

# 2017/18 Oxford Mindfulness Centre Accessibility Fund

## MINDFUL FAMILIES REPORT

### Mindfulness for Parents and Mindful Play

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“...since dad has been coming and he has relaxed a bit more, you know the benefits for him are reflecting directly on Susie’s confidence and her anxiety levels. I think it’s amazing.” (Class Teacher)

## 1. Executive Summary

This project aimed to build evidence and case studies to demonstrate the value of providing mindfulness training to parents as part of a whole school-community approach to mindfulness. Currently, an increasing number of schools are offering mindfulness to children and to teachers, but are not offering mindfulness to parents.

The project delivered a mindfulness course for parents in two schools in the deprived region of Bettws in Newport, South Wales. Each course was followed by two 'mindful play' workshops for parents to attend with their children.

Despite challenges with participant recruitment and retention, the model demonstrated in this project is promising. Delivering training for parents within the school environment in deprived areas has increased access to mindfulness and made impacts on the wellbeing of these participants. This has complemented mindfulness training already delivered in these schools with pupils and teachers and had knock on impacts for children and other family members.

90% of participants reported a meaningful positive change<sup>1</sup> on the Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale which indicates an increase in the two groups sense of mental wellbeing. It must be noted that the sample size is statistically very small; however it does offer early positive indications of the projects contribution towards the participants mental wellbeing.

Almost all (90%) participants reported as never practising mindfulness with their children at the beginning of the project. Some change in this activity was reported at the end of the project with 20% of parents practicing with children everyday, 20% once a week and 10% twice a week.

Anecdotal feedback from participants and school contacts indicates that there is a demand for further mindfulness training for the participants involved in this project and an appetite for similar work with other parents and in other schools.

Based on the results, feedback and learning from this project, seven recommendations are suggested in this report. These include:

**Recommendation 2:** When recruiting schools for future parent mindfulness projects, schools should be selected based on their track record with mindfulness and a commitment to dedicating a staff member to support and attend the course. It would also be an advantage if schools can make some strategic priority/provision for ongoing support for family mindfulness.

**Recommendation 3:** The 'b Foundations' mindfulness course is an appropriate base curriculum for mindfulness courses for parents in schools, where other Mindfulness in Schools Project curricula have been delivered in that school.

**Recommendation 4:** Conduct further trials of the 'mindful play' activities to provide further indications of their impact. It is recommended that a follow-up project should include a longer 4-session mindful play course.

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<sup>1</sup> The Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale identifies a 3-8 point increase as a 'meaningful positive change'. The average point increase for the 10 participants on this project was 11.6.

**Recommendation 6:** Invite education decision makers to attend a showcase session at any further trials of this project.

A short video showcasing this project can be viewed at: [www.mindfulfamilies.co.uk/families](http://www.mindfulfamilies.co.uk/families)

“I didn’t realise how much I wasn’t connecting and wasn’t aware, so it was, it opened a completely new start for me” (Parent, Newport)

## 2. Background

Mindful Families was founded in February 2016 with the aim of enabling more people to access mindfulness, principally parents, children and people living in deprived areas. In addition to delivering mindfulness sessions in the community to groups of parents and families, Mindful Families also provides training in schools to children, teachers and groups of parents.

This project aimed to build evidence and case studies to demonstrate the value of providing mindfulness training to parents as part of a whole school-community approach to mindfulness. Currently, an increasing number of schools are offering mindfulness to children and to teachers, but are not offering mindfulness to parents.

Often, parents who are living in areas of social and economic deprivation face additional barriers to accessing mindfulness, including stigma, cost, limited provision and lack of awareness about the benefits. Providing training to parents could play a pivotal role in supporting children to sustain and deepen the mindfulness taught in schools.

The project delivered two mindfulness courses for parents in two schools (Millbrook Primary and Malpas Court Primary) in the deprived region of Bettws in Newport, South Wales. Each course was followed by two ‘mindful play’ workshops for parents to attend with their children - to inspire parents and children to begin to practice mindfulness within the family setting. This project constituted a third stage of mindfulness training in these schools, following courses already delivered to pupils and teachers.

The intended impacts of the project were twofold: to enable parents to develop a mindfulness practice for their personal wellbeing and that of their family; and the collection of evidence to demonstrate the value of training parents as part of a wider approach to mindfulness in schools.

## 3. Programme Background and Design

The mindfulness course for parents and ‘mindful play’ sessions were delivered by Tim Anfield, a mindfulness trainer, listed on the UK Network for Mindfulness-based Teachers and Co-chair of the Mindful Schools Wales Group. The courses were supported by the school’s Family Engagement Officers, primarily regarding recruitment, attendance and

logistics. In Millbrook Primary, the Family Engagement Officer also attended the course to further support and encourage participation.

The two participating schools were chosen following prior work completed with pupils and teachers funded separately by the schools themselves and Communities First<sup>2</sup> respectively. Both schools are also situated in areas of social and economic deprivation, the percentage of children receiving free school meals is nearly double the national average and the community of Bettws ranks within the 5% most deprived communities in Wales in the Multiple Deprivation Index.

Parents were recruited through a variety of means by the Family Engagement Officers in both schools, including posters, leaflets, word of mouth, and promotion at school events such as Christmas concerts. Both schools chose to target promotion initially at Nursery and Reception age parents, but this was later opened up to all other parents in the school.

It was decided to deliver this project during the school day to enable parents to attend the adult mindfulness course without the need for childcare. It also enabled children to attend the mindful play activities with their parents when required. The sessions were linked to school drop-off and collection times to remove travel barriers and maximise participation. This flexibility would not be applicable if the activities were to be conducted at evenings or weekends.

The mindfulness curriculum chosen for the parents course was '.b Foundations' from the Mindfulness in Schools Project. This course is derived from MBCT<sup>3</sup> and Frantic World and adapted especially for the school context. This was chosen for continuity with the mindfulness training already received by the schools - .b Foundations for staff and Paws b<sup>4</sup> for pupils. This course is also particularly appropriate for the target groups since it is very accessible, interactive and requires more modest time commitments from participants in comparison with MBCT.

The .b Foundations course includes eight 90 minutes sessions without a longer retreat session. Home practice expectations for parents is limited to informal mindfulness practice and up to 20 minutes of formal mindfulness practice. Responding to input from the Parent Engagement Officers it was agreed to include a short break within the 90 minutes to maximise accessibility and nurture group cohesion.

The mindfulness trainer for the project is also trained in the Nurturing Parents mindfulness curriculum and supervised by its creator, Eluned Gold. This curriculum was reviewed alongside .b Foundations at the design stage of this project in consultation with Eluned Gold. Consequently the delivery of .b Foundations was adapted slightly for this project including a greater emphasis on self-care and nurture. For example the 'Befriending Practice' was introduced in session 2.

The mindful play workshops included in this course have been developed over 2 years and trialled on over 20 occasions with different groups and contexts. The activities are inspired by the core mindfulness practices and principals from adult mindfulness training but delivered through short and interactive games for participation by parents and children

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<sup>2</sup> A community development programme funded by Welsh Government

<sup>3</sup> Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy

<sup>4</sup> Paws b is from the same suite of Mindfulness in Schools Project curricular and shares common practices and course roots with .b Foundations.

together. The two sessions delivered as part of this project were 60 minutes in length including starter activities, movement, body part flash cards, short formal practices, stories and discussion. These focused on drawing attention to body sensations, breath and sound; and introduced short tangible practices to be practiced by parents and children after the sessions. The activities were designed to enthuse parents and children to try mindfulness together and on their own, while boosting their understanding and confidence to enable them to incorporate mindfulness into family life.

After the final mindful play sessions, in both schools, focus groups were carried out with the participating parents to acquire feedback on the course. Interviews with class teachers and a participant were carried out at Malpas Court and at Millbrook Primary, interviews were completed with the Family Engagement Officer, a participant and the Headteacher. Some of the interviews and a mindful play session at Millbrook Primary were also filmed to create a video to document the project.

## 4. Measurable Impacts

The aims of the programme and intended outcomes can be viewed in the table below:

| Project element                                       | Aims   | Objectives   | Outputs   | Outcomes  | Data collection method  |
|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| .b Foundations course for parents                     | For mindfulness to be accessible and of benefit to all, regardless of economic or social barriers.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-All parents will have increased understanding of mindfulness techniques and benefits</li> <li>- All parents will have the core techniques to begin practicing mindfulness</li> <li>-Most parents report improved wellbeing</li> <li>-Most parents attend 6 out of 8 sessions</li> <li>-Most parents state that they would like to continue and deepen their mindfulness practice</li> <li>-to build evidence that a whole school-community mindful intervention is beneficial</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Up to 18 parents trained in .b Foundations -A report of impacts of the course</li> <li>-Two case studies</li> <li>-up to 6 sound bites / short video clips with parents</li> <li>-Evidence is available to inform other schools and stakeholders with regard to the benefits of whole school-community mindfulness interventions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents have the skills and techniques to practice mindfulness</li> <li>- Parents are motivated to continue their own personal mindfulness practice</li> <li>- Parents understand the benefits of practising mindfulness</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Pre and post questionnaires with parents</li> <li>-Qualitative interviews with parents</li> </ul>   |
| Family Mindfulness workshops for parents and children | <p>For mindfulness to be accessible and of benefit to all, regardless of economic or social barriers.</p> <p>For families to practice mindfulness together</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Children will have an increased understanding of mindfulness techniques and benefits</li> <li>-Parents will have increased understanding of techniques that they can practice with their children</li> <li>-Most parents and children will have increased confidence to practice mindfulness at home and together</li> <li>-Most parents and children will be more motivated to practice mindfulness</li> <li>-To build evidence that a whole school-community mindful intervention is beneficial</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Up to 18 families attending family mindfulness workshop</li> <li>-Two evidence sets of the benefits of Family Mindfulness to share with stakeholder and related networks</li> <li>-Up to 4 sound bites and short video clips</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents and children have new ideas of how to practice mindfulness together</li> <li>-Parents and children are motivated to continue their own personal mindfulness practice</li> <li>-Parents and children are reminded of the benefits of practising mindfulness</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Immediate impact assessments</li> <li>- Qualitative interviews with parents and children</li> </ul> |

## 5. Quantitative: Methodology and Findings

The purpose of the quantitative element of the evaluation was to measure any impact the programme had on the parents level of wellbeing over the duration of the course as well as their mindfulness practice. Pre and post questionnaires were used, with pre questionnaire including general demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity and level of education. The questionnaires also included the Warwick Edinburgh wellbeing scale<sup>5</sup> and a set of questions relating to mindfulness practice, including frequency of practice, knowledge and understanding. In addition were questions relating to general experience of the programme. The pre questionnaire was administered before the first session and for practical reasons the post questionnaire completed immediately after the first mindful play session, so after the full 8-week adult course but before the final mindful play session.

### Participants

30 parents initially signed up to attend the course. 11 parents completed the parent-only course<sup>6</sup>. 10 parents attended the final session and completed the pre and post questionnaires:

| School       | No' of Parent 'sign up's | No' of parents attending the first session | No' of parents attending 6 or more parent sessions | No' of parents attending the last session where post q's were completed |
|--------------|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Malpas Court | 14                       | 6  | 3  | 3   |
| Millbrook    | 16                       | 11   | 8  | 7   |

### Demographic summary

Of the 10 parents who completed pre and post sets of questionnaires;

- 50% (10) were in the 25-39 age bracket and 50% (10) were in the 40-54 age bracket
- The majority attending were female 80% (10) and all were biological parents 100% (10).
- The majority of parents were not in full-time employment (40%), with 30% permanently sick or disabled, 20% in part time work and 10% were unemployed.
- The level of education attainment generally ranged from GCSE's, A-levels and NVQ's, with 20% reporting no qualifications at all.
- In terms of ethnicity, all of the parents participating were white British or self identified as Welsh.

### Wellbeing and Mindfulness Practice

90% of participants reported a meaningful positive change<sup>7</sup> on the Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale which indicates an increase in the two groups sense of mental wellbeing. It

<sup>5</sup> The Warwick Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale (WEMWBS) was used to measure mental wellbeing

<sup>6</sup> Completion of course is defined as a parent who attended six out of the eight adult mindfulness sessions.

must be noted that the sample size is statistically very small, however it does offer early positive indications of the projects contribution towards the participants mental wellbeing.

Overall the parents participating clearly enjoyed the programme with 80% strongly agreeing and 20% agreeing that they had enjoyed the programme. All 100% of participants strongly agreed that they would recommend the programme to others.

90% of participants said they never practised mindfulness before the course began. At the end of the project however, all reported as having a regular weekly practice, with 70% practising every day, 20% practising twice a week and 10% practicing four times a week.

All parents agreed (20%) or strongly agreed (80%) that following attending the programme, they now knew techniques to practise mindfulness and understood the benefits. This has also led to a motivation and intention to continue with their established practise with all parents agreeing (20%) or strongly agreeing (80%) that they wanted to keep practising after the programme had finished. This intention was similar in regards to maintaining a practise with their children, with 60% strongly agreeing that they felt confident to continue practising with their children and 40% agreeing.

Almost all (90%) participants reported as never practising mindfulness with their children at the beginning of the project and a small amount of activity was reported at the end of the project; everyday 20%, once a week 20%, twice a week 10%, with 40% still not practising with their children.

However, 50% reported as strongly agreeing that their child enjoyed the mindful play sessions, with 40% agreeing and 10% disagreeing.

It must also be noted, that this was reported before the second mindful play session was run with the parents and children in the project and it would be interesting to have measured this again after the second session but this was not possible for practical reasons.

All participants reported as never practising mindfulness with other family members at the beginning of the project (100%) and this remained low at the end of the project with 60% still never practising with other family members but a small increase in activity was reported by some; once a week (20%), Once every two weeks (10%), everyday (10%).

The majority of the parents also reported that they felt they had benefited from the interaction with other parents in the group, with 60% strongly agreeing, 20% agreeing and only 20% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

## 6. Qualitative: Methodology and Findings

The purpose of the qualitative research was to identify and document some of the personal experiences of the participants of the programme and their perception of any impact for them or their family. We were also keen to get feedback and ideas from the participants as to how to improve the course for any future schools or groups of parents taking part.

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<sup>7</sup> The Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale identifies a 3-8 point increase as a 'meaningful positive change'. The average point increase for the 10 participants on this project was 11.6.

Furthermore, we were keen to hold interviews with class teachers of the participant’s children to see if they had perceived any impact on the children as a result of their parents taking part. This was in addition to seeking feedback from the parent engagement lead in each of the schools as to their experience of having the programme in the school and reflections regarding impact, model delivery and recommendations for improvement.

A focus group was carried out after the second mindful play session in both schools with the parents who took part, totalling 10 parents. The following interviews were also held:

|                                   | <b>Malpas Court Primary School</b>  | <b>Millbrook Primary School</b>         |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Interviews – face to face</b>  | Dawn Webb, Senior School Leader with responsibility for Additional Learning Needs | Joy Passmore, Family Engagement Officer |
|                                   | Julie Harrington, Class Teacher   |   |
|                                   | Jo Short, Class Teacher, Speech and Language Base                                 |   |
| <b>Interview – Over the phone</b> |   | Lindsey Watkins, Head Teacher           |

### Parents feedback on the course impact on themselves

All parents reported that they had been practising the mindful techniques taught on the programme at home and had, as a result, experienced positive impacts. In addition to a general sense of relaxation following the sessions, the parents described how they felt calm and relaxed after practising the techniques at home.

“I’ve learnt how to relax better now” (Parent)

Parents also reported how since attending the course, they were sleeping better and if awoke in the night, used the breathing exercises to help get back to sleep quicker which meant they were less tired in the day.

“yeh I have been sleeping better and its helped me deal with stress and if I wake in the middle of the night, I use mindfulness. Its helped me relax and not sleeping has been stressing me out so I am sleeping, I am better” (Parent)

“yeh the breathing exercised have helped me relax and fall asleep. I sit back and use the tools to fall asleep which means I’m not so tired in the day which is great” (Parent)

Parents also described how the mindfulness has become something that now supports challenging and often stressful situations with their children, providing an anchor to help keep them calm and ‘be there’ for their children.

“like when the baby aint sleeping and I’m tired, you can so easily lose your top but I just calm down, take a breath” (Parent)

A parent in each school also reported how since attending the course and practising mindfulness at home, they have been able to reduce their medication for the management of their physical pain. Furthermore, one parent described how she had noticed the impact this was having on her day to day alertness:

“I’m on tank loads of medications for my knee, and muscle relaxants which help me with nerve pain and this course has been the first time that I have been introduced to an alternative to getting it under control and I have cut down actually, genuinely I have cut down on my night time pain killer which makes you foggy in the day an so I am sharper but the point I am making is that if I have an alternative to the amtriptamine, then if I have a different tool, I have a different type of support that I can do I would love to do more on pain management, it’s been huge. “(Parent)

### Perceived impact on the participants’ children

Through interviews with the class teachers of some of the children of the parents who took part, there were reports of perceived impact as a result of their parents attending the mindfulness course. A general sense of increased calmness and less likely to respond negatively to situations that the child found difficult was reported. For one child, a teacher perceived a distinct impact; a reduction on the child’s anxiety levels and increase in their confidence:

“yes and calmness he has when he loses but I can notice a difference. And like I said, if something changes in the routine he is ok. He is calm and happy now” (Class Teacher)

“But since dad has been coming and he has relaxed a bit more, you know the benefits for him are reflecting directly on Susie’s<sup>8</sup> confidence and her anxiety levels. I think its amazing.” (Class Teacher)

“she has started to say initial little sounds, so she isn’t speaking as such but she is starting to be more verbal and I do think it is about her anxiety levels are reducing” (Class Teacher)

### School reflections

Both schools felt the course was valuable for the participants involved and complimented existing wellbeing strategies already in the school such as Thrive<sup>9</sup> and ELSA<sup>10</sup> and that the

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<sup>8</sup> This name has been changed to protect the child’s identity

<sup>9</sup> The Thrive approach, draws on child development, neuroscience and attachment theory to support children’s emotional and social wellbeing in school

<sup>10</sup> ELSA stands for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants and is an educational psychology led intervention for promoting the emotional wellbeing of children and young people

programme offered an additional opportunity to strengthen contact and relationships with the parents who attended.

“The feedback we’ve had from parents is that they have really enjoyed the sessions and that they have felt that it’s really helped them on a daily basis... and in the future we would definitely want it to continue if possible and have more sessions and maybe train some staff as well to be able to deliver as well” (School Senior Leader, Newport)

“Mindfulness compliments existing wellbeing work by being able to offer additional techniques and tools for the staff to use and to be able to offer another course for the parents to benefit from”. (School Head Teacher, Newport)

They also indicated that the model to deliver mindfulness to parents in the school setting, followed by involvement with children, was valuable and articulated a desire to develop this approach further or host follow up courses;

“It worked well and smooth because parents can just drop their children off and don’t have to get on a bus to go anywhere else. It’s easy... Because if it is after school, they say ‘no’ because I have to take the children home and you are looking at things like childcare but actually when the children are in the classes it is really good.” (School Senior Leader, Newport)

“Mindfulness for parents enabled there to be a link between the support the school was already providing to the parents and the children and brought that together.” (School Head Teacher, Newport)

“We are currently helping to write the new curriculum and all this is going to be in the new curriculum – ELSA, Thrive, Mindfulness... It will be all teachers, are teachers of wellbeing but we will also have specialist teachers of wellbeing who need to train. So it is going to be massive, massive for education and Welsh Government, to train teachers to a high standard, in health and wellbeing to understand the brain and how the brain reacts, and well it is just exciting times really... we really need input from everywhere, so getting all the research from globally, we are getting it in there and it is going to happen so people need to be trained and be good at it. (School Senior Leader, Newport)

“I can take it (the report) to the health and wellbeing group and then it will go to the assessment and criteria group...” (School Senior Leader, Newport)

## **7. Learning considerations and recommendations for future delivery**

The model demonstrated in this project is promising. Delivering training for parents within the school environment in deprived areas has increased access to mindfulness and made meaningful impacts on the wellbeing of these participants. This has complemented mindfulness training already delivered in these schools and had knock on impacts for children and other family members. It has also made a contribution to the school community’s understanding of the potential of mindfulness and informed the schools future vision for wellbeing.

As key community hubs, schools represent accessible local venues in all parts of the country - with captive audiences. Schools already have established relationships with parents and children, an understanding of their needs and some resources to recruit and support parents. Wellbeing is a significant priority in schools and they are particularly willing to up-skill in this area and engage with projects that can contribute to this. School-based mindfulness for families clearly can increase accessibility to mindfulness and has the potential to be scaled and targeted to particular areas of need.

A few considerations for future development/delivery considered below.

### **Participant recruitment and retention**

The schools were able to recruit enough participants prior to enable the courses to go ahead – 14 and 16. Just over half of these participants (6 and 11) attended the first session and just over a third (3 and 8) attended 6 out of 8 sessions of the adult mindfulness course. This is a notable drop-off which limited the spread of the project and resulted in a statistically very small sample size. For example the demographic data in section 4 indicated that the project was attended by 100% white Welsh participants, whereas in reality 2 regular participants were of other ethnicities but unable to attend the final few sessions.

During the focus groups at the end of the project, both groups reflected that they had not been sure what the course was going to be like based on the posters and conversations they had had with school staff prior to signing up. They also felt that the difficulty in understanding what mindfulness actually is, and existing stigma relating to it being ‘hippy’ or religious in nature, or misunderstandings of about mindfulness as ‘relaxation’, may have prevented others from participating in the course.

Both groups suggested the following to strengthen recruitment in the future:

- Taster session
- Showing a video featuring what the course may include
- Linking it other initiatives or themes, such as wellbeing or ‘empathy day’
- Getting parents who had done it to talk to other parents about it

It’s notable that the group that sustained the greatest participation in the project was in the school with a particularly strong background in parent engagement. It’s also significant that the Family Engagement Officer in this school had previously attended mindfulness training herself and attended the course with the group on this project. It must be noted that even with this degree of support only half the participants that signed up for the project completed 6 out of 8 sessions. Participant recruitment and retention represents a key challenge going forward.

The courses took place within the school day. This naturally made the course inaccessible to working parents and it must be noted that only parents out of work or with flexible working patterns are able to participant fully in the project. For example, one parent attended 4 out of the first 5 sessions before having to withdraw from the course due to a change in shift patterns.

### *Recommendations for future projects:*

1. A taster session should be delivered prior to the course including a video about the project and ideally a testimonial from a previous participant.
2. When recruiting schools for future parent mindfulness projects, schools should be selected based on their track record with mindfulness and a commitment to dedicate a staff member support and attend the course. It would also be an advantage if schools can make some strategic priority/provision for ongoing support for family mindfulness.

### **Suitability of the .b Foundations course with parents**

The .b Foundations mindfulness course was chosen for consistency with mindfulness training already delivered in the school. The feedback from participants and school contacts also indicated that the course was an accessible course for this target audience. The interactive nature of the course engaged the participants throughout and it was felt that sessions over 90 minutes in length would be a barrier. Similarly greater expectations for home practice would have been unrealistic.

A number of changes were made in the delivery of this project in response to time limitations, participant progress and input from the Nurturing Parents curriculum. A few examples are given here:

- Based on school advice, short breaks were included in most sessions.
- Self-nurture was emphasised as a key theme throughout and 'Befriending' practices were introduced earlier.
- The introduction of the 'Turning towards difficulty' practice was delayed to allow more time for participants to embed the core practices.

### *Recommendations for future projects:*

- 3 .b Foundations is an appropriate base curriculum for mindfulness courses for parents in schools where other Mindfulness in Schools Project curricular have been delivered. Should this project scale, further guidance regarding the delivery in this context would be advantageous, possibly informed by the 'Nurturing Parents' course.

### **Mindful Play**

Delivering mindful play within the school context was helpful to enable parents to attend sessions as part of established routines, without extra travel requirements. They were able to attend without the need for childcare in most cases and then attend with their children seamlessly when required. This overcame many logistical challenges experienced when trailing mindful play on evenings and weekends.

Most participants indicated at the start of the course that they were participating in the project in the hope that it would support them in their interaction with their children. The mindful play activities were therefore an incentive to engage with mindfulness courses.

The mindful play activities were generally well received by parents and children but the impacts of these activities in this project are unclear. Due to practical constraints the follow-up post questionnaires were collected immediately after the first mindful play session.

During the focus groups however, one of the groups also felt that they would have liked more mindful play sessions at the end of the course and that the two they attended were not enough. They felt it was not long enough to get the children into mindfulness and more opportunities to try out different exercises would have been really useful to support it becoming embedded into the home. They also shared feedback from the children of how much the children had enjoyed the mindful play sessions and that they enjoyed doing them with their parents and spending time with them in the school.

“there was some feedback from the children that they were a bit disappointed that it was only two sessions and I don’t know how the parents feel but the children were saying that two sessions of family mindfulness wasn’t enough. The children wanted more. They wanted to keep on coming back” (parent, Newport School)

#### *Recommendation for future projects:*

4. Conduct further trials of mindful play activities to provide an indication of their impact on practice levels and family wellbeing. It is recommended that a follow-up project should collect evidence after the delivery of a 4-session mindful play course.
5. Consider offering additional resources for families to take home to record and incentivise ongoing practice.

## **Sustainability**

The appetite from schools for this project indicates that there is potential for expansion. There are clear questions to be considered regarding funding since it is unlikely that existing school funding will be directed to parent interventions.

Having parents practicing mindfulness at home will be a benefit to pupils in sustaining mindfulness training initially received in schools e.g. Paws b. Mindfulness practice is a long term undertaking though and it should be considered if/how ongoing support can be given to parents and children to maximise the chances of long term impacts.

To provide ongoing support to participants and to enable the project to scale in a school it would be desirable to develop the expertise to deliver this course within the school. This is a lengthy and costly process but the Mindfulness in Schools Project ‘School Mindfulness Lead’ course is the most accessible model for this in terms of cost and length of training. This approach also utilises the .b Foundations course used in this project.

Schools in areas of Wales are now required to identify ‘Wellbeing Leads’ and funding is available for training. Welsh Government, via the Education Consortia and ‘Pioneer

Schools', are currently redeveloping the curriculum in Wales. There is some scope that this process could extend to enabling schools to have some capacity to extend mindfulness training to parents, to enhance and extend mindfulness training provided to staff and pupils.

*Recommendation for future projects*

6. Deliver follow up trial to further evidence this model, ideally in Pioneer Schools. Invite education decision makers to attend a showcase session to illustrate the value of mindfulness for parents and children.
7. Pursue funding for an expanded programme.

## 8. Appendix

### Video

A short video showcasing this project can be viewed at: [www.mindfulfamilies.co.uk/families](http://www.mindfulfamilies.co.uk/families)

### Case Study – 'Jennie'<sup>11</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

Jennie is 42 and a full time mum and looks after two children, aged five and nine with her husband at home. She lives in Newport and took part in the Mindfulness for Parents in Spring 2018. Jennie said she didn't really know what to expect when she joined the programme or had any idea what mindfulness was but was keen to try it out; "I was a complete mindfulness novice but thought I'd find out about it and give it a go". She was also keen to see if it could help with managing pain caused from having arthritis, fibromyalgia as well as joint and nerve pain.

Jennie attended the 8- session mindfulness course in the school with other parents, while her children were attending school lessons. Based on the 'b Foundations' mindfulness course, the sessions provided the participants with opportunities to try key mindfulness techniques and to discuss their experiences with other parents and a trained mindfulness teacher. Home practice, videos, talks and practical activities were included to deepen participant's understanding of the impacts of stress and mindfulness. Jennie was able to learn some simple ways of doing mindfulness at home.

"The sessions were really relatable, and Tim was great with us all, he gave scenarios to us that we could all really identify with. Sounds silly now, but there was a story about a cookie, which makes you think about your thought processes and how you can jump to conclusions and assume the worst and then lash out which impacts on others around you negatively. It really had an impact on me – I instantly thought 'that's me!'. It's really made me stop and think. As a result, I am not so quick to jump to conclusions and when unexpected things come up, especially when I'm in an irritable mood, I stop and pause and take a few minutes to breath and stop myself reacting. It means I've stopped lashing out at people close to me

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<sup>11</sup> 'Jennie' is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participating parent

which is having a positive impact on those around me. Its stopped the negativity spreading. My husband has noticed a difference. He has said I am much more calmer”.

Not only did Jennie experience benefits in relation to stress management but also pain management too.

“The ‘Paws .b’ technique I use all the time; it really helps me when I’m stressed. It basically is a really simple way of stopping and taking a breath. I can use it at any time and has really helped me. I also use the body scan at bedtime, again a simple way of noticing different parts of my body. Sounds easy but it’s amazing! This, especially, I have found really helpful for pain management and has meant I don’t have to take as many of my pills for pain at night. This has had a massive impact because I am less groggy in the day, so I am more alert. I never thought that I could learn tools to help with pain that weren’t taking pills from the doctor.”

Jennie saw the benefits for her family too and plans to keep her practice going at home;

“all the way through the course, I was thinking “oh this would be good for my husband” or “this would be good for my son”, I am sharing stuff I learnt with my family and have bought some books and hopefully that will keep my practice going and I won’t forget all I learnt. I would love to do more training or more classes. There are some great things to do with kids too and the sessions at the end with Tim really helped give ideas of what to do at home”

Jennie also enjoyed the increased contact she had with the school and would recommend the course to other parents;

“I was actually coming in to the school every week for the sessions, it was really nice – school feels more familiar now and like I’m getting to know everyone better. Everyone should have a go, it might sound a funny course at first but its fab, it’s really fab”.