

Sue Nardoni on Creating a More Positive Outlook

'I now know how to stop the runaway train.'

Summary

Sue Nardoni, Headteacher of Pycroft Grange Primary School in Surrey, completed the *Heart Health for Headteachers Programme* in October 2022. Prior to completing the course, Sue described feeling like she was on a runaway train without the tools to stop it. This course has equipped Sue with the tools she needs. It has left her feeling more positive, leading to improved physical and mental health and a much happier home life.

Key Outcomes:

1. A more positive attitude:

- The course has allowed Sue to feel much more positive about the future.
- This has led to improved physical and mental health and attitude towards it.

2. Being more level-headed:

- The course has helped Sue to recognise the key triggers of stress and how they present themselves.
- She now finds herself in control, being able to stop and reflect before reacting to a situation.

3. A huge positive impact on family life:

- Sue now consciously regulates herself before going home, enabling her to leave work at work.
- This has led to more quality time with her family and a happier home.

'You need to be responsible for your own wellbeing, but you can't be without the tools to do it.'

The impact work was having on life at home

Sue is very passionate about her job but she was struggling with the challenges of the role and how they were impacting her life, particularly outside of work. She described the feeling as being on a runaway train; she was overwhelmed and without the tools to manage it. This in turn was having a huge effect on family life. She was getting home from

work and small things would cause big blow-ups unnecessarily. She found it very upsetting to see how her stress was affecting how she was with her family.

'It is not fair on your family to pick up the pieces from what has happened in the day at work.'

Seeking the tools to be better prepared

At a Trust Executive Heads meeting, Sue was asked by the CEO whether she thought they do enough for Headteacher wellbeing. Sue answered no. There was plenty of checking in by core group members, but *'ultimately these are the people you are trying to impress'*.

This is where Pursuit Wellbeing came in. Sue joined a small pilot group set up by the Trust and found that the *'Headteachers were able to open up and share things they might not want to with their employer'*. What appealed to Sue, was that the programme was going to provide the tools she needed to be better prepared for the ups and downs of the job and life.

'You can't be resilient if you haven't got the tools to know how to be resilient.'

Understanding the effect stress has on the body

For Sue, a lightbulb moment in the course was understanding the Autonomic Nervous System and how if you get into fight or flight mode and don't deal with it, you will become overwhelmed. She has learned to focus more on the positive things to help put things into perspective.

It also helped her acknowledge the key triggers leading to stress for her and how they present themselves, and the *Inner Balance* breathing has really helped her be aware of how her body feels. Sue thoroughly enjoyed the group aspect of the course too. Being able to talk and listen to the honesty of the other heads has been very empowering.

'It gives you the knowledge of how everything in your body works and gives you the tools to prepare, adapt and recover.'

A more positive attitude

Having completed the course, Sue is feeling so much more positive, leading to better physical and mental health, and she is surprised by how much her attitude to physical and mental health has changed.

At work, she is more level-headed and able to stop and reflect before reacting. She is much better at taking a step back and looking at others' perspectives and is able to reflect on what is manageable for the staff, and how it is delivered.

At home, it has had a massive impact on family life. She now deliberately re-regulates before stepping back into the house, leading to more quality time with her family and home being a happier place. For Sue, taking part in the course has been life-changing, *'I am a nicer person to be around.'*

'I now feel that if I get on that runaway train, I know how to stop the train.'

Empowering her team

Sue is now keen to spread the knowledge through her staff and provide them with the tools to help them. She says she can't change the job, but she can better equip her staff.

For more information on how you can take part in the Heart Health for Headteachers Programme, contact Maria Brosnan at:

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