

Sussex Mindfulness Centre

Annual Report

2020-2021



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1. Executive Summary

This annual report provides an outline of the activity of the Sussex Mindfulness Centre (SMC) during 2020-21 for the year April 2020 to March 2021. During COVID-19 pandemic we continued provision of courses moving from face-to-face to online. Our team adapted quickly, using new platforms and continued to honour and provide provision without interruption.

SMC has had a very busy year with more trainees than ever benefiting from our four training programmes, more NHS patients and staff than ever participating in mindfulness groups for a variety of clinical problems or to enhance well-being, and a thriving programme of research. SMC is moving ever outwards, meeting its costs through income generation through working with other organisations and attracting government (HEE) funding. Its profile nationally is strengthening through its leadership role in organisations such as BAMBA, through IAPT leadership, and through training and research collaborations with mindfulness colleagues across the country and internationally.

We hope to continue to grow the work we do whilst remaining deeply embedded in the culture of appreciative respect, compassion and community that sustains us.

“Adapting to online teaching and holding the frame despite everything going on with Covid was a major success and I’m really grateful the teaching was able to go ahead. It was remarkably smooth and well-run.

This was excellent beyond expectation and the best I have seen or received online. Well supported with admin staff and availability and clarity of information.”

Foundation Course Evaluation 2020, trainee.

a. Summary

Our Vision is a world where mindfulness and compassion can help everybody flourish and live to their full potential, and nobody is held back by mental or physical health challenges.

Our Mission is to improve the wellbeing and mental health of people who use our services. We do this by running mindfulness and compassion programmes, training teachers, and conducting research.

Our Values are congruent with the principles, values and philosophies that underpin the practice of mindfulness, compassion and the NHS. Our mindfulness training is based on evidence for what works and what is safe, and we evaluate what we do to allow for continuous innovation and improvement.

Our Objectives are to:

- support Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust (SPFT) referred to as ‘Trust’ staff to run high quality, safe and effective mindfulness groups and interventions.
- provide high quality training programmes that produce safe, effective and inspiring mindfulness teachers and practitioners working in the NHS and the community.
- make our events, teaching, teacher training and research relevant, stimulating and accessible to as broad a range of participants as possible, reflecting the communities we serve.
- responsibly explore and research the use of mindfulness and compassion-based interventions with groups which have the hitherto untapped potential to benefit from them.
- develop, adapt and evaluate traditional and compassion-based interventions so they are tailored to meet the needs of groups facing specific challenges.
- explore ways in which mindfulness and compassion practice can contribute to building workplace cultures in which employees can flourish.
- promote and disseminate the benefits of mindfulness and compassion approaches to the private and public sector to benefit the community and to generate income that sustains the work of SMC.
- support service-user involvement in SMC planning and decision making through the Mindfulness Advocates’ Group.
- continue to be financially self-sustaining.

b. Key staff

Dr. Robert Marx	Co-lead of Sussex Mindfulness Centre (training and practice)
Dr. Clara Strauss	Co-lead of Sussex Mindfulness Centre (research)
Dr. Fergal Jones	Sussex Mindfulness Centre trainings Convenor and MBI Practice Network Chair
Paula Bellers	Communications Coordinator
Niki Larsen-Johnson	Administrator
Sally Turner	Senior Assistant Psychologist (MBCT in IAPT programme)
Laura Hearnshaw	Psychology Graduate Volunteer

c. Financial sustainability and staffing

This year we have Fergal Jones as our SMC training courses convenor (0.2), Niki Larsen-Johnson, SMC and CAT Administrator (0.6 on SMC), Sally Turner administering and evaluating the IAPT training (0.2) and Laura Hearnshaw (0.4) our Psychology Graduate Volunteer. Plus, we continue to have Paula Bellers, our Communication's Coordinator (0.2), as well as our 13 trainers. All this work is overseen by Robert Marx (0.4) totalling 1.9 WTE. Clara Strauss focuses a lot of her time on mindfulness research and is largely funded by research grants. Alongside Clara, Fergal Jones and Kate Cavanagh are clinical academics, devoting much of their time to mindfulness research supported by a dedicated group of PhD students, clinical psychology doctoral students, master's students and undergraduate students. The SMC research team are extremely grateful to the National Institute of Health Research, the Economic and Social Research Council, Headspace and Health Education England for supporting their research work.

In 2020-21, we generated a surplus this year of £59,767 after all these salaries, have been taken from our income, and so we aim to recruit a Business Development Manager (Project Manager), Band 7 (0.2), a Senior Research Assistant, Band 5, (1.0) and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Consultant, Band 6, (0.2). Paula Bellers is sadly leaving us so we also need to recruit a Communications Co-ordinator.

2. Teacher Training

SMC is currently delivering or hosting a range of mindfulness-based teacher training programmes including Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) and Adapted Mindfulness-Based Interventions (Adapted MBI).

Foundation and Adapted MBI Courses ('a' and 'b' below) attract both external, fee paying applicants and Trust staff, while the courses detailed under MBCT in IAPT ('c') are Health Education England (HEE) funded and serve a national NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) population. The MBSR training ('d') also generate external income.

a. Foundation

Teacher foundation training in Mindfulness-based Approaches (MBCT/MBSR). This year-long training ran in 2019 and 2020 and a new cohort began again in Feb 2021. In 2020, this training had 12 participants (5 SPFT and 7 external) and in 2021 has eight trainees (4 SPFT and 4 external).

“It’s the best training I’ve ever done, and I’m so glad you allowed me to jump on board.”

Foundation Course Evaluation 2020, trainee.

b. Adapted MBI

This year-long training ran in 2020 and a new cohort began February 2021. In 2020, this training had 11 trainees (4 SPFT and 7 external), and in 2021 we have nine trainees (4 SPFT and 5 external).

Both Foundation and Adapted MBI ('a' and 'b') are convened by Fergal Jones and administered by Niki Larsen-Johnson. The main trainers are Taravajra, Bridgette O'Neill and

Ruth Sequeira, supported by Robert Marx, Clara Strauss and a community of experienced mindfulness trainers, teachers and experts-by-experience (referred to by us as 'Advocates').

“I was struck by how the tutors made the switch to online training look so effortless ...”

Adapted MBI Training Course 2020, trainee.

These trainings have increased the number and geographic spread of MBCT teachers and MBI practitioners across the Trust, enabling increased availability and quality of mindfulness-based interventions for service-users (SU) and also staff well-being initiatives.

Both courses have consistently received good feedback from participants, with **100%** of respondents in the 2020 end of course evaluation rating the trainings as either

'excellent' or *'good'*. Both courses are financially self-sustaining, with almost three Trust Foundation places funded by the Trust for which we are very grateful. We have been impressed with the way our trainers have offered a seamless transition to online training due to COVID-19.

c. MBCT in IAPT

This Mindfulness Centres Collaboration, which SMC leads on, is a national year-long HEE funded teacher training programme with four sites across the country. We ran the 2nd cohort in 2019-20 with 24 trainees and have just started the 3rd cohort for 2021-22 with 82 trainees.

“Overall this has been the best training I have ever completed. Seeing embodiment of mindfulness in practice and being with others on a shared journey has been wonderful. I feel motivated to continue. I will miss this.”

MBCT in IAPT training cohort 3

In addition to this SMC is also involved with two trainings for those who support this training course, and MBCT in IAPT services more generally:

i. **MBCT in IAPT Supervisors training**

This is a two part, national, HEE funded training for experienced, clinically trained mindfulness teachers to become supervisors, both in IAPT services and for the MBCT in IAPT training programme. The first part of the training (two days) delivers necessary skills to supervise in IAPT and the second part delivers necessary skills for mindfulness-specific supervision. These are delivered by our partners, the Mindfulness network and Exeter university. This training took place in June/July 2021 and we have 34 people registered.

ii. **MBCT in IAPT Assessor training**

This is a national, HEE funded training for experienced, clinically trained mindfulness teachers to become competency assessors using the Mindfulness-based Interventions Teacher Assessment Criteria (MBI-TAC) for the MBCT in IAPT training programme. The training has 3 levels which are being delivered between April 2021 and spring 2022. All of the core SMC trainer team are doing this training and it will also enable us to offer this more formal assessment of competence as an additional aspect to Foundation and Adapted MBI trainings ('a' and 'b').

“Thank you so much for delivering such an incredible course. I have never experienced such compassion and kindness, especially on a training course!

It's made me believe that I can teach mindfulness and supported me in knowing I just need to be good enough and do my best, rather than striving to be perfect...”

MBCT in IAPT training cohort 3

d. Mindful Self-Compassion

i. MSC Teacher training

SMC is currently the only host in the UK for the one-week residential MSC teacher training. The last training hosted was in February 2019, when we filled the training centre beyond capacity to 45. Feedback from that included reference to the trainers as *“exceptional”*, *“brilliant”* and *“excellent in modelling radical acceptance, resonance and resource building”*. Feedback confirmed that the course was *“sensitive but appropriately challenging”*, with **95%** rating the quality of the training as *‘excellent’*. This training’ generates a surplus, which is used in supporting SMC activities and staff. Our most recent MSC teacher training with Vanessa Hope and Ali Lambie (which was to be Vanessa’s last course before retirement) was due to be held in February 2021 but had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. We have rearranged this course for November 2022, this time to be delivered by Ali Lambie and Zoe Shobbrook-Fisher and with a slight price increase in line with the price increase at the venue at Ammerdown.

“Trainers’ core kindness and care, created a safe space to learn and explore”

MSC Teacher Training evaluation

ii. MSC Core Skills workshop

In addition to this, SMC offers a two-day intensive workshop with the originators of Mindful Self-Compassion Dr. Kristin Neff and Dr. Christopher Germer. They are a big draw as they are the creators of MSC and we anticipated good sales as this was the only time that they were working together in the UK in 2020. A July 2020 booking was secured at the Old Ship Hotel in Brighton and marketing was underway to publicise this event. Unfortunately, we had to cancel this face-to-face offering due to COVID-19, but Steve Hickman, Director of the Center for Mindful Self-compassion very generously included SMC in their online world tour for 2020 to act as a fund-raiser for SMC. We combined efforts to put on an online workshop over four 3-hour sessions in July 2020, which proved successful as it included participants world-wide.

We are planning to be able to run in person workshop with Kristin and Chris in July 2022.

“It was organized very well with so much support with IT and the MSC counsellors on the side answering questions and holding separate support groups was amazing.

I felt just as connected as if we were in person. Thank you for creating and offering this program.”

Online MSC core skills workshop 2020, participant feedback.

3. Mindfulness Provision

Across the Trust, we now have 33 Trust approved MBCT teachers who provide approximately 30 service user MBCT groups per year plus 21 MBI Adapted practitioners.

a. SPFT Staff Courses

We offered 16 staff mindfulness groups in 2020 funded by HR and 15 are scheduled for 2021 with COVID-19 funds. The latter include places for staff in neighbouring NHS Trusts. SPFT staff courses have been open to staff from neighbouring NHS Trusts this year.

One staff group each year is a Mindful Self-Compassion group, led by Catherine Cameron and Robert Marx, who in 2020 became only two of a very small group of accredited MSC teachers in the UK.

SMC teachers run the session in every Trust Induction on 'caring for ourselves and each other' using a mindfulness-informed approach.

b. SPFT Courses for Service Users

Eight-week MBCT groups or shorter adapted mindfulness interventions are run in working age adult, older people, young people and learning disability services across the Trust. There is a particularly well-developed programme of 12 MBCT 8-week groups annually in Health in Mind (HiM) as well as regular groups in ATS and GTS services in Brighton & East Sussex and Lighthouse who have been trialling Adapted MBI interventions. Provision of patient groups is not overseen by SMC but run by local services.

c. Drop ins

We run free monthly mindfulness drop in sessions (currently online) on Mondays (staff and service users), Tuesdays (staff) and Thursdays (staff) hosted by Trust Mindfulness teachers.

d. Day Retreats

We run two day retreats every year. These are free and open to Service user's, ex-Service users, SPFT staff and SMC trainees and alumni who have completed the eight-week MBCT course.

4. Supervision

We currently have 18 Trust-approved mindfulness supervisors, some of whom are Trust employees and others of whom provide services via the SPFT bank. We are seeking to grow this number, in order to build the necessary supervision capacity internally and to cover the loss of capacity as people retire or move on. We have eight mindfulness supervision groups for mindfulness teachers mostly in Brighton & Hove ATS, in West Sussex and in Lighthouse facilitated by Robert Marx. We have an East Sussex supervision group funded by Psychologies and Psychological Therapies (PPT) led by Ann Pelling, a Learning Disability supervision group led by Bridgette O’Neill, CAMHS and Recovery College supervision groups led by Taravajra and a Health in Mind (HiM) group supervised by Lynn Ley.

We have started offering **apprenticeships** to recently qualified mindfulness teachers who want to build their teaching experience by co-teaching with one of our experienced trainers under their supervision.

5. CPD Master classes

We offer a series of master classes which are open to trainees, qualified teachers and externally. Events are led by a mixture of trainers with an international profile (the online MSC core skills event was hosted from different locations in the USA) and by local trainers. SPFT mindfulness trainees and staff are entitled to attend a free event every year and to attend subsequent events at substantially reduced fees.

15th May 2020	Robert Marx, Ines Santos, Clara Strauss, Mike Hales & Helen Leigh-Phippard, Julia Racster-Szostak & Simon Foster	'Safety and effectiveness: working with trauma using mindfulness'
15 th , 19 th , 22 nd , 26th July 2020	Kristin Neff & Chris Germer	'4-session online Core Skills in Mindful Self Compassion'
4 th Sept 2020	John Peacock	'Buddhist Foundation of Mindfulness'
2 nd October 2020	Alistair Wilson	'Mindfulness: Trauma and Dissociation'
6 th Nov 2020	Rebecca Crane with Clara Strauss	'MBCT: the evolving story'

We provided one online retreat in September 2020 and we are also offering two online retreats in the Autumn of 2021.

6. Peer Support & Mindfulness Advocates

It has been possible to meet virtually and discuss common issues on a few occasions, however in reduced numbers. The mindfulness advocates have been somewhat dissipated as a self-organising group during 2020-21, dealing variously with family and work commitments and other challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Advocates continue to contribute in the training of mindfulness teachers as they have done in previous years, and will **facilitate a workshop in our Annual Conference**. A question has been raised regarding the recruitment and self-referral of younger adults (under 25-30 years of age) and reasons why this might be lower than might be beneficial in that age group. Under the circumstances it hasn't been possible to investigate this but, in considering this, advocates have wondered whether public understanding of the nature of mindfulness practice, the form of mindfulness groups and the possibility of self-referral are sufficiently clear. Advocates believe these matters of general awareness may also negatively affect the recruitment of other social groups, narrowing the demographic of people who benefit from the therapy. The social breadth of recruitment into mindfulness-based therapies has been under consideration by advocates for some time now. Their workshop will focus on this question.

7. Consultancy and Involvement with other Organisations

a. Business development

SMC is dependent on raising money from running courses, mindfulness support for NHS staff and organisations and also external business.

i. Business Leaflet

We have produced a short leaflet to show the type of service we provide and outline how mindfulness can support wellbeing and increase productivity within the workforce. We have developed a price structure that is favourable to public and third sector organisations as our motivation is to make profit but also offer support where it is needed.

ii. Mindfulness for external organisations

We have facilitated an 8-week MBCT course for East Sussex County Council, but due to organisational changes we have not been able to secure repeat courses. We have had several meetings with organisations such as the police and third sector organisations, and although it has been difficult to secure 8-week courses, we have provided taster sessions for organisations who have felt that this would be beneficial for their staff, without the commitment to an 8-week course. This has included American Express, Brighton & Hove Stammering Support Group, Alliance for Better Care, The British Safety Council and Ricochet Media.

We have been providing MBCT groups and/or taster sessions for staff at the Office for National Statistics in Hampshire and in Wales since 2018.

iii. Working with our Charity, Heads On

The Trust Charity, Heads On, has been working to secure support from businesses with the offer of a mindfulness session for their staff in return and secured a session with IBSTOCK Tools. This money is ringfenced in the Heads on Charity pot for mindfulness activities for patient benefit that are not offered via our usual channels.

iv. **Mindfulness tasters for NHS providers**

We are keen to raise awareness of the benefits of mindfulness among GPs, CCGs and NHS providers. Internal/free tasters have been provided for various NHS providers, including the Department of Psychiatry and Rother and Hastings CCG.

v. **Working with the British Safety Council**

We have formed an arrangement with the [British Safety Council](#) to offer the mindfulness component of their new [‘Being Well Together’](#) programme, which has a mission of being a one stop shop for business health, safety and wellbeing. This involves a scale of fees according to the level of membership. Requests for mindfulness provision will come via engagement with the Being Well Together package.

vi **Mindfulness films**

We made two short films advertising our SMC teacher training programmes, [Adapted mindfulness-based interventions \(MBIs\)](#) and [Foundation Training in Mindfulness-based approaches](#), which are available to watch on our website.



We produced a short film and wrote the script called **‘Keep Your Mind in Gear’** to support a safer, mindfulness-based approach to driving. It was commissioned by Brighton & Hove City Council Road Safety Department to use in their safer driving campaigns. Using local actors, friends and a Brighton-based music producer to give the film authenticity and keep the cost down. We received positive feedback and are encouraged by ongoing plans by the Council to embed it within the road safety agenda. The Council employed a marketing agency to run a digital campaign to promote the film. Overall headlines for a two-week period (29 March to 18 April 2021) were that the film reached almost 75,000 people and data suggested that

20-30% of people said they will now use mindfulness while driving. See more about this initiative on the [Sussex Mindfulness Centre website](#) and on the [Brighton & Hove City Council website](#).

Plans to produce a film about the benefits of our mindfulness courses for the Office of National Statistics, which could be used to promote the training for business, were put on hold during COVID-19 restrictions.

vi. **Business advisors**

We continue to work with Julia Powell who is offering us her extensive communications experience in the Third Sector in return for experience co-teaching mindfulness groups. We are also working with Brett Davis, former Microsoft sales director, who is helping us with our sales strategy in relation to local businesses who might want mindfulness.

b. **Leadership roles in external bodies**

BAMBA (British Association of Mindfulness-based Approaches)



Robert Marx has been chairing this national group since July 2020. BAMBA is transitioning to becoming a charity with a Board and Trustees and is moving towards becoming a more formal accrediting body. BAMBA has been given the role of accrediting the MBCT in IAPT training by NHS England and is now represented at the National Psychological Professions Workforce Development group which it attends. BAMBA has a programme of work focusing on EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and have sent out a consultation on EDI issues. We have also sent a wider consultation with 72 replies on areas our members want us to focus on. We have professionalised the Register and are looking to add in a supervisors' and assessors' register. We held a day retreat with Mark Williams with around 500 people.

8. Research

At SMC we are passionate about research because research enables our mindfulness work to be safely innovative and allows us to find out what is helpful and for whom. Most of our research looks at the potential benefits of mindfulness courses for groups of people where there isn't already good research evidence.

We have been researching mindfulness courses for people experiencing a range of mental health difficulties including obsessive-compulsive difficulties, depression and distressing voices. Some of our research is for working age adults but we have also been conducting research involving younger people and older people. Last but not least, we have been offering mindfulness courses to our NHS staff for a number of years and have been evaluating their effectiveness through high quality research studies.

Research Objectives

- To continue to improve service user, carer and staff experience by evaluating the impact of our mindfulness-based programmes and training, making changes where necessary in response to evaluation, and thereby improving their delivery.
- To seek funding for research projects that expand the international evidence for the use of adapted and innovative mindfulness and compassion practice with groups of people whose potential to benefit from these approaches has not yet been established.
- To disseminate the findings of our research and practice in the peer-reviewed academic literature.

We are also actively engaged in conducting research to contribute to the evidence base on effectiveness and safety. Currently funded research studies include:

- evaluating the potential of mindfulness courses for people with a diagnosis of “emotionally unstable personality disorder (EUPD)”.
- Conducting a feasibility study of an adapted MBCT course for people diagnosed obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

We also have contributed significantly to peer-reviewed academic literature and mindfulness and compassion literature more broadly, publishing findings of our research studies so that our research makes a difference beyond SMC. As a group, we have published over 50 peer reviewed papers and five book chapters.

Compassion Research

We are hoping to start to research compassion-enhanced mindfulness courses, in order to see if bringing compassion practices into our mindfulness courses might be helpful. Our compassion research has included **developing a new self-report measure of compassion** so that we can see if our courses help to enhance levels of compassion for self and other people.

9. Annual Conference

This year the 8th annual conference is scheduled for 17th Sept 2021:

‘Emerging from COVID-19: mindfulness reaching schools, politics and marginalised groups’ with Sam Allen, Caroline Lucas, Willem Kuyken, Byron Lee, Celia Heneage and Nicola Smith.

The conference in 2020: ‘New Frontiers in Mindfulness-Based Approaches’ was cancelled in due to COVID-19.

10. Future Focus

We have started the new financial year in a good place and continue to do what we do well; enabling patients and NHS staff to build resilience and working to expand the evidence base for the therapeutic benefits of mindfulness. This will be our continued focus for the next year whilst reaching out to marginalised groups and those who don’t easily access mental health support as well as developing our business strategy to build a funding stream from support to business.

SMC is developing new aspects of its training pathways, including:

- (i) a top up training that will allow graduates of the Adapted MBI programme to 'top up' their existing training so that they can teach MBSR or MBCT;
- (ii) provision of additional assist teaching experiences to people who have completed a training in MBCT/ MBSR and who wish to further develop their skills and/or have taught enough courses for BAMBA accreditation; and
- (iii) the option for graduates and others to have an MBCT/ MBSR course formally MBI:TAC (Mindfulness Based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria) assessed, which may become a national requirement. Following the successful provision of training online in the COVID-19 pandemic, SMC is exploring the possibility of widening the pool of potential participants for its Adapted MBI training by approaching NHS Trusts over a greater geographical region regarding whether they wish to fund their staff to attend this. As detailed earlier, SMC is also building its training and supervision capacity, not least through SMC trainers becoming trained to administer the MBI:TAC.

SMC is focussing on EDI in relation to mindfulness-based interventions and trainings. This includes projects that have recently started to examine demographics in relation to trainees on SMC courses, participants in SMC staff mindfulness groups and participants in MBCT courses in IAPT, to see whether certain groups are under-represented. If this turns out to be the case, these data will provide a starting point for future work to understand why this may be and what may help make mindfulness-based interventions and trainings more inclusive. SMC is also exploring the possibility of hiring a consultant who can advise in relation to EDI and of funding some training for SMC and other Trust mindfulness staff in relation to this.

With regards to research, SMC is continuing to submit research funding applications, including a recent NIHR bid to build on a randomised controlled trial that examined the efficacy of self-help mindfulness for NHS staff wellbeing.

11. Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support of Sam Allen, Chief Executive Officer of Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust for her genuine and continued support of Sussex Mindfulness Centre alongside the teachers who have adapted and offered courses and drop-ins for staff and service users via new platforms which has been necessary since lockdown.

Report prepared by Laura Hearnshaw and Paula Bellers 3.9.21.