In the aftermath of the Covid-19 Pandemic, more and more people are suffering from mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression.

Is there anything we can do for ourselves to help?

Why Mindfulness is a Super Power.

Researchers believe that using Mindfulness enhances our own ability to 'turn down' the volume of our body's response to stress. Stress can compromise the immune system and lead to other health problems or make them worse. Lowering our stress response is possible – once we learn how.

A useful analogy to understand this a little more, is to compare human beings to aeroplanes. We operate perfectly well on autopilot for much of the time, just like an aeroplane. Systems are in place to keep things ticking along quite nicely without much intervention. However, just like an aeroplane, changes can happen that require the pilot to switch off the autopilot so that they can become engaged with whatever is happening in the present moment and make whatever adjustments are necessary for the aeroplane to remain steady and safe.

Trouble is, as human's we don't always know how to switch off our own autopilot. We may not even have noticed that anything has changed. By the time we realise something isn't right with our own operation system, alarms are already sounding, lights are flashing and crisis steadily looms on the horizon.

Mindfulness practice allows us to be just like the skilled pilot. It doesn't mean we can change the stormy skies, turbulence or malfunctions but we can be trained to become better equipped at recognising the signs of potential trouble before it's too late.

Just like any training whether it be to fly aircraft or practice Mindfulness, the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Scientists have learned that London Taxi Driver's completing 'the knowledge' show significant increase in size of the hippocampus – the area responsible for memory and thought. Understanding these kinds of changes in the brain help researchers to develop further knowledge around rehabilitation programmes.

Research has discovered that the grey matter in the hippocampus can also become thicker after practising Mindfulness, showing increased activity in these areas of thought and memory. The amygdala may be best known as the part of the brain that drives the so-called "fight or flight" response. While it is often associated with the body's fear and stress responses, it also plays a pivotal role in memory. Research has found that neural pathways in the brain actually rewire themselves if they are 'trained'.   Mindfulness meditation therefore can be described as exercise for the brain so effectively we turn down the volume on fear and turn up the volume on increased memory and focused thought.

This coming out of autopilot allows us notice with much more awareness, what is actually happening to us and around us in the present moment. Rather than closing our eyes, turning away or simply ignoring the signs – we learn how to make adjustments that will improve our experience.

Over time we can see that despite the turbulence, storms and difficulties – we have the resources and resilience to get through it all. Once we realise this, we are able to face lives challenges face on, with wisdom and peace.

Sandra Harper has been an ADI for 18 years and has been integrating Mindfulness into driver training with great effect. During lockdown Sandra has been teaching Mindfulness online on behalf of a large organisation and this programme is currently being delivered globally in two time zones.

Apart from teaching meditation (the brain training bit), Sandra invites people to view the world from alternative perspectives. The only real prerequisite is to be curious and open to possibilities.

In this session Sandra will guide us through a practice known as "Taking in the Good – Balancing the Negativity Bias" Participants are invited to come along with a pen and paper and an open mind for this journey of exploration. Sandra will explain some of the neuroscience behind the 'Negativity Bias' and then guide a meditation practice.