



**Out of the Box and into the
Mind-Body Connection:**

**Introducing the REfresh Mindfulness Program
for Healthy Aging and Wellness at Work in
Juniper Senior Housing Communities**

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Digging deeper for the treasure of wellbeing, REfresh Body, Mind & Spirit invigorates inner resources that bring balance and connection into today's fast-paced, digital society.

by Tsultrim Datso and Sue Lembeck-Edens, REfresh creators

REfresh Body, Mind & Spirit, an innovative program to promote wellbeing, uses a mind-body approach to revitalize, restore and re-energize, giving a fresh outlook to senior and workplace wellness. The goal of REfresh is to enhance physical, social, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing to empower all participants to become their best selves, regardless of personal challenges. It is designed to create a supportive community through mindfulness by encouraging both senior living residents and staff members to be more attuned to the health of body and mind and, therefore, function with more awareness.

REfresh draws upon the theory and research of positive psychology, neuroscience, mindfulness training, and mind-body disciplines such as yoga and movement therapy. It offers mind-body techniques of movement and breathing exercises, with reflection on aspects of wellbeing such as stability, connection, enjoyment, and generosity towards oneself and others. The program consists of guided group sessions, daily community wellness breaks, weekly themed topics, eye-catching posters with inspirational messages, reminder takeaway cards and leadership training.

REfresh strengthens the natural human ability of mindfulness. Mindfulness here is defined as sensing and perceiving one's experience in the present moment with care, confidence, and curiosity. By integrating REfresh into the fabric of daily life at Juniper, residents and staff benefit from stress reduction and build an attentive community together with humor and delight.

The International Council on Active Aging's vision is to "change the way we age . . . both society's perception of aging and improving the quality of life for aging Baby Boomers and older adults within the seven dimensions of wellness (emotional, vocational, physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, environmental)" (www.icaa.cc/about_us/missionvision.htm). ICAA Advisory board member, Lawrence Biscontini (2017), explains how mindfulness, an overall awareness and integration of brain, body and breath, is ideal for enhancing wellbeing, health and healing in older adults.

The wellbeing of workers is now being tied to mindfulness as well. "Growing evidence demonstrates the beneficial effects of mindfulness practices among workers, in terms of both physical symptoms (e.g., pain) and mental well-being," according to a recent study in the CDC journal Preventing Chronic Disease (Kachan et al., 2017). Using survey data for 50,343 employed adults (representing approximately 131 million US workers), they found "high and increasing rates of exposure to mindfulness practices among US workers. . . . Approximately 1 in 7 workers report engagement in some form of mindfulness-based activity . . ." The researchers cite studies showing that mindfulness-based interventions for health care providers, reduced stress, mood disturbances, and burnout (Krasner et al. 2009) and can improve workers' health, increase productivity, and reduce employers' costs (Burton et al. 2016).

**REfresh:
Building
community,
1 breath
at a time**

REfresh was developed to address these societal trends and research findings:

Active Aging Movement

- In *The Longevity Economy*, Joe Coughlin (2017) critiques products and services that are based on a deficit model of aging and shows the need for addressing more than basic survival needs of older adults; he strongly advocates for a thriving model, one that leads to fulfillment, creativity, meaning, purpose, productivity and contribution in later stages of life.
- Mindfulness is globally trending as part of over-50 fitness programming in classes such as Seated Yoga, Mindful Breathing, Sit and Feel, Mind and Motion, Breathing and Stress classes (Biscontinini, 2017).

Mindfulness and Aging Studies

- Older adults cited social support, stress management, increased quality of life, elevated mood, greater acceptance and awareness in daily life as wellbeing benefits of group mindfulness training (Fountain-Zaragoza & Prakash, 2014).
- Mindfulness training among seniors led to an emphasis on being rather than doing, sensory awareness as a way to connect with the present moment, active acceptance of things as they are, and opening to life with constructive and creative responsiveness (Keller, Singh & Winton, 201).
- Older adults who participated in yoga postures, breathing and mindfulness exercises showed gains in memory and cognitive flexibility (Gothe, Kramer & McAuley, 2014). Seniors interviewed about their mind-body practice of yoga reported the following benefits: greater acceptance of self and others, more compassion and understanding, a greater sense of community and less loneliness (Kishida et al., 2017).

Mindfulness at Work

- “A mindful revolution is spreading across all sectors of professional life, as organizations integrate mindfulness practices to improve efficiency, compassion, and creativity while employees increasingly seek balance at work and at home... (www.enaropa.org/course-overview/mindful-work/).

“Aligning with our mission to encourage active bodies and fulfilled spirits to empower people to live their best life, REfresh is one more example of Juniper’s commitment to changing the face of aging,” states Lynne Katzmann, founder and CEO of Juniper Communities. “We are applying the rapidly growing science of mindfulness to chart a positive transformation in long-term healthcare and enrich the lives of senior living associates, residents and family members.”

- Harvard chose to offer mindfulness training to address employee stress because “...First of all, the current neuroscience was just exploding about the benefits of mindfulness. And second, mindfulness was beginning to really emerge as a force in the corporate space. Along with the science and corporate momentum, the team wanted something that spoke to the goal of building ‘One Harvard’” (Hurlock, 2016).

According to Anne Campbell, Senior Executive Director at Juniper Brookline, “The healthcare industry as a whole has taken on a more resident-, person-centered approach. I see this as the next step of that; to be present for somebody. It’s not only knowing that Mrs. Jones likes to get up at 10:00 in the morning, it’s also knowing that when you help Mrs. Jones at 10:00, you’re completely there with her. Instead of thinking of the next thing you have to be doing.”

REfresh Pilot Study Findings

A 6-month pilot study of REfresh sessions for staff and residents in assisted and independent living was conducted in 2017 at Juniper Village at Brookline located in State College, PA. Analysis of participant attendance data, feedback surveys, and focus group interviews reveal positive findings.

1,036 participant sessions were conducted (the number of participants multiplied by the number of sessions each attended); 38 individuals attended 11-73 sessions per person, averaging 1 session per week for 30 weeks; 33 participants responded to a post-program survey and 26 completed group interviews.

Respondent reports include the following:

- **Greater sense of wellbeing in mind and spirit – 71% of all survey responden**

“I keep coming because I like it. Some days, when I don’t go to REfresh in a week, I can feel my body, my bones and stuff, that are tight and stiff. I really enjoy it for that reason.” - Staff member

- **Greater sense of wellbeing in body – 68% of all survey respondents**

“I like learning to breathe through things.

You get a little stressed out during your day, you forget to stop and just take a breath. It’s amazing how that can just calm you down. Whether you’re angry or sad or – just having one of those days, to stop and breathe is beneficial for me.” - Staff member

“Sometimes when they have their themes for the week, I do notice that I look at things differently. I think, oh, I haven’t really thought of it that way. So those are in the back of my mind, the different themes ...they teach.” - Staff member

- **Decreased stress – 68% of all survey respondents**

“I feel lighter afterwards and a little more focused. If I’ve come in a hurry and have a lot on my mind . . . I have a little more mental clarity when I’m done.” - Staff member

“It was a good, quiet time. It redirects your thinking and I always felt relaxed when I got through”
- Resident

- **Increased acceptance of self and others – 75% of all survey respondents**

“Able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes ” - Resident

- **More thoughtful responses to others – 71% of all respondents**

- **Increased enjoyment while working at Juniper – 87% of staff respondents**

“A time for fellowship” - Staff member

- **Decreased stress – 68% of all survey respondents**

“Sometimes I’m kind of sleepy and drowsy and going there REfresh] wakes me up. I have more energy then”
- Staff member

- **Would recommend REfresh to others – 100% of residents and leadership survey respondents**

What's unique about REfresh?

REfresh is among the first comprehensive, body-mind awareness (also known as mindfulness) wellbeing program designed for residents and staff in senior living communities. What distinguishes it from others is its emphasis on community building, inclusivity, and accessibility. Connections among residents and staff are enhanced by participating in shared group sessions. Both the terminology and types of practices accommodate young and old across all levels of ability and care. Rather than meditation, yoga, or tai chi classes, REfresh sessions uniquely combine mind-body wellbeing disciplines into guided experiences that are embedded in on-going activities of the workday, accessible to residents and staff.



Residents and staff in a REfresh session open together.

“The best effect of everything was the community that was built. The whole program became a fabric of what we do here.” - Anne Campbell, Senior Executive Director

How REfresh is evolving

Based on its current success, Juniper is looking to expand the applications of REfresh in all its communities during 2019. A more sensory version of REfresh was recently created for residents living with dementia. Staff members report the program provides enhanced focusing and calming effects for residents. Juniper's Well-spring Memory Care setting now includes a REfresh Room, a quiet and soothing environment where staff can renew for 5-10 minutes using REfresh techniques.

Technological developments include REfresh audio recordings for use on demand and videos that staff can use for activities with residents. Juniper is currently piloting an in-house REfresh facilitator training program for staff, a program that might possibly be shared with other organizations in the future.

Suggestions for developing a Body-Mind Wellbeing program in your senior housing community:

- 1.** Identify how your wellbeing program for residents and/or staff meets larger organizational goals, thus enlisting support of leadership and the retirement community at large.
- 2.** Use Community Participatory Program design: consult potential participants about their needs and interests, language and culture to choose program components. Solicit their feedback periodically to modify the program over time.
- 3.** Be inclusive of potential participants' differing abilities, schedules, and locations in order to create meaningful activities and easy access.
- 4.** Experiment with delivery methods such as length of guided practice, group size, and technological aids, such as public address system announcements and recorded sessions available on demand.
- 5.** Graphics and written materials such as posters and practice cards can empower participants to use mindfulness techniques outside of formal sessions.
- 6.** Consider reserving a quiet place of renewal for staff.
- 7.** Remember that an essential aspect of wellbeing is humor – keep it light and enjoyable! passion and understanding, a greater sense of community and less loneliness (Kishida et al., 2017).

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