

Welcome to the December e-bulletin for working carers.

Christmas Special

Yes it is December and this means I am making a Christmas edition of this newsletter. I hope you have found the newsletters helpful and enjoyable over the last few months. I would love to hear if you want any particular news or information because I want to keep improving the support I can provide to you.



Christmas Quiz

OK, OK I haven't created a Christmas quiz for you (I am very sorry but I will try next year). I searched for one and the Telegraph

has a fun one and I wouldn't say it's too hard. Give it a try and see how you get one. [Please click here.](#)

Online Counselling

Did you read last week's topic of the week? I spoke about a new service by Cumbria County Council. I think it will be very useful to some, during the festive season. Click [HERE](#) to read and learn more about this new service.



Mindfulness Top-Ups at the Helena Thompson Museum, Workington:

Wednesday 11th January 6.30pm – 7.45pm

Wednesday 8th February 6.30pm – 7.45pm

Wednesday 8th March 6.30pm - 7.45pm

Former participants of a Mindfulness course are welcome to attend the Top-Up Sessions, these sessions are drop in sessions, you can attend as many or as few as you like or none at all if you do not feel that you need a Mindfulness 'top-up'

Time of Reflection

As well as Christmas, the awkward in-between week that is a blur of boxing day sales, chocolate and an odd change of routine, it is also new year. This time of year makes us reflect on the year and what we have achieved; the good, the bad and the ugly. What I always find funny is, how easily we can forget about events or little moments in the year and only really remember the 'headlines'.

For me and probably for you, this year has disappeared in a flash. It was only yesterday I was buying Easter eggs and eating lots of toasted hot cross buns (to be fair you can buy them all year round now). I have recently finished an 8 week course of Mindfulness (more on the next page) and it made me realise how often we look at our past or think/daydream about our futures rather than being present in the moment of now. This December especially, I am appreciating the community where I live and soaking up the meet ups with friends and family rather than the world wind that it is another activity that I need to go to. The reason being, our traditions change over the years and people come in and out of our lives and I want to appreciate them whilst they are here.

At the end of year, I feel gratitude. Grateful for the little moments of laughter, joy and support. I am grateful for the team at West Cumbria Carers because they are so supportive but no matter what, they can make you smile and feel good about yourself.

So what does this mean for 2017? Well I am going to take better care of myself (next month's newsletter will be about healthy lifestyle). What I food, how I talk to myself (the negative mind monkeys will be quieter) and fitness. Of course, we all say this at the end of the year but I have a half marathon to plan for and lots of money to raise.

Do you have any resolutions for 2017?

What are you grateful for in your life?

What will you do in 2017 which will help you live a happier, healthier life?

New Mindfulness courses to start in the new year at Millom and Wigton. Both starting with an introduction to Mindfulness session on: 31st January 10am-1pm- Millom and Wigton –23rd March 6pm-8pm

Feeling the Stress of Christmas?

For a number of people Christmas can actually be a time which brings stress, worry and a change of schedule. It might be spinning the plates or having a guest who has particular needs. If you want to learn how to reduce your stress during the festive period please click on the links below and read more.

Below are links to websites :

14 ways to manage stress this Christmas-

<http://www.independent.ie/life/health-wellbeing/mental-health/14-ways-to-manage-stress-this-christmas-35281683.html>

Tips for taking the stress out of family situations-

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/wellbeing/mood-and-mind/mind-healing-tips-taking-stress-christmas/>

Tips for reducing stress if a guest has dementia -

<http://www.aol.co.uk/living/2016/12/21/tips-on-reducing-dinner-stress-for-christmas-guests-with-dementi/>

Feeling Lonely at Christmas

I was looking for some interesting stress bursting reads and I stumbled upon this interesting article about loneliness. [Click here for the article](#). The article is about Millennials (people aged between 25– 34) being twice as likely to be lonely at Christmas than our Elderly population.

I am a Millennial so I obviously wanted to read it but I think it shows that loneliness is all around us. When you have the Christmas TV shows, films and social media it creates a 'perfect' Christmas and it is an aspiration which is never possible to achieve (unless you watch EastEnders and that is the opposite). Anxiety, stress and reflection on what has not been achieved in the past year plays heavy on their minds. This can lead to isolation or feeling lonely when you are surrounded by others. Reading this article made me realise that no one has a 'perfect' Christmas but we somehow compare others to others. Often the small mishaps one year become the joke the family shares in the future.

Are you a creative carer with a way with words? Contact us about an exciting project we will be doing in the new year with Dove Cottage and Wordsworth Museum.

Mindfulness- The Hannah Blake honest review



Everyone experiences Mindfulness differently and with an 8 week course. People enter it for different reasons. Anxiety, a change in circumstance, intrigue or just unable to manage to focus because of the chatter in their head. There are so many reasons but mindfulness is about one thing- creating calm.

I will note that I missed two sessions – one due to being on holiday (but I was still able to practice and the second due to sickness - I was just a big moan and didn't practice but I think the practice would of helped).

At the start I was looking forward to it because I had heard positive reviews from carers. We had to try and seat quietly for 1 minute, it felt like forever! By the end of the first session we managed 30 minutes. By the end it was about 50 minutes for one session.

We started with just focusing on our breath. Just breathing in and out, not letting our mind start thinking about what we had to make for dinner later. Every time we got distracted we had to smile to acknowledge it and then go back into it. At the start this felt very odd but by week 8 it was standard practice.

As the weeks went on it got more and more advanced, for example, we would do a 'body scan'. This basically means, you focus on parts of your body moving from your feet up to your head. The first time I did this, it was surreal. It felt like my whole body was made out of stone, I could hardly move. Later on, we had to create visions of putting negative thoughts away, and replace with positive.

There was homework of watching a TV programme without doing anything else. No food, no ironing, scrolling on the phone, just watching TV. It was a 'turning point' for me. It made me realise the auto pilot I go into after work and how rubbish TV can be. Now I don't watch as much TV, freeing up time for other things.

Practice is key to get the most of this however practice can just be a few minutes here and there. I don't get 'worked up' about things as much as I used to because it is an emotion which will pass by. I just stop for a amount, take a few breaths and it is amazing how that small action can do so much for the mind. Every time I say something negative to myself, I stop and say 'you wouldn't say this to a friend, so don't say it now'.

I have to say there were a few times in the sessions when I fell asleep rather than go into mindfulness. I was told this is because my body and mind aren't used to relaxing without shutting down.

It is hard to explain my experience but I enjoyed being part of a group. Sharing the experience, growing, learning and listening to other's struggles with it . Overall it has helped me and glad I did it.

We hope you find our new newsletter for working carers helpful and interesting.

If you have something you would like to be included in the next edition, please email hannahblake@westcumbriacarers.co.uk



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