

LOVE IN ACTION¹



A CREATIVE FUTURES (UK)
COMMISSIONED REPORT EXPLORING
MINDFULNESS PRACTICE FOR
ARTISTS IN SERVICE



RAPHAEL CLARKSON | MARTHA WRIGHT

Thanks

With gratitude to the many hands who have supported us in this work, including the content contributors and proofreaders;

Flora Benson, Ross Benzie, Davina Chauhan, Alex Evans from Kazzum Arts: www.kazzum.org, Jade Flahive-Gilbert, Paul Griffiths, Joe Holtaway, Lisa Laeber, Susanne Olbrich, James Redwood and Simon Roth (simonrothmusic.com).

...and thank you to our commissioner

Creative Futures (creativefuturesuk.com) - Creative Futures believes in the transformative power of creativity and the arts. They work with communities across London and the southeast to deliver programmes which can have lasting and positive impacts on everyone involved. Children and young people are at the heart of the design and delivery of all their projects, making every project they deliver unique.



Writers

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Martha Wright - Founding Director of Mindful Music, educator and musician. Martha has worked as a teacher and workshop facilitator in a variety of settings, to better understand the wellbeing needs of learners, frontline workers and society as a whole. She is inspired by her experiences practicing and facilitating mindfulness with Wake Up London, Plum Village and The Barn Retreat Centre in Totnes.



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¹ Our report title is inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh's book and terminology, 'Love in Action'.

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Context, Overview and Key Pointers

This report is the result of a Creative Futures (UK) commissioned action learning research project co-designed by Raphael Clarkson (a Creative Futures facilitator and Mindful Music’s composer in residence) and Martha Wright (the Founder of Mindful Music).

Creative Futures (UK) commissioned this report to contribute to the support of artists in service (working in participatory arts sessions, education, healthcare and associated community settings), providing them with tools for self-care and developing support networks and wellbeing approaches when required.



Mindful Music is a charity established to support children in their emotional and social development, using music and mindfulness. Martha and Raph have been working with schools and artists to practice and share the ethics and values of mindfulness. Our intention has been to create a culture of mindfulness within the delivery team and to share this way of working with schools, rather than to simply use mindfulness as a tool. This report considers

how this way of working can be of service to the sector, not only for beneficiaries, but for the freelance facilitators too.

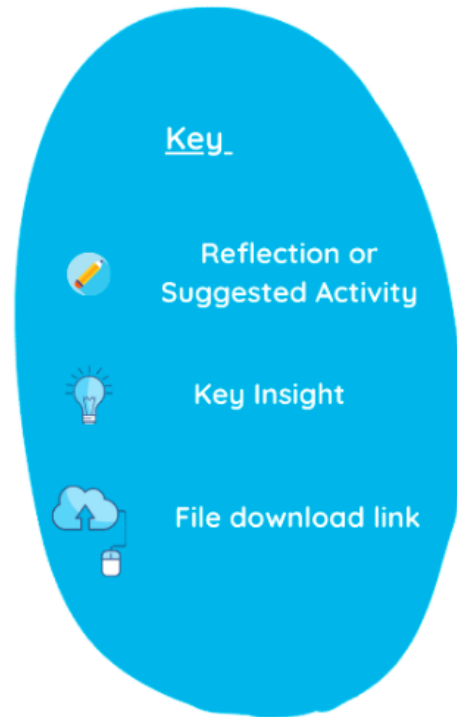
Martha's experience with mindfulness practice has predominantly been through her time spent practicing with the Plum Village community, a tradition set up by the Vietnamese peace activist, poet and Zen master, Thích Nhất Hạnh. Many of our reflections and resources through this report are therefore leaning towards Plum Village teachings, though we have also referred to a range of Buddhist, secular and scientific mindfulness teachers, as well as research into self-compassion, wellbeing and trauma informed therapy. You can refer to the bibliography for further reading.

We are aware of the many risks and challenges that artists face in participatory music settings - both in terms of the emotional intensity of the work (*with children and young people showing record numbers of mental ill-health*) and the dangers of developing secondary trauma, and also the risks and vulnerabilities associated with Covid. The way in which these factors have been intertwined over the last year demonstrates the urgency required in developing wellbeing and protective practices for artists.

We believe that mindfulness practice for artists can offer routes to greater wellbeing and also protect against secondary traumatic stress and burnout. So this is intended to be a practical wellbeing support for practitioners based on programmes developed by the Mindful Music educators, musicians, therapists, mindfulness practitioners and partners (www.mindfulmusic.london/people).

It feels important to share a few words about using a trauma sensitive approach as a facilitator (please refer to the bibliography for further reading about this). We are aware of the need to hold a trauma sensitive and compassionate approach towards ourselves, as facilitators, as well as those we deliver workshops for. Therefore we offer this report, like all of our workshops, as an invitation. An invitation to engage in practices for your own, and shared, wellbeing. As you embark on this reading, and this way of working, we hope you are able to give yourself permission to stay with your body, your feelings and your beautiful needs. We simply offer. You decide what and how you wish to engage with our offer.

Finally, this report is reflection based and intended for immediate application. So when it comes to theory, you may notice we have been brief. Further reading and resources can be found through the bibliography, references and reflection activities. We have also, where possible, included weblinks should the reader choose to deepen their understanding and personal practice.



Introduction

Through this document, we are exploring ways to transform unspoken intuition into practical resources and exercises, or ways of working for artists. We aim to take insights from many coffee shop conversations between so many artists over the years and to share them as concrete, tangible culture setting actions. This is rarer than it should be. But it is happening.

Martha established Mindful Music (mindfulmusic.london) as a charity to support children in their emotional and social development. The charity has been built with input from educators, musicians and therapists to introduce culture shifts as a foundation for learner wellbeing in schools. It has been invaluable to have input from arts facilitators ([Simon Roth](#), [John Webb](#) and [James Rhodes](#) to name a few) from the start. Their insights and perspectives have been invaluable to enabling our programmes to be built upon foundations of experience, joy, peace and understanding.²



While developing work at Mindful Music and planning this document, we have asked ourselves, as freelance artists, the following questions which we invite you to take a moment now to reflect on:

- ***How can I utilise my own inherent strengths when working to serve institutions and others?***
- ***How can I work in an intuitive way?***
- ***What conditions do I need for my gifts to reach those who can benefit from them?***
- ***What support is available to me?***

We would love to hear about your own experiences and reflections, please share them with us via [this online form](#).

We hope to offer some of our practice based insights around these questions. And if nothing else, we hope the words to follow can serve to provide a sense of connection for the community of artists who come to read this. From many conversations, we suspect some of your insights already chime with our own, and so reading our encouragement and examples may help if you have ever felt your voice unheard or misunderstood in an education culture of grading, marketisation and competition.

It has felt so supportive to meet the many artists and educators who have approached Mindful Music over the years to volunteer or collaborate and bring our insights to the fore. When we began in 2015, Martha was explaining what mindfulness is to schools who were hearing about it for the first time. Today, state schools are referring to mindfulness and wellbeing to meet curriculum requirements. It seems we are on a wave moving in a hopeful direction.

² Starting with cultivating 'joy, peace and understanding' in an approach inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh's book *Love in Action*.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in the writing of this report is that of reflective based action learning.³ Actually, we have been meeting as practitioners to reflect and share insights since March 2018. Our focus has been on learning and understanding the contexts we work in.

Martha's approach draws largely on her teacher training where she developed her own reflective practice based on the Kolb reflective cycle and critical incident analysis, later refined through studying 'Transformational Leadership' and training to be an action learning facilitator.⁴

This report has gone through a number of 'learning cycles' with actions (such a half day of mindfulness), leading to reflective conversations informing the next action (a focussed mindfulness practice session). The writing is a product of reflective conversations which took place between October 2020 and March 2021.

The Foundation; 'peace in oneself peace in the world'⁵

Mindfulness is not taught, it is caught

*"Studies show that your words account for only 7% of the message you convey. The remaining 93% is non-verbal. 55% of communication is based on what people see and the other 38% is transmitted through tone of voice."*⁶

Behavioral neuroscience studies that focussed on mirror neurons - neurons in the brain that mimic or *mirror* emotions of others - have studied this transmission. Researchers found that leaders who laugh and set an easygoing tone have better performing teams who laugh more than leaders who are humorless. Research has also seen how quickly stress spreads, particularly if the leader themselves is stressed.⁷

³ More about Action Learning as a practice <https://www.actionlearningcentre.com/about-action-learning>

⁴ Brief video explaining Kolb's reflective cycle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObQ2DheGOKA>
More about critical incident analysis <https://www.dur.ac.uk/dcad/forstaff/evaluation/selfcrit/>

⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh created this calligraphy based on one of his gatha and refers to it in his books and talks https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh2G6_1i6tA

⁶ Lydia Ramsey <https://www.businessknowhow.com/growth/body-language.htm>

⁷ Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership by Daniel Goleman and Richard E. Boyatzis <https://hbr.org/2008/09/social-intelligence-and-the-biology-of-leadership>

According to the NCBI, 35% of people meditate to reduce stress. Mindfulness is the practice of focusing attention. Mindfulness of bodily sensations, mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of ...⁸

When practicing mindfulness as a workshop leader, we can become aware that we are stressed or that we are at risk of becoming stressed. Tuning this internal rudder enables us to choose to take care of ourselves before and even during challenging situations. Say you notice you are stressed five minutes before leading a workshop for others. Mindfulness is what gives you a chance to choose how you want to act and how you want to engage with the group. We don't want to repress our feelings but we do have a number of ways in which we can look after ourselves, as we are, in these moments. We can postpone investigating the emotions and in the moment choose to generate laughter or joy. We could invite a colleague to support us in leading the group warm up. We could begin the session with a game that enables us to laugh. We could also show our common humanity to the group and say, 'I had a difficult morning today but I'm here now with you and that makes me very happy!'. And if all else fails, we can smile with our eyes!⁹ Smiling is a safety signal to our own body, as well as to others.

Practice for Ourselves as the Starting Point

Martha Wright -

"When facilitating a mindfulness session, I am aware that every word and action is a transmission. Habits, values, thoughts and feelings influence words and actions, so they too are transmitted. The sense impressions and memories that have accumulated over time will also, at least in part, be transmitted.

So when I practice mindfulness, or any practice to improve my own wellbeing, I know I am supporting not only myself but all around me too."

Included in this document are resources we have been developing for our programmes in schools. The starting point for offering wellbeing workshops to others has been our own wellbeing, you may notice this is accounted for at every stage of the delivery.

A key way to ensure a sense of wellbeing for any team, is to create conditions for everyone to at least be able to opt into practicing together. At Mindful Music, we bring mindfulness practitioners together with musicians and teachers to spend time practicing meditation, mindful eating, deep rest, compassion based meditation, mindful walking and playing. We draw on teachings and practices from Plum Village, Kristin Neff, Tara Brach and Jack Kornfield and we emphasise the importance of simply being together to practice. It is not always easy to include time to simply practice mindfulness, together, in the everyday rhythm of working, and it continues to take effort

⁸ For more guided meditations with instructions and explanations, see *The Blooming of a Lotus, Revised Edition of the Classic Guided Meditation for Achieving the Miracle of Mindfulness* By Thich Nhat Hanh and Translated by Annabelle Laity (Sister Chan Duc)

⁹ Joseph Saunders introduced Martha to the term, 'smiling with your eyes' during Alexander Technique training

to ensure this time is prioritised and protected. We need to call upon system leaders to make space for this, and as freelancers, we need to prioritise it for ourselves.

With this in mind, at the start of our delivery planning, and throughout, we have been taking time (whatever we can manage from five minutes, to half days) to practice mindfulness together.

Taking this time for self care and to experience the activities we are sharing with others is, we feel, the most fundamental practice for being in service.



Downloadable Resource: *Holding Your Own Half Day of Mindfulness* [link here](#)

Taking Responsibility for Yourself

Practicing with others is encouraged by many mindfulness teachers, particularly those from the Plum Village community. But it does not mean you do not continue to take responsibility for yourself.

*The Acrobat Sutta, translated and with a commentary by Andrew Olendzki*¹⁰

[The Buddha addressed the monks:]

Once upon a time, monks, a bamboo acrobat, setting himself upon his bamboo pole, addressed his assistant Medakathalika: "Come you, my dear sad Medakathalika, and climbing up the bamboo pole, stand upon my shoulders."

"Okay, master" the assistant Medakathalika replied to the bamboo acrobat; and climbing up the bamboo pole she stood on the master's shoulders.

So then the bamboo acrobat said this to his assistant Medakathalika: "You look after me, my dear Medakathalika, and I'll look after you. Thus with us looking after one another, guarding one another, we'll show off our craft, receive some payment, and safely climb down the bamboo pole."

This being said, the assistant Medakathalika said this to the bamboo acrobat: "That will not do at all, master! You look after yourself, master, and I will look after myself. Thus with each of us looking after ourselves, guarding ourselves, we'll show off our craft, receive some payment, and safely climb down from the bamboo pole. That's the right way to do it!"

[The Buddha said:]

¹⁰ "Sedaka Sutta: The Bamboo Acrobat" (SN 47.19), translated from the Pali by Andrew Olendzki. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 2 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn47/sn47.019.olen.html>

Just like the assistant Medakathalika said to her master: "I will look after myself," so should you, monks, practice the establishment of mindfulness. You should (also) practice the establishment of mindfulness (by saying) "I will look after others." Looking after oneself, one looks after others. Looking after others, one looks after oneself. And how does one look after others by looking after oneself? By practicing (mindfulness), by developing (it), by doing (it) a lot. And how does one look after oneself by looking after others? By patience, by non-harming, by loving kindness, by caring (for others). (Thus) looking after oneself, one looks after others; and looking after others, one looks after oneself.

Reflections on cultivating and sharing wellbeing in practice



What am I transmitting?

There are strong links between mindfulness and empathy - i.e., taking the perspective of another, as a means to build interpersonal and intrapersonal connection. Empathy is a key part of any work with young people, and one way to stay in tune with what one is transmitting as a facilitator is to have lived experience of the session activities themselves - thereby developing one's empathy for the young people in the session.

Practising mindfulness for oneself can therefore contribute to the empathic understanding of the young people one is working with (especially if we are using mindfulness activities in our sessions with those young people), as well as more generally maintaining an awareness of our own body and feelings.

Indeed, many wellbeing practices, from mindfulness and Alexander Technique to trauma informed work and polyvagal exercises all share an emphasis on bringing the mind back to the body, and often specifically to the breath, as a grounding and calming tool. This is something that is simultaneously key to our own wellbeing as practitioners as well as to the wellbeing of the young people we are working with.

The following two stories reflect the simultaneous need to practice for oneself, for one's own wellbeing, and at the same time for the good of the group/children you are working with. In fact, the two outcomes are inseparable.

Raph Clarkson

"In 2018 I was lucky enough to be involved in a week-long Continuing Professional Development series organised by Kazzum Arts (www.kazzum.org/train-with-kazzum-

[arts](#)), comprising a range of methodologies, practical approaches and activities to support practitioner knowledge, resilience and wellbeing. I was (perhaps overly) confident that despite some very difficult territory being covered - issues around trauma and abuse for example - that I could throw myself fully and authentically into each discussion and activity.

For a long time I had felt that we as teachers, facilitators, practitioners, leaders, are often asking our participants to explore what is stressful, painful or anxiety-inducing territory for them - an under-confident child being terrified of singing on their own in front of a class, for example. It followed, I thought, that we, as adults/leaders should experience the same activities/territories that we are asking the children to do, so as to understand how it might feel for them - and thereby better support them and hold the spaces in a caring and supportive manner.

So here at Kazzum I thought, "this is the perfect opportunity to practise what I preach", almost excited at the prospect of delving into difficult territory in order to improve my leadership skill-set. Well - as it turns out, I was over confident regarding my ability to throw myself into each activity, and I underestimated how difficult and painful I might find something.

Four days into our CPD week and we were being led, as a group of participants, in a drama therapy activity from an experienced practitioner who would work with vulnerable and traumatised children on a regular basis. All I can remember from the activity was a feeling of completely freezing up and feeling emotionally completely incapable of offering an idea, sound, or contribution to the group. Of course the leader was understanding and supportive, and there was no expectation or pressure to do anything that felt uncomfortable. But nevertheless, I felt unable to do anything apart from sit, listen, and feel very deep senses of anxiety, emotional pain, and lethargy.

It struck me that I must have worked with hundreds of children who may have felt this way during an activity I have led - not because the activity was badly handled, or inappropriate, but because as anyone who has experienced pain or trauma knows, any form of creative expression can open up a deep channel to very challenging and powerful emotions. The big difference between many of us and the children we are working with, is that as reflective, thoughtful and experienced practitioners we are used to naming emotions, sitting with those difficult feelings, and finding healthy ways to process them. Many children won't have developed these skills and so it's imperative that we understand this fact and think about how we can create environments that support children who may have these experiences in our workshops.

One of the ways of doing that, it seems even more clear to me after having had this experience myself, is to make sure that we all (teachers, practitioners, facilitators, adults/staff) experience the activities that we are asking the children to take part in, before we work with the children. This way we a) discover the parts of the activity that

children might find particularly challenging (not always obvious to us at first glance), and b) make sure we understand and are comfortable in ourselves with the emotional journeys we are asking the children to undertake.”



Reflection

When you are facilitating - or simply living your everyday life - how often do you check in with your body?

See if you can experiment with asking yourself;

What is my face doing?

What is my body doing?

How does my voice sound?

How am I feeling?

Coming home to yourself in chaotic settings - a case study

Martha Wright

“If you had asked my school teachers to predict where I would be now, not one would have imagined their ‘easily excitable’, ‘distracted’ and ‘too chatty’ student to be running calming sessions for children! (I had not started practicing mindfulness and I was attuned to the busy world around me) And yet, in the last few years when I witness a child having a tantrum or a class becoming agitated I have been learning to remain still, understanding and caring. I’ve had more than one child suddenly ask ‘why are you so calm?!’ in the middle of their tantrum. And I have meditated out loud on my feelings and needs in the middle of an impossible din to find the whole room silent and ready to learn after only five minutes.

I am learning, despite a system built upon practices of rewards and sanctions, that peace is possible even in some of the more extreme scenarios.

Now - let’s be clear - mindfulness is a practice! So of course sometimes, like all of us, I also get flustered or frustrated and I am not at all calm. I might be shocked or feeling stuck and I say something I later reflect on that could have been much better phrased! The quicker I can forgive myself for these moments, the quicker I can learn, apologise to the class if necessary, and move forwards.¹¹

I also give myself a break when needed. Alone in this practice, it can feel (and sometimes with limited conditions, it really is) impossible to remain grounded, particularly

¹¹ Remember teachers are often in loco parentis situations. See 20 Discipline Mistakes Even Great Parents Make <https://www.nymetroparents.com/article/no-drama-discipline-excerpt-20-discipline-mistakes-parents-make>
From the book *No-Drama Discipline* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.

if another adult interrupts me and addresses the children in the more commonplace threatening manner 'be quiet or you will miss your break!' - completely undoing the calm and trust I have been generating over time. I have regrettably also been that adult. So I don't expect myself to shift the entire system tomorrow. But I am trying, and I trust in time and the catching nature of this energy. And so I continuously practice to cultivate calm, to remain tuned in and to try and find a way through situations that will support all involved."

Our experiences, and the pandemic restrictions limiting our ability to visit classrooms, have inspired us at Mindful Music to develop short meditations specifically for the purpose of helping the adults (facilitators, artists, teachers, parents, carers...) to take a moment whenever they need to come back to themselves during lessons and workshops.



Resource: You can sign up [here](#) to access Mindful Music's freely given resources.

Being aware of your body language

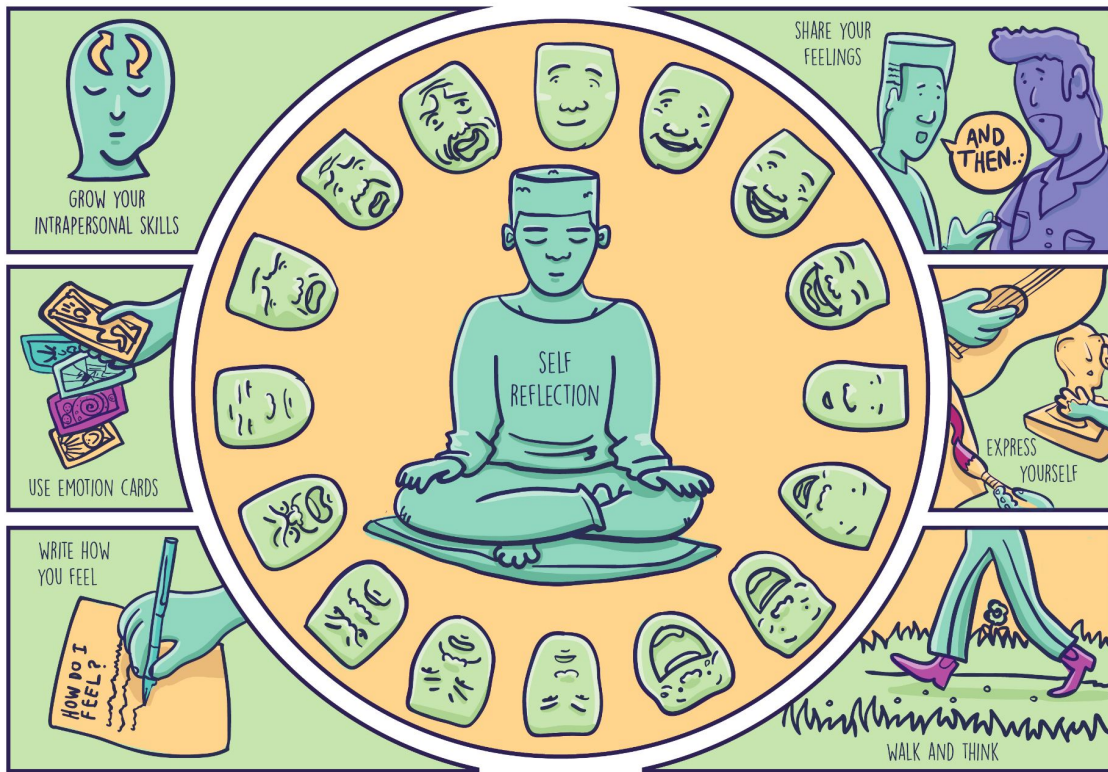
Raph Clarkson

"Many artists will be familiar with the conundrum created by the contrast between their larger physical size as adults and the relatively smaller size of the young people they are working with.

I often find myself on my knees when working with a group of primary school children, if they are sitting down, so that we can communicate on an equitable platform, at similar eye levels. Non-verbal communication is a crucial element of one's practice, and I have found a particular focus/awareness of this when working with children with autism, because often these children are picking up on vocal pitch, facial movements, the feelings/emotions you are transmitting and how you are using your body, more than simply the words you are using. Alex Evans of Kazzum spoke about sometimes maintaining a more neutral expression at first (for example, on children's arrival) with good quality eye contact, expressing focus and calm. This allows him to make his shift into other expressions and emotions to have weight and clarity and to therefore have significant impact/effect upon the group."



There are again important links to be made here with the concepts of facial mobilisation, attunement, empathy and mirror neurons, and while not the main focus of this report, connections with trauma informed approaches, specifically the social engagement theory of Stephen Porges and Dan Siegal's work on interpersonal neurobiology (see [Resources and experiences influencing this document](#)).



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Illustrations by robinlaneroberts.com



Illustrations by Robin Lane-Roberts for Kazzum Arts

Conditions to care for yourself and others

On the one hand, there are the feelings you want to foster in the session. Your personal, regular mindfulness practice is an opportunity to cultivate the feelings and habits you want to transmit. If you want your sessions to be joyful, playful, safe and fun, you need to practice cultivating feelings that foster joy, play, safety and fun.

On the other hand, there is the support you need to cultivate for yourself. We have already touched on the need to accept how vulnerable we are to becoming affected by a challenging day or difficult feelings. How can we support ourselves during these times? Let's take a closer look.

We have been working to explore the options available to us during these times with a focus on cultivating acceptance. Firstly, and importantly, all feelings are valid and welcome!



You can see [here](#) some Mindful Music check activities for our classes and staff, you will notice these activities encourage everyone to share how they are doing and to know that whatever comes up will be welcome.



“If you’re struggling, at least one of the children is likely struggling too!”

We are confident knowing that it is possible to feel even stress, while also calling upon calm and mindfulness to take care of this stress.

If we can notice and accept how we are doing at any given moment, it will be much easier for us to see what we need to do to support ourselves. Maybe we already know ahead of the session that we need to ask our colleagues for support? What conditions do we need to be able to do this? Do we take a quiet moment before entering a scenario? Can we plan breaks for everyone, children and us? Do we have warm ups at the ready that are gentle for us too? Is there a calm activity in case anyone (including us) needs it? Could we use some calming exercises in the session, that we know will take care of our own state of mind as much as everyone else's?

Maybe you're feeling fine ahead of the session but 10 minutes in, you're going into group work, it's really noisy, energy is stressful, kids are getting agitated. It just takes one person to ask for a calming exercise and everyone can benefit immediately from this. Trust your instincts.¹² If you're struggling, at least one of the children is likely struggling too! Have the confidence to pause and request a calm break (e.g. at Mindful Music, we regularly stop and breathe while listening to a sound of the bell).

Consider this scenario;

A small team of artists are seated on a few chairs that form the large circle ready to seat the 20 children and support staff for this afternoon’s session, which is due to start in ten minutes. The team have all been there for 20 minutes already, greeting each other, setting up the space ready to receive participants, and going through the plan for the workshop, all except for David, who at that moment bursts into the room, multiple bags and instruments hanging from his body, the rain and sweat dripping off his exposed hair, glasses that are fully fogged over, and a coffee cup stained from spills caused by the frantic dash from the tube station. “I’m so, so, so sorry everyone”, says David, “I had a nightmare journey, my train was cancelled and I left the house too late anyway because I was waiting for a delivery which didn’t come....”

“Don’t worry”, starts Sophie, the artistic lead on the project....

“I’m so sorry for letting you all down,” interrupts David, “It’s not fair on you all... I’ve forgotten to eat today as well, I’ve got to leave more time for travel next time and make sure I bring food...”

¹² Eckhart Tolle on how to listen to feelings and intuition <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci8ZAJ6Z8C4>

“Why don’t we just go through the plan as quickly as we can so that....” attempts Sophie, before David breathlessly continues:

“I’m sorry, I’ve got to go and use the toilet, where is it? And I’m so sorry I’ve got to make a quick call as well - my landlord has been badgering me all week about a rent payment... I’ll be back in 5 minutes....”

On his return David peppers the discussion of the plan with further apologies and admissions of guilt for his lack of time-keeping and organisational skills, before the first few children enter the room and the session begins.

We have all been David - having had a nightmare day, turning up late, stressed, anxious and feeling guilty that we’ve let the team and workshop participants down. We have all also been Sophie, the leader of a project completely sympathetic and supportive of a colleague in distress, but struggling to make that support be felt clearly in the face of an unstructured and chaotic unloading of difficult feelings.



So what can we do when we find ourselves in David’s shoes, or indeed, in Sophie’s?

This is an opportunity to come back to the core values of mindfulness. We can acknowledge that this is one of those difficult and universal scenarios. Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer offer some wonderful ways to practice mindful acceptance and self-compassion during challenging times in life.¹³ When we practice self-compassion, it becomes possible to remain in touch with our own self-worth regardless of what our inner critic or others may think or say. When we are accepting of ourselves, we can be accepting of others too while maintaining our boundaries for everyone’s sense of safety.¹⁴ In a world of celebrated external value and consumption, this is an invaluable approach to wellbeing. Educators are working to outcomes over experience. Artists are *consumed* as *products* in the music industry. Practices for our own wellbeing can reinforce self-acceptance (“I’m taking care of myself” = “I’m valuing myself”) and build the *reservoir of hope* we need to continue our work while maintaining a connection to our values.¹⁵

Perhaps, with some mindfulness based self-compassion, David could have apologised just once, and then quickly refocused on his appreciation for the group and the task at hand - that is to become prepared for the session? An apology is usually helpful, but not to excess. Could David simply have expressed his regret for being late alongside a reassurance of his respect and appreciation for everyone’s time and a determination to be more punctual in future?

With self-compassion we can also acknowledge that navigating work scenarios is not always so easy for us as freelancers. Getting used to ever-changing set ups, arriving into spaces with no chance of a check-in or debrief, working with multiple new people, balancing changing

¹³ Many resources on Kristin Neff’s website <https://self-compassion.org>

¹⁴ NVC for needs, making requests and link for boundaries?

¹⁵ Reservoirs of Hope: Sustaining Spirituality in School Leaders (2011) Flintham, A.

workloads and not to mention the full days when the offer of food or even a fridge is unclear... we must learn to take care of ourselves and to recognise our own limits within challenging conditions.

David and Sophie are already doing so much to make a positive experience happen in the world. They could each afford a moment to simply acknowledge how well they are doing!



"To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself." - Thich Nhat Hanh

Martha Wright

"During my time living and working as a community in Plum Village, I learnt how important a regular practice of noticing and offering appreciation for ourselves and each other is. It combats the mind's tendency to focus on what's not working or what could be improved.

I was also introduced to the practice of total relaxation. Often in the middle of the day, this is a time to lie down and be guided in relaxing and offering gratitude to each part of your body. I continued to practice total relaxation when living in London and it felt like an outrageous gift to my body, particularly during times of constant doing.¹⁶ Any feelings of guilt were overridden by my awareness of the benefits, not just for myself but for all around me too, and so it has become a central practice for me. It is also a practice that has been appreciated by the Mindful Music team - often after a workshop or as a standalone event, with the intention of reinforcing feelings of self-care.¹⁷"

Again, inspired by the Plum Village rhythm, when offering projects at Mindful Music, we take our time. This may mean a longer timeline, more breaks, time to reflect or simply allocating time to be still on a meeting agenda. Take this report you are reading right now. We are writing it as freelance artists with freelance artists in mind and it is something we have put many hours of care into. We are happy with it as it is. But we did also want to make another more structured version for systems change. This will happen, but first we must rest and appreciate what we have done. (Please get in touch if systems change is something you would like to work with us to address!) We know that a key foundation for slowing down is knowing your capacity and accepting your limits. Taking our time requires us to be agents of change; slowing down is counter to the fast paced world we live in that is so focused on growth and impact. Slowing down requires awareness and discipline but it keeps us well and able to touch the joy we hope to transmit to schools, even when dealing with challenging situations.

¹⁶ Plum Village practices including 'flower watering' which is to offer appreciations <https://plumvillage.org/extended-mindfulness-practises/>

¹⁷ Total Relaxation or Deep Relaxation recordings are available on the Plum Village app and Youtube Pages

So we are aware of slowing down when planning the timeline for projects. We are also aware of prioritising different conversations and actions. When the time allocated for a project is limited, it is so common to see people focus on what needs to be improved, what could have been better and to want to plan the next step. These conversations are so important but it is also important to notice and celebrate what is already going well. Conscious that there will always be room for improvement, we prefer to build on what we have already and to focus on what is already going well. This doesn't mean we never talk about improvements, those conversations have a way of happening. It means we give time and space for also building a culture of appreciation and gratitude for ourselves and each other. Sharing appreciations for five minutes at the end of a session can be a good place to start.

'You Have Enough'¹⁸

Raph Clarkson

"I was working as a supporting artist with the fantastic music workshop leader [Paul Griffiths](#). Along with a visual artist, we were based in a public area of the Evelina Children's Hospital, with the brief of working with any child that wanted to take part in artistic activities, and was available to do so (i.e., not bedbound, or receiving treatment or consultation at that time). This meant we would see some children for as little as a ten minute session, while some children were sat working with us for over an hour. 10 year old Tom was clearly tired from his hospital experience and seemingly groggy, but sat down with us keen to get involved. He drew pictures and described them verbally, which I then started to encourage him to turn into written lyrics for a new song that we might make together. As I started to suggest to him that he might make up a melody for one of his lyric lines, I realised that he had been losing energy for a good five minutes, and in my own creative excitement, I hadn't really noticed. Paul had noticed however.

"I think Tom has offered a huge amount to us already. Maybe it's time that we offered something to Tom?"

"Play him something, you mean?" I asked, and Paul nodded. So I picked up my trombone, Paul his guitar, and we started to improvise some gentle music with Tom as our audience. He smiled, and sat back in his chair - Paul and I played until he was collected by a nurse and escorted back to his bed.

It struck me that so often we are incredibly focussed on what we can get out of students, what they can contribute to a lesson or session, as opposed to what we, a team of artists or instrumentalists, can bring or offer to that student or students. Teachers always remark on how wonderful it is to have live music in school, and we will all have had experiences - as artists, as well as students - where that artistic offering from the

¹⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh



practitioners captures students' attention, fosters calmness, simply allowing the children to sit, listen and be. Very often as an artistic team we have these tools and don't make full use of them - certainly less regularly in a mainstream school environment where the focus is so often on what the students are producing, as opposed to what they are experiencing and how they are feeling."

Culture setting and the importance of clear communication

As artists (and humans!) we all naturally have different values, expectations, skill-sets and ways of working. How does this difference play out when we are working together (one artist in partnership with another; artists in partnership with teachers; artists in partnership with children, and so on)? How might this difference manifest in a classroom session, and what effect might it have? If it causes conflict, what can we do about it? Part of developing our own wellbeing as artists through mindfulness can lead to an understanding of what our own values are. Through clear communication and an empathetic approach, we can also understand the values of those we are working with; and this is key to setting a healthy working culture in which we can all thrive and feel confident and supported. Here's a scenario to consider:

Taz and Tim, two artists visiting a school, were excited about how their work on graphic scores had been developing with the class. At first, they had encouraged children to make simple visual marks to represent a short, spiky sound or instead a long, sustained sound on the assorted school percussion that was available. Over the weeks this had led to sophisticated visual symbols devised by the children to represent different ideas, images, sounds, and emotions. Today, these symbols were mapped onto a large grid. When a symbol was pointed to, an individual child would be prompted to improvise sounds that represented that symbol. This would happen until Taz moved on to a different symbol, or pointed to the one that clearly represented "STOP!"

The activity had worked well so far. Taz now turned towards Maria, a particularly enthusiastic child armed with a glockenspiel and two powerful looking beaters. He pointed towards the symbol which by now, it was agreed by the group, represented the Sun. To Taz's surprise, Maria didn't gently caress the glockenspiel with each beater, representing warming, soothing, gentle rays of light - no! She pounded the metal keys with all her might, and with as much speed and dexterity as she could muster.

"No no no Maria!" Taz interjected, "That's not what the Sun sounds like! It's gentle, it's calming, think of soft rays of light, carefully resting on the leaves and the grass... here, let me show you," he continued, picking up his own beater and striking the instrument gently, in the way that he had first imagined.

Tim looked on in quiet dismay, unsure of how to hold what he thought must be Maria's discomfort and upset about being told her creative expression was 'wrong', and also

how he was going to address, with Taz, this divergence of their artistic values that had clearly just taken place.

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As an artist, having a sense of your values and ethics is so important. The better you know yourself, the better you can begin to understand others. Taz and Tim clearly had a different set of priorities and outcomes in mind during this workshop, likely stemming from a varying set of needs. But there will be some common ground too.

Identifying what matters to you when working creatively will enable you to articulate your needs and priorities ahead of a project. Asking teachers and arts facilitators to let go of outcomes and stay with the process is not so unusual these days. And, with respect for others and ourselves, it can be done in a clear and kind way that honours everyone's experience and opinions. Tim now has an opportunity to explore this with Taz. Ideally this would happen ahead of the work taking place, but life is not always as tidy as we would like.

First, Tim needs to take care of his dismay. When we are triggered, it is helpful to tune into what we can learn about ourselves before turning our attention to the trigger. In the case of a different way of working affecting others, Tim needs to be considerate of Taz's experience. Tuning into what Taz did well is so important for painting a more rounded picture in your heart when someone does something and it triggers hurt in yourself or others. From this space it is easier to address the difficulty and decide the most appropriate course of action.

This is a tricky situation because Taz's behaviour is ultimately beyond Tim's control. But they share a responsibility for the group. Perhaps the power dynamics, individual wellbeing, time and space are not available for Tim to have a useful conversation with Taz on this occasion. If so, this is a learning for Tim when running future projects and sessions.

Tim will need to ensure there is time in the project plan for him to be explicit in communication with his peers about his values and intended outcomes when working with groups. He will need to spell out the necessity of welcoming **all** ideas in order to build confidence and demonstrate respect for the children's ideas. We are talking about a way of working that may feel obvious to many, but it was not for Taz.

It's important to remember that the values and intended outcomes we hold for group work may be built upon new and different perspectives from our peers. The good news is that focusing on outcomes and indicators are fairly tangible ways to help others to understand your intentions and needs. In this scenario, Tim can make his expectations very clear moving forwards. Ahead of the next session he could say, 'in this session my focus is for participants to enjoy the experience of creating. It is vital that children feel safe when offering their ideas. They need to know that all ideas will be accepted and celebrated. Musically, the polish can come later, if necessary.' He could even go so far as spelling it out, "When you are hearing ideas from the group, if a child plays something that feels completely off the mark and outrageous to your well trained ears, in that moment you may need to set aside your musicianship in order to receive

and honour what the child is trying to express. Celebrate, accept with respect and if necessary you can make a note to address any musicianship areas for development in a separate task. Noticing what is there rather than what is lacking is paramount. Postponing immediate reactions is a practice, just do your best.”

Ultimately, we only have control over ourselves. We can communicate our needs, values and visions to others, but it is up to them whether they can or want to work in the same way as us. We do often share responsibility for groups and with good relationships, we can develop our approaches and learning together with respect and appreciation as foundations. Some scenarios and institutions have established conditions to support a process for shared learning and growth, and some have not. So remember to be kind to yourself, do your best and know when it is time to let go.

Case Studies

Working as an Artist in Residence with Mindful Music

Raph Clarkson

“My experience of two half-days of mindfulness in preparation for this report strongly underlined the relationship between mindful practice as beneficial for personal wellbeing, and the benefits of my practice when working with participants/children/the community.

Almost immediately I was making connections between our mindful practice and my work in school settings.

Mindfulness activities sparked instant connections with workshop games or activities that I have used (e.g. “Eyes Up, Eyes Down” - see [resource sheet](#)).

With many Mindfulness meditations and exercises taking metaphorical form or using strong imagery (for example, the “What is your Weather” check-in), I felt instant links with the various methods I know and use to generate creative word/lyric ideas with children.

Indeed, this very link was made as part of a project I am currently designing in collaboration with Mindful Music, Spitalfields Music and Engines Orchestra. The “What is Your Weather” check-in exercise that I experienced on our half days of mindfulness has become an original song that I have written to be used in workshops with children; and it could easily lead to a creative extension exercise with children:

Step 1: Model the exercise. “I am feeling quite happy, so my weather is sunny”.

Step 2: Ask all children to complete weather sentence stems in their own minds - "I am feeling X, so my weather is X". Perhaps all children have used mini-whiteboards or written their answer in an exercise book.

Step 3: Ask for any children to share their weather, using just the "My Weather is...." stem.

Step 4: Decide on your four favourite "Weather" answers/completed stems, and arrange them so that everyone can see them.

Step 5: You've now got a set of lyrics and you can continue songwriting!

Of course, you can adapt this concept to your own needs and make it simpler/more complex depending on the context.

So, again, I felt the simultaneous benefit of practice for my own wellbeing - the ability and invitation to share my thoughts and feelings, to be held by a group that fosters calm and wellbeing - and how the mechanics of doing this could benefit children and communities that I work with. I felt my creative imagination firing in terms of how I might design projects.

My feeling as a music workshop leader is that so much of what we do in creative music projects actually already links with mindful work and wellbeing. However, due to contextual constraints or needs, mindfulness and wellbeing are often slightly buried or seen as a secondary focus, or a coincidental benefit. For example, we might often be working on a project where we have been asked to focus on pushing literacy skills, or engaging with a school history project. We might also be pushed towards creating a polished, professional performance for a school sharing (practitioners may recognise the "process vs product" dilemma rearing its head here!). All of these things are of course beneficial and good, but my instinct in many conversations and through this research is that our biggest successes in projects, and the fundamental reasons why we do the work, centre around the development of children's emotional intelligence, their confidence, inner strength, self-expression, interpersonal relationships with peers and group bonding. More and more when I ask myself the question "Why are we doing this project in this way", or on a more specific level "Why are we doing this warm-up exercise in this way", my answers centre around a concern for the overall wellbeing of individual children or the group. Once the individuals and the group are held with confidence and care, the more surface level concerns of literacy, specific academic skills or "product" often take care of themselves.

And so, if our ultimate concerns when designing and leading work with children and communities is wellbeing, emotional intelligence, and group connection, what better way to develop ideas and individual practice as a leader than to practice mindfulness and

wellbeing oneself. Doing this practice oneself fires your own creativity in designing projects, whether the main focus is on wellbeing or something else.



Resource: You can sign up [here](#) for access to Mindful Music's freely given resources which includes an animated video of Raph's song, Listen Closely.

Examples of effective support and organisational practice

We asked our former facilitator Flora Benson to share her experience with check-ins;

"I was engaged by Mindful Music to run a series of workshops for children with behavioural difficulties at a primary school in East London. I was supported by the Mindful Music check-ins held before, during and after the program's duration. Each check-in session was structured and intentional, and included short mindfulness practices to help ground and centre, allowing participants to speak and listen more consciously and openly. The professional and emotional support offered during these sessions contributed to the program's success."

Raph experienced an intentional focus on staff wellbeing when working on one of Kazzum's (kazzum.org) 'Pathways' project sessions with ESOL learners from a Post 16 provision. Many of whom are Young Refugee, Asylum Seekers, or young Migrants. As well as clear pre-session planning, Kazzum followed a clear and structured approach to post-session reflection for facilitators outside of the sessions with participants. Each practitioner was given space to reflect verbally on the session, one by one, for a maximum of five minutes each. Everyone shared individually before each person could then have a turn at responding to what they had heard in this first round of reflection, for a period of one minute. This allowed for deep group listening, each voice being treated and held as equal, and therefore a true group-led reflection on the session (as opposed to broken conversations/people talking over each other). Each practitioner would then fill in a carefully structured reflection document based on this conversation/group reflection.¹⁹

Conclusion

A central and repeated notion we have landed on in the writing of this document is to **teach from your own practice** so that you can have an intrinsic idea of what you are asking the children to do. Conscious of our audience - freelance arts facilitators - we have stayed with our original goal of sharing personal reflections, insights and resources for your own use. However

¹⁹ This is a technique used within Coaching and Restorative Justice. Kazzum developed it with the consultation of Terence Bevington at Connexus - a transformational Justice organisation. Further related resources were supported by Sheila Preston's work: <https://sheilapreston.com/work-with-me/#groupcoaching>.

a number of times we have referenced further research into mindfulness and wellbeing, particularly around trauma informed approaches and the ultimate need for system change. This requires further investigation.

Ongoing reflective practices and action research processes have led us to see ourselves as agents of change, knowing that our part to play is already enough and that it is connected to a wider web of change. Satish Kumar at Schumacher College spoke with senior monastic Br Phap Lai in Plum Village on the topic of change with a reminder to act for the benefit of future generations, with trust that they will continue the work over many years.²⁰ What could this notion of multigenerational change mean for us as artists in service working in schools? How can we trust that our intended outcomes will happen beyond our evaluations? Something we do know is that our own wellbeing is key. Not just to be able to do high intensity work, but also for the participants. Everybody's wellbeing is connected to everybody else's wellbeing. As a facilitator, we are the source of wellbeing for the group.

Areas for further exploration:

- We touched on ideas connected to restorative justice and taking the Early Years child led learning approach into Key Stages 1-5 and beyond - can we do this?
- How can we develop trauma informed approaches for wellbeing as individuals?
- What would it take to bring about system changes where trauma informed approaches for wellbeing are prioritised?
- When faced with a huge system we have felt encouraged to to come back to ourselves and to celebrate the unique offering we are already making. How can we stay with ourselves, day by day, step by step, and know that change is still possible? How can we better understand what we are doing as individual artists working on individual projects to benefit the children or beneficiaries in our care? What can we do already, just as we are? What are we inspired to cultivate?

²⁰ Non Violence for a Future to be Possible | Br Phap Lai, Satish Kumar, Earth Week 2019 11 06 available on the Plum Village Youtube Channel via this link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozDe7LovjLw>

Practical Resource Bank

Through the making of this document, we have been referencing and referring to various resources. Here you will find them collated. Our intention is to offer them as useful supports or references when running your own project in an education setting.

- **Mindful Music singalong and deep rest audios with facilitator guides:**

You can sign up [here](#) for access to Mindful Music's freely given resources. You will initially be emailed a link to our password protected videos, links for our singalong and deep rest audios, and notes on running your own mindfulness practice sessions.

You will be asked if you want to subscribe to be sent resources a maximum of three times a year. If you do subscribe, we will be able to email you guided meditations and future resources as they become available.



Before the project begins

- If you are sharing wellbeing practices such as mindfulness, consider how and when you as a team and individuals will practice in preparation. [Here](#) is a guide we have put together for finding even just five minutes to practice, as well as guides for running your own sessions of mindfulness.
- Location (where possible, can you find opportunities for nature connection? Particularly if working online. Plan in moments to at least look out the window).
- Plan in CPD
- Values (e.g. at Mindful Music we consider, practice and teach compassion, listening deeply, acceptance, connection, kindness, self-awareness and self-control)
- Intentions (Curriculum outcomes are fairly straightforward. It's also helpful to consider what the process intentions are? Do you want participants to feel at ease? Do you want them to experience joy? How will you support participants in their self-confidence?)
- When it comes to feeding back grievances or difficulties, ensure there is a clear understanding of who that person is. Usually it's the producer or leader of the project.
- Consider safeguarding - check the policy with the organiser and institution/school.
- One pager on how Mindful Music facilitators weave our values into sessions [here](#).



Before each workshop

- Brief the school staff
- Brief everyone on inviting the bell (if you will be using one) you can use [this resource](#)
- Where will you go for a break?
- Where will we sit and feel comfortable?
- Does everyone know how the lead artist wants the space to be used?
- Lead artist 'This is where I would like you to sit and this is why, if that's ok?'



Check-ins

At Mindful Music, we often practice our activities for groups as a team too. Checking in is very central to our way of working with others. [Here](#) is a one page document about how to check in as a group or facilitators, as well as with groups we are working with.



After each workshop

- One way to develop your own reflective practice is to regularly write in a leadership journal²¹
- Debrief (this is an opportunity for everyone to capture and celebrate what is working, to pick up on any learning and to set intentions for future sessions)
- End of session reflections (it is so helpful to have a space dedicated to shared learning and understanding through speaking and listening circles - this is not the time to make decisions, it is a time to learn and grow together)

At the end of the project

- Consider the process as well as impact reflections
- Question generation as a result of doing the work

²¹ Keeping a leadership journal is practice used in education training. Teach First and Canterbury Christ Church support trainee teachers through provision of action research methodology and learning cycles. More here from Mindful Music's founding chair of trustees, Dr Robin Precey https://cel.journal.uj.edu.pl/documents/61921109/116154769/cel_vol2_no1_08062016.pdf

Resources and experiences influencing this document

Experiences

- Facilitating and attending Wake Up London practice events <https://wakeuplondon.org>
- Attending Heart of London practice events <https://www.hols.org.uk>
- Four months and three week long Plum Village retreats <https://plumvillage.org/retreats/>
- Facilitating and attending The Barn Retreats <https://www.sharphamtrust.org/mindfulness-retreats/the-barn-retreat>
- Attending a Wake Up Your Artist (WUYA) retreat <https://joeholtaway.com/2019/01/06/wake-up-your-artist-retreat-2019/>
- Attending and collaborating on mindfulness for musicians events with Susanne Olbrich <https://susanneolbrich.net> and Joe Holtaway <https://joeholtaway.com/>
- Attending Alexander Technique Classes with Joseph Sanders

Selected apps and downloadable resources

- Visit mindfulmusic.london/resources for singalong and deep rest audios. Or you can sign up [here](#) for access to all Mindful Music's freely given resources.
- plumvillage.app
- insighttimer.com/jackandtara
- self-compassion.org
- joeholtaway.com/rest-relaxations/
- insighttimer.com/joereillymusic
- theheartmovement.org

Mindfulness teachers to address life as a non-white practitioner

- Angel Kyodo Williams
- Lama Rod Owens
- Larry Ward
- <https://www.hols.org.uk/colours-of-compassion>

Mindfulness practitioners with addiction

- Noah Levine

LGBT community practicing mindfulness

- River Wolton
- <https://www.meetup.com/OutBreath/>
- Rainbow Sangha <https://plumvillage.uk/find-a-group/online-and-phone-groups/>

Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness

- David Treleaven <https://davidtreleaven.com>

Wellbeing resources

- <https://www.musicmindsmatter.org.uk>
- <https://www.ukmusic.org/advice/mental-health/>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk>
- Alexander Technique <https://alexandertechnique.co.uk/alexander-technique>
- Action Learning <https://www.actionlearningcentre.com/about-action-learning>

Books, Links and Articles

Peace is Every Step “The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life,” by Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh.

The Miracle of Mindfulness written by Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh during the Vietnam War as a guide for social workers.

Happy Teachers Change the World by Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh and Katherine Weare.

Love in Action by Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh.

The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook by Kristin Neff, PhD and Christopher Germer, PhD.

Radical Acceptance by Tara Brach.

Start Where You Are by Pema Chödrön.

Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World by Christina Feldman.

Focus by Daniel Goleman.

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman.

[No-Drama Discipline](#) by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.

Dan Siegel on Interpersonal Neurobiology by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D.

Brene Brown's work on vulnerability <https://brenebrown.com/blog/2019/04/26/book-read-first/>

Big Magic - Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert.

Quiet by Susan Cain.

The Wounded Leader: How Real Leadership Emerges in Times of Crisis by Richard H. Ackerman and Pat Maslin-Ostrowski.

Reservoirs of Hope: Sustaining Spirituality in School Leaders (2011) Flintham, A.

Plum Village (2019) Non Violence for a Future to be Possible | Br Phap Lai, Satish Kumar, Earth Week 2019 11 06 available on the Plum Village Youtube Channel via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozDe7LovjLw>

Stephen Porges polyvagal work www.stephenporges.com

The Little ACT Workbook: An Introduction to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: a mindfulness- based guide for leading a full and meaningful life by Dr. Michael Sinclair and Dr. Matthew Beadman.

Nicola Naismith's report 'Artists Practicing Well'
<https://www.nicolanaismith.co.uk/research-writing/artists-practising-well>

Help for the Helper: The Psychophysiology of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma by Babette Rothschild.

Polyvagal Exercises for Safety and Connection: 50 Client-Centered Practices by Deb A. Dana .