

Grow Mindfulness Train-the-Trainer Program for Youth



Final Project Report
June 2022

Centre for Mindfulness Studies

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Background

The Centre for Mindfulness Studies (CMS) received a 3-year Ontario Trillium Foundation GROW grant for an integrated mindfulness train-the-trainer program that will train 60 frontline workers from 15 youth-serving agencies across the City of Toronto.

The project is designed to increase the capacity of frontline workers by providing them with mindfulness-based training to strengthen both their personal and professional resilience and their capacity to deliver this program to co-workers and youth participants (ages 16-29).

Goals

The goal is to equip supportive allies such as frontline trainees with the skills to support youth to build resilience and well-being as well as strengthen their sense of personal agency by increasing their resilience and emotional intelligence and reducing stress from workplace burn-out.

Benefits

Agencies will have another service and form of support to provide to their staff and youth participants. Each agency would be able to continue offering mindfulness-based programs to staff and youth participants at the close of the training.

Stronger community partnerships and enhanced services within the social service sector



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This project is made possible through the generous support of Ontario Trillium Foundation's Grow Grant.



Participating Agencies

The Centre partnered with 33 youth-serving agencies.

- Arrabon House
- AboutFace
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Toronto
- Brampton Salvation Army Queen Youth Shelter
- Catholic Family Services
- Covenant House
- CultureLink
- Dixon Hall
- Elizabeth Fry Toronto
- Friends of Ruby
- Global Leadership Village / Sacred Women International
- Hamilton Community Legal Clinic
- Jessie's – The June Callwood Centre for Young Women
- LOFT Community Services
- Massey Centre
- Planned Parenthood Toronto
- Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers
- Reconnect Community Services
- Sheena's Place
- SKETCH Working Arts
- Springboard Services
- St. Michael's Family Health Team
- Stella's Place
- StepStones for Youth
- Strides Toronto
- Surrey Place
- WE Charity
- West Hill Collegiate
- West Neighborhood House
- Woodgreen Community Services
- Youth Without Shelter
- YouthLink
- YWCA

Program Overview

The training consisted of two programs: Mindfulness-Based Wellness (MBW) & Mindfulness-Based Intervention (MBI)



MINDFULNESS-BASED WELLNESS PROGRAM

It is a 7-week mindfulness-based program which aims to help young people to grow (develop and thrive), to have resilience (adapt and recover), openness (possibility and perspective) and wellness (movement towards health). The objectives are to provide psychoeducation, experiential learning, skills, and tools that facilitate these goals.

MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTION PROGRAM

This 7-week program focuses on helping youth deal with difficult mind and mood states, such as anxious states or depressed mood. The goals of this program are to help young people to develop skills and coping strategies that promote resilience and self-efficacy, often despite some significant challenges, both personal and systemic, affecting mood and engendering anxiety.



Project Highlights

- 33** Youth-serving agency partners
- 82** Frontline workers trained to deliver MBW & MBI to youth
- 137** Programs & workshops facilitated
- 228** Staff & adult allies learned mindfulness skills
- 1468** Youth participants reached

Train-the-Trainer Program Evaluation

MBW LAUNCH

- 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction personal program
- 5-day MBW Train-the-Trainer Intensive
- Supervised Training Practicum of the MBW program

Year
1

Phase I: MBW Program

In the first year of the project (2019), the frontline workers were trained to deliver the MBW program.

MBSR Personal Program

Attending an 8-week MBSR program (2.5 hours each week) was the first stage in the training. This personal program aims to develop their mindfulness practice, to help manage stress, and to improve their well-being. 65 frontline trainees completed the program. Three MBSR groups were delivered in 2019.

MBSR Program Evaluation

Participants were asked to complete a course evaluation after the program. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Their perceived stress, well-being, and mindfulness skills were measured before and after the program using standard, widely accepted scales: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), WHO-5 Well-Being Index, and Five Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ).

Average Rating (1 lowest – 10 highest)



Overall, how would you rate this program?



How important has the program been for you?



Said they will continue to practice what they learned

"I became/am a more mindful, less reactive, more accepting, less judgmental person."

MBSR Program Benefits



Results showed that after the MBSR program, the frontline trainees have lower perceived stress, improved well-being, and higher mindfulness skills. The differences in these three aspects are statistically significant at 95% confidence level in the predicted direction.

The frontline trainees had a positive experience in taking part in the program and highlighted several benefits:

- Expanded and deepened knowledge and practice of mindfulness
- Increased awareness and understanding of self and experiences
- Increased ability to cope with stress and challenging situations
- Greater ability to regulate emotions
- Applied the tools and learnings in professional work
- Provided an opportunity for self-care and to focus on own needs
- Became more mindful, present, and in the now



"I think it reminded me that I am important too. I feel like it was a practical way to 'put the oxygen mask on myself before I put it on others. I believe it reminded me that space and compassion for my emotions/thoughts is important even if/when it is inconvenient."

MBW Train-the-Trainer Intensive

CMS developed a training curriculum for the MBW Program for Youth. This was the second stage of the training - a 5-day Train-the-Trainer Intensive which was held on June 17, 18, 24, 25, and September 6, 2019. The intensive involved teaching the frontline workers mindfulness core concepts, introducing the MBW program, teachbacks, and discussing program modifications to better suit the context of their clients and agencies.

In the Intensive, the frontline trainees received an MBW Program for Youth manual to guide their training and facilitation of the program. They also received a workbook that their clients can use to enrich their learning.

55 frontline workers completed the Train-the-Trainer Intensive. 10 frontline workers dropped out or postponed their participation in the project due to various reasons: personal problems, health issues, left the agency, conflict with work schedule, etc.

MBW Train-the-Trainer Intensive Program Evaluation

Average Rating (1 lowest – 10 highest)

8.6

Overall, how would you rate this program?

8.7

How important has the program been for you?

8.6

Did the training program meet your expectations?

"I was impressed with the facilitators, their knowledge, and comfort with the practice. The fluid adaptation that was suggested and tolerated was impressive."

Helpful Aspects of the Training Intensive

- **Teachbacks.** During teachbacks, they were provided an opportunity to facilitate the practices and receive feedback from peers and mentors.
- **Structure of the training intensive.** They appreciated experiential learning style of the program, the large and small group work, and the rotation of mentors.
- **Group discussions and Q&A.** These were helpful particularly when discussing the topic of adaptations to specific clientele.
- **Program manual and resources provided.** The frontline trainees found the manual, workbook, handouts to be thorough, practical, and precise.
- **Learning from other trainees.** The training intensive provided a good venue for frontline workers to network and to learn from others' experiences and ideas.

"Not enough space to write. This will forever impact my work in a positive way."



Suggestions for Improvement

- Allot more time for teachbacks to practice inquiry and facilitation of the mindfulness practices.
- More discussion on adaptations to suit the trainees' clientele and troubleshooting of possible challenges in delivering the program.
- Build in trauma-informed practices in the training curriculum.
- Share success stories and learnings from previous or similar programs delivered.
- More diversity in the mentors.
- Spread out the training intensive because the schedule is intense.

Phase II: MBI Program

In 2020, the second phase of the project was launched, and the frontline workers were trained to deliver the MBI program.

This launch was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the program was delayed. In response, CMS conducted a needs assessment and shifted personal and professional training programs online to ensure optimal accessibility and safety amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, frontline trainees took an MBCT and the MBI Train-the-Trainer Intensive. In 2021, CMS facilitated an additional MBI Train-the-Trainer Intensive for additional youth-serving agency partners.



MBCT Personal Program

MBCT combines cognitive behavioral techniques with mindfulness strategies to help individuals better understand and manage their thoughts and emotions to achieve relief from feelings of distress.

Three MBCT programs were facilitated in 2020 and one in 2021. The format of the first two iterations were modified based on the needs of the frontline workers. Additionally, a 30-minute didactic was added after each session to explore the themes of the session as facilitators in training.

MBCT Program Evaluation

The same course evaluation process was used as in phase I of the project. 29 participants completed the evaluation form.

Average Rating (1 lowest – 10 highest)

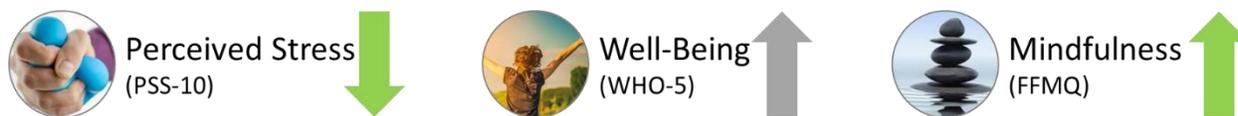
8.1

Overall, how would you rate this program?

7.6

How supportive has the program been for you?

"This has been a supportive and safe space that has allowed me to grow my mindfulness practice in a way where mistakes were ok and was enough. This way of teaching had a profound impact on me."



After completing the MBCT program, the results imply that the frontline trainees have lower perceived stress, improved well-being, and higher mindfulness skills. The differences in perceived stress and mindfulness skills are statistically significant at 95% confidence level in the predicted direction (n=25). Although there was an increase in perceived well-being, the difference is not statistically significant.

Qualitative results were also analyzed and there were a mix of responses when it came to the perceived benefits and experiences of being in the program.

Benefits of the Program

- Provided a space to practice mindfulness and support one's well-being
- Improved emotion regulation skills
- Helped with reducing stress and anxiety levels
- Learned practical and accessible techniques and tools that can be used in daily life and difficult moments
- Served as a support during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Provided a space to foster connection with others

"I noticed the immediate benefits on my own mental health with stress and anxiety."

"This program came at the right time as I did not have many supports in regard to Covid-19 pandemic well-being."

Challenges during the Program

- **Online vs In-Person format.** Participants recognized the flexibility and adaptability of the team to shift to an online format, but some found it difficult to engage in the program through the screen.
- **Home Practice.** Some participants expressed difficulty in engaging with the practices and finding the time to do Home Practice.
- **Length of the Sessions.** The first 2 MBCT groups were modified into 14 weeks (1-1.5h per week). For some, this made the sessions feel disjointed and there was not enough time for discussions. This was a key learning point for CMS and the next MBCT offerings were facilitated in its standard format.
- **Trauma-Informed and Anti-Oppressive Practice.** Some participants raised the lack of trauma-informed and anti-oppressive approach in facilitating the program. CMS responded by providing training to core facilitators, redesigning parts of the program, and collaborating with an advisory group of youth and frontline workers in developing the MBI curriculum.

MBI Train-the-Trainer Intensive



CMS delivered two MBI Train-the-Trainer Intensives: (1) Oct. 6 – Dec. 8, 2020 with 48 participants and (2) Nov. 30 – Dec. 9, 2021 with 13 participants. Similar to the MBW Train-the-Trainer Intensive, the frontline trainees received a manual to guide their facilitation, a workbook for clients, and additional resources to enrich learning. Both MBI Training Intensives were facilitated online.

CMS utilized the learnings from the first phase of the project in redesigning the MBI Curriculum as well as the facilitation of the MBI

Training Intensive. In this curriculum, there was a more deliberate focus on the therapeutic elements, common to mindfulness-based programs, to be used as a framework for curriculum development and for trainees to understand the goals and objectives of the program. It is also more trauma-informed and focused on providing an inclusive and safer space for young people.

This was undertaken in collaboration with an advisory group of youth and frontline service providers to ensure its relevance to the psychosocial and cultural context of marginalized youth in Toronto.

MBI Train-the-Trainer Intensive Program Evaluation

21 participants completed the evaluation form.

Average Rating

(1 lowest – 10 highest)

8.4

Overall, how would you rate this program?

8.7

How important has the program been for you?

8.5

Did the training program meet your expectations?



“The fact that such a comprehensive and in-depth training program is available to youth workers for free is amazing. We are a sector that is often underserved and has limited professional development opportunities for staff. This is an amazing gift to the sector.”

Helpful Aspects of the Training Intensive

- Discussion on **trauma-informed practice and on collective care** were helpful for participants in developing their knowledge and skills to facilitate the program to their clients.
- Having **several speakers and mentors** in the training team exposed the participants to different teaching styles and different viewpoints.
- **Structured space** provided participants to share their experiences and ideas and to brainstorm enriched the learning process.
- Clear **explanation of the underlying principles** behind the sessions and mindfulness practices deepened the understanding of the program.
- **Teachbacks** were key in practicing the skills and receiving feedback from peers and mentors.
- **Organized materials** (facilitation manual, workbook, and readings) contributed to some ease in learning.

"I feel that the GROW program was designed to take mindfulness out of the confines of "western models of practice" mainstream and make it more equitable and accessible to groups often excluded from such practice. In this case the youth."

"I now have a deeper appreciation for mindfulness and its importance in both my personal and professional life. For example, when we talked about the importance of a therapist/facilitator practicing mindfulness in order to foster a safer space, a lightbulb went off for me. I also now understand that CMS presents one conceptualization of mindfulness and that it's critical to incorporate multiple perspectives and viewpoints while facilitating mindfulness programs."

Suggestions for Improvement

- Have less breakout room discussions since some topics are better addressed in the larger group
- If utilizing breakouts, provide more time so everyone can share their thoughts and not feel rushed
- More focus on providing feedback during teachbacks from mentors
- Spread out the training intensive because the schedule is intense
- More practical models and examples on how to embody a trauma-informed approach

Supervised Training Practicum

The trainees delivered the MBW and MBI program to their youth clients and were mentored by experienced faculty members from CMS. Each group was assigned a mentor who provided supervision and guided the program delivery from set-up to the closing of the group. As the trainees became more experienced in facilitation, the mentorship became more flexible, and they were provided with more independence.

"I personally felt the impact of the mindfulness practices on my own health and well-being. I professionally have found the curriculum and training very helpful and solid and has and will be supportive to my delivery of programs."

Key Developments

Through the training process, the following skills were developed by the trainees (based on self-report and observation of mentors):

- Development of personal mindfulness practice and skills that are useful in approaching challenging situations
- Deeper understanding of the underlying principles, assumptions, and mechanisms of mindfulness
- Increased mastery in facilitating programs and skills in guiding formal mindfulness practices and cognitive exercises
- Improved skills in inquiry and acknowledged the importance of embodiment
- Adapted the curriculum, practices, and exercises based on the needs of the clients

Helpful Aspects of Mentorship

- Mentors provided ample support and guidance
- Receptive and helpful in creating plans and recalibrating the curriculum to meet the needs of the trainees' population
- Provided additional information and useful resources
- Established an atmosphere that made trainees feel well-supported and confident



Impact on Youth

More people are anxious, depressed and stressed than ever before. Youth have been hit the hardest. The goal of the project is to help youth improve their resilience and well-being and develop tools to work with stress, depression, and anxiety.

Youth were involved in developing the program. Advisory boards composed of youth from various backgrounds were consulted in the design of the program, practices, and materials.



MBW Program

65 MBW programs and workshops were facilitated. Participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the program as well as pre and post scales to measure changes in perceived stress and well-being.

Average Rating	(1 lowest – 10 highest)
9.2	Overall, how would you rate this program?
8.5	How helpful has the program been for you?
8.1	I intend to continue practicing mindfulness.
8.7	I would recommend this program to others.

n=62

"This program has been a great reminder of how much your life can change when you practice mindfulness everyday."

Participants reported a statistically significant decrease in perceived stress and improvement in well-being at 95% confidence level (n=37).



Perceived Stress (PSS-10)



Well-Being (WHO-5)

MBI Program

72 MBI programs and workshops were facilitated. A similar evaluation process was followed in this program.

Average Rating (1 lowest – 10 highest)

9.4

Overall, how would you rate this program?

9.0

How helpful has the program been for you?

8.4

I intend to continue practicing mindfulness.

8.6

I would recommend this program to others.

n=114



“Within the first week or two I saw the things I learned naturally integrating into my life. The tools I learned have made a huge impact on my relationship with anxiety.”

Participants also reported a statistically significant decrease in perceived stress and improvement in well-being at 95% confidence level (n=41).



Perceived Stress (PSS-10)



Well-Being (WHO-5)



“I loved the group and the facilitators of the group. They all helped me learn a lot from their experiences and gain more knowledge on health and wellness. They made me feel safe and I felt like I belonged. I was excited knowing we are going to meet up and chat away. Sadly, the sessions had to end.”



“As a black woman, it's not the norm to find outlets such as this to help you and the fact that it was offered during the pandemic it has helped alleviate a lot of stress.”

Benefits of the MBW & MBI Program

- Developed skills to manage stress, approach challenging situations with mindfulness, and improve general well-being
- Learned specific and accessible practices that can be practiced in daily life (ex. STOP, Mindful Check-In, Mindful Movement, 5-4-3-2-1, etc.)
- Expanded knowledge and understanding about one's mental health and well-being through concepts discussed in the program (ex. window of tolerance, negativity bias, components of self-compassion, etc.)
- Greater interest and understanding of mindfulness and its benefits
- Provided with a kind and inclusive environment to share, connect, and learn from others' experiences
- Given access to much needed support during a difficult period such as the pandemic or stressful life event
- Cultivated self-compassion and kindness to oneself and other people



This program really gave me a moment to connect with myself and the others. It has also helped me through stressful times by using their strategies.

"It came about at a time in my life where I needed additional support on my mental health journey and having the course and the structure of it was very beneficial to supplementing the current care I was receiving."

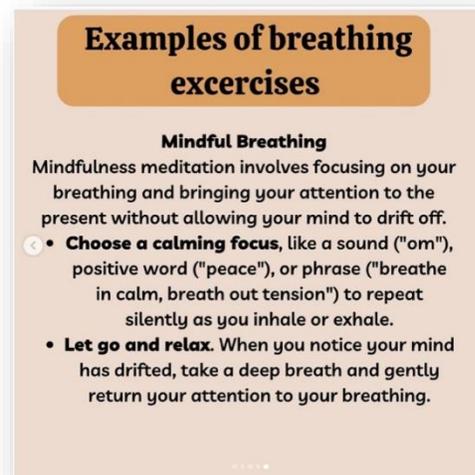
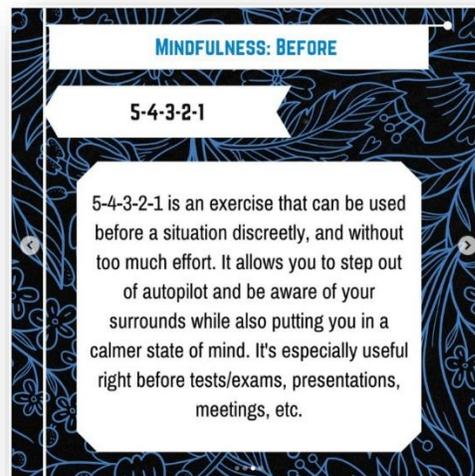
Suggestions for Improvement

- Facilitate the program in-person in the future
- Encourage increased engagement from participants through more interactive activities such as games, arts-based practices, and icebreakers
- Center the group towards peer support and allow more space for discussion
- Provide options for flexible participation, being mindful of participants' comfort level in sharing with the group
- Provide more structure and reminders for home practice and allot time to explore experiences
- Lengthen the sessions and find an optimum schedule which accommodates participants who are working

Youth Champions

Building relationships with youth leaders and training them and collaborating with them in developing and facilitating programs for their peers is key in engaging and getting buy-in from youth. We collaborated with Strides Toronto to provide training to their Youth Champions so they can create resources based on the MBW and MBI program that can be useful and accessible to their peers. They were provided honorariums for their work.

Here are samples of the content they created which were posted on Stride Toronto's Instagram page: @thezone_stridesto.



Thank You

This project would not have been possible without the efforts and commitment of:

- Centre for Mindfulness Studies' Community Program Team and Staff
- Centre for Mindfulness Studies' Faculty and Mentors
- Partner Agencies' Frontline Workers and Staff
- Youth Advisory Board
- Service Provider Advisory Board

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