



December 2020 Newsletter

Welcome to the December edition of the BC Association for Living Mindfully (BCALM) newsletter. Featured this month is an update on BCALM programming; an interview with facilitator Dr. Caren Zilber-Shlensky; and an article by Dr. Mark Sherman on self-care. And, if you have been wondering how to become involved in BCALM, then look no further! We have information below about current **volunteer** and **donation** opportunities. **Wherever you are in your mindfulness practice, BCALM is here to support your journey.**

Update on BCALM Programming



Since April 2020, BCALM has transferred our Art of Living Mindfully (ALM) and our Community Art of Living Mindfully (CALM) eight-week courses to an online platform to an online platform, and we have been offering drop-in online guided meditations to our community as well. We have offered 37 courses since the pandemic began, serving over 500 participants. We are unsure

when in-person classes will resume, but we are monitoring the situation and will respond accordingly once public health restrictions are lifted. BCALM also continues to work in conjunction with **UVic's Island Medical Program** to facilitate the ALM class for medical students. In early 2020, BCALM lead **four** full classes and recently offered a drop-in meditation session for the students. For the latest updates, please visit our [website](#).

The BCALM Community

BCALM, like many non-profit organizations, has had to be creative to stay afloat over the past many months, with all in-person programming stopping abruptly, and volunteer board members encountering their own particular challenges in a time of great change. We have been incredibly fortunate that individual board members and our executive director Dr. Mark Sherman recommitted themselves to supporting the work of BCALM. One board member in particular deserves recognition. Dr. Claudia Fabbri, who is currently the president of BCALM's board of directors, took it upon herself to recruit new members. After putting out a call for volunteers, (through the BCALM newsletter, Volunteer Victoria and other avenues) she gathered a remarkable group of qualified individuals who expressed their energy and commitment to the vision of BCALM. Please visit our website to read the impressive [bios](#) of our current board, each of whom had particular reasons for undertaking this volunteer position at a time when many of us are scaling back our community involvements.

New board member Kathryn LeGros writes:

"I had the wonderful opportunity to do the Art of Living Mindfully course in the spring of 2019. Although I had a general sense of what the program might entail, I was very pleased and impressed with how the sessions progressed, particularly how I was so positively impacted. The homework between classes allowed me to delve deeper into concepts introduced by the facilitator which led to greater acceptance and compassion for myself and others. The daily practice that I committed to following the class further helps me to get to calm. When I saw the posting from BCALM looking for board members, I felt that the association that is responsible for providing these classes and programs that help so many people would be worth supporting. I give great thought to how I allocate my time and skills. This is the only local board for which I volunteer, because the programs the society offers in Victoria and beyond provides people with tools to make life better and easier. It is something positive!"

We hope you have found your experience with BCALM through the ALM course, Days of Mindfulness, and other activities to be helpful and worthwhile.

We are now looking at how we can help even more people. **To do that, we need the support of our BCALM community.**

Part of that is our ask for volunteers. And part of that is raising money.

VOLUNTEERING - BOARD RECRUITMENT

BCALM is currently looking for a Treasurer to join our Board of Directors!

Are you looking for an opportunity to volunteer for a progressive wellness organization, further your board experience, and make a difference in the community? BCALM is looking to fill our Treasurer role on the Board of Directors. The ideal candidate has significant experience with corporate and/or not-for-profit financial management, and experience and literacy with budgeting and financial records.

If interested, please email your cover letter and resume

to bcalmhr@protonmail.com before **JANUARY 8, 2021.** *Please ensure your cover letter clearly indicates how you meet the requirements (duties and responsibilities, skills and qualifications, and time commitment) for this position.

For more information, visit the [Volunteer section](#) of our website.

DONATING

Your donation, whether it is \$20, \$50, or more, will support BCALM in a variety of ways:

1. Launching an Art of Living Mindfully program for youth
2. Providing offerings free of charge
3. Hiring a half-time executive director whose focus will be to consolidate the successes of the organization and identify the possibilities for growth and development
4. Increasing administrative support

Click [here](#) to learn more about how to donate!

[**DONATE HERE**](#)



Interview with Dr. Caren Zilber-Shlensky

Board member Margo McLoughlin recently interviewed Dr. Caren Zilber-Shlensky, a family physician in Victoria and one of the facilitators for BCALM's Art of Living Mindfully.

Margo McLoughlin: Tell us about your role with BCALM and what you love about it.

Dr. Zilber-Shlensky: I've been a facilitator of BCALM's Art of Living Mindfully (ALM) class since 2016. I also occasionally speak to organizations that request mindfulness presentations and workshops from BCALM. As a facilitator, I really appreciate the opportunity to be with a group of people who begin the course as strangers to each other, and then, by the end of eight weeks, there's been this alchemy, this coming together through authentic sharing, including experiences of suffering, and exploring mindfulness over multiple sessions. And to watch that transformation, and be part of it, feels so gratifying.

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Staying well during COVID-19

By Dr. Mark Sherman

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With the holiday season before us, and a global pandemic unfolding all about, this can be a challenging time for many. We are tired of working from home, Zoom meetings, being separated from those we love, and our lives generally changed from the ways we are used to. Many of us are having financial challenges, are struggling with our mental health, or are navigating loneliness and uncertainty.

During such times of uncertainty and challenge, caring for ourselves and each other becomes even more important. In this short article I hope to offer some guidelines to remember during such times as we are facing.

1. Consider diet of the body and diet of the mind

- Keeping our physical body healthy is important in times of pandemic and in times of challenge. It increases our resistance to infection and supports our mental health and resilience. While it can be more tempting now to numb ourself with sugary and processed foods, practicing self-care includes being mindful of a general focus on whole foods, lots of fruits and vegetables, and plenty of water.
- There is no shortage of media to consume these days. Yet notice how you feel at the end of the latest public health report, or news of the latest outbreak? There is a fine line between being informed and simply feeding our own fears and sense of helplessness. Consider limiting your news exposure to every other day and be mindful of other media you consume and how it uplifts you or brings you down.

2. Exercise the body and the mind

- Many of us are working from home, and research shows we are much less active than usual since the pandemic began. Physical activity supports our immunity and also our mental health and perspective—particularly outside activity. Dress

appropriately and go outside—no matter the weather—for a walk, a hike, a bike ride, some gardening etc. Notice how you feel when you return. Has your perspective changed?

- Exercising the mind is something we do, consciously or unconsciously. This is what creates our automatic thoughts. When we are caught up in places of fear, our thoughts darken, our body contracts and we see the world through a lens that is not always representative of what is actually here. Meditation and mindfulness exercise the mind, on purpose, to notice your feet against the floor, this very breath rising and falling in your belly or chest; and the sense of worry or suffering that is here, so that we can better attend with compassion and love. Mindfulness allows us to move beyond our narratives and to see more clearly what is right here and now. It invites a sense of presence and compassion into whatever comes our way. Please consider 10-15 minutes per day, using one of our BCALM guided [meditations](#) or another from a phone app such as Insight Timer or Headspace.

3. Honour the healing power of Nature

- We are blessed in BC that we are surrounded by forests, ocean, lakes, and mountains. Being outside in these environments remind us of space, stillness, and our connection to the natural world. Feel the wind or sun against your face; spend a few moments with the silence of a tree; listen to the symphony of sound in a forest or at the beach. It is in our moving beyond the four walls of our home that we remember, again, the safe expanse of the natural world of which we are a part.

4. You are not alone

- With the physical distancing we are facing, it is easy to feel alone when separated from our loved ones and our social opportunities. Feeling connected requires a little more ingenuity these days, however love and connection are important foundations for our health and wellness, so any effort is worth it.
- Being outside makes contagion much less likely, and so hikes, walks, bike rides and physically distanced picnics are welcome ways to meet up with friends or family and still practice distancing.
- We are blessed in the vast array of virtual platforms that allow us to ‘see’ each other. MS Teams, Zoom, Facetime, and Skype are easy opportunities to reach out

and (virtually) touch someone.

5. Self-Compassion

- Perhaps the most important tip towards staying well during this time is the kindness, care and ease that you offer to yourself. This is a difficult time and emotions may be heightened. Accepting the suffering that is here and offering a sense of compassion to who you are, and how you feel right now, allows you to treat yourself as you would your most dearly beloved, to be able to listen to your needs and to attend.
- Take a hot bath, go for a walk, write yourself a gratitude letter or take yourself out on a date. Self-compassion is what informs all of the aforementioned tips towards wellness during this time. This is not a time for harshness, judgement or shame—but for Love.

As we begin to witness and accept our own suffering and challenges, we can more easily see the suffering of others. Now is the time for unity and kindness more than ever. Though it is easy to feel tired and complacent about all of the public health restrictions, remember that during a pandemic wearing a mask is a gesture of respect and care for one another. Physical distancing is an act of love. Hand washing protects not only yourself, but also those around you. At such times as we face together, it is our collective actions of mutual care which will bring us resolution and minimize the suffering caused by COVID-19.

This too shall pass, and we will emerge from this challenge with strength and blessings that we perhaps cannot see at this moment. However, for now this is the time to take care of you, and all those around you, with a deep sense of care and gratitude for the simple blessings of good food, movement, Nature, loved ones and, of course, yourself.

Mindfulness Resources

BCALM offers an extensive list of mindfulness resources on its website, including links to meditations, online resources, and suggested readings. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Upcoming CALM Offerings

BCALM is also pleased to offer a **private stream** mindfulness-based stress management course, similar to the MSP-funded Art of Living Mindfully (ALM). This group is called Community Art of Living Mindfully (CALM).

CALM is offered to provide service to community members who would like to develop a Mindfulness practice, although *do not fit the diagnostic criteria for a physician referral*, as required for MSP funding. The next CALM offering will be in **January 2021**.

Click [here](#) to learn more about these offerings and join the mailing list.

Did you know...?

- 67 ALM courses were offered in 2019, graduating over 900 people from our program.
- 10 Days of Mindfulness were offered in 2019.
- 1 Community Art of Living Mindfully (CALM) private stream class was offered in 2019.

