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Looking back at the first face-to-face transnational partner meeting of the BENEFIT project in Prague

Mindfulness and resilience among youth in European countries

On the 1st of June 2023, an international meeting of BENEFIT partners took place in Prague. Co-funded by Erasmus+ European funds, the project aims to promote mindfulness and mental resilience in young people. Youth mental health experts from five European countries: the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, Ireland and Portugal met to discuss cooperation on the project, which is now underway. During the project you can look forward to training and workshops for young people and youth workers in all partner countries. The result will be an online e-learning platform to be launched in November 2024.

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What do you think of when you say mindfulness? "Everyone immediately imagines that they must have an empty head, a head without a single thought. But that's impossible," says Andri Agathokleous, a trained psychologist and member of an international consortium from the Institute of Development in Cyprus. "If you have thoughts in your head, be happy, it means you are a human being and you are alive," she adds with a smile to explain. Having started mindfulness herself 12 years ago under the guidance of her teacher, she now has a daily practice that helps her stay calm even in the challenging situations she encounters in life. She can no longer imagine her life without mindfulness. "Thanks to my regular practice, I have been able to cope with many challenging situations with greater peace of mind. Difficulties come and go in life. That's normal. The important thing is what attitude you take towards them. Mindfulness helps me to keep perspective," says Andri.

Mindfulness and its benefits

Mindfulness is a skill that is inherent in all of us. With daily practice, we can strengthen and develop it, similar to a muscle in the body, and gain perspective and distance from our everyday feelings, emotions, thoughts, and events that happen and enter our lives. We often cannot control what happens to us, but we can choose how we approach it. This is the basic tenet of mindfulness, which allows us distance and perspective.

Scientific research confirms that the regular practice of developing mindfulness has the following benefits on our health, wellbeing and overall life:

- Stress reduction in children, adolescents and adults
- Improving attention, memory and academic performance
- Improving concentration in children and adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD, etc.)
- Increase empathy and kindness towards self and others

- Improving overall physical and mental well-being
- Reduction of inflammation in the body and at the epigenetic level
- Support treatment of depression, anxiety, eating disorders and other psychological disorders and illnesses

How to develop your mindfulness practice

Participants in the international consortium agreed that everyone has their own practice. "My way when I need to calm down and relax is to stop and write down everything that's going on in my head. When I have a problem, I write down the pros and cons every time. This helps me make good decisions. Writing is important to me and always calms me down," says Anna Christou from the Greek Center for the Advancement of Research & Development in Educational Technology.

Starting your own mindfulness practice can be beneficial for anyone and at any age. Formal practices include various forms of meditation, mindful movement, and other activities and exercises. Informal practice then brings the capacity for mindfulness into everyday activities by, for example, mindfully savoring a meal slowly, being fully aware of the colors, shapes, sounds, and smells around us on a walk, or paying full present attention to another's words during a conversation. Mindfulness also teaches us to listen to our bodies and their needs. We become more aware of if and when we are hungry or thirsty, whether we need to rest or go for a run outside.

What do we take away from the meeting?

Meeting like-minded people with a similar passion for mindfulness and mental health was enriching and empowering. Everyone is personally involved in developing their own mindfulness practice and supporting their own resilience and well-being, so we believe that mindful collaboration will yield guaranteed results. The face-to-face meeting provided clarity not only on the outcomes of the project, but also the tasks and timeline, and energized us for further collaboration.

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