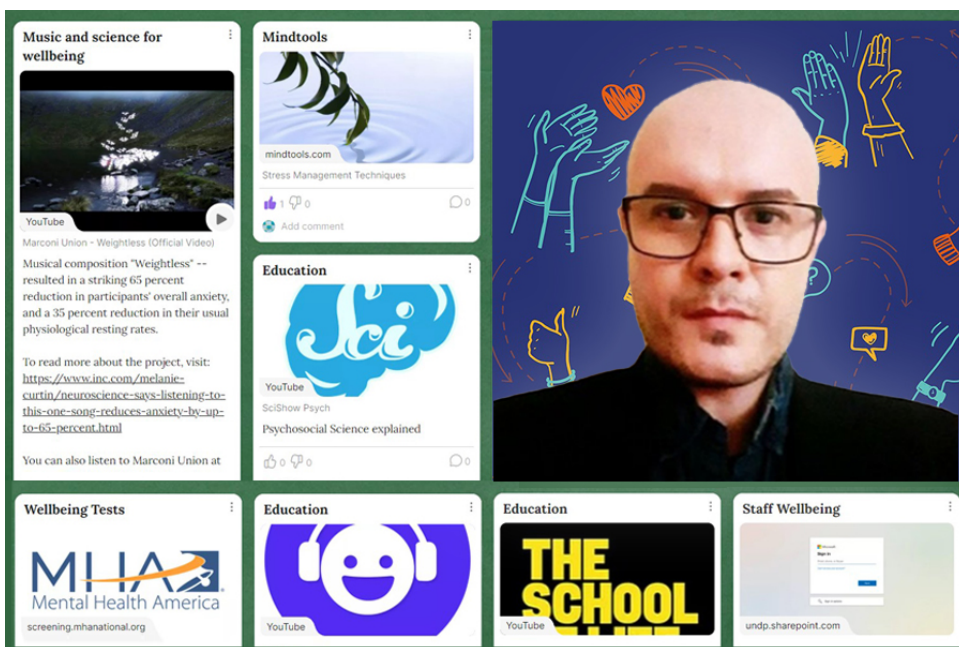


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Elvis Lundberg serves as a UN Volunteer Programme Officer for Disability-inclusive Development with UNDP in Nepal, focusing on the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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Mood Café in Nepal: a voluntary space to promote mental health and wellbeing

We mark World Mental Health Day 2021 under the theme: Mental health care for all: let's make it a reality. UN Volunteer Elvis Lundberg (Sweden) shares his story from Nepal, where he volunteers to ensure the mental wellbeing of others. Elvis is a Programme Officer for Disability-inclusive Development with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), working specifically on the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD).

I began my UN Volunteer assignment in December 2020, when we were facing the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic in numerous ways. Many were experiencing physical and mental challenges, yet there was not much space to discuss these.

The idea and inspiration for Mood Café came to me as I was working together with the UN

Resident Coordinator's Office in Nepal on implementing our country-level Disability Score Card Assessment Action Plan. I realized that there was a need to set up a network or resource group to support and engage employees.

A survey was conducted among UN personnel in Nepal on the need for a safe space to exchange on topics like mental health and invisible disabilities. The outcome? Some 88 per cent of surveyed staff were in favour of the establishment of Mood Café.

“ Knowing colleagues who struggle with anxiety, depression, stress-related disorders and panic attacks I set up this voluntary peer-to-peer support group in the hope that our joint efforts will bring about improvement in our wellbeing, both at work and beyond. --Elvis Lundberg, UN Volunteer Programme Officer for Disability-inclusive Development with UNDP, Nepal

I knew that finding a sense of belonging to a community, feeling supported, being accepted for who we are and connecting to others are factors of great importance. Thus, coming together in an environment free of stigma, judgment and questioning has been a much welcome relief.

Mood Café has been in development for a while. Now, we offer Friday drop-in sessions for all interested, where we casually converse about coping strategies, learn about mental health issues and share our challenges and success stories.

Besides that, we have our own WhatsApp group, a common Padlet page where we can share our ideas and knowledge and a referral system in place. We also go out for walks and social get-togethers during the weekends. As of late, we have a Master's student specialized in mental health on board, voluntarily providing guidance on mental health and wellbeing.

Among those who have benefited from this initiative are UN Volunteers serving in Nepal.

“ Connecting with people with a passion for improved mental health and wellbeing helps me to remain resilient, and gives me the strength to help others. --UN Volunteer James Russel, Energy Support Programme Liaison Officer with UNICEF, Nepal

For the future, as COVID-19 restrictions ease, we will have more of a focus on in-person

activities, such as wellness retreats, nature walks, group gym workouts, building a stronger volunteering buddy system and much more.

“ Thanks to the gathering, I realized that I am not alone and now have a better understanding of the common challenges we face in our community. --Yee Su Yoo, UN Volunteer Green Recovery Assistant with UNDP, Nepal

I look forward to sharing more about Mood Café and our achievements with UN personnel in other regions, as a case of volunteerism-integrated best practice.



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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)