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**“MINDFULNESS IN RECOVERY”
EVALUATION REPORT**

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In May and June 2019, youth (18-25) and adults (25+) participated in a 7-week “Mindfulness in Recovery” (Addictions) workshop series (weekly 1.5-hr. sessions), 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 anywhere in the Province that had Internet access via computer or smartphone. They connected to the sessions from home. Rob Wadman-Scanlan, a clinical social worker with the Department of Children, Seniors, and Social Development, attended the program each week to support the youth, as needed.

All participants (15) who attended at least one session were given copies of Andrew Safer’s book, *Anxiety, Stress & Mindfulness: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Wellness*. Six individuals completed the program—three aged 18 to 25 and three over 25. Additionally, six inmates attended the first session from Her Majesty’s Penitentiary, but were unable to continue due to privacy concerns. 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.

The weekly session topics were:

1. Mindfulness, awareness, and addictions
2. Awareness, facing difficulties, and mindful choice
3. A new relationship with thoughts
4. The push & pull of craving, dealing with discomfort, and making friends with yourself
5. Triggers, emotions, and pausing
6. Kindness towards oneself and others
7. Courage & mindfulness in everyday life

Participants provided consent to use their evaluation comments anonymously in a report and for promotion of the program. They 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 the program. At the last session, they also responded in their own words to a series of questions. Six participants completed both pre and post evaluations; one set was excluded due to incomplete data.

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

The greatest percentage change (47.1%) between pre and post occurred with the statement about getting stuck with thoughts and feelings that trigger cravings and not knowing how to interrupt this pattern. Not having confidence to deal with stress registered a 43.7% change. Not feeling equipped to deal with urges and cravings, 41.2%. Not knowing how to deal with discomfort and vulnerability, 37.5%. Not believing I can make a difference in my life, 37.5%. Running away from what feels unpleasant because staying present hurts: 31.2%. No control over thoughts, moods, and feelings: 31.2%. Eight additional statements showed changes between 10 and 20%.

Substances of choice included cocaine (3), opiates (1), and marijuana (1). Rum, alcohol, and nicotine were also mentioned.

Asked how this workshop series has helped them deal with urges and cravings, three participants said they learned to pause and stay with the urge rather than impulsively giving in, and knowing they can fight the urges. One other said they see cravings as bodily sensations, and another mentioned thought stopping. Other ways it has been helpful in terms of recovery included (1) slowing down thoughts, mind not constantly racing, think before acting; (2) self-calming, can be with difficult emotions instead of escaping; and (3) viewing convincing thoughts as just thoughts. When there is space between me and thoughts, can decide not to use.

Asked how helpful the workshop series has been (0=not helpful; 10=extremely helpful), the average was 9.2. All five said they felt others in recovery could benefit from learning about mindfulness and meditation practice.

“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.” –Participant

“It’s 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. It gives people the power to not act.”—Participant