

Mindfulness

November 2020



Introduction:

This report is based on the experiences and knowledge of colleagues in nine third sector organisations in Leeds, including Time to Shine projects. Their experience of using mindfulness was mixed - some people use it personally and professionally, others hadn't used it before - but the majority were interested in incorporating some elements of mindfulness into their work in order to support staff, volunteers and participants.

What is mindfulness?

[The NHS website](#) has a clear, easy to understand explanation of mindfulness and the benefits it brings. In essence, it is about paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you. [MindWell](#) also has a section on mindfulness and some exercises to try.

Colleagues felt that the profile of mindfulness had increased during the pandemic as people recognised the need to protect their own mental health during such challenging times. The overlap between mindfulness, meditation and positive thinking was acknowledged. One person said that they find it really difficult to 'switch off' whilst working from home, and thought that mindfulness activity could help. Another person shared that using a short mindfulness exercise as an icebreaker at the start of a training session had a really positive impact on the dynamics of the group.

Ways to incorporate mindfulness into project delivery:

Colleagues shared a range of ideas, including:

- Running a 6-week course of Lifespa mindfulness sessions over Zoom and offering tactile creative tasks (such as whittling wood) which require care and concentration (The Great Outdoors)
- Taking part in a 'photography of mindfulness' event (Float Your Boat)
- Incorporating it into socials or 'check in and chat' Zoom meetings (People In Action and Sage)
- Leading relaxation sessions over Zoom (Sunshine in Leeds)
- Using cards containing positive or mindful messages as a pick-me-up or sharing inspirational quotes in WhatsApp groups and inviting comment (Sporting Memories)
- Sharing a [happiness calendar](#) or poem in weekly 'Friday wellbeing' emails (Forum Central)

Taking the first step:

Some colleagues said that they feel daunted by the prospect of introducing mindfulness to others, particularly if they are not very familiar with it themselves, and worry that some will think it a silly idea.

One way is to introduce it in a lighthearted way “ trust me for 5 minutes of your life, and if the mindfulness exercise is a disaster, it’s only 5 minutes”. Another way is to look into the science behind mindfulness to appeal to people who look for evidence before taking part. The Headspace app has a section on [the science-backed benefits of meditation](#) and the [research findings](#). Different people relate to different things so having a broad understanding of the approach helps to reach more people.

All agreed that having personal experience of using mindfulness techniques makes it much easier to ‘sell’ the approach to other people. In the new year Time to Shine will arrange a Zoom mindfulness session in which attendees can take part and experience the benefits for themselves. In the meantime, Leeds Mindfulness Co-op has [free guided meditation and nature connection recordings](#) available for you to practice whenever you wish.

A case study from Canal Connections:

The organisation is linked into [Beyond Measure](#) , a programme of digital engagement exploring research and evidence in culture and health. A recent activity brief was to take photographs by the waterside, focusing observation on colour and texture. One person said they took 2 hours to walk 20 meters because they were looking at things in so much detail. They learned to look at the environment in a different way and to slow down. Personal invites encouraged others to take part and one teenage participant appreciated being asked to take part in a specific task. He took really well to the mindful element of this photography but wouldn’t have thought to go out and do this on his own.

Links and resources recommended by colleagues during the Time to Learn session:

- [MindWell](#) - mindfulness resources
- [Leeds Mindfulness Cooperative](#) - has a website and is also on facebook
- [Headspace](#) - a good introduction to mindfulness
- [Tara Brach](#) - free guided meditations of varying lengths
- [Insight Timer](#) - free guided meditations for sleep, anxiety and stress
- [Calm](#) - a paid for app which offers a 7-day free trial
- [Deepack Chopra](#) - 21 day meditation experience
- [Spirit Junkie by Gabrielle Bernstein](#) - well-designed card decks containing inspirational messages
- [Jennifer Piercy at the Yoga Nidra network](#) - a good introduction to guided meditation to aid sleep
- [Blurt](#) - increasing awareness and understanding of depression

