

Andrew Safer
 Safer Mindfulness
 Mindfulness Instructor & Trainer – Workshop Facilitator – Author
 (709) 722-2716 – andrew@safermindfulness.com
 58 Pennywell Rd.
 St. John's, NL A1C 2K9

Mindfulness in Recovery (Addictions)

Program Evaluation Report

The 7-week workshop series, “Mindfulness in Recovery”, was presented in May / June 2019. Participants met in 1.5-hr. weekly sessions via Zoom video conferencing. Six individuals completed the program, three aged 18 to 25 and three over 25. An additional six inmates attended the first session from Her Majesty’s Penitentiary, but were unable to continue due to privacy concerns.

Participants connected to the video conferencing sessions via smartphones and laptop computers. Rob Wadman-Scanlan, a clinical social worker with the Department of Children, Seniors, and Social Development, provided support as required.

All participants who attended at least one session (15) were given copies of Andrew Safer’s book, *Anxiety, Stress & Mindfulness: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Wellness*.

This project was a collaboration between Canadian Mental Health Association-Newfoundland and Labrador, Safer Mindfulness, and the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, with funding support from the Department of Health and Community Services.

The Mindfulness Approach

Whereas normally we become identified with our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and impulses and are immediately drawn in to the ongoing drama, mindfulness practice enables us to take a step back and see these states of mind as events that come and go. This approach to dealing with urges and cravings involves (1) grounding oneself in the present moment, (2) developing non-judgmental awareness, (3) experiencing discomfort instead of avoiding it, (4) seeing the habitual nature of urges and cravings, and (5) making a mindful choice to do something different than usual.

Program Elements

- Mindfulness, awareness, and addictions
- A new relationship with thoughts
- The push & pull of craving, dealing with discomfort, and making friends with yourself

- Triggers, emotions, and pausing
- Awareness, facing difficulties, and mindful choice
- Kindness toward oneself and others
- Courage & mindfulness in everyday life

Several mindfulness practices were introduced and practiced in the group, and participants were encouraged to practice daily at home, in between sessions.

Evaluation

Martha Traverso-Yepetz, PhD, a professor and researcher at the Division of Community Health at Memorial University, and Andrew Safer developed the evaluation instrument collaboratively in 2013, and Andrew Safer added to it in 2019. It was administered during the first and last sessions. Participants wrote unique personal codes on the evaluations, facilitating pairing (pre- and post). Anonymity was assured, and participants provided written consent, allowing their words to be used anonymously in this report and in promotional materials. Of the six participants' evaluations, one was dropped due to incomplete data.

Quantitative Evaluation

In the evaluation statements below, those that show the most significant changes between pre- and post scores appear first, and the least significant changes appear last. The totals include responses from all five participants (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree).

Means and percent changes were provided by Megan Walsh, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behaviour, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan.

Note: Lower numbers post-intervention indicate positive progress because they show lower levels of agreement with negative statements. (See the evaluation form, p. 7)

Pre-Intervention Means	Post-Intervention Means	Difference in Means	Percent Change	
3.4	1.8	1.6	47.1	I get stuck with thoughts and feelings that trigger cravings and I don't know how to interrupt this pattern.
3.2	1.8	1.4	43.7	I don't have confidence in my ability to deal with stressful things that happen to me.
3.4	2.0	1.4	41.2	I don't feel equipped to deal with urges and cravings.
3.2	2.0	1.2	37.5	I don't know how to deal with my discomfort and sense of

				vulnerability.
1.6	1.0	.6	37.5	I don't believe I can make a difference in my life.
3.2	2.2	1.0	31.2	Staying in the present hurts so much that I run away from what is unpleasant.
3.2	2.2	1.0	31.2	I feel like I have no control over my thoughts, moods, and feelings.
2.6	1.8	.8	30.8	My thoughts are true.
4.0	2.8	1.2	30.0	I have difficulty dealing with troubling emotions.
3.0	2.2	.8	26.7	I don't know why I'm so vulnerable to addictions.
3.8	2.8	1.0	26.3	I have difficulty accepting things as they are
2.8	2.2	.6	21.4	I'm not grounded in my body.
4.2	3.4	.8	19.0	I think over and over about things that have already happened.
3.0	2.6	0.4	13.3	Not being fully present in my immediate experience is normal for me.
2.0	1.8	0.2	10.0	I'm usually unaware of what things or events trigger my cravings.
3.6	3.4	0.2	5.6	I keep thinking about my concerns for the future.
4.2	4.0	0.2	4.8	It is normal for my mind to never stay in one place.

Selected themes were categorized:

Category	Number of evaluation statements	Percent Change
Stress	1	43.7
Believe I can make difference	1	37.5
Dealing w/ discomfort	1	37.5
Urges, cravings & triggers	3	32.8
Troubling emotions	2	30.6
Relationship w/ thoughts	5	26.7
Being present / accepting things as they are	3	23.6
Grounded in the body	1	21.4

Changes in Participants, Pre- to Post*

Participant	Pre-mean	Post-mean	Difference	Percent change
1	2.6471	2.4706	0.18	6.7
2	3.4706	2.4706	1.0	28.8
3	3.1176	2.4706	0.65	20.7
4	4.0	2.7647	1.24	30.9
5	2.7647	1.5882	1.18	42.5
Average for all participants				25.9

* Provided by Megan Walsh, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behaviour, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan

Qualitative Evaluation

Julie Huntington, B.Sc., B.Ed., transcribed the qualitative responses from the participants' evaluation forms. Five participants' responses are included in the tables below.

1. *What does mindfulness meditation have to do with everyday life?*

Categories	Number of Participants
Focused on now / choose to be present, accept things as they are	2
Our relationships, internal and external	1
Keeps thoughts from being debilitating	1
Daily practice creates good habits for dealing with stressful events	1

2. *How helpful has this workshop series been for you?*

Scale: 0 = not helpful, 10 = extremely helpful

Ranges / Categories	Number of Participants
5-7 (somewhat helpful)	1
8-9 (very helpful)	1
10 (extremely helpful)	3

3. *If it has helped you deal with urges and cravings, how specifically has it helped?*

Categories	Number of Participants
Learned to pause, stay with the urge, rather than impulsively giving in. / Knowing I can fight urges.	3
See cravings as bodily sensations	1
Thought stopping	1

4. *How else has it been helpful in terms of recovery?*

Categories	Number of Participants
Slow down thoughts, not constantly racing / slowing mind down, think before I act	2
Calm myself / can be with difficult emotions instead of escaping	2
Helpful to view convincing thoughts as just thoughts / space between me and thoughts, can decide not to use	1

5. *What is your #1 substance (or behaviour) of choice?*

Categories	Number of Participants
Cocaine	3
Opiates	1
Marijuana	1
Also mentioned: rum, alcohol, nicotine	3

6. *Can you compare how much you were using at the beginning of this workshop series 7 weeks ago, to now? (Quantity/ Frequency)*

Same amount	1
None in beginning, none now*	3
Beginning: 10-20 cigarettes a day, no marijuana. Now, no cigarettes, no marijuana.	1
*Quit drinking a week before starting series, have not used cocaine for 10 months. I believe this series has contributed to my ability to stay sober.	

7. *What did you learn about addiction in this workshop series?*

Categories	Number of Participants
Can detach from substances/habitual behaviours – Understand reactions, not get attached; able to let go – mindfulness can be aid in not engaging in addictive behaviour	3
I'm in control	1
Think engaging in substance will be better, but it causes more suffering.	1

8. *Have you been able to do some meditation practice at home? Yes (5)*

9. *If yes, about how many times a week? For how long?*

Everyday	10-20 min.; sometimes an hour
6 times a week	20 min.
Every morning	7 min.
3-4 times a week	5-15 min.
No answer	No answer

10. *Do you think other people in recovery could benefit from learning about mindfulness and meditation practice? If yes, in what way? Yes (5)*

Could learn how to be able to control the urges.
It gives people a different ritual which involves spending time with the self as it is, which is the opposite of what we are doing when we are attempting to escape ourselves by using.
To help gain control of thoughts spiralling out of control.
A tool to use to stay out of storylines. Staying present helps you feel more centered and accept things as they are, thus less desire to use, learn to be with the feelings and urges that are going on. Because this is happening, we don't have to act on it. Gives people power to not act.
No answer

(Continued...)

 Personal Code

MINDFULNESS IN RECOVERY

(Pre- and Post-Intervention)

Please write down in the box on the left the number that best fits how you feel with regard to the statement:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neither Agree, nor Disagree 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree 0=Don't Know

- My thoughts are true.
- It is normal for my mind to never stay in one place.
- I think over and over about things that have already happened.
- I keep thinking about my concerns for the future.
- Not being fully present in my immediate experience is normal for me.
- I don't believe that I can make a difference in my life.
- I don't have confidence in my ability to deal with the stressful things that happen to me.
- Staying in the present hurts so much that I run away from what is unpleasant.
- I don't know how to deal with my discomfort and sense of vulnerability.
- I have difficulty accepting things as they are.
- I have difficulty dealing with troubling emotions.
- I don't feel equipped to deal with urges and cravings.
- I'm not grounded in my body.
- I'm usually unaware of what things or events trigger my cravings.
- I feel like I have no control over my thoughts, moods, and feelings.
- I get stuck with thoughts and feelings that trigger cravings and I don't know how to interrupt this pattern.
- I don't know why I am so vulnerable to addictions.

(Post-Intervention Only)

1. What does “mindfulness” mean to you?

2. What does mindfulness meditation have to do with everyday life?

3. How helpful has this workshop series been for you? (0 = not helpful; 10 = extremely helpful) _____
4. If it has helped you deal with urges and cravings, how specifically has it helped?

5. How else has it been helpful in terms of recovery?

6. Have you been able to do some meditation practice at home? _____
7. If yes, about how many times a week? _____ Usually for how long? _____ minutes
8. Do you think other people in recovery could benefit from learning about mindfulness, meditation and other practices, and mindfulness in everyday life activities? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, in what way?

9. Do you have any suggestions about how this workshop series could be improved?

10. If you live in or near St. John’s, do you plan to come to Monday night meditation at least once, to check it out? Yes ___ No ___
 Thank you!