



Carers4Carers

Finding support through supporting each other

March—April 2021

Welcome to our first newsletter in what is now officially Spring. What a relief. This winter has been a long hard slog and, although COVID restrictions will still be with us in some form for some time, at least we can now look forward to warmer weather, longer days and burgeoning gardens. It can't be an accident that spring flowers are such cheerful colours.



Being positive can make us feel so much better so this month we are focussing on Mindfulness. Lisa has written an article for us and you will find a double-page spread with activities and ideas to help you engage with something that so many people recommend. We all need to 'take a break', whether it be an hour or two or just a snatched 10 minutes. Many mindfulness activities only require a few minutes so why not try some to enable you to carry on refreshed? On our website we have several stories written by carers and I know many of you will relate to some of them. Take a look at the ideas for 'Take a Break'. You will find them under the 'Carers' Experiences' tab.

Colin Pearson from Carers' Trust joined us at our last coffee morning. He reminded us that the CRESS service is available not just for emergencies. It's also there for if you could do with a few hour's break a week. You do need to register for the service in order to benefit. See the back page for contact details.

The new Hastings House website has just gone live. If you are a patient there, do take a look. It has a clean look and is much easier to navigate. The helpful section for carers is easily accessible via one of the white tiles on the home page. Their latest newsletter is also available from the home page—under 'Patient News' - but I'm attaching a copy for patients on our mailing list.

Healthwatch Warwickshire has sent me advance information of a survey. Six years ago, Claire Hall, the then Commissioner for Adult Carers, approached me to help organise one of several Focus Groups with members to find out what carers wanted from a commissioned support service. The findings formed the basis of the council's Joint Strategy for Adult Carers. The strategy now needs to be renewed and Healthwatch have been asked to run a project called 'Carers-Understanding our health and wellbeing needs'. It will take the form of a survey and the questions are currently being finalised. Once available, I shall be encouraging you to respond. You can have a say on what future support is offered. I'm hoping Poonam, from Healthwatch, will be able to join us at one of our Virtual Coffee Mornings to explain a little more.

VIRTUAL COFFEE**MORNING**

Last month, we had the largest attendance at our Virtual Coffee



Morning with seven attendees. Can we top that this month?

Having spoken to several of you recently, I know there are some of you who are thinking of giving it a try and it would be lovely to have you with us. Despite the lockdown, we have been joined by several new members during the year and I know they are anxious to get to meet everyone.

It was good to have Colin Pearson with us last month, who was able to bring us up to date on several developments.

Please find the joining instructions in the letter or email accompanying your newsletter or phone/email if you can't find them.

The next coffee morning will be on **Friday 26th March at 10.30 a.m.** I'll send a reminder.

THE LATEST SCAMS

I've been fortunate up to now not to have received scam messages until this week when I have received several by phone and text message.

An automated call claiming to be from HRMC who were looking into fraudulent claims I had made. If I did not act by pressing 1, I would be arrested.

A text message claimed that an underpaid parcel could not be delivered until I clicked on a link to pay the money.

HSBC told me a payment had been made from my account. If I did not authorise it, click on a link. (I don't bank with HSBC!)

Remember—never click on a link, press a button, give passwords, pins or account details. Don't engage in conversation.

Most large organisations list current scams on their websites so you can check them out there. Yes, the Parcelforce message was listed there.

CENSUS SCAMS

census
2021

After Census Day, March 21st, field officers will visit households who have not submitted a completed form. Trading Standards anticipates scammers may take advantage to perpetrate online, telephone and doorstep crimes. It's important to remember:

- You will never be asked for your national insurance number, passwords, bank account details or credit/debit card numbers or any payment.
- You will not receive any payment for completing the census so offers of money in exchange for account details will be fraudulent.
- You will not be called for information about the census unless you have made an appointment with the Census Contact Centre or made a query or complaint.
- No-one will enter your home in relation to the census.

You can receive free help to fill out your form. Information is on the back of the purple leaflet you should have received or phone 0800 141 2021.

You can report a fraud directly to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or visit www.actionfraud.police.uk/

MINDFULNESS

In January 2020, we had an excellent talk given by two members of the IAPT team. We talked a lot about ways of coping with stress, low mood, feelings of loneliness and isolation; all feelings that are so common amongst carers. We had planned some follow-up sessions, including one on Mindfulness but of course, two months later, all face to face meetings were cancelled. So, as our third lockdown continues and there are several months to go before we are likely to be 'free' I thought it was time to revisit this. Now might be a good time to develop some habits of practising different forms of mindfulness to help cope with some of these emotions.

A recap: what is mindfulness? It's a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgement. It helps us be aware of the sights, sounds, smells and tastes around us at the present moment. It also encourages awareness of our thoughts and feelings as they happen moment to moment.

So many of us multi-task, which is often seen as an asset and at times necessary, but it doesn't enable us to give our full attention to what we are doing.

How does mindfulness help? It can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives. We become more self-aware, feel calmer and less stressed, more able to choose how to respond to thoughts and feelings, cope with difficult thoughts and, so importantly, be kinder towards ourselves.

How can we practice mindfulness? You probably sometimes already do some form of mindfulness without being conscious of the fact. It can include breathing methods, guided imagery and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

Later on in this newsletter, Lisa talks you through how to choose a smartphone or tablet app that can help guide you, together with some recommendations. Some ideas follow for activities for those of you who prefer to work in a different way.

Let's start with breathing.

Find a comfortable seat and sit in an upright position.

4-7-8 breathing: Your eyes can be open or closed. Press the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth, slightly open your mouth, and exhale until you reach the bottom of your breath. Close your mouth and quietly inhale through your nose for 4 counts. Then hold your breath for 7 counts.

Finally, exhale very slowly so that it takes a total of 8 counts to return to the bottom of your breath. Repeat for 4 full breaths, and work your way up to 8 breaths over time.



AFFIRMATIONS

Making affirmations is a self--help strategy and the idea is to promote self-confidence and belief in your abilities. It's quite possible you've already affirmed yourself without realising it. You might have told yourself, 'All I can do is my best', 'I've got what it takes' or 'I believe I'm able to succeed'.

When I talk to members some seem very dubious in their abilities to care effectively for their loved one while perceiving others to be doing much better. I think you are all doing brilliantly but let's face it, we're not good at blowing our own trumpets. We're all different with different situations and I know you are all doing the best you can.

Repeating affirmation statements about yourself can encourage your brain to take these positive statements as fact. If you truly believe you can do something, your actions often follow.

Here are some ideas for some statements. How should you use them?

- Repeat each one several times to yourself. Don't like saying them out loud? Say them in your head.
- Write each one on a piece of paper or card. Choose two or three each time. Read them through and say them to yourself.
- Like drawing or decorating ? Copy some of them out on to separate papers or card and decorate them. Do it several times.

Repeating them can be very calming and relaxing. Try to think of more statements.

I forgive myself for not being perfect because I know I'm human.

I can say 'no' to others and 'yes' to myself

I never give up.

Everyone's journey is different

I accept what I cannot change.

I am a unique and worthy person

The past cannot be changed

I matter

Positive thoughts create positive things

Smiles are contagious

It may not be easy but it will be worth it

I respect myself.

You only fail if you quit

I believe in, trust and have confidence in myself.

One of the most straightforward mindfulness meditation exercises is just to do whatever you are doing, but slowly and more consciously.

Take the time to slow down each day. Try to make this a habit by choosing a specific time when you will slow down. To slow down, you can:

- Meditate—try meditative writing, writing down your feelings and senses
- Listen to relaxing music
- Go for a walk
- Turn off your phone, tablet or computer



CRAFTY?


Many people report the benefits they have derived from being creative. Crafts can be very mindful and calming. Repetitive crafts allow you to focus meaningfully; try weaving or beading. You will also have the bonus of a tangible reminder of your mindful practice.

Make a gratitude jar: Find an empty jar. If you like, decorate it with paint or coloured paper. On separate slips of paper, write down things that you are thankful for: a person, a kind act or something positive that has happened. Add to the jar every few days and on other days, take out the papers and read what you have written, repeating several times.

A fun activity would be to make a gratitude flower. Write a few of your gratitude statements on to separate petal shaped pieces of thin card. Arrange them into the shape of a flower, adding a few petals each time.



MINDFULNESS 5-4-3-2-1. This can be a calming activity and may help to manage anxiety or anger. Look around your surroundings and find:

- 
- 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can touch
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste

ZENTANGLES

If you can draw a line and a round shape, you can draw a zentangle.

It's a relaxing, easy to learn way of creating beautiful images by drawing structured patterns. The patterns, called tangles, are a combination of dots, lines, simple curves, and orbs. The patterns are often drawn on 3" square tiles.

Doodles are mindless drawings, often through boredom. Zentangles are focussed and purposeful.



LISA'S GUIDE TO USING A PHONE or TABLET APP TO SUPPORT YOUR MINDFULNESS SESSIONS

I'm a big fan of mindfulness but I'd got out of the habit. And it is all about habit. For me, just 10 minutes each day trying (though not always succeeding) to focus on breathing and relaxation and clearing my mind of all other thoughts helps me sleep better and be less stressed dealing with whatever life is throwing at me. It kept me sane when I was caring for my parents and it's backed up by evidence.

So, what do you need to think about when choosing and using an app? I've trialled a few: some completely free, some offering a free trial and then paid content. And what have I decided? There are some clues below and I'll tell you at the end! Here's my biased list!

Do the visuals please you? Is it easy to find your way around the app? I prefer photos to cartoons, but you might be different. I like to have a way of saving my favourite meditations to listen to again.

Find a voice you like and you are half-way to finding an app you'll stick with. I love the man's voice on Calm and I've really missed him since moving to a free app; no-one else has yet come close!?

Try before you buy. If you've the time and inclination, download a few and play around with them. Maybe dip into the completely free ones first but don't discount the paid-for apps.

Try a beginner's programme - usually a daily meditation of around 10 minutes that takes you through the basics. The Smiling Mind app seems to tick all the boxes for beginners... and it's completely free!

Some meditations are very practical, focussing on the breath and relaxation; others offer more stories, anecdotes and life lessons. These annoy me (unless it's the man from the Calm app) as I like to focus on my breath. Some apps offer bedtime stories and calming soundscapes and music too.

I prefer apps that offer a different meditation each day. It's easy to just fire it up and do the meditation they offer. It adds a bit more variety.

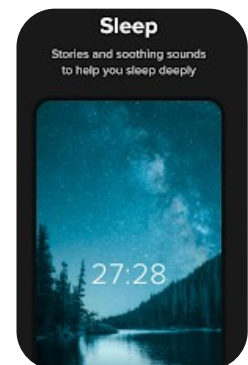
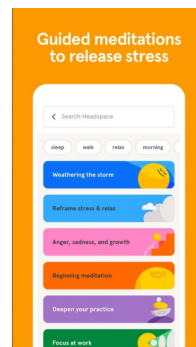
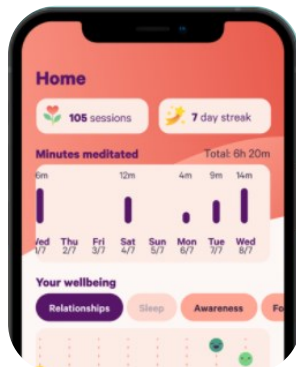
There's some great free content out there but paying for something may give you a bit more of a nudge to use it!?

Practise at the same time each day. It's all about habit and I tack it onto something else – either before I get out of bed or in the evening when my husband is walking the dog.

Don't be afraid of signing up, accessing the free trial, and then cancelling. BUT remember to cancel perhaps by putting a date in your diary for a few days before.

So, there it is, a quick guide to mindfulness apps. I'd urge you to dip your toes in the water

and maybe even paddle!? It's a great habit to get into. Full details, including current prices can be found below. What's my favourite? So far, Jeff the quirky Canadian from the Calm app gets my vote though I am exploring the free Smiling Mind app a bit more!!



Mindfulness apps

Balance: Free for the rest of 2021 and then £60 / year. Only available for iPhone so I haven't tried it, but it gets great reviews. An android version is on its way (apparently).

Calm: 7-day free trial and then £30 / year. Great for beginners and the more experienced. Offers guided meditations, soundscapes e.g., rain, bedtime stories and relaxing music. US voices. Little content after the free trial ends but more free content can be found on their website www.calm.com/together

Headspace: 14-day free trial and then £50 / year. Great for beginners. Similar offer to Calm but with cartoon graphics rather than photos. UK voices. Little content after the free trial ends but some free content on their website <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/>

Insight Timer: Completely free. A dauntingly huge range of meditations, music, and sleep stories. I think something to dip into once you know a bit more.

Fitbit: There are a few free meditations on the app and a few more if you have a Fitbit Premium subscription. Not worth paying just for the meditation. US voices.

MyLife: More free content than some or £10 / month to access more. No music, soundscapes, or stories. Unlike other apps, you don't have to sign up to access the free content. US voices.

Smiling Mind: Completely free. Again, similar content to MyLife. Not as slick as some of the other apps but I like that it's not-for-profit. Australian voices.

UCLA Mindful: Completely free. Offers a few basic meditations to give you an idea of what mindfulness is. US voice.



LINKS AND SIGNPOSTS

We aim to use this back page for links to items we have mentioned throughout the newsletter. They will then be easy for you to find. The links are also uploaded onto our website, so if you can't find your newsletter, you can find them here:

<https://www.carers4carersonthefosse.org.uk/Links/>



LINKS MENTIONED IN THE NEWSLETTER

Register for the Carers' Trust CRESS service. It makes sense to register before you need it then everything will be in place. Phone 02476 632972 (option 2)

Carers' Experiences: "Take a break" - www.carers4carersonthefosse.org.uk/Take-a-break/

More 'Take a break' activities are available in the resources library of Care Companion—
www.carecompanion.org.uk

More about mindfulness: www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/; www.mind.org.uk
www.nhs.uk; (If typing in link, go to home page and type 'mindfulness' into search bar.)

Mindful breathing: www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/MindfulBreathing.pdf

More about zentangles: www.giftedguru.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Zentangle-Handout.pdf

Hastings House surgery (with Kineton): hastingshouse.org.uk/

Kineton Surgery (with Tysoe) : www.kinetonsurgery.warwickshire.nhs.uk/

I have received several items of news today just too late to be included. Please see additional information in your accompanying email or letter.

The C4C volunteer team would like to wish Gillian a very happy birthday for April 7th.

70 years young!



I have strict instructions to include this from Lisa. I get the feeling it's on 'pain of death'!!

OUR MONTHLY MEETINGS

In accordance with Government guidelines during the current COVID-19 pandemic, we regret that our meetings have been **CANCELLED** until further notice.

POSITIVITY CORNER

Someday everything will make perfect sense. So, for now, laugh at the confusion, smile through the tears and keep reminding yourself that everything happens for a reason.