

Andrew Safer

Founder, Safer Mindfulness Inc.

Mindfulness Instructor & Trainer – Workshop Facilitator – Author

(709) 722-2716

andrew@safermindfulness.com – www.safermindfulness.com

Mindfulness Training for Mental Health and Well-Being Project Report

July 11, 2023

Mokami Status of Women Council

43 Grenfell Street

P.O. Box 329, Stn. B

Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL

AOP 1E0

Attention: Stacey Hoffe, Executive Director, Mokami Status of Women Council

Program Description

Safer Mindfulness Inc. of St. John's and Mindful Matters of Happy Valley-Goose Bay conducted the 10-session "Mindfulness Training for Mental Health and Well-Being" program with Indigenous adolescents in Goose Bay. The one-hour sessions met twice weekly over five weeks, from May 21 to June 27, 2023. All of the youths attended in-person, with the exception of a youth and parent in Wabush who connected via Zoom.

Funding support was provided by Ulnooweg Foundation, and was facilitated by Mokami Status of Women Council.

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Ten adolescents registered for the program. Nine attended the first session, and six attended the last session. One youth who was still connected to the program was unable to attend the last session due to vacation plans. Aged from 11 to 17 (average age: 14), they live in Goose Bay, Sheshatshiu, and Wabush. They presented with a range of issues including suicidal ideation / suicide attempts, anxiety, depression, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and stress.

Andrew Safer conducted the Mindfulness training and delivered the session presentations. Blake Sheppard-Pardy, MSW RSW, arranged the logistics, coordinated with the caregivers and the youth, and supervised the in-person sessions at the Friendship Centre. ASIST-trained Misty Dyson, Mokami Status of Women Council, was on hand to provide support as needed.

The parents / caregivers were instrumental in registering the youths for the program, and supporting their attendance at the sessions.

The session topics included the following:

- 1. Mindfulness and Mental Health: What's It All About?
- 2. Grounding and Mindfulness-Awareness Practice
- 3. Being Present & Mindfulness in Everyday Life
- 4. Birthright of Goodness: Discovering Inner Resources
- 5. Self-Judgment vs. Kindness / Making Friends with Yourself
- 6. Stress and Anxiety & the Power of Pausing
- 7. Rumination & Disengaging from Thoughts
- 8. A New Way to Relate to Feelings & Emotions
- 9. Applying Mindfulness Skills to Dealing with Difficulties
- 10. Mindfulness in Everyday Life

During the sessions, we did a check-in and did Mindfulness practice together (sitting and/or walking) with instruction and guidance, had open time when the youth could share, presented the topic of the day, introduced additional mindfulness practices / exercises (Mindful Eating, Loving-Kindness, Pausing through Head and Shoulders, Mindful Listening), Q&A, assigned readings from *Anxiety, Stress & Mindfulness* by Andrew Safer, and provided further guidance on home practice.

After three people withdrew from the program—which is expected with an offering of this duration—the remaining seven youths formed a cohesive group, making friends and supporting each other.

Certificates of Completion are being issued to six youths who attended at least seven out of ten sessions.

Program Adaptations

The program was adapted for Indigenous youth as follows:

- Indigenous people were represented in the presentation visuals.
- Several Indigenous Mindfulness teachers were introduced to the youth.
- The main Mindfulness practice that the youth engaged in during the sessions was changed from sitting to walking meditation, following their clear preference for mindful walking.
- Not starting the session until those who were expected had arrived.
- The word “suicide” was not used in the sessions with the youth. Hence, Session #1 (above) was changed from “Mindfulness and Suicide Prevention” to “Mindfulness and Mental Health”.
- The language used on the presentation slides, and verbally, was simplified to be suitable for youth.

Anecdote

In the sixth session, one of the older youths asked if we would be talking about “exam anxiety”. The topic that evening was “Stress & Anxiety and the Power of Pausing”, and as it turned out, one of the presentation slides was on test anxiety. Noting the youth’s interest, Andrew gave a thorough explanation of the relevance of Mindfulness in this situation. At the next session, the youth announced that he had just taken a math exam—and he passed! When he came upon a question he couldn’t answer, he meditated! The following week, Andrew asked, “So what happened when you meditated?” The youth responded that the answer would come to him, and he would write it down.

Follow Up

The youth were told about free weekly Mindfulness practice sessions that are available to them on Zoom: Monday night at 7:15 pm and Friday at 12:00 Noon. They were encouraged to come to one just to see what they are like, and with no pressure, to continue if they chose to do so. It was explained that this is a very supportive way to keep Mindfulness alive in one's life, in addition to regular practice at home. The Zoom invitations are sent to the parents/caregivers on Monday and Friday mornings.

In addition, Blake and Misty indicated an interest in meeting with the youth periodically for Mindfulness practice and discussion.

Evaluation Report

A report on the outcomes of the pre- and post-evaluations will follow.