

Compassionate Minds Workshop

Report on the Day

On Wednesday 27th January 2016, Sabrina, Hayley and myself travelled to the Costessey Centre to attend a workshop on Compassionate Minds, run by a lady by the name of Sue Anderson, who is a Director of Compassionate Therapy Services, so you could say, technically, that she is an Occupational Therapist, whether or not, her title suggests that, I have no idea. I will tell you more about the day in this report:

We, being Sabrina, Hayley and me booked a taxi for 9.30, to pick us up then pick Hayley. Shell was originally going to take us there, however, the much-loved “Sproodle,” Frank had an “attack of the runs,” to put it as cleanly as I can. We slightly “mis-calculated” the start time, so we arrived a whole hour and a half earlier!

To pass some time, Hayley and I went to check out the facilities on the outdoor gym, then came back into the warmth, and sat listening to the music from a Zumba class taking place, which we could also watch through a glass window, but, to spare the embarrassment of Zumba-ettes being “watched,” we left them to “Zumba away!”

People started arriving at 10.50, and before we knew where we were, Sue had arrived and asked us to all sign in and leave our email then get our teas and coffees, then we all, 18 of us, find our seats and begin to settle when Sue introduced herself, she explained about her role and that this training was new to her, so we were to be her “guinea pigs.”

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- She started to talk about “tricky brains,” which was basically, how the brain’s state of mind keeps changing; one minute you’re feeling happy and the next, depressed.
- The next part was an interesting item called “3 Circles,” which were in different colours – Blue, indicating “drive and achievement,” Green, “soothing and connecting,” Red, “threat and protection.”

Sue spoke more in depth on these, which in lay person’s English describes the three ways that peoples’ brains and bodies react in certain situations. For example, the colour blue indicating how a person can feel ready to take on a day where they may be busy and have that “can do” attitude etc., as well as achieving satisfaction in how your day has gone, if that makes sense?

Sue spoke more about mindfulness and, as one exercise, for each member to move into the centre of the room, and stand in a circle, and one member in turn to stand in the middle of the circle, say something which keeps them well, which they really love and if anyone else loves the same thing, they join them in the circle as well. The most popular one was dog-walking!!

We then sat down back in our places and we were asked to do another compassionate exercise; this time, Sue passed around to each member, a gemstone, each one a different colour. We were asked to pick up the gemstone, place it in our hand, close our eyes and focus

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entirely on the texture and shape of the stone and escape from the day-to-day stuff for a short while. There was complete silence! After 10 minutes, we were asked to focus back into daily life and share any comments and ask any questions as we went along.

There were a few amusing quotes and cartoons on the slides that were connected with compassion, and most noticeably, was the appearance of the famous *Grumpy Cat* from Facebook, with funny statements: "I had tea and didn't like it!" Then he popped up again, announcing in his usual grumpy way, that it was time for lunch!

For lunch, we were asked if we could try some "mindful eating," which was "zoning out" from distractions and just focusing on the food item you were eating, and once again, closing your eyes, and your brain processing the taste, texture and how it makes you feel. After a few minutes, we all convened into the waiting area to queue up for what was predominantly a vegetarian lunch, consisting of Cous-Cous, Taramasalata, Rice and Kidney Beans, Vegetable Quiche, flapjacks, olives, you name it. It was all very nice and a true banquet, as well as chatting with each other and looking at some compassion books that Sue had bought with her.

We all reconvened at 1pm, ready for the afternoon session. We started with another couple of interactive exercises. This one was when each member got up and we just followed each other around the room, firstly focussing on a moment when you felt really good and you had to convey this feeling by walking around smiling,

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using compassionate body language, namely arms behind your back etc., and to also focus separately on when you didn't feel too good. Fascinating to see the immediate change of body language, hunched shoulders, not smiling and looking down at the floor etc.!

We then returned to our seats and were introduced to Bob the Skeleton, who unfortunately had his leg ripped off accidentally by Sue, who did look amusing when she had Bob's leg over her shoulder!! She handed out a couple of post-it notes and asked us to write down a situation about what was going through our minds on that day, and in turns, we would place this post-it on the part of the skeleton where we were feeling any emotion or worry, also, if that makes sense?

We settled down once again and took part in another "closed eyes" focussing away from the real world and focussing onto our "safe place," perceived or unperceived and also for our brains to process the sounds of this "place" and to also link this feeling with that of the 3 Circles model, which I wrote about earlier in this report.

It was now a Q&A session, which involved reading some handouts as well, one particular one in mind was called, Compassion under the Duvet.

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This is a listed, 4-step process, which I will list below:

1. Before you get out of bed, focus on breathing in and out, at a pace which is soothing for you. Notice how it flows in and out smoothly. This is called **Soothing Rhythm Breathing**.
2. Bring a hint of a smile to your face and notice the warmth and support of your bed.
3. Imagine yourself at your compassionate best, feeling great courage, kindness and non-judgment. Notice your warm voice tone, friendly facial expression and how you move through the world.
4. **Repeat this TWICE A WEEK** to begin with, then increase to **DAILY** if you can – approach your practice with playfulness and curiosity!

After the handouts had been, well, handed out, Sue began to talk about how we deal with self-criticism, the negative bias of our brains and something called a **Compassionate First Aid Box**.

She ran through slides, which were not all Easy Read, as the text overtook the pictures and felt that should be an equal balance of both. This was raised in the Evaluation form which was to be returned at the end of the day.

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Sue raised a general scenario around the “brain bias,” a few examples as follows:

- *A lion and a giraffe are both in Chapelfield Gardens (very unlikely scenario). The lion catches sight of the giraffe and runs towards it. The giraffe runs off and so does the lion. The question is, what happened next? The giraffe returned to the same spot and the lion was nowhere to be seen.*
- *You are in a shop where the Customer Service staff are friendly and smiling at you. Yet, another shop you go into, the staff are very different, and are clearly more interested in talking with their colleagues than serving you. What scenario do you remember most? The negative one, as that is your brain’s negative bias coming to the surface!*

Sue then showed a slide of something called the **Compassionate First Box**, which is a box that should contain just things that are all dear to you. For example, if your favourite colour is purple, you would have a purple paper square (or even a purple gemstone), a picture of your pet, picture of your loved one, etc.

And just before the Evaluation stage, the final exercise was to write a **Compassionate Letter (or email)**. This is something that you write to yourself literally, praising yourself for the work you did in coming along to the Workshop. Sue provided writing cards and envelopes, which each member wrote out one of these privately, then sealed them, placed your home address on, and Sue will

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be posting them to you along the way, which should make an interesting item through your door on the day you receive it!

We then ended with completing the Evaluation Forms and setting off home. It was certainly a very interesting day and certainly made you think more about how you manage your day-to-day wellbeing.

For more information on this or any other aspect related to Compassion, you can contact **Sue** via the website, www.compassionatetherapyservices.co.uk or **Facebook: Compassionate Therapy Services** or by telephone on **07823 338402**.

*Report written by Paul McCluskey
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