

DH NW and NHS NW Mindfulness and Work Preparedness Pilot

Wendy: It's helping me slow down my thinking and grounding me. It's enhanced my recovery by taking away a lot of anxieties; with breathing spaces I can bring myself back into the moment, really helping with the "racing head".

Introduction and Policy Context:

This programme, brokered and commissioned both by DH NW and NW NHS, written by both and funded under PSA16 (supporting vulnerable and socially excluded adults), has applied mindfulness approaches within a mixed group drawn mainly from the Recovery community (former drug and alcohol users) as well as from the BME asylum seeker and carer communities. Going beyond the initial NICE recommendation of mindfulness approaches for depression management, this programme seeks to explore the benefits of mindfulness for vulnerable individuals facing a broad range of life challenges. In the context of the current emphasis on Health and Worklessness, the programme was designed to support the health and well-being of individuals currently outside the labour market, and to assist a sustainable and appropriate move towards training and employment, with all the social and mental health benefits this has been shown to provide. This also supports the government's renewed drug policy emphasis (Drugs Strategy 2010 – supporting people to live a drug free life), in which the priority is to move from treatment to supporting full recovery.

Project Objectives:

The programme was designed to provide bespoke Mindfulness Training for individuals otherwise unlikely to access these resources, in order to support well-being and movement towards social engagement through volunteering, training and employment. The programme was developed in relation to the principles of Empowerment, Dignity and Respect. "No decision about me without me" and the recovery champion principle that 'Transformed People can help Transform People'. Hence a strong emphasis was placed upon pre-established trust relationships in the third or public sector and nurturing community support networks. Key community workers themselves participated fully in the programme alongside participants, and provided support groups between sessions. The programme is being followed up with a series of brokering approaches, connecting participants with benefit and employment advice and support networks etc, as well as personal "mindfulness buddies". The programme has a focus on supporting continued recovery, and spreading "Recovery Contagion", and hence is hoped to lead on to mindfulness teacher training for some participants.

Programme Outline:

Participants, selected by community support workers as ready and able to engage with and benefit from the programme, took part in a full Breathworks mindfulness programme over 4 fortnightly day-long sessions, with local community support groups in between to keep momentum, address challenges and gather development suggestions. The programme was a Breathworks Mindfulness for Stress course (itself a development of the 8 week MBSR programme), developed by Breathworks and incorporating elements of compassion meditation. The course was followed by

- a "Next Steps to Employment" session, with supported employment and benefit experts helping inform and guide a focus on effective personal action planning.
- a Celebration Day sharing initial outcomes, with participants stories and certificates presented by the Regional Director of Public Health.

Blue (week 6): I notice a lot more things, mindfully walking through Manchester. I'm a lot calmer and can deal with things a lot better, accepting and releasing, I'm sleeping a lot better, I definitely think it helps with my continued recovery.

Evaluation and Governance:

Programme delivery was supported by distinct Steering and Advisory groups, which included NHS, third sector and academic expertise as well as "experts by experience" from the recovery community. Clinical and risk governance protocol was developed with the regional psychological governance NHS lead. The primary evaluative tools used before and after programme were the Recovery Star and the 5 facets of mindfulness questionnaire. Evaluation is being overseen by Prof Chris Fox from the Policy and Evaluation Research Unit at MMU, and is due for completion during summer 2011. Community members were also trained to conduct interviews with participants in tune with the empowerment approach of the pilot.

Co-Development:

An additional innovative and empowering aspect of the pilot has been the encouragement of "co-development" participation. Feedback has been gathered by course participants using audio-visual equipment. Mindfulness meditation CDs are to be recorded in local regional accents and translated into a participants' community language (Farsi). There has been debate around cultural congruence and links made with international research teams on the "cultural universality" of mindfulness to inform future provision. A community-led Mindfulness blog has been popular on a recovery web forum, encouraging debate, ownership and promotion. Real time feedback has supported ongoing adjustment and improvement of provision. Input has been invited for the co- production and co-presentation of this poster at the National Mindfulness Conference in Bangor.

Next Steps:

Participants are being linked up with 1-2-1 public sector "Mindful Buddies" within NHS NW to support practice and offer further career support and linkage with "the world of employment". Local Support groups are continuing to be fostered, aided by a planned follow-on event. Proposals are in development for some participants to commence further training, initially to assist and support local community Mindfulness programmes, with a view to some going on to become full mindfulness trainers.

Anthony (week 3): I've been paying a lot more attention to my surroundings. Taking time out and relaxing is going to benefit you.

Brenda (week 4): It's made me appreciate all the things around me, you do run on autopilot. I feel a lot calmer and feelings in my body that I've never felt. I heard the rain bouncing off things, the magpies, the kids, it was really nice. I'm someone that takes on lots of things then starts thinking "you can't do all this", rushing around trying to make everyone else happy. It's enabling me to appreciate actual surroundings and myself. It's like a new door opening, it makes me feel dead at ease. Walking down the street I'm not rushing.

Dave: I think it's absolutely wonderful, superb, I do it every day, it makes you feel so good, fresh and alert. It takes a lot of aggression out of me and calms me very much. It's so simple, but if you don't know it it's a million miles away. You can go to pain and make it feel totally different from what it did before the body scan. It is a different part of recovery, something you control in yourself, I think I'll be doing this for the rest of my life. It makes you feel so good, and it's not hard to get to grips with it. The exercise takes some of the anxiety away from me. Looking at things and doing something about them rather than getting rid of them.