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## **Mindfulness in Recovery (Addictions)**

### **Program Evaluation Report**

January 9, 2020

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 participated in 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, MSW, RSW, 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, there were presentations on the weekly theme, Q&A, and discussions both one-on-one and in the group.

## Evaluation

Martha Traverso-Yeppez, 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. One of the six evaluations that were completed during the last session was excluded 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; 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	Evaluation Statement
3.4	1.8	1.6	<b>47.1</b>	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	<b>43.7</b>	I don't have confidence in my ability to deal with stressful things that happen to me.
3.4	2.0	1.4	<b>41.2</b>	I don't feel equipped to deal with urges and cravings.

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

Selected themes were categorized:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of evaluation statements</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
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
<b>Average for all participants</b>				<b>25.9</b>

\* 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

Average rating: 9.2.

#### 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

### **Instructor's Summary**

Mindfulness has been known to be helpful for people in recovery from addictions, as illustrated by implementations of the Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention program developed by G. Alan Marlatt and his colleagues at the Addictive Behaviors Research Center at the University of Washington. In the 7-week "Mindfulness in Recovery" workshop series conducted in St. John's in the Spring of 2019, there were strong outcomes in key areas.

Knowing how to interrupt thoughts and feelings that lead to cravings showed the highest change pre to post evaluation: 47.1%. The basic meditation practice trains in recognizing thoughts and redirecting one's attention to the present moment via the breath. The inability to deal constructively with stressful situations plays a major role in substance use, so it is noteworthy that there was a 43.7% improvement in confidence in this area. Various mindfulness and meditation practices help develop openness, precision, and awareness. This can inform one how to proceed in difficult situations. Similarly, participants felt more equipped to deal with urges and cravings (41.2%). Pausing, non-judgmental acknowledgment of discomfort, a present-moment orientation, and the ability to work with thoughts are mindfulness elements that would seem to be relevant here. A significant contributor to addiction is escaping discomfort. The mindfulness approach is to acknowledge it, responding if necessary instead of reacting. There was a 37.5% increase in knowing how to deal with discomfort and vulnerability. Similarly, there was a 37.5% improvement in self-efficacy. Similar to discomfort, another measure showed a

31.2% improvement in not escaping what is unpleasant. Related to self-efficacy, participants' impression that they have more control over thoughts, moods, and feelings also increased by 31.2%.

Unquestioning belief in the truth of one's own thoughts leads to suffering, as it feeds delusion. There was a 30.8% improvement in this aspect. Relationship with thoughts is a fundamental element of mindfulness practice, and increasing familiarity with thoughts, feelings, and emotions is a hallmark of meditation practice. There was a 30% improvement in dealing with troubling emotions, a key factor in the addiction process. Self-awareness tends to increase with mindfulness practice, which would enable knowing one's vulnerability to addictions. This increased by 26.7%. Orientation to the present moment equates with accepting things as they are. The self-perceived ability to do this increased by 26.3%. Grounding is a key element in mindfulness practice. Participants' responses indicated a 21.4% improvement in feeling grounded in the body. An additional three statements indicated increases between 10 and 20%.

Asked how the series has helped deal with urges and cravings, three out of five participants said they learned how to pause and stay with the urge instead of giving in, and that knowing they can fight the urge has helped. One participant said they relate to cravings as body sensations, and another said what helps is the ability to stop thoughts. In terms of recovery generally, they found that slowing the mind down gives them a chance to think before they act; calming themselves and being with difficult emotions instead of escaping was helping with recovery; and another participant cited viewing convincing thoughts as just thoughts, and deciding not to use.

Participants were asked how helpful this workshop series has been (0=not helpful; 10=extremely helpful). The average was 9.2. All five said they think this program would be helpful to others in recovery.

This workshop series demonstrated the effectiveness of the "Mindfulness in Recovery" program. Zoom video conferencing was shown to be an effective platform for conducting this training, providing access to individuals located anywhere in Newfoundland and Labrador, or beyond, where there is Internet service sufficient for smartphone or laptop use.

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?

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

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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?

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

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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?

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

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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!*