

How can I improve my practice as a Chief Executive working with carers and their families creating my living theory of mindfulness and learning?

Sonia Hutchison

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDGSjkFESiU>

'It seems, then, the innovators in science are frequently those with sufficient courage to challenge widespread assumptions, enabling them to observe phenomena that were concealed from their peers by the veils of pre-conceived ideas. Norwood Russell Hanson comments: "the paradigm observer is not the man who sees and reports what all normal observers see and report, but the man who sees in familiar objects what no one else has seen before."' (Wallace 1996, p. 61)

In this paper I have four aims of my research which are to:

1. Enable me and my staff to put carers at the centre of their practice
2. Enable me and my staff to be able to reflect on our personal experience and professional practice to maintain our motivation for keeping carer centred
3. Look at how energy affects interactions when we're working with people and look at the way of measuring energy that motivates us and how we pool energy when we are together.
4. Enquire as to how I can create a mindful workforce

'Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgementally ... And if we're not fully present for many of those moments, you may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realise the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.' (Kabat Zinn 1994, p. 4)

This paper will look at how my role as a leader can create the time and space to enable my staff to learn about their own practice using 'enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care' (Dadds and Hart 2001, p. 169). I will explore how we can develop something I have called the dynamic pooling of flowing energy, which I will define throughout this paper, to help us learn and to improve what we are doing. My definition of a carer throughout this paper is taken from the Princess Royal Trust for Carers definition 'A carer is someone of any age who provides unpaid support to family or friends who could not manage without this help due to illness, disability, mental ill-health or a substance misuse problem.' <http://www.carers.org/whats-a-carer>.

My Story

The theoretical framework for this paper uses ethno-autobiographical elements as I look at my experiences and where I have come from to research my practice. By this I am referring to Kremer's (2003) meaning 'as a creative and evocative type of narrative healing storytelling, ethno-autobiography explores consciousness from a subjective perspective.' This will be over-arched by using a living theory to enable me to research how I can improve my practice. Whitehead (1985) describes living theory 'for me, a living theory in

that the explanation contains evidence of an evaluation of past practice, evidence of an intention to produce something not yet in existence and evidence of the present practice through which the intention is being realised in action.'

In this section I will look at my story to locate myself in my research. "The consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004 p. 319).

I have been a chief executive of Bath and North East Somerset Carers' Centre for 20 months. I had come from managing the local Young Carers' Service and have a passion for supporting carers to improve their lives. This comes largely from my life experiences. I was fostered long term when I was three and a half as both my parents had schizophrenia and misused drugs and alcohol. I was not a young carer, my caring role really started as an adult although it took me a long time to realise it. These experiences made me determined to help people and make people's lives better as I had been given a chance by being fostered and I wanted to make sure other people had support in their situations.

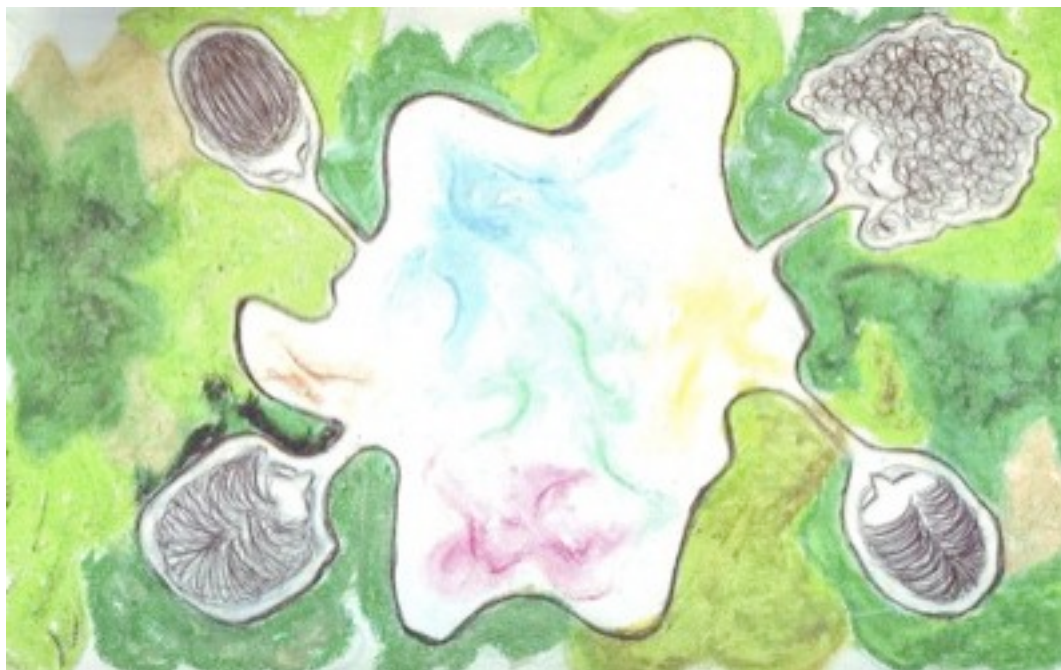
I had a Christian upbringing although I am now interested in Buddhist philosophies of mindfulness. Four years ago I took up Tai Chi, which is teaching me to be present in the moment and not to be distracted by everything that is going on. I have led a huge amount of change at the Centre over the past 20 months .

There has been a lot of tension and contradictions during this time. Whitehead (2008) talks about living contradictions in living theory. I have certainly felt this at times. The Centre went through a period of great uncertainty with funding as many people are currently experiencing. I found that I was totally consumed with worrying about our finances and that it became much harder to focus on being carer centred, being mindful or supporting staff to achieve this. However, during this time I asked staff how they were feeling through a survey (appendix 1) and what they would like to help them through this difficult period which allowed them to remain in the moment and to experience their feelings rather than only asking them to be future-orientated.

I learnt a lot about listening to staff and volunteers feelings: I received some criticism (appendix 2) but I was able to hold it and to look at how I could improve my practice which I did by implementing support for staff. It was also important for me to be able to acknowledge the feelings of staff. I had been feeling a low energy as staff morale was low and there were difficulties with staff feeling divided and unsupported. Unfortunately some staff left during this period. I introduced a new structure to respond to staff's needs to have work shared out equally and to have support to manage their workload. Funding was maintained and new funding enabled additional hours to help with capacity. This has enabled four new staff members to join an existing team of eight (including myself) as well as some key freelance positions. A new energy has entered the organisation as morale has increased. Staff have been given more freedom to pursue their passions while having a framework to share work between each other and an Operational Manager has been introduced to support staff with their workloads.

I have been developing meetings which can be energising in which staff can discuss their practice and share learning with each other. I am encouraging staff to research and learn together to support carers and their families effectively which is developing. I am researching how a dynamic flow of energy can be pooled to support and motivate staff, carers and volunteers. When a meeting goes well there is a real buzz. The picture below is about sharing energy through conversations when you enter them mindfully. I drew it when

I was 18 and called it Conscious Conversations.



It was inspired by the book *The Celestine Prophecy* (Redfield 1997). These meetings are opening spaces for staff, volunteers and carers to pool ideas and energy to develop the Centre.

Recently I have been leading Chi Gong sessions at lunch times with staff. Bringing this into the Centre came organically through staff wanting to introduce some exercise into the Centre and I offered to lead a 30 minute Chi Gong session. The sessions enable staff to renew their energy in the middle of the day, restore their hearts and minds as well as their bodies as Chi Gong focuses on Eastern views of energy. The sessions provide another time for staff to be mindful and return renewed to their work.

It is important to me that the Centre is carer led and I have been supporting staff to develop a structure in which carers are involved on every level and take control of opportunities to have their voices heard such as training professionals, setting up their own groups and telling us what they want so we can apply for funding to provide it. We have provided opportunities for carers to increase their learning by providing training and opportunities to put to use their expertise as carers to have influence and make public their knowledge. This is the principle of living theory.

TASC is a method of action research that can be used to develop a living theory enquiry model (Wallace 2010). TASC is a method I would like to bring into the Centre to help staff, carers and volunteers to give them some structure to what they are doing. I encourage this model to be used but have not formalised it and yet it is being used all the time. For example carers came together to plan a training session for hospital staff. I encouraged staff to bring together the carers to plan what they would do. They spent some time gathering and organising the experiences the carers had. They identified what the training session would involve and how they would achieve the outcomes. They generated ideas for how to achieve their outcomes. They decided which ideas they would use and who would do what and created a plan of how to make the day work. They implemented their ideas by running the day. They evaluated the day by asking hospital staff for feedback, which was very good, and they communicated it by writing a report, gaining media

coverage and an article going into our newsletter. Carers and staff were involved in all parts of this process and the learning from it is being taken forward into another day at the hospital. However, this process was all done without a concept of TASC. A concept of TASC may help carers, volunteers and staff to understand what they achieved by introducing the TASC wheel to show them what they have done and how they can repeat it. I will be exploring using TASC in the future.

I have been researching my work with carers, volunteers, other professionals I work with and staff and have been videoing conversations with them to learn how I can improve my practice and have asked carers, volunteers, other professionals I work with and staff to validate my findings as well as validating my research with my research group.

My Research

In my research I have been using a multi-media approach by videoing conversations as part of the validation process to gather evidence as to whether I am being successful in my aims.

I have been using a living theory methodology. This methodology is based on the premise that it is through an individual's lived experience that they can research their influence and have this validated by a research group. Living theory creates an emphasis on a strong research community that can be used to validate the findings of the work. The research group I work with uses a research methodology that has been endorsed by Habermas (1976) Appendix 3. Creating a living theory

‘includes the unique contribution of an individual’s methodological inventiveness in the creation of a living theory, rather than referring to some overarching set of principles to which each individual’s methodology has to conform, in an impositional sense of the word. There are however distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology that include ‘I’ as a living contradiction, the use of action reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence.’ (Whitehead 2008, p 9)

Living theory has unique elements that are not present in traditional methodologies.

‘This need for a unique explanation of our educational influences means that traditional theories cannot by their nature produce valid explanations for this influence. In a traditional theory an explanation is produced as a set of propositional relationships. These relationships are abstract and general. One of the characteristics of a traditional theory is that it is a general theory from which an explanation can be derived that applies to a particular case. Living theories are different. They are the explanations that individuals produce for their educational influences in learning. They are grounded in the relational dynamics of everyday life and explain the receptively responsive educational influences of individuals in their own lives. They are unique.’ (Whitehead 2008 p 14)

TASC (Wallace 2010) has been the action research model I have been using to structure my research.

Multi-media research findings

These findings are based on my multi-media research. The scholarly context is changing continuously with digital technologies opening up new forms of representation (Eisner 1988, 1993, 1997, 2005) for communicating the meanings of embodied expressions of energy, values and understandings. In this section I will reflect on the meanings I find in the videos in relation to my question. I have checked the meanings I find with the people interviewed and have ethical permissions to use these videos in my work. All the commentary I have made has been agreed by the people in the videos.

The video captures evidence of a dynamic flowing of energy through the words in the conversations and also provides a more powerful medium by capturing the embodiment of the dynamic flowing of energy. I will identify moments in the video where I think the interaction I have with the person I am videoing captures the energy-flowing dynamic. Whitehead (2010) summarises this method:

'Empathetic resonance has been demonstrated with visual narratives (Huxtable, 2009) where a cursor is moved backwards and forward along a video-clip, with pauses where the viewer feels that the practitioner is expressing an energy-flowing ontological value. The validity of the researcher's response is evaluated in relation to the practitioner's response.' (p 96)

Jill Tovey – Office Administrator

I have known Jill Tovey since becoming Chief Executive. Jill came forward to be interviewed when I explained my research and agreed that the video and commentary could be used in my research and in this paper.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hovy0O6qqU4>

As I watch this video with Jill I find it really useful as Jill identifies an area that I am interested in bringing into my research which is enabling staff to bring in their personal experiences into their work practices as I am aware that much of my energy and motivation for my work comes from my personal experiences. Often personal experiences are seen as something that should not be brought into the work arena and that being professional requires staff to have boundaries between the personal and the professional. However, Jill brings out very clearly that in order to create respect and trust it is important to share your personal experiences. The conversation leads us to go on to explore Jill's

personal experiences and for me to do the same. I feel that by the end of the video the relational dynamic is warmer. At 8:16 you see a real connection as we have shared our personal experiences of caring with each other which validates Jill's perspective that sharing each others stories bring you closer together. I realise Jill is right to say that the team needs more time and space for opportunities to share personal stories and although meetings can go quickly as Chief Executive I am in the position to give permission to my staff to share with each other. I am really pleased that Jill felt able to bring this important issue up and feel this reflects that although there is more work to be done in this area Jill felt there was enough trust to know that she could discuss her ideas with me and that I would be receptive to what she had to say. Jill's input will help me to improve my practice and gives me a another way in which I can create a mindful workforce as the increase in understanding of each other and listening to each other will allow people to be more aware of each others lives.

Jill Tremellen – Chair

Jill Chairs the Management Committee made up of nine trustees at the Centre and has been line managing me since I became Chief Executive. Jill was interested in my research and agreed to be interviewed and for me to use the video and commentary in my research and in this paper.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vdIfyw01v0> Part one

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxcawzeh8mg&feature=related> Part two

The video with Jill provides me with a good narrative of my time at the Centre and the history of the organisation, which helps me to locate myself in the organisation. I feel Jill identifies that my influence has been to bring change to the Centre and to energise the Centre in that change despite some of the difficulties. I enjoy the final minutes of the conversation and am glad I didn't switch the camera off as Jill discusses that my research is about trying to get more depth to the organisation by looking at mindfulness and trying to get inside people's understandings to ensure that the Centre is carer centred and is based on shared values. I feel it is important that Jill and I agree about where the motivation for running the Centre comes from because although my influence that Jill describes is to make the Centre more business like and more effective as a charity my values have also driven the changes to ensure carers remain the centre of what we do and that we change to make a difference to carers lives.

As I watch the video I can see that we have a comfortable relationship and feel happy talking to each other. At 8:08 on part one you can see a moment where we both smile capturing the relational dynamic we share with each other. This is important in my growth as a Chief Executive to feel the support and warmth from my Chair to enable me to grow and develop and I am aware that my staff need this from me to enable them to learn in a safe and nurturing environment. At 2:57 Jill identifies that trustees feel they are more able to challenge which they want to do and I feel that this validates that I enable a learning environment where we can learn together and people feel safe to do this.

Jill identifies a number of reasons why the energy has grown in the organisation. I feel there are six key points:

1. Being excited and moving forward,
2. Having real work,
3. Being enthusiastic together
4. Generating the energy through meeting together
5. Shared vision
6. Desire to move forward

I feel these six points link with the picture Conscious Conversations and how energy is pooled together. At 2:18 Jill identifies that I had the energy to grow the organisation, which is significant as it is important for me to be able to identify where I gain my energy from and how I keep my energy flowing to enable me to be able to facilitate the energy flow for the rest of the organisation. I am aware this relates very directly to my background and my life experiences, which motivate me to support people and facilitate change, which is explored in more depth in my conversation with Andrew. However, I also need to remain mindful that different people gain energy in different ways.

At 2:33 Jill identifies that she has seen her role as identifying people to help me to grow the organisation. I feel this is a way that Jill has supported me in my learning and that in order to support the rest of the organisation to develop their learning providing support is a key factor to enable the organisation to be a learning organisation

Lydia Clark – Carers' Officer

I have worked with Lydia for 17 months and supervised Lydia for 10 months. Lydia works directly supporting carers.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aj5GESz1uT0>

As I watch this video I feel the smiling and laughing shows that Lydia and I have developed a safe and trusting relationship, which I feel, has developed through having supervision together over the last 10 months. Supervision at the Centre is provided monthly and is a time where staff can discuss their work, reflect on what they are doing, receive guidance if needed and plan for their next month's work. I feel the relationship the video captures shows evidence of the pooling of energy I create when I work with my staff and that Lydia reflects this in what she says in the video.

Lydia identifies my energy for new ideas and identifies a number of reasons she feels I have increased her energy and motivation for working at the organisation I feel there are eight key points

1. Enabling staff to be creative.
2. Having a holistic approach to maintain staff's well being
3. Having a nurturing approach to help staff grow
4. Creating an enjoyable environment
5. Turning negatives into positives
6. Appreciating people
7. Listening to People
8. Involving people and being open to critique and change

Lydia also identifies ways I create a learning environment one of which is a recent opportunity I was able to support staff to identify their Personality Type through the Myers Briggs Type Indicator Instrument (1975). Lydia identifies this opportunity as an example of my holistic and nurturing approach to learning and an opportunity for staff to learn together.

Lydia also identifies how I am introducing mindfulness into the organisation although she does not describe it as mindfulness it meets the definition of mindfulness I describe in my introduction. ' Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgementally (Kabat Zinn 1994 p 4). Lydia identifies the chance for the team to have time to think and reflect when we had a team day using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (1975). Lydia's description of the team day feels to me that it is a validation of creating chances for the team to be mindful. Also Lydia and I discuss the recent introduction of Tai Chi at lunch times which I have begun teaching. Lydia also identifies Tai Chi as being nurturing and looking after well-being. I feel that by providing time to do Tai Chi within the workday creates another space for the team to be mindful.

Andrew Henon – Artist

I have worked with Andrew on projects engaging carers in socially engaged Arts Projects for the last six years. I worked with Andrew on a book called Creativity Works, which can be seen at www.actionresearch.net/writings/henon/creativityworkslowah.pdf

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQ0qQPfC2QY> Part one

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4Gsr4L_v9E Part two

I feel these videos show more than any others the relational dynamic and the dynamic flowing energy the relational dynamic pools, I think this is due to the fact that Andrew and I have worked together for six years and as Jill Tovey mentions earlier it takes time to build trust working together which Andrew and I have had. I have kept part one as evidence of this and you can see in the first 40 seconds we spend most of the time laughing with each other and although we are mostly talking about Andrew's coat I feel the video-clip evidences a depth of knowing that is through working and researching together for six years.

As I listen to Andrew in this conversation I feel he identifies a way of working that I had not been fully aware of as he reflects back to me that in my practice he has witnessed me enabling and facilitating change. Andrew's comments enable me to reflect on my story as to why it is important to me to facilitate and enable change and the sometimes painful experiences of this role. I feel Andrew validates my belief change is important and I feel my belief in the importance of change is key to learning as you are continually growing and changing as you learn.

I feel my conversation links well with the conversation I had with Jill Tovey who identifies the importance of knowing each other at work as I identify that a lot of my energy and motivation comes from my childhood and personal experiences of being fostered and caring for my mum as an adult. I feel my personal experiences are significant as in all the conversations I have had people identify my own energy as being important, as a leader I need to be aware of where my energy comes from and how to maintain it. I feel my personal experiences also relates to the empathy Andrew describes that I have for my work.

I recognise Andrew's comment about being serious about my work but not serious to work

with. I feel Andrew's comment is also validated by Lydia's comments that I create an enjoyable environment to work in. I feel my ability to make an enjoyable work environment comes from my ambition to have a job I enjoyed and that I want my staff and those I work with to enjoy their job.

I feel my conversation with Andrew highlights the importance of creating space to be mindful, as there were several points that I had not been conscious of that Andrew makes and yet they resonate deeply with me. Through the process of talking with Andrew I am able to be more aware of my influence and of my motivations for my ways of working. Being conscious is a key point of mindfulness and a reason that it is important to make space to reflect and learn about your practice with other people. I feel again the conversation with Andrew links back to my picture of Conscious Conversations, which is so important in pooling energy.

My Findings

My work is an original piece of research that adds to a growing epistemology of living theory and the importance of this methodology for uncovering the expertise of practitioners and will empower professionals whose embodied knowledge is currently under valued in favour of advice from government.

“Able, brilliant and skilled professionals do not thrive in an environment where much of their energies are absorbed by the need to comply with a raft of detailed requirements.’ (House of Lords 2009 pp15)

My research has identified a number of ways to pool practitioners dynamic-flowing energy to improve what we are doing as practitioners together which is central to my findings and in developing the living theory I am creating.

Shared and pooled vision and knowing based on the personal and professional

Jill Tremellen identifies the importance of 'generating the energy through meeting together', which enables the pooling to take place. Sharing what matters to each other is a key point that Jill Tovey raises. Both concepts validate my view that in order to create the pooling of energy you need to share and agree on your values. Whitehead (2010) puts it this way 'The energy-flowing values I have in mind are ontological in the sense that they are the values used by individuals to give meaning and purpose to their lives in ways that are consistent with carrying hope for the future of humanity and their own. ' (p. 90). Jill Tremellen identifies this as 'a shared vision' and Lydia articulates that whilst I lead the vision I am open to 'involving people and being open to critique and change'. The shared vision I hold is the Centre should be carer centred empowering carers to make a difference to their lives. By remaining focused on this vision it allows flexibility but has enabled me to regain the energy where I have experienced living contradictions in my practice as my values have been challenged by those who did not share my vision. This element of the creation of the pooling of dynamic-flowing energy can be summarised as a shared and pooled vision and knowing based on the personal and professional.

Google philosophy of creativity, fun, appreciation and work that is challenging

Lydia identifies four areas 'enabling staff to be creative' 'creating an enjoyable environment' 'appreciating people' and 'listening to people'. Jill Tremellen identifies three areas 'being excited and moving forward', 'having real work' and 'being enthusiastic

together'. This has echoes of Google's philosophy:

'Our founders built Google around the idea that work should be challenging, and the challenge should be fun. We believe that great, creative things are more likely to happen with the right company culture ... There is an emphasis on team achievements and pride in individual accomplishments that contribute to our overall success. We put great stock in our employees—energetic, passionate people from diverse backgrounds with creative approaches to work, play and life... as new ideas emerge ... they are traded, tested and put into practice with dizzying speed—and they may be the launch pad for a new project destined for worldwide use.'

Google are practice driven innovators. Google's philosophy is an ethos I recognise and fits with my values. As I discuss with Andrew I can see it is central to creating and maintaining the pooling of energy in workforces. Andrew validates this approach where he says 'You take your work very seriously, but without being too serious. There's an element of humour in the room when you're working' (Andrew part two 0:19-0:29). I am calling this the Google philosophy of creativity, fun, appreciation and work that is challenging

Mindfulness and learning

Lydia identifies two areas 'having a holistic approach to maintain staff's well being' and 'having a nurturing approach to help staff grow'. This corroborates that I am living a theory of mindfulness and learning in my practice which is being observed by one staff member and provides me with the opportunity to develop a method for measuring this at the Centre in future by continuing to develop my phenomenological approach which Cresswell (2007) describes as:

'A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon. ... The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all individuals. This description consists of 'what' they experience and 'how' they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994)."(pp. 57-58)

Conclusion

I set out with four aims in this research. I will review my learning from my research and whether I feel I have met these aims.

1. Enable me and my staff to put carers at the centre of their practice

My research has developed my learning that in order to do put carers at the centre of our practice it is important that there is a shared vision do do this across the organisation. As the leader it is essential that I draw everyone back to this vision with every decision that is made.

2. Enable me and my staff to be able to reflect on our personal experience and professional practice to maintain our motivation for keeping carer centred

My research has identified that I need to make more time for me and my staff to reflect and share our personal experiences to develop trust and respect to enable the team to work more effectively.

3. Look at how energy affects interactions when we're working with people and look at the way of measuring energy that motivates us and how we pool energy when we are together.

My epistemology of dynamic flowing energy has developed the beginning of a three-part living theory, which I can summarise as:

- ⤴ Shared and pooled vision and knowing based on the personal and professional
- ⤴ Google philosophy of creativity, fun, appreciation and work that is challenging
- ⤴ Mindfulness and learning

The use of video has begun to capture evidence of the dynamic flowing energy but has identified I need to do more work to be able to measure the dynamic flowing energy.

4. Enquire as to how I can create a mindful workforce

My research has identified the importance of making time for people to be in the moment is important and that as a leader I am able to protect this time for my workforce. This time enables staff to develop and learn rather than constantly acting and reacting. By introducing opportunities for Chi Gong I am not only enabling the creation of a mindful workforce but also the holistic well-being which is so important in maintaining the dynamic flowing energy.

In conclusion I feel my research has identified some key learning however, in the words of Nelson Mandela's (1994) which is also my signature on my emails.

'I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.' (P 751)

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Staff and Volunteer Survey

We are going through a huge amount of change as an organisation as we try to prepare to be ready for a competitive tender. In order to help staff and volunteers feel supported through this process I'd like to gather some feedback to ensure we are providing enough support.

Do you feel supported by your direct manager/volunteer manager?
Do you have any ideas how they could support you more?

Do you feel supported by the Sonia Hutchison, Chief Executive?
Do you have any ideas how she could support you more?

Do you feel you have enough support?
Do you have any ideas how we could support you more?

If you would like someone to speak to you about your feedback, please give your name, otherwise you can give your feedback anonymously. Thank you for filling in this survey.

If you would like to email this please email it to info@banescarerscentre.org.uk where it will be anonymised before it is read, please title the email confidential survey.

Appendix 2

Staff and Volunteer Survey

14 people responded to the staff and volunteer survey (Appendix 1) from the staff and volunteers. This survey was undertaken in February 2011 in a period of great change and uncertainty. No funding had been guaranteed and staff were particularly concerned about their job security. However the feedback has been honest and has identified some key areas of learning and development.

- More time is needed to increase team spirit and social time for staff and volunteers to get to know each other and the Chief Executive.
- More time is needed to ensure staff and volunteers are included in decision making from start to finish and for their input to be more visible.
- More time needs to be taken to explain when ideas are not taken on board why this has happened.
- More projects including the whole staff team are needed to increase team spirit.
- More meetings with staff and trustees.
- More forward planning
- More staff

These changes will be implemented through strategic planning meetings including staff, volunteers and trustees annually which will set the organisational plan for the year. A report will be written to explain if ideas have not been able to be implemented from these meetings and have therefore not been included in the plan for the year. The strategic plan will have time scales to ensure all staff know what is happening in advance and that detailed planning can be included much earlier on. Staff, trustees and the Chief Executive will be responsible for monitoring this during Service Provision Sub Committee Meetings quarterly. All Sub-committee meetings meet quarterly and now include relevant staff to increase communication between staff and trustees.

Staff will have the timetable for the newsletter mail outs for the year and will have deadlines to submit their events and their information by. All staff will be involved in this process to ensure this is shared across the team, staff will be involved in proof reading newsletters before they go to print. A review of the newsletter will be undertaken during the year with staff, carers and other stakeholders.

Training opportunities and social events for volunteers will be well publicised and offer time for volunteers to meet with each other at least twice a year.

Social events for staff will be planned for the year with a minimum of 2 per year and at least one will include volunteers and trustees.

A variety of meetings will be set up to enable staff to discuss workloads with each other. A Case load meeting will enable discussion about workloads between staff and enable information and concerns to be shared. This will take place 3 times a month and a team meeting will take place once a month for more strategic information and training opportunities.

A new post has been created to ensure staff have a fair allocation of work, work is planned in advance and more projects involve the whole team. This is the Operations Manager post and is in line with the service review discussions, staff will be involved in the recruitment of this post. A Case Manager post has been created to ensure staff are supported in their work and the complexities that arise from supporting carers, this will replace the Carers' Support Manager post. A review of the current organisational structure will be out for consultation, one to one meetings will be arranged with the Chief Executive to ensure all staff are included. Any changes or decisions not to change the structure will be clearly explained to the staff.

Two operational posts are being advertised and more capacity has been taken up by

existing staff by increasing their hours.

	Yes	No	Comments
Do you feel supported by your direct manager / volunteer manager?	14	0	
Do you have any ideas how they could support you more?	3	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More advanced planning and consistency. Clarification of staff roles and responsibilities so we all know what each other is responsible for and the underpinning admin processes - much of which is in hand I know. • There has always been an answer when I have had a problem. • I feel the whole process of the change in name, and revamping of the information was done in a way that did not involve the whole staff group in the decision making; which in turn felt that staff were not valued and opinions were not considered. This in turn made me feel negative towards the change. The way it was implemented felt that no one had a say in it (including the carers we work with) • Continue to have meetings with other befrienders incorporating training session 3-6 monthly • I think they are doing a fine job and organisation is excellent.
Do you feel supported by Sonia Hutchison, the Chief Executive?	8	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have no contact • I have only met Sonia briefly. Should I need her support I am certain she would give it • I feel as if I am just one of the staff not known by Sonia • to a certain extent • no personal contact • not sure
Do you have any ideas how she could support you more?	2	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More advanced planning and consistency. Clarification of staff roles and responsibilities so we all know what each other is responsible for and the underpinning admin processes - much of which is in hand I know • Get to know us better More team working with collaborative decision making • if there is input via Trisha

Do you feel you have enough support?	9	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am supported and helped at all times • pretty much • yes at the moment everyone is under the same pressure • enough support but feel opinions are not listened to • with Trisha
Do you have any ideas how we could support you more?	6	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things improve when there is some staff interaction time to understand what others are doing. This can happen in the office informally but as lots of people work remotely it is limited and the loss of briefing sessions has reduced insight into what is happening and makes it more difficult to support each other • employ more staff • We used to have such a GREAT TEAM SPIRIT, but that is sadly lacking, if only there could be more consultation BEFORE decisions are made, not after, I'm sure team spirit would improve • more meetings as a staff group and management committee group together to discuss changing agenda with staff team being listened to and action plan made before changes are made • The support and contact with Trisha is superb including the transport • Trisha and Sonia have both been aware of my family problems and have understood.