



Mindful Ageing Support Groups: Facilitators Guide

Ageing Mindful

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Introduction to the Guide

The Mindful Ageing project aims to promote a healthy lifestyle for individuals aged 50+ through a combination of online learning and support groups. The overall goal is to help older people to develop a positive mindset towards ageing and take an active approach to well-being.

Based on research completed by the Mindful Ageing partners in the UK, Bulgaria, Ireland, France and Finland, the project has developed new training methodologies to support older people to make beneficial changes to their mindset and day-to-day lives. This includes:

- A 3 day bootcamp programme, looking at a range of positive psychology and mindfulness tools and techniques.
- Mindful Ageing Support Groups which will provide peer support and mentoring to help implement the techniques into everyday routines and turn them into habits.
- This guide outlines the Mindful Ageing Support Groups and is designed to be used by trainers, coaches and support workers in order to implement the methodology in a wide range of settings.

For more information about the project, please visit <https://mindfulageing.eu/> or follow us on [Facebook](#).

Partners:



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Mindful Ageing Support Groups: Methodology

Mindful Ageing Support Groups are a series of intensive small-scale support groups which aim to become self-sustaining. The Support Groups are based on a mentoring and coaching methodology through which participants are encouraged to set themselves positive actions to promote their mental well-being over the longer term.

A skilled facilitator will guide participants to set actions (e.g. attend an hour long yoga class every week) and the group will support each other to achieve these goals. Groups will be supported to work together and become self-sustaining. The aim is to build local networks and combat feelings of isolation. This methodology gives a sense of ownership to the participants which supports a high rate of retention following the initial programme. This is because participants are actively engaged in supporting each other.

The Mindful Ageing Support Groups are based on and adapted from the award winning and innovative Circles methodology by Inova. In a traditional Circle™, a facilitator works with approximately 5 mentees in a group setting. The programme blends group discussion and individual airing of issues, reflection, goal setting and personal action planning, with peer support being a key and sustainable element to the methodology. Like Circles™, the Support Groups will initially be led by skilled facilitators with expertise in action learning and the methodology. These facilitators will then 'up-skill' selected participants to take over the running of the groups and ensure their sustainability following the funded period of the programme.

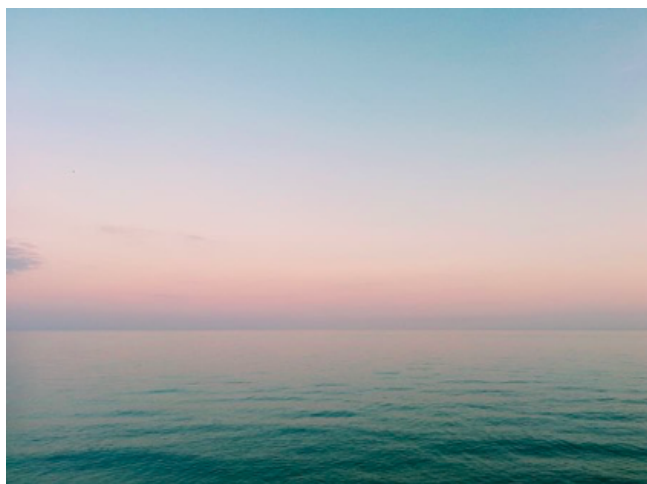


Figure 1: Photograph of a sunset over the ocean. Taken from Google Images.

Adapting the Methodology to Create Mindful Ageing Support Groups

The Mindful Ageing Support Groups have been created by Inova Consultancy Ltd, as the expert partner in this methodology, alongside the other project partners, following in-depth research with members of the direct target group (adults aged 50+), including those who currently follow Positive Psychology related practices such as Mindfulness, Yoga, meditation etc and those with no prior experience. Wider stakeholders were also included in the research phase, including staff who support older people from organisations across all partner countries. Feedback from these groups has helped us to develop the materials and approach to be used in both the Mindful Ageing Bootcamps and in the Mindful Ageing Support Groups.

Key findings include:

- Population ageing is one of the biggest social and economic challenges that European societies are facing in the 21st century.
- One of the consequences of an ageing population will be the change in the workforce distribution which will result in decreasing the active population and increasing the share of older workers in the economy.
- Practising mindfulness techniques reduces stress, worry and loneliness; decreases systemic inflammation; and improves mental health, sleep, awareness, self-efficacy, cognitive functioning and psychological well-being.
- A significant amount of older people fear loneliness, social exclusion and ageism. Active participation in society must be encouraged to counteract the 'trend of exclusion.'
- Older adults tend to isolate themselves when they lose some of their physical abilities because they fear showing others that they are no longer as they used to be, which leads to a loss of confidence and loss of joy.
- In all countries, experts working with older people who participated in the research indicated their strong interest in joining activities and training related to mindfulness and positive psychology, i.e. meditation courses, yoga sessions and physical exercise, especially in morning hours.

A copy of the full report can be found on our [website](#).

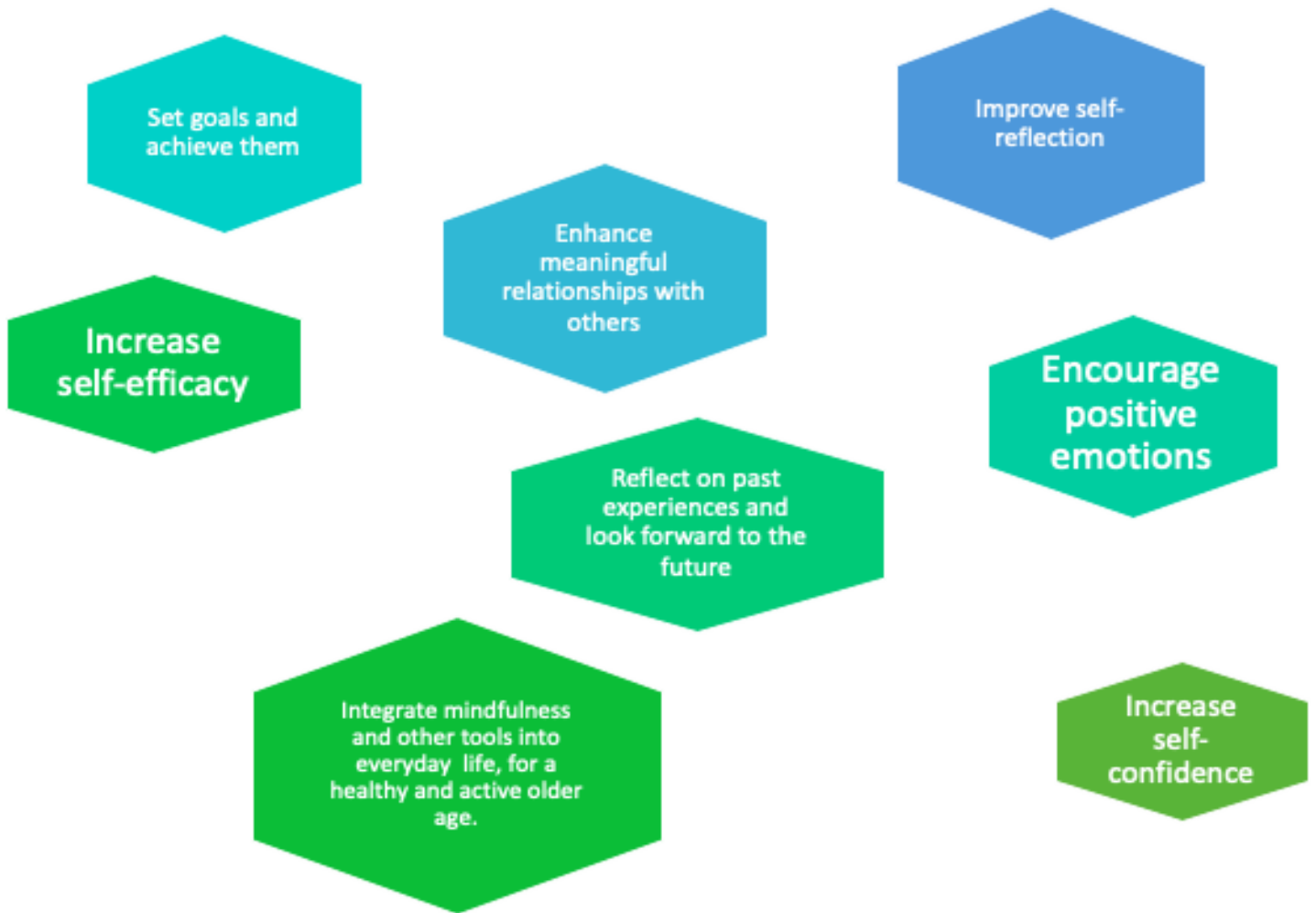
Mindful Ageing Support Groups- Our Philosophy

- Our support groups follow our philosophy for providing a safe and friendly space for participants to work together towards a common goal.
- Support groups give the participants the opportunity and space to share their problems, issues, opportunities, and challenges with others.
- Support groups allow for the generation of ideas and discussion.
- The support groups enable participants to look forward and plan their next steps in order to achieve their goal towards building a mindful approach to ageing.
- Self-reflection and self-belief is continuously encouraged.
- Participants will engage with likeminded people and network to combat feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- By the end of the sessions, each participant will be on a journey towards a more active, positive older age. Each participant will set themselves specific goals to build their resilience and develop a positive and active older age.



Figure 2: Image of a cloudy blue sky, taken from Google Images.

Benefits of the Mindful Ageing Support Groups



The Importance of the Question

Whilst training, people often fall into the trap of giving advice rather than asking the right questions. The support group methodology challenges this notion by putting all focus on the learner's needs. Learning is a continuous journey, the path of which can only be unveiled by the individual themselves. Support Groups help to uncover this knowledge through sharing and learning from each other.

As Nancy Kilne wrote: *'Giving everyone a turn [to talk] increases the intelligence of groups. Knowing they won't be interrupted frees people to think faster and say less.'* (Time To Think 2002)

The thinker [presenter] needs information – at the right moments. The focus in support groups is on questioning instead of advice giving. As a facilitator, it is of the utmost importance that you allow participants to find their own answers (or, advice) by asking insightful and reflective questions (and by inspiring other participants to do the same). The idea behind this is that participants are encouraged to question their responses and to support other group members to reflect why they responded to certain questions in a certain way. This can be achieved through a multitude of ways, such as group discussions, completion of the exercises suggested and/or guided questioning from other participants.

An example: when using the notion of guided questioning, you will give each participant a time slot to talk about the challenge they are facing / the opportunity they want to explore (5-15 minutes, depending on the size of the group). The other group members will listen carefully and offer questions. Questions that allow the group members to understand the issue more fully will bring new insights that the presenting participant may not have thought about and/or change their perspective towards the challenge / opportunity. As a result, the group opens the path towards further discovery and strengthening of self-reflection.

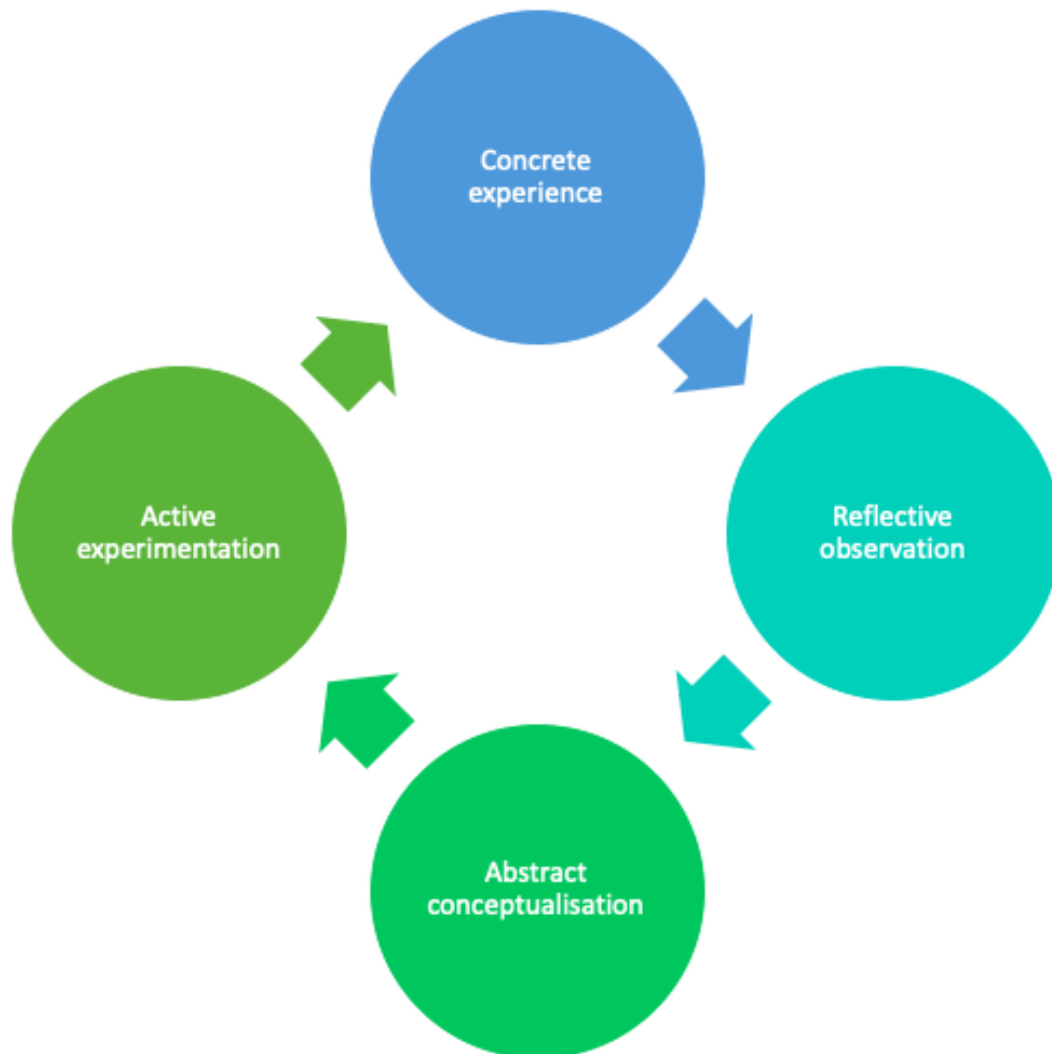
The methodology is effective because it places the learner at the centre of the situation and integrates theoretical learning with real experience. It's about action and implementation, rather than hypothetical scenarios.

Over the next two pages, you will find two models that help to further explain the purpose, process and value of the support group methodology.

Figure 3: Action Learning Process



Figure 4: Experiential Learning Cycle¹



For more information see the useful videos about the above models:

- **What is action learning?** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAJ0z_IdZXE
- **The 3 minute Kolb** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObQ2DheGOKA>
- **How we learning naturally**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF63HHVbpQ8>

¹ Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1975)

The benefits of action learning:

- This approach enables you to gain a deeper insight into the situation you are facing and enables you to generate options and solutions.
- It challenges assumptions on which your plans are built.
- It enables you to check plans, ideas and solutions- are they appropriate and realistic?
- Participants have more opportunities to spot issues, solutions and approaches which they have not previously thought of due to group discussion.
- It can help expose blind spots.
- It offers a way of challenging your ideas and maximising your chance of achieving your goals.

Main outcomes and overview of facilitation:

For the most successful and effective delivery of the Support Group methodology, we recommend approximately 5 participants per Support Group. This allows for the best learning experience compared to the time given (3-4 sessions of 3-4 hours each).

Each session will see a combination of group discussion with the individual airing of issues, self-reflection and goal setting. It is therefore of the utmost importance that only skilled facilitators with prior experience in action learning, or those who have been trained in the methodology by a colleague from Inova Consultancy (UK), are able to lead a Support Group, through the initial sessions.²

As a Mindful Ageing Support Group facilitator, you will most likely have your own style of training. However, the Support Group Methodology is developed to be fairly non-directive, something that has to be taken into account at all times; they are learner led and learner focused, meaning that it's the participants who decide what they want to talk about. It is only through the topics that are discussed by learners that, for the most part, will direct you as a facilitator to those exercises you believe will be most beneficial.

² If you would like to receive further advice about or training for the facilitation of Support Groups, please contact Inova via www.inovaconsult.com.

As a starting point, you may wish to explore the following aspects of self-reflection and action learning. These will then introduce discussion, learner led topics of conversation and a safe environment:

- Explore what may cause a particular mindset, condition, or consequence.
- Review decisions or actions and see how they have led to the current situation in terms of individuals' outlook and approach to ageing.
- What could be done differently? What can you learn and how can you change?
- By examining their own thinking, participants may alter their way of thinking.
- Remember that we can learn from our mistakes; we learn and grow from detecting and correcting the errors we have previously made.
- Facilitation should be **future focused and solution focused**.
- Facilitation should explicitly encourage participants to commit to goal setting and action plans.
- Group dynamics is an essential part of a support group and the facilitator may need to intervene at times to ensure everyone gets an equal opportunity to reflect on and discuss their goals. Facilitators must also engage when challenges occur such as inappropriate responses from group members.
- A facilitator must encourage members to think outside of the box.
- Contracting: define a group agreement within the support group and participants should be made aware of their responsibilities at the beginning of each session.



Figure 5: Image of a lake and the reflection of the mountain tops and cloudy sky. Taken from Google Images.

Support Groups Piloting and Reporting:

The Support Groups methodology will be developed and piloted twice over the course of the project's lifetime, in each of the partnership countries: The United Kingdom, Finland, France, Bulgaria, Ireland and Greece. Each piloting phase will include a minimum of 3 sessions with between 5-8 participants.

In order to collect as much feedback from this pilot as possible, each participant will be asked to complete a short evaluation form at the end of each session. These will be kept by the facilitator in order to collate all the results at the end of the pilot. Following the end of the pilot, each partner country involved will write a national report in English. This report will summarise all the information gathered from the piloting in that country, as well as listing feedback and recommendations from participants and facilitators. Each partner will also attach the relevant annexes needed to support the report and the information stated within.

A template of the national report shall be sent to all partners prior to the commencing of their first piloting.



Figure 6: An image of a sunset over a lake with a bench in front of the lake looking out towards the reflection. Taken from Google Images.

Mindful Ageing Support Groups Set Up & Process

The information below shows how a Support Group should be set out and how the sessions should generally proceed. All the information provided here is recommended based on previous experience of peer mentoring programmes. Therefore, we strongly recommend following these guidelines when facilitating your Support Group.

Layout of the Group:

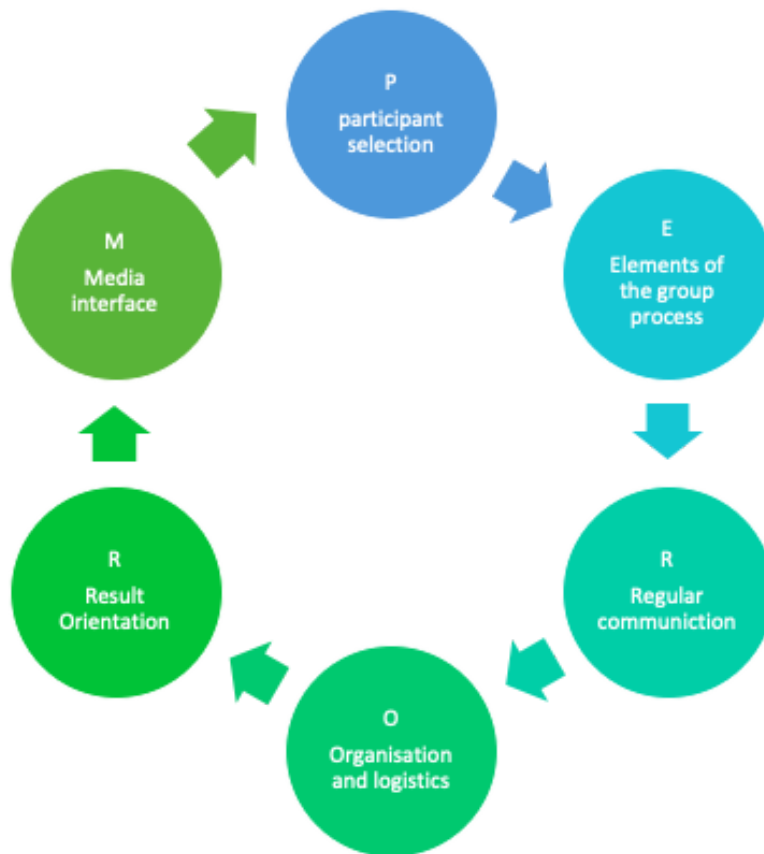
Below is a standard layout of a support group. The inclusive nature of the support group allows each participant to see one another and to be involved during the discussions. This may also need to be adapted to online delivery, which will involve small breakout rooms and a main room where each participant can feedback to one another.



There is also the option of delivering the sessions online. This option should be considered by facilitators based on the needs of the target group and the national Covid-19 guidance and advice. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Inova has delivered mentoring circle programmes online successfully.

Matching participants for the support group

As a facilitator it is up to you to ensure that the group dynamics within the support group are as peaceful and productive as possible. Please consider the following points when grouping your participants.³



³ Adapted from Virtual Group Coaching: A Curriculum for Coaches and Educators by Van Dyke (2014)

Session Outlines

Each support group should be learner led and learner focused. In this section, an outline will be provided which can be used for each session. There are certain activities which must be completed in order to facilitate the group and collect the appropriate data for the funded programme. These are in bold. Other activities/ suggestions are flexible and can be adapted to fit the needs of the group.

Mindful Ageing Support Group- 1

Learning objectives: building positivity:

This session will focus on helping participants look at how we can build positivity through changing mindsets. We will also look at setting SMART goals for the rest of the sessions.

- 3 minute breathing space meditation (see toolkit for script).
- Personal introductions.
- Introduction to Mindful Ageing support groups and the action learning methodology.
- **Administration- attendance list and learner agreements signed.**
- Set ground rules.
- **Completion for Mindfulness Audit for over 50's form.**⁴
- Outline way of working in the sessions- questioning not advice giving, timing etc. Exploration of issues and ideas.
- Goal setting and action planning.
- **Evaluation forms.**
- **Agree details of next session- date, time, venue (if not prescheduled).**
- Closing meditation (see toolkit for selection).

Suggested tools/ exercises:

- Icebreaker exercises (to aid introductions).
- Thinking differently.
- Old woman/ young woman.
- Turning negatives into positives.
- Emotion card exercise.
- SMART goals.

⁴ The Mindfulness Audit for over 50's could be sent out to participants via email prior to the session (particularly if support sessions are being hosted online) in order to save some time during the support group.

Mindful Ageing Support Group- Session 2

This session will focus on helping participants to understand what motivates them and how small changes can bring more balance and happiness to life.

Training objectives: building satisfaction

- 3 minute breathing space meditation (see toolkit for script).
- **Administration- signing attendance lists.**
- Contracting- check the ground rules and review if needed.
- Progress review- discussion of successes/ difficulties following last session.
- Articulation of new challenges/ opportunities.
- Exploring motivators (see toolkit).
- Exploration of issues.
- **Evaluation form.**
- **Agree details of the next session- date, time, venue (if not pre scheduled).**
- Closing meditation- see toolkit.

Suggested tools/ exercises:

- Icebreaker exercise.
- Thinking differently.
- Old woman/ young woman.
- Emotion card exercise.
- SMART goal.

During the final session of the support groups, final evaluation forms will need to be completed along with the soft skills assessment form. As a facilitator, you should provide participants with their 'soft skills graphs' after they have completed the sessions so that they can compare their scores and think about their results/ improvements/ realisations.

Mindful Ageing Support Group- Session 3

This session will focus on exploring the positive relationships that participants have and how these can be enhanced and used to support themselves. You should use this session to plan how the group will continue.

Learning objectives: building networks:

- 3 minute Breathing Space Meditation (see Toolkit for script).
- **Administration - signing attendance lists.**
- Re contracting - check the ground rules and review if needed.
- Progress Review: discussion of successes/difficulties following last session.
- Articulation of new challenges/opportunities.
- Building our networks - strategies for sustainability and building on these sessions (see section "The Next Steps" and Toolkit).
- **Completion of 2nd "Mindfulness Audit for Over 50s" form.**
- **Completion of Final Evaluation Form.**
- Closing meditation (see toolkit for selection).

Suggested tools/ exercises:

- Wheel of life
- Motivation rope
- My vision board.

We have planned for a minimum of 3 support group sessions, however this time can go very quickly and your participants may wish to have an extra facilitated session, perhaps to discuss other issues/ challenges or complete the tools which you may not have the time to complete. This should be discussed and agreed upon based on the needs of both participants and facilitator.

The step-by-step facilitation process

Below, we have outlined the different steps to facilitating a support group. Please read these steps carefully.

Follow these key topics to make your introduction informative but engaging for participants:



Step 2: contracting and administration

Learning agreement: At the start of the Mindful Ageing Support Group session 1, it is recommended that you ask each of the participants to complete a learning agreement. The Support Groups Learning Agreement (found in the Annexes of this guide) is a social contract which enables the facilitator to have equal rights and power during the sessions. This will need to be translated into each partner language.

By setting out the mutual expectations of each party, everyone gains the necessary information about the training and also the accountability and responsibilities of each participant. It is also recommended that the signed learning agreements are scanned and copied, so the participant and facilitator both have a copy (if completing the sessions online, these can be signed electronically).

Attendance list: At the start of each session, each participant **MUST** sign an attendance list. This is essential for facilitators to evidence participants' attendance to the sessions (for funding requirements). The signed attendance lists should be scanned and sent as part of the annexes for the national reports (original copies should also be kept in your organisations records). If completing the sessions online, it is recommended that you maintain a list of registrations and take screenshots of each session, evidencing the number of participants taking part.

Step 3: introducing the participants

Once steps 1 and 2 have been completed, it is time to introduce the participants. Each participant should be given **2-3 minutes** to introduce themselves. If you need to prompt your group in what type of information to share, please look at the suggestions below:

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Name | Brief outline of their background/life | What they would like to get out of the support group |
| Experiences of using positive psychology tools | Current lifestyle practices in relation to mindful ageing | Their attitudes and feelings towards ageing |

It may also be useful to identify if any of the participants have had previous experience in a mentoring or coaching setting or have been a part of previous courses which have used the adapted Circles™ methodology.

Step 4: Introducing the support group methodology

Once introductions have been done, it is important that everyone is aware of the methodology which will be used and the aims of the session. You should make sure understands the following:




- The background of the support group methodology.
- How the methodology works
- That the Support Groups provide a facilitated space for participants to complete tools, share discussions and have a dedicated time slot to present and explore their issue, challenge or opportunities.
- The outline of the session structure (3 sessions, 2-3 hours per session)
- A trained facilitator present at all times
- Allocated time slots for each participant to speak (10-15 minutes depending on group size)
- Setting SMART goals: Always remind participants that learning is about being resilient in the face of difficulty. It is totally normal if they do not manage to achieve everything that they set out to achieve (self-awareness and knowing your limits also forms a big part of the learning curve participants will experience in the Support Groups), but they will be encouraged to review difficulties, learn from them and find ways forward or new paths for action in a supportive environment.
- The 'questioning technique' used during the Support Group sessions

The questioning technique




The presenter (the person speaking) should be encouraged to specify to the group what they need or what they would like to gain. The presenter is expected to initiate input from participants if required.

Advice giving can be unhelpful when it directs the presenter towards a particular way of thinking/ a course of action. Using the questioning technique instead helps to support the presenter in finding their own solutions.

Look out for and avoid sentences starting with:

-  **Have you thought about...**
-  **Could you try...**
-  **Have you tried...**

Some statements may be focused on a questioner's experience when the focus should be on the presenter. For example:

-  **When I feel lonely I...**
-  **When I first tried meditation I...**
-  **I always found...**

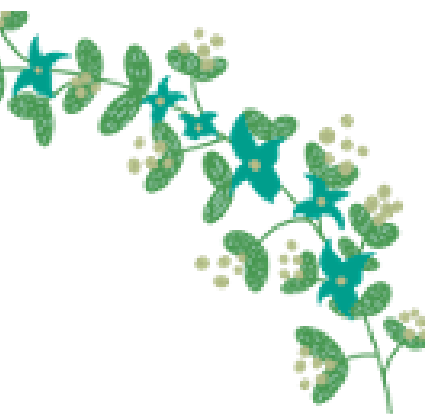
However occasionally some types of advice, when specifically asked for, can be helpful (but only if asked for); for example, a presenter might ask for advice about contacts or possible networks.

For example: 'I'm experiencing loneliness and want to meet new people in my area. Does anyone have any recommendations of groups I can join?'

This may be appropriate; it may be helpful to provide them with some suggestions and recommendations for groups they can join in the local area. However; the advice also offers room for caveats (not a single path which solves all their issues). You, as the presenter, would need to take responsibility and check out the credibility of the adviser. **Remember that the Circle is not a substitute for professional advice. Sometimes learning from others can provide a useful shortcut.**



Figure 7- Image of a silhouetted person meditating looking out towards the sun setting behind some mountains. Taken from Google Images.



Facilitators Toolkit

The following section provides an overview of all the tools which can be used during the Mindful Ageing support groups. The tools will also be presented during the 'Train the Trainers Workshop' for this project. The tools and resources for these exercises are available as handouts and can be accessed on the Google Drive.

These tools are offered as guidance for the facilitator- you do not have to use every tool! Please pick those that you feel will be most useful to your group. This is not an exhaustive list so feel free to add your own as well! You can add new tools/ exercises and resources for use with the Mindful Ageing target group on our [online platform](#).



Figure 8: A cartoon drawing of two older male friends with their arms around each other and their walking sticks in the air. Taken from Google Images.

Icebreaker Exercises

Below you can find two examples of simple exercises which can be used to help break the ice and aid introductions during your first support group session.

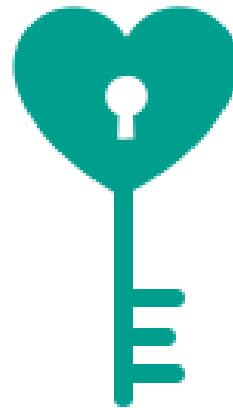
Icebreaker 1: key icebreaker

Time:

- 5 minutes introduction
- 5 minutes for the activity
- 5-10 minutes for discussion

Resources

- Your own personal keys.



The aim of the icebreaker is to help participants get to know one another and feel comfortable talking about themselves within the group.

Step 1: Ask each participant to get out their keys.

Step 2: From their keys and keyrings, each participant must tell the group about themselves and how their keys represent them. For example: a set of keys with lots of keyrings from different countries could represent the person's love of travelling.

Icebreaker 2: Who are you? The pirate ship exercise

Time:

- 10 minutes (dependent upon group size)

Resources:

- Image of the ship- see toolkit folder.

The aim of this icebreaker is to allow each person to reflect on how they feel about joining the Mindful Ageing support group and their attitudes towards ageing generally.

Step 1: show participants the image of the ship.

Step 2: invite each participant to reflect on which person in the picture best represents them in relation to ageing and joining the sessions.

Step 3: ask each person to share the number of the person who they have chosen with a short sentence explaining why.

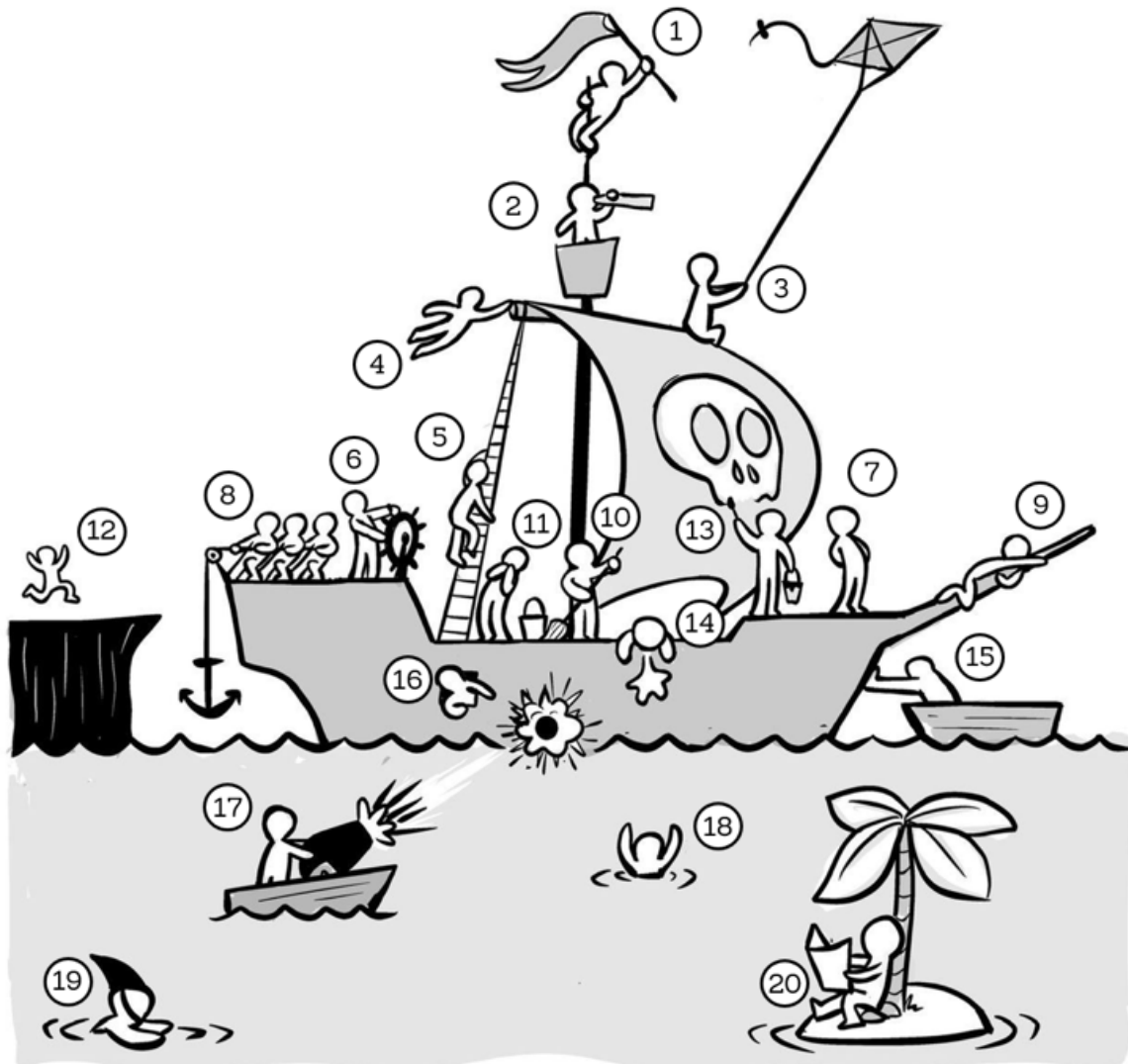


Figure 9: image of the pirate ship exercise by Juan Daniel Sobrado.⁵

⁵ Source taken from: <https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/who-are-you-the-ship-exercise>

Session Exercises

Below you can find examples of different exercises which can be used throughout the support groups in order to spark conversation and encourage the participants to reflect upon their experiences and goals.

Exercise 1: Thinking differently

This exercise aims to encourage participants to understand how easy it is to get stuck in certain thought patterns or behaviours rather than thinking more creatively and trying new things or ways of living.

Step 1: Draw the three images (or show on your screen if running an online support group). Ask participants what the first image is- most people will say a 3 in Roman Numerals.

Step 2: Ask participants what the second and third image is. Then ask how they could turn the second image into a 4, and how they could turn it into a 10.

Step 3: Then ask how they could turn the second image into a 6. Most people will try adding a '1' by the right hand side of the upper V of the X.

Step 4: Finally, write the solution- write the two letters SI next to the X to make 'SIX.'



Exercise 2: Old woman/ young woman

Seeing things differently...



Ask participants what they see when they look at the image- a young woman or an old woman?

Most people look at the picture and see one thing first - either the old or young lady. If participants can't see both, ask someone else to take a look and see what they can see. Ask another group member who can see both to explain how.

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- How did they feel if someone else saw something different to you and you couldn't see it? Maybe they felt frustrated, or confused.
- Can they see both now?
- Can they go back to only seeing one?

The meaning of this exercise is that we often get 'stuck' seeing ourselves, our lives or specific situations in certain ways. Encourage participants to reflect on how they view ageing and the impact it may have on them. Are the assumptions we make correct? How can we view / approach ageing in a more positive light?

Exercise 3: Turning negatives into positives

This exercise is used to encourage participants who may be going through something negative (e.g. a difficult transition into retirement) to turn their mind into a more positive mindset. It's very easy to fall into a negative thinking pattern at hard times. The facilitator can use this exercise to support participants to avoid this trap.

The facilitator should give the following questions to participants and ask them to write their answers/ think about them individually.

What can you do to think more positively about the current situation or challenge?

Are you able to increase your self belief in any way?

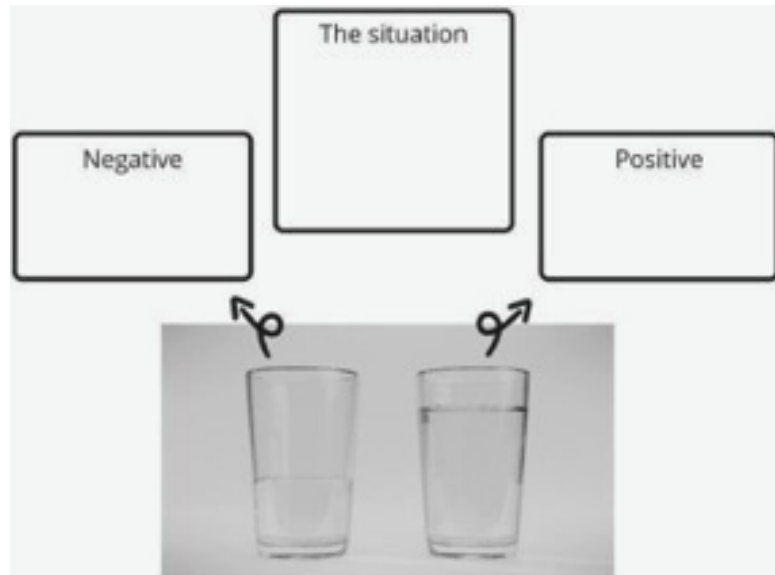
What steps can you take to work towards your future dreams?

Is there anyone in your network who could help and support you?

How will you know if you are on the right path?

Can you identify any benefits of thinking positively?

An additional tool may help with this process. For example, ask participants to reflect on a situation using this diagram:



Invite participants to write down the negative situation they are experiencing. Ask them to think of the 'half empty' thoughts they are having. Afterwards, encourage participants to think about the 'half full' perspectives.

Exercise 4: Emotion Cards:

The aim of this exercise is to prompt participants to introduce themselves or to discuss their feelings and emotions.

Step 1: Each participant should be given a set of cards. The facilitator can also present them on a screen whilst giving individuals enough time to select a card.

Step 2: Participants should choose a card with a heading (A THOUGHT PROMPT) and picture (VISUAL INSPIRATION TO TRIGGER THEIR OWN THINKING) which they feel appeals to them to the greatest extent. The card needs to be relevant to them at the present moment.

Step 4: Ask the participants to reflect on their emotions and if they are negative, assess ways to change aspects of their circumstances which could alleviate their struggles. If emotions are positive, they could reflect on aspects of their life which are working well and evaluate the things they should do more of.

- The cards can be used with the aim of introducing oneself to others and discussing where one feels they are in life at the moment. The cards can act as inspiration. They can help to create connections with others.
- The facilitator could model the process by using a card to introduce themselves first, or introduce a feeling they have.
- Sample cards can be found within the Facilitators Toolkit.

Exercise 5: Setting SMART Goals

The aim of this activity is to encourage participants to set some key goals to work towards throughout the Mindful Ageing support group sessions. The goals should help them to work towards a more positive lifestyle as they grow older.

Some examples are:

- ‘I will meditate for 10 minutes everyday,’
- ‘I will attend a yoga class once a week,’
- ‘I will volunteer at a local gardening club.’

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| S | <p>Specific</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to accomplish? • Why do I want to accomplish this? • What are the requirements? • What are the constraints? | |
| M | <p>Measurable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will I measure my progress? • How will I know when my goal is accomplished? | |
| A | <p>Achievable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the goal be achieved? • What are the next steps I should take? | |
| R | <p>Relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this a worthwhile goal? • Is this the right time? • Do I have the necessary resources to accomplish this goal? • Is this goal in line with my long-term vision? | |
| T | <p>Time-Bound:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long will it take to accomplish this goal? • When is the completion of this goal due? • When am I going to work on this goal? | |

Step 1: Ask participants to write down or think about a goal they would like to achieve.

Step 2: Ask the participants to evaluate how to make their goal SMART. They should follow the acronym on the handout above and should write down their answers before discussing with the members of the group.

Exercise 6: Wheel of Life

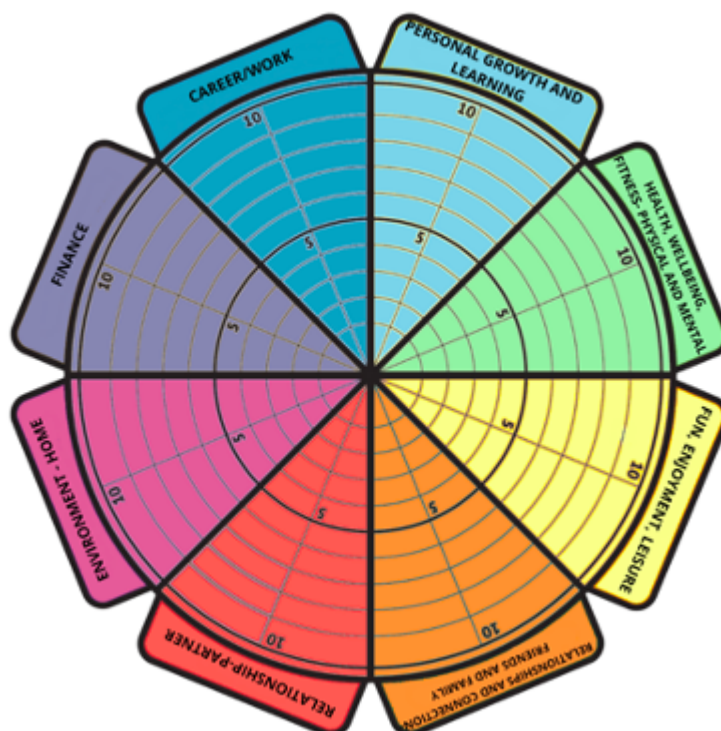
This exercise enables individuals to get a snapshot of how they spend time and energy to meet their needs, and any areas they would like to improve in.

The participants can work on the Wheel of Life on a piece of paper. This activity helps reflect on key areas of an individual's life that are represented as 'pie' and divided into '8 slices.' Each pie can be rated from 0-10 whereby 0 represents zero satisfaction and 10 represents complete fulfilment.

Step 1: Ask participants to establish what the pie represents. You can provide some guidance by suggesting topics such as relationships, achievements, or finance.

Step 2: Participants should mark a dot on each pie which represents where they feel they are at in regards to their overall satisfaction with that area of their life.

Step 3: Once all the dots are marked, participants can join up all the dots and see how 'wheel-like' the wheel actually is and use the information to reflect and set meaningful goals.



Exercise 7: Hot Air Balloon

You may wish to refer to the 'intrinsic and extrinsic motivators' resource before beginning this exercise.

This exercise helps participants to think about their key things that drive and motivate them and explore how they can find motivation by prioritising the activities which bring them joy.

Step 1: Ask participants to draw a hot air balloon on a large sheet of paper. Ask them to write down on a post-it note all the activities they currently do/ have in their life or that they would like to have in their life. For example, volunteering, hobbies, social activities, work, family commitments.

Step 2: Each post-it note represents a weight holding down the balloon. Ask participants to start taking away post-it notes.

Step 3: participants should be encouraged to think about the activities which motivate and excite them until the balloon is light enough to float. The activities taken away last represent their key drivers and activities which they should focus upon to stay motivated and engaged.



Figure 10: Illustration of a green hot air balloon taken from Canva.

Exercise 8: My Vision Board

The aim of this exercise is to encourage participants to explore and visualise the things they want to achieve in the future. A vision board is a way in which to focus your energy upon achieving a specific goal.

Step 1: Ask participants to create their own vision board focusing on how they envisage their retirement and older age. Encourage them to be as detailed as possible.

Possible prompts:

- Where will they live?
- What activities will they be doing on a regular basis?
- What will their diet be like?
- What are their hobbies/ interests?
- Who do they want to spend their time with?

The vision board is designed to be a creative activity and should be produced however the individual prefers. You may wish to provide participants with an A3 sheet of paper, scissors, glue and art and craft supplies so they can create a collage. If you are delivering this online, you may want to ask participants to use their own equipment and share their creation at the end using their camera or 'share screen' option if they wish to work digitally.

This could also be linked back to the SMART goals activity. What small steps can participants take to move towards achieving their vision?

Exercise 9: Relationship reflective exercise

This exercise encouraged participants to think about an important relationship in their life. It could be a colleague, a friend, a partner or a child. Participants are asked to reflect on this relationship and their personal boundaries.

Being more mindful about the relationships that we have and how we nurture them can have a big impact on our positivity and happiness!

Possible questions for reflection:

- What do you hold dear for yourself?
- Are you being pushed or pulled in a direction that doesn't suit you?

- Are you feeling like you are losing yourself?

Step 1: Ask participants to list two things they could change about this relationship. Do they need to ask for a change in behaviour from the other person or is it something that they can change about themselves?

Step 2: Discuss and identify common themes emerging from the group. This can help strengthen relationships and overcome barriers that they may be experiencing in setting boundaries.

Exercise 10: 6 degrees of separation:

This exercise is based upon the famous '6 degrees of separation theory' and can help participants to think about their networks and how these can be effectively cultivated and used during times when they need more support.⁶

Step 1: Split your group into pairs.

Step 2: Each pair should spend a few minutes introducing themselves to each other.

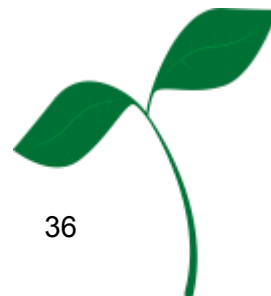
Step 3: Ask each pair to make a list of things that they have in common.

Prompts:

- Where they grew up
- Where they went to school
- Where they have worked
- What hobbies they have
- Where they go to socialise.

From this, can they find a mutual friend or acquaintance?

⁶ The six degrees of separation theory grew out of work conducted by the psychologist Stanley Milgram in the 1960s. For more information about the theory see: <https://exploringyourmind.com/the-six-degrees-of-separation-theory/>



Meditation Scripts

Below are some examples of resources that contain meditation practices and scripts which may be useful to use with participants at the beginning of support group sessions.

- Oxford Mindfulness Centre: resources and free audio practices
<https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/learn-mindfulness/resources/>
- Insight Timer: an app for sleep, anxiety and stress with more than 100,000 guided meditations. <https://insighttimer.com/en-gb>
- Positive Psychology: 22 mindfulness exercises for adults
<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>
- Every Mind Matters: mindfulness breathing exercise
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=wfDTp2GogaQ>
- The Coaching Tools Company: guided meditation scripts
<https://www.thecoachingtoolscompany.com/de-stress-series-relax-clients-in-under-5-mins-guided-meditation-scripts/>

The Next Steps

Within the Mindful Ageing funding proposal, it is planned that the Support Groups will become self-sustaining. Each facilitator will identify at least 2 participants to take over leadership of their Support Group over a longer term (which can be agreed on a personal basis). These individuals will be 'up-skilled' and trained as leaders in the methodology by the project partners - they will then undertake a commitment to continue to run their groups to provide ongoing support to existing and potentially, new members.

This process can be developed and agreed locally depending on the individuals involved; for example, groups may wish to continue to meet face to face on a regular basis or groups may move to an 'online' format, utilising tools such as What's App or Skype to continue meeting to support each other. In light of the COVID19 virus, we will support the groups to build IT skills which can help them to meet through online technology, in order to support if similar situations arise again in future, as this has been invaluable in linking people with support during the crisis.

This aspect should be considered throughout the delivery of the Mindful Ageing Support Groups: Facilitators may wish to ask participants during the registration phase, if leading these on a voluntary basis is something that would be of interest to them. Those who are motivated to do so and who have shown commitment to making changes in their daily lives through participation in the Bootcamps and Support Groups can then be trained to facilitate and manage the group in the future.

Annexes:

Mindful Ageing Support Group Learning Agreement:

Organisation's name and address

Our commitments:

We agree to:

- Place you in a Mindful Ageing support group
- Monitor your support group and ensure that you meet at least 3 times
- Provide you with support during the Mindful Ageing programme.

Your commitments:

You agree to:

- Attend and actively participate in all meetings with your Support Group (at least 3 meetings; more meetings can be agreed by the Support Group)
- Notify [organisation name] and your mentor if you are unable to attend a meeting (at least 2 days in advance)
- Complete all necessary paperwork, and return to us: evaluation forms after each session

Confidentiality:

- I agree that I will not disclose confidential information that I may be privy to in the support group to any outside party, without the prior consent of [organisation name] and group participants involved.
- Please note, failing to comply with your commitments will be treated seriously by [organisation name] and we have the right to remove you from the programme as a result of non-compliance.

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

If you have any queries about this agreement please contact [name] via [add email].

Mindful Ageing Mindfulness Audit Assessment Form:

This form is to be completed by participants prior to or during their first session. It should then be completed after their last session so that facilitators can provide participants with their soft skills graphs.

Name.....

Date.....

Please evaluate yourself at this present time (1= poor, 5= excellent).

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I understand my own limitations . | | | | | |
| I feel optimistic about the future. | | | | | |
| I have a strong network which I am able to utilise when I need support. | | | | | |
| I am confident. | | | | | |
| I know what I want next. | | | | | |
| I am able to manage stress | | | | | |
| I am able to build new relationships easily. | | | | | |
| I have a good sense of humour. | | | | | |
| I set myself realistic goals and achieve them. | | | | | |
| I make a positive contribution to society. | | | | | |
| I am proud of what I have achieved in my life so far. | | | | | |

Mindful Ageing Support Group Session Evaluation Form:

To be completed by a facilitator

Facilitator name.....

Group number.....

Session number.....

Date.....

To be completed by participants:

1. What were your expectations for today's support group and have they been fulfilled?
2. What are the 3 main things you will take away from today's session?
3. What was the best part of the support group so far?
4. Any further comments?

Name.....

Date.....

Thank you! Please return this to the facilitator.

Your comments may be included in future promotional/ marketing materials for the Mindful Ageing project. If you are happy for your comments to be used for these purposes, please tick this box:

References:

All images used in this report have been taken from free-to-use online sources such as Canva and unsplash. When Google Images were used, the settings were altered to provide images that were free-to-use.

The branding and design of this document has been created by the Mindful Ageing partnership.

- A Curriculum for Coaches and Educators by Van Dyke (2014)
- Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1975)

Website links:

- <https://exploringyourmind.com/the-six-degrees-of-separation-theory/>
- <https://www.sessionlab.com/methods/who-are-you-the-ship-exercise>
- <https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/learn-mindfulness/resources/>
- <https://insighttimer.com/en-gb>
- What is action learning? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAJ0z_IdZXE
- The 3 minute Kolb <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObQ2DheGOKA>
- How we learning naturally <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF63HHVbpQ8>