

WELLFEST21 ROUND-UP

Last week, June 17th, we held our 2nd WellFest event for practitioners and support staff across the FE sector. For this year's event we wanted it to be bigger and better than ever, so we joined forces with our friends and colleagues at Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network to have a greater audience. We also had some fantastic sponsors and supported again this year, with special thanks to Cache Alumni, NCFE, BDL, Skills Forward, LearnBox & Cognassist. This blog provides a summary of our fantastic speakers & experts covering important and insightful themes. All resources discussed will be made available from the WYLP website.

THOMAS MINNS - MINNSMIND

The morning opened with professional rugby player Tom Minns sharing his story & experiences with mental health and importantly how he manages his struggles and well-being. Tom discussed the importance of exercise on the mind and body & how HIIT workouts are a fantastic way to work out and can be adapted to any one at any ability.

Tom shared that 20 minutes of moderate cardio exercise improves your mood for up to 12 hours afterwards and how we should all find 20 mins a day to support our wellbeing. Part of Tom's journey is to find ways to keep him motivated with his mental health and he used a "Curry therapy" and having an "emotional water bottle" – Curry Therapy is a way Tom looking forward to enjoying a curry if & when he starts to feel his well-being reducing and his water bottle to remind him to drink water.

Tom found running helped him during the pandemic! He started off running 1Km and worked his way up to running a half marathon. Using Apps such as strava & couch to 5km are a great way to motivate yourself to start a running journey. Tom's commitment to supporting mental health doesn't stop with just looking after himself, he also runs 'Minns Mind' which is a website & organisations that supports mental health to everyone who needs it and Tom spends a lot of time supporting schools & community groups by giving talks and sharing his journey. Visit - Home - Minns Mind – for more information.



LOUISE MERCECA - THE HEALTHKICK

Our 2nd speaker was Louise Mercica discussing how stress and food are interlinked to emotional behaviour and lapse of control.

Louise described how foods and what we eat triggers a guilt factor which escalates and spirals and leads people to eat unhealthy snack as sugar is racing round the system which leads to vicious cycles of food & stress guilt. These foods end up making you feel so uncomfortable & ashamed and insecure about appearance which leads to effects on self-esteem & performance at work. Louise explained that people will be dealing with this subconsciously, without knowing this cycle and how this is linked to childhood comfort food transitioning to adulthood – if you had sweets when hurt self this will carry into adulthood. This was a particular concern and issue for people during lockdown.

Louise expressed her frustrations with the Food industry & how they play on this, so we consume more high sugar and poor foods.

Convenient healthy food is significantly more expensive than unhealthy convenient so it is important to plan and chop up fruit and vegetable etc so you have healthy snacks in the fridge to grab on the go. Many people have a misconception that Artificial sweeteners are a healthier response to sugar but in reality it can be more damaging than sugar. As your body seeks more calories as you don't have it from the sweetener just the sweet taste. To find out more about Louise and her award winning book The Health Kick please visit - Louise's Video Blog | Mysite (thehealthkick.co.uk)



BOB KITCHEN - BDL & RICHARD POWELL - NCFE

Next up we had a very detailed presentation from the co-founder of BDL and the self-proclaimed little dog of the partnership, Bob Kitchen, on the importance of recognising and quickly addressing when you are stressed and anxious. Physical exercise is a way of addressing life's stresses as it teaches our brain that behaviour matters.

Bob discussed that it takes 21 days to break a bad habit and to develop a good habit – helps to rewire the brain for positive mental health. To help with this journey and bad habit breaking Bob recommends Journaling as it helps relive the positives of the day/week etc and cements this in the brain making you feel more positive.

Bob shared the need to understand Stress.

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What it is, why it is and why it matters and how Meditation is an effective way to get rid of the cultural ADHD – expectation for multitasking has a negative effect on mental health and wellbeing.

Bob finished by discussing the STEPS to preventing suicide and how BDL and CACHE have worked together to develop qualifications in suicide awareness and reduction, at a time when there's only a limited number of training solely targeted at this sensitive and life-saving subject. The qualifications developed by CACHE and BDL are the first regulated awards in the UK designed to raise awareness of and reduce suicide – to find out more visit Big Dog Little Dog (BDLD) , Mental Health and Employment Training

STEPHEN MORDUE

We were joined for a 2nd year by Stephen Mordue who shared insightful and interesting information on how to achieve a balanced lifestyle. Stephen discussed the benefits of being outdoors & how it aids rest and recovery mode.

Stephen shared that although it is important to spend time with friends and family; it is also critical that connections at work are essential to healthy mindset as is being our true self at work – the closer we are to our authentic self the better the impact on work and our mindfulness.

Stephen shared the '5 gear' methodology & how this approach recognises that some people are working at different rates & at different times and as such some people may be more productive working from home or at different times of the day where distractions could be minimal.

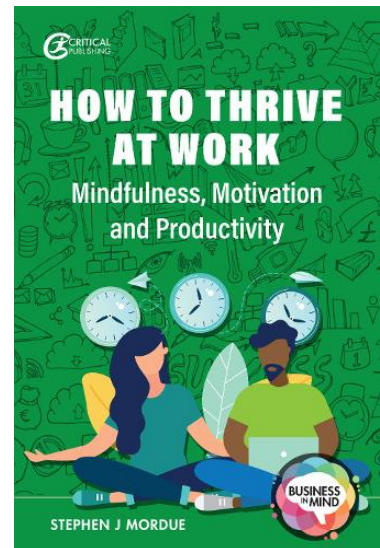
Stephen shared his thoughts on multi-tasking and how it leads to time lost and substandard work as concentration is poor and leads to procrastination. Having a small task mode setting is far more effective and productive than a multiple or large task orientated response.

Stephen finished by providing everyone with 3 approaches to dealing with every day tasks; 'Eat your frogs' – meaning start with your worst tasks first in a morning to avoid it sapping your energy for the other significant tasks later in the day.

The '2-minute rule' – if it can be done in 2 mins do it immediately – just get on with it and a favourite saying of the day was "Procrastination is the art of ruining your life for no reason"

Don't have Buckaroo moments – dragged back to the office as you leave unfinished and unmanaged. This drains psychological energy. Unfinished managed tasks you can leave behind and gear down.

For more information about how to thrive at work, ready Stephens book available on Amazon - How to Thrive at Work: Mindfulness, Motivation and Productivity (Business in Mind); Amazon.co.uk: Mordue, Stephen J: 9781913453695: Books

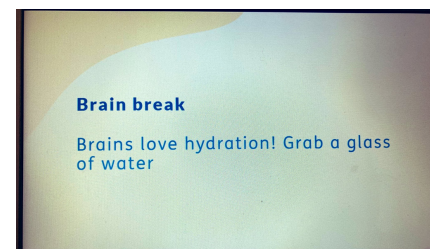


HELEN WILSON - COGNASSIST

The final session of the morning and before the lunch break was from Helen Wilson, Cognassist. Helen shared great insight into how to better support our cognitive activity to lead to a more positive and mentally strong life. Helen covered how to frame our mental health, the impact of cognition and provided solutions for how we can cope.

Helen shared the concept of allowing yourself to have 'Brain breaks' which allows you to step away and have breathing space. Helen then asked all delegates to do exactly that, and the event fell into silence as everyone participated in 3 lots of 30second of brain break.

Helen also discussed the importance of staying Hydrated and its essentiality for effective brain activity. There is not a lot of research into the link between water and mental health, but it is an area that is getting a lot more attention and results are showing positive links.



Thank you to everyone who joined us for the morning session!

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DR FRAN LONGSTAFF - FIKA & MARK GORDAN - NCFE

After the lunch break delegates were joined by NCFE & Fika who challenged the group to think about why we use the terminology 'mental fitness' - they also discussed why it is important to change the language surrounding mental health. Fika is a mental fitness skills development platform that our partners embed into their L&D strategy, empowering them to reach every employee in order to improve personal and team performance.

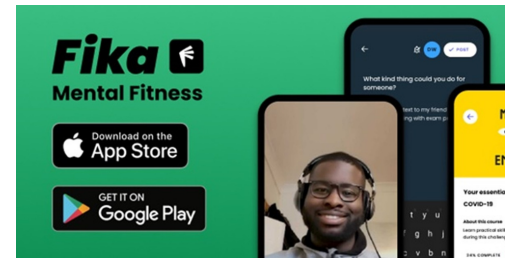
They discussed the techniques used in day-to-day life to improve mental fitness and how technology may have changed this due to the pandemic. There was also a discussion and demo on focusing on mental fitness in education in order to allow students and staff mindset to flourish.

Fika discuss the concept of Mastering the 7 skills of Mental Fitness – these being Focus, Confidence, Motivation, Connection, Meaning, Positivity and Stress Management.

Fika shared information on the App developed which they are currently offering a 1 Year usage to Fika funded by NCFE.

The Fika 7 Skills of Mental Fitness Curriculum has been endorsed by NCFE and is accessible for all college staff and students and has been Ofsted Mapped

More information can be found at - [Fika | Mental Fitness](#)



ANNE GORNAL & JAMES LEES - GMLPN

We then heard from Anne & James from GMLPN about the mental health project they are currently running. They have worked in collaboration with Association of Colleges and Greater Manchester Health & Social Care Partnership to develop a Mental Health Charter for ITP's. The aim is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Apprentices and trainees. TP's will commit to:

- Promoting Awareness of Mental Health issues
- Attend Mental Health Professional Exchanges which are facilitated by GMLPN
- Share good practice and resources with the network
- Be available to help other network members if they need mental health guidance and support

As well as the charter there is a toolkit currently under development which will pull together best practice from across the sector to share with practitioners. To find out more follow the link below:

<https://gmlpn.co.uk/news/gmlpn-recruiting-mental-health-champions-mental-health-charter-supporters/>

There is currently 13 organisations signed up and 27 mental health champions. Some work has already been completed with a team walking the equivalent distance of the English Channel.

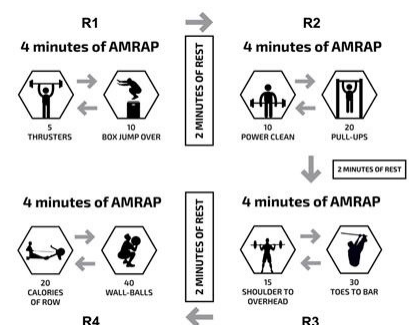
LUKE PODMORE - TAMESIDE COLLEGE

Luke opened his presentation by sharing details of the Revival project launched during lockdown – with AoC stating "The mental health and wellbeing of students and staff is a huge priority for colleges - even more so since the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic." AoC 2021

The recent AoC Mental Health in Colleges report (Jan 2021) details the challenges:

- 90% of colleges seeing an increase in students diagnosed with mental health conditions.
- 85% of colleges seeing a significant number of students with undiagnosed mental health difficulties.
- 94% of colleges have students who have attempted suicide in the last twelve months.
- Nearly half of colleges (41%) say that mental health referrals have been significantly higher since the pandemic began

Luke shared the Inactivity project set up to combat inactivity amongst students and staff at Tameside College and their increased focus on Mental health by sharing practical tips and solutions to support staff, this includes not just exercises but online quizzes, mindfulness breathing, Prize fund & incentives that can aid more activity/mindfulness



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The college used the AMRAP method and all sessions were pre-recorded so students could access at any time. Luke concluded by sharing some of the outcomes the college has achieved in supporting mental health & well-being; including a new Well-being working group & strategy and the creation of their own fitness app in association with My PT Hub.

AMIE BENTLEY - DIGITAL WELLBEING

The delegates were then joined by Amie Bentley from Manchester Met University who shared her story of digital well-being. Amie discussed the importance of being aware of your 5 senses - do this after every meeting or task and allows you to re-focus.

18% of adults cited technology use as the main source of stress in their life and many stating the need for a digital detox. However many young people have FOMO when they are not using technology & that feeling of missing out on social media makes you constantly check it. - No boundaries constantly checking emails etc outside of work

Amie shared the benefits to digital detoxing; reduce stress, allows a more positive life perspective on life & improves sleep. Whilst detoxing it is suggested that you can come up with a plan of what makes you happy, what doesn't & concentrate on the positive. It is important to be realistic - don't completely disconnect, try a mini-detox first and to let friends and family know so they can support you and do not get concerned when you are not replying!

Amie shared information on how digital technology can be impacting your well-being; covering connectivity with people, lack of being outside and taking in nature, increases anxiety & loses sense of community - Amie also shared the positives of digital technology and that everything in moderation should be a methodology used.



SALLYANN COLEMAN - APPRENTIFY

Sally Coleman from Apprentify presented a session on Anxiety awareness focusing on the causes of anxiety and some tips on how to deal with it. Anxiety is a feeling of discomfort but not all anxiety is bad - It can energise us into action. For people who suffer with anxiety it is important that they recognise the good and bad anxieties before it grows/develops into more of a problem that could be more difficult to deal with - if learners are suffering with anxiety it is a good activity to complete signs of good & bad with them so they can learn from & adapt their response so it doesn't cause a negative mindset and outlook.

Signs of anxiety; Physical signs include - fast breathing, irregular heartbeat, sweating
Phycological signs - trouble sleeping& feeling depressed

Sally discussed that getting a good night's sleep in massively important for positive well-being and mental health and ensuring a regular routine around bedtime is critical, especially when looking at the pre-sleep arrangements and understanding that Your environment matters!

Sally believe that a solution could be to try journaling your thoughts and worries before bed, getting them all down and off your shoulders to help with the quality & quantity of sleep.

EMMA NOLAN - THALES UK

Emma Nolan finished the presentations and discussed her own experience with Anxiety and Depression.Emma shared openly and honestly that while they were present in her life for a few years, they were manageable up until the pandemic. Emma said she found guidance through her university counselling and tutors as well as through her Employer. Emma wants to share her experience as she hopes to open up the conversation on Mental Health and the support available - Emma stated that asking for help if you are struggling is difficult but important.

Emma shared that private therapy worked for her but may not work for everyone so finding a variety of solutions or asking for help from people will identify a response that works.

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