

# Conversation for Kindness

## Kindness in the workplace: Benefits & Barriers

September 2022

## About the movement:

[Conversation for kindness](#) is a monthly meeting was set up in the summer of 2020 by eight colleagues and friends working in healthcare across Sweden, the UK and the USA: Bob Klaber, Dominique Allwood, Maureen Bisognano, Goran Henriks, Suzie Bailey, Anette Nilsson, Gabby Matthews & James Mountford. The purpose of the meeting was to have some time together to continue some initial conversations around kindness, and its role at the 'business end' of healthcare, and to plan interactive workshops on this topic.

## Conversations for kindness

- Monthly virtual call on the 3rd Thursday of every month [6-7pm GMT]
- A focus on listening, learning, thinking differently and mobilising for action
- An open culture of sharing of resources, energy and ideas

If you would like to join the conversation for kindness please complete the [contact form](#).

# On the day

On 15 September, about **56** Kindness in Healthcare community members came together to connect and discuss the **BBC Kindness Test**. Hosted by Bob Klaber and Suzie Bailey, we heard from guest speakers **Dr Robin Banerjee** and co-speaker **Dr Gillian Sandstrom** who shared their work in understanding what kindness looks like at work (and specifically in healthcare), discussed the benefits and downsides of kindness in the workplace, highlighted the barriers that prevent people from being kinder at work and talked about the BBC Kindness Test - the largest ever public science project on kindness. We reflected on what we'd heard discussed in breakouts, before coming back for a panel discussion.

This insights pack  
summarises the  
session

[Watch the event on YouTube](#)



# Participants were from all over the world

Denmark
Canada
Sweden
Norway
France
Australia
Netherlands
United Kingdom
United States of America



“Hello, from Nära Vård och Hälsa, Region Uppsala , Sweden. So excited to be able to join in live for the first time!”

“Hi from Rotterdam, the Netherlands. First time here. Looking forward to it.”

‘Good morning from Melbourne Australia. 3 am here and so pleased to see you all’

“Hello! Lovely to be joining from North London”

# Talk: 'Kindness in the workplace: Benefits and barriers'

## by Robin Banerjee and Gillian Sandstrom

Robin and Gillian shared their amazing work on The Kindness Test study, the largest study ever conducted on kindness. Completed in 2021, by a team led by Robin and Gillian and the University of Sussex and supported by BBC Radio 4, over 60,000 people took part from the UK and 44 other countries.

The Kindness Test was an online, anonymous survey. The questions that comprised the survey were designed to explore the following areas:

- What is kindness?
- Why is kindness important?
- Where are people kind?
- Barriers to kindness?
- Who is kind?
- How has kindness changed over time?

When asked to recall their most recent experience of kindness, most frequently participants identified friends and family as having been involved in their most recent experience, BUT 9% of participants identified that strangers were involved in their most recent experience of kindness. That's quite a significant proportion of kindness experiences occurring with strangers to the recipient!

When asked where people are kind to them, most participants identified their home environment as being the main setting for kindness (52%), medical settings (28%), workplaces (26%). Being a healthcare-based interest group, Robin and Gillian focused a large part of their wonderful presentation on kindness in medical settings. [You can find their slides at the end of this insight pack.](#)

Results were broken into different types of kindness experienced in medical settings:

- Doing something for you
- Giving things to you
- Providing you with information
- Saying something kind or supportive



**Dr Robin Banerjee**



**Dr. Gillian Sandstrom**

*Continued on next slide*

# Talk: 'Kindness in the workplace: Benefits and barriers'

by Robin Banerjee and Gillian Sandstrom (cont.)

By far, the most respondents acknowledge their experience of kindness to be the act of **saying something kind or supportive**. So you can see, when asked to describe what this kindness looked like, it wasn't just big gestures or acts involving a lot of effort or time, acts of kindness were also identified as things like being smiled at, people being friendly to them, or acknowledging them or their feelings and emotions. **The feeling of being seen or heard by others.**

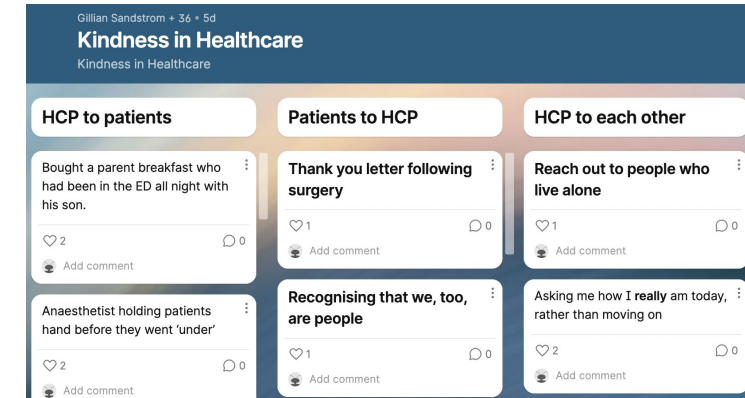
**Gillian** expanded on this concept, labelling these sorts of small gestures '**Minimal Social Interactions**'. Minimal Social Interactions can have a huge and positive impact on others! These are the sort of micro-level and 'blink and you'll miss it' social interactions that are increasingly important in a culture that increasingly sees people becoming disconnected from each other, never more so than in lives affected by pandemic restrictions for years. [She invited us to share own stories of kindness in healthcare via this padlet.](#)

Gillian has done several studies on minimal social interactions – looking at the benefits and barriers. There are several benefits to minimal social interactions:

- Benefits that come from **being seen and heard** (as above)
- Mood enhancing effects for both giver and receiver
- Enhanced feelings of trust between parties
- Improved learning and perspective taking abilities – when talking to someone who is 'different' to you, you learn something on a personal level about yourself, you learn something new about your own perspective, and something new about someone else's (or 'other') perspective.

One of the main barriers is concerns about how one's act of kindness is interpreted. **Our own sense of vulnerability** can be one of our biggest perceived barriers. Not having enough time or finding opportunities are also listed as major perceived barriers. But we also know that for the majority of respondents, the most common experience of kindness from others comes from the minimal social interactions, kind words or gestures that don't involve a great deal of time, energy or resource, or need to generate obvious opportunities.

You can find links to Gillian's work on this at this website: [https://gilliansandstrom.com/talking2strangers\\_research/](https://gilliansandstrom.com/talking2strangers_research/)



# Key themes emerged in our discussion

Rather than go to breakout rooms we stayed in a single group to reflect and discuss what we had heard. Our discussion was wide ranging and very rich but there were 4 main themes that came through in our discussion.

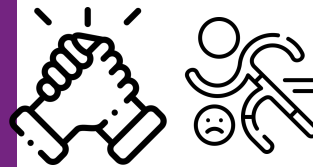
1 What does kindness mean to someone who is 'receiving' it?



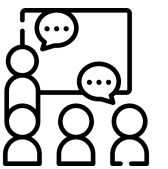
2 What does kindness look like to someone or to an organisation who is 'providing' it?



3 Ways in which people experience micro actions in different settings



4 Considerations for developing kindness



# Key themes emerged in our group discussion

## 1 What does kindness mean to someone whose 'receiving' it?



"I had a kind interaction on a GP phone call yesterday. I have never met this GP before and they gave a call back about a minor issue. They made chat about my job and about their own perspectives and I felt so happy afterwards!"

"feeling seen,  
feeling humanised"

"Kindness sometimes  
means being quiet"

"you realise very quickly if a conversation comes from the heart and out of true interest or not"  
"Authenticity really does matter."

"Experienced the kindness of a therapy dog and its owner (!) in an outpatient dept."

"Kindness is  
sometimes just being  
present/engaged"

"it doesn't feel kind or authentic if it's from a script"

### For 'Receivers' Kindness is:

- Authentic
- Non-scripted
- To be seen
- To be treated as an individual/human being
- Kindness isn't always the same for every person



# Key themes emerged in our group discussion

2

What does kindness look like to someone or to an organisation whose 'providing' it?



"So interesting to hear the BBC's approach to kindness was very similar to much of the NHSs ('soft and fluffy').....hence why we have been talking about kindness being the BUSINESS end of healthcare"

"I feel like tea offering is a very british culture centred act of kindness!"

"Thinking about 'being seen' makes me wonder about people with for example communication difficulties, who perhaps do not like eye contact, what other means may we use to show we see them."

"The 10/5 Rule, also known as the "Zone of Hospitality Rule," is a well-known guiding principle for extending courtesy to customers in the hospitality, healthcare, retail, and other service industries. The rule instructs, whenever a staff member is within ten feet of a guest, the staff member must make eye contact and smile to greet the approaching guest."

"Kindness is the glue!"

**For 'Providers' Kindness can or should be:**

- Business/standard practices
- An authentic feature of customer service
- Adapted for individuals
- Part of the culture
- A way to build relationships
- Role modelled

"We did a virtual Whose Shoes session around supporting people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities and flipped 'micro aggression' into 'Micro first steps of support' - crowdsourced it live and it was very powerful and positive"

**An important consideration was that individuals want authenticity and how we express kindness as organisations can at times be too structured**

*Kindness in healthcare*

# Key themes emerged in our group discussion

## 3 Ways in which people experience micro actions or 'minimal social interactions' in different settings



"Gillian I LOVE your minimal social interaction work. When I run, I practice my own MSI testing! I make a point of smiling and greeting every person I come across on my run. When I travel I do this MSI test. Some cities and places are kinder than others, based on what reactions (or not) I get back! Some people are thrilled to be greeted, others move out of my way haha. My small town has a much higher hit rate of a positive response to MSI than the big city 3 hours away."

"Saying something kind turned out to be VERY highly valued by people"

"I have some "new /old" friends now and find the interactions across generations to be soooo fruitful"

"it's almost like the opposite of a microaggression. A microkindness (?)--and I'm thinking, the point is, such is not random, by definition. However 'small' it has to be personalised and toward meeting a need from the other"

### Key takeaways:

- Encourage multi-generational interactions
- Even a small act of kindness can have a positive impact
- Turn microaggressions into "Microkindness"
- There can be difference in both reaction to kindness and expression of kindness based on country, city, town and culture

# Key themes emerged in our group discussion

## 4 Considerations for developing kindness



“How teachable is kindness?”  
“Is it about teaching or can we grow a kind culture in other ways?”  
“I think growing a kind culture needs to be embedded right through life and education plays a key role.”

“Are kind actions more significant than kind words?”

“people think being kind is a weakness.”

“The seductive nature of knowledge and hard skills over relationships and teams is an Achilles heel for medicine”

“In private FB groups there are lots of groups that non members never see which have created incredibly safe spaces to connect, to reach out and the kindness is simply wonderful. Social media can be a force for good”

“Values are so important, we all have being kind in our control and being kind to others definitely influences others to be kind”

### Key considerations:

- How can we teach, grow and develop kindness? What stage in life does it start and how do we nurture it?
- How significant is an act of kindness?
- How can encourage professionals to proactively develop soft skills that incorporate kindness?
- We need to change the negative mindset around kindness as being “soft”
- Encourage kindness through being kind
- Create safe spaces that foster kindness e.g. safe spaces on social media

# Further resources

**Speakers and participants shared lots of further reading, blogs and videos in the chat box in response to the discussion:**

## Resources and links

- Website for Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/research/centres/kindness/>
- Robin's website: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/cress/>
- Gillian's website: <https://gilliansandstrom.com/>
- Padlet: <https://uofsussex.padlet.org/qsandstrom/kindhealth>
- PGCert course on the Psychology of Kindness and Wellbeing at Work: <https://study-online.sussex.ac.uk/online-courses/psychology-of-kindness/>
- Kings Fund free online course - Leading with Kindness <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/an-introduction-to-leading-with-compassion-and-kindness-in-health-and-social-care>
- BBC Radio4 coverage of The Kindness Test: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00154cp>
- BBC1 The Anatomy of Kindness <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00154cp>
- The blindspot in public policy (Julia Unwin) <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/kindness-emotions-and-human-relationships-the-blind-spot-in-public-policy/>
- Podcast on kindness (featuring our very own Bob Klaber!) <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1838805/10815288-32-dr-bob-klaber-kindness-matters>
- Podcast with Rachel Tomlinson (progressive primary school headteacher) <https://whoseshoes.buzzsprout.com/1838805/10445170-27-rachel-tomlinson-a-progressive-head-teacher>
- East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust - video on how kindness and civility matters in care <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6apzHxts-Y>
- How burnout affects patient safety (Guardian article) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/sep/14/burnout-in-doctors-doubles-chances-of-patient-safety-problems-study-finds>
- The role of kindness in Cancer Care [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320439113\\_Role\\_of\\_Kindness\\_in\\_Cancer\\_Care](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320439113_Role_of_Kindness_in_Cancer_Care)
- Using padlet as a web resource - stories in health [Whose Shoes - overview \(padlet.com\)](https://www.whoseshoes.com/whoseshoes-overview)

## And a little bit of fun:

- Tipping in US vs UK (optimal interactions) Zadie Smith (New Yorker article) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/09/06/magazine20131104take-it-or-leave-it>
- Personalised interactions in teaching (inspiration for new handshakes!) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0jgcyfC2r8>
- Minimal Social Interactions the 3 year old way [pic.twitter.com/C4ISyYU2eb](https://pic.twitter.com/C4ISyYU2eb)

# Acknowledgements

This insights pack has been co-produced by:  
Nicki Macklin  
The team at Kaleidoscope Health and Care  
Dr. Bob Klaber

# Presentation

Dr. Robin Banerjee

Dr. Gillian Sandstrom

# Kindness in the workplace: Benefits and barriers

Dr. Robin Banerjee

Dr. Gillian Sandstrom



# Today's session

- Introduction to the Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness
- Results of The Kindness Test
- Research on minimal social interactions
- What kindness means for you in your work
  - Padlet activity
- Questions, chat



# Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness

The Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness brings together an interdisciplinary team of academics and diverse community partners to explore, investigate, and illuminate kindness and its impacts on people and communities.

## The Kindness Test

The largest ever public science project on kindness, conducted in partnership with BBC Radio 4.

[Find out more about The Kindness Test](#)



People and partners



Research



Knowledge exchange



News and media



Teaching



Kindness on campus



# The Kindness Test

- Largest ever public science project on kindness
- >60,000 responses
- Diversity:
  - All regions of the UK as well as 144 countries
  - Huge range of ages, from 18 to 99
  - Wide range of topics

The logo for 'The Kindness Test' features the text 'The Kindness Test' in a teal, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is an illustration of two hands, one light-skinned and one dark-skinned, holding a bright orange flower together. The background is a light teal color with a subtle pattern of small white dots.

The  
Kindness  
Test

# Research questions

- what is kindness?
- why is kindness important?
- where are people kind?
- barriers to kindness
- who is kind?
- how has kindness changed over time?

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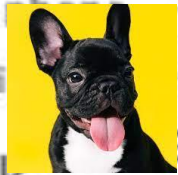
The  
Kindness  
Test

# What does kindness look like?

The last time someone was kind to you

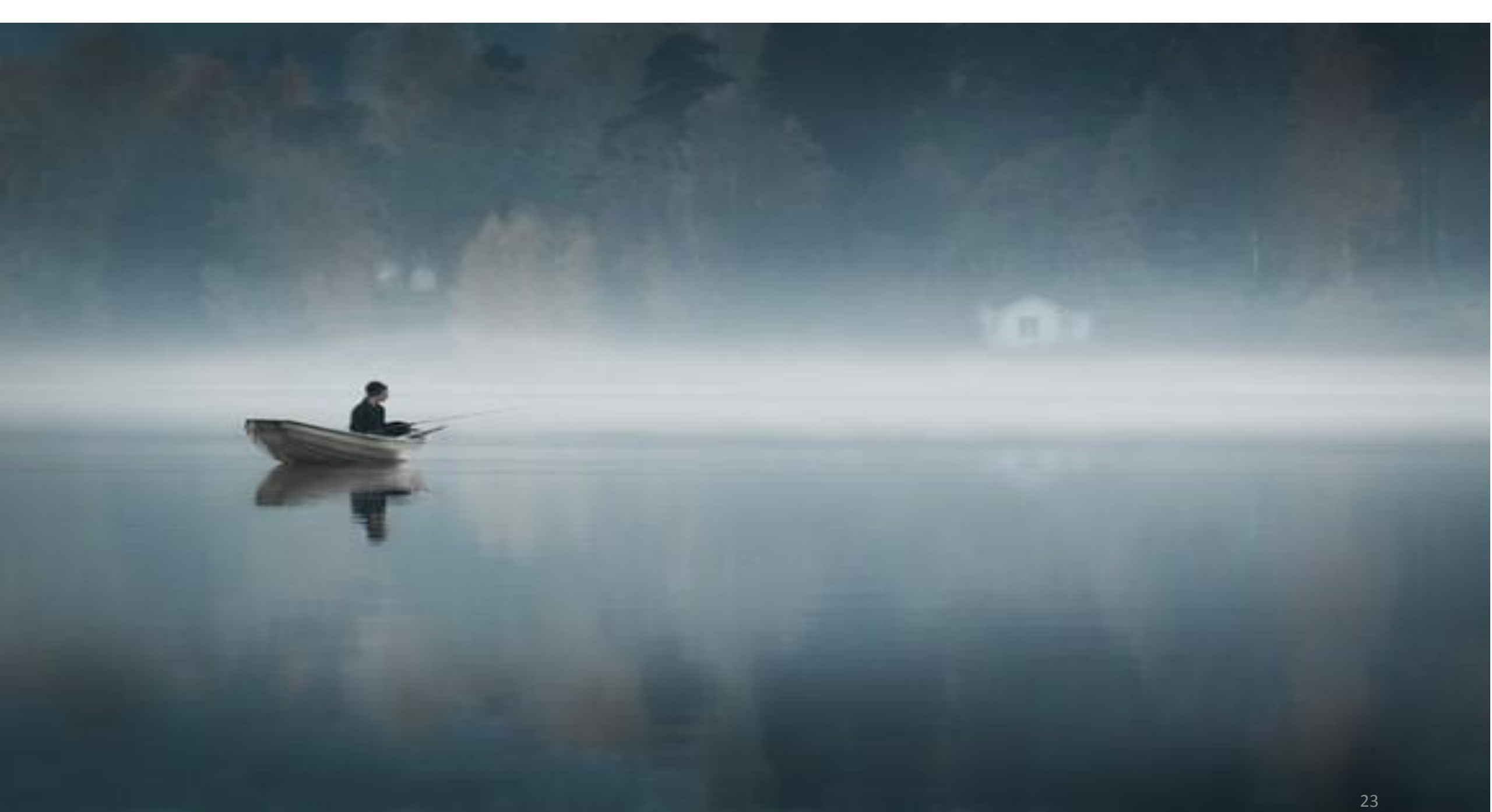
- Who was the person who was kind to you?
  - 9% from a stranger

# Kindness from strangers



# Research program

- Benefits of minimal social interactions
- Barriers to minimal social interactions







# Benefits of minimal social interactions: Well-being

- Field experiment, talking to the barista in a social way or an efficient way
- Field experiment, I trained volunteers at the Tate Modern art gallery to talk to visitors



# Benefits of minimal social interactions: Enjoying class

- Classroom experiment, with different lab groups
  - Displaying nameboards
  - Being greeted at the door by the instructor
  - Neither



# Benefits of being seen

Participant



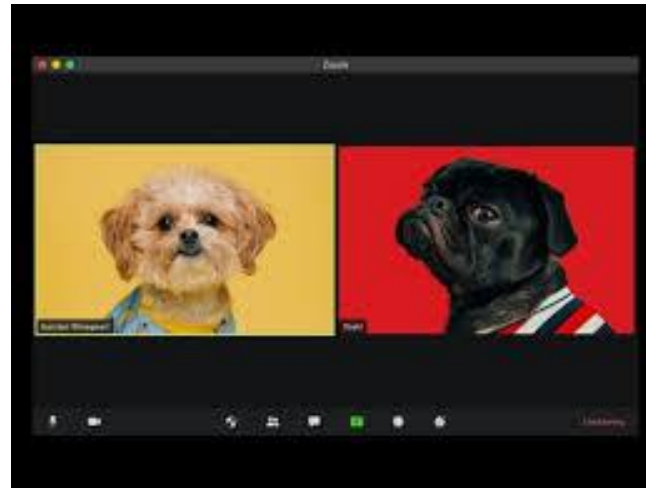
Confederate



Experimenter



# Benefits of minimal social interactions: Trust

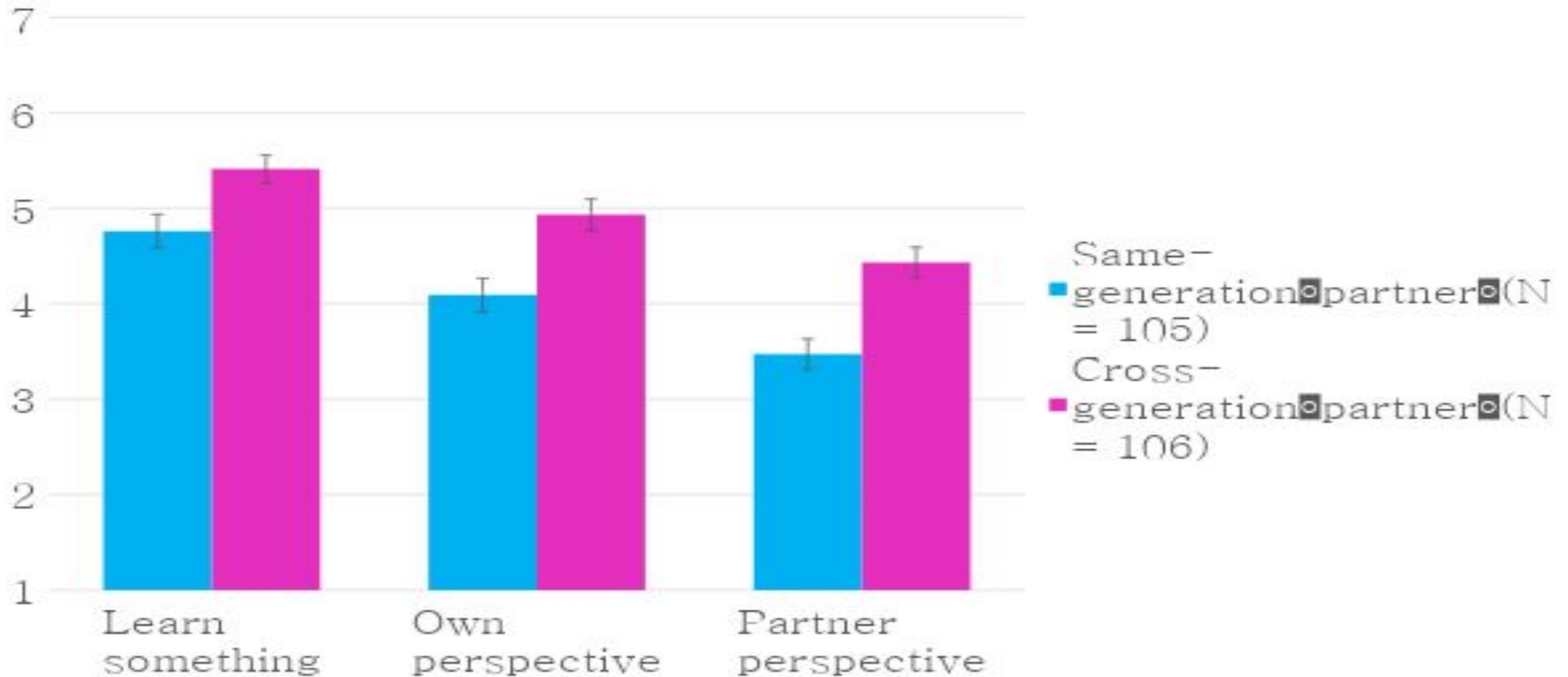


# Benefits of minimal social interactions: Learning, perspective

- Participants were:
  - 25-30 (younger)
  - 65-70 (older)
- Conversation was:
  - Same-generational
  - Cross-generational



# Benefits of minimal social interactions: Learning, perspective



# Benefits of minimal social interactions



# Research program

- Benefits of minimal social interactions
- Barriers to minimal social interaction
  - They worry about a lot of things, but
  - Fears are overblown
    - Even talking to someone dissimilar is positive
      - Cross-generational conversations
  - Practice makes perfect





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The  
Kindness  
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# Research questions

- what is kindness?
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The  
Kindness  
Test



# Where are people kind?

Which of these are the places where you are **MOST** likely to see kindness?

- home (52%),
- **Medical settings (28%)**
- workplaces (26%)
- in the streets (18%)
- green spaces (22%)
- shops (22%)
- Place of worship (15%)
- Restaurants (13%)
- Transport (13%)
- Online (10%)
- Education (7%)
- Sports (5%)

The Kindness Test

# Kindness in medical settings

The last time someone was kind to you

- Where was it?
  - In a medical setting (e.g. doctor, dentist, hospital) (889 responses)
- Who was the person who was kind to you?
  - Service provider, including medical, hospitality, retail or other (614 responses)
- Type of act (from service providers)
  - Doing something for you (92 responses)
  - Giving things to you (18)
  - Providing you with information (126)
  - Saying something kind/supportive (333)



## The last time someone was kind to you

- In a medical setting
- **FROM** service provider
- N = 614

- “I am currently in hospital so acts of kindness are all around me”
- “People at hospital going over and above their jobs to support me”
- “I was feeling ill and visited the urgent care. Everyone was sympathetic, kind, and helpful. They gave me their full attention and **made me feel heard.**”
- “All the staff were very kind and **treated me as an individual**”
- “nurse **introduced herself** to me by her first name in an effort to put me at ease with the situation”



## The last time someone was kind to you

- In a medical setting
- **FROM** service provider
- N = 614
- Doing something for you (N = 92)

- Helped to find room, accompanied to door/car/taxi
- Staying late/coming in early (e.g., for emergency appointments, flu jabs)
- Rescheduling after missed appointments, computer glitches
- Bending the rules, making exceptions (often to visit patients)
- “I was getting an MRI and after I was all ready to go and moving into the machine, my nose started itching fierce. She itched it for me with gauze.”



## The last time someone was kind to you

- In a medical setting
- **FROM** service provider
- N = 614
- Giving things to you (N = 18)

- Cups of tea, biscuits/sandwiches
  - “I was in A&E and needed to eat and drink ,the man charged with cleaning the area I was in went out of his way to find me a cheese sandwich”
- “Individual brought in thank you gifts for staff following the care they had received.”
- Free brushes from the dentist/hygienist
- Free/discounted treatments from dentist/chiropractor
- “I was given an enlargement of a photo of my husband, that I had said was nice, by an employee in his care home.”



## The last time someone was kind to you

- In a medical setting
- **FROM** service provider
- N = 614
- Providing you with information (N = 126)

- Taking time to explain, provide details, keep informed, answer questions
- Listening (patience)
- Help filling out forms
- “I was in hospital for two months earlier this year, seriously ill, the staff contacted my wife every day with updates on my condition”



The  
Kindness  
Test

The last time someone was kind to you

- In a medical setting
- **FROM** service provider
- N = 614
- Saying something kind/supportive (N=333)



# Share your story of kindness

Please use Padlet to share an act of kindness you performed, received or witnessed at work.

Access by:

- scanning this QR code (open your camera app and point it at the image)
- OR
- <https://tinyurl.com/3f6334pw>





# What are the positive/negative consequences of kindness?

- People who reported receiving more kindness reported:
  - more well-being and higher life satisfaction
  - less loneliness
  - fewer mental health difficulties
  - less burnout
- People who reported being more kind reported:
  - more well-being and higher life satisfaction
  - less burnout, BUT only when they were also high in self-compassion



# What are the barriers to kindness?

What factors do you think might **discourage** people from performing acts of kindness?

- concerns about kindness being misinterpreted (65.9%)
- not having enough time (57.5%)
- use of social media (52.3%)
- not having the opportunity (42.1%)
- kindness being seen as a weakness (27.6%)

# The Kindness Test



How did [being kind] make you feel afterwards?

- **connected** (mean 2.79),
- **happy** (2.51),
- **a good person** (2.08),
- **meaning** (2.08),
- very rarely **embarrassed** (1.08)

# Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness: Our goals

- We are looking for opportunities:
  - to share academic research on kindness
    - e.g., running workshops on kindness in the workplace, or talking to strangers
  - to help others use/apply academic research on kindness
    - e.g., helping kindness-focused organizations ground their work in the academic literature
  - to work with organizations to conduct research related to kindness
    - e.g., working with you to help you evaluate kindness in your workplace or evaluate an intervention

# Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness: What can we offer

- **Mailing list**: learn what we're up to, and what our community partners are up to
- Networking **events** to share what works in practice
- **Consulting** projects
  - Kindness at the Bar: focus groups
  - Essential Mix: non-profit with funding from Big Lottery Community Fund, testing interventions in the field, we are advising on research design, doing analyses etc.
- **Students** to help with a literature review
- **If you think we might be able to help with a project you have in mind, let us know!**

# Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness: What can we offer

## Teaching

Join our groundbreaking distance-learning PG Cert course on [The Psychology of Kindness: and Wellbeing at Work](#). Study online with total flexibility, and apply your learning to foster a positive workplace culture.

**Foster a positive workplace culture that's built for success**

At a time when it's needed most, discover how to create better working environments and relationships across a wide range of industries. Become a catalyst for an organisational working culture that promotes kindness and enables employees to flourish and succeed. Delivered 100% online in as little as 8 months, this first of its kind PG Cert course evaluates the different approaches of kindness and wellbeing from an interdisciplinary and contemporary perspective.





# Thanks!

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