Henry the Fish: An Analogy

Setting: A dirty fish tank
Character Name: Henry *(they/them)*

Henry is a healthy fish. Henry uses they/them pronouns.

They take good care of themselves, manage stress, and help other fish when they need support.

Let's look at Henry's tank. It's murky, the temperature keeps changing, and there are too many things in the water that shouldn't be there.

The filter keeps clogging. It isn't cleaned often enough, and sometimes the chemical mix isn't right.

Safety is the foundation for health and in an environment that feels unsafe and isn't as healthy as it could be, Henry's individual coping skills can only go so far.

When one challenge is resolved, others are not fixed.

While Henry does have strong coping skills, and supports their team, it is difficult to thrive in an unsafe tank. And Henry can't clean the tank by themselves. This is a system problem and the longer it stays unsafe the greater the risks to all the fish.

In healthcare, providing workers with individual level supports can help them with managing stress.

Examples of individual level supports may include:
Training, peer support, and access to the Employee and Family Assistance Program.

These supports and skills are important but will only go so far in protecting workers from psychosocial hazards that may exist in the workplace.

That's where Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees – JOHSCs – come in.

JOHSCs look at the whole system, not just individual workers. They focus on how to clean the tank.

They are the health and safety eyes and ears of an organization, with both worker and employer representatives.

Together they identify hazards, including psychosocial hazards, consider risks, and make recommendations to the employer to improve workplace conditions.

Employers and leaders can act on those system recommendations to make the environment psychologically healthy and safe.

When workers, employers, and JOHSCs work together, they are cleaning the tank.

A clean tank helps everyone thrive—just like a safe and healthy workplace.

[Henry's story is shared and adapted with permission from Opening Minds.]