

Let Wellness Roll Right In

Kaiser Permanente South San Francisco welcomes the PauseNow meditation bus for employees needing some peace of mind. Pictured, employee Kate Albee relaxes.

Twenty-seven feet of blue bliss rolled up to the Kaiser Permanente South San Francisco Medical Center recently, with the promise of renewed mental health through meditation.

This unique approach to self care on 6 wheels is known as the PauseNow meditation bus, and it was brought to the facility by the medical center's Health Education Department, which provides health education and support programs to employees and members in South San Francisco and Daly City.

"As part of our Employee Wellness program we are trying to bring more mental health awareness to our employees, and I think this is a great way to do it," said Tricia Brovelli, senior health educator. The PauseNow meditation bus is privately owned and rented out as a wellness asset by companies, schools, and senior centers. This was the first time the medical center tried out the bus.

The custom-converted shuttle bus has 7 private spaces, or pods, where employees were able to meditate for up to 15 minutes. Each pod has an iPad with a menu of audio meditations to choose from, including nature sounds, "sound baths," or just silence. Noise-cancelling headphones help make sure that the experience is insulated from the outside world.

"It was just calm and quiet and surreal — just beautiful calmness," said Vangie Cade, manager of Volunteer Services. "I've been working at the medical center for 30 years and I don't think that I've ever taken the time out to just center myself, and this gave me that opportunity."

"When you come out and go back to work, you feel energized, like you have a second wind," said Linda Finnigan, a health educator.

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According to the American Institute of Stress, numerous studies have shown that job stress is the "major source of stress for American adults and that it has escalated progressively over the past few decades."

Specifically, the American Psychological Association reports that 65% of people working in the U.S. cite their work as a significant source of stress, and more than one-third say it's a chronic issue.

Brovelli said her department got encouragement from managers who wanted to bring the bus to the medical center. All 60 reserved time slots on the bus were taken quickly.

“In terms of being a manager of a department, it definitely helps to promote wellness,” said Sharmila Grant, manager of the Social Services Department. “My team works with a lot of complex cases. So, for them, just to get a moment out of their really busy day, just to breath, is helpful.”

“I like that Kaiser Permanente has offered this opportunity to us. It shows that they encourage self-care,” said Rahael Solomon, an inpatient social worker and a member of Grant’s team. “It’s important that we take care of ourselves in order to be compassionate toward others.”

Having the time and the opportunity to focus on mindfulness and emotional health not only helped some employees feel happier, but they were also inspired.

“Kaiser Permanente has done a great job by having this vehicle here today,” said Cade. “Now I think it’s something I need to do for myself.”

“This is the best,” said Mahmood Syed, a supply chain technician. “I literally felt like I was floating on the water or in the air. It was beautiful.”