

MINDFUL MAMAS TOOLKIT

GUIDANCE ON CO-PRODUCTION
IN WELLBEING SERVICES



**South
London
Listens**

**parent
action**
PART OF
citizensUK

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Thank you to the Parent Action team, in particular Layla Meerloo for overseeing the project and reviewing this guide. A big thanks to our partners and Thriving Mums at Max Roach.

We are particularly grateful to our research partners at KCL, Dr Samantha McCann, Dr June Brown, Jennifer Holly and Siobahn D'Almeida.

WHO ARE PARENT ACTION

We are Parent Action, a project of Citizens UK. Becoming a parent can change your life entirely, and for many this change is hard. We understand that going through such a significant change without the right support around you is not only difficult, but lonely. We want parents to have a place where they belong. From wanting support with your mental health, to making new friends, to taking action on poor housing to helping you thrive as a parent and as a person. We want to help families build the confidence and abilities to create change in their lives and in their communities.

For more information on the weekly activities we run, as well as our Community Organising work and volunteer opportunities, visit our website on: <https://www.pact-citizens.org/>

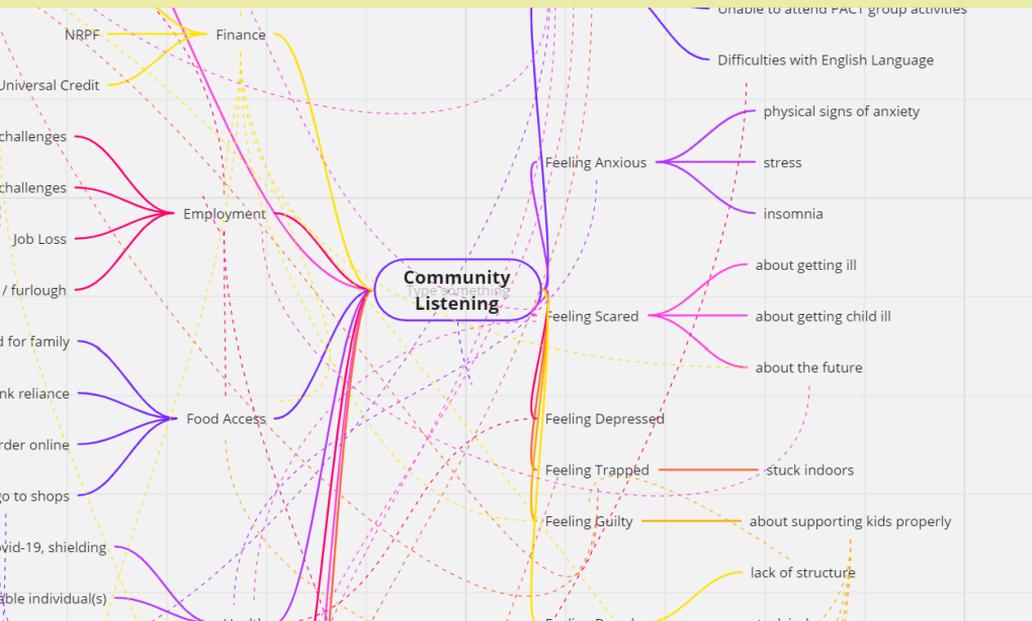


WHO IS THIS FOR AND WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

If you are familiar with recent funding proposals you will know that **'co-production'** is one of the buzzwords for consideration. For many of us, co-producing activities is already embedded in our approaches. For others, expectations of what co-production means is more aligned with practices of **'community consultation'**. This toolkit is to guide, inform and share learnings from our attempt to *authentically* co-produce a wellbeing course. This means a true dedication to the process, and the benefits that come not only from the 'final product' but also from participation in its creation. If you are exploring co-production, but are finding it difficult to imagine it put into practice, this guidance may help you.

Moreover, this is about community **wellbeing and the power of peer support** in improving mental health and as a preventative measure. We hope this toolkit can support any organisation aiming to be more community-led in their approach to wellbeing.

COMMUNITY LISTENING



In 2020, as part of the South London Listens campaign we listened to 300 parents talk about their mental health. We then co-led workshops with parents to draw out the key themes and come up with some solutions.

Key Challenges:

Stigma around mental health - cultural taboos or feeling ashamed to talk about mental health. This could also be fear of the consequences, e.g. social services.

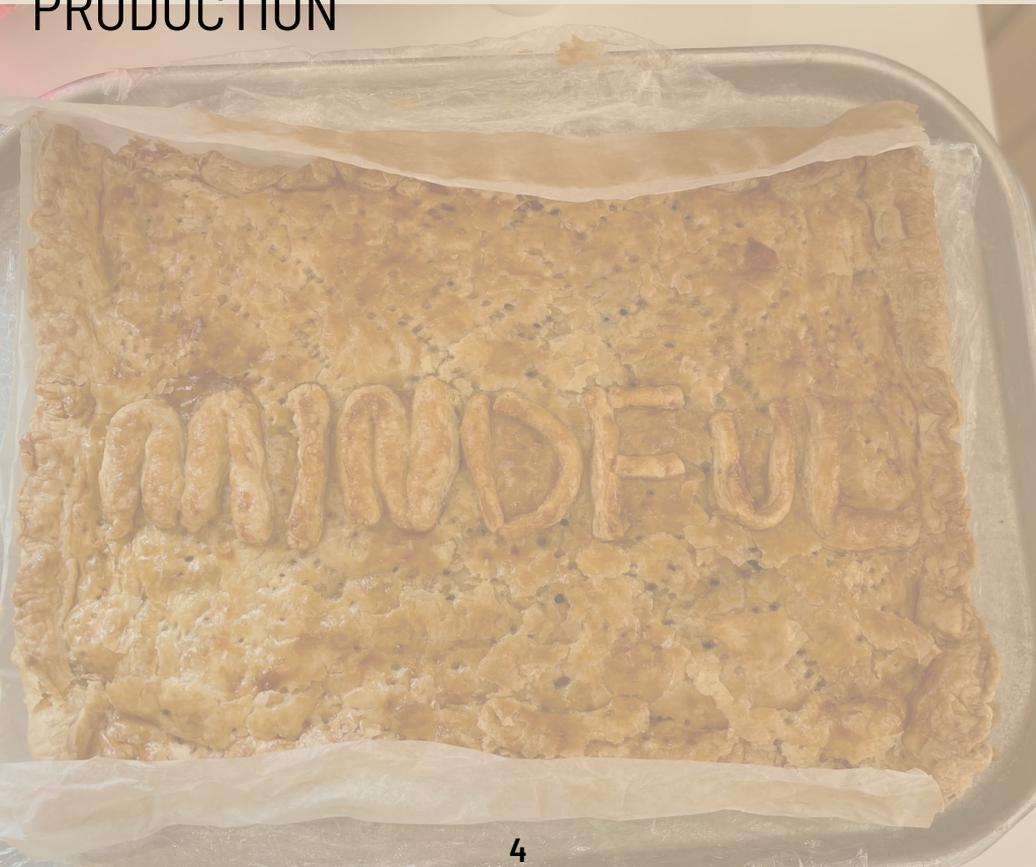
Access to services - From not knowing where to start, to long waiting lists and mental health services that are not appropriate or the right fit for the individual.

We asked parents what they wanted to do about it and they proposed something that is parent-led and offers a space for peer-support.

Solution - Co-Produce a peer-support offering by parents for parents, this was later named Mindful Mamas.

***"IT'S LIKE WHEN YOU COOK,
YOU ARE HAPPY TO EAT
BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHAT
YOU PUT INSIDE, IT'S SO
SWEET, AND YOU'RE EXCITED
TO EAT."***

**-MINDFUL MAMA DISCUSSING CO-
PRODUCTION**



CO-PRODUCTION

According to NHS England, Co-Production is

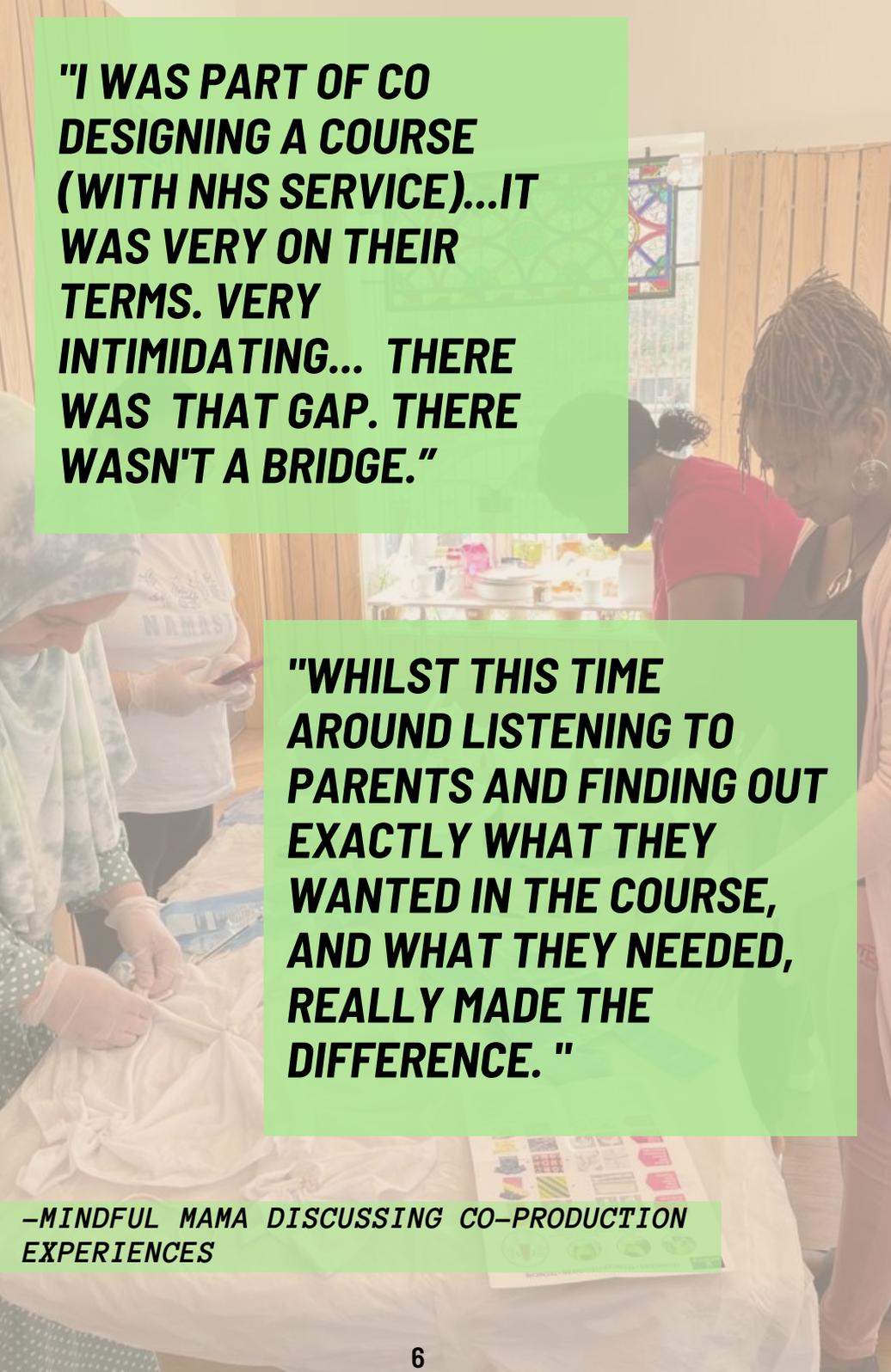
“is a way of working that involves people who use health and care services, carers and communities in equal partnership; and which **engages groups of people at the earliest stages of service design, development and evaluation.**”

Through this approach, those with ‘lived experience’ are valued as being able to advise on the support they need as well as positively influencing their lives.

Unfortunately, co-production is too often used loosely to refer to a community consultation approach. That is, *we are service providers with a great idea, can you let us know what you think and we might change it a bit for you...* In this case, the power is still almost entirely with the service provider.

What I refer to as **‘authentic co-production’** is an approach that involves the community from **the start to the end of the process. It values their skills and has the potential to create more sustainable impact.**

This all sounds great, but how does it look in practice? This toolkit will demonstrate how we co-produced our wellbeing course for parents - Mindful Mamas.



**"I WAS PART OF CO
DESIGNING A COURSE
(WITH NHS SERVICE)...IT
WAS VERY ON THEIR
TERMS. VERY
INTIMIDATING... THERE
WAS THAT GAP. THERE
WASN'T A BRIDGE."**

**"WHILST THIS TIME
AROUND LISTENING TO
PARENTS AND FINDING OUT
EXACTLY WHAT THEY
WANTED IN THE COURSE,
AND WHAT THEY NEEDED,
REALLY MADE THE
DIFFERENCE. "**

**-MINDFUL MAMA DISCUSSING CO-PRODUCTION
EXPERIENCES**

WORKSHOPS

As previously mentioned, many Parent Action parents were already involved in the initial listening process of South London Listens, and also in solutions workshops that resulted in their 'asks' to key decision makers. That was more parent peer-support, and when that programme was funded we need to involve the community in the design of what this offering would look like.

The key moments of co-production with Mindful Mamas was: the **initial listening, designing the course, designing marketing/promo material, naming the group, recruiting parents, leading workshops and following the evaluation and review.**

We decided to run a number of co-production workshops, using a range of 'design-thinking' activities, with clear aims on how to use the time.

- Connect and inspire parents to be involved
- Find out what parents wanted to achieve during the course
- What would success look like to parents, this also helped to inform our evaluation process
- Who should deliver it and how it should be delivered
- And what happens after the course finishes

EXAMPLE ACTIVITY

WHO AM I?

What do I want or need to get done?

What do I need to do differently?
What decisions do I need to make?

Who am I?

What situation am I in?
What is my role in the situation?



What am I feeling?

What emotions am I feeling? How will I feel if I get what I need?
What are the key goals of research?

It's hard to get support because..

What challenges do I have?
What stops me from getting what I need?

This activity encourages group reflection on individuals' roles, needs, goals, feelings and challenges.

It requires one facilitator to ask the questions, take group feedback and write on a flipchart. When complete, ask participants to close their eyes while you, or a participant/volunteer reads it back to the group.

Following the activity, the group felt affirmed that many experiences were shared, connected with other parents, emotional and proud of the things they do which are often unacknowledged as a mother.

We repeated this activity with all cohorts, and some participants even facilitated it in other PACT groups voluntarily.

Credit [Dot Project](#)

RESULTS



We ran 2 x co-production workshops for the first cohort, where 25 parents attended. There was a creche, and the session lasted 3 hours (with breaks). Following this, each cohort had an initial session that had a 'mini-workshop' to inform the content of the course, but the structure more or less stayed the same based on the initial workshops.

Parents understood that this course had childcare, which is different to other Parent Action groups.

Some key things came through the co-production workshops:

- **A focus on themselves as 'individuals'**, i.e. not a parenting course
- **Goals** were varied and included: making time for oneself, more confidence and giving back to the community
- **Learning styles:** parents wanted the sessions to be engaging and practical. A place to share and be vulnerable, learn wellbeing skills and share resources. A different 'theme' or topic focused on each week.
- **Peer-Support:** parents did not want to just hear from 'experts' but other parents with shared experiences
- **Energy:** parents understood that after the session the day would resume, and so wanted to end each one 'on a high' for example dancing or being silly
- **Materials:** a booklet during the course as a reminder, with extra information and homework to practice
- **Alumni network:** having a Whatsapp group and regular meet ups following the course to encourage each other

These findings and a brief course plan based on this was shared in a follow-up zoom session.

THE POWER OF NAMING

Often members of the community are 'named' or 'referenced' in ways they may not identify as. For example 'vulnerable', 'migrant', 'service user' 'BAME' – it takes power, agency and individuality away and often generalises experiences or focuses on negatives.

We asked PACT parents to submit name suggestions and then the group voted on their favourite.

The winner was 'mindful mamas' and this gave a sense of ownership as well as an opportunity for creativity in the group.



MARKETING & PROMOTION



We promoted the course through various channels:

- Attending groups and having 1-2-1 conversations with groups, taking contact details and sharing links to register
- Flyers in Spanish and English at all Parent Action groups
- A video message explaining what the course is about
- Follow-up phone calls with anyone that expresses interest or signed-up
- Parents and volunteers promoting within and beyond Parent Action groups and activities



PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When applying for funding or planning your timeline for your course, there are some practicalities to consider.

•**Space for group and creche** – we used a rented Church space that had a downstairs hall for the group and an upstairs room for the creche. It was in a convenient location for our community. In winter, check if there is adequate heating, same for ventilation in summer. This is particularly important for the area where the creche is.

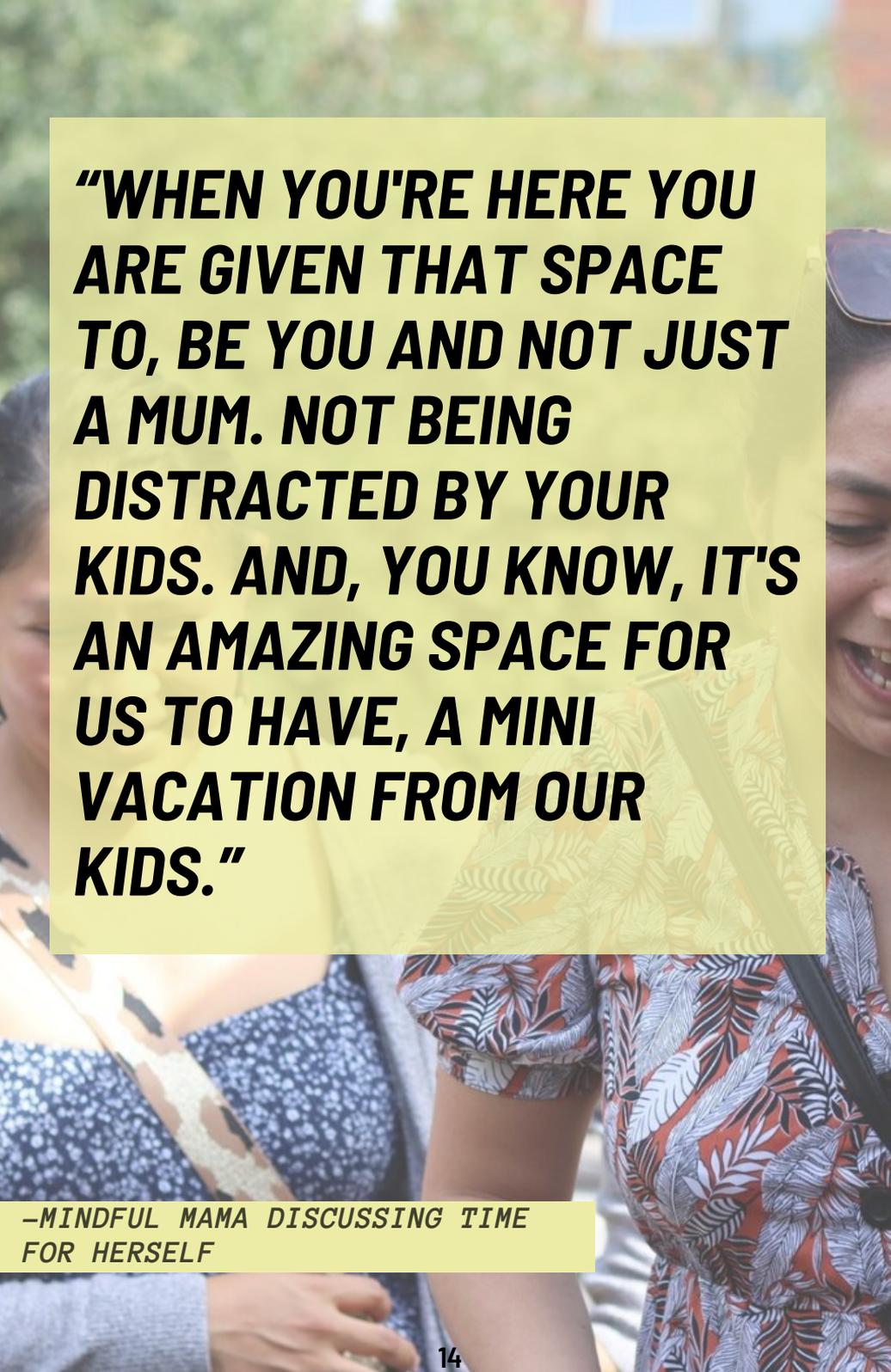
•**Refreshments** – we provided drinks and snacks for the group. Parents asked for healthy snacks like fruit and crackers.

•**Time** – it sounds simple but make sure you have enough time. More time booked in the venue and with the creche means parents can comfortably settle in children or grab a cup of tea when they arrive and have a chat. Enough time during the session means we be patient and allow individuals to share at their own pace – particularly if they have English as their second language or need some support with translation.

•**Communication**– once permission was gained from participants we started a WhatsApp group. This meant that any updates about the sessions or resources could be shared to everyone at once. It also gave space for parents to share their own ideas and keep in contact beyond the course.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Staffing**– the course will need a facilitator. This does not need to be a mental health professional, but this person should be comfortable holding a space for parents to lead.
- Staff time**– this was no small feat, planning, designing, developing and delivering the course was a full-time job.
- Signposting** – being aware of organisations that can support your community and how you can connect them to it.
- Relationships**– building relationships with parents during but also around the course. Checking-in during other activities is so important. Connecting with community partners can support you in delivering interesting sessions.
- Community**– we have existing relationships with many of our parents built on trust, this made things easier for us.
- Safeguarding**– essential that you have a clear safeguarding policy as complex issues may arise during the sessions.

A woman wearing a red, white, and grey patterned shirt is smiling. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people. A large yellow text box is overlaid on the image.

“WHEN YOU'RE HERE YOU ARE GIVEN THAT SPACE TO, BE YOU AND NOT JUST A MUM. NOT BEING DISTRACTED BY YOUR KIDS. AND, YOU KNOW, IT'S AN AMAZING SPACE FOR US TO HAVE, A MINI VACATION FROM OUR KIDS.”

—MINDFUL MAMA DISCUSSING TIME FOR HERSELF

CHILDCARE

One of the biggest expenses was the creche we provided. This was essential to allow parents time for themselves. It's important to work with an agency you trust, and one that will work with parents to help them feel at ease. For many it was the first time they were away from their children.

Some parents struggled to settle in their children. For others, it was their first time away from their child, and so struggled initially with the separation. This is why we decided to extend the course from 6 weeks to 7 weeks – allowing the first week to focus on settling in. We worked together with our reputable creche company and planned a **'stay and play' session**. This meant parents could ease themselves out of the creche, but also have time to connect with the creche staff.

Because of the relationship we built with the creche staff, they would let us know about parents that were struggling and offered advice. We also kept them in the loop of what we were doing during the sessions. For example when we had our final celebratory sessions, the creche also planned a celebration with the kids.

MATERIALS

Our Mindful Mamas booklet was designed in collaboration with PACT volunteer Lilli, a full-spectrum doula @more_swole

You can see an example journal on our website here: [Mindful Mamas Journal](#)

Every week parents received a small booklet which corresponded with the theme of the week. It would include some reflective exercises and wellbeing tools.

In this example for 'Confidence' the booklet included a 'self-love letter' exercise. This is a great exercise for individuals to do at home. It asks the participant to write a love letter to themselves, which can be difficult but is a good opportunity to speak positively to yourself.

Many of these exercises were either crowdsourced, from the internet or from participants in the group.

Some useful websites for wellbeing activities are: [Happier Kinder Together | Action for Happiness](#)
[Mental wellbeing – Mind](#)
[Help yourself and others - Thrive LDN](#)

SELF LOVE LETTER

Sometimes we find it easier to show love to others, than we do to ourselves. It might seem awkward at first, but self-love is a powerful exercise in seeing yourself more positively.

Use the postcard from our first session and write your own self-love letter, use the sentences below to guide you. And read as many times as you like to feel the love!

Thank you for...

I am really proud of you because...

I love the way you...

I want you to know...

I admire the way you...

I am learning to love...

I care about you.

SUPERVISION

One of the key objectives of Mindful Mamas was Peer-Support, and an opportunity for parents to share their experiences. The Parent Action community is diverse including in their circumstances.

As a facilitator, you are holding the space for a lot of experiences, emotions and trauma. These require responses like sign-posting, follow-ups and check-ins. Some situations are particularly complex or they may be overwhelming or triggering to hear.

This is why we decided to incorporate weekly Supervision for the facilitator during the course. The Supervision was led by someone who could provide practical and emotional support depending on the situation.

It is also worth investing time in Mental Health courses, many of which are free and available online like Mental Health First Aid.

Check out thriveidn.co.uk for a great selection of free training.

GETTING STARTED WITH PEER-SUPPORT

We needed to create an environment that safely enables peer support.

To establish the group as a safe space we started the second session off with a reflective exercise

- In groups discuss the following questions:
- How do you want to feel in these groups?
- How do you make people feel welcome?
- What can others do (or not do) to make you feel good here?

We then wrote these up as our shared group agreements, and had them in the whatsapp group and on the walls during sessions.

Some themes came up consistently: **non-judgemental, confidentiality, active listening, communicating with kindness and having fun.**

EXAMPLE OF GROUP AGREEMENTS LIST

SETTING

GROUP AGREEMENTS

WE WANT TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE SPACE
THAT IS CARING, COMFORTABLE AND CALM

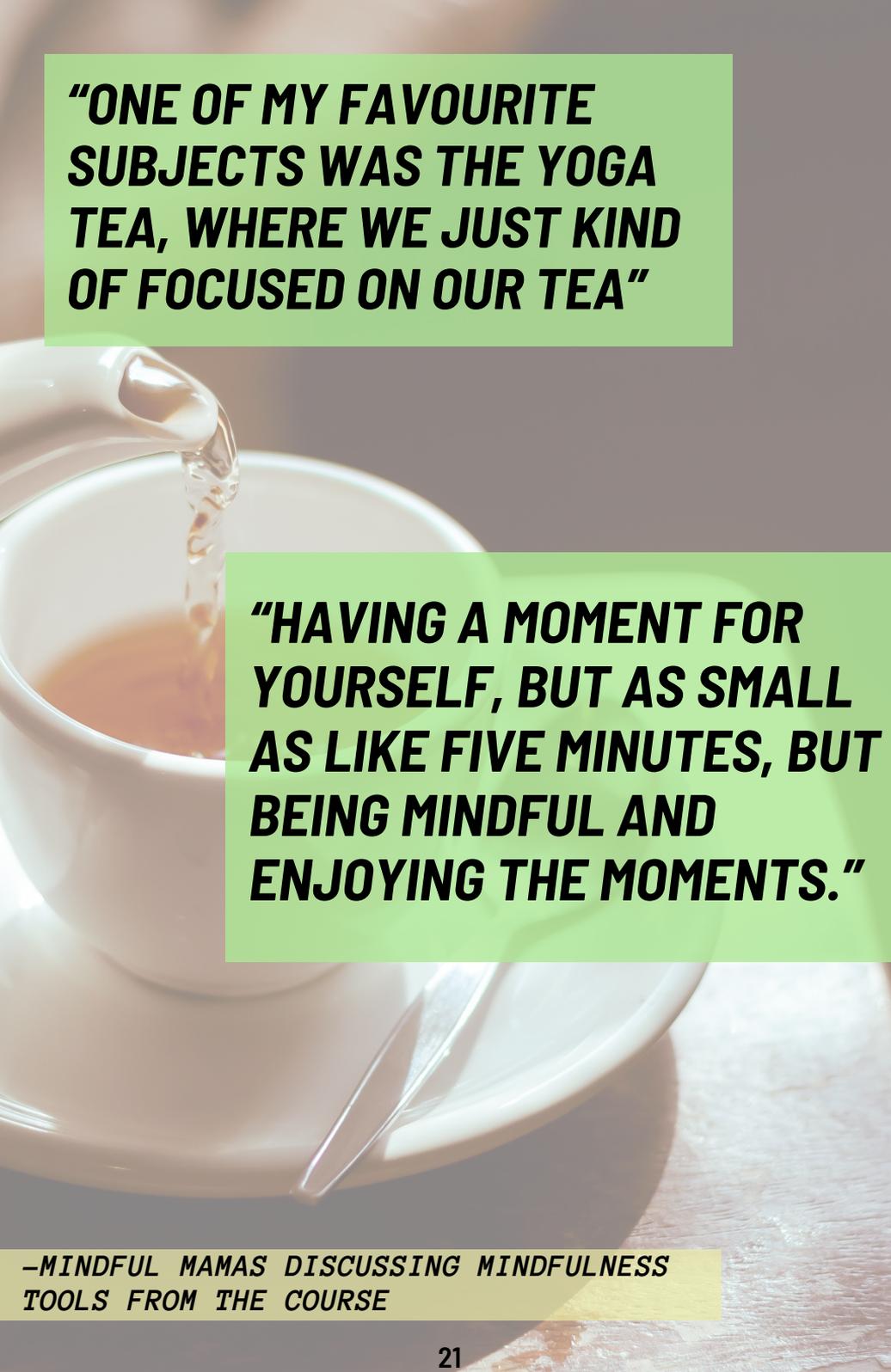
WE WILL PRACTICE THIS BY NOT JUDGING
EACHOTHER AND RESPECTING CONFIDENTIALITY.
OF THE GROUP

WE WANT TO HAVE FUN, AND FEEL HAPPY AND
AT HOME. WE CAN SUPPORT THIS THROUGH
POSITIVITY, FRIENDLINESS AND ACCEPTING EACH
OTHER.

WE WANT TO BE HEARD, SO WE WILL TRY NOT
TO TALK OVER EACHOTHER, TO LISTEN AND
AVOID USING OUR PHONES

WE WANT A SAFE SPACE FOR EVERYONE SO WE
WILL GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER, BE OPEN-
MINDED AND MINDFUL OF OUR DIFFERENT
EXPERIENCES

THIS IS OUR SPACE, AND IF SOMETHING DOES
NOT FEEL RIGHT FOR US WE CAN STEP AWAY

A close-up photograph of a white ceramic teapot pouring a stream of golden-brown tea into a white ceramic cup. The cup is placed on a matching white saucer. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light brown color. Two semi-transparent green rectangular boxes with white text are overlaid on the image. The top box is positioned above the teapot, and the bottom box is positioned to the right of the cup. The text in both boxes is in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**“ONE OF MY FAVOURITE
SUBJECTS WAS THE YOGA
TEA, WHERE WE JUST KIND
OF FOCUSED ON OUR TEA”**

**“HAVING A MOMENT FOR
YOURSELF, BUT AS SMALL
AS LIKE FIVE MINUTES, BUT
BEING MINDFUL AND
ENJOYING THE MOMENTS.”**

**–MINDFUL MAMAS DISCUSSING MINDFULNESS
TOOLS FROM THE COURSE**

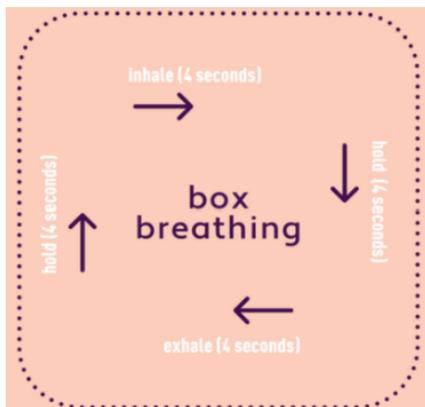
SESSION STRUCTURE

Relaxation & Checking-in

We started every session with a short grounding exercise. This was important to bring everyone into the present moment. This was led by the facilitator or the leaders. Some examples are box-breathing, tea meditation and chair yoga. Some exercises are shared at the end of this toolkit.

Following this we did a check-in round the circle. How are we feeling today? Instead of asking this directly we used some more accessible tools like: what weather am I today? What am I grateful for today? What is something I found challenging this week, and something I overcame?

These check-ins sometimes continued into the Whatsapp group too and parents shared that they used these tools with their children too.



GOAL-SETTING

While there were clear themes that emerged from the co-production. For example: reducing stress, confidence and communication skills. There were also quite specific responses too. In particular for the 'What am I trying to get done'. For example, 'getting a new job', 'spending more time outdoors', and 'improving English skills'.

At the start of the course, participants chose one goal to focus on. We planted a seed and wrote down the goal. Each week we returned to the goal while watching the plant grow. Some grew so well we planted them in our allotment and they produced beans!



PARENT LEADERSHIP

Parent leadership is a core value at Parent Action, and is promoted in all our activities. What does that actually mean? It means we recognised the challenges of being a parent and we want to give space for growth. By taking the lead parents can access their own confidence and gain power to thrive as individuals but also positively impact the wider community.

In practical terms, Mindful Mamas gave space for leadership through co-production and opportunities to share experiences and skills. Participants shared things that brought them joy like dancing, baking and laughing yoga. Participants also shared practical tips for managing their stress levels, for example: journaling, organising their time, making good habits and books they found helpful.

In the first few sessions of each course we invited parents that already led workshops to demonstrate to others. Following that I reached out to participants and supported them when needed to plan their workshops. It's important to note that not every participant is in a place where they can or want to lead a workshop for the group. Especially if self-esteem is particularly low. This is why time for sharing as a group is also important, because it gives them other opportunities to contribute.

SESSION STRUCTURE

Ending on a high!

During our Co-Productions sessions, parents said they were worried about leaving sessions feeling deflated or struggling to continue the day. The idea to end the sessions with a fun energiser was a great way to overcome this, and an opportunity for some more parent leadership.

For many of the sessions, this meant putting on some music and having a dance, or playing a game – like musical chairs.

We also spent the last week of the courses celebrating and reflecting. This was entirely co-produced and involved ideas like bringing in home-cooked food to share and handing out certificates.



**MINDFUL MAMAS FROM ALL COHORTS
COMING TOGETHER**

CONNECTING WITH NATURE

Enjoying the outdoors came up in all our coproduction sessions and it is no surprise when surmounting evidence demonstrates how important getting outside is for our mental health and wellbeing. As a result, each cohort had a session dedicated to nature. This session was planned later in the course (week 5) as it was more likely parents were comfortable leaving their children with the creche at this point.

We went on walks to local parks and took binoculars with us. It was a great opportunity to practice mindfulness.



-MINDFUL MAMA ON OUR TRIP TO A LOCAL NATURE GARDEN

BEYOND THE COURSE

One of the objectives of the Mindful Mamas course was that the benefits of the course continued afterwards. 7 weeks may not be enough time to fulfil your goals, but it is enough time to focus or consider them. Moreover, it is time to try new things and figure out what works for you. We hoped that Mindful Mamas would continue their journey after the course, and could share their skills with the wider Parent Action community.

After each course we invited participants to a reunion a couple of months later to reconnect. This was usually a lunch or picnic event. Parents also kept in touch via the WhatsApp group, or saw each other at some of our other activities. We asked, what would you like to do next? Participants said they wanted to keep meeting up and share with other parents. Many participants went on to develop their skills by taking Mental Health Champion training. Others developed their leadership skills by running workshops with parents on journalling, relaxation and setting boundaries.

BEYOND THE COURSE

When all the courses finished we brought together the different cohorts to reflect on the journey and celebrate the achievements of the group. Many parents from Mindful Mamas have formed part of a core team dedicated to Mental Health advocacy in the community.



-MINDFUL MAMA SHARING JOURNALLING TIPS WITH THE GROUP

IMPACT & INFLUENCE

Mindful Mamas was evaluated by King's College London. We asked parents what they wanted to measure and we combined this with our proposal's objectives. The Warwick-Edinburgh Scale aligned well with these measures so we used this before and after each course. We also conducted interviews with a few participants to support our analysis.

The results were very promising, and will help support future proposals, as well as demonstrating the impact that co-produced services can make.

You can read the full evaluation report here: [KCL - Mindful Mamas Report 2023](#)

IMPACT & INFLUENCE

Here is a summary of the report's findings:

After attending the Mindful Mamas course, average wellbeing score increased in all groups of attendees. The impact was particularly strong amongst attendees with a high risk of depression before the course. Attendees reported that establishing a supportive and judgement free community, re-establishing an identity outside of parenthood and developing confidence were key aspects of the course that lead to improvements in wellbeing.

An additional notable benefit was improved relationships with children. The empowering, parent-focused and collaborative ethos of Mindful Mamas was highlighted by attendees as being at the centre of its success.

FINAL COMMENTS

This toolkit has explored the steps we took to co-design and deliver the Mindful Mamas wellbeing courses for parents. It has also demonstrated the benefits of this process, which you can learn more about in the full evaluation report.

It is clear that a genuine co-production approach can engage, value and uplift those involved. What is important to note, is that this does not happen overnight. Time is needed to build relationships and trust with individuals so that they can participate in a way that is meaningful. This will lead to more genuine contributions and longer-term impact.

