



CASE STUDY

SPACE TO BREATHE

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SPACE TO BREATHE

Spirituality is concerned with the human spirit, including what gives us identity and meaning, and allows us space to explore purpose and connections.

Non-religious spirituality does not locate itself within any particular religion or tradition. Space to Breathe, as the name suggests, is an organisation that was setup in a time-pressured, task-heavy culture to offer space for conversation and to offer an invitation to explore what spirituality means within the landscape of life. Its focus is on well-being, with non-religious spirituality as the main tool, looking to provide authentic, spiritual solutions to everyday problems. It seeks to inspire people to live well, live fully and live deeply. And everything potentially can offer the opportunity for encountering the spiritual.

One element of the work at Space to Breathe is the use of creative arts to address well-being. They provide a language for our thoughts and emotions when it's hard to speak things out loud or when what we really feel is hard to pin down. By way of example, we run a project offering creative well-being support to several businesses in the Sheffield area. To maintain confidentiality, business or organisation names have been omitted in the account below.

Businesses are given the chance to have an art installation brought to their workplace to stimulate conversations about well-being. These pieces are usually around A1 size and are created by local artists. They ask a simple well-being question through their artwork. The piece is accompanied by an activity that invites each person to respond and asks them to bring feedback or comments to the wider organisation.

One of the art pieces is "The Art of Connection". This involves a beautiful and original artwork by Sheffield artist Lucy Freeman. Lucy was given the challenge of coming up with a piece that asks questions of how we connect to others. How do I feel connected in the place I work? What enables me to feel valued? What is my role in the larger picture of my working life? These questions were inspired by the writing of Brené Brown as she describes the nature of connection. "I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."¹ We were keen to invite people to explore their sense of value and connection, with particular attention to their working connections.

After Lucy had presented her concept, the Space to Breathe team created an activity to accompany the piece that was a jigsaw-themed response, picking up on Lucy's design. Printed on small pieces of jigsaw were words that aimed to encourage and inspire staff to know how important they are and that their organisation simply wouldn't be the same without them. These were positive values and the invitation to the staff teams was to choose a word that felt meaningful to them. These pieces were deliberately small enough to be taken away and kept as a source of encouragement. The questions Lucy had used as inspiration for her piece of art were also displayed for staff to consider. How do I feel connected? What enables me to feel valued? What is my role?

Alongside these small pieces of jigsaw were larger pieces, constructed by another local artist and designer, James from Makers on Abbeydale Road in Sheffield. These were for people to write their responses on to both the questions displayed and the individual values that they had felt drawn to. This was also an opportunity for people to provide any other written feedback.

The written responses were then gathered together and sensitively collated. Everything was treated anonymously, which we felt was an important way to encourage participation. The collated responses were presented as a report to the organisations, giving them real data and a real-time picture of how staff felt connected to the business, to each other and themselves.

The description above offers a brief window into how the project progressed and some of the rationale for it. One of the most interesting elements of this work for the Space to Breathe team was to notice the different ways in which people responded to the project and how their engagement changed over the week. There was a direct correlation between the amount of time spent with staff teams and the level of participation in the project. We discovered that as we engaged with staff face-to-face, actually being present and chatting to them, there was a significant increase in their level of engagement. This in turn allowed genuine conversations to flow and valuable, honest feedback to be given. There was value in sharing the space with staff teams and connecting with them. It was humbling to be part of the life of these organisations for a week. It was a privilege to be allowed into the heart of a community and to build up a level of trust through attention to and an interest in each member of staff as individuals.



¹ Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010).

Feedback from businesses taking part has been encouraging in terms of the experience for staff, how thought-provoking it has proved and how it has highlighted well-being at work. This has been an exciting project to be involved in. It has provided opportunities for deep learning for us as a team as well as providing creative spaces for the business teams involved to begin to grow together. It has reinforced our commitment to supporting the creation of a culture of workplace well-being. Encouraging people in the area of well-being is a vital way to support both the spiritual and the mental health of people in the UK.

This connection between spirituality and mental health underpins much of Space to Breathe's work, which has so far included:

- well-being coaching with an emphasis on exploring spirituality
- well-being days
- pop-up workspaces, building community within existing networks of entrepreneurs and solo workers
- creative, well-being support for businesses. These frequently begin with an art installation as a way of initiating well-being conversations
- an arts label called Proost, collaborating with artists looking to explore soulful creativity in their work
- support to festivals, such as Greenbelt and the Edinburgh Festival
- art and reflection days, built around a creative arts focus.

In the introduction to his bestseller *The Road Less Travelled*, Dr M. Scott Peck says, "I make... no distinction between the process of achieving spiritual growth and achieving mental growth. They are one and the same."²

Nicky Redsell is a coach and co-director of Space to Breathe, a community interest company based in Sheffield. It is an organisation that uses non-religious spirituality and the creative arts to nurture the wellbeing of others. See www.spacetobreathe.eu and Twitter @space2breathe. Nicky worked with pioneers at the Centre for Pioneer Learning for six years, latterly as centre director, and is currently chaplain for lay ministry students at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, providing pastoral and spiritual support.



² M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled* (London: Hutchinson, 1993).

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