

The Mindfulness All Party Parliamentary Group hearing: Armed Forces, Policing and Emergency Services



The Mindfulness All Party Parliamentary Group hearing on the Armed Forces, Policing and Emergency Services met with great success in the House of Commons, Westminster, London last month. On 25th October 2018, a panel of expert speakers from the UK and USA gave talks on the latest research and implementation of workplace mindfulness training programmes in the context of high-stress or trauma-prevalent public service. The meeting was a valuable opportunity for the exchange of expertise and learning between

service leaders, researchers, mindfulness teachers and practitioners, and police, ambulance, and fire service personnel wishing to integrate mindfulness into their work.



The Armed Forces and frontline public services were chosen as the focus of this hearing in recognition of the high demands placed on this personnel to respond decisively and wisely often when under extreme pressure. Although working in different roles, both armed forces personnel and frontline emergency staff share the need to serve others, often in extremely stressful or traumatic situations. Anecdotal evidence speaks of cultures of service in which the needs of individual personnel are backgrounded, leading to burnout, poor mental health, and in some cases, suicide.

Innovative and successful mindfulness programmes have been pioneered in the US and UK armed forces, UK policing and Scottish Ambulance Services amongst others. This Mindfulness APPG meeting provided a space for the sharing of best practice, debate and shared learning on the role mindfulness can play in supporting people in these valuable roles. Around 15 Members of Parliament and 140 attendees listened to the talks and participated in an open Questions and Answers session. The meeting was ably chaired by the Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne MP and Clive Lewis MP, themselves mindfulness practitioners with a background of military service, who spoke of how mindfulness supports them in both their work and home lives.

We were honoured to host a panel of highly regarded speakers. Chief Constable Bill Skelly spoke about mindfulness training provided to staff in the Public Protection Unit in Lincolnshire Police as an investment in their personal wellbeing and their ability to provide a high level of service to the public. Sir Tim Boughton spoke movingly on the impact of his 20-year career as an officer in the military, including service in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and his work to embed mindfulness in training for all new recruits to resource them for the emotional impact of their service. Former Assistant Chief Constable Ivor Twydell, now a mindfulness trainer, discussed how mindfulness can help those leading frontline services lead in innovative and more responsive ways. Dr Amishi Jha outlined her work at Miami University with US military personnel and explained the connections between mindfulness, the brain's ability to pay attention, and mental health and resilience.



Dr Jutta Tobias Mortlock, of City University, London, spoke about her research on workplace behavior change initiatives geared towards generating sustainable wellbeing and performance and emphasised the importance of teamwork in mindfulness training. Detective Inspector Jenni McIntyre-Smith and Police Constable Ewan Sim described their work developing an 8-week mindfulness training program and evaluating it through a trial run by the College of Policing with thousands of police staff from across the UK. Dr Douglas McPhail discussed the mindfulness training program he has run with the Scottish Ambulance Service, which is changing how paramedics work and how they transition from work into their home lives. Finally, Dr Joel & Michelle Levey, pioneering workplace mindfulness trainers, described the ‘Jedi Warrior Training’ programme they carried out in the 1970s in the US Army Special Forces in response to the high rates of suicide of military personnel returning from Vietnam.



The talks covered a breadth of experience that ranged over a long time frame, from the Levey’s programme, through to very recent innovations such as the online programme for police developed by DI Jenni McIntyre-Smith. Key points that emerged were the need to adapt mindfulness training to the very particular circumstances of frontline work and to take into account the fast pace and high pressure and the preference of personnel to focus on the ‘doing’ of mindfulness over the theory behind it. Other shared values that emerged were the importance of working as a team, and of peer teaching and support, which was backed by both research findings and experience in delivering training. The Mindfulness APPG sessions on Armed Services, Policing and Emergency Services made a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogue between trainers, researchers, and colleagues in frontline services. Following the meeting, many attendees met for lunch, hosted by Dr Jutta Tobias Mortlock at City University to continue the dialogue. We are confident that further collaboration and innovation

will grow from connections made on the day.

The Mindfulness Initiative provides the secretariat for the Mindfulness APPG.

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