

Andrew Safer
Safer Mindfulness

Mindfulness Instructor & Trainer – Workshop Facilitator - Author

andrew@safermindfulness.com - (709) 722-2716

www.safermindfulness.com

“ANXIETY, STRESS & MINDFULNESS”
EVALUATION REPORT

January 10, 2020

Between September and December 2019, youth (18-25) and adults (25+) participated in two 12-week “Anxiety, Stress & Mindfulness” workshop series delivered by Andrew Safer of Safer Mindfulness. This program was offered through a partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association-Newfoundland and Labrador (CMHA-NL) and Safer Mindfulness, with funding from the Department of Health and Community Services. The Zoom video conferencing platform enabled people to participate from any location in the Province via computer or smartphone, as long as Internet access was available. Participants connected to the weekly 1.5-hour evening sessions from home.

Eighteen participants were in the starting group on Wednesday evening (9 were 18-25, and 9 were 25+); 10 attended the last session three months later. Twenty-two were in the starting group (25+) on Thursday evening, and 8 attended the last session. Nineteen participants from both groups who attended a minimum of 8 sessions are being issued Certificates of Completion.

Participants connected to the weekly sessions from St. John’s, Portugal Cove, Conception Bay South, Torbay, Paradise, Mt. Pearl, Flatrock, and Bauline locally, and Brigus, Port aux Basques, Stephenville, Stephenville Crossing, and Islington outside of St. John’s. Andrew Safer’s book, *Anxiety, Stress & Mindfulness: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Wellness*, was given to all of the participants.

Following were the weekly session topics:

1. You Can’t Do It Wrong (Mindfulness-Awareness Meditation)
2. Getting to Know Anxiety Instead of Running Away From It
3. Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Mindfulness-Awareness Practice
4. Turning Our Habits on End
5. Birthright of Goodness
6. Treating Ourselves and Others with Kindness
7. Digital Distraction: Mindfulness Meets the Internet
8. Mindfulness in Everyday Life
9. Stress: Exploring Thoughts and Beliefs
10. Self-Centeredness and the Big Picture
11. “Me” Is the Culprit
12. Fear and Fearlessness: Facing What Is

Included in the program sessions were instruction and guidance in mindfulness and meditation practice, Q&A, presentation on a theme, and discussion in pairs and in the group.

Participants completed evaluations during the first and last sessions. Both times, they indicated the extent to which they agree/disagree with 17 statements, enabling comparison before and after. At the last session, they also responded in their own words to a series of questions. They provided consent to use their comments anonymously in a report and for promotion of the program. Sixteen participants completed both pre and post evaluations. There were six participants for whom only post evaluations were available.

The statement with the highest average percentage change pre to post (33.3%) was about getting stuck with storylines that bring anxiety and not knowing what to do about it. Similarly, there was a 32.4% improvement in their sense of control with regard to thoughts, moods, and feelings. Significantly greater self-efficacy is suggested by the 32.1% increase related to believing that one can make a difference in one's own life. There was a greater belief that it is not normal to not be fully present (27.9%). There was a 25.6% improvement regarding rumination, suggesting participants are dwelling on their thoughts less: recognizing them, and returning to *now*. In addition, there were 12 statements that showed increases of between 10 and 25% pre to post. With regard to these 17 statements, the average score increased by 21.2%.

Participants were asked how the workshop series has helped them deal with anxiety and stress. Six people mentioned dealing with thoughts in a new way: (1) seeing them as fleeting, and not reality; (2) better able to remove themselves from troubling thoughts; through awareness, breaking the cycle of spiralling negative thoughts; interrupting stories when the mind is spinning out of control; and (3) generally finding it easier to navigate thoughts. Regarding anxiety, three people said (1) mindfulness practice helps prevent the escalation of anxiety, and it grounds them; (2) seeing anxiety as temporary, and not running away from it helps them cope; and (3) coming back to the present lessens anxiety. Other responses ranged from accepting a loss of control (as opposed to fighting it), to being calmer / less reactive and keyed up.

Asked how helpful this workshop series has been (0=not helpful; 10=extremely helpful), the average was 8.0. Asked if they think other people could benefit from learning about mindfulness, 21 participants answered Yes; 1 Maybe.

This project showed that the “Anxiety, Stress & Mindfulness” workshop series is helpful for people who struggle with anxiety and/or stress, and can be delivered from St. John's while effectively serving individuals who live elsewhere in the Province. Zoom video conferencing, which provides virtual interaction in real time, was shown to be a viable method for program delivery.