

Embedding mindfulness at Raise the Youth Foundation

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

School:	Raise the Youth Foundation
Location:	Manchester
School Type:	Social Enterprise
MiSP Curriculum:	.b & School Mindfulness Lead
Age Group/s:	11-25
Author:	Jason Steele
Role:	CEO
Issue/s Addressed:	Anxiety, confidence.

Raise the Youth Foundation is a not-for-profit social enterprise dedicated to bringing people, partnerships, communities and industry together, to raise the youth and invest in young people’s future. Since it was founded in 2011, Raise has had a clear vision for its future – to invest in vulnerable young people (aged 11-25) by ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn, develop and, ultimately, realise their true potential in life. Mindfulness has become an organisation-wide approach providing a crucial foundation for Raise as a whole.

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The young people that Raise supports have many individualised needs, ranging from mental health, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, multiple exclusions, many placement moves, school phobias and

anxiety, separation, loss and being unable to have their needs met in other forms of education. As a Trauma Informed organisation, we fully understand that our young people’s frustrations, feelings, thoughts and difficulties at managing their school day, can lead to expressing their feelings from a heightened state of fear, pain, rage, grief and need high levels of care and support.

Our young people are often reacting to such feelings, thoughts, body sensations and urges by reacting to fight, flight, freeze. Other young people have high levels of anxiety around exams, who need to be supported to settle down to learn and have the skills to manage their anxiety, building the confidence and knowledge to understand how to face their fears and know that they ‘can do it.’

At Raise we believe in opening our arms and our hearts to the children and we endeavour to inspire our young people each and every day. We want to show them a different way of being and teach them new skills, delivering education in a way that works for them and putting them at the centre of everything we do. We believe in them and try to help them to believe in themselves.

Our team of highly talented multi-disciplinary professionals create innovative plans to address each young person’s unique needs.

Mindfulness is a way of life at Raise. It is not something just for the children. It is integrated into the way we operate and embedded as a whole school approach, supporting our children, young people and staff. Doing the work we do can be tough for staff and mindfulness provides the tools to self-regulate, to be able to do their best for the children. It gives us all space to reflect. We’ve trained everyone, from teachers, directors, TAs, social workers to our cleaners, finance and administration teams. Our work can be challenging and mindfulness

enables us to extend non-judgement and kindness to all the people we deal with on behalf of the children. This helps us to achieve better outcomes whilst looking after ourselves. I also feel that our mindful approach has an impact on the other agencies we deal with, and the wider community recognises the values we have.

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Our young people at first learn mindfulness informally by seeing how we behave. We are role models for them, as it takes a whole community to raise a young person. We then offer opt-in mindfulness practices. We do body scans in the same room that the young people sit their exams in, so they learn to manage that anxiety in that space. We also teach them how to do a 'FOFBOC' and a '.b'. We have '.b' stickers everywhere!

Often weekends can be very difficult for our young people so every Monday is a Wellbeing Monday. Last year we offered the whole .b curriculum as a voluntary programme and of 9 young people who started it, six completed it and we found them teaching it to the other children! So, this coming year, we will offer the .b curriculum as part of Personal and Social Development lessons and expect these formal lessons to pick up momentum alongside the informal practices we do.

I train everyone myself. This means we don't have to pay for external courses, we can shape the training sessions around the Raise day, we don't have to travel anywhere and I can schedule it at the best time for staff and their wellbeing. Train the trainer is an affordable, sustainable model. I went on the **School Mindfulness Lead** course to learn how to teach .b **Foundations** and can honestly say it was the most brilliant training. Since 2011, I have worked non-stop to get Raise where it needs to be, and I went on the **SML** course and it took me two days to stop twitching and realise what it was all about. My trainers, MiSP's Jem and Dom, just oozed mindfulness and it was truly a retreat for me. It energized me and I could find myself again. I would recommend it to



Jason Steele speaking at the 2019 MiSP Conference

anyone who wants to embed mindfulness in their school. Wellbeing is paramount for both adults and children working together. If we're not all well, we can't succeed.

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I first discovered mindfulness through a book which I actually bought for someone else: Vidyamala Burch's "Living Well with Pain and Illness – Using Mindfulness to Free Yourself From Suffering". This book had a profound impact on me. I had been working really, really hard to make Raise the Youth work and to establish the Raise Education and Wellbeing School. I'd had my own range of challenges in life and learning and was experiencing ongoing pressures as I tried to balance everything. Reading this book, and finding mindfulness, changed my relationship with difficulty. I began to practice mindfulness myself and learnt more and more about it.

Mindfulness helps individuals grow and develop and get ready to fulfil their true potential. It helps people engage with their work, their studies, their relationships and, really, their lives. It plays a central role in giving us the capacity to manage our circumstances, whether we are adults or young people. I am pretty confident that mindfulness is well-embedded at Raise and even if I wasn't around mindfulness at Raise is here to stay. But I'm not going anywhere!