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## **Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training: Follow-Up**

“Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training” was piloted in May/June 2021 through a partnership between Canadian Mental Health Association—Newfoundland and Labrador (CMHA—NL) and Safer Mindfulness Inc., with funding support from VOCM Cares Foundation and Pennecon Limited. CMHA—NL provided funding support for the follow-up sessions.

Conversations within the Suicide Prevention Team made it clear that it would be important to provide follow-up sessions for participants of the Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training program.

Four one-hour in-person sessions, meeting every two weeks, were offered at The Lantern in St. John’s, Newfoundland on Wednesday evenings, August 25 through October 6. Attendance ranged from three to four, to five at the last session. Three participants attended all four sessions.

Bailey Reid and Linda Cox, from the Team, alternated attending. Bailey, a registered social worker, took a seat in the library and participants were invited to talk with her if they were so moved. Linda, a community support worker, also made herself available during the sessions.

The sessions included a check-in, sitting and walking mindfulness practice, one-on-one discussions on a theme, typically, how did mindfulness come into your days this past week? Following that, participants shared highlights of their exchange. There was a Q&A and general sharing, a snack, and the sounding of the gong to signal the close of the session.

**Reflection from Bailey Reid**, MSW, RSW, a registered social worker who attended two of the sessions..."The Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training program has been a proven success based on program evaluation and participant feedback. People with Lived Experience (PLE) of mental illness and/or addiction have informed CMHA-NL that After-Care and/or Follow-up sessions were an important addition to MH&A programming. Follow-up supports recovery and a sense of community.

This was evident through my observation of participant interactions. This comment was made a number of times by separate participants, 'It's easier to go deeper into mindfulness when we are together as a group. There is something about doing it together.'

Participants appeared to have strong introspection skills and self-awareness. They were able to discuss their different states of consciousness after their mindfulness practice and detailed their ability to better control thoughts and feelings due to this practice. I offered to speak with participants individually in a separate room. One participant availed of this service and was provided with resource counselling. Overall, it was a privilege and pleasure to be part of this group and much was learned from the participants' insights."

**Reflection from Linda Cox**, Community Support Worker, who attended the 8-week program, Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training, and one follow-up session..."As the group settled in that first evening of the program, Andrew explained the process and benefits of Mindfulness Meditation. The interest was evident with how attentive the group was and continued to be during the entire eight weeks.

A bond seemed to be forming among the participants where they would greet one another and celebrate the positives from their past week. For example: "I certainly took care of myself this week by going for a nice long walk around the lake with a friend."

During the one-on-one sessions, several participants described how they held their breath when they felt stressed or fearful (although this is not part of mindfulness practice). They commented that deep breathing, awareness practice and pausing helped them to deal with difficult emotions. Others commented that they could stay in the present moment when focused on the breath. That they appreciated how Andrew provided a venue for them to learn to be kinder and less judgmental to themselves for past mistakes.

Several expressed how thoughts of suicide decreased with learned skills, that meditation calmed down their busy thoughts that otherwise could lead to suicide.

The participants who stayed with the program and attended every week seemed the happiest. They appeared to carry themselves with more confidence than before, and were eager to celebrate their accomplishments. Some talked about how their home practice was

improving and that they read Andrew's book (*Anxiety, Stress & Mindfulness*) cover to cover for the second time while highlighting important points of interest. They were feeling less stress and more ease as they went about their daily lives with far fewer thoughts of suicide, some with even zero thoughts of suicide."

**At the end of the last session** on October 6<sup>th</sup>, each of the five participants who were present provided a number (1-10) for the intensity of their suicidal thoughts currently, as well as a number representing their recollection of what it was in the beginning of the program, five months earlier. Their responses are in Table 1, column 3, and Table 3, below. Columns 1 and 2 are provided for context (next page).

Beyond providing an opportunity for fellowship for participants, a key rationale for conducting follow-up sessions is to see if they have retained their gains since the end of the program, or if there has been further improvement.

Recognizing that the number of participants was small and that additional groups need to be conducted and studied to draw conclusions, following are some observations:

- Even when compared to all participants' pre-evaluation measures (rather than only the completers), there was a 22.2% improvement from the beginning of the program to the end of the follow-up sessions. Referenced to the completers' pre-evaluation measures, there was a 41.8% improvement. It appears that the "Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training" program is effective in helping participants who complete the eight weeks, deal with suicidal thoughts.
- When asked to rate the intensity of their suicidal thoughts on day 1, participants who completed the program reported measures significantly higher, on average, than non-completers.
- The average rating for intensity of suicidal thoughts for the follow-up group was within 4.3% of the average rating at program completion. This suggests that, on average, for the individuals at follow-up, the gains that had been achieved during the program had been maintained over the 3.5 month intervening period.
- At the end of the last follow-up session, the five participants were asked to recollect the intensity of their suicidal thoughts at the beginning of the program. Their average rating was 6.7, which compares to 4.5 for the self-reports of the eight completers for that time period: a 33% variance, suggesting that, on average, their memories were more extreme than their actual experiences.
- Questions remain regarding non-completers. Were they, on average, less afflicted by suicidal thoughts, and therefore less motivated to stay?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> With assistance from Curt Hillier, Psychologist, Khalili & Associates Inc., St. John's.  
"Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training: Follow Up"  
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On the next pages are the numbers that show participants' changes in intensity of suicidal thoughts throughout this process.



<b>Table 2 Non-Completers</b>			
Intensity of suicidal thought ratings by individuals who completed the pre-evaluation, but not the post-evaluation.			
0			
5			
2			
3			
1			
2			
3			
Average pre-evaluation: <b>2.28</b>			
Average for all (15) respondents who completed the pre-evaluation: <b>3.47</b>			

<b>Table 3</b>
<b>Intensity of Suicidal Thoughts at Beginning of Program:</b>
<b>Recollected at Follow Up</b>
(October 6)
8/9
8
8
8
1
<b>33.5; Average: 6.7</b> compared to completers' self-reported intensity of suicidal thoughts, beginning of program: Average: <b>4.5</b> (33% variance)

**To view the report**, "Suicide Prevention Through Mindfulness Training: Outcomes Summary", please click here:

<https://safermindfulness.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Suicide-Prevention-Outcomes-Summary-AUG-10-21.pdf>

