



CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS New Research Study Shows Benefits of Mindfulness for Parents

Toronto, March 17, 2015 - A new research study showing the benefits of Mindfulness for parents of adult children living with developmental disabilities was a collaborative research study done in partnership with Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Developmental Services Ontario Toronto Region (DSO TR) at Surrey Place Centre, Community Living Toronto (CLT), York University and the University of Warwick.

“Dr. Yona Lunsky’s research study team were interested in collaborating with us, at the DSO TR and CLT, in order to help answer the question; how best to support families who are supporting their adult children living with developmental disabilities”, says Karen White, Manager DSO TR, Surrey Place Centre.

The appeal to parents to look after their own health and wellness needs was one of the motivating factors behind the recent study; that has now been published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders and just in time for National Family Caregiver Day.

Parents seeking help or services for their adult children were divided into two groups over a period of six weeks. One group participated in a weekly support and information group and learned about resources and services available for their adult children. The DSO TR staff developed the agenda for each meeting based on the group’s input, and arranged for staff working in the area, such as Passport, to meet with the group to present the information and respond to questions. There was time for informal discussion with the group leader and the other caregivers. The other participated in a group-based Mindfulness intervention, co-led by Sue Hutton at Community Living Toronto and Dr. Anna Palucka from CAMH.

“The parents in the Mindfulness group reported reductions in terms of depression and stress, whereas the parents in the other group did not,” says Dr. Lunsky. “And the change was sustained over time. The parents in the Mindfulness group improved and they kept those improvements.”

The experience was so positive for some of the participating parents that more than two years after their experience in the study, they are still organizing Mindfulness meetings among themselves.

“My analogy is, if I was a cup, it was filled right to the brim,” says Lee Steel, one of the parents in the study. “So even if a small issue came up, I would just spill over.”

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Steel, whose 25-year-old son has autism, found herself struggling to find the right supports to help him after he became an adult and was no longer in school. But when she ended up in the Mindfulness group, she soon realized that she had not been paying attention to her own health and wellness. Her introduction to Mindfulness changed all that.

“I am taking more active steps about self-care than I had ever given myself permission to do before,” says Steel. “I didn’t know that part of being a good parent was to have a life, have my own interests. Over the years that really took a back seat. I felt like being a good person, being a good parent, was all about what I could do for somebody else.”

Mindfulness gives caregivers the tools to cope, and focus on self-care. Increased opportunity to access Mindfulness support for families, and caregivers is a strong recommendation from the study. As a result of the positive feedback received from parents and caregivers, a recommendation from the study was to provide pertinent information on ongoing basis using the Shared Learning Forum model. “We feel confident that parents will be better informed going forward as a result of the research study.” says Karen White of DSO TR, Surrey Place Centre.

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About Surrey Place Centre

Surrey Place Centre provides specialized clinical services that are responsive to individual need and which promote health and well-being. In addition to the direct service role, the Centre facilitates system-wide access to information and supports. Our leadership in research, evaluation and education is directed toward advancing knowledge and practice in the field and building the capacity of service systems. As an organization we are committed to supporting the social inclusion of people with developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, as well as young children challenged with visual impairments. For more information visit www.surreyplace.on.ca.

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