

Awaken Pittsburgh

2017-2018 Annual report

Taking mindfulness to the community

Research demonstrating the benefits of mindfulness training is now well established. There are many well-designed studies documenting how teaching mindfulness skills can: reduce anxiety and depression; improve mental health and wellbeing in children; improve the performance of educators; improve self-control in incarcerated youth; reduce distress in the workplace; reduce the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and produce other health benefits such as reducing drug abuse¹. Clearly these are benefits that many people in our community could benefit from to improve their quality of life both at home and at school or work.

Awaken Pittsburgh incorporates well-accepted mindfulness techniques into our programming in order to benefit our community. We have also adopted a “train the trainers” model, whereby Awaken staff train participants to practice mindfulness and experience the benefits themselves, before going on to teach others in their institution or workplace. Since trainers from within the participants’ environment can be more effective than outside experts, and multiply the impact of their training², we expect this model to be highly effective and to benefit far more community members.

Program development and delivery

At the start of the 2017-18 school year, Awaken Pittsburgh had developed and piloted our flagship Mindful Connections™ program series: for helping professionals; for educators; and for classroom settings. We had also piloted programs based on the .b and Path to Freedom curricula, specifically designed for youth.

Awaken Pittsburgh is a research and evidence-led organization, so assessing our impact both qualitatively and quantitatively is critical to our ongoing success. We have used our own data collected using open-ended program evaluations and focus groups alongside standardized surveys of mindfulness and its impacts³ to identify the most relevant measures of change and success to our participants and their organizations. Highlighted in this report are the pre- and post-program surveys and their results. Using our standardized survey data, program evaluation questionnaires and focus group discussions, we have collected a body of evidence with which we can evaluate our success in terms of our impact on participants, the benefits to organizations, and identify the most effective ways to deliver our programs.

During 2017-18, we ran our established programs 11 times, ran a new condensed-format Mindful Connections™ for Workplace Wellness program and also piloted Mindful Connections™ for Addiction recovery and Empowerment. We are very grateful for support from Duquesne University and grants from the Hillman Family Foundation and the Staunton Farm Foundation that funded parts of this work. In total we trained 192 participants, including caring professionals, public-facing workers, educators, at-risk high school students and people recently released from prison, in mindfulness practices and how to benefit from them in their lives and work.

2017-18 Programs

10 program sites
13 programs delivered
192 participants reached
221 hours of programing

Benefits to our participants

For programs with adult participants, we measured 8 indicators of mindfulness and their impacts to asses our program success (4 facets of mindfulness, perceived stress and 3 indicators of quality of life in the workplace, see box). Looking across these programs we were able to quantify improvements in many of these indicators. At least one indicator of mindfulness improved significantly⁴ for 6 out of 7 programs, perceived stress fell significantly for 5 out of 7 programs and at least two measures of professional quality of life improved for 5 out of 6 programs.

There were 5 sites where we ran comparable full programs (Mindfulness Connections™ for Helping Professionals or Educators). Across these programs, we found that mindfulness measures and compassion consistently increased, and burnout and secondary traumatic stress reduced, as shown in the graph below. For 3 of the programs, participants made improvements for every

Indicators of success

Facets of mindfulness:

- observing
- describing
- acting with awareness
- non-judging of inner experience

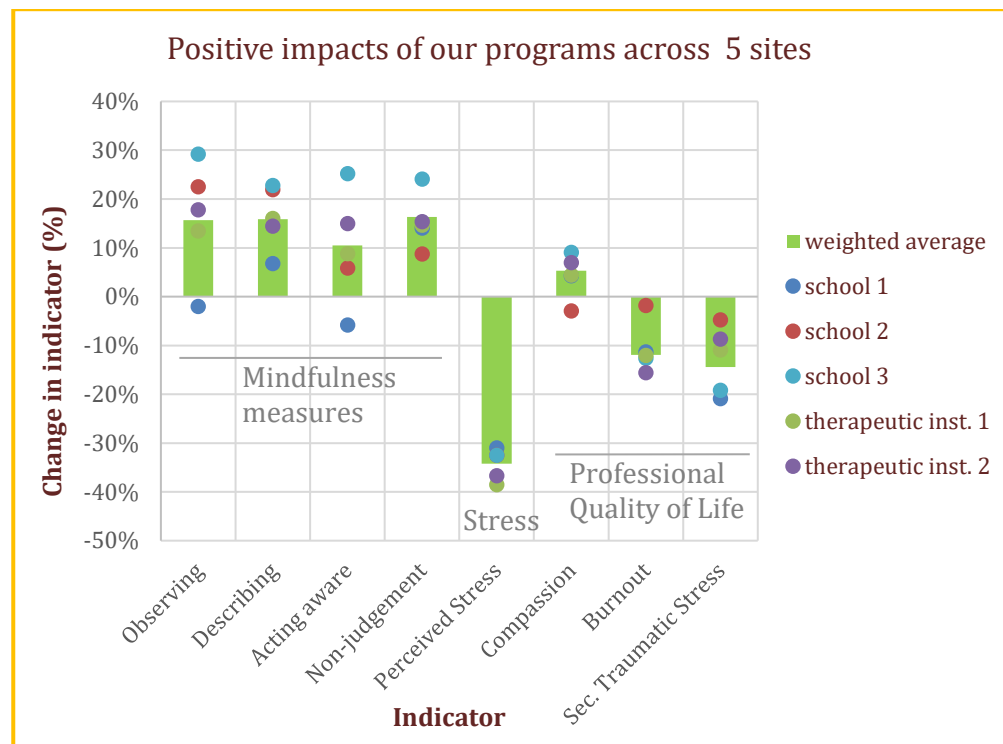
Perceived Stress

Professional Quality of life

- compassion satisfaction
- burnout
- secondary traumatic stress

indicator we measured, in the other two at least 6 of the 8 indicators improved. Our largest impact was on perceived stress, which was reduced in every program, by an average of 34%.

Other programs where we ran more compressed program schedules had fewer positive impacts and in two cases inconsistent attendance of participants did not allow us to measure our impact reliably.



Since participant numbers in each program are relatively small, we grouped the 5 comparable programs together to conduct a more powerful and informative meta analysis⁵ to assess the significance of our impacts.

We found strong statistically significant changes in mindfulness outcomes from pre- to post-program, but that the size of the impact varied across sites⁶. Further exploration revealed that 6 of the indicators improved highly significantly with no significant differences across sites, the observing facet of mindfulness improved significantly for 4 out of 5 sites, and the acting in awareness facet improved significantly for 2 out of 5 sites⁷.

We were fortunate that our extended programming at two sites (both schools) allowed us to perform a delayed post-test. Without any further teaching of participant mindfulness practices, we asked participants to take the post-program evaluation again. The results comparing this delayed time point to the pre-program findings clearly showed that the overall changes produced by the program persisted, with no significant difference across sites. Infact, positive changes for all 8 indicators either persisted, or even increased further⁸.

Program evaluation

Course evaluation surveys were completed for 11 of our programs and looked in detail at each session of each program. Participants' agreement with statements that the sessions increased their knowledge, their mindfulness practice and were enjoyable ranged from 64% to 100%. Between 46% and 100% (weighted average 82%) of participants thought the resources and supporting materials provided were useful. Most importantly from 29% to 82% (weighted average 60%) said they would use the mindfulness practices they learned every day or almost every day going forwards, and many others said they would use the practices at least a few times a week.

In our participants' own words:

"This course opened up my life to a new approach, to a life of kindness, gratitude and peace"

Participant, Therapeutic Institution 1

"If stress is the headache, then mindfulness is the aspirin"

Participant, School 2

"I think this is a great example of how our school supports the wellbeing of staff while also benefiting students"

Participant, School 1

"It will help me remain more centered in difficult situations"

Participant, Public workplace

Improving our effectiveness as an organization

Now that we have completed and formally assessed our courses several times we are beginning to look across our evaluations to critically assess each of the course components, the resources that we provide and the program designs that work best. Only one of our programs for adults has not shown significant improvements, and this was a highly condensed version of the program. We conclude that the full program of teaching, spread over a sufficient time period is needed to allow participants to truly benefit from the mindfulness training that we can provide. Further evaluation across more programs will allow us to assess if the supporting resources we provide, or the size and composition of participants groups affects the likelihood of producing the maximum desirable effects. We are actively working on how to help organizations schedule the program and assessments to maximize participation and completion rates.

Such feedback is critically useful information will be used to benefit both Awaken Pittsburgh and our future clients so that they can best benefit from the courses.

In conclusion

2017-18 has been a busy year and one where we have grown enormously in our programming and reach. With much work done to develop further programs and refine our existing models, we look forward to serving more organizations and supporting more people in our community in the year ahead.

It is extremely gratifying to see our impact on the wellbeing of the participants and that this is measurable both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the words of one of our participants "This has potential to make such a positive difference in the lives of children, families, and communities"

¹ Meta-analyses of research studies have found evidence that mindfulness training can: reduce anxiety and depression [Goyal et al. (2014) JAMA Intern Med. 174(3):357-368, Kourhy et al (2013) Clin Psychol Rev. 33(6):763-71]; increase mental health and wellbeing in children and adolescents [Dunning et al. (2019) J Child Psychol Psychiatry. 60(3):244-258]; improve wellbeing and performance of Educators [Lomas et al. (2017) Teaching and Teacher Education 61:132-141]; improve attention in incarcerated youth [Leonard et al. (2013) Frontiers in Psychology 13(4): Art792]; reduce employee distress in the workplace [Slomp et al. (2019) Stress Health. doi: 10.1002/smi.2857]; and reduce the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [Boyd et al. (2018) J Psychiatry Neurosci. 43(1)7-25]; improves emotional control and reduces drug abuse [Tang et al. (2016) Drug and Alcohol Dependence 163, Suppl. 1, S13-S18].

² Orfaly et al. (2005) *J Public Health Management Practice*, November (Suppl), S123–S127.

³ Modified version Baer's **Five Facets of mindfulness** [Tran et al. (2013) J Clin Psychol. 69(9), 951–965; Baer et al (2006). *Assessment*, 13(1), 27-45], **Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale** [Cohen et al. (1983) J Health Soc Behav. 24(4):385-96] and **Professional Quality of Life: Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue Version 5 (ProQOL)**. [Hudnall Stamm, 2009-2012, www.proqol.org]

⁴ Using Wilcoxon Signed Rank test (significance at $p < 0.05$).

⁵ Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was followed by univariate ANOVA for the interaction terms and significance levels assessed by individual t-test between site changes from pre- to post-test. The Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons was applied to prevent alpha inflation. See statistical report for more details.

⁶ Results of MANOVA showed a highly significant main effect of pre to post mindfulness changes ($F_{(8,37)} = 18.508, p < .001$), and a significant interaction term with sites ($F_{(32,138)} = 1.563, p = .042$).

⁷ For perceived stress, describing emotions, non-judgment, compassion, burnout and secondary traumatic stress, changes in indicators improved significantly across all sites ($p < 0.01$). For the observing indicator, post hoc analysis revealed significant improvements for 4 out of 5 sites (for 2 $p < 0.05$, for 2 $p < 0.01$) and for the acting aware indicator, post hoc analysis revealed significant improvements for 2 out of 5 sites (for both, $p < 0.05$).

⁸ Results of MANOVA showed a highly significant main effect of pre to post-test and delayed post-test mindfulness changes ($F_{(16,38)} = 4.341, p < .001$). There was no significant difference in the impacts between the sites ($F_{(16,40)} = 1.052, p = 0.429$).