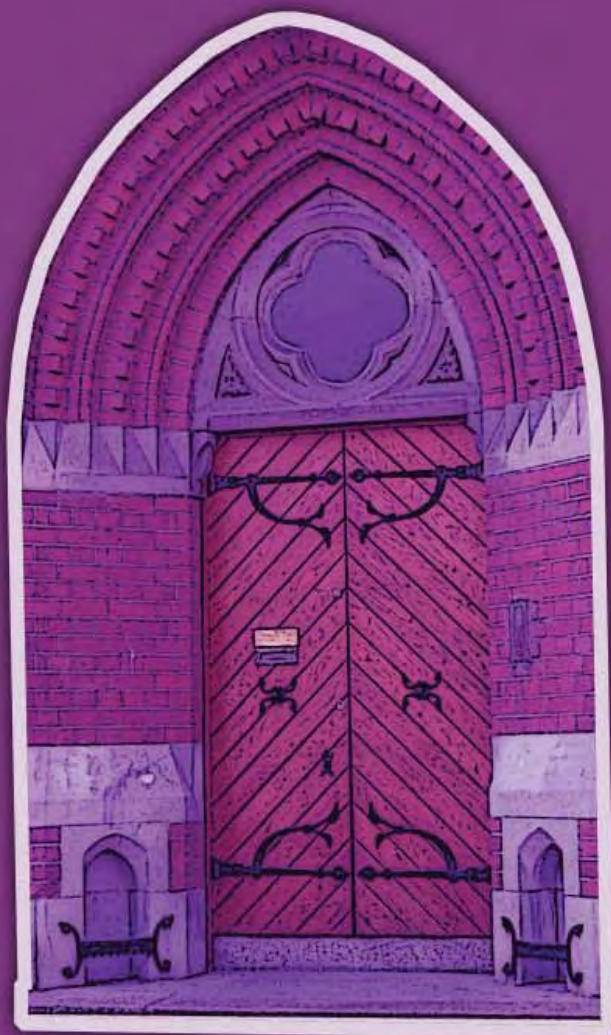




# THE DEORA MINDFULNESS PROGRAMME

A pilot study to explore the benefits  
of mindfulness training for people  
recovering from addiction

by  
TONY BATES  
&  
FAYE SCANLAN





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&  
FAYE SCANLAN*





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## FOREWORD

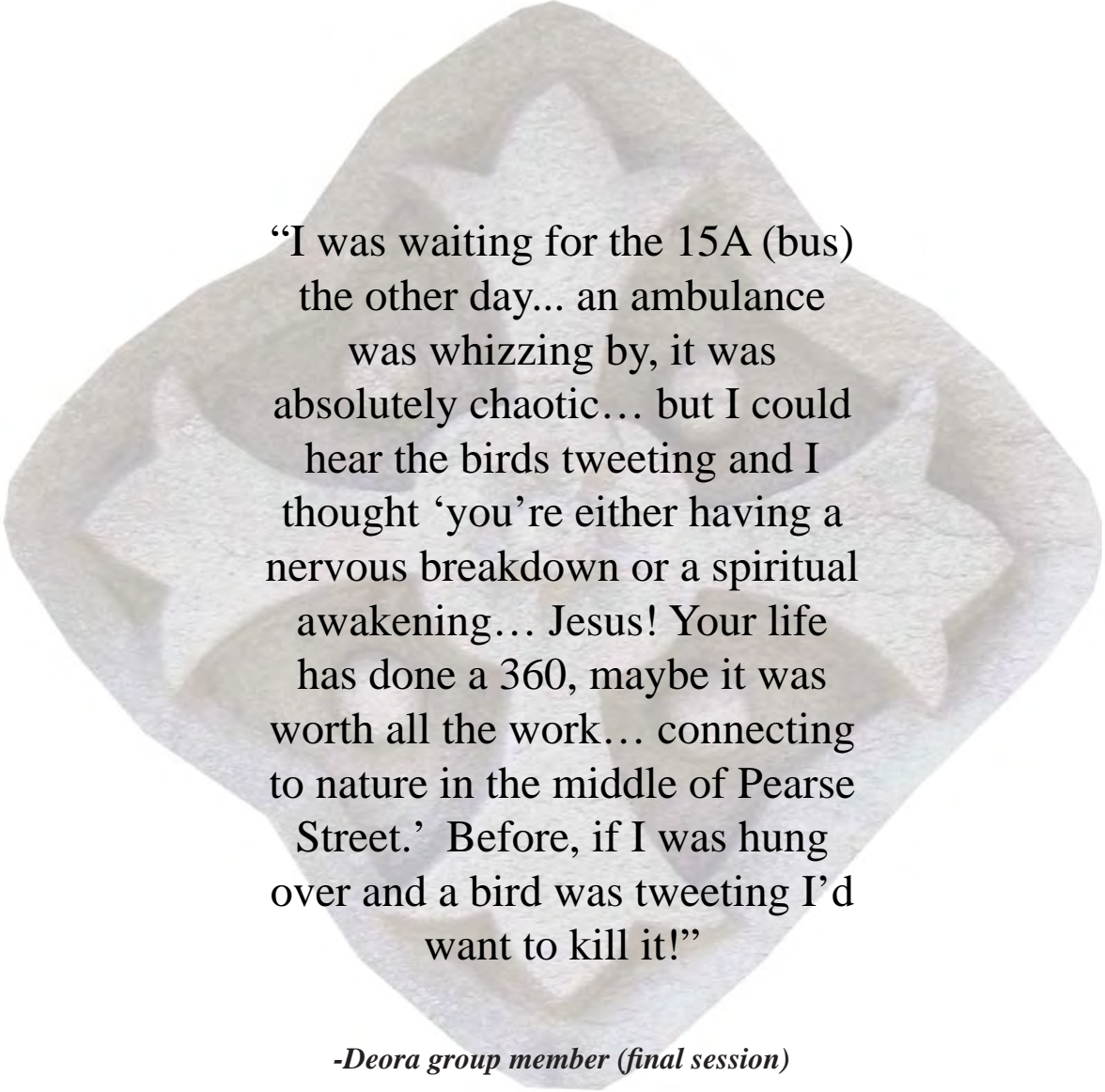
The Deora Project was established in January 2003 to provide counselling to the people of the North Inner City area of Dublin who have suffered loss as a result of bereavement, suicide and/or addiction.

In 2007, the authors were invited by the Board and Directors of the Deora Project, to conduct a course of training in Mindfulness with a group of people who had a history of severe and multiple addictions. This programme was designed to explore the potential benefits of mindfulness training to this unique population. This is a very new area of research that had never before been explored in Ireland; however a handful of recently published international studies have demonstrated the potential benefits of mindfulness on relapse prevention. In addition, the very strong evidence for the benefits of mindfulness with many other health problems, and the swell of interest in mindfulness training among therapists of all persuasions, suggested it would be valid to pilot an 8-week programme and evaluate it as thoroughly as possible.

This report describes in some detail what happened between March and June 2007 for the people who participated in this programme. It includes an explanation of mindfulness, an outline of the core elements of the course, a week by week process analysis of group meetings and both a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach.

Thanks are expressed by the training team to all the people who participated in the programme, the staff of Deora - particularly to the Director, Gerry Cunningham - and to those therapists who referred their clients to this pilot programme. The close cooperation and support we received from each of these individuals was critical to the success of the programme. We would like to thank Dr Barbara Dooley, Headstrong's Director of Research, for her expertise in designing the quantitative and qualitative analysis. We believe the results, though modest in terms of numbers, are encouraging. They suggest that mindfulness has something important to contribute to recovery by teaching this population to ground themselves in the present moment, to deal with strong emotions, and to experience their lives in more vital and meaningful ways.

*Tony Bates and Faye Scanlan, June 2008*



“I was waiting for the 15A (bus) the other day... an ambulance was whizzing by, it was absolutely chaotic... but I could hear the birds tweeting and I thought ‘you’re either having a nervous breakdown or a spiritual awakening... Jesus! Your life has done a 360, maybe it was worth all the work... connecting to nature in the middle of Pearse Street.’ Before, if I was hung over and a bird was tweeting I’d want to kill it!”

*-Deora group member (final session)*



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## Chapter 1

### **Designing the Deora Mindfulness Programme**

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#### **What is Mindfulness?**

There has been an explosion of interest in mindfulness among psychotherapists and health care practitioners. Training courses in mindfulness for people with either physical and mental health problems have been established throughout the world. These courses, generally involve 2-3 hour group meetings that occur weekly over an 8-week period. Participants learn to bring mindfulness meditation and basic Yoga exercises into their everyday lives and the impact of these practices on their health is carefully recorded.

Research findings have concluded, time and time again, that when some people practice mindfulness regularly, there are measurable positive changes in their lives. People who suffer chronic pain become able to deal with this without medication; people prone to repeated episodes of severe depression stop relapsing, without the aid of medication. People with high levels of stress and tension learn to bring down their anxiety levels and enjoy a much better quality of life. More recently, studies in the States have demonstrated the potential of Vipassana meditation and mindfulness-based programmes in relapse prevention for people with addiction disorders (Marlatt et al., 2004).

Mindfulness means being attentive to whatever you are doing when you are doing it. By settling your attention on whatever is happening in the present moment, you gradually calm your mind, and relax your body. With your awareness grounded in the present moment, you are less vulnerable to being drawn into negative rumination about the past or the future. You begin to see what is actually happening in the here and now. Positive elements in your life are experienced with greater appreciation; and in the stillness that develops through mindfulness practice, creative solutions can emerge to guide you in responding to challenging dilemmas.

This return to the present moment requires practice. It is achieved principally by using the breath as a focus, following the in-breath for the full duration of your in-breath, and the out-breath for the full duration of the out-breath. Yoga, body scan and mindful walking are also ways to bring our attention to the present moment. All of these methods work best when undertaken with an attitude of kindness towards oneself, and with a non-judgemental acceptance of whatever one is feeling or not feeling in any given moment.

**“Mindfulness means being attentive to whatever you are doing when you are doing it.”**

Mindfulness has its origins in both Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, but its application within psychotherapy has principally to do with its capacity to help us find calm and stability in the face of painful emotions. Therapies in recent years have emphasised change and self-control. While these approaches have their place, they fall short in helping us to deal with cognitive and emotional distress that recurs over and over, despite our best efforts. Often, the most effective method of dealing with our negative moods is to gently acknowledge what’s happening and let them be, without being pulled into doing battle with ourselves. Mindfulness teaches us how to let ourselves ‘be’ by surrendering the need to change how we are.

#### **Mindfulness and addiction**

The application of mindfulness to addiction is based on the Buddhist view that addiction represents a “false refuge” from the pain and suffering of life (Marlatt, 2002). According to this perspective, engaging in drug use or any other form of mood-altering behaviour

is motivated by a strong desire to avoid or escape suffering. To the extent that a person becomes dependent on or attached to whatever provides them with relief, they become vulnerable to addiction. As their attachment to this behaviour grows, their mind becomes increasingly fixated on a “craving” for the relief which this behaviour or substance promises. Gradually the individual becomes trapped by their addiction as they cling to whatever refuge they have discovered, as though it were the only way to manage the pain of being human.

According to Buddhism, people resort to addictions, not because they are morally weak or physically diseased, but out of a misguided (“ignorant”) intense form of attachment to something that appears to offer refuge or temporary immunity from suffering. They want what everyone wants: well being, freedom from pain, an experience of transcending the confines of their lives. But they are simply going about things in a misguided way. They want to avoid suffering; they fail to see that it is their addiction is causing most of their suffering.

All of the practices involved in mindfulness training (e.g. yoga, sitting and walking meditation, body-scan, self-monitoring) are designed to enable a person to track the dynamics of their addictive thoughts, feelings and behaviour and to see them for what they are. Through facing the truth of what they do when they allow themselves become swept up in these behaviours, from a stable position of being grounded in the present moment and connected to their bodily experience, they discover they have choices other than to yield to the seduction of addiction.

Specifically, the potential benefits of mindfulness to a person in recovery include the following:

1) Mindfulness training teaches the client to develop a detached awareness of the thoughts and cravings, without over-identifying with them to the extent they feel compelled to give in to their cravings. He or she learns to relate (with kindness) to their inner cognitive and emotional dynamics without having to react to them.

2) The practice of mindfulness enables the client to see that every human experience is impermanent. Through observing their minds, they notice that their thoughts, feelings and sensations are constantly changing. Pleasant sensations and images rise and pass; and the same is true of unpleasant experiences. This insight is liberating for the person as it helps them to bear what they regard as unbearable. Marlatt (2002) quotes one client who said:

*“If things are always changing, my negative moods will also change over time. Meditation helps me to let go and to allow these natural changes to occur, without worrying how I will control them through my drug use. The same goes for feeling high. I cannot stay high all the time, so I get caught in planning where and when I can get high again. The truth is, I’ll never achieve permanent satisfaction. Just knowing that things are always changing is a big load off my mind.”* (p.48)

3) The practice of mindfulness enhances the client’s ability to deal with urges and cravings:

Marlatt (1985; 1994) teaches his clients to visualise the urge as an ocean wave that begins as a small wavelet and gradually builds up to a large cresting wave. As the urge wave grows in strength, the client’s goal is to surf the urge by allowing it to pass without being “wiped out” by giving into it. He tells clients that urges are simply learned or “conditioned” behaviours triggered by specific cues and high-risk situations. Like a wave, the urge response grows in intensity until it reaches a peak level of craving. Giving in to the urge when it peaks only serves to strengthen or “reinforce” the addictive behaviour. Not acting on the urge, on the other hand, weakens the grip of the addiction and strengthens the experience of freedom and self-confidence. Like any skill, learning how to “urge surf” takes practice and improves over time as the client achieves greater balance on the mindfulness surfboard.

4) Mindfulness training fosters the development of an attitude of compassion towards one’s experience of pain and distress. In addiction treatment, it encourages in both clients and therapist a radical acceptance of

...“where they are at”. Goal setting as a result tends to be more realistic and pragmatic, better attuned to the client’s current stage of change, rather than dominated by some black and white set of criteria as to what constitutes recovery.

Mindfulness training has been gaining support as an effective intervention that helps alleviate the grip of addiction. Langer (1998) has defined mindfulness as a cognitive skill that can be taught to counter the “mindless” state of addiction “in which one is bound by rigid cognitive dichotomies (e.g. using or not using) and a reliance on alcohol and drugs as the only available means of escaping stress and anxiety” (Marlatt et al., 2004).

Teasdale described mindfulness as a skill that enabled people to assume freer and more flexible ways of thinking about their experiences (Teasdale et al., 1995). Rather than see a particular thought as “irrational” and try to change it through argument and debate within one’s own mind, Teasdale saw that we could learn to simply acknowledge a negative thought for what it was (i.e. a well-worn habit of the mind, that probably at some point in our development served a supposed self-protective function), and let it be, without investing it with the power of truth. For Teasdale, mindfulness worked at the metacognitive level rather than directly on passing thoughts and feelings.

Adapting this metacognitive perspective to addiction, Toneatto (1999) proposed that mindfulness training could teach an addict to adopt a different attitude to their experiences of craving, where he or she could learn to experience the craving on a moment-by-moment basis with an attitude of acceptance. The goal for the addict is to get to a place where they could see through the fiction that the substance they desired would solve these cravings. By being able to tolerate the intensity of their cravings on a moment-by-moment basis (i.e. the stimulus), without yielding to the pressure to achieve a quick fix (i.e. the response), Toneatto believed that an addict could break their usual conditioned behavioural routine.

## The Deora mindfulness programme (DMP)

The Deora 8-week course in mindfulness training introduced an additional intervention within the Deora service in Dublin’s north inner city, to support individuals in their recovery. Participants learned to use mindfulness to bring their attention into the present moment and become aware of what is happening within them and around them; they learned to pay attention in a particular way to their body sensations, feelings and thoughts, i.e. to allow themselves to notice what is happening in each of these domains of experience, without judging themselves, without suppressing or running away from their experience, and to disengage from familiar negative thinking patterns that heighten distress and inevitably lead to self-destructive coping strategies. The long term objective of this practice was to enable participants to be aware of those thoughts, feelings, urges and subtle behaviour patterns that led to relapse and to enable them to cope with their vulnerabilities in a more creative way.

The Deora programme was an 8-week structured course based on Jon Kabat-Zinn’s (1990) Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course. This course was designed by Kabat-Zinn to teach patients in a general hospital setting to cope with stress and physical pain. It incorporates an introduction to basic meditation techniques, Hatha Yoga, Body-Scan training and stress management. In addition to these elements that constitute MBSR, the Deora programme also incorporates elements of Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) - a programme that adapts mindfulness training for individuals recovering from severe mental health problems and incorporates some generic cognitive therapy skills training (Segal et al., 2002). The evidence base for both of these programmes is considerable (see for example, Baer (2006) for a review of the effectiveness of mindfulness training with different care groups).

In recent years, Alan Marlatt and his colleagues in Seattle Washington, USA have been incorporating

mindfulness in their approach to relapse prevention with addicted people. They have just produced a course which combines core strategies to prevent relapse within the 8 week course structure developed by Kabat-Zinn. They are calling their programme “Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention”. The authors met with Alan Marlatt and had some training in his approach to input into their work in Deora. Any future developments of this approach would do well to consider adopting his approach, as it is customised particularly for people in recovery from drug addiction, and incorporates evidence-based relapse prevention strategies.

## **Design of the Deora Mindfulness Programme**

Since this project represented a new venture in the Deora service, it was important to consider a number of elements that would enhance the likelihood of it being of benefit to participants. There is a limited body of evidence on the applications of mindfulness-oriented approaches to promoting recovery among those with a history of substance misuse. This was a small pilot project; we had no idea whether it was going to work and we were very clear with the participants that we would be learning as much as they hopefully would. We also tried to present this programme in language that made sense to the participants and to provide them with the necessary resources to develop their practice of mindfulness between sessions.

The following elements were considered to enhance the success of the course:

- Selection
- Pre- and post-course assessment to evaluate benefits of the course
- Provision of CD’s and handouts to facilitate participants in daily practice
- Careful planning for each training session

### ***Selection***

Mindfulness approaches work best with populations who are not caught up in a severe crisis. Therefore it

was important that participants had already achieved some stability in their recovery through individual and group programmes offered within the Deora service. Individuals for whom this programme was deemed to be inappropriate included those experiencing severe depression, psychosis and those who were currently abusing drugs or alcohol.

Individuals most likely to benefit from the training included those who had achieved a degree of freedom from addiction, who were not currently misusing substances, who had completed a course of therapy and who had achieved some insight into themselves. Mindfulness helps people to live with aspects of themselves that they recognise as leaving them vulnerable to relapse, in whatever form that takes for them. It was important that participants in this programme had some sense of wanting to find a way of maintaining stability in their lives, and that they accepted this required daily practice during and after the course.

Selection was largely dependent on referral from Deora staff, who we felt were the best judges of readiness for mindfulness training in their clients. Originally, it had been planned to select 10 participants for the course. In fact, 13 out of a short-list of 20 were selected as the interest in the course was greater than anticipated.

### ***Pre- and Post assessment***

With any new intervention, it is important to build in some way of evaluating its effectiveness. A selection of tests and measures were administered to each participant before the course and these measures were repeated on completion of the course. A number of widely used, standardised measures were employed, in addition to qualitative individual feedback from participants collected through one-to-one interviews when the course had been completed.

### ***Production of CD’s to enable participants to practice between sessions.***

The exercises that are intrinsic to this course require guidance and daily practice if they are to

...be successfully incorporated into a person's life. A number of selected CD's were made available to each participant, including those produced by John Kabat-Zinn, Mark Williams, Pema Chodron, and a guided meditation CD produced by one of the authors (TB). The former CDs are easily available and details of how they can be ordered are contained in John Kabat Zinn's book "Coming to our Senses". While these are invaluable resources, it is advisable for any mindfulness trainer to consider producing his or her own CD's.

### *Planning of course content.*

This course roughly followed the curriculum for mindfulness training outlined in a detailed manual produced by Segal, Teasdale and Williams, 2002. This was the core text for this Deora pilot project. The course team copied from this book (permission given by the authors in the book) a series of weekly handouts that summarised the content for specific sessions. Participants were provided with a folder to collate these materials for their own personal use. The yoga component of the DMP was taught by a master yoga teacher, Orla Punch, and guided CD's were provided for home practice.

## *Course team*

### **Dr. Tony Bates**

Clinical psychologist and founding director of Headstrong - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health. Trained in Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy with Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mark Williams and others. He has conducted structured training courses in Mindfulness in mental health (psychiatric hospital) settings since 2001.

### **Clive Shannon**

Service user in recovery, has assisted Tony Bates in running MBCT courses in St. James's Hospital. He is currently responsible for running the monthly mindfulness support group in St James's Hospital and has had some training in UK.

### **Faye Scanlan**

Psychology graduate and Programme Development Officer with Headstrong.

### **Orla Punch**

Master yoga teacher with widely based national and international teaching practice.

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*This report is dedicated to the memory of Frank O'Kelly, who joined this programme mid-way through as part of the course team. His presence infused the group with an amazing honesty as he shared candidly, with his own unique brand of humour, his impending death from pancreatic cancer. Mindfulness had helped him enormously in overcoming a lifetime of psychiatric disorder, but now it was his turn to be teacher and to show each of us how to live the one precious and transient life we have been given. He died on December 27th, 2007.*

## Chapter 2 - Learning to practice mindfulness

### Core elements of training within this 8-week Deora mindfulness programme

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Human beings find it very hard to be still. We are frightened of our inner lives and spend a great deal of our energies running from ourselves. One of the participants in this Deora programme described how having a bath was impossible for him. He simply couldn't cope with being alone with himself. If we are to achieve any kind of friendship with ourselves, as we are, we have to find a way back to being at ease in our own company.

There are many wounds that we carry in our minds and bodies, which make it hard to come into a place of stillness where we connect with who we are. Mindfulness meditation is a simple practice that allows us to come home to ourselves and to rest in the present moment. It teaches us how to ground ourselves and to achieve a perspective on our thoughts and feelings that is liberating. We learn to see our emotions as part of who we are, but not as the defining element of who we are. Without the freedom that this perspective brings, we have little choice but to behave in ways that shut out our inner lives. Addictive behaviours are often an attempt to escape distress and achieve an altered state of consciousness that feels tolerable, if only briefly.

Mindfulness gives us a different kind of freedom, where we become able to connect with our experience, hold it in awareness and consider more adaptive ways to manage our inner and outer lives. We learn to cultivate a radically different relationship to negative experiences through accepting them and seeing them for what they are. Switching from avoidance and self-criticism to acceptance is a key feature of mindfulness training.

Acceptance is often misunderstood; it is not a passive submissiveness or resignation. It is about learning to accept things as they are; the ability to be in the moment without wanting it to be something else. It allows us to see more clearly what needs to change. It allows us to have a different relationship with our

“Time and again we miss out on the great treasures of our lives because we are so restless. In our minds we are always somewhere else. We are seldom in the place where we stand and in the time that is now.”

- John O'Donohue, *Anamchara*, 1997

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“I find it so hard to be with my thoughts, to be in my head that I haven't even been able to take a bath in years – I just can't be alone with my thoughts, I live in yesterdays and tomorrows. I hate meditation, but I need to slow my head down... to get myself into today”

-Deora participant

thoughts, where we see they are just thoughts and not truths. Mindfulness is not a harsh discipline, but one that only works when you relate to yourself with a light touch and a lot of compassion.

The objective is to begin to recognise that the mind creates a running commentary and to reduce our degree of identification with our thoughts. This allows us the space to see the possibility for change.

To begin the practice of mindfulness, we need to choose to stop and pay attention to our experience. Paying attention to our experience in a mindful way grounds us in the present moment and gives us stability. Mindfulness steadies us and enables us to rest in the present moment. It also puts us in touch with our innate wisdom and creativity and informs us how we might best address the challenges that confront us in any given moment of our lives.

## Steadying the Mind

Try focusing on your next three breaths, without trying to change them in any way. You may find that you can connect with your breath most easily by noticing the sensations in your tummy as it expands and recedes with each inbreath and outbreath. Or you may find it easier to simply notice the sensation of air moving in and out your nose, with each in- and out-breath. Don't try to change anything, don't even try to relax, just bring your attention gently back to your breath and see if you can stay with it as it moves in, and out, of your body. (If this is hard for you to do, try focusing on your out-breath, and regard your in-breath as a natural pause between each out-breath.)

How did that feel? Strange, relaxing, frightening or neutral? Even now as you read this, it may be possible for you to delegate some portion of your attention to your breath, and notice what happens with it over time. Paying attention to your in-breath and our out-breath, you might think that your breathing has changed, but if you observe it more carefully, you may discover that you have not really changed anything; you are simply letting your breath flow more naturally. As long as your breathing feels pleasant, you know you are doing something right.

You are not trying to change anything; you are simply taking time to bring your attention back to your breath. You do not have to struggle or make an effort. If you do, you will disrupt the natural flow of your breath and notice yourself becoming uneasy. What you are trying to do, as best you can, is to simply be with your breath and allow yourself to slow down and enjoy the present moment.

By bringing our mind into the present moment, we achieve mindfulness. When we bring the mind home in this way, we also become more aware of our body. If we continue to practice mindful breathing, we can find ourselves easing back into our bodies in a very short space of time. We begin to feel more connected, more grounded, and also more alert to all that's happening in and around us. Breathing is the bridge to the body. Attending deliberately to our breathing helps to anchor our attention in the present moment, and gives us a platform from which we can observe the changing patterns of our thoughts and feelings, as they move and shift from one concern to another, from one sensation to another. It is important to note what comes up for you when you slow down in this way, and then to let it go and see what happens next.

Because our mind so naturally wanders, it requires practice to be mindful. There are many different exercises that can guide your practice and some may suit you more than others. The following are a sample of the exercises we used most frequently in the Deora course.

## Basic breathing exercises

### Exercise 1: In/Out

The first breathing exercise is "In/Out". Very simply, we choose to pay attention to the movement of the breath in and out of our body. We may notice the sensation of air passing in and out of our nostrils or we may keep our attention on the sensations of our tummies expanding and contracting as we inhale and exhale. Focus wherever you find it easiest to stay with your breathing.

To help you keep your mind on your breathing, you might try saying silently to yourself, with each in-breath: “Breathing in, I know I’m breathing in”, and with each out-breath: “Breathing out, I know I am breathing out”. As you become more keenly aware of your in-breath as your in-breath and your out-breath as your out-breath, just use the word “in” when breathing in, and “out” when breathing out.

You may notice your mind wandering, and when you do, just accept that this is what happens to everyone, and then gently escort your attention back to your in-breath and your out-breath. And if your mind wanders a thousand times, just very gently notice that’s it’s drifted off and bring it back to the breath, a thousand times. You don’t have to suppress your thinking or try to ‘control’ it in some way, you only have to come back to your breathing and enjoy this breath, and this breath, and this breath...

### *Exercise 2: Following your breath for the full duration of your breath*

The first exercise described above naturally leads into this second exercise which focuses your attention a little more closely on the duration of your breath. Called “Long/Short”, this exercise invites you to let your attention follow the flow of your in-breath for however long it takes, and similarly, to keep your attention on the out-breath for its full duration, however long that takes. The terms “long” and “short” do not mean that you should either lengthen or shorten your breath. They simply direct you to follow the course of your breath, whatever its duration. Rather than try and control your breath in any way, you are invited to ‘get out of your own way’ and to allow your breath enjoy itself. If your in-breath is short, let it be short; if it is long, let it be long.

When you take time to become aware of your breathing, you may notice that the quality of your breathing changes slightly. It may naturally slow down and deepen, without you making any effort to do so. Mindfulness, without you doing anything, brings a calmness to your breathing, and in turn to your body and your mind.

### *Exercise 3: Paying attention to your posture*

As you sit and enjoy your breathing in and breathing out, notice your posture. It helps to embody in your posture the state of mind you are trying to create through your practice. On the one hand you want to find a posture that’s comfortable and restful; but you also want to find a way of sitting that embodies a certain alertness and awareness. In practicing mindful meditation, you are not trying to switch off from or tune out reality. What you’re trying to do when you practice mindfulness is to wake up to what is happening in your life, in the present moment. And so it helps to sit comfortably, whether on a chair, or a cushion, or a stool, but also to sit in a dignified and erect position, which embodies this state of wakefulness.

Find a way of sitting that allows you to sit for whatever period of time feels right to you. It might be 1 minute, it might be 45 minutes. It is worth taking time to find a sitting or lying position that feels comfortable and that allows you remain alert. A chair may be fine for you, but it is usually recommended that you sit up straight with your back away from the chair, to help you maintain a degree of alertness.

Be mindful of what muscles you need to engage to help you remain alert and dignified, and see if you can relax all your other muscles. For example, you may become aware of tension you are holding in your shoulders. You don’t need this tension to remain alert, so allow yourself to relax and drop your shoulders. Notice also your facial muscles and be aware of any tension you may be holding there. You have three hundred muscles in your face which can both hold and express all that you feel. For now, just see if you can notice any tension you are holding in your face and gently let it go, by smiling.

### *Exercise 4: Accepting whatever is happening*

Enjoy the sensation of being able to breathe, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, whatever you are feeling. Be aware of the preciousness of this moment and of the simple wonder of being alive. Enjoy this

moment; come home to whatever is happening for you. It may be that your life is in a good space. Take the time to acknowledge and appreciate that.

Or maybe you are in a really tough place in your life at the moment. Perhaps you feel confused, tired, sad or alone. See if you can allow whatever is there to be there, accepting your pain as it is in this moment, rather than trying to push it away from you. By taking time to be mindful, you create an opportunity to bring a kindness to wherever you are hurting in your body or mind.

Notice your pain, and with care and gentleness, allow it to be there. It's what's happening right now. It won't last, nothing lasts forever. But right now, your pain is coming from a part of you that has no other way to communicate with you. Try being with yourself, and letting yourself be. Notice how your thoughts try to carry you away, possibly regretting something you did or didn't do, or possibly trying to frighten you with worries about what might or could happen sometime in the future. Notice these thoughts, notice what concerns rise up in your mind and smile. And then ever so gently, let your thoughts be, and return your attention to your breath. Don't fight, don't struggle, just let yourself be, and be kind to whatever part of you is hurting.

It often happens in the course of our practice that some thought or realisation hits us like a bolt out of the blue and shakes us to the core. Perhaps some problem we had been trying to block out of our awareness, perhaps some appointment or commitment we had forgotten. Because you have taken time to be still, the mind has an opportunity to remind you of something important. When this happens, note what has been brought to your attention, thank your practice for reminding you about this and then let it go, as you gently return your attention to your breathing. The aim of what you are doing is simply to be present to your breathing as best you can, and not become drawn into endless ruminations. There will be time to attend to these matters later, for now, simply note that they have emerged into your awareness and let them recede into the background as you return to enjoying the present moment.

When the mind is relatively stable and focused, any object in the field of our attention - be it a pressing concern or a piece of music - becomes more vivid and clear. And when the mind is clear, it is more likely that real understanding will be achieved, and that a wiser course of action will follow.

### *Exercise 5: The 3-minute breathing space*

This exercise combines all of the above and when you have practiced it repeatedly, it becomes a resource that you can tap into at several points in your day.

#### *STEP 1: Bringing your awareness back home*

Begin by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture, whether you are sitting or standing. If you like, close your eyes. Then, bringing your awareness to your inner experience, ask: 'What is my experience right now?'

What thoughts are going through the mind? As best you can, acknowledging whatever thoughts or images are passing through your mind without becoming drawn into them. Just letting them pass in and out of your mind, taking care to see what they are about. And then letting them go.

What feelings are here? Turning toward any sense of emotional discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging their presence, and allowing them to be there, rather than pushing them away.

What physical or bodily sensations are here right now? Perhaps quickly scanning the body to pick up any sensations or tightness or pain that may be in your body. See them for what they are and let them be.

#### *STEP 2: Anchoring your awareness*

Then gently lead your attention back to the physical sensations of your breath, as it passes in and out of your body. Bring your attention to the movement of your belly. As you breathe in, and breathe out... feeling the sensations of the belly wall expanding as the breath comes in... and falling back as the breath goes out.

Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out, and use your breath to anchor yourself, to ground yourself, in the present moment.

### *STEP 3: Opening your awareness*

Now expand the field of your awareness around your breathing so that, in addition to the sensations of the breath, it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture and facial expression. If you become aware of any sensations of discomfort, tension, or resistance, zero in on them by breathing into them on each in-breath and breathing out from them on each out-breath as you soften and open. Whatever you notice, whatever sensations or feelings are there, let them be, they are already there. As best you can, expand your awareness to take in all that's happening around you. What do you hear? What do you sense is happening in the environment around you?

#### *Exercise 6: Extended sitting meditation*

(from "A Mindful Way through Depression, by Williams, Teasdale and Kabat-Zinn, 2007)

#### *SETTLING*

1. Settle in a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor with your bottom supported by cushions or on a low stool or meditation bench. If you use a chair, sit away from the back of the chair so that your spine is self-supporting. If you sit on the floor, it is helpful if your knees can actually touch the floor, although that may not happen at the beginning; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel completely supported.
2. Allow the back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, have your feet flat on the floor with legs uncrossed. Gently close your eyes if that feels comfortable. If not, let your gaze fall unfocused on the floor four or five feet in front of you.

#### *BRINGING AWARENESS TO THE BODY*

3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact, and pressure in your

body where it makes contact with the floor and with whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations.

#### *FOCUSING ON THE SENSATIONS OF BREATHING*

4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the belly as the breath moves in and out of the body, just as you did lying down.
5. Focus your awareness on the mild sensations of stretching as the abdominal wall gently expands with each in-breath and on the sensations of gentle release as the abdominal wall deflates with each out-breath. As best you can, stay in touch with the changing physical sensations in your abdomen for the full duration of the in-breath and the full duration of the out-breath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses between an in-breath and the following out-breath and between an out-breath and the following in-breath. As an alternative, if you prefer, focus on a place in the body where you find the sensations of the breath most vivid and distinct (such as the nostrils).
6. There is no need to try to control your breathing in any way – simply let your body breathe by itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience – there is nothing that needs to be fixed, and no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply surrender to your experience as it is, without requiring that it be any different.

#### *WORKING WITH THE MIND WHEN IT WANDERS*

7. Sooner or later (usually sooner), the mind will wander away from the focus on the breath sensations in the belly, getting caught up in thoughts, planning, or daydreams, or just aimlessly drifting about. Whatever comes up, whatever the mind is pulled to or absorbed by, is perfectly okay. This wandering and getting absorbed in things is simply what minds do; it is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer focused on the breath,

you might want to actually congratulate yourself because you've already come back enough to know it. You are, once more, aware of your experience. You might like to briefly acknowledge where the mind has been (noting what is on your mind and perhaps making a mental note: "thinking, thinking" or "planning, planning" or "worrying, worrying"). Then, gently escorting your attention back to the breath sensations in the belly, as you bring your awareness to the feeling of this in-breath or this out-breath, whichever is here as you return.

8. However often you notice that the mind has wandered (and this will quite likely happen over and over and over again), each time take note of where the mind has been, then gently escort your attention back to the breath and simply resume attending to the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each in-breath and with each out-breath.

9. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to cultivate greater patience and acceptance within yourself and some compassion toward your experience. Continue with the practice for ten minutes, or longer if you wish, perhaps reminding yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience with the here and now each time that you notice that the mind has wandered off and is no longer in touch with the abdomen, in touch with this very breath in this very moment.

### *Exercise 7: The Body Scan*

(from "A Mindful Way through Depression, by Williams, Teasdale and Kabat-Zinn, 2007)

1. Make yourself comfortable lying down on your back, in a place where you will feel warm and undisturbed. You can lie on a mat or rug on the floor or on your bed. Allow your eyes to close gently.

2. Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in your body. When you are ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to

the sensations of touch or pressure where your body makes contact with the floor or bed. On each out-breath, allow yourself to sink a little deeper into the mat or bed.

3. To get into the most helpful mindset, remind yourself that this will be a time for "falling awake" rather than falling asleep. Remind yourself as well that the idea here is to be aware of your experience as it is unfolding, however it is. It is not to change the way you are feeling or to become more relaxed or calmer. The intention of this practice is to bring awareness to any and all sensations you are able to be aware of (or lack of sensation) as you focus your attention systematically on each part of the body in turn.

4. Now bring your awareness to the sensations in the belly, becoming aware of the changing patterns of sensations in the abdominal wall as the breath moves into the body and as it moves out of the body. Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out, as the belly rises on the in-breath and falls on the out-breath.

5. Having connected with the sensations in the belly, now bring the focus or spotlight of your attention down the left leg, into the left foot, and all the way to the toes. Focus on each of the toes in turn, bringing a gentle, interested, affectionate attention to begin with and investigate the quality of the sensations you find, perhaps noticing the sense of contact between the toes, a sense of tingling, warmth, perhaps numbness, whatever is here, perhaps even no sensations at all if that is the case. It is all okay. In fact, whatever you are experiencing is okay; it is what is here right now.

6. When you are ready, on an in-breath, feel or imagine the breath entering the lungs and then passing all the way down the body, through the left leg, to the toes of the left foot. On the out-breath, feel or imagine the breath coming all the way back up from the toes and the foot, right up through the leg and torso and out through the nose. As best you can, continue breathing in this way for a few breaths, breathing down into the toes on each in-breath and

back out from the toes on each out-breath. It may be difficult to get the hang of this – just practice this “breathing into” as best you can, approaching it playfully.

7. Now, when you are ready, on an out-breath, let go of the toes and bring your awareness to the sensations in the bottom of your left foot - bringing a gentle, investigative awareness to the sole of the foot, the instep, the heel (noticing, for example, the sensations where the heel makes contact with the mat or bed). Experiment with “breathing with” any and all sensations – being aware of the breath in the background, as, in the foreground, you explore the sensations in the bottom of the foot.

8. Now allow the awareness to expand into the rest of the foot – to the ankle, the top of the foot, right into the bones and joints. Then take a deeper and more intentional breath in, directing it down into the whole of the left foot completely, allowing the focus of awareness to move into the lower left leg – the calf, shin, knee and so forth, in turn.

9. Continue to scan the body, lingering for a time with each part of the body in turn: the left shin, the left knee, the left thigh; the right toes and then foot and ankle, the right lower leg, the right knee, the right thigh; the pelvic area – groin, genitals, buttocks, and hips; the lower back and the abdomen, the upper back and the chest and shoulders. Then we move to hands, usually doing both at the same time. We rest first with the sensations in the fingers and thumbs, the palms and the backs of both hands, the wrists, the lower arms and elbows; the upper arms; the shoulders again and the armpits; the neck; the face (jaw, mouth, lips, nose, cheeks, ears, eyes, forehead); and then the entirety of the head.

10. When you become aware of tension or of other intense sensations in a particular part of the body, you can “breathe in” to those sensations in the same way as you can to any others – using the in-breath to gently bring awareness right into the sensations, and, as best you can, have a sense of what happens in that region, if anything, as each breath lets go and releases on the out-breath.

11. The mind will inevitably wonder away from the breath and the body from time to time. That is entirely normal. It is what minds do. When you notice it, gently acknowledge it, noticing where the mind has gone off to, and then gently return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on.

12. After you have scanned the whole body in this way, spend a few minutes being aware of a sense of the body as a whole and of the breath flowing freely in and out of the body.

13. It is also very important to remind yourself that if you, like most modern people, suffer from low-grade chronic sleep deprivation, since the body scan is done lying down, it is very easy to fall asleep. If you find yourself falling asleep, you might find it helpful to prop your head up with a pillow, open your eyes, or do the practice sitting up rather than lying down.

Take some time everyday to learn to steady your mind by attending to your breathing mindfully, and practice drawing your attention back to the present moment. While the capacity to be mindful really comes into its own when we face some unique or challenging event in our unfolding everyday lives, doesn't it make sense to take some time out from our daily routine and find a moment where we can be quiet with our selves and come home to our inner capacity for stillness and clarity? There will always be thoughts and bodily sensations that emerge and cause us stress, but as we practice mindfulness, what begins to happen is that your capacity to note these and to attend to them, with kindness and appreciation, becomes steadier. And with that steadiness comes a deeper understanding and insight into those elements and experiences in our lives that keep repeating themselves over and over. Understanding and insight free us from automatic patterns of reacting to our inner world by trying to avoid it, or becoming caught up in repeating past mistakes, and allows us to ground ourselves in the present and make some fresh choices about how we might wish to live our lives.

Mindfulness is not a stand-alone practice. It is one element, or one expression, of a general philosophy of what it takes to become a human being. Mindfulness comes from spiritual traditions in the East and West that articulated a number of elements required for people to “grow up”. All of these philosophies recognised that it was easy for humans to get it wrong and find themselves confused and alienated from others.

Meditation emerged in each of these traditions as a way of deepening one’s understanding of what it means to be human and progressing through different stages of psychological and spiritual growth. Mindfulness practice does not require of you that you sign up to some particular religion or school of thought; but it works best when it’s undertaken as part of an commitment to take more care of your self and to grow in your appreciation and respect for all living things.

## Chapter 3

### Weekly Account of the Deora Mindfulness Training Sessions

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*What follows is a weekly summary of what transpired in each group meeting of the Deora Mindfulness programme. It describes the group's key reactions to learning the basics of the practice of mindfulness and exploring its potential for helping them prevent relapse. Each account ends with a summary of what the facilitation team felt had been the key learning for the group in each session.*

#### Week One: "Bring it on"

##### Agenda:

- Introduce members to one another
- Establish ground rules and deal with any specific concerns members have
- Identify each person's goals and expectations
- Introduce idea of the mind being on autopilot and the dangers inherent in living that way
- Raisin experiment
- Short breathing exercise
- Feedback and Homework
- Distribute guided meditation CD's and handouts

#### 13 participants and the team present

Our primary purpose in the first week of the programme was to enable members of the group to experience that they were a unique group, embarking on project that had never been tried before in a setting like Deora and to give them some idea about how were we going to behave as a group over the next nine weeks. We felt it would be important to hear from each person regarding their expectation, goals, concerns or misgivings, and to establish the usual ground rules to ensure this group respected the need for safety and confidentiality among its members. Finally we wanted them to have one or two actual experiences of practicing mindfulness, and give them the opportunity to reflect and give feedback on the experience. We also assigned homework to encourage participants to begin to take their practice home, and into their daily lives.

Thirteen people showed up in addition to the mindfulness team. The members were quiet and clearly a little tense in the opening stages of the group. As they articulated their personal goals, we were struck by how aware they were of the need to steady their minds and become more grounded in the present moment. It was as though the case for mindfulness had already been made before we ever got around to introducing the concept. Members described how they mostly felt very out of touch with themselves, noticed how their minds wandered a lot and how hard it was for them to simply be in the present: As one member put it "I want to be more aware of where my head's going. Just to be where I am."

Many also reported feeling anxious, driven, unable to relax. This made it hard for them to be present to people they cared about and to whom they wanted to learn to be more present: "I want to be present when I'm doing things with my sons". Others hoped that this course would help them be more at ease with themselves, "To learn to relax a bit, I'm very driven as a person", "to get to know my feelings, to be comfortable in myself". See Table 1 for additional goals articulated by group members in the first session.

In terms of ground rules for the group, we clearly agreed that it should be a safe place for its members and that whatever was said would never be repeated outside of the group in any way that might identify a particular member. Concern was expressed by some members that they might cry. This was discussed and it was accepted that it was a real possibility for many of them, and that it could be a very positive

and important experience. The team discussed writing notes during the group on group process and publishing an account of the group when it was over, along with some kind of formal evaluation of its impact on the members. It was important to achieve a clear understanding about the research aspect of this pilot in MBRP and to be given permission by the group (also signed earlier by each of them) to report on the experience to the Deora staff team, and to others working in similar drug projects. All reporting would be done in a completely anonymous manner and no personal details would be disclosed to anyone outside the group programme.

about reality and make contact with old familiar realities in a new, fresh way.

An important component of mindfulness training is the opportunity for each group member to reflect on whatever experience they had whilst engaged in any given exercise. Feedback was encouraged, and whatever happened for someone (there was no such thing as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ experience) was valued as important. Some people really got into the exercise - “It was like a form of meditation – I was there, just looking at it – in the present”. Others found they became distracted very easily - “I was daydreaming.

### **Table 1: Examples of Goals articulated by group members:**

*“To learn to focus on things, to concentrate and relax and focus on one thing.”*

*“I want to be more aware of where my head’s going. Just to be where I am.”*

*“I want a miracle – to be able to control my own mind more often, to be able to tap into myself, to be able to change my mind”*

*“To be less anxious, not to fear negative thoughts and run away from negative thoughts...”*

*“I just want to be able to concentrate, to be able to appreciate the good stuff in my life – I have so much but I have no respect for it.”*

*“To be able to be present in any situation and to live life to the full.”*

*“To get to know myself on a deeper level.”*

Mindfulness was introduced using the well-documented “Raisin Experiment” (See Segal et al, 2002). A small chocolate mini egg was used on this occasion instead of a raisin, due to lack of availability of raisins. The basic idea was that an individual egg was placed in the palm of each member’s hand and they would imagine they had never seen one before and get to know it as an entirely new experience, using each of their five senses and giving it their full concentration. This is always a fun way to give people an actual experience of focusing their full attention on an object, in the present moment, and experiencing what can happen when we let go of preconceptions

Even looking at the egg I was thinking I was hungry, what would I have for dinner, then that reminded me of a stone I found on the beach as a kid... then I was thinking, ‘concentrate on the egg!’ One individual noticed his own inner critic at work in and described it like this:

*“The hard part for me is not that I’m going off (in my thoughts), it’s my anger at myself - ‘you don’t care. You’re not even listening. Focus!’ - It’s the judgement of myself I find hard, like a little soldier in my head”.*

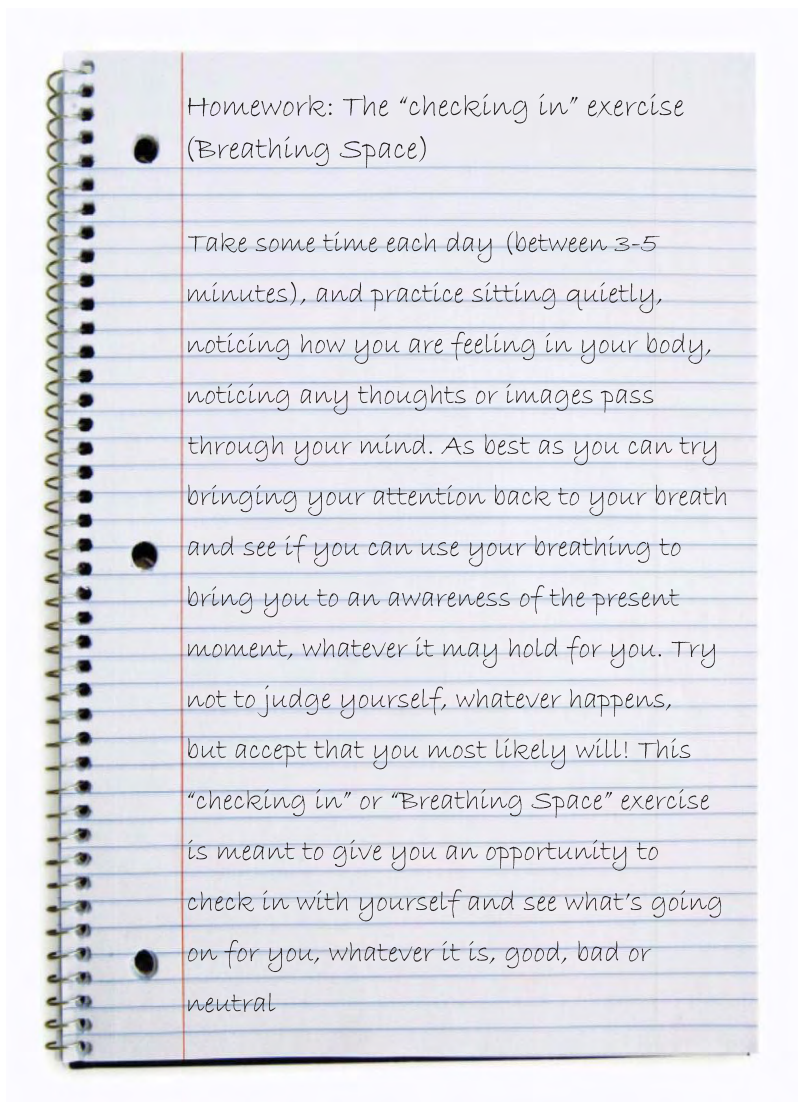
All reactions were equally valuable and revealing, and the exercise helped to bring into focus some of the issues that mindfulness would be addressing as the course proceeded, e.g. difficulty with concentration, the mind's tendency to wander, and problems created by harsh self-attacking thoughts.

To conclude this first session, one of the facilitators (Clive) guided the group in a short breathing exercise, to focus on the breath and observe whatever was happening with an attitude of curiosity and acceptance. As one member of the group later described the experience, this was like looking at whatever you were feeling and saying "Bring it on". Rather than trying to change their feelings or get rid of some unpleasant thought, we asked them to "let themselves be" and notice how they felt in their bodies. The reactions were mixed: from "It reminded me of Mrs. Dalloway – I could hear the clock tick, the dog bark and the distant wave. All was well" to "I just switched off, thought of the sea".

One person's reaction to this exercise came as something of a surprise:

*"It's like something came over me, I couldn't even hear you (Clive) after a few minutes; it was mad, like a lightness... it was a bit scary. It was like I was really relaxed but for a split second or two this kind of lightness came over me. I got a fright, thought I'd snap myself out of it".*

We encouraged her to adopt a kindly but curious attitude to her experience. And to notice what happened within her when she shared this experience with others in the room. She regained a full sense of being grounded within minutes, but it was suggested that we should begin with very short breathing exercises and check in frequently with participants.



In our post-group analysis, the facilitation team felt that perhaps more formal breathing exercises should be introduced later in the programme, and that the early sessions should maintain a focus on helping people – through body scan exercise, mindful stretching and yoga – to reconnect with their bodily experiences and become firmly grounded.

## Week Two: “Just because we’re addicts it doesn’t make us any different”

### Agenda:

- Any feedback / comments on session 1
- Review individual experiences with homework assignment
- Brief breathing exercise
- Introduce and complete full Body Scan (BS) - using John Kabat-Zinn CD
- Discuss each person’s experience of BS
- Distribute body scan CD’s and handouts
- Set homework

### 13 participants and the team present

Reactions to the first meeting were generally positive, but some people were disappointed as they hoped that this course might provide a simpler, faster solution to their emotional distress. One lady, who subsequently reported finding great benefit in the course overall, commented “Last week I was disappointed, I wanted something life-changing, quick!”.

Group members were very vocal about their positive and negative experiences of attempting a brief mindfulness - “checking in exercise” – during the past week. There were several reports of finding it hard to make time - “I struggled just giving it time, to give it to myself is very hard, I can do it here”, “I was doing it, but only for a few minutes on the bus or something”. One person noticed how distressed his thoughts were – “My head was mental, I was having insane thoughts”, and another picked up on how judgemental he was being with himself – “It’s good, I get calm, but by the time I get to the hall door it’s gone, then I start beating myself up for not being able to do it”.

It was important to hear a wide range of reactions and it was important that the team accepted them all with equanimity - to react calmly to each one, without appearing to be selectively favouring some and discouraging others. The challenge for the team was to model a “mindful” response to whatever experiences people were having, so that the group

could gradually recognise that this was what we meant by being non-judgemental.

***Body scan exercise:*** TB used stick drawings to illustrate how the mind can very often be in a different time zone to the body and asked group members to reflect on their own experiences of being “disconnected”. He then asked the group what it was like to live like this (given that we all do so much of the time). One person responded “It’s not living, you’re not present”. It was agreed by everyone present that being out of touch with one’s body and feelings was a major risk for someone in recovery as tensions and urges could creep up on you unawares and get the better of you. The idea of taking some time daily to check in systematically with your body and “stay in touch with it” became the rationale for the Body Scan exercise, which is simply a slowed down body awareness exercise, where attention is brought very systematically to each part of one’s body.

As one of the participants described in the follow-up interviews, addiction brings with it a fundamental mind-body disconnection, mindfulness allowed her to confront this in a gentle way: “I walked around for 2 years with a shoulder that was out when I was addicted.... I did register the pain, got migraines etc., I felt it severely, but I was still running from it, wouldn’t confront it.”

A recording of John Kabat-Zinn’s (JKZ) guided body scan exercise was used because the team had purchased copies of this CD for each person to practice at home, and it was felt that they should be introduced to it within the formal programme.

Reactions to the Body Scan exercise were mixed, but with more people responding unfavourably than favourably. Table 2 gives a sample of some of these reactions.

Clearly many were put off my JKZ’s American accent. One woman reported: “My initial reaction was ‘nothing has ever worked before, this is pointless, sitting here listening to some American telling me to feel my toes’”. Later she added “but I suppose I need

**Table 2: Sample of reactions to the first exposure of the Body Scan exercise**

*"I drifted in and out of it, but would come back and bring my thoughts back to it."*

*"I realised how out of touch I am with my body – I had to move my toes to get it. I found him (JKZ) very slow."*

*"I kept drifting off."*

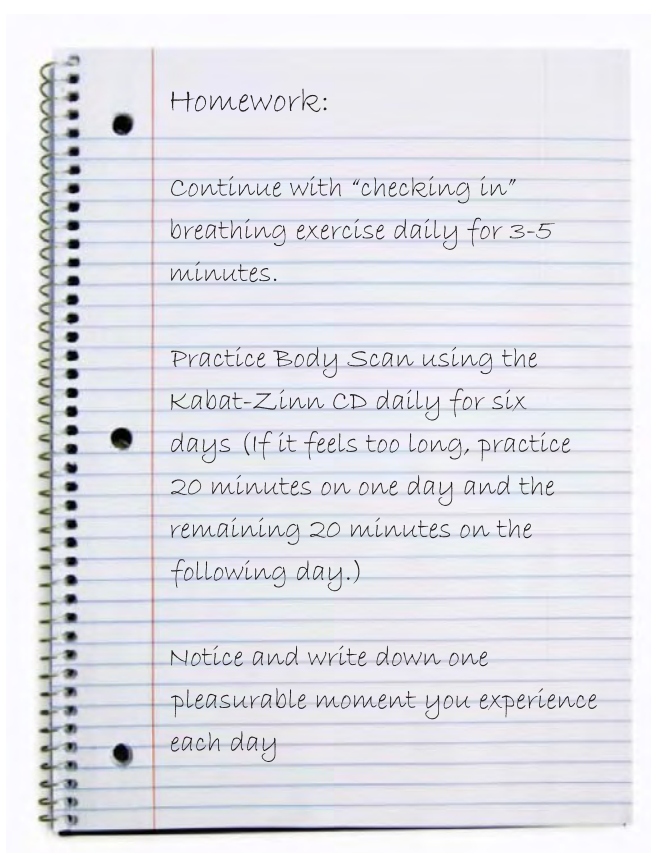
*"The tape was annoying, I wanted to throw it out the window."*

*"I was aware of pain in my body, tired, I was trying to bring my attention back to the tape – it was there anyway (the pain). I wanted to leave the room, I didn't know why."*

to open my mind". Others wanted JKZ to move a lot faster. Some group members realised that the reason the body scan is slow is that it is as much training for your mind to remain focused as any other meditation exercise. And that it takes time to feel what's happening in your body when you've been out of touch with it for a long time. And someone else did report how she had arrived in a negative mood, not knowing why, only to realise through the body scan that she was extremely angry: "I was very angry within myself when I came in... in a rage actually. By doing the BS I felt like I was able to be in my body more". Another member spoke of becoming aware of a stiffness in her neck, she hadn't previously noticed.

Those who had found the CD unhelpful now began to wonder if the whole course was designed "by-americans-for-americans" and voiced their concern that maybe none of it would work for them, particularly with their complex history of drug abuse. But one man challenged this view and pointed out that "just because we're addicts it doesn't make us any different". He added: "I feel quite honoured to be part of this. I didn't always feel like that. I just thought I was there to line the counsellors' pockets. Now I'm opening my mind. Before I'd rebel, but all I ever did was rob myself of opportunities like this one".

In the post-group team reflection, it was felt that the group had been much more engaged and "real" in this



session and that the message had gotten through that mindfulness was not magic and that it required some degree of work. There had been a moment when TB responded a little too defensively to one comment that the group were all guinea pigs. Again a key theme in running mindfulness groups is to be able to take whatever arises and respond in a curious but somewhat neutral way. It was agreed by all the team that producing our own, somewhat briefer, body scan exercise would make this key ingredient of mindfulness training much more accessible. For the time being, we would provide them with copies of Mark Williams' body scan CD next week.

### Week 3: Mindfulness creates a space where you can hold your life in awareness and see what you need to do

#### Agenda:

- Review homework
- Introduce and practice Yoga
- Reflect on experience of doing yoga
- Automatic thinking and how it influences our mood and behaviour
- Mindful awareness of automatic thinking and how it enables change
- Mindful sitting exercise (20 min)
- Feedback and homework
- Distribute CD's and handouts

#### 9 participants and the team were present

Today the group started with a very lively discussion of homework, captured perfectly in one report “When I came out last week I didn’t want to do the homework but I knew I had to. The first night I didn’t do it, I was beating myself up for it. The second night I came in late, the CD (body scan) didn’t work. I felt great!” The other exercise – record pleasurable moments in the day – had captured everyone’s imagination and seemed to work very well.

*“I did do the pleasurable moments – there were things in that. I went to the aqua centre. The inner child is there but the macho head is pulling it back. I rang my family, I’m happy for them but also that I’m not there. I allowed my inner child to come out”*

*“Writing the positive events down was great, to remember them, cause I’m not good at remembering that and you’re reliving it as you write it down. When it’s happening I don’t really stop and enjoy it (the moment)... I skate over it. Now I stopped, was aware of it all. It was a very powerful thing to do”*

*“It was in my head during the day – journaling the pleasurable moments – so in some ways I had an antenna for it”.*

*“I did the ‘moments homework’ – I had more sad moments but that’s probably just where I was at.”*

Group members tended to report on the journaling and sitting practice experiences at the same time. It was striking how they seemed to be achieving greater awareness of their inner lives, but it was also evident that this was a painful experience for most of them:

*“I’m a bit worried, there’s a lot of personal stuff going on, my brother’s up in court being sentenced... it can be distracting... there’s a lot of tension in my neck. I’m carrying a lot of family stuff but I’m not running away from it.”*

*“I did some meditation during the week. I found it very hard. I love coming here ‘cause I can’t give myself the time. Coming here, realizing the amount of tension in my body... there’s a lot of indecision in my head, change in my life, big decisions to make.”*

*“Some days it was great, others I had my eye on the clock...it was an irrational agitation. The bottom line is that sometimes I find it hard to sit with myself. I want to escape. I was watching all sorts of crap on telly. There are days I don’t even want to entertain the thought of being with myself. I knew that’s exactly what was going on”.*

#### *Yoga*

Orla introduced yoga exercises and spoke about their value in helping us connect with our bodies and use this to ground ourselves in the present moment. She took the group through a range of Hatha yoga exercises that involved standing and lying down. She brought people through the exercises at a fairly swift pace and this appealed a lot to the group. When we reviewed their experiences afterwards, it became even clearer that the yoga had engaged their attention completely and that it had made them very aware of their breathing and bodily experience.

*“I was concentrating fully on the exercises”*

*“I noticed I was weaker on the left side”*

*“When you focus on breathing, inhale into it, you can go more. I stopped using my brain, just breathed through it.”*

*“I really enjoyed it. It’s better than the gym. I had been doing Reiki but the teacher was ‘getting in contact with the spiritual world’ so I said stop!”*

*“The last breathing exercise we did was the first time that I’ve ever stayed with meditation. Last week I was thinking about sea gulls, I was in space. Why? Suppose I’m doing a lot of surrender in my life at the moment. Yoga took my mind off why I was here, but doing it mindfully helped... yeah, that helped. It’s starting to come together for me”*

### ***Awareness of Automatic Thoughts exercise***

To introduce automatic negative thoughts and their power in shaping our perceptions of the world and how we react to everyday events, we had the group imagine the following scenario:

***You are walking down the street and someone from a programme you’d attended walks towards you on the other side of the street. You are happy too see this person and you had a good relationship with them when you both went through the programme together. As they walk towards you, they appear to be looking in your direction, but they keep walking on and don’t acknowledge in any way that they see you.***

After listening to this scenario, each person was invited to write down whatever thoughts had passed through their minds as they imagined themselves in that situation. Also to note down any feelings they may have had. This exercise demonstrated how rapidly or “automatically” we make interpretations of routine everyday events (mostly without ever being aware that we are doing this) and how our emotional reactions are powerfully affected by the interpretations we make. The group mostly jumped to very negative conclusions and felt badly within themselves that the person across the street had chosen to ignore them. Their thoughts “seemed true” but as they each shared their experience of this exercise, they group began to realise that in any given situation, many interpretations are possible:

*“If someone gives you a compliment you can be embarrassed, angry, happy. The key is your interpretation, not the stimulus”*

*“You don’t call out to them either (the person ignoring you), you don’t check reality, I suppose it’s a self-obsession thing”*

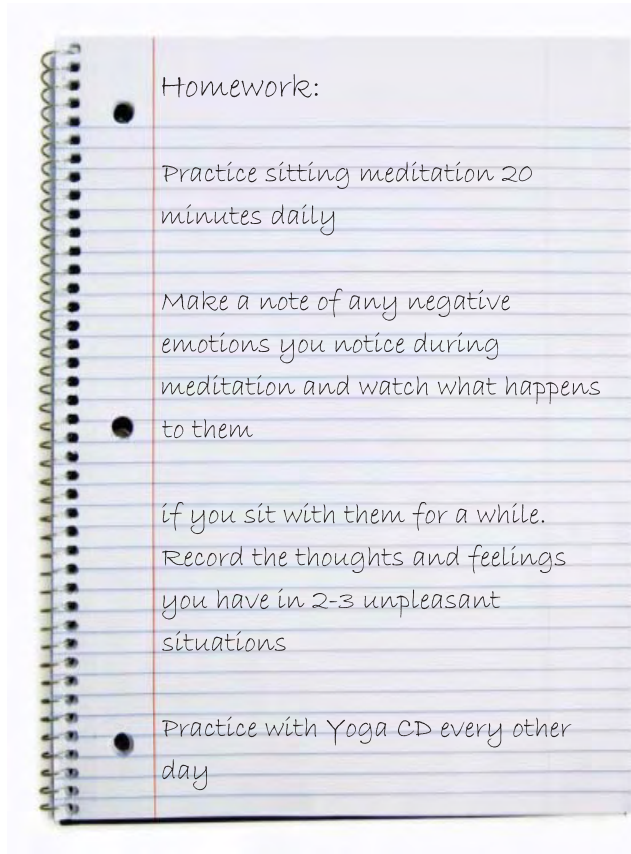
*“It’s funny, if it happens to someone else I can see it’s irrational, I like to think that I’m more impartial, that I have distance, perspective”*

The value of mindfulness in helping to become aware of our automatic thoughts was discussed. If we could somehow catch ourselves as we were becoming pulled into some familiar negative interpretation of an event, we might be able to pause and change how we react, instead of being pulled into some self-defeating behaviour that may start us down the slippery slope to relapse.

The really dangerous space to get into is where you just react in the absence of any awareness. When we react without thinking, it’s generally because our feelings are pretty strong and we have little time or capacity to think about what we’re about to do, and whether we really want to act in a particular way. Mindfulness introduces a pause between the stimulus and the response; it creates a space where we can look at what’s happening and make choices. We may choose to act in the same old way we always have, but we may also choose to act in a different way and see what happens. It’s up to me, but at least this time I am making a free choice.

This same principle applies when painful or difficult memories are triggered and we react against them and act in a destructive way towards them. Mindfulness gives us the capacity to see what’s going on and to hold our distress in awareness, until it begins to ease and transform. Mindfulness buys us time and helps prevent us from making the same old mistakes over and over. Mindfulness also has power to transform negative emotions, not by pushing them away but holding them gently in awareness, like we would a child in distress.

The session ended with a brief sitting meditation, after which Clive read a poem by Rumi to settle everyone down before the group left the session.



in the group rather than avoided, in some vain hope that they might show up in future sessions.

Generally the team felt the group were achieving a genuine sense of cohesion. Many comments were made between the group members themselves, and many reflected a tremendous capacity for empathy between themselves. One or two members were “burning to tell their story” but the team felt that we should be careful not to let one individual say too much in case his trust level in the group was not quite up to his appetite for self-disclosure. It was suggested that perhaps he could have some time with his own therapist in a one to one this particular week, so that he could ventilate freely and safely.

Movement exercise at the beginning and sitting quietly at the end seemed to work very well in this session.

### *Post session team analysis*

This session made the team much more aware that this is a group of people that carry a lot of inner tension and trauma. Many have had experiences that they would prefer not to remember. Many have a great deal of chaos in their lives, in terms of where they physically live, economic pressures and stresses emanating from within their extended families. For some, the desire to run away is very strong, and understandable in many ways. Any kind of self-awareness training with a group like this has to be carefully paced and carried out in tandem with skills teaching to deal with the realities in their lives that are severely challenging.

On reflection, the authors would recommend that in future courses, trainers take more time to emphasise the importance of participants accessing additional support to cope with whatever comes up during the course. This was in fact suggested by one of the participants in the follow-up interviews.

The issue of non-attendance by some members was raised. Although there were a few apologies, it was clear that others who had begun the programme may well have chosen to drop out. This needed to be raised

## Week 4: “Cradling your cravings”

### Agenda:

- Review and discuss homework /personal practice
- Yoga (30 min)
- Being aware and coping with urges / cravings
- Assign homework
- Distribute Pema Chodron CD’s and handouts

### 6 participants and the team were present.

When this session began, it was evident that energy was very low. It may have been perhaps because only six people turned up. It also became clear from their discussion of experiences with homework – recognising and writing down their thoughts and feelings in “unpleasant situations” (what also became clear from this? Maybe it’s just the phrasing here, but I don’t get the point...). Members described some objectively difficult situations and how being aware of their reactions had helped them to cope (or not).

*“My unpleasantness was over a funeral... there’s nothing more unpleasant than that – there was regret, anger, sadness, pacing back and forward and all that... like I didn’t know what to do”*

We explored this further with him and his notes showed that he felt “angry (100%), regret (60-70%)”. Noticing he felt that way and allowing himself to be upset had helped him to get through it without doing anything self-destructive.

Death, anniversaries, feelings of loss and guilt were very common experiences recorded by the group. There was a keen sense in the room that recovery for each of them was a “life or death” matter. And if mindfulness could help them stay alive, they wanted to give it every chance.

*“The way I look at it, once I stay clean they didn’t die in vain... Even now, I don’t call them by their names cause that gets closer to the emotions... I’d do anything to recover – for me it’s even recover or die – I’ve already relapsed twice...”*

While some of the participants found the homework difficult, the positive impact that this simple journaling exercise had on some participants came through in the follow-up interviews. As one participant stated:

*“It (the course) got me to recognise that my feelings, good and bad, pass. Like the homework exercise, when we had to write down good and bad feelings and how they pass was great. The good ones made me laugh, the bad ones were hard... noticing the bad feelings passed made me feel guilty that I wasn’t feeling good all the time. The homework helped me deal with it, accept it, ‘I can’t do anything about it’”*

The main issue for discussion in this session was how to recognise and cope with urges and cravings. Many of them were confused about this idea of being present and accepting one’s feelings and cravings, versus giving into them.

One man captured the idea of being “mindfully aware” of urges and craving pretty well: “It’s like, when you get a craving, to accept them and go through it rather than running away from them and turning to something else, cause then it would just come back worse. When it hits me, I just go through it, the cravings will only last 3 or 4 minutes, a cigarette only lasts 3 or 4 minutes, and then it’s only one, then the next time I’d beat myself up and before the craving even comes I’ll give in. Mindfulness makes you aware that they are only feelings, not more sinister, even though it feels that way sometimes”.

Another person described how she was overcome with anger after an unpleasant encounter with a city official. Her day had started out very well, as she had the insight during her practice that we “make up our realities”. She had found this idea very liberating and felt that she’d finally “got what mindfulness was about”. However, after her frustrating encounter she “completely lost it”. She described feeling sorry for herself and becoming carried away with a “story in my head” that she would always be miserable. And then the thought hit her: “wouldn’t it be great to get drunk!” She described how she “cradled this feeling” for a long time before deciding to do something

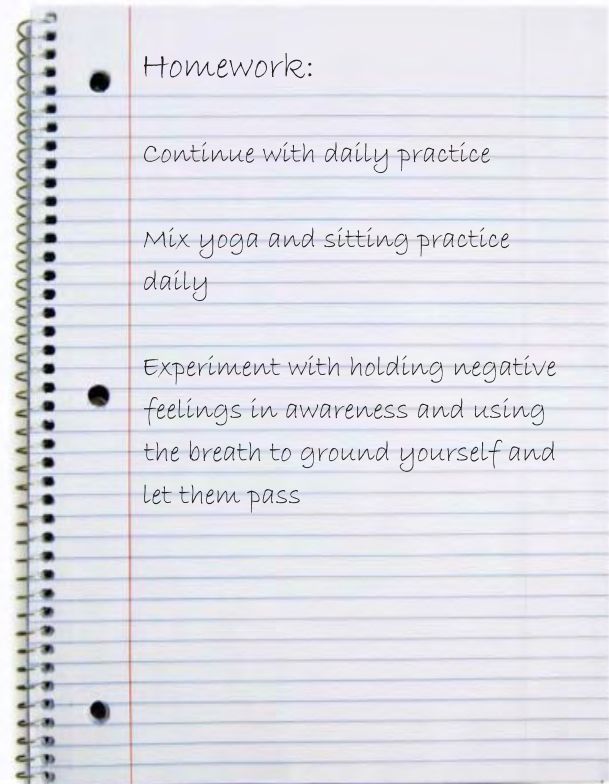
constructive, which seemed to “break the spell”. This led to a very important discussion about how people reacted to urges and cravings. A member responded to the above account with the observation that she wasn’t so much cradling the feeling as “linking arms with it, going down the road with it, not holding it.”

One of the team summed up the message we were giving as “it’s holding something still rather than letting the puppy take you for a walk”. This message wasn’t completely clear and some people felt confused.

Once again, clarity came from within the group itself. The challenge as somebody described is “to find your way back after you’ve been taken for a ride”. And someone else added:

*“It’s about stopping, if you go with it it’s like a snowball. It gets bigger and sucks everything in its path. For years I felt lonely, I was hurting.... It’s to hold it, to accept it. At home I get a belt of ‘you’re lonely’ or ‘you’re an eejit’... it’s about getting up off the chair... if it hurts feel the hurt: Is it just in my heart or is it in my legs or my body? It’s to feel the pain, not to jump up and run away. At the beginning I thought they were all off their heads (when they told me to ‘feel the pain), I thought ‘I’ve been feeling it for years!’ but then I stopped. I felt the pain. It was everywhere. In my heart, my head my legs... now it hasn’t come back for a long time. For years I had been making my problems bigger and bigger and the pain was getting bigger and bigger”.*

Yoga followed and the energy within the group rose steadily. Session ended with a very quiet and deep sitting practice. Increasingly there is less need to provide guided instructions for mindful meditation and people have become very comfortable with silence.



### **Post session analysis**

The team felt we needed to make sure to remove extra chairs when members fail to show up. This allows people to sit more closely together and helps build cohesion. Given that it became obvious very early on in the group that their energy was low, it might have been wiser to abandon the agenda momentarily and ask the group what that was about. We might also have extended to them the option of doing the yoga before getting into the difficult territory of strong negative emotions.

The whole issue of coping with strong emotions needs further clarification. Also some practical skills for coping with cravings and urges would have added a lot today. (We have since become aware of a very helpful literature on this issue by Alan Marlatt and his colleagues, which will be discussed further in final section of this report)

## Week 5: “emotions are messengers”

### Agenda:

- Discuss missing people and how that feels for those present
- Review homework and experiences with personal practice
- Yoga practice
- Discuss emotions: what they can teach us about ourselves and how to cope with them
- Short talk by invited guest (someone who has used mindfulness successfully to face very difficult challenges in his life)
- Distribute handouts

9 participants present in addition to team and invited speaker (Frank)

We began today with an invitation to the remaining group members to express how they felt about some people dropping out, or how it felt when other group members had failed to show up and then re-appeared. By and large they appeared un-fussed by people who left or didn't show. Part of that was because of their considerable experience of being on group programmes where this happened regularly: “I'm used to it by now, it happens in every group”. And partly, their reaction reflected a strong philosophy of looking out for number one and not counting too much on anyone else: “I'm here for myself”, “It's about my recovery ultimately, not anyone else”, “I try not to depend on people, it's what I've learnt”. One member did find that when others dropped out, it undermined her confidence in this programme: “I do start to wonder what am I doing here if all these other people are dropping out?”

The group took time to sit a while and get centred before reviewing homework. There was further evidence of people finding it hard to cope with the degree of tension and /or distress they encountered in themselves when they tried to practice.

*“I find it very hard to do meditating, my mind doesn't want me to do it, but I just tell myself ‘discipline, discipline, discipline’. I can do about ten minutes but I feel all the*

*tension in my body... I just want to kick out, to clench my hands... I just want to run”*

*“I'm the same, I find it very hard to meditate, hard to stay still... I'd be trying to force myself to feel relaxed”*

But many self-reports shared among the group spoke of having had some very positive experiences when practicing.

*“I ate my cereal really slow, I noticed all the textures and the tastes. I noticed I was absent – I say ‘absent without leave’ a lot of the time. A lot of the time when I was driving... my brain was just somewhere else most of the time... I was trying to be mindful of everyday things”*

*“Some days I have wobbly thoughts, but I try to ‘let it be’ and just come back to my breathing”*

*“For the first time in my life I've noticed how nasty I am to myself...”*

The major portion of the first half of this session was given over to 25 minutes Yoga, followed by 15 minute sitting meditation (with 1-minute breaks where we checked that people were doing ok)).

### *Emotions*

We discussed emotions as being the body's language for how we were experiencing the world. Emotions were messengers that were trying to alert us to something that was happening between us and the world. We could disregard them or we could ‘invite them in’ and listen to what they might be alerting us to. Our emotional reactions can be very subjective and therefore do not always correspond accurately with what's happening in the external world, but they do identify very accurately how we are feeling in ourselves and thus they provide us with important information. They are a more reliable source of information than our automatic thoughts. And they can also be a good radar system, telling us when something in our world isn't quite right.

The problem for most of us is that we're on auto pilot most of the time and we don't even notice what we're feeling until our emotions are so strong that they

overwhelm us. Mindfulness teaches us how to come off autopilot and take time to notice painful emotions as they begin to gather force. And as one member pointed out, “if we don’t listen, we can end up dead.”

We read and discussed Rumi’s poem “The Guest House” and I offered to show DVD of Thich Nhat Hahn next week where he speaks about specific techniques for coping with strong emotions, which sparked a lot of interest within the group.

### *Invited speaker – Frank*

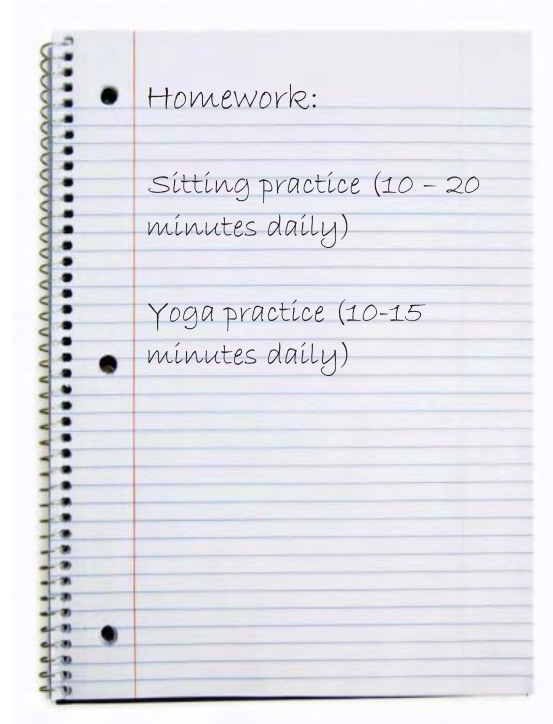
Frank (aged 37 years) had been a member of the St James’s Hospital mindfulness training course and follow up support group for the past 5-6years. He had developed a very stable, strong practice which helped him to avoid relapse and hospitalisation since 2000 (he had been hospitalised 27-30 times in the previous 20 years, generally for months at a time, for severe bi-polar disorder) although he had been given many other diagnoses between age 14 and 30). In so many ways his recovery was remarkable and he attributed this primarily to the benefits of mindfulness. I (TB) invited him to speak to the group about his practice and how it got stronger over the years. He did this very well and the group were clearly captivated by his account and impressed by how recovered Frank was now.

Frank added further that just as he got over his “little psychiatric problem”, he was told that a nagging pain he had had in his side was pancreatic cancer. He has known this since January 07 and the prognosis is pretty grim. He spoke very openly about this, without any extreme emotion and with a lightness of touch that was sensitive to his listeners. Frank was not someone that would seek to “talk up” his emotions or try to provoke upset in others. Quite the contrary, he spoke simply, didn’t labour the point that he was almost certainly facing death, but didn’t deny the reality of this and the challenge it was for him emotionally.

The group were very deeply affected by the poignancy of his story and a few shed tears. But they also heard how incredibly helpful mindfulness had been through it all and how, when it came to coping with intense

physical pain, which he had had regularly in the past six months, mindfulness had been powerful in helping him to “ride the wave of pain” and not get overwhelmed by it.

The group invited Frank to join them for the remaining few sessions of the programme and he accepted their invitation very graciously.



### *Post session analysis*

Yoga in the early stage of the group worked very well to settle them down and to bring their energy and attention “up”.

Allowing time for extended sitting meditation, where we took 1-minute breaks to check and see how people were doing was felt to have worked very well. Frank had made a powerful impact on the group and it was agreed that his presence for the remainder of the programme - particularly on our away day - would help to galvanise the group and increase their motivation and confidence in the practice.

The teaching on emotion needed longer time and more practical examples and opportunities to practice accepting and allowing feelings to emerge. This is a key challenge for this group and perhaps also for this client population. It needs to be worked out much more precisely next time round.

## Week Six: Knowing what sets me off, catching myself before it's too late

### Agenda:

- Review homework
- Brief Sitting meditation,
- Yoga (30 minutes)
- Identifying relapse triggers
- Play and discuss “Dealing with emotional storms DVD (40 min)
- Distribute “Emotional storms” CD and handouts

9 participants (including Frank) and the team were present

We began with sitting meditation. There was very active engagement with this exercise by the group. Members tuned in very quickly to how they were feeling and shared this openly afterwards. We moved directly into yoga practice, outside in the garden, and returned to group room where people shared any changes they noticed in how they were now feeling. The idea was to give them an experience of the “impermanence of feelings”: Feelings come and go; it can be enough to notice them, to acknowledge that whatever I am feeling is simply what I'm feeling, to continue to bring my attention back to the present moment, through focusing on the breath, through engaging in some activity, and to notice how feelings shift and change.

With emotions that are intense and painful, it was also important to learn specific coping techniques. For this reason we would be showing a DVD on “Coping with emotional storms” by Thich Nhat Hahn in the second half of the session.

Identifying key situations, events, that can provoke a relapse into old thinking and behaviour patterns

Different situations, events and emotions can set off a chain reaction that leads to relapse. Each person needs to know what sets them off and to take evasive action before it's too late. It is helpful to know one's personal “relapse signature”, i.e. those warning signs that tell me I may be moving towards danger. A sample of the

### Table 3: Relapse signatures described by group members

*“I stop meditating... I'm not aware... I'm mindless instead of mindful”*

*“I go to bed and don't keep in touch with anyone”*

*“The lies my brain tells me, the addiction tells me... 'one is just going to be enough”*

*“I see people lying out in the garden or buying garden furniture and I fucking hate them... I want that... fucking frustration... of not being able to move, of being stuck there... fuck this, I might as well go for a drink...”*

*“For me it would be frustration at things that have never changed and probably won't ever change. Like my family”*

*“I had a great four days away, I came home and it was the same thing... nobody there... I felt lonely... I thought 'fuck this', got into bed... then I thought 'why are you getting into bed, you're not tired?' I jumped back out...”*

*“It can be something small that grows into something big in my head...”*

*“Yeah, that happened to me on Sunday... I think its memories I'm not aware of, having feelings and I don't know where they're coming from”*

*“For me it's when I lose a sense of gratitude”*

*“For me the trigger is becoming my own God, needing no one”*

group's responses are listed in Table 3.

The above examples revealed a range of behaviours, thoughts and strong feelings (some which appeared to come out of nowhere) that people could identify as important warning signs of possible relapse. We then

tried to develop these insights a bit further by having members draw out their personal “relapse maps”, i.e. that chain of thoughts feelings and behaviours that seemed to carry them towards addictive behaviour, e.g.

*“Your head starts to go first, you don’t use and then go mad. It can be so subtle. I was doing recovery stuff before I relapsed but I was doing it automatically, my heart wasn’t in it. I’d actually relapsed before I picked up the drug... you can get the buzz before you even get near the drug... the anticipation and then the hit. I loved it, for a minute, and then the minute went.”*

### ***Coping with emotional storms: Watching Thich Nhat Hahn DVD***

Thich Nath Hahn is a Zen Buddhist monk whose writings - e.g. “The Miracle of Mindfulness” published in 1972 - have had an enormous impact on the development of structured mindfulness training programmes in health care situations. Thus, his approach to mindfulness training is very evident in the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme for chronic physical diseases developed and taught by John Kabat-Zinn in the USA and also in the Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy programme (MBCT) for depression developed by John Teasdale and Mark Williams in the UK. Both these programmes now have been scientifically researched and shown to have significant benefits. This DVD on emotional crises is particularly relevant to the needs of this population and describes some very practical methods for using mindfulness to steady ourselves and take care of ourselves when we experience intense emotions that can easily overwhelm us.

This DVD elaborates on a number of very profound ideas, in very simple language, for dealing with strong emotions. Thich Nath Hahn uses very familiar images and metaphors to give people a sense of exactly what’s involved in each of the steps he describes.

Strong emotions, he says, can take us by surprise and we should learn to recognise the signs before it is too late. Strong emotions can lead to suicidal behaviour, as some people feel that suicide is the only way they

can get free of their strong emotions. Emotions are powerful energies that arise from our unconscious and if we do not learn to deal with them they can overpower us. We should prepare in advance for emotional storms by learning how to embrace our feelings and emotions. We have to begin to learn how to deal with emotions right now, because when the storm hits, it may be too late. Like the way we prepare for winter; we cut wood in the summer and let it dry so that it can be of use to us when winter comes. It is too late to cut wood in the winter-time. We should not wait until then.

Some of the points made by Thich Nhat Hahn on the DVD about emotional storms:

- Our emotions are only a part of us. We are more than our emotion. We should write on a piece of paper and carry it around “dear emotion, you are only a part of me”.
- The challenge is to mobilise other elements in us to take care of the emotion. If you have been practicing mindful breathing, you are prepared to mobilise mindful energy to take care of your painful emotion. Our emotion is not our enemy, it is our “baby”; we need to know we can take care of it. By recognising the emotion, embracing the emotion, I can experience relief.
- Our well being in a crisis is like a tree being blown around in a storm. If we look at the upper part of the tree, we see it being blown around, and we may feel it is so fragile and vulnerable. But if we bring our attention to the trunk of the tree, and think about how firmly rooted it is in the soil, we can have a very different feeling. We see that is stable. During the experience of strong emotion, we also should not stay on the level of the head or the heart, we need to bring our attention to our naval, and become aware of our breathing. Lying down, placing our hand on our belly, and breathing deep and slow. We need to hold firm to - “cling to” - our in-breath and out-breath, until the storm passes. What we do meanwhile is to maintain an awareness of our breathing and keep ourselves firmly grounded in the present moment.

- Emotions are impermanent, they do pass. By surrounding the emotion with mindful awareness, the emotion loses much of its power and energy. When it passes back into our subconscious, it will not be as strong. It has taken a “bath of mindfulness” and next time it comes up it will be a little weaker.
- We have survived emotions before, and each time we do, we grow strong. Each time we experience them and survive, we also grow in our confidence to look after the part of our mind that is capable of feeling intense pain.
- We are afraid of the elements in our unconscious that feel intense fear, despair, anger etc. We are so afraid that we set up blocks within our mind so that these feelings won't arise. We do this without being aware that we are doing it. Every time we sense these feelings might arise, we get busy. We keep our minds occupied so as not to feel whatever we have locked into “mental basements”. And we fill our conscious “living rooms” with as much distraction as possible. But of course hidden pain and hurt feelings do arise despite our best efforts to suppress them. In our dreams and sometimes in our waking lives, we are made aware of strong emotions that we carry within us.
- Repression of feelings also sets up a situation of bad circulation between our conscious and our deeper minds. We suffer symptoms, sometimes they are physical, other times repression of our feelings can lead to symptoms of mental illness. The solution is to open the door of our mental basement and allow them arise. But we need to be able to look after them when they do. And this is why we practice mindfulness and build up our capacity to surround and transform painful emotions that are present in us.
- The energy of mindfulness is strengthened by practicing with others and by deepening our understanding of how our mind works. In psychotherapy, we practitioners can bring mindful energy to others and make it safe for them to bring out painful emotions that they cannot cope with alone.

During the time that painful emotions are not present, we should take advantage of this to practice mindful walking and mindful sitting. With each in-breath, with each step, we can say “I have arrived” and with each out-breath, each step we can say “I am home”. This helps us to develop an easy rhythm and to remind ourselves that we are choosing to arrive in the present moment, rather than keep running away. This is an “act of revolution” because it reverses the way we normally live.

#### *Reactions to DVD:*

*“I already had a mini-storm today (left room crying earlier in session) but I wasn't prepared, I wanted to run away and I did for a minute... he's great, has a lovely way of speaking”*

*“I think taking anti-depressants could be compacting it, they'll come back... I wouldn't take them myself... I used to but I think I was just trying to get meds – think they'd make it worse... bigger, blacker, stronger”*

*“Regular practice - chopping wood in the summer - is so important... there are warnings, this weekend I found myself checking in with myself before I noticed my mood change – otherwise it could have turned into an argument. Just being aware in the moment it dissipated.”*

#### *Post-session analysis:*

The group feels like its really dealing with fundamental issues of concern to relapse prevention. We could do a lot on the subject of relapse prevention, maybe having them literally write down the chain of thoughts-feelings-behaviours that lead to relapse, and also a list of actions they could take to pull themselves out of a nose dive. Mindfulness enhances their capacity to be aware when trouble is looming, or to see themselves walking themselves into danger. The DVD described ‘internal’ coping mechanisms which could help them weather whatever storm hits; there are also probably some practical ‘external’ coping mechanisms they could employ to avert a relapse.

## Week 7: Practice, practice, practice...

### Agenda:

- Practice and consolidate all of the exercises the group has been introduced to so far.
- Play CD excerpts (omitted in earlier sessions due to lack of time.)
- Discuss any issues re mindfulness that remain unclear to the group.
- Discuss termination of the program
- Individual recovery plans

### 7 participants and the team attended

The group were taken by bus to a meditation centre by the sea where we all spent a day (10am – 4 pm) practicing mindful sitting, mindful walking, Yoga, listening to excerpts from tapes and CDs, eating in silence together, and planning what they each needed to do to support their own continued recovery. The day was marked by a great deal of silence and concentration. I think this is an important day where the emphasis is on the various practices themselves, rather than on teaching, problem-solving and discussion which dominate the weekly sessions. Because it was important for the team to fully engage in the practices during the entire day, and be present with the others as they also practiced, it was decided not to take notes. No new material, handouts or CDs were introduced on this day. There was a keen awareness among the group that this programme was drawing to a close.

## Week 8: Staying clean

### Agenda:

- Sitting meditation
- Checking in with our emotions
- Developing a recovery blueprint,
- Review original goals and check whether they had been achieved
- Personal learning from this course
- Supports and resources to strengthen mindfulness practice

### 7 participants present and the team

We began with sitting practice, which the group now do with little or no guidance. Afterwards we checked in with how they were feeling and their reactions were as follows: ‘Uneasy’, ‘brilliant’, ‘grand’, ‘chilled’, ‘anxious’, ‘relaxed’, ‘complete’.

### *Recovery blueprint*

We systematically went around each person and had them answer three key questions:

- 1. What made you stop using?*
- 2. What’s making you stay clean?*
- 3. What have you learned in this course to help you in recovery?*

Tables 4, 5 and 6 give a summary of comments made in answer to these questions.

#### **Table 4: What made me stop using**

*"I stopped cause it wasn't what I wanted, I knew there was more to me than what addiction had to offer"*

*"I drank to feel better and change how I felt about everything. It seemed to work at the start but it stopped working. I was still feeling bad anyway, with or without it."*

*"For me it was misery and fear of being controlled, it was the slavery"*

*"I loved taking drugs, the feeling... but I lost the ability to be a human being, to do anything. I knew it was quit or die, so that's what I did..."*

*"It was like a really messy divorce. I couldn't leave the drugs... I relapsed. I just couldn't keep up, I couldn't take it. I was so desperately unhappy and completely stuck, like walking into the same wall every day... I loved it, loved taking drugs... But I couldn't get enough because reality catches up with you, like the boogey man, snapping at my heels"*

*"I was beginning to get ashamed of the things I was doing... it's very frightening to be that out of control in what you say and do."*

*"You start using in gangs but you end up on your own... eventually I said 'fuck this shit, this is not for me'. I always knew it wasn't for me: sitting in a field, talking about robberies... 'I don't belong with these scumbags'... I was ashamed, I could never get away with it... wherever I went, people always saw me... I could never run, I was always caught, it just never happened... I was worth more than the life that drugs had to offer me and that there was more to life"*

The members of the group described reaching a point of insight where they experienced that even heavy substance abuse couldn't entirely block out the realities they were trying to escape. And when they realised that there was something more to their life than being a slave to addiction. Their personal stories of turning their lives around were shared with great honesty and emotion. The personal insights they had achieved were the reason they were in this programme

and a fundamental part of their motivation to learn a new skill and avoid relapse.

Asked why they were continuing to "stay clean", they described previous relapses and how much they realised that relapse can happen very quickly and destroy whatever life they had built for themselves in recovery. They talked about "fear" as an important element of their motivation to stay clean. Some of them believed that if they relapsed again, there wouldn't be a "second recovery" in them.

Others focused on how much they would lose (Table 5) if they relapsed. They described the feeling of being free of "something big"; the experience of seeing the world in a new way and feeling they had a place in the world; and the sense that they were now growing in a way that wasn't possible before.

#### **Table 5: Why I want to stay clean**

*"The simple little things you appreciate that before you'd never have even noticed. Simple things – like the robin in the garden... the roses starting to bud"*

*"There's some really good days, really brilliant and exciting, you feel free... like you've just escaped something big..."*

*"For me being out of addiction is enough. I don't expect to wake up and walk on roses 24/7, it's enough to get up and not need a drug... there's a big world out there for me to see"*

*"The madness is just too painful. It's isolating, lonely, chaotic, it's just not where I want to be. Now I feel well, connected, like I belong in me, and in the universe in a broader sense."*

*"At the moment I feel a strong sense of purpose in my life but it hasn't always been there. What I'm doing now is fulfilling me; it's making me whole."*

When asked what they had learned in this course to help them stay clean, many people talked about slowing down and experiencing what was actually happening at any given moment in their life, rather than creating stories about how unsatisfactory life was or how they might dream it could be different. Some referred to feeling more at ease with painful emotions, and how attending to painful feelings had changed these emotions.

### Table 6: What I have learned in this course

"I suppose gradually I'm losing fear the fear. Sometimes I get frightened of becoming frightened. Now, it's like thinking 'what's the worst that can happen? This too shall pass. It's like everything, it's impermanent, just sit with the discomfort and what's the worst that can happen? You're not going to use over this or to get a gun and put it in your mouth'"

"The yoga was great. The meditation was good too, I took some of the things you said, like 'bringing the puppy for a walk' and when Clive said that 'your days when thoughts are most (difficult) can be when you learn the most'"

"I started to slow down in my own mind... for example, for as long as I can remember, as soon as I woke up, I'd put the radio on... I can't remember anytime I didn't need noise... lately, I'm not interested in banging on noise as soon as I come in"

"I liked the last day in Wicklow. It was very sad for me but I didn't want to run... I was incredibly sad... but it was OK to be sad... I was very, very sad. I'm a country girl, it reminded me of my grandparents' farm... the whole thing there with my family. It was sheer pain. I remember sitting there by the swings thinking 'this is unbearable!.. but it was OK...'"

"I was waiting for the 15A (bus) the other day. An ambulance was whizzing by, it was absolutely chaotic... but I could hear the birds tweeting and I thought 'you're either having a nervous breakdown or a spiritual awakening... Jesus! Your life has done a 360, maybe it was worth all the work... connecting to nature on the middle of Pearse Street.' Before, if I was hungover and a bird was tweeting I'd want to kill it!"

### Table 6 (continued)

"The whole thing at the start for me was a bit slow. I wanted to speed things up, I heard it was 'a life-changing experience'. Usually I make up so much drama... stories in my head... Now I'm watching a bit more what I'm thinking... I've had two fantastic weeks and I think it's a direct result of slowing down – I was so content."

"Addicts are never happy with what they have; they always want something bigger, better. When I heard your story (Frank's) it really made me appreciate what I have, appreciate my life, 'because most of the time I don't even notice it, I'm just obsessed with one thing or another"

"I loved that video we watched (Thich Nhat Hahn) where he said that your emotion is your baby and you don't run away from it..."

### Supporting their practice beyond this course

There was a strong feeling in the group that they wanted to have some opportunity to continue to practice in a group setting. Clive offered to return for an hour each week and lead a sitting meditation for whoever might show up, it would be a simple exercise, with mainly silent practice and not too much discussion.

The team also identified mindfulness classes that were held weekly in the Sanctuary and Orla was happy for any of them to attend her formal Yoga courses in the city centre.

### Finale

The group ended with a 10 minute sitting meditation and each participant was encouraged to give themselves credit for having completed the course and to have done their best at all stages throughout.

## Chapter 4

### Evaluating the Deora Mindfulness Programme

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#### EVALUATION OF THE DEORA PROGRAMME - QUALITATIVE

*An analysis of follow up 'qualitative' data based on one-to-one interviews two weeks following the course and 'quantitative' data based on pre- and post scores on psychometric measures*

Two weeks after the Deora mindfulness course ended, one of the team (FS) met with each of the group members on a one-to-one basis and asked them a number of structured questions regarding their individual experiences. She also had each person complete a battery of tests that had also been administered prior to the course beginning. Although the number of subjects (6) who completed pre- and post- questionnaires is much too small to form any conclusions regarding the impact of mindfulness training on a population in recovery from addiction, there were some interesting findings, which are reported below.

#### Participant 1

*How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?*

It got me to recognise that my feelings, good and bad, pass. Like the homework exercise, when we had to write down good and bad feelings and how they pass was great. The good ones made me laugh, the bad ones were hard... noticing the bad feelings passed made me feel guilty that I wasn't feeling good all the time. The homework helped me deal with it, accept it, 'I can't do anything about it'

*How could the course have been more helpful to you?*

I enjoyed it an awful lot. All of the course really except that sometimes the meditation was a bit long. I thought you (facilitators) were all great. I was

delighted and honoured to do it, to be an addict and all! It has helped me to do things; especially the yoga was really helpful. I miss it to tell you the truth.

*What was a key moment in your experience of the course?*

One of the major ones was discovering that good and bad feelings go, they pass. Teaching me not to dwell on things, teaching me I'm the problem in my own life. That I think I know better, want to do it my own way...being childish and stubborn

The yoga – how you feel with the energy, the total feel good factor from doing that kind of stuff

Being involved in the group

Giving me the learning tools to help someone else

*What was the most challenging part of the course for you?*

The body scan

*What impact has the course had on:*

*(1) How you deal with your addiction and cravings*

I've been lucky in that my cravings and compulsions had left me for a good while but this has helped and taught me that they will pass, that they're not me; that feelings are feelings, cravings are cravings. I can do a body scan to check in on where it's coming from, what's my part in this and why I'm letting it come in on me because I've dealt with these things. For me I notice a lot of the time it's to do with hunger

*(2) Your relationships with others*

When I do it right I give them space to say how they feel. I'd be thoughtful of them, that they have an opinion and a voice

*(3) Your relationship with your family*

In the same way (as with others) I'm just mindful of

them and of myself, that I can fly off the handle and sometimes I need to eat something 'because I get narky when I'm hungry. It's made me more aware. The danger for me is that I go back to my own way, thinking I'm better, that I'm fixed, I'm OK, forgetting my problems

#### *(4) Your work*

I'm not working but it gets rid of some of the fear and more into the acceptance of myself... confidence.

#### *How much do you practice mindfulness now?*

I know it's good and I feel happier when I do it so if I don't it's me getting in my way again, I'm the problem. About 4-6 times a day I would do 'everyday mindfulness'. Sitting, I try to do 7 days but probably only do 4 or 5. I only do yoga if I have the space and time – twice a week if I'm lucky

#### *Have you had any relapses since beginning the course?*

No. Coffee is my only downfall. It makes my brain race a bit but I'm aware of it now

#### *What kind of support would be helpful to you in maintaining your practice?*

What Clive is doing – someone to come and sit with me. For me, actually getting out and doing yoga in a course because I fall short sometimes on my own, give in quicker. I'll try keep the meditation and prayer going. Just doing what I know is good and getting involved with other people doing the same – being nice to themselves.

## **Participant 2**

#### *How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?*

It was very helpful because it confronted one of the many things you run from as an adult – the mind-body connection, and the spiritual element that's there by default. It confronted it in a gentle way as well.

It was very compatible with the 12 steps; it didn't clash in any way with the ideology of the 12 steps.

It would have been a problem if it did... thought, prayers, meditation, conscious contact with yourself... the Mindfulness course did all of that.

[Speaking about the mind-body disconnection that occurs in addiction]

I walked around for 2 years with a shoulder that was out when I was addicted... I did register the pain, got migraines etc., I felt it severely, but I was still running from it, wouldn't confront it.

The notion of the moment: walking in the moment, brushing your teeth... I feel like I'm doing it as supposed to projecting into the next thing where I'm supposed to be doing, doing what I should be doing. Because usually I've done something before I even start tackling it, my head's gone on to the next problem.

I confronted the notion of slowing down in the moment, confronted as supposed to spoke about it. There's kind of nowhere to go with it – it's confronted in a practical rather than an academic way. He (Tony) spoke of meditation, and the next thing he hits the gongs and you're doing it. Because it can seem very fluffy and intangible otherwise. Learning through doing makes it more challenging in every way.

#### *How could the course have been more helpful to you?*

The inclusion of the Body-scan homework at an earlier stage... in the John Kabat-Zinn book it seems to be the basis that you tune in to... it's so hard, it bored me, but that's not the point. It's one of the pillars.

A bit more structure... there were times it was perceived he (Tony) was winging it... I thought 'have you planned for today'?

Things like walking meditation were just put in very quickly at the end... seemed like rushing to the finish line for a while at the end

In Bray, when Clive was doing the 'address the thoughts, then the emotions' we hadn't really prepared enough. It was confusing over what we were meant

to be doing... he kept asking 'what now? What next?'... you need to spoon feed for crises! Using cheesy slogans... in your face... simplicity can come in to your head in a crisis. It is ultimately about crisis intervention at times.

Be more forceful about insisting people do their homework, not to criticise, but to out them, you get what you put in

There's a responsibility element – people wandering out and in of sessions (although when asked she did not feel we should get overly strict about attendance)

### *What was a key moment in your experience of the course?*

Realising that I don't have my ears constantly shoved with noise... it just happened... I didn't notice for a week. Something's different. I don't need it now, I choose it. The change had happened, I didn't catch it for a few days

I would try practice the homework; the key thing for me was the absolute unwillingness to do it. All talk and no action is only all talk and no action. I need discipline. It's important for me to recognise that – the observation of my own reluctance.

The day in Wicklow was hard, but hey, I didn't run away from it. I was able to remain in the day

### *What was the most challenging part of the course for you?*

The discipline aspect around the homework, it still is very challenging. There are days I'd rather watch grass grow than listen to my own breathing.

Basically, the practice was the main challenge, not thinking about it, talking etc.

The people in the course were lovely. No one put in or out on me. ... I found I noticed my own insecurity,

that I was worrying about nothing.

### *What impact has the course had on:*

#### *(1) Your addiction and cravings?*

A profound impact noticing the thought and leaving it be. Before, I'd need a strategy to make a cup of tea... I'd judge my own thoughts etc.

I was so sick last week, I had a huge desire to get sleeping pills, it would have been no problem but I said no, I'd sit with the discomfort.

It's intercepted the disease in some way. I sat with it. It was horrible, awful, about as far away from the serenity of yoga as you can get but I was ok.

I'm so much more appreciative of my body sensations. I was so happy to be well after... I encompassed gratitude versus just huge relief and giving a one hour long lecture to anyone who would listen on how bad it was.

It intercepted my recovery from a point of view of gratitude and allowing every cell in my body to feel well versus just relieved and retrospective about how lucky I was to survive and all the feelings that go with it.

#### *(2) Your relationships with others?*

At times I'm less reactive... I'm more inside of my own body, I'm able to say: 'there's a situation, I have an opinion on it', 9 times out of 10 it's none of my business, it will be a situation I created.

Primarily, I've slowed down.

My main difficulty was my relationship with myself, the impact on my relationship with others was an added benefit... I'm at all times 100% aware that if I'm feeling intolerable or irritable with someone it's usually triggered by something within me.

Generally, I'm more chilled out with myself, on a good day. For me it'd be the lifetime achievement award if I can improve my relationship with myself.

#### *(3) Your relationship with your family*

My family and I don't have a relationship... my

family is a sick entity. The notion of detaching with love, getting in to madness, being a doormat for it or accelerating me... it's down to my role (within the family) and my relationship with myself. I can be rational with anyone else but as soon as I walk in the door at home I'm the sister, the daughter, I'm right back... I've detached... I need to be careful of being around them as they are a trigger. I'm not avoiding them in a diseased way, not running but avoiding them in a self-preservation way – detaching versus avoiding – it's solution based. It's an important distinction, a shift in perception. Avoidance is a mechanism; the perception is I'm not avoiding them for it but detaching for self-preservation. My head's in the solution, not the disease.

#### *(4) Your work/study*

Before I was obsessed, went to extremes... should be studying 24 hours a day... one week ago I found myself slipping back to that... I haven't achieved the balance but I'm striving towards it so my head's still in recovery. I used to use a lot of drugs at exam time and I got through, so now I don't have that I've got to use what I have.

#### *How much do you practice mindfulness now?*

Generally, when I'm walking... I try to do something in the morning and at bed time... twice or three times a day... I don't take it overly seriously either because you'd hate it

#### *Have you had any relapse since beginning the course?*

No

#### *What kind of support would be helpful to you in maintaining your practice?*

Practice, to keep connected with it. Post-course strategy, like after care, discuss how to make it work... an after care model... personally, I meditate anyway, I will probably go to the Buddhist Centre, I've got on to Plum Village, I can't do the retreat but they do have a magazine – The Bell... the AA do Grapevine, you use it between meetings to keep it real, because things fade into the background.

My idea is to practice with meditation, get the magazine and try get to Plum Village (Edith is interested in going too). The Dublin Buddhist Centre does yoga so I'll touch base with them...

I'll try and keep it up. It's like a diet: you know exactly what not to eat but you can always start tomorrow.

### **Participant 3**

#### *How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?*

It was helpful in the sense that it helped me to meditate and I'm meant to be doing that for my 11th step.

It's helped me to stay more in the present moment

I'm not as stressed because I'm more relaxed and clear headed, not miles ahead or behind (myself)

#### *How could the course have been more helpful to you?*

The long body scan at the start could've been shorter, to build things up more gradually.

More yoga and to start it earlier in the course

The homework – like a journal, you can look over how you've changed during the week, like keeping yourself in check and on the ball... to be aware of your behaviour and how you're reacting so you can change in time before drastic consequences.

#### *What was a key moment in your experience of the course?*

I really liked the yoga.

I liked how we chatted about things, the friendly atmosphere; it was never awkward or uneasy.

#### *What was the most challenging part of the course for you?*

The long periods of meditation and the body scan...

trying to stay mindful without daydreaming.

*What impact has the course had on:*

*(1) Dealing with your addiction and cravings*

I'm doing the 11th step so it helped by helping me to meditate, to do the 11th step. It's definitely helped, without a doubt, the combination of both (the 12 steps and the Mindfulness). Tony seems to have a good understanding of the steps.

*(2) Your relationship with others*

In general I'm a bit more chilled out, calmer. I'm wired naturally but I'm more relaxed... I'm trying not to fly ahead or go into the past because that does affect other people, even if you don't intend it to... This (the benefits) is only if I keep it up.

*(3) Your relationship with your family*

Similar to my relationship with others (see above)

*(4) Your work*

N/A

*How much do you practice mindfulness now?*

Everyday I practice in some way. I haven't done any yoga. I try to do sitting on a daily basis... Walking, not as much, I do more driving meditation! I don't walk much and when I do I'm on a mission.

*Have you had any relapses since beginning the course?*

No

*What kind of support do you need to maintain your practice?*

Daily practice

**Participant 4**

*How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?*

Not Mindfulness as a whole but the meditation and yoga and the different techniques helped. I don't think I got what the whole Mindfulness thing was.

*How could the course have been more helpful to*

*you?*

It would be great if you could get an addict to teach it... someone from where they're from (the participants). Frank was inspirational, but you need someone more like them.

Mindfulness seems a bit far-fetched. It seemed like the people who were doing it were so far ahead and they were just trying to dumb it down for us... they could have talked more about how they started, their own difficulties in doing it and what helped.

If you got people who weren't that long clean they might be more willing to open up, because myself, I have my own thing, I can be set in my own ways. People might be more susceptible earlier on. There's a lot done in counselling and addiction, people have heard this all before.

*What stage of recovery do you think the course should be offered at?*

It's hard to say – it's a bit of a paradox. You need to mix it up.

*Did you find the course compatible with the 12 steps?*

Yeah, there's a lot that's similar... the only thing that's missing would be talking about a faith

*How could the course have been more helpful to you?*

More meditation and yoga in the classes, mix it up, not to have a whole class of just talking... do a bit in each class, keep people energised. Some days it seemed a bit like you (team) were winging it.

The homework seemed a bit extreme – 40 minutes is too much (this was the time period each participant was asked to devote daily to completing all the homework assignments, e.g. sitting practice, yoga, writing journal, reading) It's hard enough for people to arrive here every week... at least that's true for myself.

*Were there any key moments in the course for you?*

To sit up straight doing meditation. My posture was

the biggest thing I got out of it, and the yoga

*What was the most challenging aspect of the course?*

3 hours a day (for a session) is too long, 2 hours a day would be better

The video (Thich Nhat Than) wasn't believable. I don't want to be like that, it's a bit extreme for someone only getting in to it. You should show more about the benefits of doing it than just, 'here's a man doing it!'

*What impact, if any, did the course have on:*

*(1) Your addiction and cravings*

None

*(2) Your relationship with others*

The meditation slowed me down, I got in to it more

*(3) Your relationship with your family*

Same (see above)

*(4) Your work*

Yeah, I work with people so if I'm calmer with myself I'm more approachable and listen more

*How much practice are you doing now?*

The meditation, and I try to do a bit of yoga. I do one or other each day for 20 minutes... I liked the body scan CD

*Have you had any relapse since beginning the course?*

No

*What kind of supports do you need to maintain your practice?*

My CDs and Orla once a week

**Participant 5**

*How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?*

I think it disciplined me in to the meditation and helped me to sit with myself more. It was helpful for the meditation end of things, helped me relax, made me more aware of my thoughts and feeling and more aware of me I suppose. I've cried a lot since starting, I actually welcomed it; it was a matter of learning how to cope I suppose. It did leave me vulnerable but it was ok

*How could the course have been more helpful to you?*

I'm not sure

*What was the most challenging aspect of the course for you?*

The motivation to turn up was the only thing I found hard, was just to get up and do it.

*How did you find the homework?*

The writing part... when I walked out the door (after the session) if forgot about it (to do it). But with the CDs I was bringing them home and putting them on, and doing it.

*How did you find the CDs?*

I like them; I listened to 'From Fear to Fearlessness' at home. The 10 minutes (Tony's guided meditation) is flying now.

*Were there any key moments for you on the course?*

None that stick out, it was just gradual, I didn't come in one day and think, 'I can do this', it just sort of fell together

*What impact, if any, has the course had on:*

*(1) Your addiction and your cravings*

I don't think it has. I know if I get a stressful situation I'll do the 3 minute breathing thing so I suppose that helps and I got home on a bad day, I

thought 'I've arrived, I'm home...' so it was taking my mind off what I'm going through. When I joined I didn't think it was about addiction, but that it was a meditation course, so it's not like I didn't get what I was expecting

### *(2) Your relationships*

Maybe it has – not so much on my relationships, but more on me – I've become so much more aware of myself. To deal with what I'm learning about myself but at the same time maintaining my relationships without letting it affect me

### *(3) Your family*

I think I'm able to stay with them a lot more than I was. It used to be half an hour and I'd leave. A few weeks ago I was able to stay for 8 hours. I dunno if that was a result of the course but it was a big change.

### *(4) Your work/study*

I dunno, I finished in the last 4 months. My examiner said I excelled in exams but I dunno if that's why. I did study for them.

### *How often do you practice?*

Everyday for 10 minutes in the morning and then another 15 minutes during the day. I'm trying to do the yoga on my own but I find it very hard.

### *Have you had any relapses since beginning the course?*

No, I have felt like it, thought about it, but it's not what I want.

### *What kind of supports would be helpful to you in maintaining your practice?*

The CDs, discipline to do them and having the time in the morning. I would love to have it (CDs) on MP3. Follow-up would be good, a follow-up meeting and I plan to come sit with Clive.... I got the number for the meditation centre, I'm definitely going to keep it up. A lot of hard stuff is coming up but it's all for my own benefit and growth is coming.

### *When is the right stage in recovery to introduce this course?*

The right stage to cope? You don't know if you will be until it comes up, people who dropped out probably weren't there (at the right stage). I knew I needed something else, I'm not getting support in day-to-day counselling to deal with it so I went and organised additional psychotherapy to help.

I don't think there should be a time – one year clean or you're not in – not a time frame. If I'd done this after one month I would've relapsed. Really early recovery isn't a good idea at all. The criteria should be about: the person; what you want to get from this; and that you're going to stay clean at all costs.

### *Did you feel that we could have done something more to support people feeling vulnerable during the course?*

Maybe do raise the issue again after the first session; that you might need extra support. Put it out in some way what to expect, but when it happens it's different

### *How did this course fit with the 12 steps?*

I dropped my sponsor because I found out I didn't value her recovery, she wasn't really there for me... it's her job to guide me through recovery but she didn't call me back (when I had called her in a crisis)... they would run side by side because meditation is the 11th step.

When I heard at the start it would be a life-changing experience, it was like, wow! It was life-changing but it has been in a different way in me than I expected.... Outside stuff – things like how you view yourself, the outside world – it's been life changing in how I see my own awareness. I totally misunderstood, I thought everything would be great, calm and peaceful... it's more of a reality check... I didn't get it but now it's like, this is what they meant. It's all good, growth and change and I'm open to it.

### *Has the course met your expectations?*

I think so, it probably went over it, I did the meditation and yoga, met friends, learnt to sit with myself... I got more out of it than I expected.

### *Where to from here?*

I definitely want to keep it up; I would love to partake

in the next course (in some way)

## **Participant 6**

*(part of the interview is missing as the transcription was lost)*

### *How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?*

Very. The information... I was practicing a bit of meditation before so it confirms that and gives me motivation.

It's very simple, not a complex thing, but sometimes I worry if I'm doing it right I think it's going to prove itself over time versus getting a huge dramatic result, but I expect it's going to help me a huge amount... it's a process, you evolve with the process

### *How could the course have been more helpful?*

At the start, the body scan, the length of it put me off. Initially it was too slow but introductions have to be made, settling down other than that was great.

### *Were there any key moments for you during the course?*

I remember feeling 'oh yeah, this is it at one stage', I felt high, brilliant, but it didn't last.

One thing important to say is that I was on Prozac, when I started, now I'm not. I'm kind of stepping up to life. I'll try it, if it doesn't work I'll go back – I said it to my counsellor.

I'm more enthusiastic about life

Something we did with Clive – the Pema Chodron CD was fantastic, I had heard it before but it made more sense to me. She was talking about "Maitri".

### *How often do you practice now?*

Daily

## EVALUATION OF THE DEORA PROGRAMME - QUANTITATIVE

### Method

Individuals who voluntarily participated in the 10-week MBRP programme completed a range of quantitative assessments pre- and post-course. The goal of this study was to measure the impact of participating in a 10-week MBRP programme on participants' psychological functioning, quality of life and mindful qualities. Due to the sample size, lack of a control group, and lack of controlling for the level of pre-existing substance abuse on outcomes, it is not feasible to generalise from these results. However, when taken together with the qualitative feedback from participants, the results offer tentative suggestions on the potential of applying Mindfulness-based approaches to support people recovering from addiction.

### Recruitment

Participants were recruited for interview from local rehabilitation services on the basis of a referral from their key worker. Over 100 individuals were referred for interview. Selection criteria for interview included the applicant demonstrating an interest in learning more about mindfulness, and being drug-free (including methadone) for at least six months.

Nineteen individuals were selected for interview, 15 of whom were accepted to participate in the programme. The semi-structured interviews were carried out by the Programme Director TB (Clinical Psychologist) and an assistant FS (psychology graduate). The questions were tailored to establish brief background knowledge of the applicants, including their history of substance abuse, psychological history, treatment history and current treatment. The interview also explored any previous experience with meditation and their reason for interest in the programme. Exclusion criteria for proceeding to participate in the programme included the individual reporting symptoms of current distress and the absence of a supportive relationship with a key worker.

On the basis of these interviews, 15 participants were selected to voluntarily participate in the 10-week MBRP programme.

### Analyses

Participants were required to give their written consent to take part and to complete a series of quantitative assessments one-week prior to beginning the programme. One-week after completing the programme, participants were required to complete a post-course assessment. There was no control group in this study.

The assessments used were the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21), The Life Orientation Test – Revised (Lot – R, Sheirer, Carver & Bridges), Resilience Scale (RS), World Health Organisation Quality of Life (WHOQOL-Bref), Kentucky Inventory Mindfulness Scale (Kims, Baer) and the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (CAMS-R, Feldman).

Of the 15 participants who began the programme, nine completed it. However, the current data analyses include only the participants who completed both the pre- and post-course assessments. The final sample size was seven participants, this sample size is too small to have statistical power therefore results cannot be generalised. All missing data were recorded as -1.

## Results

### Participants

Fifteen participants entered the MBRP programme, six were male and nine were female ranging in age from 28 – 48 years ( $M = 33.8$ ,  $SD = 5.95$ ). All of the participants had a history of multiple addictions, length of use ranged from 6 – 24 years ( $M = 15.5$ ,  $SD = 5.95$ ). Two of the participants' addictions were limited to alcohol and prescription medication, eight had a history of abusing multiple Class A drugs such as speed, ecstasy, heroin and crack cocaine. Data regarding the history of drug use was missing for 3 participants. Three participants had spent time in

prison. None of the participants were using illicit drugs or alcohol at the onset of the programme. One participant reported taking prescribed anti-depressants at the onset. All of the participants were currently working through the 12 step programme, and they were all receiving support from a sponsor, a key worker or a counsellor. Six participants had previous experience of meditation, three of whom practiced on a regular basis. None of the participants had any previous experience of mindfulness training. Two participants had a primary school education or less, six had a secondary school education, and six had completed tertiary education. One participant was in full-time employment, two were unemployed, one was in vocational training, and five were students.

Independent sample t-tests revealed no significant differences between baseline assessments of participants who completed the programme (n=7) and those who did not (n=8). One-tailed paired samples t-tests compared means of participants' pre- and post-course assessments.

Improvements were found in participants' self-reported level of psychological functioning, quality of life and mindful qualities. However, not all of these improvements reached statistical significance. This may have been due to a lack of statistical power in the data set due to the small sample size (n=7). The following tables illustrate which variables achieved significant improvement and which variables improvement did not reach statistical significance.

**Figure 1**

Quality of Life (WHOQOL-Brief)	Significant improvement (p<.05)	P value (one-tailed t-test)
Physical	No	.037
Psychological	No	.022
Social relations	Yes	.267
Environment	Yes	.077

As Figure 1 illustrates, participants showed significant improvements in their quality of life relating to their social relations and their satisfaction with their environment. The most substantial improvement they reported was in their social relations. There was a

trend toward improved physical and psychological functioning however it did not reach statistical significance.

**Figure 2**

Mindfulness (KIMS)	Significant improvement (p<.05)	P value
KIMS Total score	No	.03

*KIMS Subscales*

Observing	Yes	.08
Describing	No	.03
Acting with awareness	Yes	.19
Accept without judgement	Yes	.05

*Mindfulness (CAMS-R)*

CAMS-R	No	.012
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As Figure 2 illustrates, neither of the mindfulness scales used detected a significant improvement in participants' mindful qualities, however, there was a trend toward an improvement. Participants did report significant improvement in three of the four subscales of the KIMS. The greatest improvement was in their ability to act with awareness; they also reported improvement in their ability to observe their thoughts and feelings and to act without judgement. They reported a slight improvement in their ability to describe their thoughts and feelings; however this improvement was not significant.

**Figure 3**

Optimism	Significant improvement (p<.05)	P value
LOT-R	No	.024

**Figure 4**

Resilience	Significant Improvement (p<.05)	P value
Resilience Scale (RS)	No	.01

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate a trend toward improvement in participants' optimism and resilience, however changes were not found to be significant.

**Figure 5**

Depression, Anxiety & Stress	Significant Improvement (p<.05)	P value
DASS21 – overall score	Yes	.08

**Subscales**

Depression	Yes	.06
Anxiety	Yes	.17
Stress	Yes	.2

As can be seen in figure 5, participants self-reported significant reductions in their levels of stress, anxiety and depression after taking part in the course.

**Discussion**

Given the small sample size and the lack of a control group in this study all results must be interpreted cautiously. A sample of seven participants does not allow for the statistical power necessary to draw any firm conclusions regarding the usefulness of MBRP for individuals recovering from multiple and enduring addictions. Moreover, the lack of follow-up data impedes us from determining whether any gains achieved through the course were maintained in the months after completion. Therefore, we cannot generalise from these results, however, we can take encouragement from tentative evidence of the benefits of MBRP reported in this pilot study. When taken together with the qualitative data collected throughout the course of the study, and with previous research that has been carried out on MBRP internationally, it can be concluded that the use of MBRP in supporting people recovering from addiction shows promise and warrants further research.

The analyses revealed improvements in participants' self-reported levels of psychological functioning, quality of life, levels of optimism, resilience and mindful qualities. Not all of these results were statistically significant, however all showed trends toward improvement in the expected direction. The

most significant improvements found in all the scales were in their ability to accept their thoughts and feelings and in their satisfaction with their social relationships. This suggests the use of MBRP may benefit people recovering from multiple and enduring addictions.

It is interesting to note that neither of the overall scores on the two mindfulness scales reached statistical significance. Yet the KIMS detected significant improvement in participants' mindful qualities. This suggests that participants were better able to observe their thoughts and feelings, to act with awareness and to accept without judgement after taking part in the course. However, their ability to describe their thoughts and feelings was not significantly improved as a result. They reported a greater ability to practice core mindfulness skills, while still having difficulty in articulating their thoughts and feelings. While no causation can be inferred, their increased ability to accept their own thoughts and feelings is likely to have aided them in their ability to be more tolerant of others, and to be more sensitive to the results of their own behaviour. This would fit well with their increased satisfaction in social relationships that was found both quantitatively (p=.2) and reported in qualitative feedback.

There was a trend toward improvement in participants' self-reported quality of life, this was most notable in their satisfaction with their social relationships and their physical environment. This finding is compatible with their improved ability to accept without judgement which they reported. While no causation can be inferred, this finding suggests they may have applied this mindful quality to better accept their relationships with others and their physical environment. Participants reported slight improvement in their psychological and physical functioning, however neither of these was significant. The lack of significant improvement in psychological functioning is in keeping with the lack of significant improvement of optimism or resilience. This suggests that the course did not significantly improve protective factors relating to mental health. However, the DASS-21 detected significant reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression suggesting a decrease in participants' experiences of negative psychological states.

## Chapter 5

### Summary and Recommendations

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*“Meditation is an ordeal that opens people to discovering something about themselves; an ordeal that takes people to the edge of their comfort zone and beyond.”*

- Alan Marlatt

This 8-week course was an exploration of the value of mindfulness training to the complex process of recovering from an addiction and staying “clean”. It was never presented as a grand solution to the problem of addiction, but as an adjunct to a range of therapies and programmes from which the participants had already benefited.

Meditation of any kind is not an easy subject to explain. The experience of practice, rather than any number of explanations or descriptions is what allows an individual to grasp for themselves what it means. As a result those who have limited or no experience of meditation often hold many misconceptions about it.

Thirteen adults began the course and seven were still there at the final meeting. Of those who dropped out early on, we know that some of them found returning to the drug service for a weekly course was itself upsetting as they preferred to think they had left all that behind them. Two reported that they found it hard to be in a room “full of addicts” after being successfully clean for a long time. These are issues that we would anticipate and address more rigorously in any future selection process. It may be that if an individual has successfully stayed clean away from the ethos of a drug counselling service, then their introduction to mindfulness training should be in some very neutral location where there is no special focus on addiction.

Of those who completed the course, all reported that they found it that mindfulness made sense to them, and that it had strengthened them in their recovery. Only one individual reported that he still didn’t “get mindfulness” by the end of the course.

Due to constraints in the design and sample size of the quantitative study, we cannot draw any firm conclusions on the benefits of applying mindfulness

to relapse prevention. However, the results were encouraging and clearly indicate that further research in this area is warranted.

Overall the participants appreciated those experiences of mindfulness which were facilitated by different course exercises. As one participant said:

*“He (TB) spoke of meditation, and the next thing he hits the gong and you’re doing it. Because it can seem very fluffy and intangible otherwise. Learning through doing makes it more challenging in every way.”*

From the earliest session, short simple introductory exercises were used to keep the teaching sessions experiential and avoid prolonged conceptual debate. Furthermore, the early sessions focused on basic exercises that involved the body, as a way of helping people to reconnect with their bodies and become thereby grounded in the present moment. Exercises such as the body Scan and Hatha yoga stretches were particularly successful in bringing participants into mindful awareness of the present moment. Many identified yoga as the most helpful aspect of the 8-week programme, but it’s probably the case that no one of these exercises stands alone. The mix may be critical, and the timing of how each exercise is introduced remains an open and important question.

What was striking was that each participant reported that they were practicing daily, - generally a 10-15 minute sitting meditation - in the follow up interviews.

What didn’t work well in this group was having participants do a long body scan exercise early on. This was simply the result of our choice to use Jon Kabat-Zinn’s pre-recorded 45 minute guided CD on body scan. This is a very useful resource, but if we were to repeat this course we would want to provide participants with a 15-20 body scan exercise, preferably recorded by one of the group leaders. Perhaps their practice could evolve in time into a longer, fuller Body Scan.

Another learning was the need to introduce Yoga much earlier on, probably from the opening session.

Due to the unavailability of our yoga teacher until week 3, we were not able to introduce this component of the programme until the group was up and running.

One participant reported that he didn’t feel he “got what the whole mindfulness thing was”. As he put it:

*“Mindfulness seems a bit far-fetched. It seemed like the people who were doing it were so far ahead and they were just trying to dumb it down for us... they could have talked more about how they started, their own difficulties in doing it and what helped...it would be great if you could get an addict to teach it”.*

Our hope would be that through this report, the concept of mindfulness will be brought alive, off the pages of text book definitions, by conveying the participants’ own experience of practicing mindfulness, of their struggles as well as their gains.

One thing that definitely came through is that it’s not easy. In the words of one participant “there are days I’d rather sit and watch grass grow than listen to my own breathing”. We would hope that their words and their stories will go some way to ‘de-mystifying’ mindfulness for people who may be interested in participating in future. In addition, we would hope that some of the participants will eventually go on to train in mindfulness themselves and teach future programmes. Two of the participants were exploring the possibility of going on a mindfulness retreat in Plum Village at the time of the follow-up interviews which was encouraging in this regard.

The impact of mindfulness that was most relevant to this group is that it taught them to be less afraid of stopping and being with their experience, however easy or difficult it was, in the here and now. Participants described in various ways how they had learned to stop running from the present, through distractions of one sort or another and to simply be with themselves. They discovered their reason for running was a fear of being overwhelmed by some feeling they had if they were to acknowledge its presence. However, they discovered for themselves that the effect of trying to run from, or suppress, negative feelings was to leave them feeling

permanently on edge and therefore vulnerable to returning to addictive behaviours that had helped them avoid feelings in the past.

Playing the DVD of Thich Nhat Hanh on “Coping with Emotional Storms” seems to have been especially helpful to all participants, bar one in the group. The message contained in this talk was simple: Our feelings are not our enemy, they are a part of us that needs care and attention. And that if we stay present to our feelings they naturally transform and pass. For each participant, different feelings may cause distress and threaten to overwhelm them.

In this course we focused on painful emotions like hurt, sadness, anger. I think in future courses we would recommend focussing on feelings and urges broadly fitting the description of “cravings” which can arise in the presence or absence of distress. This is an aspect of relapse prevention that has been very well developed by Alan Marlatt. For this reason (and many other good reasons) we would recommend making contact with Marlatt and his Colleagues in Seattle Washington, seeking permission to incorporate his exercises for “coping with urges and cravings”.

In the light of our experience in this programme we would recommend focusing on cravings early on in any mindfulness training course. We had the good fortune to attend a two day training event in Copenhagen with Alan Marlatt but we were already at week seven so that it was too late to incorporate his insights into this programme. One of the differences between the programme we ran and Marlatt’s programme is that he gets straight on to the issue of cravings in the first session tailoring it around addiction specifically from the outset.

Marlatt and his colleagues use a lot of metaphors in their programme. For example, they offered a variety of metaphors to give participants easy ways to observe their thoughts e.g. imagine your thoughts as leaves on a river floating along; or clouds in the sky floating past and dissolving; or as if you’re sitting in the cinema watching the words/thoughts on the screen. They also used the imagery of a pig to help participants to externalise their cravings and gain

control over them. e.g. imagine your craving as a greedy pig, the more you feed it, the stronger it gets.

We believe incorporating the creative elements to the course would be helpful in future programmes as participants need strong associations with simple messages to get them through crises. As one of the participants on our course put it:

*“You need to be spoon fed for crises! Using cheesy slogans... in your face... simplicity can come in to your head in a crisis. It is ultimately about crisis intervention at times.”*

Marlatt and his research group have just embarked on a major study of the benefits of mindfulness training in the treatment of addiction. It may be very useful for future programmes to establish formal contact with his group and explore possibility of using the same training and research evaluation protocol. That way learnings on both sides of the Atlantic could be shared and data also.

Another striking feature of Marlatt’s programme is that they accept anyone on to the programme that was referred by the local rehabilitation services. They did not exclude people taking methadone, very violent offenders or people experiencing psychotic episodes. As Alan Marlatt himself stated when questioned on this policy at the workshop in Copenhagen: “My position is that anyone can benefit from this. If they’re not getting anything out of it they can drop out. They can always give it a try”

Overall, this was a very enjoyable experience for all of us who worked on this programme, and, by all accounts, for the participants themselves. This is not an insignificant observation. We have heard reports of patients in certain mindfulness courses who found the programme very “heavy going”. Basically, the aim of mindfulness is to open our minds and hearts to an appreciation of the present, and to an experience of gratitude for simply being alive at all. When I attend Plum Village, the monastery of Thich Nhat Hahn in the south of France, what strikes me is that this practice is one which gives people a sense of joy and well being. And that if it doesn’t, one is probably

trying too hard, or simply approaching it with the wrong attitude.

It seems only logical that if we can present mindfulness training with a lightness of touch, and with a sense of joy, in our courses, the likelihood of sustained practice afterwards will be much greater.

## *Bibliography and resources*

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### **Websites (where a wide variety of CD's can be ordered)**

Mindfulness-based stress reduction: [www.umassmed.edu/cfm](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm)

Dialectal behavior therapy: [www.behavioraltech.com](http://www.behavioraltech.com)  
Acceptance and commitment therapy: [www.acceptanceandcommitmenttherapy.com](http://www.acceptanceandcommitmenttherapy.com)

Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy: [meditationandpsychotherapy.org](http://meditationandpsychotherapy.org)

Mindfulness and Acceptance Special Interest Group of the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy: [listerv.kent.edu/archives/mindfulness/html](http://listerv.kent.edu/archives/mindfulness/html)

Audiovisual materials of all kinds: [www.soundstrue.com](http://www.soundstrue.com)

Thich Nhat Hanh link: [www.iamhome.org](http://www.iamhome.org)



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