

Tutor Feedback Form Autumn 2022

Name: Dr Bill Paterson

Project: Awakening Awareness to Self-Care

Project Ref: EV272

Date of delivery: 23 September – 11 November + Day of Practice 18 Nov

Number of course participants: 10

1/ Please summarize your project, with particular emphasis on your experience of delivering the course (online or in person) and the impact you feel it's had on participants. Where possible please give personal examples, and anecdotes, as these may be used anonymously for promotional use on our website.

Awakening Awareness to Self-Care was a Mindfulness Based Living Course (MBLC) adapted for and delivered to a group of participants drawn from the Addiction Services in Fife. DAPL (Drug, Alcohol, Psychotherapy Ltd.) was the supporting organization and it collaborated with Restoration Fife and NHS Fife Psychology Department to advertise the course to clients. DAPL were generous with time, connections, and advice on how to attract, connect and retain clients for the MBLC. I asked that clients only be referred if they were in remission, meaning they were currently abstaining from substance abuse and had undergone some 1-2-1 therapy. There appeared to be a fruitful collaboration amongst these organization for both the referral of clients, and future coordination of services out with the course. I think it also reinforced that the delivery of a well-structured mindfulness course by an experienced teacher is a viable intervention for client working with addiction. My hope is that DAPL and Restoration Fife might pursue other funding opportunities for future MBLC or CBLC for those that have completed this course.

Attendance

Ten potential participants had arrived in person for the taster session which I delivered after Restoration's Friday Coffee Morning in St. Lukes Church. I attended a coffee morning so that I could introduce myself and the MBLC to as many of their clients as possible. Starting the MBLC after the Coffee Morning seemed the best way to attract as many participants as possible because they had eaten breakfast and were already in the building. This cut costs and coordination for clients that often lead chaotic lives. Before the start date 20 participants had voluntarily signed up to start the MBLC. On the day, 10 participants arrived in person for the first session. Attendance was very good with between 9 and 6 attending ever week. Nine arrived for the last session, and six participated in the day of practice in week 9. I have also organized two follow up

session to encourage continued practice before the end of the year and start of 2023. This has been appreciated by clients. In terms of maintaining attendance for addiction service clients, this is hugely successful. I created a short evaluation form on Microsoft Forms so that participants could express their experience and could discover what I could have done differently. Only five participants completed the evaluation, but the feedback is rich.

See below pg. 5 – 7 and the link to the evaluation form here
<https://forms.office.com/r/gALLEXHhZM>.

Rationale

Over the last 11 months I have worked with this client group as a Person-Centered counsellor in training on placement at DAPL. In my experience with this client group, there is almost universal self-loathing and after years of addiction they perceive loathing/judgement from their family and community. To some extent I understand the craving that many experience, their courage to abstain, fail and start again because of the desire to live a more meaningful life. So I was really touched when listening to a podcast by Gillian Shorter and Mat Southwell. They pointed out that the drugs population are one of the most demonized populations in our society, and yet it is largely made up of human beings that have suffered and survived terrible traumatic experiences, including sexual violence as children.¹ My compassion in action was further motivated, when on the first day I described the rationale for the course: the Everyone Project had sent out a message asking who I thought would benefit from the MBLC but could not access the course because of different barriers. When I said that I had chosen this group of clients from the addiction services in Fife, nearly everyone in the group replied, “Thanks, Bill. Thanks for choosing us”. The appreciation was so heartfelt that I was surprised by how emotional I felt. It was clearly cherished that someone, the Everyone Project and I, had believed them worthy of funding to access teachings and compassionate care when they struggle with self-loathing, pain from trauma and feel ostracized by their community.

Preparation

As an experienced MBLC teacher, I foresaw that the MBLC could be very challenging for the client group and myself. Specifically, I knew I would be introducing both the practice of allowing craving in the mind and body to be present, but also the practice of ‘loving kindness to the self’ when self-loathing is prevalent. In preparation for the course, I read several texts on addiction. For example, John Frey’s book *A Million Little Pieces*, really helped to develop a deep sense of empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard for the client group.² I appreciated Valerie Mason-John and Paramabandhu Groves (2018) work highlighting the use of Buddhist practices for clients experiencing addiction. They advocate the use of the 3-minute breathing space in every session to create a habit of checking-in with the mind and body.³ Like the work

¹ David Nutt (2022). 73. Overdose Prevention Centres with Gillian Shorter and Mat Southwell, *The Drug Science Podcast*. [online] drugscience.org.uk. Available at: <https://www.drugscience.org.uk/podcast/73-overdose-prevention-centres-with-gillian-shorter-and-mat-southwell/>.

² Frey, J. (2011). *A million little pieces*. London: John Murray.

³ Mason-John, V., Groves, P., Gabor Maté and Kabat-Zinn, J. (2018). *Eight step recovery: using the buddha’s teachings to overcome addiction*. Cambridge, UK: Windhorse Publications.

of Dr Gabor Mate⁴, Mason-John and Groves identify the relationship between trauma and addiction, such that addiction can be understood as an escape from pain and suffering. Therefore, along with the body scan, it seemed pertinent to introduce Polyvagal Tuning devised by Alistair Appleton⁵ from his study of the literature and research on *Polyvagal Theory* by authors such as Stephen Porges,⁶ and Deb Dana.⁷ It was clear that a trauma informed teaching of the MBLC would be appropriate.⁸ I also put my faith in the MBLC process to lead them gently towards a new way of relating to their experiences and themselves. I took all this knowledge, experience, and apprehension to my mindfulness supervisor, Gareth Williams. Here we reflected on my deep sense of caring and my fear of causing harm to a vulnerable group.

The Sessions

After experiencing polyvagal tuning in the first sessions, all the clients expressed an experience of feeling ‘relaxed’, ‘liberated’, ‘openness’ and ‘freedom’ from the tension that they normally carried in the body and mind. From week two we began each session with the three-minute breathing space to encourage the habit of checking-in with what was going on in the body and mind. Participants very quickly began to understand that mindfulness is not a relaxation class but learning how to recognize and be with what is going on in the body and mind with kindness. This became a key practice for recognizing and being with craving for this group. Clients explained that normally they spent a great deal of time and energy practicing aversion to craving thoughts and feelings – literally running away into activities or trying to mentally push them away from awareness. One participant in particular was overwhelmed when he realized just how much of his life, he had given to exercising aversion that built tension and fatigue in the body. From pushing away thinking and feelings he now felt liberated by the permission to let go and allow. The ‘memories of kindness’ practice brought up a lot of difficulty with regards to connecting with the sensation of kindness towards the self.

From the feedback from participants directly after the practice, it is clear that the practice of SGRS with Sound was a key moment in learning how to allow things to be just as they are. The ability to sit and experience silence, stillness and spaciousness was very new and very powerful for many of the clients. Most had never experienced this level of peace and there were tears of relief that this could be accessed – even without drugs. Participants reported being able to experience sounds moving through ‘the space within which all sound occurs’, but without a need to engage in story making about the sound. In the inquiry I invited participants to be curious about whether thoughts too

⁴ Gabor Maté (2018). *In the realm of hungry ghosts close encounters with addiction*. London Vermilion and Mate, G. (2020). *The Wisdom of Trauma – Gabor Mate Film*. [online] The Wisdom of Trauma. Available at: <https://thewisdomoftrauma.com/>.

⁵ Alistair Appleton (2022). *Mindsprings Meditation Online*. [online] Mindsprings Meditation Online. Available at: <https://mypersonal.mind-springs.org/> [Accessed 16 Dec. 2022].

⁶ Porges, S.W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation*. New York Etc.: Norton.

⁷ Dana, D. (2018). *The polyvagal theory in therapy : engaging the rhythm of regulation*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, and Dana, D. and Porges, S.W. (2020). *Polyvagal exercises for safety and connection : 50 client-centered practices*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

⁸ See Treleaven, D.A. (2018). *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing*. W. W. Norton & Company, van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. London: Penguin Books, Waelde, L.C. (2022). *Mindfulness and meditation in trauma treatment : the inner resources for stress program*. New York: The Guilford Press.

could move through that space without having to become stories? For nearly all the participants this really opened the way for experiencing ‘thoughts are not facts’. Similarly because ‘energy follows focus’ there is no need to give all thoughts attention to become stories, and the related emotions, sensations, cravings and behaviors they bring.

These insights amongst many of the participants helped to make sense of the ‘observer and undercurrent’ teachings and practices in week five and six. Most participants really understood that the content of the undercurrent is merely the shadows and echoes of the past, which might be compelling viewing but cannot be changed by thinking. Rather engaging with the undercurrent leads to hours of tormenting and self-loathing. As I expected most of the clients experienced a very intensely judgmental observer. Clients reported that they had spent so long ruminating over the content of the undercurrent because they hated themselves for past actions towards themselves, their family, and their community. Participants explained that this was normally where craving to escape and relapse was most likely to occur. It was a very powerful and emotional session for the participants and me. I do find it a great honor and privilege to hold space for such honesty and pain, but I was not alone as the support from each member of the group for each other was vocal and tangible. This is testament to the co-creation of mindfulness and the sense of belonging it creates in the group.

I was therefore apprehensive about introducing the practice ‘Loving Kindness for Self and Other’. However, whilst there were difficulties, there were also openings towards kindness to the self as a new way of relating to the observer, the undercurrent and the self in general. Many reported that they connected with the aspiration or intention to be kinder to the self. After years of self-loathing causing nothing but tormenting, tension, anxiety, shame and fear of relapse to escape, loving kindness provided a possible alternative worthy of working towards. The self-compassion break has been adopted as a mantra for some of the participants - a pause long enough to gently hold the loathing or craving with care, understanding and non-judgement. However, like all the practices it requires repetition over time to become a reflex or it will be forgotten. The RAIN practice has been the most challenging of the practices for the clients because turning towards difficulty is so alien after years of aversion and/or grasping. The 3-minute breathing space, Self-Compassion break and RAIN are the key practices that I will continue to support the group to practice in the coming drop-in sessions. Interestingly, I feel a very real responsibility to support the group in maintain their practice after the end of the eight-week MBLC.

In all I think the Awakening Awareness to Self-Care MBLC has been very successful. Client feedback on the final session was that the course had been challenging, a revelation, enlightening, bringing hope, experiencing peace and inspirational – to name a few. I am in the process of writing a report for Fife Addiction Services to illustrate the impact of the MBLC on the participants in the hope that they will fund another MBLC.

DATA gather anonymously from clients through Microsoft Forms November - December 2022

Please use one or two words that captures your experience of the sessions

Calming and clever

Calm and present

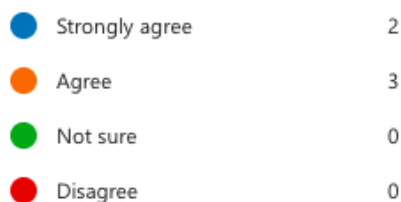
Helpful

Brilliant relaxing

Uncomfortable at times but welcoming and inspiring/hopeful

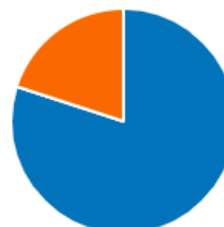
Since the sessions I am more aware of my unhelpful thinking

[More Details](#)



Since the sessions I am aware of the link between my thinking, emotions, sensations and behaviour

[More Details](#)



Since the sessions I am developing kindness towards myself

[More Details](#)



The course has/will impact on my family relationships

[More Details](#)

● Strongly Agree	1
● Agree	3
● Not Sure	1
● Disagree	0



The course has/will impact on my relationship with myself

[More Details](#)

● Strongly Agree	2
● Agree	3
● Neutral	0
● Disagree	0



What, if anything, was the most important thing you learned at the sessions, and why?

Learned its normal to talk to myself

Make time for mindfulness

How to calm my mind because I have personality disorders

It's ok not to be ok

That I can acknowledge my thoughts exist without them being everything I am.

I would recommend this course to others

[More Details](#)

● Strongly Agree	5
● Agree	0
● Neutral	0
● Disagree	0



Is there anything else that you would like to mention about the mindfulness sessions?

Loved the ninth session which was 3 hours. Wish there was somewhere to practice this regularly

Everyone should be doing this

The tutor was key he was really good

This course has so much more useful content than I every thought it would. To be finally taught how to view my thoughts as separate entities and not the fabric of being was a revelation. I'm not going to lie - I found it really hard at times and didn't feel relaxed when others did but I'm just trying to view it like anything else I would need to practise/ learn/study to get good at). I've been told for years in relaxation after yoga to 'let go, relax and if a thought comes acknowledge it but let it go and in never ever got it. I never got the separation of thought from self and it's like I've been given an awesome gift. I'm not going to pretend I like some sort of enlightened being now - Ill busy myself with everything task under the sun and find there is 'no time' for meditation as old habits die hard and I'm used to being tortured by those thoughts that I've now to just acknowledge. I'm really hopeful though, that this can make a big difference to my life if I can make myself do regular practise. I struggled with the kindness to myself part - it made me realise that i don't like myself and I don't want to be 'that girls' friends. I don't really want anything to do with her so it's difficult to be kind to her - I struggled with that bit. On the upside of this though I now am aware I have a problem and therefore can try and work on it - before I just felt a sense of conflict and couldn't pinpoint it (I didn't even fully realise I felt conflicted until this course tbh, I just felt an unease in my own skin. So in short this course is so much more than learning to 'relax' it's necessary tools for like. Like a gym for your mental health 🧘 you need to practise consistently and you'll see results. Saying that I struggled with the homework - when I've tried to meditate before this my heart rate actually goes up and I get more stressed. I know this is stupid but I feel I need someone close by to make sure something bad doesn't happen (I don't know what).

2/ Please reflect below on:

- **something you feel went particularly well**

SGRS with Sound was a key moment in learning how to allow things to be just as they are. The ability to sit and experience silence, stillness and spaciousness was very new and very powerful for many of the clients. Most had never experienced this level of peace and there were tears of relief that this could be accessed without drugs. Participants reported being able to experience sounds moving through 'the space within which all sound occurs', but without a need to engage in story making about the sound. In the inquiry I invited participants to be curious about whether thoughts too could move through that space without having to become stories? For nearly all the participants this really opened the way for experiencing 'thoughts are not facts' and that because 'energy follows focus' there is no need to give all thoughts attention to become stories, and the related emotions, sensations, cravings and other behavior they bring.

- **something where you felt there was room for development or improvement**

For this client group at least, I think the MBLC would benefit from including polyvagal tuning. Using this practice from the first session really helped the participants to experience a tangible shift away from their normal anxiety and depressive states. It opened the way for curiosity to learn more, and stay with the difficult practices like ‘memories of kindness’ and ‘loving kindness for the other and self’.

- **something that was curious or surprising.**

I was surprised that participants were able to connect with the ‘loving kindness for the self’, if only as an aspiration and motivation for the future.