1.4 officers required per berth.

Some officer categories are in especially short supply, particularly those

with technical experience at Management Level, while in the tanker and offshore sectors there is a reported shortage of Management Level Deck Officers.

But there is one positive highlighted: "The good news is that in the past five years the industry has made good progress in reducing officer turnover rates from 8% to 6%, retaining qualified seafarers and increasing the number of years that they serve at sea."

In an analysis of diversity within the seafarer workforce, the report found a positive trend in gender balance, with an estimated 24,059 women serving as seafarers, a percentage increase of 45.8% compared with the 2015 report. "The percentage of female STCW certified seafarers is estimated to be 1.28% of the global seafarer workforce and it appears that there has been a significant rise in the number of female STCW certified ratings compared to STCW certified female officers, with female ratings found predominantly in the cruise ship and passenger ferry sectors," said the report.

and trauma and minimises the risk of further harm in the interview process, which in turn sits within a broader Crew Wellbeing Continuum through which we can prepare, support and guide organisations and crews through responding to and recovering effectively from an incident at sea. 📞

*Captain Terry Ogg is a marine investigator at Recall Recover Limited. Terry and Rachel's services have been supported and taken up by QWEST, a joint venture between WEST P&I Club and C Solutions Limited, in its Crew Care offering. For more information, please visit [www.recallrecover.com](http://www.recallrecover.com).*

Captain Terry Ogg and Dr Rachel Glynn-Williams have created a trauma-informed practice



# Finding a place for females at sea

*The IWSF aims to improve the conditions for women seafarers worldwide*

By Carly Fields

**F**ounded by three pioneering women seafarers of India in 2017, the International Women Seafarers Foundation (IWSF) works enthusiastically for the benefit of the female seafaring community around the world, with an overarching goal of gender equality in the maritime profession.

Over the past four years the Foundation has partnered with administrators, maritime unions, ship owners, ship managers and several maritime representative bodies to provide training, education, guidance, mentoring, policy and execution support at various levels. With close to 500, and rising, women seafarer members, the IWSF is relentless in pursuit of its aims.

Co-founders Capt Radhika Menon, chief engineer Suneeti Bala and engineer Sharvani Mishra speak with *The Sea* about their ambitions for the future.

***The Sea: Why is there a need for an organisation to represent female seafarers?***

**IWSF:** “The percentage of women in seafaring is below 1% worldwide, which is much lower than several other shore-based industries. This is despite years of good efforts and intentions by governments and the shipping community. Because of this low percentage, the acceptance of the handful of women seafarers currently serving on ships is difficult and they are never given fair treatment on board. Women seafarers become the victim of social biases and harassment (including sexual harassment) on board. Due to a lack of experience within the crewing, ship management, chartering and owning industries, on board issues are rarely properly addressed. In most cases, the companies end up getting discouraged and choose not to hire women seafarers. The IWSF was created to bridge the gender, knowledge and training gaps among companies and seafarers with the



IWSF would like to see gender parity in shipping

aim of increasing the number of women seafarers and eventually bringing about gender parity.”

***The Sea: What can female seafarers do to improve acceptance of them on board and ashore?***

**IWSF:** “Just as every profession has its own set of challenges, so too does the maritime industry. As it has been an overwhelmingly male-dominated industry for many years, it presents some unique and unusual challenges for women seafarers. The entrance of women into the seafaring trade is a small, but growing phenomenon which we support.

***The Sea: What can companies do to help remove bias, and change perceptions and behaviours?***

**IWSF:** “Companies should take a systematic approach to address this. This includes:

1) Training: adequate gender sensitisation training should be provided to all seafarers (including women seafarers) and shore personnel about dos and don'ts, and codes of conduct when working on board.

2) Policy: stringent policies on a company's outlook and behavioural expectation on board should be established and all employees, including seafarers, should be apprised of the consequences of deviating from such policies.

3) Shore guidance: since the industry lacks experience in handling social issues involving women seafarers, we invite companies to partner with IWSF to ensure that the women they employ on board always have the right guidance for social situations.

*“As it has been an overwhelmingly male-dominated industry for many years, shipping presents some unique and unusual challenges for women seafarers”*



Government and industry commitment to increase the hiring of women seafarers will, to a great extent, help ease the social gaps on board.”

*The Sea: What should regulators be doing to achieve the same?*

IWSF: “Regulators need to come out with mandatory policies that companies should follow to ensure a fair working environment for women seafarers. For example, sexual harassment is a common reality for many women at sea. This can range from persistent verbal harassment and inappropriate comments to physical assault. However, cruise sector companies that have established high-profile sexual harassment policies seem to have been able to reduce the number of incidents of harassment and have encouraged women to seek company support in such situations. But there seems to be less attention paid to these matters in the cargo sector. With regards to other issues, such as maternity benefits and the availability of certain products required by women on board, it seems we have a long way to go. The IWSF has worked extensively with the Indian Government to come up with guidelines for companies for hiring women seafarers which was published as DG notice 7 of 2019. We still have several works in progress and need international support to enable us to achieve progress at a fast pace.”

*The Sea: Do you think that the outlook for female seafarers has changed since you were established and if so, how?*

IWSF: “Since the establishment of IWSF in India, we have seen tremendous improvement in the comfort levels of Indian companies when it comes to hiring women seafarers. In the past four years, we have seen a mindset change in companies like Synergy Maritime, Scorpio, Maersk, Fleet Management, MMSI and several others. We now see a lot more demand for women seafarers than before. So yes, we do believe the outlook is changing, although it could have been faster. IWSF partners with administrators, maritime unions, ship owners, ship managers, and several maritime representative bodies to improve hiring of women seafarers and to ensure a reduction of gaps in social understanding. We also provide



Women face unique challenges on board

mentoring and webinar sessions to our members to improve their behaviour at work and conduct conferences to create an interactive platform for women seafarers and shipping companies. All these efforts have paid off, but we will travel further if more organisations join with us.”

*The Sea: How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted female seafarers and does that differ from the impacts on male seafarers?*

IWSF: “The pandemic has affected both male and female seafarers equally. The short supply of vaccines, missed ship embarkations, overstays due to travel restrictions, and a lack of empathy from owners and charterers has affected the entire seafaring community. Women seafarers were no exception. We know some seafarers who have had to stay longer than eight months on board.”

*The Sea: What practical advice would you give to female seafarers currently at sea that are facing challenges?*

IWSF: “It is important to know your work well, and to know your strengths and weaknesses to succeed in any kind of working environment. For those on board facing tough situations – sometimes so hard that they actually quit at the end of it – I advise them to have patience and have faith in their abilities. Always do your work sincerely

and dedicate time for more study. On board is not usually a social place, it is a workplace, so respect this environment. Also, never mix personal pleasures with work and stay focused. And if you ever need help, we are just a call or a WhatsApp away.”

*The Sea: If seafarers reading this, male or female, would like to help the IWSF in its aims, what can they do?*

IWSF: “To all seafarers who wish to help us, please have an open mind and accept and respect female colleagues. Treat them equally on board – you can inspire your co-workers to cast off a gender bias mindset. If you can instil a work/social culture on board that is inclusive for all genders, you can drive this forward and be the harbinger of change when you shift to a role ashore, bringing in the best practices, the work culture, and the right training and policies that will encourage a gender-neutral seafaring world.”

*The IWSF is currently working on improving its global network and intends to represent the voice of women seafarers at government – and IMO – level. It plans to drive favourable policies for women seafarers of any rank. To connect with IWSF or to join its ranks follow it on social media: [www.facebook.com/iwsfmumbai](http://www.facebook.com/iwsfmumbai); [www.linkedin.com/in/international-women-seafarer-foundation-414740150/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/international-women-seafarer-foundation-414740150/); [twitter.com/iwsfladyatsea](https://twitter.com/iwsfladyatsea).*

*"It might be suggested that the minimum standards of accommodation are already prescribed by the Maritime Labour Convention, but maybe the word 'minimum' has been interpreted rather widely"*



## Where you live and work matters

*Ship designers need to 'live' the space they are proposing for seafarers*

By Michael Grey

**A**t a time when seafarers are often trapped aboard their ships for months on end, with no shore leave and tours extended by Covid-19 regulations, living conditions matter more than ever. Even before the pandemic struck, the standard of accommodation aboard ships emerging from the shipyards was a cause for criticism. Indeed, a study by The Mission to Seafarers some time ago described too much of ships' accommodation as "institutional" and called for more imagination in its "liveability". Those seafarers who had been at sea for some years were reported as noting that the standards were clearly falling.

Are things getting any better, at a time when on-board standards arguably matter more than ever? Some interesting work by the Seafarers International Research Centre at Cardiff University sadly suggests that more thought in the design of accommodation for seafarers aboard cargo ships is necessary.

The work was completed before the pandemic struck but the research, which was financed by Lloyd's Register Foundation, has now been revealed in the shape of a leaflet that provides clear examples of poor (or better described as thoughtless) design in both the furnishing of accommodation and other important matters such as temperature, vibration and noise and the provision of leisure equipment.

It might be suggested that the minimum standards of accommodation are already prescribed by the Maritime Labour Convention, but maybe the word 'minimum' has been interpreted rather widely! Some of the issues, which have been raised by very many seafarers during the research, which took the researchers to ships and shipyards around the world, are not terribly difficult to address, with some goodwill and forethought.

Cabins, for instance, were often provided with inadequate storage space, which is an important criticism, as seafarers, who tend to join and leave their ships by air, do not tend to be burdened with a great deal of 'stuff'. The research points out that cramped and cluttered spaces impacts on wellbeing and may contribute to poor mental health.

### Heat and light

A further well-documented complaint suggests that there is often insufficient control of light and temperature in cabins, with the latter often centrally controlled so that the individual has little choice. And bearing in mind that the modern seafarer tends to spend more time in the cabin than did their predecessors, this too is more important than ever. Others have noted that modern cargo ships often have little recreational space in the fresh air around their accommodation blocks, and may be poorly supplied with recreational rooms, so cabins really matter.

Indeed, the research comments adversely on the lack of dedicated provision for recreation and suggests that a range of facilities could be provided that would make life at sea rather more pleasant. Based on what is provided on some very well fitted ships, it is suggested that such facilities as an indoor swimming pool, basketball or squash court, and a well-ventilated gymnasium, would make a really positive difference. A decent sized lounge, equipped with satellite TV would also make life better, as would cabins with unrestricted access to the internet. If such facilities could be included in the initial specification there is no doubt that the cost would not be unreasonable.

It is also pointed out that noise and vibration methods have improved markedly in recent years, thanks to advances in the cruise ship world, so there is no technical reason why similar standards should not be provided for those who live aboard deep-sea cargo vessels.

But above all, this useful research actually demonstrates how putting the designer in the place of the person who will live in the accommodation can make a difference. If you have natural light (and blackout blinds to aid sleep during daytime) and if you have a pleasant, well-appointed cabin with sufficient furniture for comfort, this goes a long way to promoting mental wellbeing. ☺



# Stark reality of crew change crisis

*Happiness levels down across the board*

Every quarter the results of the Seafarers' Happiness Index (SHI) are compiled. Throughout the past 18 months the responses have held up surprisingly well. However, in the second quarter of 2021, the impact of issues such as travel bans and challenges of crew changes began to be acutely felt.

Where in the past we had seen optimism and hope, suddenly we saw a significant drop in satisfaction levels across all categories. In the latest reporting period, the average happiness levels of seafarers dropped to 5.99/10, a steep drop from 6.46 in quarter 1.

As the happiness levels tumble we have heard from seafarers who talk of losing faith and for whom optimism is evaporating. While the first and second Covid-19 waves impacted seafarers hard, there are signs the latest waves could be even worse.

There are clear indications of issues relating to crew travel and uncertainty over leave, while an almost complete ban on shore leave is taking its toll. Even areas that usually hold up well – such as interactions on board – are struggling, and responses from seafarers paint a picture of stress, fatigue and frustration.

There is a growing sense of weariness at sea, as ships are working ever harder to deliver on the demands of trade. In the latest SHI we were told by seafarers that they are feeling constant stress and pressure. One seafarer stated: “It would be bad enough to be working for longer, but we seem to be working harder too.”

In addition, there is growing resentment that the demands on crews are constantly rising. Working days feel inexorably stretched, not just in time, but also in what is being asked of them. One respondent said: “We have broken sleep, broken systems, and people feeling broken too.” Another added: “Who can be happy with high stress, overtime, constant papers and regulations?”

## Frustration with onshore

The impact of Covid-19 on workloads is still being felt, and seafarers are wrestling with hygiene demands and pandemic-related requirements. The amount of administrative work is also rising as office staff increasingly demand information. One respondent stated: “The office, they want to know



Fatigue is just one factor affecting seafarers' happiness levels

everything, but they already have the information. So, we get asked many times for the same things.”

Seafarers also raised concerns about the checks on working hours. Port and flag State inspectors were said to be checking crew records, but not cross-referencing with ship logs. Another issue was of the physical impact of not getting ashore. Seafarers reported a desire for “intimacy” and there is a definite sense that physical tensions are being played out on board through growing anxiety, stress and frustration.

There were other tension points noted too, including a worrying sense that the different national approaches to dealing with Covid-19 is having an impact on vessels with mixed crews. This is leading to resentment along nationality lines.

The signs of a depressed, stressed, fed-up and frustrated workforce are evidenced in the responses. Across several years in compiling this data there has never been such a sense of growing despair and anger. Usually there are some bright spots to soften the blow

in other areas, but this time with all categories falling it seems that extended periods on board and relentless daily demands are having a negative impact.

Crews spoke of a sense of disconnection, of being sick of their meals, fed up with the gym, tired of the same company, and missing the people ashore. The message is of a pressing need to make life better at sea as patience is running out. ☹

Steven Jones is the founder of the Seafarers' Happiness Index, in association with the Wallem Group and the Standard Club in 2021. The 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 wellbeing, to working life and family contact. If you would like more information, to see the data or read more in-depth reports, visit [www.happyatsea.org](http://www.happyatsea.org) for access to the latest results and to have your say.

# 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

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

### TRICKY LEVEL

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

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

### EASY LEVEL

solution (Issue 2 2021)

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

### TRICKY LEVEL

solution (Issue 2 2021)

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

## Jumble

Can you correctly unscramble these anagrams to form four words? If so, send your answers by email to [thesea@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:thesea@missiontoseafarers.org) by January 30, 2022. 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..."

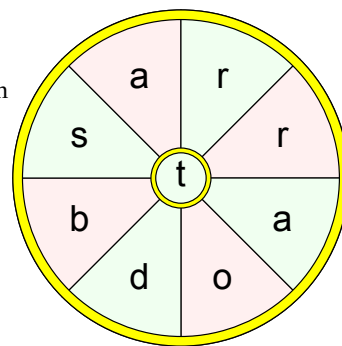
1) Aknert 2) Kulb 3) Clevistko 4) Celeshiv

Issue 2, 2021 solutions:

1) Cyber 2) Phishing 3) Hacker 4) Malware

## 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.



Answer for Issue 2, 2021 issue:

54 possible words, eight letter word was Autonomy

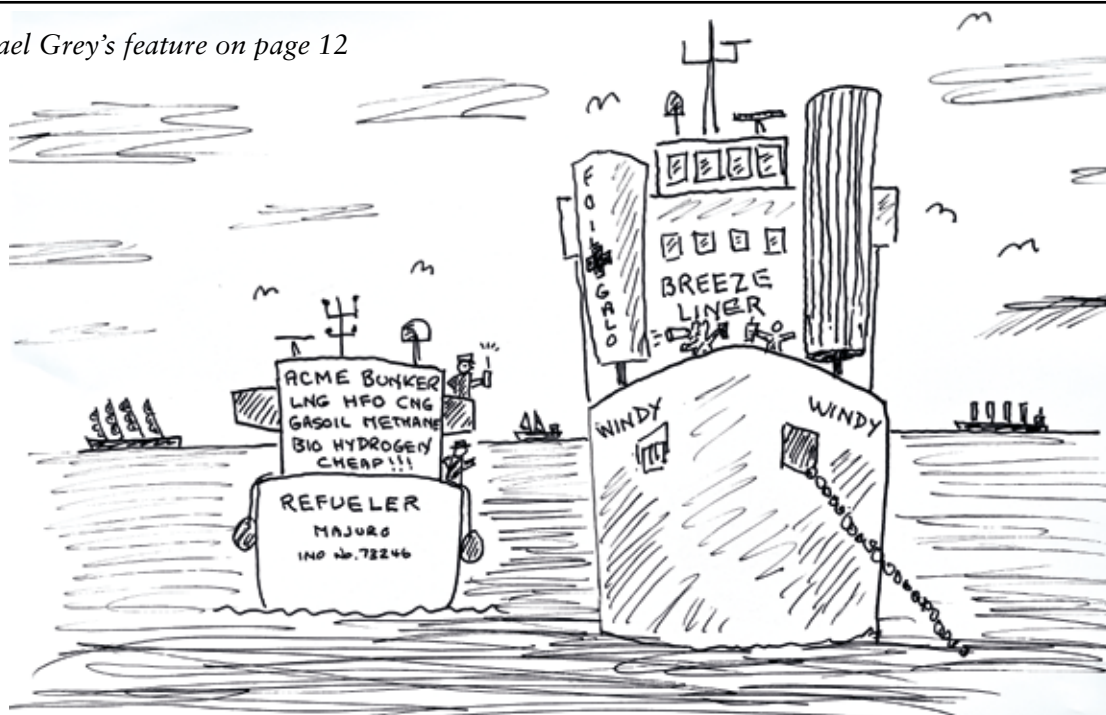
## Flag code

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

Answer for Issue 2, 2021: Hydrogen



See Michael Grey's feature on page 12



No fuel today, but have you a sailmaker we could borrow?



# 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](http://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](mailto:help@seafarerhelp.org)

### Chat to a Chaplain

You can now connect instantly with a chaplain via our new 24hr chat service. Whatever you want to talk about, simply go to our website and click 'Chat' in the bottom right corner of the screen:

[www.missiontoseafarers.org/](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org/)

### 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](mailto: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](mailto:thesea@missiontoseafarers.org).

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UKP&I

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*Now is the time for collective action*



Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent, such as this waterspout off the coast of Malapascua, Philippines

*The Revd Canon Andrew Wright  
is secretary general of The Mission to  
Seafarers.*

*In Jesus' name. Amen.*