

mindfulness podcast transcript

SG: Hello everyone and welcome to another Performing Caper's podcast by Shaper/Caper. On today's episode we have myself and Dylan discussing all things wonderful about mindfulness. So, sit back and please enjoy. Hello. Let's do some introductions. So, my name is Sarah and I'm the Creative Learning Coordinator for Shaper/Caper.

DB: And I'm Dylan and I'm the Trainee Fundraiser for Shaper/Caper.

SG: So, Dylan, what do you do as a Trainee Fundraiser? Do you fundraise?

DB: I do so. Yeah, so I'm currently in my trainee year. So, I come from a dance background, but I'm learning how to fundraise in different ways for the company. So yeah, that's what I do. What do you normally do? Because your job must have changed quite significantly obviously with what's going on right now.

SG: So yeah, so I'm normally as I said, I'm the Creative Learning Coordinator for Shaper/Caper, so my normal job before lockdown was going out and delivering all the creative learning projects. But that's obviously now changed, So I'm currently dancing about in my living room when I can. A lot of our work has gone digital so I'm doing loads of dance films and sending out some to our participants such as are Dance for Parkinson's class, they're all now getting digital videos from myself and my lovely living room. But we're also doing livestream classes so loads of fun stuff, but I'm looking forward to getting back outside.

DB: Yeah and dancing again.

SG: Well I suppose this podcast is not just about myself wishing that we were outside, but it is more about the topic of mindfulness. Mindfulness is something that Shaper/

Caper have started to begin to offer, I suppose, to different businesses and schools of organisations. It came about I suppose because I went on a training course last year in youth mindfulness. So, it was specifically for children, but Dylan you know this from being a dancer that mindfulness is something that we just do a lot of anyway within a career in dance.

DB: Yeah it definitely, obviously so me and Sarah were both in the same class in training and I think anybody in dance training, you know, you get a little bit of it sprinkled in to the training, especially you know if we're warming up, or before the start of an improvisation and stuff like that. You know, you often see Mindfulness techniques I would say, you know, it's not so much about the focus on mindfulness, but it's about the, you know, using those techniques. So yeah, you know, I definitely think it's something that we do.

SG: Do, you know, actually what the official definition for mindfulness is?

DB: I don't I don't.

SG: Well I say official, but It's not oxford dictionary official but it's the official definition according to the course that I went on. Its mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way on purpose and in the present moment non-judgmentally. So, the biggest things I suppose are that when practicing mindfulness or meditation, it has all these different words, but it's in the moment you are paying attention on purpose and non-judgmentally. So, you're not allowing your mind to wander and you're not like getting annoyed at yourself for not being able to focus solely on one thing. It's yeah being in the present moment and thinking about a particular thing on purpose non-judgementally

DB: Yeah. It's interesting as well because I think obviously, it's something that has become quite popular and quite well known but that's not something that I really thought of in terms of like the actual definition of. So, it's interesting to hear that.

SG: Definitely I think people are focusing a lot more on their own mental health, especially when working from home because trying to get that home-life work-life balance becomes infinitely harder when you've got children running around behind you and you're trying to send emails or working from the room that you would normally relax in. So yeah, I definitely think that mindfulness is starting to be used more which is really nice to see that people are focusing on their mental health and trying to pay more attention to themselves.

DB: Yeah. Do you think that that comes under the, the fact that right now, you know regardless of whether you're working or not from home, but there's aspect of you got a lot more time and space to kind of sit with yourself which...

SG: Yeah, I think it does. Yeah that's a good point, that people are running out of things to do I suppose from home. I mean, I know I've done all my jigsaws in my house and i've also cleaned the skirting boards and rearrange my living room. So, it does come a point where you kind of are just sitting and going right, what's next? What else can I do? So...

DB: I feel like a lot of the kind of busyness that keeps us occupied a lot of the time, you know that the minuscule concerns that kind of pop up during your day as you go about it, you know and just not really there anymore.

SG: Yeah. I also hope that if people have started to pay more attention to their own mental health that this will be something, they continue with them whenever we get out of lockdown. That people are more aware of that and are more aware of other

people's needs to look after their own mental health as well. So, this podcast is not just going to be us rambling on we do hope to deliver a short mindfulness practice at the end of it.

DB: Yeah.

SG: Dylan you led mindfulness session at the Time to Shine launch date. So, do you wanna let us know what Time to Shine is and what that session was like?

DB: Time to Shine is a program by the Rank Foundation and it's what's funding my post for this year. The Rank Foundation are a really great organisation. And the Time to Shine program is a year-long kind of traineeship internship kind of year for young professionals' kind of at the start of their career. So, part of that was the big launch event that happened down in Morecambe. And we were split into groups and we were asked you know, to come up with just a wee ten-minute session for the for the last day. That was something completely different but that would energise and engage everyone, and it went really well. I think people gained a lot from it.

SG: I know that the Rank Foundation then got back to you recently about delivering an online Zoom session for some of the Time to Shine participants. And I think that's really wonderful that they recognised, and they really enjoyed that session that you led, that they want to do to do something digitally. How did you find then doing it online compared to actually being in the room with everyone?

DB: Oh...That's a good question. It was very different. It just it flagged up for me how important the energy and the kind of in the room with you in the studio with you is really important to me when I was down at the launch event compared to on the zoom session since you just don't have that similar connection, I think.

SG: The people I suppose because you're letting your looking at a tiny little face on the screen. Some people get self-conscious then turn the video off, so you don't even know if they're there or if engaging with it at all.

DB: So, yeah. I think as well there comes an element of I can also see myself on the screen.

SG: Oh ok!

DB: So, it feels very much performative. So yeah it felt a little bit more detached but weirdly more connected. And maybe that's just because we can't physically connect right now. So, it's nice to have that moment.

SG: Well, I've got some quotes here just to make you feel really good about yourself. So, two of the participants got back in touch. One of them said that that was just what they needed after a busy week and they were feeling like the cabin fever was setting in, so they were then entering the weekend with a more peaceful and happy mindset. So, there you go that was one of them. Somebody else said that they usually struggle with this type of exercise but find it really good and completely forgot there were 30 others and session with them. I know that that one said exercise... Obviously we aren't getting them to do squats or push-ups or anything, but I know I was part of that session that you led and there was a little bit of movement but it was more on the spot and it was more about I suppose we would call it an improv in dance but it's about just listening to verbal instructions and then making decisions yourself in your body. What feels good and what you do but also really paying attention to those movements. And trying to be really specific with how you're moving as well so that you're not just kind of allowing yourself to be those blow up men outside car garages, but you're actually like paying attention coming back to that definition. You are paying attention you're being specific and also

being non-judgmental. Which is quite nice that that person found it good and forgot there was other people there. Even though you didn't, and you were scanning the gallery and you were very aware of other people.

DB: I think it's good as well the movement, especially for us, I don't know how you've been finding the lockdown, but for myself movement for us, that's you know, routed in this mindfulness practice I think helps to bring me back and kind of ground me which is something that has been more of a challenge during lockdown. And I found myself that when I've been doing these sessions, you know, either leading or taking part in them that just having that awareness of the movement and really being connected to it. I enjoyed moving a lot more.

SG: I want to touch briefly on the course that I went on before we get onto actually delivering a bit of mindfulness practice. It was over the course of two weekends just before Christmas time. Yeah. I found it really really insightful for my own. Yeah for my own understanding of what mindfulness is, but also the youth mindfulness program how it takes its approach towards delivering this towards children because it is aimed towards 7 to 12 or 7 to 11-year-old. So, it's kind of primary school age children. I was always really interested when I heard about this course about how they were actually going to engage with them and get children to sit down and close their eyes for five minutes ten minutes because that just like as going into schools and teaching children getting them to sit still for two minutes is difficult let alone with their eyes closed and focusing on their breath. But I think that the layout in which they deliver the course and how they focus each lesson makes that really really easy that journey for them. They described almost like a pyramid. So, kind of the first lesson you would focus on the intention and what mindfulness is and why we're, why we're delivering this course to them. Why were telling them about this and then it moves

on to talking about attention and attitude. And then once they kind of grasp this idea of mindfulness and why either learning about is what goes on in the brain when practicing mindfulness, you can then start focusing on gratitude and resilience and then we move on to like kindness of self kindness towards others and finally finishing with purpose.

DB: Yeah.

SG: I think that all of this is applicable for anyone in their day-to-day life. Yeah, even if you're 70 years old and you're beginning to do mindfulness for yourself. I think it can absolutely have a great impact on your life. No matter what age you are.

DB: Yeah, and I think you can pick up on a lot of different things so even though as you're saying you kind of done qualification in the course to teach mindfulness to children, but there are parts of it, you know the like the premise of mindfulness is beneficial for everyone. I want to come back to you helped me plan the mindfulness Zoom sessions that I was leading and one of the things that you were talking about was using "ing" words. So rather than commanding somebody, you know, okay close your eyes. Okay picture this do this do that. It's all about "ing" words. So, allowing yourself. Just closing your eyes. You know, these these kind of words. Maybe could you talk about why that's important?

SG: Yeah. Yeah. So, I suppose the main reason for that is because mindfulness is all about an invitation and you're always inviting whoever's doing the practice with you to do what's best for them and I suppose it comes back to the non-judgmental thing

as well and not changing what you're doing to do what you think is best but just doing what you're doing because that's what's natural for you. So if you were to say to somebody "breathe in, breathe out", if they're not naturally about to take a breath in there then going to change their breathing pattern so that they can breathe in when you say that and that immediately disrupts what their body is naturally doing so by using "ing" words such as; breathing, noticing, allowing, it all becomes part of the present moment and it also means that it's not a command and people can follow the instruction when their body is naturally ready to follow that instruction. It's quite a difficult way of changing your phrasing if you're not used to doing it and I'm sure you know that as well from leading the session because the minute you say "breathe in" your that like, oh no I shouldn't have said that I should have said "breathing in" and you start going down this big spiral of oh I've said this wrong. What are they going to think now? And that's the total opposite of what mindfulness is meant to be about it's not meant to be judgmental.

DB: Yeah. It's almost about ironic that that's the kind of frame of mind to that you kind of go into sometimes when you're when you're leading a session and then you almost have to catch yourself and be like "No, No, I need to be mindful." You know, I need to kind of, you know, bring that back down.

SG: I know that that was something, some feedback that was given to you after the sessions that your voice is really inviting and really calming and and I know that members of our team have said that when we lead mindfulness sessions, we sound like sex phone workers. We've got that like sultry like low voice that's really inviting, and I think was that's what you're aiming for I suppose.

DB: I think it's; it comes down to the breath as well because when you're trying to almost lead by example and have that kind of in and out breath as you're talking. It just seems a bit more breathy. That's maybe where that quality comes from. Yeah.

SG: Well those of you that are listening just now and you've kind of stuck with us all the way. First of all, well done because I know Dylan and I love a ramble. But also, we are going to get onto leading a very short practice for you just now. So, the reason that we are offering mindfulness as part of Shaper/Caper's work is because as a dance company, we actually have three pillars that provide the basis for all of the projects and all of the Touring that we do. They are Resilience, Creativity, and Health and Well-being. So, it's quite obvious that mindfulness fits into that Health and Well-being pillar.

DB: Yeah. I think it's it's really relevant in you know, the time that we're in just now you can see how it falls into this resilience as well. You know, it's about it's about making sure people are have the tools and the skills that they need to make sure that they themselves are keeping well and going through their own mind and their own thought processes and stuff like that, especially while we are in this kind of lockdown scenario.

SG: So, I suppose we'll get going on a little bit of a mindfulness practice now. This will probably only last about 10-15 minutes. We would encourage you all at home to practice mindfulness every day, whether it's 2 minutes, 20 minutes, an hour, whatever you yourself can give to yourself. Just allowing a couple of moments of stillness and focusing on your breath. We will start with Dylan leading a little bit of movement and then we'll pass back over to myself to finish off. So, if you want to do this in your bare feet or socks so that you can really feel the ground underneath your feet while we come to standing or if you would prefer to keep your shoes on, that's

obviously totally fine. Some people that aren't dancers, they're not used to just being in their bare feet all the time. So do whatever is comfortable for you have a chair nearby that you're able to just sit in straight after the standing section and try and maybe turn your phone off get rid of as many distractions as you can so that you can really just focus on our lovely relaxing voices and hopefully we don't make any mistakes now because we've just told you all about the type of words that we need to use in this session as well. So, we're going to have to be really mindful that everybody knows the tricks of the trade and if we do it wrong.

DB: No pressure then. Amazing, yeah, well, let's get going then. So, you can do this as Sarah was saying you could do this standing up or if you prefer to stay seated, you can also do this movement part seated. Make sure that you're nice and long, your spine is nice and long. And that your arms are uncrossed either in your lap if you're sitting down or by your side. Make sure your legs are uncrossed. Just plant your feet firmly on the floor. Now just gently closing the eyes or lowering the gaze. Imagining our feet are the roots of a tree. Feeling the weight of our bodies planning into the floor as your roots go deeper into the Earth... Noticing where your weight is? Is it forward in the balls of your feet? Or sitting back in the heels? Just noticing... playing with that... Shifting your weight... Forwards... Backwards... Maybe shifting side to side... Feeling that weight spilling and gathering in different parts of your feet... Testing yourself. Maybe seeing how far forward you can go. How far backwards you can go... Not being tempted to open your eyes. Just allowing yourself to stay connected to what you're doing. Where your weight is... bending the knees. Or if you're seated, curving the spine, and straightening... Just in your own time. This is our trunk. Trunk of our tree... Each time you straighten imaging growing taller... moving up to our bellies. We've got a little family of owls that have moved into our bellies, our trunk. Taking a deep breath in expanding the belly and pushing

them right out. And exhaling as they go back into their wee nest... breathing in... and out... in... Expanding the belly... and out... as you breathe in, thinking about drawing power from the ground, right up through your roots and the trunk. Really drawing power right from the Earth's core all the way through... exhaling lifting the arms just a little bit each time as our branches start to grow... arms growing taller with each exhale... and as our branches are growing maybe there is a bit of a breeze gently swaying the arms.. maybe it's sunny and you're trying to feel the warmth of the sun on as much surface area of the branches as possible... just playing... noticing the air around you and the sensation of that on your skin...how does it change if you move faster or slower... think about the rotation of the shoulders, the elbows, wrists...it's getting a bit gusty now so maybe our trunk starts to move following the arms... feeling then twisting of the spine...how does the air feel on your skin now. How can you change how that feels... as the wind begins to die down, gently bring your movement to a stop in your own time. And bring the arms back down. Allowing your self to feel safe. You're rooted into the floor. You're not going anywhere. Taking a moment noticing how we're feeling in our bodies. Is anything different? Feeling that energy still moving around inside our body. Where is it for you? In your arms? Your core? Noticing that even though we have moments of stillness we never fully stop. And that's ok... if you're standing and you'd like to take a seat for the next part of the session. Gently bring your awareness back into the room. And in your own time find a comfortable seated position. And once you're there, closing the eyes. And trying to tune back into that feeling in your body. And I'll pass over to Sarah now.

SG: So, finding yourself settled into your chair, closing your eyes like Dylan said. And just tuning into how your body feels now after you've done some of that

movement... are your arms tired... are you breathing faster... are your legs sore... maybe you feel energised. Maybe you want to do more movement. Not noticing all of these feelings and all of these thoughts passing through your head... and bringing your attention into the little family of owls living inside your belly still... as your breath in, feeling them expand and relax... noticing where your breath is now after all of that movement. Is it still down in your belly? Maybe it's moved up to your chest? Maybe your shoulders are moving, your ribs are moving, maybe your spine is still moving, slowly as you inhale and exhale... if your mind begins to wander, just bringing it back into your body and into your breath. Keeping your intention on the rise and fall of your body with each inhale and exhale... trying to follow the entire length of a breath. So, paying attention to its inception as it enters your body and goes deep into your lungs... and then follow the entire length as it leaves your lungs back out through your mouth or your nose... the entire inhale... and the entire exhale... bringing your awareness even deeper into that breath and focussing not only on its entire journey as it enters your body and leaves your body. But focus on the tiny little pause in between these moments... the gap between the inhale and the exhale... where your body does nothing... that millisecond of pause... not extending it or exaggerating it. Just noticing it... acknowledging that the pause is there... if your mind begins to wander, just bring it back into this idea of this breath... Allowing your attention to stay solely within your lungs, your body... bringing your attention back into the room... noticing the sounds that are around you... maybe there's cars outside.. maybe there's the noise of people, animals... just listening to everything you can hear... try and listen to all sounds at once... allow your attention to really stretch... now bringing your attention all the way back to your body... and listen just to the sound of your breath... maybe you can listen even deeper, to your heart beat, or the blood rushing behind your ears... slowly whenever you're ready,

allowing your attention just to feel, where you are right now. Bringing your awareness to how you're sitting. The feeling of the chair underneath your pelvis, your hands in your lap or by your side... your feet on the ground...maybe there's aches and pains in your body from sitting down all day or moving around. Just noticing all of these things... beginning to introduce some movement into your fingers and toes...wiggling them awake... maybe rolling your shoulders, moving your head from side to side, just doing whatever your body needs to do...and whenever you're ready, opening your eyes and allowing light back in...hopefully you're all feeling as zen and calm as I am right now. So, thank you all for listening to our podcast.

DB: Thank you very much.