

Resilience and wellbeing best practices and success stories of youth workers and young parents having disabled or SEN children



Creators:

Phd Silvia Popovici
PhD Elena-Irina Macovei
PhD Grasu Mihaela
Gintarė Staponaitė-Dargevičienė
Silva Blažulionienė
Lina Noreikienė
Jurgita Vainauskienė
Robertas Čepulis
Denis Mencigar
Anja Horvat
Gökçe Kumral
Ayşe Kilinc
Jessy Vandervaeren
Konstantina Kelektoglou
Eftychia Papadimitriou

2025

Content

Introduction	4
Success Stories	6
Suzana's story - The Walk Back to Myself	7
Mateja's story: Presence over Perfection.....	10
Violeta's Story: Small Steps Toward Inner Peace	14
Janina's story: Values Instead of Perfection	17
Loukia & Maria — Turning Love into Strength.....	20
Jenny & Theophilos — Finding Light in Challenge	23
Konstantina — A Journey of Love and Resilience.....	26
Elena's Story: Reclaiming Calm Amid the Chaos.....	28
Thomas's Story: Finding Balance Through Boundaries	31
Matei's Story: From Silent Guilt to Meaningful Action.....	34
Elena's Story: Returning to Herself through Compassion and Creativity	38
Rūta's story: "Coming Home to Herself: Path to Inner Peace"	42
Laura's Story: "Finding Home in Stillness"	45
Best Practices.....	49
Survival Challenge: Plane Crash.....	50
Neurographic Art for Mindfulness and Emotional Well-being.....	53
Wheel of Life for Work–Life Balance	56
Safe Place Practice	59
Recognizing Fulfilled and Unfulfilled Needs	62
Compassionate Friend Practice	66
Shake and Release	69
Gentle Stretching for Grounding technique as a mindful way to reconnect with yourself and support your child	72
Balancing Control and Flexibility	76
From Worry to Awareness: Understanding Fears and Exhaustion	79
Building Emotional Connection Through Play.....	82
Mindful Micro-Breaks for Daily Resilience.....	85
Respite Scheduling as a Family Routine.....	89
Acceptance and Commitment Support Groups (ACSGs) for Parental and Professional Resilience.....	93
Exploring the Inner World through Creative Mandala Expression	98
Mountain Meditation for Cultivating Inner Strength and Stability	102
Mindful Walking Indoors or Outdoors: Cultivating Presence and Calm through Movement.....	105

Introduction

Globally, 258 million adolescents and young people (17%) live with a disability (UNESCO, 2020). Their families often experience grief-like cycles of negative emotions (sadness, frustration, depression, loneliness, denial), which may be amplified by stigma, isolation, and external crises. Parents and youth workers of children with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN) face a high risk of burnout, yet often lack knowledge and tools for self-care and resilience.

Non-formal education plays a crucial role in supporting inclusion of children with disabilities/SEN, but also reveals the lack of support for parents and youth workers themselves. Partner organizations therefore propose a targeted intervention that combines mindfulness, relaxation techniques, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) elements, and inspirational best practices to strengthen wellbeing, resilience, and social inclusion.

In front of you is an authentic collection of best practices and success stories, where real experiences are shared to empower and inspire parents and youth workers. This pro-active, developmental initiative encourages reflection, learning, and growth.

The best practices and success stories included in the toolkit hold great potential for youth workers, young parents, and people facing difficult life situations such as disability, chronic illness, grief, loneliness, social isolation, or extreme poverty. They can serve as a starting point for:

- Training programs and workshops
- Inspirational group discussions
- Peer-to-peer support sessions

By using these real-life examples, participants can strengthen their ability to share experiences, increase self-confidence, cultivate self-awareness, and adopt positive thinking and optimism. The toolkit can also be applied in educational settings to inspire and motivate young people.

Resilience and wellbeing best practices and success stories of youth workers and young parents having disabled or SEN children act as both emotional support and practical guidance, showing that challenges linked to disability can be faced with strength, creativity, and community. Listening to the success stories of others who have faced and overcome disability-related challenges

- Provide Hope and Optimism – Hearing that someone in a similar situation has managed to cope or thrive reassures you that positive outcomes are possible, even if the path is difficult.
- Reduce Isolation – They remind you that you are not alone. Others have walked the same road, felt the same emotions, and found ways forward.
- Offer Practical Strategies – Real-life examples often include tips, coping mechanisms, or resources that can be applied directly in your own life.
- Strengthen Self-Confidence – Success stories demonstrate resilience and problem-solving, inspiring you to believe in your own capacity to handle challenges.
- Foster a Sense of Belonging – Sharing experiences creates connection, community, and solidarity, counteracting stigma and loneliness.
- Encourage Positive Thinking – They shift focus from limitations to possibilities, supporting emotional wellbeing and resilience.

In developing the best practices and success stories, youth workers and parents were engaged with reflective narratives—stories of challenges faced and resilient responses to them. This reflective and inspirational process contributes to improved mental health, enhanced wellbeing, and a greater sense of belonging to a supportive community that shares common struggles and strengths.

Success Stories



Name of organisation that shared the success story: **Uri Soča**

Suzana's story – The Walk Back to Myself



Background/ Context

Suzana has been working as a teacher at a primary school with an adapted program for children with special needs for the past twenty years. She has always approached her work with great dedication and compassion. Supporting children who require additional help has been deeply fulfilling for her — she saw it as an opportunity to truly make a difference in their lives.

Her goal was to prepare her pupils as best as possible for a successful future, to support their development, and to help them experience school as something positive and encouraging. She was often touched by their personal stories — many of the children came from families with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds,

which made her even more determined to give them warmth, stability, and motivation.

Over time, however, Suzana began to notice that her work was taking an increasing toll on her energy. Lesson preparation, thinking about her pupils, and adapting teaching plans often stretched late into the evening. Even after the workday ended, she found it difficult to put school out of her mind — she would continue working from home, and her family gradually began to feel pushed aside.

Little by little, Suzana started losing her sense of balance between work and private life. She became tired, irritable, and her mood at home

began to affect her relationship with her husband and children. She no longer found time for them, and when they finally were together, she often released her accumulated frustrations from work onto them. After increasingly frequent

arguments with her husband, she realised she needed to find a way to reconnect — with herself and with her family — and to regain the energy and joy she once felt in her profession.

The Story

An opportunity arose for Suzana to take part in a workshop focused on finding a better balance between work and personal life. Several of her colleagues also decided to join, which helped her overcome her initial hesitation and fear of being judged for taking part in something that focused on personal well-being. When she signed up, she didn't expect the experience to become such a turning point in her life.

During the very first discussions, Suzana realised she was not alone in feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. The stories shared by other participants were strikingly similar to hers — only the details differed.

One of the first tools introduced in the workshop was the Wheel of Life. With its help, participants reflected on different areas of their lives — work, health, family, personal growth, and leisure. When Suzana honestly assessed her satisfaction in these areas, she realised that the needs of herself and her family had

fallen completely to the bottom of her priorities. Most of her time and energy went into her work and the well-being of the children she supported at school.

She decided to take a small but meaningful step — to dedicate twenty minutes each day to a walk, without her phone and without thinking about work. During the first two weeks, she walked alone, but then she invited her husband to join her, and later their children as well. She wanted to strengthen their family bond — to be together without the pressure of daily worries and without the distractions that technology so easily brings into their lives. Her goal was to focus on herself and her family. Although the change seemed simple, in reality it required conscious effort and consistency from all family members.

The support of the workshop group played an important role, as participants encouraged each other, shared progress, and looked for solutions to common challenges.

Gradually, her family also began to appreciate the shared walks — what started as a twenty-minute stroll soon turned into longer walks and meaningful conversations.

After a few weeks, Suzana began to notice real changes. She felt calmer, slept better, and had more energy. At home, she was more present and relaxed; at work, she was more patient and motivated. The relationship with her family and

among her colleagues became warmer and more connected.

This experience opened her eyes. She realised that self-care is not something that comes after everything else — it is the foundation on which everything stands: work, family, health, and personal fulfilment. The Wheel of Life helped her reconnect with herself and her loved ones, showing her that true change begins with small, consistent steps

Lessons learned

Through her experience, Suzana learned that balance is not something that happens by itself — it must be created intentionally, step by step. She realised that:

- Self-care is essential, not optional. Taking time for herself allowed her to be more present, calm, and effective both at work and at home.
- Small, consistent actions can lead to meaningful change. A simple daily walk became a turning point that improved her physical well-being, emotional balance, and family relationships.
- Setting boundaries protects both energy and relationships. By learning to stop working after hours and to focus on family time, she discovered that saying “no” is sometimes an act of self-respect.
- Support and shared experiences matter. Talking openly with colleagues helped her realise she was not alone, and that mutual encouragement strengthens resilience.

In the end, Suzana discovered that caring for herself did not take away from her work — it actually gave her more strength to give her best to her students and her family.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **Uri Soča**

Mateja's story: Presence over Perfection



Background/ Context

Mateja is a dedicated special education teacher who, after years of giving everything to her work, began to lose her sense of balance and joy. Her working environment is constantly adapting to the individual needs of her pupils, to behavioural challenges, to the emotional weight of the stories that unfold in her classroom. Working with children with special needs is a profession that requires not only knowledge and pedagogical skill, but also deep emotional resilience.

Over time, these constant demands took a toll on her. Mateja noticed that she often carried the emotions of her pupils home with her. She wanted to be the teacher who could always stay patient, calm, and

strong. But behind that dedication was a growing sense of exhaustion and guilt for not doing enough.

She found herself struggling with feelings of exhaustion, self-doubt, and guilt — believing she must always give more, do better, and stay strong for everyone else. She was constantly thinking about lesson plans, individual progress reports, and how to better support each child.

Mateja knew she loved her work, but she also sensed she was losing touch with the joy that once defined it. She wanted to find a way to reconnect — not only with her students, but with herself.

The Story

Mateja has been working for many years as a special education teacher in a school for children with special needs. At the beginning of her career, she believed that her success depended mainly on professional knowledge — understanding each diagnosis, mastering every teaching method, and keeping perfect control of the classroom. Over time, however, she realised that what truly drained her was not the children, but her own inner struggles: constant self-criticism, frustration, and fear that she wasn't doing enough.

Every day she entered the classroom full of good intentions, but often left feeling defeated. Some children withdrew into silence, others reacted with anger or restlessness, and Mateja tried to stay calm while battling a storm of emotions inside. After work she would go home exhausted, wondering if she had failed again.

The constant feeling of failure was exhausting her to the point where she knew she had to find something to relieve herself. The solution was offered to her in the form of workshops, to which she was invited together with her colleagues.

The workshop was based on the Acceptance and Commitment Theory. At first, she saw it as just another psychological tool she could

use with her students. But soon she realised that ideas that acceptance and commitment theory brings to her life was, above all, a way of transforming her own relationship with stress and emotion.

Mateja started to practise mindfulness, taking short breathing breaks during the day and simply observing her thoughts without judging them.

Instead of fighting feelings of frustration, she began to acknowledge them.

Mateja asked herself what truly mattered to her as a teacher. She realised that her purpose was not to have a perfect lesson, but to create a space of safety and acceptance for her pupils. When a day didn't go as planned, she reminded herself that the thing that matters most is being present.

Gradually, she noticed subtle but important changes, not so much in the pupils, but in herself. When she accepted that noise, frustration, or a child's silence were simply part of reality, she became calmer. And as her calmness grew, the relationship with her pupils improved.

Mateja realised that acceptance is not the same as giving up. It means being fully present with whatever shows up while staying true to her values. Mindfulness helped her

understand that being a good teacher doesn't mean controlling every outcome, but remaining compassionate and grounded, even in difficult moments.

moments of awareness helped the entire classroom maintain calm and focus through class.

Mateja later introduced short “mindfulness breaks” into their workday; a minute or two to pause, breathe, and reconnect. These small

Lessons learned

- Acceptance is not giving up, it is understanding. Mateja learned that difficult emotions such as frustration, sadness, or helplessness are not signs of weakness, but natural reactions to meaningful work. By allowing herself to feel them, she stopped wasting energy on fighting what she couldn't change.
- Values provide direction when everything feels uncertain. When Mateja reconnected with what truly mattered to her, she found a renewed sense of purpose, even on difficult days.
- Presence matters more than perfection. Her students responded most positively not when lessons went according to plan, but when she was calm, patient, and emotionally available. Mindfulness helped her stay grounded in the present moment, even amid chaos.
- Small shifts can create deep change. By making small, consistent adjustments — a mindful pause before reacting, a few minutes of breathing between classes — she began to experience greater peace, clarity, and balance in both her personal and professional life.

In the end, Mateja understood that acceptance and commitment are not abstract concepts, they are daily practices. By accepting what she cannot control and committing to what truly aligns with her values, she rediscovered the joy, meaning, and calm that first inspired her to become a teacher.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **KAI**

Violeta's Story: Small Steps Toward Inner Peace



Background/Context

Violeta, a 40-year-old woman, feels that she is the main pillar of her family. She is raising a 12-year-old daughter diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The girl attends a special school, but at home, she requires her mother's constant and undivided attention.

Violeta shares that her daughter finds it difficult to interact with other family members, which means that most of the emotional and physical responsibility falls on

her. Every evening feels like being “on duty.” She rarely finds time for rest, for a conversation with her husband, or even a few quiet moments alone.

Over time, she began to experience constant fatigue, tension, and helplessness. At times, she even felt an urge “not to come home,” as the thought of always having to be available became overwhelming. She said: “It feels like I don’t exist anymore – only the mother does.”

The Story

The first step was to introduce the body scan practice, designed to help recognize bodily sensations and areas of tension. At first, Violeta said it was difficult for her to “do nothing,” but after a few attempts, she began to notice how her shoulders, neck, and jaw tensed even when her daughter was calm. She said: “For the first time, I realized that my body is always on guard – as if waiting for the next moment I’ll have to react.”

By practicing regularly, Violeta started to recognize the moments when her body signaled her to stop. These signals became reminders: “Now it’s time for me.” Gradually, she learned to listen to her body and more confidently express her needs — asking her husband to spend time with their daughter in the evenings or taking a short walk alone.

Later, she began using short breathing pauses throughout the day. When she felt tension building up, she would stop for a few minutes and focus on her breathing. “Before, I reacted instantly — now I sometimes just stop, exhale, and only then speak.

Even my daughter responds more calmly,” she shared. The breathing exercise became her way of “resetting the system” when emotions felt too strong.

The third step was mandala drawing – an activity that initially seemed childish but gradually turned into a soothing evening ritual.

At first, Violeta drew mandalas alone, but soon her daughter joined in, and later her husband as well. Drawing became a shared evening activity that naturally included the whole family. This practice helped create a calmer and more open atmosphere at home — her husband had the opportunity to bond more closely with their daughter through creativity, while Violeta could step out of her constant “mediator” role. It strengthened family relationships and brought more peaceful, connected moments together.

Gradually, Violeta realized that self-care is not selfishness but a necessary foundation for caring for others. She learned to respond to her own limits with more

*compassion and to stop blaming
herself for feeling tired.*

Lessons Learned

- Through this experience, Violeta learned that change begins with small, intentional steps. The body scan helped her notice how much tension she carried daily and reminded her that she has the right to stop and care for herself.
- Breathing pauses became her way to regain balance when emotions took over. These moments showed her that even a short pause can change the tone of an entire day.
- Mandala drawing not only provided space for calm and self-expression but also strengthened family relationships. Shared creativity became a bridge between father and daughter, bringing more connection, understanding, and emotional stability to their home.
- Ultimately, Violeta discovered that caring for herself is not a sign of weakness or selfishness — it is the very foundation of her ability to love, give, and be present for others. As she learned to listen to her body and her needs, lightness, gentleness, and gratitude gradually returned to her life.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **KAI**

Janina's story: Values Instead of Perfection



Background/ Context

Janina is a primary school teacher with fifteen years of teaching experience. She has always been recognized as responsible, meticulous, and deeply dedicated to her work. High standards and a strong sense of responsibility have accompanied her since the very beginning of her career.

This school year, a pupil with significant special educational needs joined her class. It was a new and challenging experience — Janina had never worked with a child facing such complex difficulties before. Despite her efforts, she increasingly felt that she was

unable to provide the kind of education she expected from herself. She often felt disappointed, tired, and inadequate for her role. The thought “I am not fit for this job” became a recurring part of her daily thinking.

Gradually, her enthusiasm and sense of fulfillment at work began to fade. Janina started avoiding colleagues' meetings, feeling as if she were “not a good enough teacher.” The work that once brought her meaning and joy became a constant source of self-criticism.

The Story

While working with her new pupil, Janina began to feel a growing sense of helplessness. She said: “I’m doing everything I can, but I still don’t achieve what I expect from myself.” Each day became an emotional challenge — she felt constantly judged and not good enough.

During one of the sessions, she was invited to complete the “My Values” exercise. At first, Janina reacted with skepticism — values seemed like an abstract concept that had little to do with everyday life. However, as she looked through the list and selected the values that felt most meaningful to her, the conversation took a different direction. She chose patience, care, connection, and growth.

When these values were discussed, Janina realized that until then she had been focusing mainly on results, rather than on how she

wanted to be with her students. She said: “For years I’ve been striving for my students to learn as much as possible, but I forgot that my most important value is care, not perfection.”

Over the following weeks, she began to experiment — reducing pressure on herself and evaluating her days by whether she acted in line with her values, rather than by academic outcomes. After one lesson she shared: “Today he learned only two letters, but I stayed calm and patient the whole time. It was hard, but I feel that I acted as the kind of teacher I want to be.”

This shift in perspective allowed Janina to restore a sense of meaning in her work. She noticed that when she acted according to her values, emotional fatigue decreased and satisfaction gradually returned — even after challenging days.

Lessons Learned

- Janina’s experience showed that even with many years of professional experience, new situations can evoke deep self-doubt. Yet this uncertainty can become an opportunity for growth when viewed through the lens of values, rather than through self-criticism or fear of mistakes.
- The “My Values” practice helped Janina reconnect her daily teaching with what truly matters to her. Instead of chasing impossible standards or blaming herself for unachieved results, she started to assess her actions by whether they reflected patience, care, and connection — her core values as a teacher.
- This change reduced tension and helped her rebuild a professional identity based on authenticity rather than perfectionism. Janina realized that true success is not about achieving every goal, but about being able to act every day in alignment with what brings meaning.
- Ultimately, she discovered that when a teacher lives according to their values, their relationship with students also changes — it becomes warmer, more accepting, and built on trust.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **ENTAXIS**

Loukia & Maria — Turning Love into Strength



Background/ Context

Loukia is a young woman with Down Syndrome who has built a life full of optimism, independence, and joy. Her mother, Maria, has been her greatest supporter — encouraging her to explore her abilities and live a meaningful life. Their story reflects how inclusion, encouragement, and

unconditional love can lead to remarkable growth for both child and parent. From an early age, Maria guided Loukia to focus on her strengths rather than limitations. She wanted her daughter to develop confidence, skills, and self-belief — values that would help her navigate life with resilience.

The Story

With her mother's steady support, Loukia completed her formal education and continued her studies at a technical school specializing in tourism. It was a period of discovery and growth, a time when she began to explore her interests and realize her own capabilities. During these years, Loukia found a deep passion for sports. What began as a casual interest soon became a central part of her life. She joined artistic and rhythmic gymnastics and took up swimming, activities that not only strengthened her body but also her spirit. Through dedication, discipline, and countless hours of training, she developed a sense of purpose and confidence that would carry her far beyond the classroom. Her perseverance paid off when she was selected to represent her country as part of the National Paralympic Team, proudly winning multiple medals in international competitions.

For Loukia, sport became much more than a physical pursuit. It offered her a sense of identity, belonging, and community. Within her team, she found friendship and support — people who understood

her ambitions and celebrated her victories, big and small.

Competing on the world stage taught her the true meaning of teamwork, focus, and resilience. Beyond the medals, Loukia discovered the joy of self-expression and independence. She learned to care for her body and mind with pride and to celebrate her individuality. Her cheerful personality shines through in everything she does, from her passion for cooking and her love of traveling with friends, to her colorful sense of humor and unique style. Her dream for the future is simple yet profound: to one day have her own family. This dream represents not only hope but also a deep desire for love, connection, and independence.

For Maria, Loukia's mother, motherhood was a journey that reshaped her entire understanding of strength and love. Having become a mother later in life, she encountered not only the challenges of raising a child with special needs but also the weight of societal prejudice and misunderstanding. Yet Maria faced these difficulties with

remarkable grace and determination. She learned, through trial and reflection, that to care for her daughter fully, she first needed to nurture her own emotional and mental well-being. Over time, she discovered that resilience and self-care are inseparable — two sides of the same strength.

Through her involvement with the National Down Syndrome Parents

Association, Maria found community, friendship, and purpose.

Sharing experiences with other parents provided her with balance and renewed optimism. Together, they became voices for inclusion, understanding, and dignity — showing that every family, when supported with empathy and respect, can thrive.

Lessons learned

Through their shared journey, Loukia and Maria discovered that:

- Inclusion builds empowerment: Participation in education, sports, and community life strengthens confidence and independence.
- Self-care supports care giving: Parents who look after their emotional wellbeing can better support their children.
- Advocacy creates change: Connecting with others and sharing experiences fosters awareness and collective growth.
- Their story is a gentle reminder that love, perseverance, and connection can transform challenges into lifelong strengths.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **ENTAXIS**

Jenny & Theophilos — Finding Light in Challenge



Background/ Context

Jenny is a single mother raising two sons — Vasilis and Theophilos. Her younger child, Theophilos, lives with severe autism and multiple developmental challenges that shape every aspect of their daily lives. Jenny's journey is one of courage, adaptation, and finding light even in difficult circumstances. When she lost her husband during her pregnancy, her world shattered overnight. Grief and uncertainty became constant companions, but instead of surrendering to despair, she

made the brave choice to move forward.

She devoted herself to her children, learning to navigate a life that was far from what she had imagined. Each day required strength, creativity, and patience, but Jenny refused to let tragedy define her. She found hope in small victories — a smile, a calm moment, a step toward understanding. Through every hardship, she held on to love as her guiding force, proving that even in loss, life can still hold meaning, beauty, and purpose.

The Story

Raising Theophilos required not only endless patience and boundless creativity, but also an unshakable inner strength that few could imagine. Each day brought new challenges, as his behavior could shift in an instant — from calm curiosity to sudden frustration or even aggression. Simple routines like eating or getting dressed demanded adaptability and calm under pressure. Traditional schooling quickly proved impossible, so Jenny transformed their home into a nurturing, structured space designed for his needs. She adjusted every detail — lighting, textures, sounds — even keeping the extractor fan running constantly to create a soothing background hum that helped Theophilos feel safe.

Life became a delicate balance between care and exhaustion. Jenny felt as if she was isolated from the rest of the world. Yet she refused to surrender to despair. Instead, she focused on the few things she could control — small rituals that helped her hold on to her sense of self. She took care of her appearance, laughed whenever she could, and found

brief, precious moments of peace in the evening — a glass of wine, a breath of silence, a reminder that she had made it through another day.

Then came a moment of transformation: with the help of kind volunteers and the dedicated special educator Mrs. Depi Chatzisavva, Jenny and Theophilos managed something once unimaginable — a three-day trip to Cyprus. What seemed ordinary to others was, for them, a triumph built on years of perseverance and trust. That journey symbolized joy, trust, and hope — proof that progress is not always about grand achievements. Sometimes, it appears in small, steady steps: a calmer day, a shared smile, a connection that once felt out of reach.

Jenny's strength grew from acceptance — from the decision to see her son's world through empathy rather than resistance. She learned to listen to his silences, to understand his rhythms, and to meet him where he was instead of forcing him into what others expected. Music, humor, and the kindness of compassionate people

became her lifelines, helping her rebuild emotional balance and inner peace. Through it all, Jenny discovered that love is not measured by ease or perfection, but by persistence — the quiet, daily choice to keep going, to keep

believing, and to keep finding beauty in the smallest victories.

Lessons learned

Through her experience, Jenny learned that:

- Acceptance builds resilience: Embracing reality opens the door to peace and adaptability.
- Support networks matter: Volunteers, educators, and friends can transform isolation into connection.
- Self-care is not selfish: Even small personal rituals restore balance and perspective.

Jenny's story reminds us that even in the most challenging circumstances, love and optimism can create light and meaning.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **ENTAXIS**

Konstantina — A Journey of Love and Resilience



Background/ Context

Konstantina faced serious health challenges from a young age. After experiencing kidney failure and undergoing a transplant, she later lost her eyesight completely at the age of sixteen. Despite these life-changing events, she refused to see

herself as a victim. Her guiding principles became acceptance, goal-setting, and self-fulfilment — values that shaped her path toward resilience and empowerment.

The Story

Instead of focusing on limitations, Konstantina directed her energy toward personal growth. She chose to study Psychology and Medicine, living independently and continuing her education through postgraduate studies. Her

motivation came from a deep belief that life is meaningful when we focus on solutions, not problems.

When she later suffered a stroke that affected her balance, she once again turned adversity into

opportunity. She decided to take private flamenco dance lessons — both as physical therapy and creative expression. Through movement, rhythm, and music, she regained not only her balance but also a renewed sense of freedom and self-confidence.

For the last two years, Konstantina was struck by cancer, in this chaos she moved forward with strength and determination until the last moment. She believed strongly in positive thinking, education and self-improvement. She never discussed her problems with pity or anger, she never spoke with self-pity about the suffering from

the side effects of treatments. Since her diagnosis in November 2012, she participated in postgraduate courses, trainings, seminars and also taught in seminars from the mainland to the Atlantic Ocean, enjoying everything she could.

Konstantina's journey shows how creative activities can become powerful tools for emotional healing and empowerment. Her passion for learning and her involvement in awareness-raising activities inspire others to see disability not as a limitation but as a unique path of growth.

Lessons learned

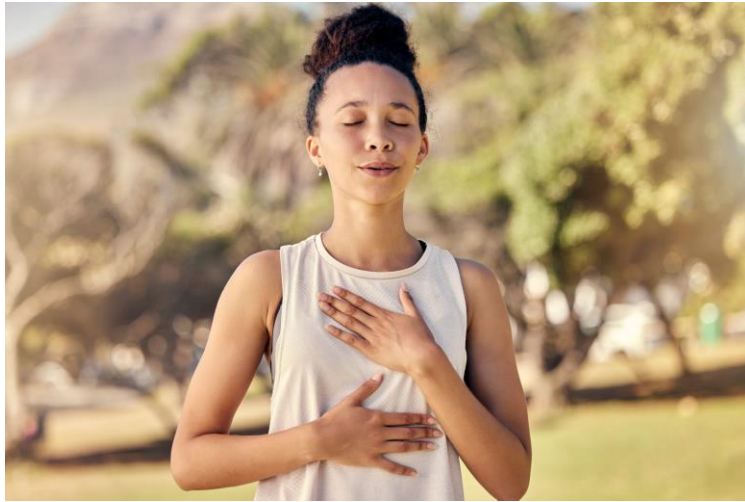
From her experience, Konstantina discovered that:

- Focus on the solution, not the problem: Every challenge can become a starting point for self-development.
- Lifelong learning empowers: Education nurtures confidence, purpose, and independence.
- Creativity heals: Art, dance, and self-expression can support rehabilitation and mental balance.
- Sharing inspires: Active participation in awareness campaigns helps others find strength in their own stories.

Konstantina's story is a testament to inner strength, acceptance, and the transformative power of a positive mindset. Her life encourages young people and adults alike to continue dreaming, learning, and living fully — no matter the obstacles.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **Vision Tree**

Elena's Story: Reclaiming Calm Amid the Chaos



Background/ Context

Elena, a 37-year-old mother of two, is raising her 9-year-old son, Leo, who has been diagnosed with ADHD and sensory processing disorder. Although she loves her son deeply, everyday life often feels like an endless marathon of managing emotions, routines, and unexpected crises.

At home, she describes the atmosphere as “constantly charged.” Simple moments like getting ready for school can quickly escalate into stress and conflict. Her husband works long hours, so much of the daily caregiving falls on her shoulders.

Over time, Elena began noticing that her patience was wearing thin. She felt constantly “switched on,” always anticipating the next outburst. She said:

“It’s like living in survival mode. I’m always doing something for someone, but never for myself.”

Even when Leo finally fell asleep, she found herself scrolling on her phone late at night, too wired to rest, too exhausted to connect with herself.

The Story

When Elena joined a group session for parents of SEN children, she was skeptical. “I thought it would be another lecture on positive parenting,” she admitted. But the psychologist began by inviting the parents to place one hand on their heart and take three deep breaths together. That small act made her unexpectedly emotional.

In the following weeks, the group introduced the “Pause and Name” technique, a mindfulness practice where parents take a few seconds to notice what they’re feeling and give it a name before reacting.

At first, Elena struggled. “When my son screamed, I just wanted to fix it immediately,” she said. “Naming my emotions felt too slow.” But after a few attempts, she began to notice how naming her own frustration (“I feel overwhelmed right now”) created a small gap between reaction and response.

Gradually, Elena started using short breathing pauses throughout the day. She placed a reminder on the fridge:

“Breathe first, then speak.”

That small phrase became her anchor. When tensions rose, she took one conscious breath before addressing Leo. Over time, she noticed that her tone softened, her son calmed faster, and even small conflicts ended more peacefully.

The group also encouraged her to schedule “mini-rest” rituals, five minutes of tea on the balcony, journaling before bed, or simply closing her eyes for two minutes in the car before school pick-up. At first, these moments felt indulgent, but later she said:

“I realized rest doesn’t have to be long, it just has to be real.”

These small steps helped her rebuild energy, presence, and self-compassion.

Lessons Learned

- Burnout often starts with invisibility: forgetting one’s own needs in the constant effort to meet a child’s needs.
- Short, mindful pauses can shift the entire emotional climate at home.
- Naming emotions helps reduce reactivity and builds emotional awareness for both parent and child.

- Small self-care rituals throughout the day restore energy and calm more effectively than long, irregular breaks.
- Elena learned that caring for herself was not a luxury, but a quiet act of love that her son could also learn from.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **Vision Tree**

Thomas's Story: Finding Balance Through Boundaries



Background/ Context

Thomas is a 42-year-old secondary school teacher who has been working in an inclusive classroom for more than ten years. This year, he welcomed a new student, a 15-year-old with autism spectrum disorder and strong sensory sensitivities.

Thomas prided himself on being empathetic and dedicated, but after a few months, he began to feel emotionally drained. He spent hours after class preparing visual aids, rewriting lesson plans, and responding to emails from parents and specialists.

Despite his efforts, he constantly worried that he wasn't doing enough. He noticed growing irritability, trouble sleeping, and an ongoing sense of guilt when taking time for himself. "Every day feels like walking on eggshells," he admitted. "I love my work, but I'm starting to resent it."

He reached a point where he considered taking a break from teaching; something he never imagined before.

The Story

During a professional development session on teacher well-being,

Thomas participated in an exercise called The Circle of Control. The

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the National Agency. Neither the European Union nor National Agency can be held responsible for them.

activity invited him to identify what was within his influence (his teaching approach, communication style, self-care) and what was beyond it (students' moods, parents' expectations, systemic limitations).

At first, he found it difficult to let go of control. "If I stop caring so much, doesn't that mean I'm giving up?" he asked during a group discussion. Yet as he reflected, he realized that his constant need to fix everything stemmed not from strength but from fear; fear of failing his students.

He began experimenting with small boundaries. He turned off school emails after 18:00 and stopped checking messages during weekends. Instead of reworking lesson plans late at night, he gave himself permission to rest. He also scheduled a weekly "silent coffee" moment before entering his classroom, a short grounding ritual to connect with himself.

Gradually, Thomas noticed changes. His mornings became calmer, his interactions with students warmer. He found himself laughing more often and reacting less defensively when challenges arose. "When I stopped running after perfection, I

started enjoying the process again," he shared.

A turning point came when his student with autism had an unexpected meltdown during class. Instead of panicking or feeling guilty, Thomas silently repeated his grounding words "Here and now". He paused, lowered his voice, and gave the student space to breathe. The tension in the room eased within minutes. Afterward, several classmates approached him to say they admired how calm he had stayed.

Encouraged by this, Thomas introduced the Circle of Control exercise to his colleagues during a staff meeting. Together, they mapped out what each teacher could and could not influence within their classrooms. The discussion sparked honest sharing about emotional fatigue and inspired a new culture of mutual support in the team.

By the end of the school year, Thomas described himself as "a different kind of teacher; one who leads from presence, not pressure." He had rediscovered the balance between dedication and detachment, between compassion and boundaries.

Lessons Learned

- Thomas discovered that sustainable teaching begins with clear emotional and practical boundaries.

- The “Circle of Control” helped him release unrealistic responsibility and focus on what he could genuinely influence.
- Learning to pause before reacting restored a sense of calm and self-trust, even in unpredictable situations.
- By sharing his insights with colleagues, he contributed to a more supportive and open school culture.
- Ultimately, he realized that caring deeply does not mean carrying everything, boundaries are not barriers, but bridges to balance, resilience, and authentic connection.
- Consistency and small rituals like a morning pause or reflective coffee can serve as anchors for emotional balance throughout the day.
- Rest and professional distance do not reduce empathy; they sustain it over time.
- When teachers model self-care, they teach their students emotional regulation more effectively than through any lesson plan.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **Demetrius**

Matei's Story: From Silent Guilt to Meaningful Action



Background/ Context

Matei is a 37-year-old Romanian father. He is employed full time as a logistics coordinator, and with his wife, they're raising their 9-year-old son, Luca, who has been diagnosed with ADHD and sensory processing disorder.

Luca is a sensitive, emotionally intense child — loud noises, unpredictable environments or even the texture of clothing can trigger meltdowns or anxiety easily. Matei always loved his son dearly, but he

acknowledges that from the outset, he was “one step behind” as a parent. Of course, his wife became the primary caregiver — going to all the therapy sessions, scheduling appointments and handling Luca's meticulously regimented life.

In contrast, Matei became the support who came after: the one to pick up groceries, to fix things and to provide financially. But emotionally, he was feeling more

and more disconnected — from not just his son, but from himself.

When Luca had one of his big emotional outbursts, “there would be panic inside,” Matei said. “I’d sometimes want to solve it right off the bat. I sometimes simply walked out of the room. I didn’t know what to say. And I’d later feel so ashamed -- I failed again.” Over time this guilt hardened into silence. Conversations with his wife became less long, and his self-esteem grew

smaller as a father. “I felt like a background character in my own family,” he said quietly. Then things took a turn: his wife attended a seminar about parent education and heard about the Acceptance and Commitment Support Group (ACSG) available at their local family center. She urged Matei to attend, not as a remedy, but as a space dedicated to him — as though an ache that she felt he needed, even though it still seemed that he wouldn’t be able to verbalize it.

The Story

Matei started the ACSG skeptical. Therapy had always seemed a thing “other people” needed. But the first session was a surprise to him. Instead of worrying about what could be “fixed,” the group thought about what was important: values, actions, emotional presence.

The facilitator gave the idea that being a parent doesn’t mean having the answers but showing up to the task in a meaningful way, even when it’s difficult. One metaphor from the first session resonated strongly with him: the “Passengers on the Bus.” In this metaphor, Matei was the bus driver — and his hard thoughts (such as “I am a failure”) and uncomfortable feelings (such as panic or guilt) were passengers shouting directions.

He didn’t need to toss them or obey them — he could keep driving, as long as he remained attuned to where he wanted to go. That image stayed with him. For the first time in his life, he understood that he didn’t have to let his guilt interfere with his trying to be the kind of father he wanted to be. It could roll along, but he was still in charge.

In the second session, the group addressed a values clarification exercise (The Compass Exercise for example). Participants were encouraged to think not about objectives such as “fixing behavior” or “being calm,” but about more profound values — Why am I even here for my child? Matei’s answer came out slowly to him: “Because I want Luca to know I’m here for him, not only in good times, but in bad.”

Armed with this newfound clarity, Matei started making weekly goals for small value-based actions. His first commitment was an uncomplicated one: spending five minutes each night just listening to Luca, without giving advice or changing the subject. It was uncomfortable the first few nights. Luca would often go on tangents or become distracted. But Matei stayed with it. “I just let him talk,” he said. “And something shifted.

He began asking me questions too. He even told me about a dream he had — something he’d never done before.” In the ensuing weeks, Matei also picked up defusion techniques: ways to escape critical self-talk. Instead of thinking, “I’m a bad father,” he practiced saying “I’m having the thought that I’m a bad father.” This subtle shift gave him breathing space. “It feels like I had some distance from that voice,” he said. “And in that space, I had the chance to decide, ‘What to do next.’”

He also exercised mindfulness: just noticing, with total awareness.

One day he sat quietly beside Luca as he constructed a Lego structure. He watched the process instead of checking his phone: the focus in his son’s eyes, even the little sighs of exasperation. “It was an insignificant thing,” Matei said, “but it made me feel more connected than in weeks.”

In week six of the ACSG Matei bravely had a different type of conversation with his wife. He had revealed what he’d learned with empathy — not in the form of advice or complaint, but of reflection. They learned about parenting not as a job to be divided but a shared journey they could both experience — with space for failure, emotion and even growth.

Lessons Learned

- Matei discovered there’s more to be found in emotional presence than perfection. He didn’t have to be 100% sure — he needed to keep in touch with his values and act on them.
- Passengers on the Bus metaphor assisted him in reducing dissonance with guilt and inner criticism. He realized that thoughts are not commands — they’re just thoughts.
- But through tiny acts like listening, being conscious, noticing and saying “yes” to uncomfortable moments, he was able to renew their relationship of trust with his son.

- The ACSG established a new form of identity in him: not a failing father, but a learning father — one that's allowed to develop.
- He learned that in sharing that emotional territory with his wife, as opposed to dominating or retreating, their parenting work was more secure.
- Above all else, Matei discovered that small expressions of connection, carried out consistently, leave a legacy — not only of parenting but of love, resilience and courage.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **Demetrius**

Elena's Story: Returning to Herself through Compassion and Creativity



Background/ Context

Elena, 29, resides in a small city apartment with her five-year-old daughter, Sofía. She experienced a big shake when Sofía was diagnosed with global developmental delay and childhood epilepsy just after her fourth birthday.

The diagnosis gave answers to years of uncertainty — but also threw a deep emotional tornado into the world at that moment: grief, guilt, fear and loneliness. As a single

mother with no family nearby or friends, Elena had no space to fall apart. She persisted. Taking her medicine, juggling appointments and working closely with therapists, and adapting her home into a safer, more regulated environment. She could not stop thinking about Sofía's well-being, physical growth and emotional development at every turn. "I basically went into survival mode," Elena said. "I didn't cry. I didn't think. I just functioned."

But internally she began to sense a growing disconnect — not just from others, but from herself. Elena began having insomnia, chronic fatigue and headaches. She became emotionally numb. “I stopped asking how I felt. I didn’t have time to break down. So I just stopped feeling.”

While doctors praised her for her dedication, Elena quietly felt like she was failing, especially when Sofía had a seizure or when most therapy sessions appeared to be in

vain. She carried the unspoken axiom: If I had done more, become stronger, she wouldn’t be doing so badly.

Then one night, exhausted, she fell down on her phone and watched a short video of a psychologist discussing self-compassion for caregivers. Initially, it was strange thinking. She wondered, “Self-compassion? That’s just self-pity in a nice dress.” Yet something in her stopped. That night was the start of Elena’s quiet return to herself.

The Story

Elena started with a few articles and videos about self-compassion, in particular the work of Dr. Kristin Neff, who popularized the conception of kindness to oneself as not a weakness but a strength that keeps caregiving going. She began doing a simple self-compassion break at night: putting her hand on her chest and saying three things, quietly:

- This is a moment of suffering.
- Suffering is part of being human.
- May I be kind to myself at this moment.

She cried the first time she attempted. “It was the first time I spoke to myself like I would to a friend,” she said. “And I didn’t even

know how badly I needed to hear it.” Then Elena created a simple “night routine”: five minutes of quiet, deep breathing, saying gentle words. As time went on, she found her inner voice softening. When Sofía had a meltdown or wouldn’t eat it would trigger the old narrative — You’re doing it wrong — when something could not be said. But Elena taught herself to pause, to take a breath, and to say instead: This is hard. I’m trying my best. I am enough right now.

A second transformative moment was when a friend who knew her and told her, ‘You should keep drawing as you once loved,’ gave Elena a blank sketchbook. At first, it lay unused for weeks. Then one night, after Sofía went to sleep,

Elena picked it up and drew a spiral. She never tried to make anything “good,” just shapes and colors. She felt odd but also comforted. At night she began to sketch. The work became her creative ritual — 15 minutes of artistic expression unencumbered by the judgment of others. Drawing was a way to release emotions she couldn’t name. One page had only red strokes. Another, a circle within a circle. She noticed that afterward, she was calmer — less agitated, more whole.

She eventually invited Sofía to draw with her. At first, her daughter just scribbled. Then, she started picking out colors and designs. Their exchanges were rarely much for talking — but something sacred began to develop between them: quiet companionship, shared focus and concentration, nonverbal bonding. Elena said, “It was the most peaceful part of our day.”

Elena began taking walks alone on weekends, each with no destination, just a chance to breathe. On one such walk she started taking short voice notes — little reflections, reminders, and tiny affirmations. “I forgive myself for being tired.” “I am still worthy, even when lost.” Listening to these later she remembered that she was learning to mother herself and not just her daughter.

To deepen her support, she joined an online self-compassion forum for parents — a friendly platform

where people could share journal prompts, reflective questions and short stories. She said little to no comments, but hearing stories of other parents reminded her: I’m not the only one who carries invisible weight.

Eventually, she contacted a local art therapist for one-on-one appointments every two weeks. These weren’t intense or formal — just a safe space to speak, create and reflect. Through that process, Elena started naming all the pain she had buried for so long: grief for the life she once imagined Sofía would have, shame over times she had “lost it,” and profound longing for connection — not just with Sofía, but with herself.

By month three, Elena found herself describing her emotional state not as “fine” or “broken” — but as “alive.” She had hard days, of course — seizures, hospital runs, tantrums — but she also had tools, compassion and a creative outlet that made sense and anchored her.

Most importantly, she began to “say yes” to her own needs. She carved out time — even 30 minutes — for herself each week. She turned off notifications. She asked a neighbor to babysit once a month. She reached out to a former friend and started sending simple voice messages.

“I wasn’t waiting for peace to come,” Elena said. “I started

creating it — one kind word, one image, one pause at a time.

Lessons Learned

- Elena realized self-compassion is not indulgence — it is critical fuel for the long road of caregiving. By giving herself the kindness she had shown her daughter, she began to feel human again.
- Creative expression — no matter how ill-constructed or amateurish — freed her to express unspoken grief and emotion. Her sketchbook became a quiet buddy, a mirror and a safe place.
- Through brief routines (such as breathwork, voice notes and art), Elena learned that she didn’t need hours to heal — she needed presence and permission.
- By inviting Sofía into her creative and artistic haven, she was able to bond in a new way, one that did not depend on talking or expectations.
- Community — even silently observed — helped Elena feel less alone. Hearing that others suffered for the same reasons made her burdens seem lighter.
- She found that she didn’t heal through fixing problems, but through accepting her reality, forgiving herself and celebrating her efforts, no matter how small.
- Elena’s journey reminded her that a “good enough” mother was also a kind, living, growing woman — not strictly a caregiver.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **PSKC**

Rūta's story: "Coming Home to Herself: Path to Inner Peace"



Background / Context

Rūta works full-time and is a mother of two – one university student and one high school senior. Her days are filled with responsibilities: managing work tasks, supporting her children, and keeping up with the endless flow of daily duties. Though she finds meaning in her family and work, the constant juggling between roles often leaves her drained and with little time for herself.

Before joining the group, Rūta rarely paused to rest or reflect. She was used to “keeping things together,” always moving from

one task to another. Gradually, she began to notice the signs of stress — exhaustion, restlessness, and a racing mind that made it hard to relax even when she tried.

Rūta joined the mindfulness group seeking balance — a way to slow down, reconnect with herself, and learn how to care for her mental wellbeing before reaching a breaking point. She hoped to find practices that could help her restore calm, patience, and kindness — both toward herself and others.

The Story

At first, Rūta wasn't sure what to expect from the group, especially since the sessions were held online. She missed the natural connection and shared energy that comes from being together in person. Yet, she soon discovered that even through the screen, the group atmosphere was warm, open, and supportive. Listening to others share their challenges made her feel safe to open up too.

During the sessions, Rūta learned to pay attention to her inner world — her thoughts, emotions, and body. Among all practices, mindful breathing became her anchor. Whenever life felt too fast or overwhelming, she could return to her breath, slow down, and reconnect with the present moment.

Over time, these small pauses began to make a difference. Rūta noticed that she was calmer at work and more patient in her relationships. Instead of reacting automatically, she learned to take a breath and respond with greater

awareness. When stress levels rose, she reminded herself to stop, breathe, and notice what was really happening — inside and around her.

After the group ended, maintaining regular practice wasn't always easy. The daily rush of responsibilities often pulled her back into old habits. Yet Rūta found that even occasional moments of mindfulness — during a break at work, while walking, or before bed — helped her restore balance and clarity. These small steps kept her connected to what she had learned: that she has the power to take care of her mental wellbeing every single day.

Mindfulness and compassion practices gave Rūta the tools to pause before burnout, to rest without guilt, and to be gentler with herself. She no longer waits for a “catastrophe” to make changes — she tries to nurture herself consistently, even in simple ways.

Lessons Learned

Through this journey, Rūta discovered that self-care doesn't require special conditions or expensive methods — only the willingness to pause and be present.

She learned that:

- Her psychological wellbeing deserves as much attention as her work and family.
- A few mindful breaths can shift her entire perspective.
- Compassion toward herself allows her to see more goodness in others.

Rūta's story reminds us that mindfulness is not about perfection — it's about coming back to ourselves, moment by moment. By allowing herself to stop, breathe, and simply be, she found renewed calm, inner strength, and joy — even amid life's busyness.

Ultimately, Rūta's experience shows that true change begins in the smallest moments — in a single conscious breath, a softening of the heart, and the decision to care for oneself with the same kindness we offer others.

Name of organisation that shared the success story: **PSKC**

Laura's Story: "Finding Home in Stillness"



Background / Context

Laura works as a preschool teacher. Surrounded by the joyful energy of young children, her days are filled with movement, noise, and constant attention to others' needs. She is caring and devoted to her work, yet the fast pace and emotional demands of the job often leave her feeling mentally exhausted.

Outside of work, Laura is a young mother raising a child with special educational needs (SEN). This role brings deep love and meaning to her life, but it also adds layers of responsibility, worry, and emotional intensity. Balancing her

professional and family life often feels like a constant juggling act — always caring for someone else, but rarely finding a moment to rest or care for herself.

Before joining the mindfulness and compassion group, Laura rarely took time to slow down. Her mind was always busy — planning, organizing, solving problems, and thinking about others. She noticed that tension and irritability were becoming more frequent, especially in her relationships with colleagues and family.

Laura joined the group hoping to find some calm in her busy life — to learn how to relax, understand

herself better, and respond to challenges with greater ease rather than reactivity.

The Story

At first, Laura felt nervous about joining a group. She wondered if she would fit in or have anything meaningful to say. But as the sessions unfolded, she began to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere, the calm voices of the facilitators, and the sense of warmth in the group. “It felt like being at home,” she later said.

Through mindfulness exercises and guided meditations, Laura began to discover new ways of relating to herself. The simple act of pausing — noticing her breath or feeling her feet on the ground — became moments of relief in otherwise hectic days. The grounding practices stood out to her as most powerful.

Over time, Laura noticed changes not only in herself but also in her relationships. She started to speak more calmly, to think before reacting, and to reflect on why certain conflicts happened instead of rushing to defend herself. “It

helped me to soften my tone,” she explained. “Now, before saying something, I take a breath and think — what’s really going on here?”

After the group ended, Laura continued to use mindfulness and compassion tools, though not as regularly as she wished. The main obstacle was lack of time and the fast rhythm of daily life. Still, whenever she paused to meditate or simply noticed her breath during stressful moments, she felt grounded again — as if briefly returning home to herself.

Looking back, Laura realized that the practice helped her clarify what she truly wants and what she can expect from herself and others. She described herself as “still learning” — learning how to communicate, how to think more openly, and how to be kind to herself in the process.

Lessons Learned

- Laura's journey shows that meaningful change does not always come from big decisions but from small, consistent moments of awareness. Through mindfulness and compassion practices, she learned that relaxation and inner calm are not luxuries but necessities — especially in a demanding job like teaching young children.
- She discovered that mindfulness is not about doing things perfectly but about coming back to herself — noticing when tension builds up, softening her tone, and choosing her words with care.
- Laura also learned that growth is a continuous process. Even though she sometimes struggles to find time for regular practice, she now carries a deeper understanding of herself:
 - She knows when she needs to slow down.
 - She recognizes when her mind becomes restless.
 - She values calm communication over impulsive reactions.

Ultimately, Laura's story is about returning to balance — learning to be both caring toward others and gentle toward herself. Her experience reminds us that mindfulness and compassion are not about escaping life's pace but about finding calm and clarity right in the middle of it.

Best Practices



Name of organisation that shared best practice: **Uri Soča**

Survival Challenge: Plane Crash



Description

Participants are placed in a simulated scenario where a small aircraft has crashed in winter conditions. Each person must individually choose ten items from a given list that they consider most useful for survival. Afterwards, the group discusses and agrees on a common list.

The activity encourages reflection on values, teamwork, acceptance of differences, and responses under stress. It connects closely with the principles of ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) by helping participants practice acceptance of uncertainty, awareness of automatic thoughts, present-moment focus, defusion from the “I’m right” mindset, and value-based decision-making.

Context

This exercise is suitable for teaching teams, special education staff, and other professionals in high-stress school environments. It can also be applied in any organization aiming to improve communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and effective functioning under

pressure.

Steps / Methodology

1. Introduction – The facilitator presents the survival scenario (plane crash, extreme weather, limited resources).
2. Individual reflection (5 min) – Each participant selects ten items independently.
3. Sharing without explanation (5 min) – Participants read their lists aloud to the group without justification.
4. Group discussion (15 min) – The group negotiates, justifies, and agrees on a final joint list.
5. Presentation of results – The group appoints a representative to present the final choice.
6. Reflection and ACT connection – Participants analyze their decision-making process:
 - What thoughts arose?
 - How did they react to stress, uncertainty, and disagreement?
 - Which behaviors reflected their values (cooperation, safety, respect)?
 - Where could they have used more acceptance and less struggle with discomfort.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Development of psychological flexibility – the ability to stay calm and act effectively under pressure.
- Improved teamwork, listening, and integration of diverse perspectives.
- Reduction of impulsivity and cognitive rigidity.
- Increased awareness of values and value-driven behavior.
- Strengthened trust and cohesion within the group.

Evidence

During our workshops we found out that the initial reaction of our participants was guided by fear and need for control. Individuals reported noticing their automatic thoughts and described moments when they consciously chose to step back and listen. After their first reaction the best results emerged in groups that listened to each other and accepted diversity. Trainers noted that even skeptical participants became more open to perspective-taking and compromise as the exercise progressed.

Lessons Learned

- Stress and discomfort cannot always be eliminated — but we can choose how to respond to them.
- Effective teamwork requires psychological space for every voice, not just the loudest one.
- Defusion from personal beliefs enables better collective decisions.
- Conscious, value-based action leads to better relationships and outcomes.

Tools/Resources

- Worksheet: “Plane Crash Survival” (item list and instructions).
- A suitable space for teamwork and calm reflection time.

Name of organisation that shared best practice: **Uri Soča**

Neurographic Art for Mindfulness and Emotional Well-being



Description

Neurographic art is a creative mindfulness technique that combines art, psychology, and self-reflection. By drawing free-flowing lines and shapes, participants engage both the mind and body, promoting relaxation, emotional release, and awareness. URI Soča uses this practice with our participants in vocational rehabilitation and also with professional staff in a Slovenian primary school for children with special needs. This activity promotes emotional regulation, self-expression, mindfulness, helping participants manage stress and improve well-being.

Context

This practice is applicable in special needs schools and other emotionally demanding vocational/educational environments, where professional workers/educators are frequently exposed to stress, compassion fatigue, and emotional overload. It can also be used in healthcare, social care, and counseling settings to support emotional balance and prevent burnout. The activity is particularly effective for professionals who benefit from embodied, creative forms of reflection

rather than purely verbal methods.

Steps / Methodology

1. Introduction to mindfulness and creative process. Participants learn about neurographic art as a method that integrates drawing and mindfulness. The facilitator explains how line drawing can calm the mind and enhance self-awareness.
2. Free drawing of neuro lines. Participants begin by creating spontaneous, flowing lines or abstract shapes on paper. This stage symbolizes the uncontrolled or chaotic aspects of the mind.
3. Transformation and connection. Sharp angles are softened into curves, and lines are connected organically, representing the integration of thoughts and emotions.
4. Coloring and reflection. Participants choose and apply colors that resonate with their emotional state. This process deepens emotional insight and fosters relaxation.
5. Group sharing and reflection. The session concludes with an optional group reflection, where participants discuss how the process affected their mood, awareness, and sense of calm.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Increased emotional awareness and self-reflection.
- Reduction of stress and tension through mindful drawing.
- Enhanced sense of calm and mental clarity.
- Improved ability to recognize and process emotions.

Evidence

Most participants (professional workers and participants in vocational rehabilitation alike) reported feeling calmer, more focused, and emotionally balanced.

The practice helped them release emotional tension, it enabled them to

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the National Agency. Neither the European Union nor National Agency can be held responsible for them.

be in the moment without thinking about their problems.

Lessons Learned

- Participants who may feel uncomfortable with traditional mindfulness or verbal reflection responded positively to the visual, hands-on nature of neurographic art.
- Participants initially focused on the “beauty” of their drawings; facilitators learned to emphasize process over product to support genuine mindfulness and emotional release.
- Seeing one’s chaotic lines evolve into harmonious forms helps participants internalize the idea that emotional turbulence can be transformed into balance.

Tools/Resources

- Paper and drawing materials (markers, pens, colored pencils).
- Quiet and comfortable space for practice.

Wheel of Life for Work–Life Balance



Description

The Wheel of Life is a self-reflection tool that helps individuals assess their satisfaction across different areas of life (career, family, health, personal growth, leisure, etc.). Within the Burnout Blueprint project, URI Soča introduced this tool to professional staff in a Slovenian primary school with an adapted program for children with special needs. The practice is used in workshops and followed up through peer-support groups to strengthen balance between professional and private life.

Context

This practice is applicable in special needs schools and other high-stress educational settings, where staff often face challenges balancing work demands with personal well-being. It can also be applied in workplaces with high emotional demands, long working hours, or blurred boundaries between personal and professional life.

Steps / Methodology

1. Identification of challenges – Staff discussed difficulties in balancing professional and personal life.
2. Workshops – URI Soča introduced the Wheel of Life method.
3. Self-assessment – Participants rated their satisfaction in key life areas.
4. Goal setting – Each participant defined one or two bigger, realistic goals to improve balance.
5. Weekly steps – Participants set and monitored minor weekly goals through peer-to-peer groups.
6. Continuous reflection – Participants tracked progress, reported on life satisfaction, and set new incremental steps toward their main goals.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Greater clarity about personal and professional priorities.
- Reduced stress levels and improved family relationships.
- More time for leisure activities and healthier lifestyle choices (better sleep, increased energy).
- Improved teamwork, morale, and job satisfaction between the professional staff.

Evidence

Within two months, most participants reported reduced stress and stronger family connections.

Professional workers reported better energy levels, improved sleep, and higher motivation at work.

Lessons Learned

- Teachers in special needs settings require tailored well-being support.
- Reflection tools are most effective when paired with a supportive organizational culture.
- Small, consistent changes (like setting boundaries for after-hours work) deliver meaningful long-term results.

Tools/Resources

- Wheel of Life templates (print or digital).
- Workshop facilitation guides.
- A structured peer-to-peer support group.

Safe Place Practice



Description

The Safe Place Practice is a guided visualization that helps individuals create an inner sense of calm and security. By imagining a place where they feel completely safe and peaceful, participants learn to activate emotional safety and physical relaxation. This technique supports stress regulation, reduces anxiety, restores inner balance, and improves focus — both in professional and personal contexts. It can also be applied with children, teaching them how to calm themselves, regain focus, and rebuild trust and emotional stability in challenging situations.

Context

The practice was introduced during a consultation with a psychologist, when a teacher shared that she was experiencing strong emotional discomfort at work. After the consultation, the teacher reported that she successfully applied the practice not only for herself but also in her classroom. She guided short visualizations with her students, helping them identify and create their own “safe places.”

The method proved especially effective before tests or after conflicts — children became calmer, more focused, and more open to communication.

Steps / Methodology

1. **Preparation (2–3 min)** – Participants sit comfortably, take several deep breaths, and close their eyes.
2. **Guided visualization (10–15 min)** – The psychologist or teacher invites participants to imagine a place where they feel completely safe and calm. They explore it through their senses — noticing sounds, colors, smells, textures, and bodily sensations.
3. **Naming the place (2 min)** – Each participant chooses a word or phrase that symbolizes this place and helps them recall it when they need calm.
4. **Returning to the present moment (2–3 min)** – The practice ends with a few mindful breaths and gentle awareness of the surroundings.
5. **Reflection (5–10 min)** – Participants share how they felt and when they might use this technique in everyday life or in the classroom.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Promotes deep relaxation and emotional regulation.
- Reduces stress, anxiety, and physical tension.
- Strengthens self-awareness and internal emotional resources.
- Improves concentration and focus during stressful moments.
- Easily adaptable for use in schools and families.

Evidence

During another session, the teacher shared that the Safe Place Practice helped her manage strong emotions during tense moments. She described it as “a small psychological pause” that allowed her to regain calm and a sense of control. When she introduced the practice to her

students, she noticed that they became calmer, more focused, and more open to expressing their feelings. Over time, this activity turned into a short “calm ritual” before lessons — improving classroom atmosphere and strengthening communication among students.

Lessons Learned

- Even a short guided practice can significantly reduce stress and increase emotional safety.
- Teachers benefit from personally experiencing self-regulation techniques before applying them with students.
- Regular repetition strengthens trust and calmness for both adults and children.
- Visualization is a simple, effective, and universally applicable tool for supporting emotional well-being in educational settings.

Tools / Resources

- Guided Safe Place Practice script or audio recording.
- Quiet and comfortable space for the activity.
- Reflection worksheet for teachers or parents.
- Facilitator – psychologist, counselor, or trained teacher.

Name of organisation that shared the best practice: **KAI**

Recognizing Fulfilled and Unfulfilled Needs



Description

This activity helps parents, caregivers, and teachers recognize and better understand their own and their special educational needs (SEN) children fulfilled and unfulfilled needs. The practice combines a playful introduction (“Needs Bingo” game), reflective work through the exercises “My Needs” and “My Child’s Needs,” and a short body scan relaxation. This combination helps participants not only to become more aware of emotional needs but also to develop a more conscious, compassionate relationship with themselves, their children, and their students.

Context

The activity was conducted in a mixed group of teachers and parents who were either raising or working with children with special educational needs (SEN). The session was led by a psychologist from the KAI organization, experienced in working with burnout prevention and emotional self-care. Participants shared similar experiences – exhaustion, guilt, difficulty distinguishing their own needs from those of their children, constant stress, and a lack of emotional balance. This practice aimed to help them become more aware of their emotional

state, strengthen empathy toward themselves and their children, and develop a more compassionate perspective on daily challenges.

Steps / Methodology

1. Introduction and warm-up (10 min) – Participants are welcomed and introduced to the session topic and objectives. They play a “Needs Bingo” game using cards with different needs (e.g., love, safety, recognition). The activity helps participants relax and begin talking about needs in a playful way.
2. Individual reflection (10 min) – Participants fill in the worksheets “My Needs” and “My Child’s Needs.” They reflect on which needs are currently being fulfilled and which are not.
3. Pair discussion (10 min) – Participants share their insights with a partner, discussing similarities and differences between their own and their children’s needs.
4. Group reflection (5 min) – The group discusses how recognizing these needs can help create a warmer, more trusting relationship.
5. Body scan relaxation (5 min) – The psychologist guides participants through a short body awareness and relaxation exercise to help them notice tension and reconnect with their bodies.
6. Conclusion (5–10 min) – Participants share their insights and identify small changes they want to make to take better care of themselves and their children.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Improved ability to identify and articulate both personal and children’s emotional needs.
- Reduced feelings of guilt and tension in parenting and professional life.
- Strengthened empathy, awareness, and emotional resilience.

- Better understanding of how bodily sensations are connected to emotions.
- Enhanced mutual support among group members – both parents and teachers.

Evidence

When completing self-reflection questions after the session, many participants noted that the experience helped them to:

- recognize their own and their children's emotional needs more clearly;
- understand how unmet needs affect relationships and well-being;
- reduce guilt about taking time for themselves;
- accept their personal limits;
- experience more calm and inner balance;
- feel stronger empathy and connection within the group.

After the session, both parents and teachers shared that they realized self-care is a prerequisite for caring for others. The body scan exercise was often described as a **valuable moment**, helping calm the mind and restore connection with oneself.

The psychologist observed that, as the session progressed, participants became more relaxed and emotionally open. By the end, the group atmosphere shifted from tension to warmth and mutual understanding.

Lessons Learned

- Both parents and teachers often ignore their own needs while focusing on children's needs — increasing the risk of burnout.

- Playful activities (such as using *Needs Cards*) help reduce tension and foster openness.
- Body awareness practices deepen reflection and support emotional integration.
- Group dynamics and professional facilitation strengthen safety, trust, and mutual support.

Tools / Resources

- *Needs Cards* (e.g., love, safety, recognition).
- Worksheets: “*My Needs*” and “*My Child’s Needs*.”
- Quiet and comfortable space for reflection and relaxation.
- Guided body scan script or audio recording.
- Facilitator (psychologist or emotional well-being specialist).

Name of organisation that shared the best practice: **KAI**

Compassionate Friend Practice



Description

This practice helps participants learn to treat themselves with greater gentleness and understanding. The *Compassionate Friend* visualization invites individuals to imagine a being—real or imagined—who offers unconditional care, warmth, and acceptance. Through this experience, participants learn to become their own compassionate friends, replacing harsh self-criticism with empathy and kindness.

Context

The practice was applied in a group of parents raising children with special educational needs (SEN). The group was led by a psychologist from the KAI organization, experienced in emotional self-care and burnout prevention. Participants often shared feelings of guilt, shame, isolation, and emotional fatigue related to the ongoing care of their children with high needs. The activity was introduced as a way to help parents reduce self-criticism, strengthen self-empathy, and cultivate a more compassionate mindset that they could also model for their children.

Steps / Methodology

1. Introduction (5 min) – The psychologist introduced the concept of compassion, emphasizing that genuine care for others begins with the ability to care for oneself.
2. Guided visualization (15–20 min) – Participants were invited to imagine a compassionate being or figure who accepts them completely. This could be a real person, a spiritual figure, an animal, or an imagined presence.
3. Written reflection (10 min) – Participants wrote down what messages or feelings they received from their compassionate friend.
4. Sharing in pairs (10 min) – They discussed what resonated most deeply and how the experience affected them emotionally.
5. Home task – Participants were encouraged to write a short letter to themselves “from their compassionate friend” whenever feelings of guilt or inadequacy arose.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Improved ability to recognize and accept personal emotions with kindness.
- Reduced feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy.
- Increased empathy and patience toward their children.
- Strengthened group connection and trust among participants.
- Greater openness to discussing emotional fatigue and vulnerability.

Evidence

During another session, several parents shared that the practice helped them respond more calmly in stressful situations. One mother described how, when her daughter became upset, she paused and silently recalled her compassionate friend, who reminded her: “You’re

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the National Agency. Neither the European Union nor National Agency can be held responsible for them.

doing the best you can. You don't have to be perfect to be a good mother.” Others reported that the practice reduced their sense of guilt and inspired them to create an “*Empathy Book*” — a shared notebook where group members wrote supportive messages to one another.

Lessons Learned

- Parents of children with SEN often need external permission to care for themselves.
- Gentle, imagination-based practices effectively reduce self-criticism and build emotional resilience.
- Group support and shared reflection are essential for integrating self-compassion into daily life.

Tools / Resources

- *Compassionate Friend* guided meditation audio or written script.
- Reflection sheets.
- Quiet and comfortable space for group work.
- Skilled facilitator (psychologist or emotional well-being specialist).

Name of organisation that shared best practice: **ENTAXIS**

Shake and Release



Description

Dance for Joy and Connection is a mindful movement practice rooted in traditional dance that helps individuals reconnect with their bodies, release tension, and cultivate joy. Developed by Konstantina during her experience of living with an incurable illness at the age of 23—one of the most creative phases of her life—this practice became a way for her to sustain emotional balance, creativity, and inner strength through movement. It emphasizes spontaneous, non-judgmental expression rather than performance or choreography.

Within the *Mindfulness & Relaxation Toolkit for Burnout Prevention*, this practice has been adapted to support youth workers and young parents of children with special educational needs (SEN). It offers a simple, inclusive, and culturally meaningful approach to relaxation, emotional regulation, and social connection.

Context

This practice is applicable in youth work, inclusive education, and therapeutic community settings where participants face chronic stress, emotional fatigue, or physical limitations. It can be practiced individually, with family members (including children with SEN), or in group sessions with youth workers as part of self-care and team-building activities.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the National Agency. Neither the European Union nor National Agency can be held responsible for them.

The activity promotes embodiment and cultural connection while providing an accessible, low-barrier entry to mindfulness through movement and rhythm.

Steps / Methodology

1. Preparation – Create a calm, open space. Choose simple traditional or folk music that feels emotionally uplifting or soothing.
2. Grounding – Invite participants to feel their feet connecting with the floor and take a few deep breaths.
3. Free Movement – Encourage gentle, spontaneous movement—either individually or in a circle. No choreography is required; participants follow the rhythm and their body's impulses.
4. Connection – In pairs or groups, mirror each other's movements to foster empathy, playfulness, and non-verbal connection.
5. Reflection – After dancing, take a few moments for mindful breathing and reflection. Invite participants to notice how they feel in their body and emotions before and after the exercise.
6. Adaptation – For accessibility, movements can be done seated or with props such as scarves or ribbons for sensory engagement.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Improved emotional regulation and stress relief.
- Enhanced body awareness and mindfulness.
- Stronger sense of joy, vitality, and presence.
- Deeper social connection and cultural appreciation.
- Increased energy and reduced fatigue for youth workers and caregivers.

Evidence

Participants reported feeling lighter, more grounded, and emotionally connected after the session. Youth workers noted improved group cohesion and mood, while parents of children with SEN experienced shared joy and bonding moments with their children. Konstantina's personal experience demonstrated how mindful dance can serve as a life-affirming practice even under difficult physical and emotional circumstances.

Lessons Learned

- Mindful movement can be a powerful form of emotional resilience when words are not enough.
- Simplicity and accessibility are key—no technical skills are required.
- Cultural traditions can offer profound pathways to healing and connection.
- Short, playful sessions (5–10 minutes) can have lasting positive effects.

Tools/Resources

- Playlist of traditional or folk songs with gentle rhythms.
- Props (scarves, ribbons, soft fabrics) for sensory engagement.
- Simple reflection prompts (e.g., “How did your body feel before and after dancing?”).
- Facilitation guide for youth workers or parents.

Name of organisation that shared the best practice: **ENTAXIS**

Gentle Stretching for Grounding technique as a mindful way to reconnect with yourself and support your child



Description

Gentle Stretching for Grounding is a mindful movement practice designed to help individuals reconnect with their bodies, release physical and emotional tension, and restore calm. The technique was developed and practiced by Nikol, a mother of a child with autism, as a daily ritual to manage emotional overload and fatigue associated with caregiving.

Through short sessions of conscious breathing and gentle stretching, she discovered a way to ground herself, regain balance, and be more present and emotionally available for her child. Over time, this practice also became a shared activity — a quiet moment of connection that supported both her own well-being and her child's sensory and emotional regulation.

Within the Mindfulness & Relaxation Toolkit for Burnout Prevention, this practice highlights how mindful body awareness can become a sustainable self-care strategy for parents and youth workers in high-stress caregiving roles.

Context

This practice is suitable for parents of children with special educational needs (SEN), caregivers, and youth workers who often experience chronic stress, emotional fatigue, or physical tension. It is especially relevant for individuals supporting children on the autism spectrum, as it combines gentle physical activation with emotional grounding and predictable routine — elements that can benefit both the caregiver and the child.

The method requires no special equipment or prior experience and can be practiced in just 10–15 minutes, either alone or together with a child, to promote calmness, body awareness, and emotional stability.

Steps / Methodology

1. Preparation – Find a quiet space and wear comfortable clothing. Use a yoga mat or towel. Sit or stand in a relaxed position.
2. Breathing Awareness (2 min) – Breathe deeply in through the nose for a count of four, and out through the mouth for six. Repeat slowly while focusing on the breath.
3. Neck & Shoulder Movement (2 min) – Gently roll shoulders backward and forward. Tilt the head side to side to release tension.
4. Side Stretches (3 min) – Raise one arm overhead and stretch to the opposite side. Switch sides, breathing deeply throughout.
5. Spinal Twists (3 min) – Sitting cross-legged or on a chair, gently twist the torso to each side while maintaining steady breathing.
6. Forward Fold (2 min) – From a standing position, bend forward from the hips, letting the arms hang loosely. Keep knees slightly bent.
7. Closing Breaths (2 min) – Return to an upright or seated position. Take three deep, calming breaths, noticing how the body feels after the movement.

For children, especially those with sensory sensitivities, the practice can be adapted through slower pacing, use of soft background music, or visual cues.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Reduces muscle tension and physical stress.
- Enhances emotional regulation and calmness.
- Increases mindfulness and present-moment awareness.
- Strengthens parent-child connection through shared movement.
- Improves sleep quality and overall well-being for caregivers.

Evidence

Nikol reported that consistent daily stretching helped her manage fatigue and anxiety linked to caregiving responsibilities. Practicing together with her child created moments of shared calm, emotional safety, and improved sensory tolerance. Over several weeks, she noticed more patience, lighter mood, and better sleep quality.

Parents and youth workers who tested the technique in similar contexts confirmed its simplicity and positive grounding effect, even when practiced for only 10 minutes per day.

Lessons Learned

- Gentle, mindful movement supports both physical and emotional recovery.
- Small, consistent practices are more sustainable than long sessions.
- Including the child in relaxation routines fosters mutual regulation and trust.
- Stretching can serve as both self-care and co-regulation activity.

Tools / Resources

- Yoga mat or soft towel.
- Comfortable clothing and quiet space.
- Short guided audio for mindful breathing (optional).
- Facilitation notes for parents and youth workers to adapt exercises for accessibility.

Name of organisation that shared the best practice: **Vision Tree**

Balancing Control and Flexibility



Description

This practice helps parents and teachers of children with special educational needs (SEN) recognize and manage their need for control, a key source of daily stress and burnout. By learning to identify triggers and consciously shifting from rigid control to flexible guidance, participants rebuild trust in themselves and in the child's abilities.

The approach blends mindfulness, acceptance-based reflection, and practical exercises. It supports adults in letting go of the idea that “everything must go right,” and instead encourages a more compassionate focus on connection and adaptation.

Context

During the support sessions, many participants described feeling overwhelmed by the unpredictability of their children's behaviour. Parents often shared that they felt responsible for every emotional outburst, while teachers felt powerless when classroom plans fell apart.

The “Strategies for Managing the Need for Control” activity (WP2 Session 7) was developed to address this shared challenge. Participants reflected on how their urge to control situations, from bedtime routines to classroom behaviour, often increased stress for both them and the child.

By practicing mindful awareness and flexibility, they learned to create space for natural imperfection and growth. The activity was implemented both in individual coaching sessions and in small group workshops led by psychologists.

Steps / Methodology

1. Identify Triggers (5 min) – Participants recall specific moments when their need for control was strongest (e.g., tantrums, homework struggles, disruptions in class).
2. Pause and Breathe (5 min) – Before reacting, they practice a short breathing exercise to slow down and observe sensations in the body.
3. Reframe Expectations (10 min) – With the facilitator, participants explore the question: “What can I actually control right now?” They distinguish between influence and outcome.
4. Empower the Child (10–15 min) – They practice giving the child small choices (“Do you want to start with reading or drawing?”), strengthening autonomy.
5. Reflect Afterwards (10 min) – Participants note what changed when they allowed flexibility and share insights in pairs or group discussion.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Reduced tension and conflict at home and school.
- Greater emotional regulation and calm in challenging situations.
- Improved trust and collaboration between adult and child.
- Increased sense of agency and reduced burnout symptoms among caregivers and educators.
- Enhanced awareness that imperfection is not failure but part of genuine connection.

Evidence

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the National Agency. Neither the European Union nor National Agency can be held responsible for them.

Participants reported that practicing flexibility allowed them to manage stressful moments with more patience. They felt more connected and less reactive, describing the exercise as “a small shift that changes the entire day’s tone.”

Lessons Learned

- A balance between structure and freedom supports both the adult’s and the child’s well-being.
- Mindfulness and reflection reduce the instinct to micromanage.
- Control can temporarily decrease anxiety, but flexibility sustains harmony over time.
- Trusting a child’s natural rhythm strengthens cooperation and mutual respect.
- Even small adjustments such as allowing a few extra minutes for transitions can have a calming effect.
- Flexibility begins with self-awareness: noticing physical tension is often the first signal to pause.
- Group discussions normalize the struggle with control and foster empathy among parents and teachers.
- Over time, flexibility cultivates resilience, the ability to adapt without losing one’s sense of direction or care.

Tools / Resources

- “Control Reflection” worksheet (WP2 Session 7).
- Mindfulness scripts and short guided breathing audios.
- Group discussion questions and “Circle of Control” diagram.

From Worry to Awareness: Understanding Fears and Exhaustion



Description

This practice enables parents and educators to transform their fears and worries into meaningful self-awareness. It combines reflection, emotional mapping, and mindfulness to help participants identify early signs of exhaustion and understand how emotions influence behaviour and burnout risk.

Context

Drawn from WP2 *Session 8: Fears, Worries and Exhaustion*, this activity was developed for parents and teachers who constantly operate under emotional strain. It provides them with a safe group environment to externalize unspoken fears and to learn techniques for self-regulation and non-attachment.

Steps / Methodology

1. Warm-Up: Participants identify their current emotion and “wear it” symbolically (e.g., drawing it on paper as a hat).
2. Individual Reflection: Each person records their fears, worries, and exhaustion points.
3. Group Discussion: Facilitator explores how these emotions connect to unmet needs.
4. Mindfulness Practice: Participants observe thoughts “floating by like leaves on a stream,” without judgment.
5. Integration: Participants identify one small action to release tension daily.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Increased emotional awareness and acceptance.
- Reduced stress and emotional fatigue.
- Improved ability to recognize and respond to early burnout symptoms.
- Enhanced group connection and mutual understanding.

Evidence

Participants reported that naming emotions and visualizing them reduced their intensity. The guided mindfulness practice was frequently described as “a mental exhale” that made space for clarity and calm.

Lessons Learned

- Emotions lose their power when expressed safely.
- Visualization and humor (like the “emotion hat”) help reduce tension.

- Collective reflection strengthens empathy and normalizes vulnerability.

Tools / Resources

- “Fears, Worries, Exhaustion” worksheet.
- Mindfulness visualization script (“Leaves on a Stream”).
- Group discussion questions on emotion mapping.

Building Emotional Connection Through Play



Description

This practice emphasizes play as a natural bridge between adults and children with special educational needs. It demonstrates how shared playtime can foster emotional understanding, reduce stress, and prevent burnout by replacing daily struggles with moments of joy and presence.

Context

Adapted from WP2 *Session 10: Communication and Connection with a Special Needs Child* and *Session 12: The Role of Play*, this method encourages parents and teachers to use play as a language of connection. It reminds adults that engagement through creativity and humour is not just beneficial for children, it restores balance for caregivers too.

Steps / Methodology

1. Icebreaker Game – Start with a light group activity (e.g., “Who Am I?” or “Telephone”) to foster laughter and openness.
2. Observation through Play – Adults engage in play with children, noting emotional cues, needs, and communication patterns.

3. Reflective Sharing – Discuss how play reveals the child’s inner world and emotional needs.
4. Mindful Closure – End with a relaxation exercise or group gratitude round.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Strengthened emotional bond between adult and child.
- Improved communication and empathy.
- Stress relief and renewed sense of joy in caregiving.
- Increased insight into children’s developmental and emotional needs.

Evidence

During the piloting sessions, both parents and teachers expressed surprise at how profoundly play influenced their connection with children. One mother, who initially described her relationship with her autistic son as “tense and task-oriented,” noticed a shift after introducing ten minutes of free play each evening. “When I stopped correcting him and just joined his world,” she said, “he started seeking my attention with laughter instead of tears.”

Teachers who applied the same approach in classrooms also reported significant changes. One educator shared that a student who often refused to participate in group activities began to initiate communication during playful drawing tasks. Over time, the student’s anxiety levels visibly decreased, and trust within the class grew stronger.

The group facilitators observed that adults became visibly more relaxed and emotionally open after playful interactions. Laughter acted as a release valve, softening perfectionism and allowing genuine connection to emerge. Participants frequently mentioned that they rediscovered the joy of being spontaneous, creative, and imperfect: qualities that had been overshadowed by daily stress.

In follow-up sessions, parents and teachers described continuing the play rituals at home or school, noting not only improved relationships with children but also a decrease in their own emotional fatigue. For many, these small, playful moments became their “anchor of calm”: a reminder that healing often begins in joy, not in effort.

Lessons Learned

- Play is a form of mindfulness — it keeps adults grounded in the present.
- Observation through play reveals what words often cannot.
- Joy is a protective factor against burnout.

Tools / Resources

- “Play Observation Sheet.”
- Collage creation materials (paper, magazines, glue).
- Relaxation or mindfulness script for closure.

Name of organisation that shared best practice: **Demetrius**

Mindful Micro-Breaks for Daily Resilience



Description

These mental breaks are brief and measured (30 seconds to 3 minutes) opportunities to stop the constant cycle of feelings of over-stress and overwhelm during the day of caregiving. They are basic but effective practices based on research: focused breathing, sensory grounding, body scans, anything that helps control the nervous system and develop long-term emotional resiliency.

Contrary to other longer mindfulness practices, Micro-Breaks are a daily part of the system, helping parents of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) manage and sustain an increased use of time to self-care. This practice has been used in parenting programs in the UK, Australia, and Slovenia to report that over the course of the day, caregivers experienced a higher rate of greater stability, reduced emotional outbursts and greater energy. It also encourages self-regulation, present-moment attention, and stress recovery and has been particularly successful when used as part of parental education or

mental health intervention to support caregivers of SEN.

Context

Mindful Micro-Breaks are especially appropriate in contexts where the need to manage emotionally high demands and manage time-scarcity are a reality – for example homes with a single or multiple children with SEN. But parents can't help but experience an onslaught of unpredictability, sensory overload and decision fatigue. These breaks are ideal for:

- Parents with limited access to formal mental health or respite care.
- Working single parents or caregivers.
- Families in rural or underserved areas.
- Moments of de-escalation and emotional recovery in the aftermath of a crisis.

It is another practice that teachers or therapists working directly with families can utilize to model co-regulation and support emotional literacy during family routines.

Steps / Methodology

1. Orientation & Psychoeducation.

Parents are also introduced to the physiological effects of chronic stress and how frequent, short pauses reset the nervous system. A facilitator goes on to explain the science behind “micro-dosing” mindfulness and its cumulative effects on emotional resilience.

2. Integrate anchors in your daily routine

Parents recognize between 3 and 5 daily moments they can embed a micro-break. Common anchor points include:

- Before waking the child.
- During the child's therapy session.
- After a meltdown.
- Before bedtime.

- While waiting (e.g., at school pick-up).

3. *Practice 3 Core Techniques:*

- Parents are equipped with easy and low effort exercises including:
- Box breathing (4-4-4-4): Inhale – Hold – Exhale – Hold.
- 5-4-3-2-1 sensory grounding: Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can feel, etc. •
- Progressive muscle relaxation: Tense and release different body parts.

Each exercise is a one to two minute task that can be accomplished sitting, standing, or lying down.

4. *Create a Reminder System*

Visual or auditory cues (e.g., sticky notes, phone alarms, bracelets) remind parents to pause. In some programs, a parent may use “self-regulation cards” around the house as prompts for practice.

5. *Track & Reflect*

Parents may keep a simple log or voice note diary, recording when they did the break and how they felt about it before and after. Which practices helped most. This encourages them to develop a habit and look at their stress patterns.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Less stress in your day.
- Better emotional regulation, particularly during child crises.
- Enhanced consciousness of body and emotions, which helps in detecting stress sooner.

- Improved parenting patience and clarity of thought.
- Better quality of sleep, which results from nervous system down-regulation.

Evidence

- In a 2021 UK pilot of 150 caregivers of SEN children, 84% reported diminished emotional reactivity after 4 weeks of micro-breaks.
- Parents using micro-breaks every day reported a 33% reduction in burnout-related symptoms in an Australian parenting support group, within two months.
- Neuroscientific evidence shows that even short bouts of concentrated attention lower cortisol and activate the parasympathetic nervous system, and it happens with less than 3-minute breaks.

Lessons Learned

- Parents overestimated the time required and often thought they required long sessions to be able to reap the benefits. Framing self-care as brief, daily “emotional hygiene” lowered the bar for adoption.
- Facilitators were taught to steer clear of introducing complicated mindfulness language, opting instead for everyday metaphors such as “recharging your mental battery” or “taking a breath before the storm”.
- Visual aids, like emotion check-in thermometers, encouraged parents when a micro-break was needed.

Tools/Resources

- Instructional handouts or video clips demonstrating breathing and grounding strategies.
- Visual reminder cards near kitchen, bathroom or bedroom.
- Apps for smartphones that use short mindfulness timers (e.g., Mindful Pause, Smiling Mind).

- Encourage peer support through WhatsApp or parent forums for accountability.
- Printable micro-break calendar with emotional reflection prompts.

Name of organisation that shared the best practice: **Demetrius**

Respite Scheduling as a Family Routine



Description

Respite Scheduling is an active approach that focuses on the parents of Special Educational Needs (SEN) children planning, organizing, and adding short-term breaks into their weekly routines. Instead of merely using formal respite services, this approach teaches families to organize regular, manageable breaks and self-care periods through creative, community-based, or family-based means.

The aim is to normalize parental breaks as part of a routine, not an option, so as to prevent emotional burnout and support the sustainability of caregiving through the long haul. Scheduling breaks (even 15–60 minutes each) will help even temporary physical or mental distancing from family-based childcare activities so that parents can recharge and go back to work with a freshened body and mind.

An approach like this one has been applied to parental wellbeing programs in three countries, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway, and previous research has indicated that structured and consistent respite can lessen burnout for caregivers and build positive family processes.

Context

Respite Scheduling is particularly applicable for:

- Families with no formal respite programs, or with limited funding or availability.
- Those living in rural/underserved communities with single-parent households, or caregivers.
- Parents who feel guilty or ashamed about prioritizing themselves and who need a structured template to validate self-care.
- Complex caregiving needs in families where stress piles up quickly and incessantly.
- It can also be used with a therapist or an in-home social worker and school-based support team to help families design a more sustainable scheduling system.

Steps / Methodology

1. *Family Planning Talk*

- It begins with a facilitated (or self-guided) conversation to assess: • Daily/weekly stress load as it stands.
- Existing support networks.
- Activities that help the parent reconnect (walk, nap, hobby, quiet time) are good ways to make everyone around them feel restored.

Step one inspires the parent to speak up about their own needs and helps build the foundation of understanding between family members. This is to encourage a healthy and open introspection and help the parent reflect privately as part of their healing.

2. *Choose Informal and Formal Sources of Support*

Parents explore:

- Time-sharing with a spouse or co-parent.
- Grandparents and trusted neighbors/friends participating.
- Safe, independent activities for the child (with support or screen time where indicated).
- Local youth centers and/or SEN playgroups for after school or community programs.

3. *Start with Micro-Respite*

- Goals are high-level, achievable, and low-threshold:
- 15–30 minutes of off-duty time once or twice a week.
- Actions could be a short walk, phone call, rest, journaling or silence.

A “respite doesn’t mean absence” mindset is paramount — your being in the same house is OK if you allow a break when you can.

4. *Block Time on a Shared Weekly Calendar*

Respite times are planned and prominently recorded on paper or digital calendars and treated like any other obligation (e.g., medications, school pick-up). This puts the need for breaks on the outside, and alleviates guilt.

5. *Evaluate and Adjust*

The family looks back on:

- Each month.
- What worked.
- What upset, or guilt.
- If new routines can put breaks in a variety of ways, allowing greater use of time off.

Parents gradually build up to 1–2 hours rest per week. Then they move on to more structured activities such as classes on yoga or social gatherings.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Lower chronic exhaustion and caregiver fatigue.
- More emotional availability for children and partners.
- Better recovery from stress and better mental health outcomes.
- Enhanced co-parenting or support network integration.
- Healthy boundary modeling and self-care behaviors for children.

Evidence

- In the Norwegian Parent Empowerment Initiative (PEI, 2020), parents who implemented structured respite scheduling experienced 43% fewer self-reported burnout symptoms at 6 months.
- In another Dutch family support pilot, a family study (SEN Resilience Network, 2019), families using scheduled respite had more stability in child behavior management and lower parental reactivity in meltdowns.
- “Planned rest” was identified as the most mentioned mechanism for sustaining long-term caregiving without ruptures of breakdown in Aarhus University (Denmark) according to a qualitative study.

Lessons Learned

- Parents tend to deprioritize until crisis. Follow-through is improved through visual scheduling and group accountability.
- Families who openly shared respite goals with children led to more cooperation — especially when children felt included and knew their parents would return soon.
- Providers of respite also became trained to undergird the notion of “permission” to rest and reframe those pauses as a critical recharge to be a better parent, rather than self-interest.

Tools / Resources

- Family scheduling templates (paper or app).
- Weekly planning sessions run by a professional or peer.
- Respite service menu (cheap, indoor and outdoor options).
- Support circle mapping tool to get ideas about who might help (who may stay 15 mins with the child?).
- Visual "Parent Is Recharging" cards for communicating with children during breaks.

Name of organisation that shared the best practice: **Demetrius**

Acceptance and Commitment Support Groups (ACSGs) for Parental and Professional Resilience



Description

An Acceptance and Commitment Support Group (ACSG) is a structured group intervention grounded in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)—a contemporary cognitive-behavioral approach developed for improving psychological flexibility.

Unlike therapies that emphasize modifying negative thoughts or feelings, ACT teaches participants to accept what's outside their control and to commit to doing things they value, despite emotional discomfort. ACSGs teach participants — such as young parents of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and youth workers — to identify and create space for painful internal experiences (guilt, anxiety, fatigue) while determining what matters to them most (being a nurturing parent, a sustainable professional). By carrying out active exercises and reflecting on the dialogue, they cultivate a capability to take meaningful, intentional, core value aligned actions.

This framework of the group has been used among those working as part of a team of mental health and social care staff in European, North American, and Australasian contexts to help people move through the high emotional intensity of caregiving and professional support in SEN situations.

Context

ACSGs are especially effective in emotionally demanding settings such as:

- Special education and early intervention schools.
- Programs for young or at-risk parents in the community.
- Youth work groups, or social care services.

They are particularly well-suited to provide:

- Parents of SEN children with persistent grief, guilt and burnout.
- Youth professionals suffering compassion fatigue, role strain, and emotional overload.
- ACSGs foster both a resilient work group and a self-awareness group capable of sustaining long-term health through structured work in a psychologically safe environment.

Steps / Methodology

1. Program Structure:

Format: Small group (6–10 participants), headed by an ACT practitioner trained to work in this field. Co-facilitator suggested for emotional support and breakout tasks.

Length: 6 to 8 weekly sessions, 90 to 120 minutes.

Environment: Private but cozy, flexible to physical or virtual delivery.

2. Session Framework: ACT Hexaflex

Each session addresses one or more of ACT's six fundamental psychological flexibility processes:

ACT Process Focus in Group Sessions

Acceptance	Making space for painful feelings like grief, frustration, or helplessness
------------	--

ACT Process Focus in Group Sessions

Defusion	Learning to observe thoughts without becoming entangled in them
Being Present	Using mindfulness to engage fully in the current moment
Self-as-Context	Noticing that one is more than their thoughts or roles (e.g., "overwhelmed parent")
Values	Clarifying what truly matters—being present, loving, authentic
Committed Action	Taking steps, however small, toward those values, even in emotional discomfort

3. Experiential Activities

There are metaphor, reflection and practical exercises associated with each session including:

- Values Clarification – “The Compass Exercise”: An exercise to identify guiding values that influence decisions.
- Defusion: “Passengers on the Bus”: Depicts self as bus driver and disruptive thoughts as passengers.
- Acceptance — “Tug-of-War with a Monster”: Shows that struggling with emotions is pointless.
- Committed Action – “Small Steps Planning” – Participants select and commit to one little something for which they have value each week.

4. Tailored Considerations:

- For Parents of SEN Children:
- Emphasize a non-judgmental environment in which emotions like grief, self-blame and resentment will be normal.
- Move from “Am I happy?” to “Am I what I hope to be, as a parent?”
- Focus on workability – valued activity which is effective over time, even when you don’t feel it emotionally.

For Youth workers or educators:

- Redress burnout and boundary-setting.
- Reconnect with professional purpose and reduce the reemergence of one's over-identification with the suffering of others by using ACT tools.
- Foster exemplifies flexibility and regulation in their involvement with families.

Benefits / Outcomes

- More emotional resilience and psychological flexibility.
- Less experiential avoidance, guilt and self-criticism.
- More consistency between values and daily caregiving or professional behaviour.
- More tolerance for emotional discomfort without acting out or withdrawing.
- Increased parenting/support roles that bring a sense of purpose and connection.

Evidence

- Evidence from ACT-based group intervention research suggests that there are consistent reductions in parental stress and burnout, especially among parents with children with developmental disabilities (Whittingham et al., 2016).
- ACT has also been shown in social workers, or indeed frontline professionals in general, to improve their mental health and decrease avoidance behaviours (Hayes et al., 2013).
- Pilot studies in Slovenia and the UK of ACT groups demonstrated positive effects on psychological flexibility and value-based action of caregivers and teachers of SEN children (Ciarrochi et al., 2010).

Lessons Learned

- Most participants had initially resisted acceptance-based language, as they perceived it as “giving up.” Facilitators found

that metaphors and experiential exercises were key in reducing resistance.

- Parents and professionals alike appreciated the normalization of discomfort — that anxiety, sadness and fatigue come as part of healthy caregiving.
- Weekly home practice assignments (mindful parenting moments and journaling) allowed the incorporation of ACT principles into the space between sessions significantly.
- It was pivotal to establish a non-judgmental and safe group environment to facilitate emotional vulnerability and honesty.

Tools / Resources

- ACT Core Process, session plans, facilitator guide.
- Participant workbook with metaphors, values mapping and reflection exercises.
- Online location or in a physical space that maintains confidentiality and emotional safety.
- Evaluation tools for assessing stress, flexibility, and value alignment (e.g., Valued Living Questionnaire, AAQ-II).

Name of organisation that shared best practice: **PSKC**

Exploring the Inner World through Creative Mandala Expression



Description

Mandala Practice is a mindfulness-based art therapy that combines creative expression with present-moment awareness. Through drawing or coloring mandalas, participants engage in non-judgmental exploration and self-reflection, fostering emotional expression and insight. The symmetrical and harmonious patterns of mandalas provide a meditative and safe space to connect with one's inner world. This practice supports relaxation, stress reduction, self-discovery, and emotional balance, helping participants cultivate calm, focus, and self-awareness.

Context

The practice was applied in a group of parents raising children with special educational needs (SEN). The group was guided by a psychologist from the PŠKC organization, experienced in art therapy and mindfulness-based practices. Participants often shared feelings of stress, emotional fatigue, and difficulty expressing their inner experiences. Mandala Practice was introduced as a creative way to explore emotions, cultivate self-awareness, and promote relaxation. By engaging in the structured and harmonious process of creating

mandalas, participants were able to experience calm, balance, and emotional clarity amid the challenges of caregiving.

Steps / Methodology

- Introduction to mindfulness and mandala practice (2–3 min) – The facilitator introduces participants to mandala as a mindfulness tool, explaining its purpose: fostering self-awareness, emotional expression, and present-moment focus. Participants learn that the process is about mindful creation rather than perfect results.
- Choosing approach: pre-drawn or self-drawn (2–3 min) – Participants decide whether to use a pre-drawn circular template for mindful coloring or create their own mandala from scratch. The facilitator explains that both approaches support emotional expression and mindfulness.
- Creating the mandala (15–20 min)
 - Pre-drawn template: Participants color intuitively, selecting colors that reflect their current emotional state. Attention is placed on the sensory experience, color choices, and being fully present.
 - Self-drawn mandala: Participants start with a small central circle representing the self. They gradually add patterns, shapes, and symbols extending outward, using radial symmetry to create balance or freeform designs if preferred. This stage encourages focus, order, and exploration of inner thoughts.
- Coloring and deepening mindfulness (10–15 min) – Participants color their self-drawn mandalas, paying attention to emotional resonance, sensory engagement, and the meditative rhythm of coloring. The process is non-judgmental and introspective.
- Returning to the present moment (2–3 min) – Participants pause, take several mindful breaths, and observe bodily

sensations, emotions, and thoughts after the mandala creation process.

- Reflection and optional group sharing (5–10 min) – Participants reflect individually or share with the group how creating the mandala affected their mood, awareness, or sense of calm. Facilitators may guide discussion about applying this practice in daily life to manage stress or support emotional well-being.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Promotes relaxation, emotional regulation, and stress reduction.
- Encourages self-awareness and exploration of inner thoughts and feelings.
- Strengthens focus, attention, and mindfulness.
- Provides a safe, non-verbal outlet for expressing emotions such as stress, sadness, or joy.
- Easily adaptable for home practice or group sessions.

Evidence

During a session, one parent shared that creating a mandala helped them process feelings of overwhelm and anxiety. They described the practice as “a moment to breathe and organize my thoughts,” which allowed them to feel calmer and more centered. When participants continued to use mandala creation regularly, they reported improved emotional clarity, focus, and a greater sense of balance. Some even incorporated short mandala sessions into their daily routines as a calming ritual amid caregiving demands.

Lessons Learned

- Even a short mandala session can help reduce stress and increase emotional awareness.

- Parents benefit from experiencing the practice themselves before applying creative mindfulness techniques with their children.
- Repetition strengthens focus, calmness, and emotional stability.
- Mandala creation is a simple, effective, and universally accessible tool to support mental and emotional well-being in families raising children with SEN.

Tools / Resources

- Guided Mandala Practice script or instructions.
- Paper, pencils, or coloring tools for creating mandalas.
- Reflection worksheet for parents to note feelings and insights.
- Facilitator – psychologist, art therapist, or trained mindfulness instructor.

Name of organisation that shared best practice: **PSKC**

Mountain Meditation for Cultivating Inner Strength and Stability



Description

Mountain Meditation is a guided mindfulness practice designed to cultivate inner strength, stability, and grounded presence. Drawing inspiration from the enduring stillness of a mountain, this meditation invites participants to embody qualities of calm and resilience amid life's constant changes. Through vivid imagery and awareness of the body and breath, participants learn to stay centered and steady, observing emotions and thoughts as passing weather without resistance. This practice nurtures emotional balance, patience, and a deep sense of unshakable calm within.

Context

The practice was applied in a group of parents raising children with special educational needs (SEN). The group was guided by a psychologist from the PŠKC organization, experienced in mindfulness and emotional resilience training. Participants often shared feelings of exhaustion, instability, and emotional overwhelm resulting from the continuous demands of caregiving. Mountain Meditation was introduced as a way to help parents reconnect with their inner strength, stability, and calm. By visualizing themselves as grounded and steady

like a mountain, participants learned to cultivate patience and emotional balance amid the challenges of daily life.

Steps / Methodology

- Preparation (2–3 min) – Participants sit comfortably with an upright but relaxed posture. They take several deep breaths, allowing the body to settle and the mind to arrive in the present moment.
- Guided visualization (10–15 min) – The psychologist or teacher invites participants to imagine a majestic mountain—strong, stable, and grounded. Participants are guided to visualize themselves as the mountain, feeling the sense of rootedness and stillness within their body. The facilitator describes changing weather around the mountain (sun, wind, rain, snow) to illustrate how thoughts and emotions come and go, while the mountain remains unmoved.
- Embodiment of qualities (3–5 min) – Participants are encouraged to connect with the inner qualities of the mountain—strength, calm, patience, and resilience. They reflect on how these qualities can support them in facing daily challenges.
- Returning to the present moment (2–3 min) – Participants slowly bring awareness back to their breath, body, and surroundings, gently opening their eyes and noticing any sensations of stability or peace.
- Reflection (5–10 min) – Participants are invited to share their experiences, emotions, or insights from the visualization. Discussion may focus on how they can apply the feeling of grounded stability in stressful or emotionally demanding situations at home or with their children.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Cultivates inner strength, stability, and grounded presence.

- Supports emotional balance and resilience in challenging situations.
- Reduces stress, overwhelm, and emotional tension.
- Enhances mindfulness, focus, and self-awareness.
- Provides a practical tool for parents to manage daily caregiving demands.

Evidence

During a session, one parent shared that Mountain Meditation helped them feel steadier and more resilient when facing stressful situations with their child. They described it as “finding my inner anchor,” which allowed them to respond with calm rather than react impulsively. When the parents practiced this visualization regularly, they noticed a greater sense of emotional balance and patience in daily caregiving. Over time, several participants reported using the meditation as a brief grounding ritual before challenging moments, helping to reduce tension and foster a calmer, more present atmosphere at home.

Lessons Learned

- Even a brief guided Mountain Meditation can enhance feelings of stability and reduce emotional overwhelm.
- Parents benefit from personally experiencing grounding techniques before applying them in caregiving situations.
- Regular practice strengthens resilience, calmness, and the ability to stay present during challenging moments.
- Visualization is a simple, effective, and accessible tool for supporting emotional well-being in families raising children with special educational needs (SEN).

Tools / Resources

- Guided Mountain Meditation script or audio recording.

- Quiet and comfortable space for the activity.
- Reflection worksheet for parents to note experiences and insights.
- Facilitator – psychologist, counselor, or trained mindfulness instructor.

Name of organisation that shared best practice: **PSKC**

Mindful Walking Indoors or Outdoors: Cultivating Presence and Calm through Movement



Description

Mindful Walking is a movement-based mindfulness practice designed to slow down the body, calm the mind, and cultivate awareness through gentle motion. It combines physical movement with focused attention, allowing participants to reconnect with their body, breath, and environment. Whether practiced indoors in a quiet hallway or outdoors in nature, mindful walking invites individuals to experience each step as an act of presence and self-care.

This practice is particularly beneficial for parents, caregivers, and youth workers who often feel mentally overloaded or emotionally fatigued. It provides an accessible way to release tension, regulate stress, and return to the present moment with greater clarity and ease.

Context

The practice was introduced in a group of parents and professionals working with children and youth, including those with special educational needs (SEN). Participants often described feeling rushed, restless, or disconnected from themselves due to constant caregiving or work-related demands.

Mindful Walking was presented as a simple yet effective method to restore inner balance during busy days. By combining movement and awareness, participants learned that even short walks—taken consciously and with intention—can bring calm, focus, and renewed energy. The practice encouraged them to integrate mindfulness into everyday routines rather than view it as something separate or time-consuming.

Steps / Methodology

- Preparation and Intention (1–2 min). Participants are invited to pause before starting. Standing still, they take a few deep breaths and place a hand on the chest or abdomen. With eyes gently closed, they set an intention such as: “I walk to calm my mind” or “Each step is an act of self-care.”
- Beginning the Walk (2–3 min). Participants start walking slowly, choosing a quiet and safe space, corridor, garden path, or small room. The focus is on the physical sensation of walking: the contact of the heel with the ground, the rolling of the foot, and the lift of the toes.
- Anchoring Attention (3–5 min). As they continue, participants maintain awareness of each step, noticing the rhythm of movement and how the body feels. When the mind wanders to thoughts or worries, they gently bring attention back to the sensations in the feet and legs.
- Adding Breath Awareness (3–5 min). Breathing is synchronized with the steps—inhale for two steps, exhale for two steps. Participants notice the flow of breath and movement as a single rhythm, cultivating presence with each step.
- Mindful Return (1–2 min). At the end of the walk, participants stop and stand still. They take a deep breath and notice any changes in their body or mind—perhaps calmer, lightness, or clarity. They may silently repeat an affirmation such as “I have arrived” or “I am here.”

Optional Variation

Indoors, barefoot walking on a soft surface can enhance grounding and sensory awareness. Outdoors, walking in nature can deepen the connection with sounds, smells, and textures around.

Benefits / Outcomes

- Cultivates mindfulness in motion and present-moment awareness.
- Enhances focus, grounding, and emotional regulation.
- Reduces restlessness, stress, and mental fatigue.
- Encourages gentle self-care through daily routines.
- Strengthens body-mind connection and promotes relaxation.

Evidence

Participants reported that Mindful Walking helped them slow down and regain composure during demanding days. One parent shared: “When I start feeling overwhelmed, I step outside and walk mindfully for a few minutes. I come back calmer and more focused. It’s like pressing a reset button.” Others described using short mindful walks between tasks or during work breaks to reduce tension and improve concentration. Over time, they noticed increased emotional balance and the ability to respond to challenges with greater patience.

Lessons Learned

- Short, accessible practices like mindful walking can effectively reduce stress and restore clarity, even during busy days.
- Movement-based mindfulness is especially helpful for individuals who find it difficult to sit still or meditate formally.
- Regular mindful walking builds awareness of the body and supports emotional resilience.

- Integrating mindfulness into daily activities helps sustain long-term well-being and balance.

Tools / Resources

- Comfortable walking space (indoor corridor, room, or outdoor path).
- Optional: barefoot walking mat or soft surface.
- Audio guidance with mindful walking script.



When life becomes overwhelming and exhaustion drowns out our inner voice, we can remember this: our task is not to control everything, but to return again and again to what truly matters to us. In accepting the moment we find space to breathe, and in committing to our values we find the strength to keep going.