

# Recipient of the Workforce Development Innovation Fund 2016/17



## Independent Lives

# Mindfulness in social care

It is well recognised that social care work can be emotionally demanding. Those working in social care often need extra support to ensure they are taking care of their own mental health and wellbeing.

Mindfulness; the practice of paying attention to the present moment, is increasingly being recognised as a valuable tool for improving the wellbeing of those working in stressful roles. In this project, the charity Independent Lives aimed to introduce mindfulness practices to reduce stress and improve wellbeing for its care workers.

## Introduction

Based in West Sussex, Independent Lives is a user-led charity working with disabled people, people who need care and support, and carers.

The charity helps people lead full, active and independent lives, providing a range of services from direct payment support to personalised home-based care. The charity also engages with disabled people living in the local community through user-led support and action groups. The organisation employs around 100 staff in various health and social care roles including advice, support and domiciliary care.

Independent Lives recognised its care workers often faced stressful situations through their daily work and wanted to help improve their wellbeing while providing a positive impact for customers. They chose to use established and tested mindfulness techniques to achieve this.

An ancient practice, mindfulness is well regarded for its health benefits – particularly in helping people deal with stressful situations while improving their mental wellbeing. Using techniques similar to meditation, mindfulness helps people become more aware of their

surroundings so they can remain calm and relaxed, even in difficult situations. It's a practice that can be used almost anywhere, at any time, and its benefits can be felt in just a couple of minutes; making it a great technique for busy care workers.

## What we wanted to achieve

Through this project, Independent Lives wanted to offer all its care workers an introduction to mindfulness with the opportunity to then undertake a more in-depth eight-week course. The aim was to equip care workers with a range of practical techniques to help them manage their feelings in stressful situations while supporting their overall wellbeing.

By launching a pilot project, the team also hoped to understand how mindfulness could be used on a bigger scale in the future.

## What we did

Before the launch of the pilot project, the team researched the principles of good practice in mindfulness teaching. This was to ensure the techniques were introduced in a safe and effective way.

Independent Lives also worked with an experienced mindfulness teacher, Susan Kelly; founder and director of Grow Mindfulness CIC. As an experienced social worker, Susan understood the pressures facing care workers and the benefits mindfulness can offer them.

All care support workers were given the opportunity to attend the Introduction to Mindfulness taster session, to find out more about the subject and how it could support their wellbeing. This provided the opportunity for care workers to discover more about mindfulness before committing to the longer course.

10 team members then attended the eight-week mindfulness course which ran weekly for two hours. All attendees completed a full screening and registration process to ensure the practice was safe for them to attend in terms of health and wellbeing.

Working with an independent HR manager, Independent Lives created staff surveys to measure and monitor the impact of the mindfulness training. These included separate surveys for those completing the introductory course and those taking the eight-week course. By conducting surveys both before and after the courses, the team was able to monitor the effectiveness of the training.



Really enjoyed the course. It has changed aspects of my life already. It has enabled me to want to be myself and look at issues that arise rather than ignoring them, thank you.

Training course participant

## What we achieved

19 care workers attended the Introduction to Mindfulness sessions, following which 10 went on to undertake the eight-week course. Feedback from the course has been positive. The surveys have provided valuable evidence supporting its value with many care workers reporting that they feel calmer, more confident, more relaxed and better able to deal with stress in their role.

Here are just some of the findings from the 8-week mindfulness course attendees:

- 89% said they will keep up the practice
- 89% said they feel they have benefitted in their personal life
- 77% of attendees could see the benefit of mindful practice
- 50% said they were curious to investigate mindfulness further
- 54% said they would read a book on mindfulness
- 54% said they would like to attend a course to further their understanding in mindfulness
- When asked, on a scale of 1 – 10 (10 being most helpful), “How helpful has the 8-week course been to enable you to manage stress at work?”, all attendees gave a score of ‘7 and above’, which indicates the course has been helpful in its aim to support staff wellness.

Following the mindfulness project, Independent Lives has developed an information sheet about mindfulness for its customers, staff, and other organisations.

## What we learnt

One key finding from this project is that mindfulness isn't for everyone. There were mixed feelings amongst staff, with some reluctant to try the practice. A strict screening and registration process was required before joining the course and this may have discouraged some potential attendees from taking part.

The team also learnt that mindfulness involves more than simply attending a course. The techniques only work if participants commit to putting what they have learnt into practice. Buy-in is therefore needed from the participants for the project to be successful. However, when attendees do engage with the techniques, the benefits can be seen throughout every aspect of their lives. This can be a powerful incentive to encourage care workers to try mindfulness techniques as it is a practice that offers benefits both in their professional and personal lives.

The project team felt the introduction to mindfulness may have been too brief to provide a full understanding of the benefits of the practice. A longer session, giving participants the opportunity to practice and ask questions might have been more beneficial, potentially resulting in more care workers undertaking the full 8-week course.

## For more information please visit:

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

**Project leads:** Sue Caslake  
Workforce Development Officer  
[sue.caslake@independentlives.org](mailto:sue.caslake@independentlives.org)

## Skills for Care recommends

Skills for Care produces a wide range of products and services related to the wellbeing of your staff.

### Resilience

Building the resilience of your staff will help them cope better under pressure and protect them from mental and physical ill health.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resilience](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resilience)

### People performance management toolkit

This toolkit can help you manage the performance of people in your team.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/ppmt](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/ppmt)

### Managing people

We have a variety of resources to help registered managers get the best out of their staff.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/managementtools](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/managementtools)

Skills for Care  
West Gate  
6 Grace Street  
Leeds  
LS1 2RP  
telephone 0113 245 1716  
email [info@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:info@skillsforcare.org.uk)  
web [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

[@skillsforcare](https://twitter.com/skillsforcare) 

[www.facebook.com/skillsforcare](https://www.facebook.com/skillsforcare) 

[www.youtube.com/skillsforcare](https://www.youtube.com/skillsforcare) 

[www.linkedin.com/company/skills-for-care](https://www.linkedin.com/company/skills-for-care) 

