

## Mindfulness Inmate Project

November 15, 2023

### Overview

The mindfulness inmate project is an evidence-based program designed to promote mindfulness practices as a resource to support incarcerated individuals dealing with addiction and recovery. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) collaborated with various local partners to adapt and implement this program in two correctional facilities within the health district.

To implement this project, SWNPHD sponsored two mental health counselors and one social worker to complete the evidenced-based Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement (MORE)<sup>1</sup> therapy training. The MORE therapy model uses body-mind and behavioral therapy techniques as a tool to address and lessen addiction related struggles such as cravings, physical and emotional pain, stress, etc. After completing the training, providers conducted mindfulness counseling sessions to inmates in Red Willow County and Keith County correctional facilities. Sessions were conducted twice a month (or as often as there were participants to attend) from September of 2022 through August of 2023. Participation in each session was open to any inmate in the facility, whether or not they had participated in previous sessions.

Additionally, SWNPHD worked with the Bureau of Sociological Research at University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) who assisted with program evaluation and data collection. Through this partnership, evaluation surveys were created and given to both the trained providers and the inmate participants.

Overall project coordination and development was led by Heidi Wheeler, Assistant Director SWNPHD [heidi@swhealth.ne.gov](mailto:heidi@swhealth.ne.gov). Data analysis and report development was completed by Chloe Martin, Program Manager SWNPHD [chloe@swhealth.ne.gov](mailto:chloe@swhealth.ne.gov). Thank you to our providers who agreed to participate in this program: Trina McPherson, Substance Abuse Counselor at Ambience Behavioral Health; Cami Brown, Substance Abuse Counselor at Banner Health; Shelly McQuillan, Social Worker, Ogallala Community Hospital.

<sup>1</sup>For more information on MORE therapy developed by Dr. Eric Garland, Ph.D. please visit <https://drecgarland.com/about-m-o-r-e/>.

## **Provider Results**

Providers completed a total of three surveys (one pre-program, and a check-in both mid-year and post-program). These surveys included questions aimed to assess each provider's:

- History/prior knowledge with mindfulness and mindfulness practices
- Reasons for deciding to participate in the program
- Interest in continuing the program
- Opinion on engagement of and impact on inmate participants
- Perspective on barriers faced by inmates
- Advice on additional resources needed by inmates
- Personal demographic information

### **Top 2 Reasons Providers Decided to Lead Mindfulness Sessions**

- ➔ Helping inmates improve their overall mental health
- ➔ Helping inmates stop or reduce their alcohol or drug use.

All three providers were white females and shared similar motivations for participating in the program. The training and program seemed to leave a positive impact on providers. Before starting, only one of three providers had conducted some type of mindfulness group or counseling in the past. By the mid-year survey, all three providers said they had conducted other mindfulness groups or counseling.

Throughout the program all three providers expressed the need for additional resources for inmates beyond mindfulness counseling. Suggestions for additional resources included: access to healthcare and housing, additional drug and alcohol support, education or vocational training, financial assistance, and job training.

**“ I have inmates that are homeless and no longer have their ID's, SS cards or birth certificates.**

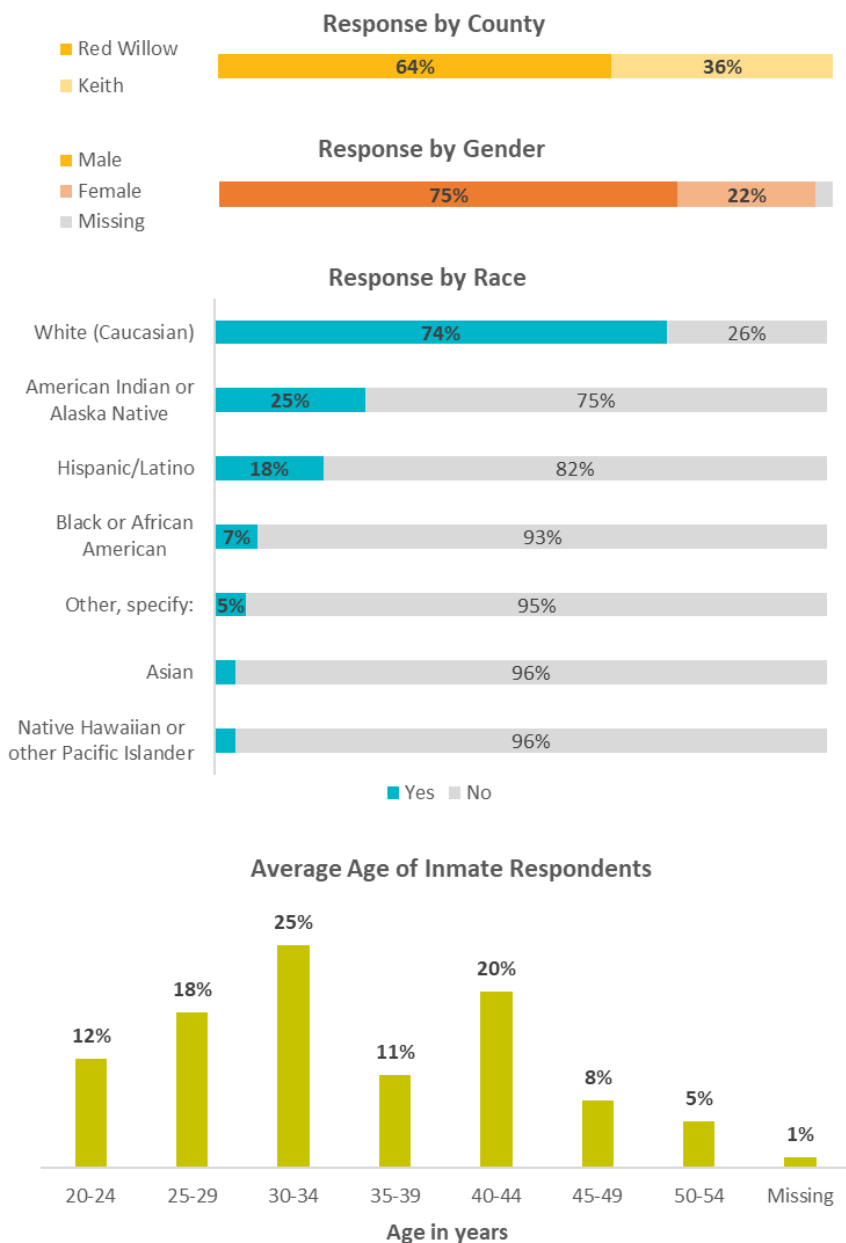
**Despite my best efforts, I could not obtain these necessary documents for one of the inmates, so he was released without being able to work or obtain housing or anything else. ”**

**“ Often times they have lost everything while in jail and there are no local supports to assist them... How are they supposed to make change happen if they have no support, guidance, or even sometimes, place to go. ”**

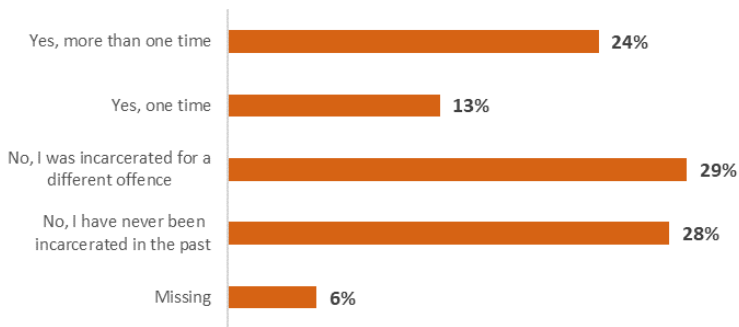
## Inmate Results

Inmates were given a short survey to complete both prior to and after each mindfulness session they attended. Additionally, a post-release survey was sent out quarterly to participants who had since been released from incarceration, but only one response was received during the one-year program.

A total of 89 pre-session surveys and 81 post-session surveys were completed by participants in Red Willow County Corrections Center and Keith County Jail. The majority of participants were white males ranging in age from 20-54 years old.



**Have you ever been incarcerated in the past for the same offense?**



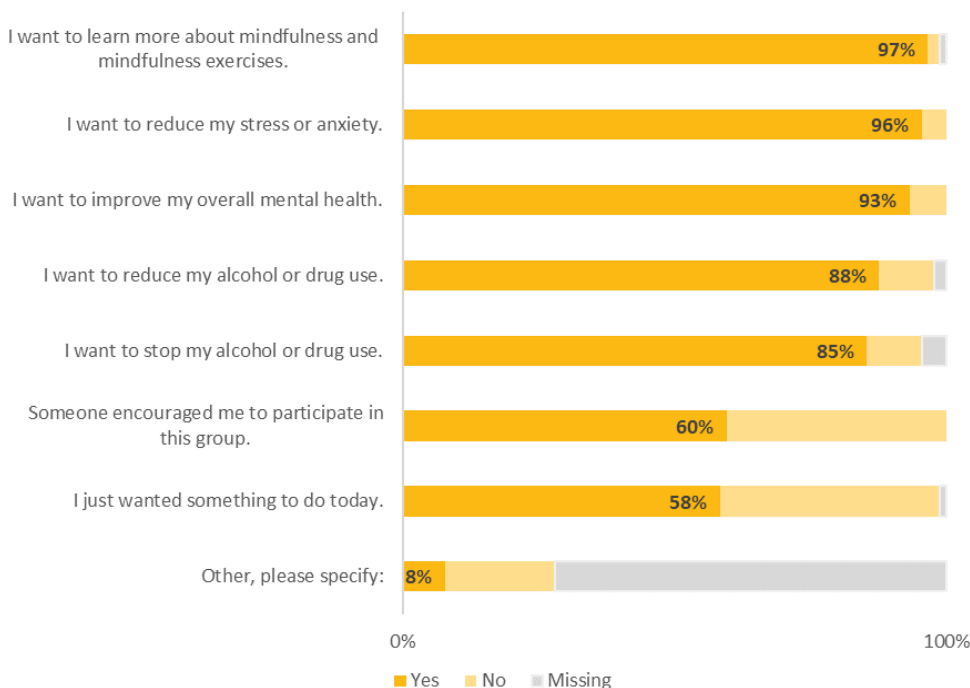
Incarceration history is a key factor in understanding the relationship between the justice system and individuals struggling with substance use. Over half of the inmates (57%) said they had never been previously incarcerated for the same offense or at all, while around one in three (37%) said they had been arrested for the same offense at least once.

Amongst the inmates who attended mindfulness sessions, the top reasons for deciding to participate included:

- **Learning more about mindfulness**
- **Reducing stress or anxiety**
- **Improving mental health**

Participants left additional comments on reasons they decided to participate in the mindfulness sessions.

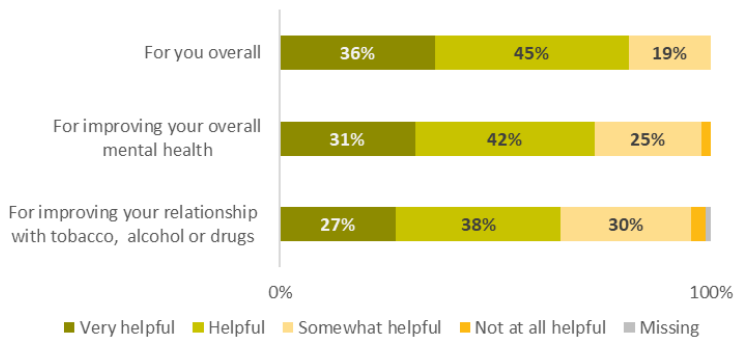
**Are each of the following reasons you have decided to participate in today's mindfulness group?**



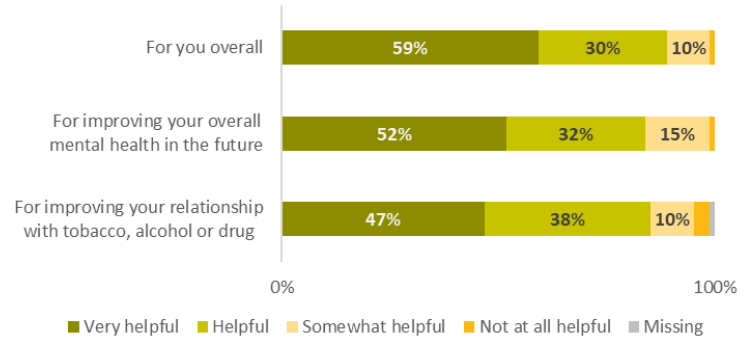
Additional Reasons for Participating in Mindfulness Sessions
"The teacher is pretty alright"
"I used to do mindfulness with medication at the doctors office"
"Help with emotions and having feelings for people"
"Quit drinking and taking Xanax"

Overall participants seemed to have a positive experience with mindfulness. After participating inmates were over 20% more likely to say that sessions were “very helpful” to them overall, as well as for both their mental health and improving their relationship with drugs/alcohol.

**Before Participating:** How helpful do you think today's mindfulness group will be



**After Participating:** How helpful was today's mindfulness group



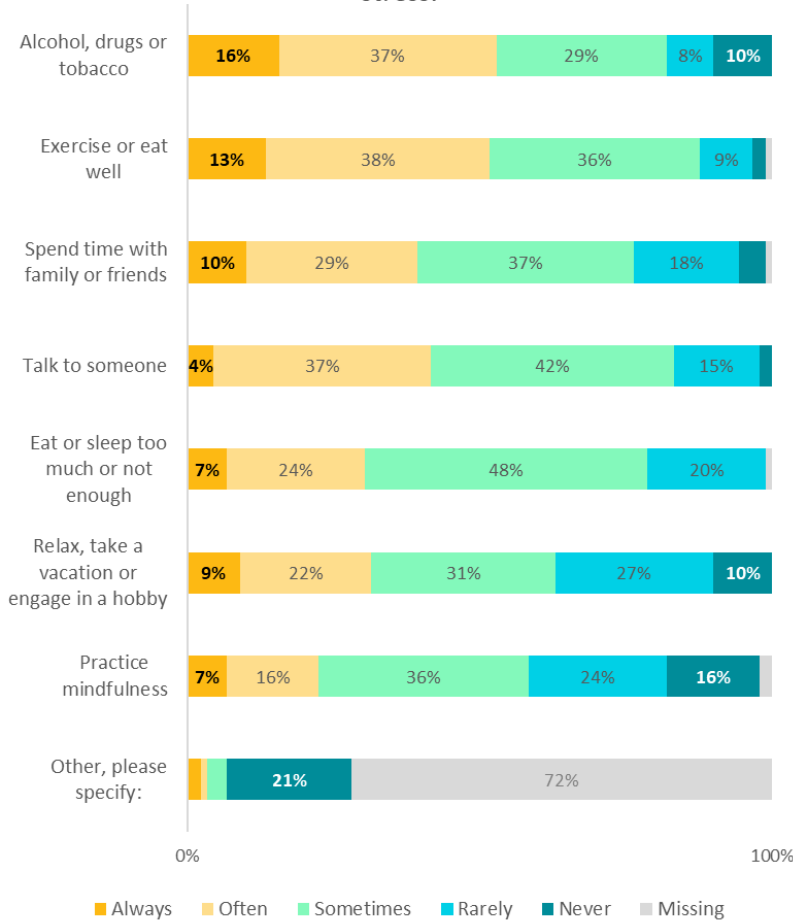
Developing stress management strategies is an important factor in dealing with mental health or substance use issues. Participating in mindfulness sessions had significant impact on inmate’s intentions to practice positive habits for coping with stress. Participants were asked to share their habits on using various activities to manage stress and were able to leave comments about other activities they enjoy.

In the pre-survey over half of participants indicated that they “always” or “often” use drugs or alcohol to cope with stress. After completing the session only 20% indicated that they plan to “always” or “often” use drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism in the future.

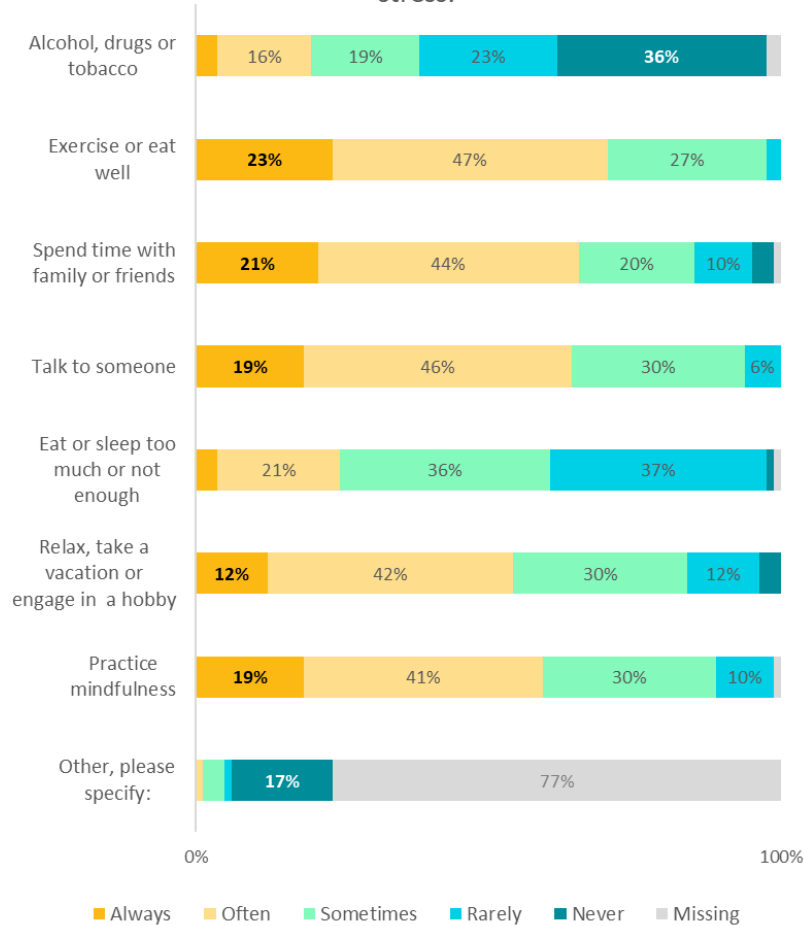
Other Mechanisms Used to Cope With Stress
<b>Before Participating:</b>
"Video games , music , driving around"
"Xanax is my problem, dabbling with meth"
"I struggle with mental health and emotions and feelings. I want to work on my issues to better myself as a person and to better understand my issues"
"Concerts, guitar"
"Xanax and alcohol"
"Draw for other people"
<b>After Participating:</b>
"Digital art"
"Opening up to people"

Notably, after participating 36% expressed the intention to “never” use drugs or alcohol to cope with stress in the future.

**Before Participating:** In the future, how often do you plan to use each of the following to cope with stress:



**After Participating:** In the future, how often do you plan to use each of the following to cope with stress:

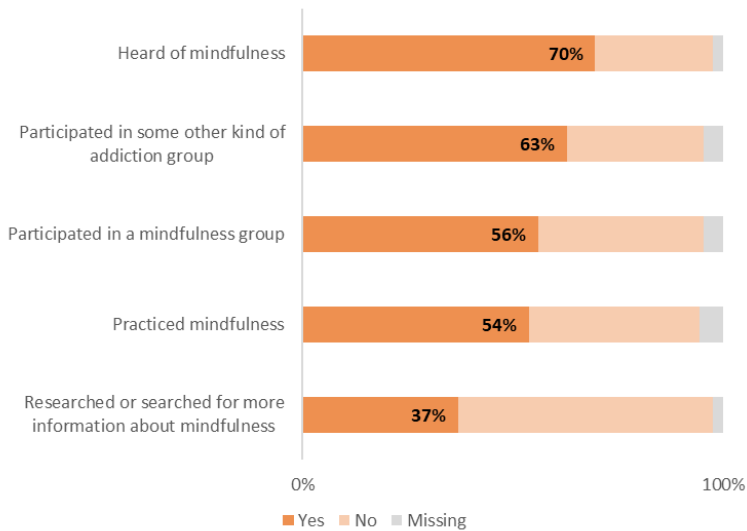


Likewise, only 23% shared that they “always” or “often” practiced mindfulness to cope with stress before attending the group session, but after participating 60% said that they plan to “always” or “often” practice mindfulness in the future.

To better understand the impact of the mindfulness sessions on inmates, participants were asked about their previous experience with mindfulness. Around 2 out of 3 participants indicated that they had heard of mindfulness before attending the session. Only around half of participants said they had practiced mindfulness before.

After attending the sessions 4 out of 5 participants indicated they would like to practice mindfulness again or participate in a mindfulness group after release. Less than 5% of participants said they were not interested in continuing to practice or learn about mindfulness.

**Before Participating:** Relationship With Mindfulness

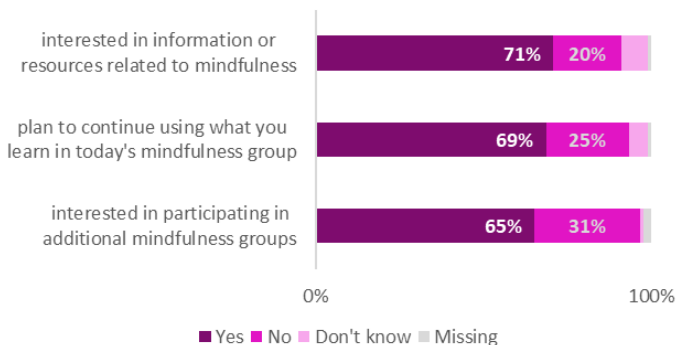


**After Participating:** Relationship With Mindfulness

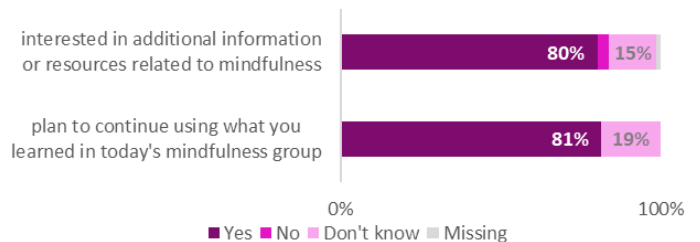


Inmates expressed increased interest in mindfulness resources and continuing to use what they learned, after having participated in the mindfulness session. Over half said they would be interested in participating in additional mindfulness groups after their release.

**Before Participating:** After release, would you be interested in



**After Participating:** After release, would you be interested in



In an open-ended format, inmates shared what types of barriers could prevent them from continuing to use the mindfulness skills they learn during the session. The most common responses included:

- Influence of the people they live or hang out with
- Financial or housing instability
- Their relationship with drugs or alcohol



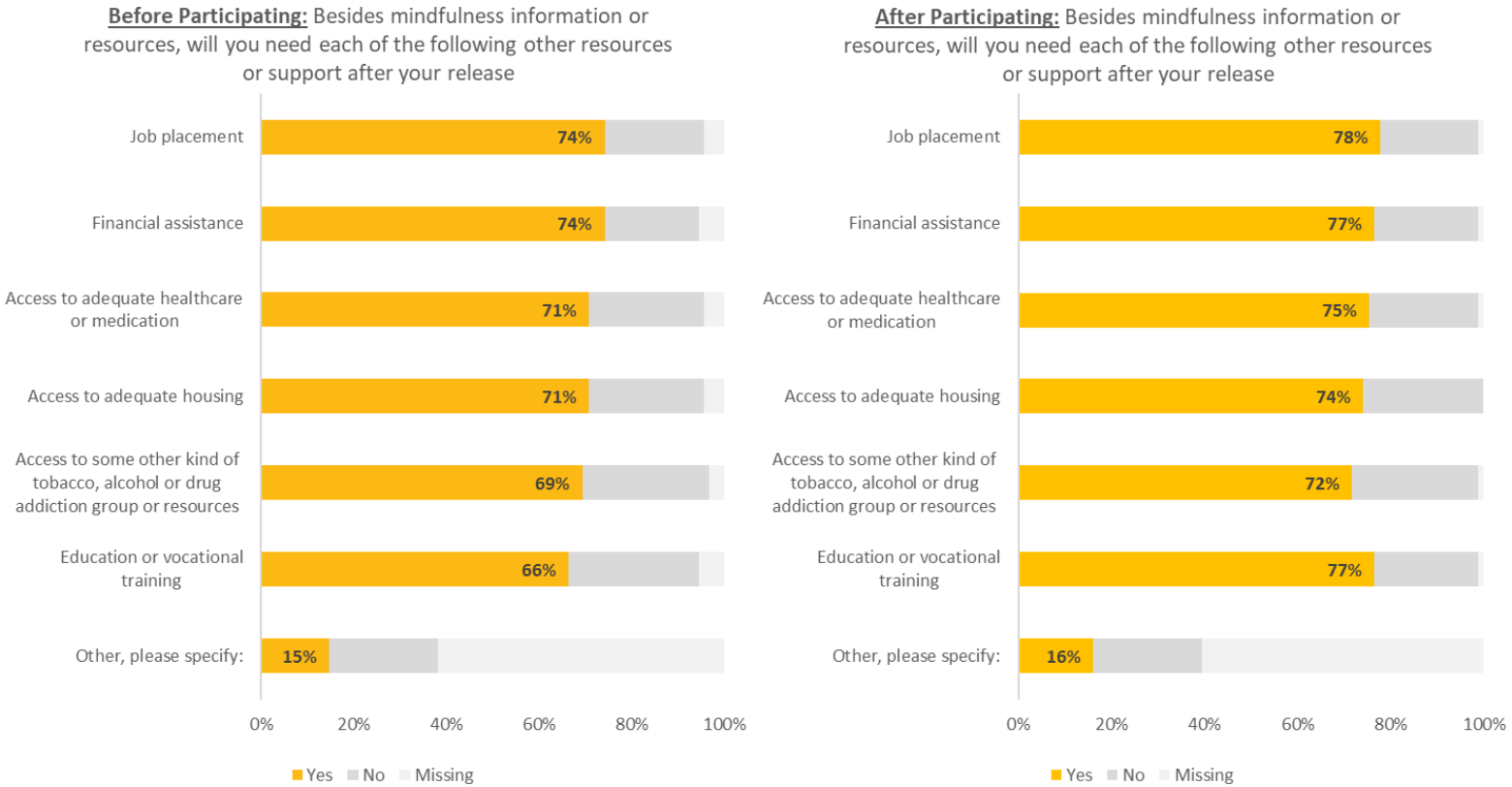
Aside from using mindfulness techniques, participants were asked what other resources would best support them after release from incarceration. Responses across all resource categories increased after participating in the mindfulness session, but in both the pre and post survey the top three resources selected include:

- Financial Assistance
- Job Placement
- Access to adequate healthcare or medication

The results show that inmates face a significant need for resources across all categories upon release. This need was echoed by the providers who lead the mindfulness sessions, as mentioned previously.



Across all the additional resources listed in the survey, nearly 3 out of 4 inmates said they would need that type of support after release. Inmates were slightly more likely to say they needed help after having participated in the mindfulness session.



Additional Resources Needed After Release:
I need rehab.
Bus Ticket
Have to start over - has nothing
Peer support
Medication (finances)
drawing material/church

Finally, participants were asked to leave any additional comments or feedback about the mindfulness group sessions. In both the pre-session and post-session surveys, many participants left positive comments about the program and mindfulness in general.

Please use the space below to provide any additional comments or feedback about today's mindfulness group:	
Pre-Session Survey	Post-Session Survey
Thank you for providing this class. I think it can and will help many people in the community.	I really liked it. I think it will change and help people.
I think this will be great for everyone with addiction problems.	Trina did a great job explaining how the group works and what possible benefits could come from experiencing it.
It is nice to see a program such as this in place I do believe this could very well help myself and others. Thank you	Thank you for your time
I'm hoping this group can help me with my mental health and my active drug addiction.	like it alot willing & wanting more.
iPods have been issued and mindfulness readings/audios would be great! addition.	Thank you! Callie
You need a "don't know" box on most all of this form.	Love mixing zanax Alcohol
I really like this more group Thank you for taking the time.	Better Life
Thank you for your time	It has let me realize anxiety I get
Thank you	This Group was Awesome thank you
I really enjoy meeting with you.	Thank you for your time and guidance
Today's first day well know after	it was Awesome Thanks.
Thank you for coming and giving more resources for addicts.	the group was Awesome Thank you.
I love mixing zanax with Alcohol or Meth with Alcohol. I've overdosed on Herion and nightquil.	Nicotine Patches 4 the Jail
Thank you!	Peace be w/ you!
Just like a better life.	
God bless you!	
better Beta-endorphins dopamine serotonin - on opiotes	
a lot of nice people - in bad seciations - Everyone needs a person to Talk to To vent. To make and meet new people.	
I believe mindfulness is an ancient practice. This is just the first time I'm seeing it presented in a group form.	
Thank You.	
This group is very helpful thank you.	
Nicotine Patches	