

香港家庭福利會

Hong Kong Family Welfare Society

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## Research study on Nature-based Mindfulness Intervention Programme

### Executive Summary

#### Introduction

1. Mindfulness is the process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality awareness to one's current experience and develop a quality of relating to that experience with openness and acceptance. Many parents and caregivers find it difficult to invest time and effort in a mindfulness-based programme. In addition, the outcomes may be limited by a lack of regular mindfulness practice at home. Therefore, innovative approaches should be designed specifically for parents under stress and caregivers of older adults who experience care fatigue and have pre-occupied care responsibilities. Meditation retreats have been well-received in traditional spiritual practices. In recent years, studies have investigated the benefits of using natural environments to enhance the outcomes of mindfulness-based programmes. The Zonta White House-Family Retreat Centre (also known as the White House) offers advantages in terms of a natural tranquil home-like environment and facilities that are ideal for mindfulness-based programmes. Its favourable geographical location allows participants to travel to the venue within a short time and enjoy the benefits of being connected to the nature.
2. With the sponsorships by Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (The Trust), the 3-year "Sunny Nature" -Family Wellness Project (April 2021-June 2024) has been launched at White House for enhancing family carers' mental health, positive family relationship, releasing their stress through the nature-based mindfulness programme. The Trust also funded this research study. Hong Kong Family Welfare Society (HKFWS) commissioned The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Department of Social Sciences to conduct this study. With the support of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Dr. Herman Lo, a local scholar who is specialized in mindfulness-based programme, HKFWS has designed a Nature-Based Mindfulness Programme for caregivers of older adults and parents under stress is designed. A mixed methods study is being conducted to evaluate the outcomes and processes of this innovative programme.

#### Research Objective & Design

3. Objectives of this research study are: (3.1) examine the effects of Nature-based Mindfulness Intervention Programme for family carers with high levels of caring-related stress. (3.2) explore the role of nature in promoting the outcome of the programme. This project has two major targets: (3.3) Caregivers of older adult with dementia and frailty, and (3.4) parents having young children under stress.
4. The Nature-based Mindfulness Intervention programme includes 4 sessions with a total of 8-hour contact time. According to the participants' condition, the time spent in the White House and collaborative service units is jointly determined by the project worker and the social worker of the integrated family services centres or the district partners, such as neighbourhood elderly centres. Participants are openly recruited by these service units. In total, 10 groups were organized and 95 participants, including 40 caregivers of older adults and 55 parents under stress, participated the programme during the project period.
5. In quantitative study, all participants are invited to complete the same set of questionnaires in four time-points, based on a repeated measure design: one month before programme, pre-programme, post-programme, and three-month follow-up. The study investigates outcomes, including depression, anxiety, stress, physical distress, daily functioning, well-being, family functioning, family conflicts, and connectedness with nature, using self-reported, standardized, and validated measured. A total of 95 participants have completed the questionnaire.
6. In the qualitative study, focus groups were conducted to collect participants' experiences and benefits of nature-based mindfulness courses.

## Overall Results /Key Findings

### Quantitative study

7. For caregivers of older adults, significant improvements are found in almost all outcome measures, including depression, anxiety, stress, physical distress, daily functioning, and well-being, when comparing pre-test and post-test results. Further improvements in family functioning and connectedness with nature are also found between pre-test and three-month follow-up.
8. For parents under stress, significant improvements are found in stress, physical distress, daily functioning, and self-compassion between pre-test and post-test. Further improvements in anxiety and all subscales in family conflicts (psychological aggression, corporate punishment, and physical maltreatment) are found between pre-test and three-month follow-up. A marginal improvement

is also found in depression. In hierarchical regression analysis, connection with nature played a significant predicting the programme effect in depression.

### Qualitative study

9. Total of 10 focus groups were organized with 34 participants. Among them, 14 are caregivers of older adults, while 20 of them are parents under stress. Transcriptions of the participant's subjective experiences are collected to demonstrate the perceived benefits of the nature-based mindfulness programme.

It was consistent with The Attention Restoration Theory, three dimensions of the benefits are identified:

#### (9.1) Being away and experiencing soft fascination

Visiting the White House allows participants to physically distance themselves from day-to-day environment. They appreciate that the programme and the nature environment offer them a space to free themselves from caregiver stress and burden.

#### (9.2) Extent

Participants experience a sense of relatedness, being able to associate their experiences in nature environments with own parenting and caregiver experiences. They felt relaxed and enjoyed the programme offered at the White House, with nurturing provided by the natural environment and mindfulness practices.

#### (9.3) Compatibility

It suggests the natural environments are well-suited to one's preference or purpose in parenting and family caregiving. It offers support to parents and caregivers and promote their adaptive coping.

## **Recommendation**

### Service Development Level

10. Based on these encouraging results, we strongly recommend continuing this initiative and organizing regular nature-based mindfulness programmes for parents and caregivers at the White House.
11. Alternative structures of nature-based mindfulness courses and activities may be considered, and more mindfulness activities that incorporate nature elements should be encouraged in the design of services or activities, so as to promote carers' continuous self-care and physical and mental health and enhance their

coping to stress, such as a one-day mini- mindfulness retreats for the basic program graduates, an intensive program similar to the standard eight-week mindfulness program, or parallel program for parent-child (or caregiver-cared) can be considered. A short-term diversified nature-based mindfulness program to meet the needs and time of carers.

### Government and Corporate Level

12. There is a need for all sectors to work together to support family caregivers; The Government may provide venues for the natural environment and facilities of the community or subsidize social welfare organizations to organize nature-based mindfulness courses/activities on a regular basis, so that parents or elderly carers in need can participate “ Nature-based mindfulness Programme” in nearby in the nearby community, to take a break and increase the physical and mental health of individuals and their families.
13. In the business sector, employers may arrange/encourage their employees to participate in the nature-based mindfulness courses and activities in a timely manner, with a view to providing more self-care space for employees as carers to enhance their mental health.

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