



## *SUSSEX MINDFULNESS CENTRE NEWSLETTER*

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*Interview with Carolyn Pollak, Mindfulness Practitioner for Health in Mind (HiM)*

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***As an experienced MBCT Practitioner for Health in Mind, could you tell us more about your job?***

I have been co-facilitating MBCT groups with Lynn Ley (lead for MBCT with HiM) for nearly 6 years. I also co-facilitate mindfulness drop-ins at the Sussex Education Centre and in the past I have facilitated mindfulness drop-ins on the wards at Mill View Hospital. My training is in Art Psychotherapy and I have 30 years' experience working in adult mental health. For this I facilitated psycho-educational groups, therapeutic art groups and introductions to meditation.

***What do you think participants find most useful about your Mindfulness groups?***

Participants feedback a whole range of helpful aspects about their experiences with the MBCT course including becoming aware of how much time is spent on 'automatic pilot' and consequently missing much of the richness of life. They often realise it is natural for all of us, in varying degrees, to experience minds that over think and feel scattered. For many being self-judgemental is huge problem. They begin to see that it is possible to train the mind through mindfulness which then can offer a choice regarding where to place the attention.

Participants often say they have developed more self-kindness and this has helped to release unnecessary tension. Participants realise there is a power in bringing awareness into the present moment which can help to identify difficulty. They comment on the benefit of using the breath to 'breathe into' the area of difficulty and soften to the experience and release on the outbreath.

Participants also report how helpful it is to be part of a group realising that they are not alone in their difficulties and finding it inspiring and reassuring to hear of others' experiences with the mindfulness practices. It appears that as the group grows in trust so the sense of all 'being in the same boat', connecting to a 'common humanity'. Participants express surprise at realising they can change their view towards difficulties and develop an attitude to one of being like a friendly witness to their own experience. Finally, some comment with surprise, that they can feel simultaneously alert and relaxed, and can appreciate the paradox.

***You are particularly interested in compassion orientated adaptations to Mindfulness groups could you tell us more about this?***

It is acknowledged that the unfolding and development of compassion is implicit in the delivery of the MBCT/MBSR courses, embodied in the facilitation, practices and language used. I agree and am also interested in how a more explicit focus on self-compassion (and compassion for others) seems a natural and necessary progression as the more we uncover our own levels of struggle the more we need to have a gentle kindly response to how difficult it can be to feel and face (when ready) the nature of our suffering. Like many other practices, it is not always easy and so a gentle approach to compassion is the kindest way and having a foundation in a mindfulness practice can help steady the effect of any storms that may arise.

***What do you feel the role of compassion in kindness plays in MBCT/MBSR?***

When we come closer to our own suffering, which can be the difficulties of the human condition, our natural inclination will be to turn away or contract or both which tends to keep the whole process going but if we can cultivate and or access our own innate kindness then there is a softer way to approach what we would rather avoid acknowledging and feeling and then accepting. Even having kindness towards being caught in the difficulties or finding that we have once again repeated the unhelpful pattern is a friendly starting point. Cultivating a kindly view to how we all have strong tendencies to either grasp at what we like or be aversive to what we don't like or feel indifference if it is neither can begin a process of releasing us from this continual push and pull of our minds. The 'kindly view' is like planting seeds of compassion and which of course will need to be watered.

***How would you like to see the Mindfulness Centre develop in the next few years?***

- I would like to see the development of a Mindfulness and Compassion course which could follow on from MBCT/MBSR courses.
- Further development for Mindfulness-based courses for specific problems.
- Development of a brief mindfulness course for staff which has its focus on 'mindful relaxation', with brief mindfulness practices which could be a stand-alone course but also act as a foundation for MBCT/MBSR.
- More drop-ins for those who have completed the MBCT course in different areas (subject to mindfulness staff availability) and more staff drop-ins.
- The creation of a mindfulness/meditation library.
- One day silent retreats for Mindfulness tutors perhaps led by a meditation teacher.

***Many thanks Carolyn!***

## Are MBCT (Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy) groups beneficial for patients & staff?

This year the SMC conducted a study led by Abeni Luken and Clara Strauss evaluating MBCT group outcomes for patients and NHS staff that have happened over the last 3 years in Sussex Partnership.

233 patients and 157 staff took part and completed questionnaires before and after the MBCT groups. These questionnaires recorded levels of self-compassion, mindfulness and wellbeing. They also recorded anxiety and depression in patients and stress and compassion for others in staff.



### Key Findings

- MBCT was effective in improving self-compassion, mindfulness and wellbeing. It was also effective in reducing anxiety and depression for patients. For staff it was effective in reducing stress and improving compassion for others.
- These encouraging findings suggest that MBCT groups in a NHS setting are associated with benefits for both patients and staff.
- Moreover, improvements in mindfulness and compassion in both service user and staff groups suggests that these groups are not simply working through non-specific therapeutic effects, such as through the development of good relationships in the group, but are working, at least in part, through participants becoming more mindful and self-compassionate.

**You can read the full study by visiting this link:**

<http://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/mindfulness-research>



We asked Heather Ball, who is a Senior Nurse and Mindfulness Teacher about her experience of the Regional Mindfulness Teacher Meeting hosted by the SMC on the 28th of June.

“It felt like a positive, nurturing space to come together as teachers across the NHS and independent sector, to share ideas, inspiration and to learn from each other.”

“Going into the future, these meetings could provide a wonderful opportunity for learning, and reflecting on how as a collective we can maintain the integrity of mindfulness approaches in our work.”

### News and events

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Training next year:

- Foundation training programme in Mindfulness-Based Approaches (MBCT/MBSR)

- By the end of the course, graduates will satisfy the teaching requirements for the national Good Practice Guidelines for teaching 8 week mindfulness courses
- If you would like to apply, please download the application form from: <http://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/mindfulness-training> and return it to [smc@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk](mailto:smc@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk)
- Training programme in Adapted Mindfulness-Based Interventions
  - To enable those who wish to develop their competence and confidence in the delivery of non 8 week Mindfulness-based interventions
  - If you would like to apply, please download the application form from: <http://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/mindfulness-training> and return it to [smc@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk](mailto:smc@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk)

The Sussex Mindfulness Centre Conference is taking place on the 7th of October this year. This is open to the public and to people not involved in Mindfulness teaching. There will be a variety of speakers, including Ed Halliwell, Deborah Lee and Willem Kuyken. It is taking place at the Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton. Places can be booked via [smc@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk](mailto:smc@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk)

Upcoming SMC Master Classes:

- 14<sup>th</sup> October 2016: Key Elements of MBSR with Taravajra & Karunavira
- 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016: Mindfulness-Based Compassionate Living (MBCL) with Erik Van den Brink

Click on the following link for more details about the Master Classes and conference:

<http://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/day-retreats-and-drop-ins>



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