

Wales Needs Mindfulness

As we emerge from the pandemic and count the cost for mental health, wellbeing is a priority for the whole of society, not just a personal concern.

Beyond the immediate crisis, we need changed institutions based on compassionate, empowering values. Our polarised politics shows that we need to get better at listening to each other. And the climate crisis demands that we build a society that values contentment above consumption.

Mindfulness has become an important movement – a practice and a way of living and working that's accessible, cost effective, proven, and scaleable. It lets people take control of their own wellbeing in a compassionate and effective way.

We believe mindfulness should be at the heart of our thinking about the society we want to create.

Mindfulness is ...

- **Effective.** Mindfulness lets people calm down and become more aware of their thoughts and feelings. That's a recognised key to mental wellbeing.
- **Accessible.** in recent research 15% of the population say they've tried mindfulness and liked it, while a further 35% are open to doing so. It's popular in workplaces and healthcare, and with children as well as adults.
- **Fair.** There are no barriers that investment can't address. Valleys Steps has taught mindfulness to thousands of people in the Welsh Valleys.
- **Empowering.** Mindfulness lets people take control of their states of mind, rather than relying on medication to feel better.
- **Proven.** Mindfulness-based interventions are backed by research and approved by NICE for some conditions. Research shows no adverse side effects for the vast majority of people.
- **Cost-Effective.** Mindfulness courses are offered to groups at a competitive cost.
- **Preventative.** In line with the goals of Wales NHS, mindfulness helps people avoid mental health problems by fostering wellbeing and resilience.
- **Compassionate.** Mindfulness fosters a kinder, more thoughtful way of living. It can help create more compassionate services – Aneurin Bevan UHB is already leading the way.
- **Scaleable.** Wales has many mindfulness teachers and well-developed organisations. Mindfulness can be taught online and in Welsh.
- **A Welsh success story.** Wales is a world leader in mindfulness, spearheaded by Bangor University's Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice.

Meddylgarwch Cymru / Mindfulness Wales brings mindfulness experts together with policymakers and leaders in Wales to learn how we can bring the benefits of mindfulness to the whole of Welsh society.



Education

Why We Need Mindfulness in Education

Supporting our children's wellbeing should be the top priority for Wales.

Even before Covid, research showed that mental health problems were steadily worsening, especially among young people. We know that early prevention is vital: 50% of mental health problems begin before the age of 15 years and 75% by 24. The pandemic has made things much worse. Despite the efforts of professionals, learners of all ages have experienced anxiety, uncertainty and disrupted education.

Research shows that staff wellbeing is the major factor in creating an environment which supports learners' wellbeing. But Education Support's 2020 survey found that 62% of education professionals and 77% of Education Leaders said they were stressed.

The Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience in the Wales 2022 curriculum offers a framework that helps schools respond. But they need practical and accessible methods that both help children with immediate difficulties and also equip them with skills for lifelong resilience.

Mindfulness can meet this need. A substantial body of research shows that mindfulness can help learners, leaders and staff *cope* with challenges, *connect* with themselves, other people and the natural world, *flourish* through gratitude, appreciation and kindness, and *empower change* fostering the greater perspective that supports better decisions.

Schools across Wales are exploring how mindfulness can integrate into the curriculum and school life, supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing of staff, learners and families within the Whole School Approach. In the wider education field, it's developing in youth work, FE and HE.

A range of high-quality evidence-based training programmes support learners' mental and emotional wellbeing and relate directly to the new curriculum. The Mindfulness Toolkit for Wales sets out how education settings can develop a strategic mindfulness journey that involves leaders, staff, learners and families, building the foundational values of awareness and compassion into the school and local community.

A lot is happening, but we need active engagement from policymakers for the transformative potential of mindfulness to be realised.

Recommendations

We urge policymakers to:

- Prioritise funding the wellbeing of education leaders and staff.
- Set funding criteria for learners of all ages for provisions that include mindfulness.
- Support schools to include families in mindfulness provision, in line with the Whole School Approach and an integrated approach to wellbeing.



Health

After Covid, we need effective ways to support the mental health a significant proportion of people in Wales. We also need to support the wellbeing of NHS staff who are reeling from a year of intense, traumatic work, on top of already demanding conditions

Mindfulness is a viable, proven practice that lets patients become active participants in their own health and wellbeing, who actively participate in a compassionate healing process, supplementing what medication can offer.

Clinical Delivery

Matrics Cymru recognises MBPs in Welsh Mental Health strategy, recommending clinical delivery of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for depression prevention, health anxiety, and antenatal anxiety and depression; MBP for psychosis; and Mindfulness-informed interventions such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (for anxiety disorders) and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (for borderline personality disorder).

MBPs are being used to support cancer care and managing chronic pain and other longterm conditions and in wellbeing programmes ranging from light touch tasters to in-depth interventions.

Staff Wellbeing

Evidence shows that mindfulness for healthcare staff is cost-effective, reduces absenteeism, burnout and stress, and increases life-satisfaction and compassion. Some Health Boards already offer staff access to MBPs to cultivate wellbeing, improve working habits, and stay in contact with the values that underpin their work.

Organisational Culture

We believe that Wales needs a Health Service in which mindful and compassionate values are integrated into all aspects of the NHS, from senior leadership down.

Recommendations

We recommend:

- Mindfulness Based Programmes become a core part of Approaches to Mental Health and psychological wellbeing in Wales.
- A vision and delivery strategy for how MBPs can support whole population approaches to healthy habits.
- An accessible national program of socially prescribed mindfulness courses and classes as a Foundation Tier, public health initiative available across Wales following the model being developed by Aneuren Bevan UHB and Valleys Steps.
- Effective models of mindfulness for people with ongoing health challenges.
- Collaboration across the NHS in Wales including sharing good practice for implementation, delivery and evaluation, and sharing resources.
- Funding for mindfulness training pathways for Welsh Healthcare professionals.
- Support for Healthcare staff through mindfulness interventions.



About Meddylgarwch Cymru/ Mindfulness Wales

Our work developed from gatherings of Welsh mindfulness teachers over several years. In 2018 a small group of these mindfulness teachers and researchers who had links with the UK-wide Mindfulness Initiative started exploring how mindfulness could help Wales.

In March 2019 the MP Chris Ruane arranged a meeting with Wales First Minister Mark Drakeford, where they presented proposals for how mindfulness could help in Health, Education and other sectors.

In November 2019 we held the Developing Mindfulness in Wales Conference at the Temple of Peace in Cardiff, attended by 140 people including many sector leaders and addressed by the FM.

And in late 2020 we formed a new charity called Meddylgarwch Cymru / Mindfulness Wales.

We work closely with mindfulness researchers at Bangor, Aberystwyth and Cardiff universities, the Mindfulness Initiative and the Welsh Government and other policymakers, and Wales' mindfulness community.

Trustees: Elizabeth Williams (Chair), Rob Callen Davies, Chris Ruane, Heather Fish, Vishvapani Blomfield, Karen Scott.

