PHOENIX CHARITABLE TRUST

'MINDFULNESS FOR LIFE' COURSE

February to April 2025

'You will learn ways to live in the present, find joy in your life and tools to help when times are tough', *(Mindfulness for Life Course Participant, Cirencester, Feb Cohort, 2025)*

'Within 8 weeks, I feel I am really embedding Mindfulness into my life. The tools have the potential to change my life for the better. It has helped me be kinder to myself which in turn is improving my health (physically) and mentally and my relationships with others'.
(Mindfulness for Life Course Participant, Cirencester, Feb Cohort, 2025)

The 8-week Mindfulness Course

The course was held at the Cirencester Baptist Church and facilitated by 2 highly experienced Mindfulness teachers (Alison Sedgwick-Taylor and Lizzie Cambray). The Oxford Mindfulness Foundation, Mindfulness for Life (Kuyken, 2024) curriculum was used as a framework. The Mindfulness for Life 8-week course (sometimes also called MBCT-L) blends the ancient wisdom of mindfulness with cognitive-behavioural techniques in ways to help you integrate mindfulness into daily life. It is an in-depth, skills-based course created to help you cultivate lasting, sustainable and positive change. It offers approaches to support with challenges, including recurring patterns of thought and behaviour that can create suffering, and to help you savour life and flourish. The course had these aims:

- To recognise the tendency to be on automatic pilot and how stepping out of it, by bringing mindfulness into our daily lives, can help us to live our lives more fully.
- To notice how often we are lost in our thoughts and feelings and practices which help to recognise this and help us to 'gather the scattered mind' and return to the here and now.
- How mindfulness can help us to recognise when we're caught up in unhelpful patterns of thinking, feeling and acting, understand them and bring kindness to them.
- Skills for keeping our balance through life's ups and down and for responding skilfully when difficulties arise, engaging with what is most important to us and opening to joy, contentment and gratitude.
- Each participant was given a Workbook and recordings of all the Meditations at the start of the course. All participants (regardless of attendance) were sent weekly emails to summarise the session and set reminders for home practice

Evaluation Methodology

At Session One and Final Session, all participants were asked to set and review their goals and complete Pre- and Post- measurement: Mental Wellbeing (WEMWBS), Mood (PHQ-90) and Anxiety (GAD-7).

Results

24 participants (8 men and 16 women, ages ranging from early 20s to mid-80's, 53% on anti-depressants) were enrolled and accepted a place on the in-person Mindfulness course. 23 attended the first session and 17 completed the course. 6 dropped out for a variety of reasons including, finding the group setting too anxiety provoking, illness, caring responsibilities, finding the course too 'simple'. 15 attended the Silent Retreat Day at St Lukes Therapy Centre on 30 March.

Mental Wellbeing

82% of participants had wellbeing in the low range (at or below 42) and the remainder in the average range at the start of the course. Following the course there were significant and reliable improvement for 82% of participants.

PHQ9

The average mood score was in the moderate depression range at the start of the course and at the end had dropped to no depression/mild depression. In the NHS Talking Therapies service, 82% would be a recovery (case to non-case).

GAD7
The average anxiety score at the start of the course was also in the moderate range and post course had dropped significantly to no anxiety in 82% of cases. In the NHS Talking Therapies service, 82% would be a recovery (case to non-case)

Goals/Intentions
In terms of what participants wanted to gain from the course (in own words):

- Be less anxious, put my worrying into perspective
- Find relaxation and peace
- Increase joy in life
- Understand myself better
- Balance in my life
- Hope to be better equipped to deal with stressful situations
- Calm down
- Sustained sense of wellbeing
- Cope with overwhelm
- Be in the present
- Improve my mood
- To live in the now
- Tools for being grounded
- Improve my quality of life
- Acceptance of getting older
- Quieten my mind
- Improve confidence
- Easing of physical symptoms

<u>Qualitative Feedback</u>
In the words of the participants:

What has been gained from the course
- Confidence, resilience, optimism, Hope, Appreciation, Gratitude, Confidence, relief-I now have a toolkit of practices I can build into everyday life. I have re-found my joy. I feel calmer when faced with adversity. I feel much more positive about life in general.
- Full insight into what Mindfulness is and isn't.
- Friends
- Life is not a race, a great understanding of how to deal with my anxiety, grounding feet, breathing into the difficulty
- Coming out of AutoPilot
- So much I cannot write it down now
- An understanding of Mindfulness and lots of tools and techniques to use day to day, plus a desire to continue the journey going forward
- Calmness
- Not reacting
- To think about yourself 1st!

Would you recommend to a friend and what might you say to them about the course

➢ 100% would recommend

- Life changing
- Go with an open mind and be prepared to be amazed
- Already recommended to my husband and Mum. I think it is life changing
- A Toolkit to help me navigate life and all it throws at us
- Helped me find the JOY again
- Eye opening and unique experience-even the biggest sceptics can benefit
- You will learn ways to live in the present, find joy in your life and tools to help when times are tough

- Give it a go-you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.
- Invaluable in managing my feelings
- The course provides a great toolkit to manage your mind, helps you to receive benefits of being in the moment
- Hels to calm the mind and have the potential to respond rather than react to difficult situations
- Very welcoming and non-judgemental
- Do it at the next opportunity
- You find yourself
- Expect the unexpected

Most helpful aspects of the course

- Community
- Sense of Peace
- Sense of being rather than Doing
- How kind and helpful everyone has been and has made me be the same
- Not alone-I have realised how many other people have similar difficulties as me
- An awareness of myself
- Hearing other experiences
- Summary emails
- Consistency of practice
- Excellent guidance
- Having Qs answered really well
- Working with Difficulty
- Hearing other's stories and how they have progressed-fills me with hope for my own journey. Retreat was a luxury
- List of practices for different circumstances with the confidence that it will help me.
- Weekly meetings
- Retreat Day
- Meeting like-minded people
- Calm and dedicated approach by wonderful guidance from Alison and Lizzie
- Learning to empty the mind
- All very good
- Meditations
- Gratitude practice
- Acceptance
- Knowing you are not the only one
- Thoughts are not facts

Least helpful aspects of the course

- The course coming to an end
- Nothing
- Nothing
- Nothing comes to mind as I have honestly found every aspect helpful
- Longer practices - but only as I struggle to find time as a busy Mum
- Some aspects (e.g. de-blobbing) need to revisit this
- Nothing
- I find weekly a bit too frequent
- Too many practices each week

Sharing with others

- I have already bought my son a Mindfulness book
- Asked if school does Mindfulness training for the children - I think children should grow up with it as a normality
- Already started sharing mindfulness with colleagues and friends

- I have waxed lyrical about my success.
- My family have commented on the change in my anxiety and ability to not catastrophise
- Yes, in the right setting
- Already sharing
- Yes, but be careful about ridicule
- Will try - expect resistance
- Already trying to bring into work and home
- Selectively

Conclusions

The course was popular and well attended with the majority deriving significant and profound benefit. 3 participants, due to life circumstances, were struggling at the end of the course and this was reflected in their scores but were, nevertheless, highly satisfied with the course. The qualitative themes that emerged from their outcome responses included 'sense of calm and peace of mind', 'community, normalisation, acceptance and non-judgement', 'hope, 'regaining joy, 'toolkit of practice', 'understanding of mindfulness, mind and selves'.

The 17 that completed the course expressed a wish to form a Community of Practice; a planning meeting was held in May to explore ways in which this could be facilitated. We foresee these individuals being 'Champions of Mindfulness' within their communities.

Next Steps

The intention is to run an Autumn course if funding can be secured. A small grant is in place from St James Place. We have a list of those patients who had expressed an interest in the February course. We may need to promote further. We could run this course in person or online.

A Mindfulness and Compassion Toolkit is in production and will be available by September 2025 for distribution initially across the Phoenix Health Group surgeries. The aim of the toolkit is for all patients to have access to this approach.

April 2025