

Cultivating Mindfulness for University Students

by

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### **Abstract**

Mental health wellness in post-secondary institutions is a growing concern as students are prone to experiencing mental health related challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Educational institutions lack comprehensive support services in order to effectively meet students' mental health care needs. Post-secondary institutions have the obligation to ensure that mental health supports are in place in order to help students effectively manage their stress, enhance their psychological well-being, and develop coping skills so that they can achieve academic success. My study explored the suitability and the effectiveness of the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) with university students. HAP is a 12-week arts-based mindfulness-based intervention (MBI). Arts-based mindfulness methods can help to promote health and psychological well-being. Furthermore, they are fun, engaging, and can help facilitate a deeper understanding of emotions, thoughts, and feelings. Fifteen students participated in two different HAP groups. Pre- and post-HAP individual interviews were conducted, and students completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, and the Ryff Psychological Well-Being scale. Paired t-tests indicated a statistically significant increase in participants' level of mindfulness and psychological well-being after taking part in the program. Results of the qualitative thematic analysis revealed four main themes: (1) the benefits of HAP in a group format, (2) the cultivation of mindfulness, (3) the benefits of making art, and (4) the impact of HAP on participants' relationships with others. I conclude that HAP can contribute to the improvement of students' mental health by providing them with effective coping strategies in order to more effectively manage the stressors associated with university life. Post-secondary institutions are encouraged to consider implementing HAP as a strengths-based mental health promotion initiative.

*Keywords:* mindfulness, well-being, university students, art-based methods, mental health, group work.

### **Abstrait**

La santé mentale dans les établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire suscite de plus en plus d'inquiétudes, car les étudiants sont susceptibles de faire face à des problèmes liés à la santé mentale tels que le stress, l'anxiété et la dépression. Les établissements d'enseignement manquent de services d'appui complets pour répondre efficacement aux besoins des étudiants en matière de santé mentale. Les établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire ont l'obligation de veiller à ce que des services de soutien en santé mentale soient mis en place afin d'aider aux étudiants à gérer efficacement leur stress, à améliorer leur bien-être psychologique et à développer des capacités d'adaptation leur permettant de réussir leurs études. Ma recherche a exploré la pertinence et l'efficacité d'un programme basé sur les arts holistiques (HAP) avec les étudiants universitaires. HAP est une intervention basée sur la pleine conscience, d'une durée de 12 semaines. Les méthodes de pleine conscience basées sur les arts peuvent aider à promouvoir la santé et le bien-être psychologique. En outre, ils sont amusants, engageants et peuvent aider à faciliter une compréhension plus profonde des émotions, des pensées et des sentiments. Quinze étudiants ont participé à deux groupes HAP différents. Des entrevues individuelles avant et après l'intervention ont été menées et les étudiants ont rempli le questionnaire sur la pleine conscience à cinq facettes et l'échelle de psychologie du bien-être psychologique de Ryff. Les tests t appariés ont révélé une augmentation statistiquement significative du niveau de conscience et du bien-être psychologique des participants après leur participation au programme. Les résultats de l'analyse thématique qualitative ont révélé quatre thèmes principaux: (1) les avantages du HAP dans un groupe, (2) la culture de la pleine conscience, (3) les avantages de la création artistique et (4) l'impact du HAP sur les participants et les relations avec les autres participants. J'ai conclu que la HAP peut contribuer à améliorer

la santé mentale des étudiants en leur fournissant des stratégies d'adaptation efficaces leur permettant de gérer plus efficacement les facteurs de stress associés à la vie universitaire. Les établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire sont encouragés à envisager la mise en œuvre du HAP en tant qu'initiative de promotion de la santé mentale comme initiative.

*Mots-clés:* pleine conscience, bien-être, étudiants universitaires, méthodes artistiques, santé mentale, travail en groupe.

**Dedication**

To my dear friend Patricia Gynspan, thank you for your mentorship, your understanding, and ongoing support. Thank you for encouraging me to push through the hardships and always offering a listening ear.

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### **Background of the Problem**

Mental health wellness in post-secondary institutions is a growing concern as post-secondary students are at an increased risk for developing mental health-related illnesses. For instance, many university students report experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, sadness, and depression (American College Health Association, 2016). Mental health conditions may affect their capacity to think and feel, perform daily activities, and interact with fellow community members (Giamos, Young Soo Lee, Suleiman, Stuart & Chen, 2017). Students also report high levels of substance abuse, sleep disturbances, and emotion dysregulation (American College Health Association, 2016).

In 2016, the Canadian Consortium of the American College Health Association completed the National College Health Assessment and surveyed 43,780 students from 41 post-secondary institutions in Canada. Survey results indicated that stress (42.2%) and anxiety (32.5%) were the most predominant factors that impacted students' academic performance. Nearly 15% of students had been treated by a professional for depression and 18.4% had been treated by a professional for anxiety. The survey also found that 2.1% of students had attempted suicide in the past 12 months and 13% had seriously considered it (American College Health Association, 2016). Likewise, findings from Statistics Canada in 2011 indicated that the mental illness related suicide rate accounted for 24% of deaths in 15-24 year olds resulting in 4,000 deaths in the youth population (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Students' lives these days are very different in comparison to a few decades ago. Several changes have occurred such as the decrease of available student grants, which further perpetuates a student's financial strain. Students are also facing increased academic pressures as it is becoming more common for people to achieve higher education and obtain a degree, which

increases the pressure of obtaining a valuable degree (Cooke, Bewick, Barkham, Bradley & Audin, 2006). Students face academic demands in addition to social challenges such as becoming separated from their friends and family. They become isolated from their support network, all during a time of increased vulnerability when they are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood and having to adapt to a new environment (Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan, & McNamara, 2014; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderon, 2013). Additionally, smartphone addiction amongst university students is becoming another source of stress. Over use of smartphones may lead to social, familial, academic problems (Gökçearsan, Mumcu, Ha laman, & Çevik, 2016), anger problems, psychological disturbances, difficulty performing daily tasks, (Ko, Lee, & Kim, 2012), sleep disturbances and depression (Thomee, Harenstam & Hadberg, 2011).

High levels of stress causes students to experience deficits in attention and concentration, difficulty with memory, and low productivity. Stress can negatively impact a student's academic performance, hinder their concentration and dedication to their studies, and negatively impact attendance (Gallego, Aguilar-Parra, Cangas, Langer, & Manas, 2014). Stress can have a negative impact on a student's learning, cognitive capacities as well as their psychological well-being (Gustems-Carnicer, Calderon, Battalla-Flores & Estenban-Bara, 2018). In fact, when compared to the general population, university students are far worse on measures of psychological well-being (Cooke et al., 2006). Additionally, when students are feeling psychologically and physically overwhelmed this may increase their likelihood of engaging in the use of alcohol, illicit drugs, and tobacco in order to cope with stress, which can have detrimental effects on their bodies (Deasy et al., 2014; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderon, 2013; Palmer & Rodger, 2009).

When a student is faced with a stressful situation and it exceeds their individual resources, it can have a direct impact on their well-being. The way that a student copes with stress has been found to be closely associated with their well-being and how they adapt to the university environment. Students who adopt positive coping strategies will be better adapted to the university environment, have a greater level of satisfaction, and experience less stress. Coping is a mediating variable between stress and psychological well-being (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2018).

Additionally, individuals who possess psychological well-being generally experience positive self-regard, positive associations with others, live a life with intention, and have the capacity to develop potential through personal growth, self-determination, and autonomy (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Psychological well-being has been attributed to increased life satisfaction, improved social support, and enhanced academic performance (Xiang, Tan, Kang, Zhang & Zhu, 2017).

Mindfulness can be used for the prevention and treatment of stress and it has the capacity to enrich a student's psychological well-being and to buffer some of the negative stressors associated with university life (Palmer & Rodger, 2009). Gallego et al. (2014) found that mindfulness-based training for college students helps them to manage adverse emotional states such as stress. By directing attention to the present moment and allowing the internal event to emerge without automatically reacting enables a person to distance themselves from their thoughts and emotions with greater ease.

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in post-secondary institutions offer students the opportunity to develop skills and coping strategies. MBIs have a low risk of causing adverse effects or harm and they can be practiced by students in several different settings with minimal

or no ongoing costs. MBIs can be offered as a stand-alone intervention or they can be offered to students as they wait for a more comprehensive assessment or other services. MBIs teach students lifelong skills that can reduce the need for ongoing and expensive professional services (Halladay et al. 2018).

Since the turn of the century, student enrolment in Canadian universities and colleges has been on a steady increase. In the 1990's student enrolment (part time and full time) hovered between 1.3 and 1.4 million students. In 2011-2012 student enrolment reached 2 million and growth since then has been minimal. In 2016, Statistics Canada reported a total student enrolment of 2.03 million (Usher, 2018). Student enrolment in higher education is growing; however, the supporting structures are not developing at the same pace (Cooke et al., 2006).

Students face unique stressors and mental health wellness is a concern, therefore, postsecondary institutions have an obligation to ensure that students have access to the required supports and services. It is important for universities to recognize that the stress students face is closely related to their psychological well-being as well as anxiety, depression, and decreased performance (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderon, 2013). The ability of the student to reduce their psychological distress is related to their personal resources and coping strategies (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderon, 2013). Improving student coping strategies by implementing programs aimed at stress reduction may be a viable way of mitigating psychological distress amongst university students and improving their well-being, and thus, their school engagement and performance.

Based on the above-noted issues, my research study explored the application of the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) to teach mindfulness-based skills to a small group of university students. I hypothesized that participating in HAP would improve their psychological

well-being and level of mindfulness. Students acquired mindfulness-based skills such as paying attention and expressing their feelings, thoughts, and emotions through arts-based activities. I hoped that this program would help university students acquire skills which will help them to navigate through the stressful and demanding school environment in a more effective manner.

The current study made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the suitability and the benefits associated with HAP delivered to university students in a Northern Ontario context. Quantitative data revealed that there was a statistically significant improvement in participants' levels of both mindfulness and psychological well-being after participating in this program. Furthermore, qualitative data revealed four main themes: (1) the benefits of HAP in a group format, (2) the cultivation of mindfulness, (3) the benefits of making art, and (4) the impact of HAP on participants' relationships with others.

The current study is four chapters in length. In the first chapter I describe the most relevant literature pertinent to the topic, and provide the research questions. In chapter two, I offer a detailed description of the study design and research methodology. Additionally, I offer a section on researcher reflexivity, I describe the data collection procedures and offer a brief summary of the results. In chapter three I provide a further analysis and detailed description of both the qualitative and quantitative findings. Finally, in chapter four I provide a summary of the study's results as well as provide implications for social work practice and post-secondary institutions supportive mental health care services. I further speak to the study's limitations and provide recommendations for future studies.

## **Chapter One**

### **Literature Review**

A literature review pertaining to mindfulness-based interventions with university students was conducted using a combination of the following terms: mindfulness, arts-based methods, stress affecting university students, psychological well-being and students, psychological well-being and mindfulness, and the Holistic Arts-Based Program. A search of the Google Scholar database in conjunction with Springer link, PubMed, Sage, Wiley Online, and Taylor and Francis revealed key topics such as mindfulness, mindfulness and psychological well-being, mindfulness-based interventions, mindfulness and university students, the effects of mindfulness on the brain, art-based methods, and the holistic arts-based program. In the following sections, I will discuss mindfulness, how mindfulness affects the brain, mindfulness with university students, mental health services on university campuses, arts-based methods, and the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP). The rationale for my thesis will also be described.

#### **Mindfulness**

Although there is a burgeoning interest in mindfulness and the research literature is growing rapidly, researchers have yet to come to a consensus on a single definition of mindfulness (Palmer & Roger, 2009). Jon Kabat-Zinn is the founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and has been credited with bringing the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness to the West where he examined it through a scientific lens. He defines mindfulness as "the awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose in the present moment and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.144). Mindful attention includes compassion, interest, friendliness, and an open and receptive attitude towards what is unfolding in the present moment regardless of whether or not it is

perceived as positive or negative (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Elements of mindfulness include the ability to recognize one's emotions, developing self-awareness, and moving towards becoming more responsive and less reactive (Loue, 2013).

It is important to distinguish between trait and state mindfulness. Trait mindfulness (also known as dispositional mindfulness) is a consistent long-lasting characteristic and a way of being in the world. Mindfulness based interventions and engagement in a regular mindfulness practice can improve trait mindfulness (Coholic, 2019). Trait mindfulness is commonly assessed through self-report questionnaires such as the Five Facet Mindfulness Scale or the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Tang, 2017). State mindfulness is "an immediate experience of being mindful" (Coholic, 2019, p.10). State mindfulness occurs when someone engages in the practice of mindfulness, for instance meditation or mindful walking. As practitioners of mindfulness become more experienced after deliberately engaging in mindful practice they develop "learned" dispositional mindfulness and become more mindful of the world around them, even when they are not engaging in a formal mindfulness practice such as meditating (Wheeler, Arnkoff, & Glass, 2017).

Mindfulness is rooted in Buddhism which is a religion or spiritual philosophy that began over 2500 years ago. Mindfulness is also a philosophy and can be practiced as a secular intervention without any reference to religion. The prime Buddhist virtues are compassion, mindfulness, and letting go of the self. The Buddhist path to enlightenment has eight aspects, one being mindfulness (Kernochan, McCormick & White, 2007). Weinstein, Brown, and Ryan (2009) found that those who had higher levels of mindfulness were less threatened by stress, used less avoidant coping strategies, and utilized more coping strategies. Western mental health professionals and researchers agree that mindfulness may be beneficial to people who have an

expansive variety of health problems and are not interested in subscribing to Buddhist traditions (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006).

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) include several strategies and tools for teaching mindful awareness. Some may include a formal meditation practice which may involve sitting, walking, and movement meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). During mindfulness meditation, participants are often asked to focus on a specific stimulus (i.e., the breath) and are asked to notice when their mind wanders and redirect it as soon as possible to the object of attention. Mindfulness instruction requires participants to observe the constantly changing stream of stimuli in a non-judgmental manner (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006). Other shorter and less formal methods include bringing mindfulness into everyday living such as practicing being present while walking, doing the dishes, eating or driving. While completing these activities, participants are asked to observe their thoughts, notice if their mind wanders and return their attention to the target of observation (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006). Incorporating mindful awareness into each moment is believed to lead to an increased sense of self-awareness, greater enjoyment of the present moment, and increased ability to make adaptive decisions when dealing with difficult situations (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006).

Mindfulness-based approaches may include Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). MBCT incorporates the fundamentals of cognitive-behavioral therapy with mindfulness-based stress reduction. It has been applied to various psychiatric conditions such as bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety. It is used to inspire participants to develop a new way of thinking and being and relating to their thoughts and feelings as opposed to changing specific thought content. It increases a person's self-acceptance, self-compassion, present moment awareness, and their ability to selectively pay attention. It also improves emotional regulation. It

is usually delivered in a group format for approximately eight weeks. Participants are encouraged to practice at home for approximately 45 minutes a day (Sipe & Eisendrath, 2012).

Similarly, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was originally developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and it has been in practice since 1979 (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It was originally developed to reduce the suffering of people experiencing chronic health conditions (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). It is rooted in Buddhist tradition; however, it still remains a secular intervention and integrates Western psychology. It is a form of complementary health care that developed outside conventional models of psychotherapy. It is typically structured in an 8-week group format where participants meet once a week for approximately two and a half hours. Each week participants are taught different topics related to mindfulness and stress management. In some groups, therapists recite scripts from Buddhist authors in order to inspire the participants. The curriculum assists with stress management by assisting participants to cultivate present moment focused attention. Participants practice a body scan, hatha yoga, and meditation. Participants are assigned homework and are encouraged to practice mindfulness at home for 45-60 minutes per a day. The program also emphasizes informal mindfulness practice to use in everyday real-world experiences such as eating, driving, talking or walking (Salmon, Septhon & Dreeben, 2011).

To date, much research has been conducted on both MBSR and MBCT, which has enabled systematic and other comprehensive reviews on these interventions. For example, Gotink, Meijboom, Vernooij, Smits and Huink (2016) completed a systematic review of the evidence of the stress reducing effects of an 8-week MBSR and MBCT program on the structure and function of the brain. Only one MBCT study was found, therefore the majority of the results focus on MBSR. The study sought to have a neurobiological understanding of these popular stress reducing interventions. The structure and function of the brain was assessed by magnetic

resonance imaging. Study findings indicated that the prefrontal cortex, the cingulate cortex, the insula, and the hippocampus showed increased activity, connectivity and volume in stressed, anxious, and healthy participants. Additionally, the amygdala showed decreased functional activity, improved functional connectivity with the prefrontal cortex, and earlier deactivation after exposure to emotional stimuli. These changes in the brain that occurred from an 8-week MBI are similar to changes that occurred in studies that focused on traditional long-term meditation practice. This secular training practice can induce emotional and behavioral changes in the brain (Gotink et al., 2016).

Additionally, Trowbridge and Lawson (2016) completed a systematic review of mindfulness-based interventions with social workers in order to understand the potential for enhanced patient care. Mindfulness has the potential to improve clinical skills, decrease burnout, and increase job fulfillment for social workers. Likewise, in the health care field, it improves patient and family relationships and personal resilience. Trowbridge and Lawson (2016) reviewed the pre-existing literature related to MBIs with social workers in order to understand mindfulness practices and qualities, and their effectiveness amongst hospital social workers including how mindfulness effects patient-centered care. By examining both qualitative and quantitative studies, Trowbridge and Lawson (2016) found that MBIs can enhance patient-and family-centered care and enrich social work practice. Furthermore, mindfulness can serve as a protective factor for social work students beginning their careers as social workers are prone to compassion fatigue and burn out (Trowbridge & Lawson, 2016).

Mindfulness has been associated with a wide range of positive mental health outcomes such as lower levels of depression (Cash & Whittingham, 2010), anxiety (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992), and rumination (Jain et al., 2007), and it can increase health and wellness (Meiklejohn et

al., 2012). Mindful awareness has been used to ease physical and emotional suffering, increase emotional fulfillment, make positive behavioral changes, accomplish deep knowledge, and increase a sense of love of service towards others (Young, 2016).

Leading a mindful life can have many positive psychological effects (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006). A mindful person can approach life situations without attachment to a particular outcome and they are better able to pay attention to their thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations (Martin, 1997). When we are not mindful and live on automatic pilot we are unaware of our thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations and we may not respond to situations skillfully (Williams & Swales, 2004). When we become mindful we become more skilled at observing our internal experiences and are better able to choose a response rather than automatically react to a situation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

### **How Mindfulness Effects the Brain**

Studies have indicated that mindfulness meditation can activate the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex. A long-term meditation practice has been shown to change areas in the brain associated with attention (Loue, 2013). Multiple areas in the brain are activated and function in a synergistic manner creating changes in the brain during mindfulness meditation (Holzel et al., 2011). Neural integration is the process in which prefrontal neurons are stimulated during mindfulness practice and spread to various areas of the brain and body, which in turn contributes to an improved sense of well-being and increased insight. During this process when the cognitive and emotional areas of the brain are triggered, the brain reorganizes and produces neuroadaptations through neuroplasticity (Beck, 2017).

According to Beck (2017) during mindfulness meditation the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex are affected in a positive manner as cortisol levels (a stress hormone) is

lowered. When a person begins to engage in a regular mindfulness meditation practice they begin to utilize the prefrontal cortex to regulate emotional experiences rather than depending on the amygdala which is responsible for the fight or flight response and is active during survival responses. The hippocampus is the area of the brain responsible for regulating cortisol and other stress-related hormones. Mindfulness aids in the controlled release of these hormones in order for the brain to develop the ability to adjust itself back into a state of functioning that is not based in survival mode. The brain can then use the prefrontal cortex to perceive its environment as opposed to through the lens of the amygdala. Eventually, these new neural networks created in the brain begin to become a person's default mode (Beck, 2017).

Holzel et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the pre-and post-changes in brain gray matter on participants who participated in an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR). They used anatomical magnetic resonance images on 16 healthy unexperienced meditation participants. Voxel-based morphometry was used to investigate changes in grey matter and results were compared to a wait-list control group of 17 participants (Holzel et al., 2011). The brain has tissue layers consisting of white matter and grey matter. Gray matter covers the inner white core and consists of nerve cell bodies and branching dendrites. It is the command and control center of the brain. Grey matter declines with age, which may also cause brain atrophy (Zerbo, Schlechter, Desai, & Levounis, 2017). Study findings indicated that there were confirmed increases in grey matter concentration in the left hippocampus of participants. A whole brain examination revealed that there were increases in the posterior cingulate cortex, the temporoparietal junction, and the cerebellum in the participating group compared to the control group. It was suggested that MBSR contributes to changes in gray matter concentration in brain areas associated with “learning and memory process, emotional

regulation self-referential processing and perspective taking” (Holzel et al., 2011, p.36).

Researchers agree that the brain is not static; it has the ability to change for the better. The current research indicates that mindfulness-based interventions can have a positive impact on the physical structure of the brain. Mindfulness-based interventions can assist with a healthy brain and emotional development.

### **Mindfulness and University Students**

There are several research studies that examine the impact of the delivery and the exposure of MBIs to university students. Outcomes from this literature review have revealed many positive results from the delivery of MBIs with this population, such as an impact on psychological well-being (MacDonald & Baxter, 2017), emotional regulation and nonattachment, (Coffey & Hartman, 2008), an increased ability to cope with stress (Roger & Palmer, 2009), and a positive impact on mental health (Halladay et al., 2019).

To begin with, several studies have demonstrated the impact of MBIs on the psychological well-being of university students. Well-being is an expanding area of research, however, researchers have yet to come to a consensus as to how it should be defined (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). Well-being can be thought of as “the balance point between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced” (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230). Well-being can be related to several factors including but not limited to achievement in life, problem solving, physical health, and professional performance. Researchers feel that we essentially have a fixed level of psychological well-being. It may fluctuate from time to time in our lives as we may feel a strong turbulence of emotions over the course of a single day due to circumstances, however, typically we return to our “set point” (Johnson, Robertson, & Cooper, 2018). Essentially, well-being is stable when individuals are equipped with the psychological, social, and physical

resources that they need when faced with a challenge. When challenges are greater than an individual's resources, psychological distress can occur (Dodge et al., 2012). The following studies examine the impact of MBIs on psychological well-being in university students.

Mindfulness can play a vital role in psychological well-being as demonstrated by Neil (2016) who examined the relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being in a sample of black South African university students and their parents and other relatives. Mindfulness was measured using a variety of self-report mindfulness and psychological well-being scales. Results indicated that mindfulness scores were significantly correlated with increased levels of meaning and positive affect, and lowered levels of negative affect, and were moderately strong predictors of life satisfaction and hope.

Similarly, Whitehead et al. (2018) examined the role of non-attachment, which is a distinct trademark of mindfulness on psychological well-being in Australian university students using a 30-item version of the Ryff scale (a self-report psychological well-being measure). Study findings indicated that the more unattached a person is, the better the quality of life they experienced and the higher their level of psychological well-being. Additionally, MacDonald and Baxter (2017) studied the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and its effect on psychological well-being in healthy female college students and found that students who displayed greater dispositional mindfulness skills had greater levels of emotional awareness and control, and a greater ability to tolerate negative thoughts which are skills that may enhance psychological health.

Mindfulness can have an impact on stress as demonstrated by Zimmaro et al. (2016) who examined the role of mindfulness in stress-health pathways among university undergraduate students. Measures of mindfulness, perceived stress, and psychological well-being were assessed

on two separate occasions during the semester. In addition, students provided two days of saliva to assess their cortisol. Study results indicated that “students with higher dispositional mindfulness reported significantly less perceived stress and had lower overall mean levels of diurnal cortisol. Mindfulness was associated with greater psychological well-being” (Zimmaro et al., 2016, p.881).

Similarly, Palmer and Rodger (2009) examined mindfulness, and stress and coping among 135 first year university students living in residence. Students completed self-report questionnaires. Study findings indicated a significant positive association between mindfulness and rational coping and a significant negative association with emotional and avoidant coping and perceived stress. The study findings supported the authors' hypothesis that mindfulness may enhance a person's ability to cope with stress; as participants with a high self-reported level of mindfulness scored significantly lower on the perceived stress scale.

Additionally, deBruin, Meppelink, and Bogels (2015) examined the effects of a mindfulness course in the curriculum of international students from 16 different universities. The course curriculum was comprised of seven weekly lectures. During the course, students gained exposure to scientific articles on mindfulness and experience in meditating. The primary goal of the course was to learn about the applications of mindfulness in child psychiatry. Study results indicated that students were less judgemental and less reactive to their thoughts, feelings, and emotions when they were participating in the course. In addition, their mindfulness increased after the course ended suggesting mindfulness may help students better manage their stress, improve their performance, and their quality of life.

Mindfulness can be beneficial with Master of Social Work (MSW) students as demonstrated by Botta, Cadet and Maramaldi (2015). Botta et al. (2015) sought to examine the

effectiveness of a mindfulness group intervention on social work students. This was a quantitative pilot study which used a pretest/post-test design. The participants were placed into groups that were three hours in duration and were taught short experiential activities that were adapted from MBSR principles. Study findings showed that students had an increase in knowledge, self-efficacy, and beliefs that were related to mindfulness. Similarly, Decker, Brown, Ong, and Stiney-Ziskind (2015) completed a qualitative study that examined the relationship between mindfulness and the risk for compassion fatigue and the possibility for compassion gratification with Master's level social work students who were completing their internships. Many social workers have a desire to enter the occupation due to compassion for others and the hopes to make gains in individual and societal conditions. However, there is a high risk for compassion fatigue to occur. Study results revealed that there was a "positive correlation between mindfulness and compassion satisfaction and a negative correlation between mindfulness and compassion fatigue" (Decker et al., 2015, p.37). The results demonstrated that mindfulness can offer a safeguard against compassion fatigue for helping professionals.

The above two studies demonstrated the importance of mindfulness for social work students in particular. Social workers are considered helping professionals and are subsequently prone to compassion fatigue and burn out. As accurately explained by Stebnicki (2007) "each time you heal someone, you give away a piece of yourself until, at some point, you will require healing" (p.317). With this in mind, it is essential that social workers practice self-care. Mindfulness can be an effective self-care tool to mitigate the negative psychological effects associated with job burnout (Botta, Cadet, & Maramaldi, 2015).

To further demonstrate the positive effects of mindfulness for university students, research has found that students who are more mindful are less inclined to use substances to cope

with stress as demonstrated by Di Pierdomenico, Kadziolka, and Miller (2017) who examined the relationship between self-reported mindfulness, self-reported coping, and physiological reactivity in relation to substance misuse. These researchers also used skin conductance measurements during an interview when students were asked to recall a personally stressful event. Correlation analyses determined the relationships among these variables and it was determined that there was a negative correlation between substance use and mindfulness. Participants who used substances to cope with stress were less inclined to be mindful and had higher physiological reactivity. Participants who were more mindful were less inclined to misuse substances and could calm themselves more quickly when faced with a stressful event. The study findings imply that mindfulness-based interventions may play a role in reducing poor outcomes for distressed students, and those who use substances as a means to cope are less inclined to have mindful traits and demonstrate increased physiological reactivity than their counterparts.

Finally, MBIs can have an impact on the mental health of university students. Halladay et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis to determine the effectiveness of MBIs for mental health outcomes in university students. The population reviewed included healthy undergraduate, graduate, college and health professional students. Study results indicated that MBIs seem to produce small to modest decreases in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and perceived stress post-intervention when compared to the passive control group (no intervention, waitlist control). Both short (two weeks long or greater) and long MBIs were analyzed and results were similar, however, studies that used mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) seemed to have larger effect sizes for depression and anxiety symptoms when compared to a control group. Generally speaking, the findings suggested that MBIs of a minimum of two weeks seem

to offer a better alternative than no intervention for students, as they may reduce signs of depression, anxiety, and stress. The review found no substantial difference between shorter and longer interventions (with the exception of MBCT) and consequently suggest that shorter interventions may provide brief and efficient strategies for decreasing student anxiety, stress, and depression (Halladay et al., 2019).

This summary of research of the delivery of MBIs with university students shows promising results. Mindfulness has the potential to enhance a student's psychological well-being, improve their mental health, and enhance their ability to cope with many of the stressors and challenges that they will be faced with. This can lead to less maladaptive coping strategies such as using substances to cope with stress. It is helpful to know that even a brief exposure to MBIs can yield benefits. HAP is an emergent approach to mindfulness and it is fun and engaging, which may help to reduce rates of attrition. It is particularly important that students have access to mental health services on campuses such as the HAP program as mental health services are scarce and plagued by several challenges, which will be described in the following section.

### **Mental Health Services on University Campuses**

There are several challenges that post-secondary institutions face when they are attempting to meet the mental health needs of students (Ontario College Health Association, 2009). Campuses face a lack of funding which has led to limits on counseling services (e.g., a maximum allotted amount of counseling sessions) or a brief therapy model (Ng & Padjen, 2018). To illustrate, Dimitris, Soo Lee, Suleiman, Stuart and Chen (2017) conducted a study which sought to understand mental health culture in five Canadian colleges and universities. Study results indicated that there are several barriers to students accessing mental health services on

campus. According to their study, participants felt that there was a long wait time to obtain mental health services, and they often were not aware of the existing services on campus.

Additionally, there is a lack of appropriate services outside of the campus as community-based mental health services often have disorganized access that is not consistent with the same operating procedures as the campus. Community based mental health programs may have different areas of expertise, however, they may lack knowledge of academic topics and the unique stressors that students face (Ng & Padjen, 2018). In addition, complete diagnostic and standardized diagnostic systems are lacking in post-secondary institutions in Canada (Jaworska, De Somma, Fonseka, Heck, & Mac Queen, 2016). Campus helping service providers often have knowledge of mental health challenges faced by students, however, they may lack expertise in serious mental illness. This lack of availability and adequate treatment services puts students at a greater risk of harm for experiencing prolonged mental health issues (Ng & Padjen, 2018).

There is a considerable lack of awareness surrounding mental illness which puts pressure on mental health support initiatives to help improve the public perception of mental illness and provide services to treat mental illness (Dimitris et al., 2017). Dimitris et al. (2017) found that universities are well aware of mental health problems among their students and many student associations have a variety of projects to promote mental health awareness on campus. However, mental health services are not promoted efficiently and the accessibility to these programs requires improvement (Dimitris et al., 2017). Perhaps, if mental health programs were efficiently promoted it would reduce the stigma attached to them as Dimitris et al. (2017) found that a self and public stigma was also a barrier preventing students from seeking mental health services.

Along these lines, Jaworska et al. (2016) evaluated existing mental health promotion, identification and intervention initiatives at publically funded postsecondary institutions across

Canada. Front line workers (e.g., psychologists, counselors, resident advisors, and medical professionals) who work directly with students were asked to complete an online survey. Study findings indicated that the majority of institutions have some type of mental health promotion and outreach program, however, the majority of respondents felt that these were not a good use of scarce resources. Most participants felt that it would be beneficial to improve promotion/outreach programs to focus on specific disorders (e.g., addictions, eating disorders). Despite the high level of mental health challenges experienced by post-secondary students, less than half of them obtain professional help (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Student barriers consist of embarrassment, stigma, preferring to deal with their stress alone, not seeing their needs as serious, students feeling that they do not have enough time and post-secondary institutions not being able to meet their needs (Downs & Eisenberg, 2012; Gulliver et al., 2010; Reetz, Krylowicz & Mistler, 2014). Enrolment in post-secondary institutions is on the rise, therefore post-secondary institutions have the obligation to respond to student needs by promoting and expanding current services and creating awareness of mental health in order to reduce the stigma.

### **Arts-Based Methods**

Throughout history, the arts have been used by human beings worldwide as a healing method and a way of communication. Arts-based methods can be used as a tool to promote health and psychological well-being (Darewych & Bowers, 2017; Recollet, Coholic & Cote-Meek, 2009). Arts-based methods may consist of drawing, painting, music, play, photos, and telling stories. Arts-based interventions such as a scribble drawing, a strength collage, and tree of life are all common arts-based activities (Darewych & Bowers, 2017). These methods can be used with several different populations including both adults and children including trauma

survivors struggling to find words, adults with a developmental disability, and individuals with language difficulties (Darewych & Bowers, 2017).

Arts-based methods are different from art therapy. Typically, art therapists have a graduate level degree in art therapy (Coholic, 2019). Art therapy is a distinct profession and is a separate discipline due to its mastery of artistic media and the method of treatment (Pamelia, 2015). Some art therapists may interpret their client's creations, however, not all of them do this (Coholic, 2019). Arts-based methods can be used by individuals who are not trained art therapists and who do not claim to be conducting art therapy (Pamelia, 2015).

There are many benefits to using arts-based methods. The art therapy process has the potential to unleash mastery and flow, improve mood, and to inspire and magnify meaning (Wilkinson & Chilton, 2013). The creation of art and the reflection process on art products can help an individual to increase self-esteem, social activity, improve psychological functioning, enhance cognitive abilities and enhance self-awareness and personal expression. Positive psychologists have made recommendations that people use art activities to convey gratitude, enhance positive emotions, and explore the meaning of life (Darewych & Bowers, 2017). Arts-based therapists have the capacity to focus on the relief of suffering, promote positive emotions, highlight strengths, and accentuate healing (Wilkinson & Chilton, 2013).

Art can be used as an alternative source of awareness and can facilitate a deeper understanding of difficult emotions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours with or without the use of verbal language, which can be particularly helpful when individuals cannot find the right words to express themselves (Davis, 2015; Jackson, 2015; Recollet et al., 2009; Venable, 2005). Additionally, arts-based methods can be fun and pleasurable and they hold the potential to stimulate someone's creativity, hidden wishes, and relieve tension (Coholic, Eys & Loughheed,

2012; Coholic, Lougheed & LeBreton, 2009). Through these activities, individuals are able to heal their mind, body, and soul (Darewych & Bowers, 2017). The Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) is an MBI that uses arts-based methods to teach mindfulness-based practices and concepts. HAP will be described next.

### **Holistic Arts-Based Program**

The Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) delivers mindfulness concepts using arts-based experimental methods in a safe, non-judgemental group environment (Coholic, 2016). The program was originally developed by Dr. Diana Coholic and colleagues for vulnerable children involved with the child welfare system who have often experienced loss and trauma. HAP encourages activities that are in alignment with mindfulness-based principals (Coholic, Lougheed & Cadell, 2009). The HAP program teaches mindfulness skills in meaningful ways that participants can easily understand. Goals include improving self-awareness, fostering self-compassion and empathy, heightening participants' understanding of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and helping them to recognize their strengths (Coholic, 2019). HAP does not teach participants how to make art. Rather, the purpose of the arts-based methods used in HAP are to be used as tools of self-expression, to develop strengths, support group cohesion, and to teach concepts (Coholic, 2019).

HAP utilizes several arts-based activities such as drawing, painting, working with sand, clay modeling, Tai Chi movements, cutting and pasting, creating collages, writing, and guided mindfulness meditation (Coholic, Oystriick, Posteraro, & Lougheed, 2016). These arts-based methods are used for a variety of reasons. They help keep participants engaged as they are non-threatening, fun and enjoyable, and help participants to develop connections with peers. Additionally, they serve as an outlet for self-expression and communication (Coholic, 2016).

These methods help children to feel better about themselves and enhance their coping skills (Coholic, Lougheed & Cadell, 2009).

Arts-based methods are particularly beneficial for children who have experienced trauma. Coholic, Eys and Lougheed (2012) reported that arts-based methods have been used to help with a specific problem (i.e., bereavement) as they help to facilitate expression. These methods are helpful for children who have undergone life challenges as they do not have to engage in a direct discussion about their trauma and the art can help with communication. In HAP, participants can still enjoy an element of control as they can share what they want to about their creation with the group or not share at all (Coholic, 2019).

Several studies have examined the helpfulness of HAP with youth populations. Current study findings have found that HAP has been effective in the development of self-esteem and self-awareness (Coholic, Lougheed, & LeBreton, 2009) and children who participated in the program felt more content (Coholic, 2011), acquired greater emotion regulation and healthy expression of emotions which helped them to cope at school and home (Coholic et al., 2012). For instance, Coholic, Lougheed, and LeBreton (2009) found that foster children who participated in a HAP group for six weeks acquired new skills, improved their ability to cope, got in touch with their feelings, and experienced more positivity after partaking in the program.

HAP has also been studied with adult populations. Especially relevant to my own work, Grynspan (2018) explored HAP with education students enrolled at Laurentian University. Group interviews were completed with participants before and after participation in the program. A thematic analysis revealed that participants experienced an increased sense of self-awareness and mindfulness, they experienced benefits from the arts-based methods, and they experienced benefits from participating in the group. HAP helped the students to mitigate the negative

impacts of stress and they learned mindfulness concepts that they planned to introduce in their education practicums. The study demonstrates the importance of HAP as a MBI prevention/promotion program for post-secondary students in order to optimize supportive services for students facing mental health challenges.

Similarly, and also relevant to my own work, Coholic, Eys, McAlister, Sugeng, and Smith (2018) conducted a mixed method pilot study that explored the benefits of HAP with adults experiencing anxiety and depression. Adults seeking mental health services had the option to participate in HAP or a cognitive behavioural program which were both being offered for 12 weeks. The Beck Depression Inventory and the Beck Anxiety Inventory were used to collect pre- and post-intervention scores on depression and anxiety. In addition to the inventories, group interviews were also completed. Data collection was consistent across both groups and findings from both interventions were compared. A multivariate analysis of variance revealed that participants in both groups reported lower anxiety and depression scores with there being no significant difference between both groups. A qualitative analysis revealed that both programs were beneficial for participants, however, there were noted differences, such as HAP participants indicated that they experienced mutual aid while participants from the other group were focused on learning specific techniques.

To date, HAP has been tested with approximately 160 children aged 8-12 years old and with the same number of youths aged 11-17 years (Coholic, 2019). The research on the program is expanding and the feasibility and the suitability of the program with adult populations continues to be explored as well as different populations of youth groups. Currently, other graduate students involved with the program are studying HAP benefits with repeat youth groups, elementary school teachers, and women affiliated with a transition home who are leaving

a violent relationship. These studies are not yet published. My current study will expand the current research base and add to the literature of the effectiveness of the program with adult populations by exploring outcomes with university students.

### **Study Rationale**

The exploration of mindfulness with different study populations has been expanding rapidly, however, there is sparse literature pertaining to the usage of mindfulness used in conjunction with arts-based methods and in particular mindfulness arts-based interventions used with university students. Similarly, it is evident that the literature suggests that HAP has been successful with vulnerable youths and children, however, there is a lack of literature pertaining to the suitability and the feasibility of HAP with university students. Finally, current research remains limited with Northeastern Ontario populations. This is relevant because according to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2009), mental health services in rural and Northern communities is less comprehensive, available, and accessible in comparison to urban areas. This further supports the need for the exploration of the HAP program for students attending a university in Northeastern Ontario.

In summary, university students experience unique stressors and impeding academic demands which hinder their psychological well-being. The way that a student copes with stress can have a positive or negative impact on their psychological well-being. With educational institutions expanding rapidly, universities have the obligation to ensure that the required supports are in place for students. The HAP program combines the benefits of mindfulness with the benefits of arts-based methods. Combined they may hold greater power to assist university students to explore and work through their thoughts, feelings, and emotions in order to improve

their academic performance, improve their quality of life, enhance their psychological well-being, and better manage their stress.

Therefore, my study may help us to understand how university support services could be enhanced to provide students with positive coping strategies in order to become better equipped to navigate through university life. The objective of my research is to gain a better understanding of participants' experience in an arts-based mindfulness group. This exploration will provide a better understanding of the impact of the program on students' psychological well-being and mindfulness skills. In the next Chapter, I explain the research questions and the methodology.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Methodology**

The following chapter will provide details pertaining to my study's theoretical framework, study design, data collection, and analysis. I offer a section on researcher reflexivity in order to demonstrate transparency and declare any potential biases and how these impacted my work. This section shares my personal reflections in order to offer a critical overview of my journey with the research process, my relationship with the participants, my approach to facilitation and my learning. I share details pertaining to the details of the methodology, the setting, the target population, recruitment methods, participant details, data analysis, ethical considerations, validation methods, and the themes generated in my thesis. Thematic analysis of pre-and post-semi structured individual interviews revealed four key themes. The themes are: (1) the benefits of HAP in a group format, (2) the cultivation of mindfulness, (3) the benefits of making art, and (4) the impact of HAP on participants' relationships with others.

### **Study Design**

Social constructivism is the theoretical framework that overarches my research study. A social constructivist framework appreciates the everyday interactions between people and how they construct their reality (Andrews, 2012). It focuses on how individuals learn by interacting with others and creating meaning together. Social constructivists accept that there is no single reality (Creswell, 2013). In social constructivist research, the researcher is highly involved in the process and plays a pivotal role in discovering and constructing meaning. The relationship between the researcher and the research participants is regarded as extremely important (Kim, 2014). This framework is relevant for qualitative research as it helps to shed light on how individuals interact with the world around them (Creswell, 2013). This framework encouraged

me to become fully immersed in the research process and I was able to gain insight by exploring and interpreting the participants' perspectives, which will be described in greater detail in the following sections.

A mixed methods strategy including qualitative and quantitative data techniques was used for this study. According to Rubin and Babbie (2010), qualitative research can be defined as "research methods that emphasize the depth of understanding and the deeper meanings of human experience and that aim to generate theoretically richer, albeit more tentative, observations" (p.342). Quantitative methods "emphasize precise, objective, and generalizable findings" (Rubin & Babbie, 210, p.342).

A mixed methods approach combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches; this approach allows for a better understanding of the research problems than what can be achieved from a single approach. Mixed methods draw upon the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods and provide a panoramic view of the research so that phenomena can be viewed through a diverse set of lenses (Shorten & Smith, 2017). Each method informs one another to provide a complete picture of the problem (Creswell, 2013). Mixed methods can be used to answer questions that neither quantitative or qualitative methods could answer alone, research questions are answered more deeply, and participants are provided with the opportunity to have a strong voice and share their experiences. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach will allow the researcher to gain as much insight as possible into participants' experiences and allow for triangulation for a more comprehensive analysis (Shorten & Smith, 2017).

My research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to gain a better understanding of participants' experiences in an arts-based mindfulness group. Participants completed an individual interview before and after the group in addition to completing

questionnaires related to their psychological well-being and mindfulness (this process will be described in greater detail in the following sections). This mixed-methods approach allowed me to gain a better understanding of the impact of the program on students' psychological well-being and mindfulness skills. The purpose of my research was to explore the following research questions: What are the experiences of students who participate in a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group? Does participation in a 12-week mindfulness arts-based group improve university student's skills in mindfulness, and improve their psychological well-being?

### **Setting**

Facilitation of the HAP program was in the Multidisciplinary Qualitative Research Laboratory (MQRL) in addition to a classroom in the School of Education Building at Laurentian University. This ensured that students were accommodated as both locations were easily accessible to them, especially those that resided on campus. The MQRL is the primary location for Dr. Coholic's research and offers adequate space to conduct group work and interviews, however, due to scheduling conflicts with the lab, the additional classroom space at the School of Education Building was obtained. This classroom offered a very large space which was suitable to facilitate groups. Several participants commented that they enjoyed this location as they had an evening class in the same building directly before or after the group.

### **Recruitment**

I consulted with Ms. Lucie Gelin, the manager at the Student Life Center at Laurentian University. Lucie supported my research project by displaying my recruitment poster (please see Appendix A) in the center and allowing me to meet with the student counsellors employed by the center to inform them about my research. The counselors supported by research by emailing their students to inform them about the program and distributing my student handouts (see Appendix

B). Lucie also invited me to present my research initiatives to students involved with the center who were enrolled in the Laurentian Initiative for Transition (LIFT) program. This brief 10-minute presentation occurred just prior to the start of the 2018-2019 academic year in August, 2018. After the presentation, students were invited to leave their contact information and they were provided with a student handout.

Additionally, Dr. Leigh MacEwan and Dr. Steven Kusan from the School of Social Work, Dr. Daniel Cote from the Indigenous School of Social work, Dr. Nancy Lightfoot from the School of Rural and Northern Health, Dr. James Watterson from the Department of Forensic Sciences, and Dr. Shelley Watson, the vice-president from the Department of Learning and Teaching, were agreeable to distributing my posters to their students. Also, Ms. Cynthia Belfitt, an Indigenous Counsellor from Indigenous Student Affairs, Ms. Kayla Dibblee, a Residence Life Coordinator, and Health Services at Laurentian University agreed to distribute my handouts to interested students. My fellow peer, Mr. Kenneth Lander, who is a facilitator with the HAP program, provided a brief presentation on the program to a group of second, third and fourth-year social work students at a social work orientation day event in September, 2018. Kenneth distributed my student handouts to the interested students and invited them to leave their contact information. My recruitment posters were also distributed at various approved locations throughout the campus.

Students could be enrolled in any year of any graduate or undergraduate level program at Laurentian University to participate in HAP. They were required to have full-time status and speak English. This inclusion criteria was required for consistency as stress may have impacted students differently depending on whether or not they carried a full or partial course load. Participants were not required to have any prior group experience. Students were made aware

that they would be committed to attending the group for two hours a week for 12 consecutive weeks. Participants were aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The participants were selected based on their willingness to attend the program and their desire to improve their mindfulness skills. This is considered availability sampling as participants were selected simply because of their availability and for convenience purposes (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

Recruitment efforts began in late August of 2018 and continued to the end of October 2018. I followed up with students via email who had attended a presentation and had left their contact information. I informed them that they may participate in the HAP program if they choose to do so and confirmed their interest. I received several emails from students who had learned about the program from the recruitment methods listed above. Students also contacted me as they had heard about the program from another potential participant. This is called snowball sampling as additional participants were located at the suggestion of another participant. This type of sampling can be used when study participants are difficult to locate and it was very instrumental in helping me to locate additional participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). As participants began to express interest in the program, I invited them to meet with me to conduct an intake interview. During the interview, I asked them to sign the consent form, I invited them to ask questions and about the program, and provided them with more specific details. I began to gather information about their availability to attend the program. I completed a total of 24 individual intake interviews prior to the beginning of the program.

Once availability was established from gathering the personal preferences of students for group times and days, I contacted them with specific dates and times for the program. I provided them with the option to attend either a morning or an evening session in order to accommodate

them. One participant that had completed an intake was unable to attend the groups as her schedule was conflicting. Groups were limited to 11 people per group as I had recognized that attrition would likely be a factor and that my groups would likely become smaller over time. Recruitment efforts led to the formation of two cohorts. The morning group started with a total of 10 participants and the evening group started with 11 participants. Groups began the week of October 24, 2018.

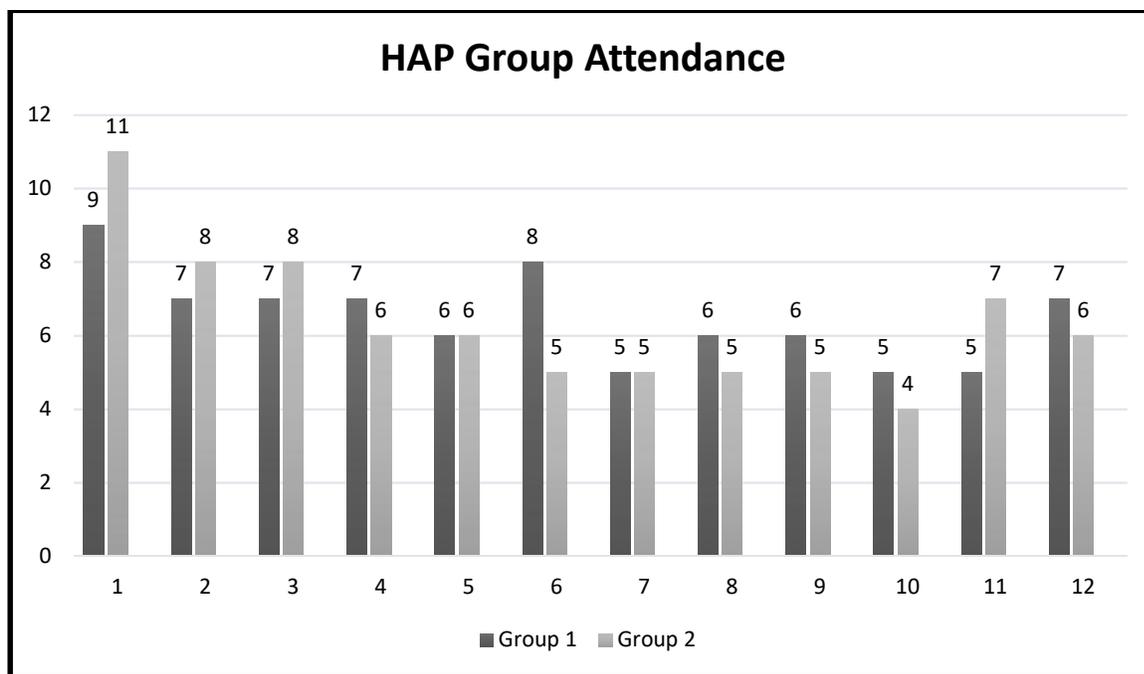
The morning group was co-facilitated by me and Ms. Heather McAlister and Ms. Stephanie McMahon, two MSW students who were trained in facilitating HAP. My evening group was also co-facilitated by me with Heather and Ms. Julia Kinna, who was a fourth-year BSW student being trained to facilitate HAP. They were assigned to co-facilitate my groups by my first thesis supervisor.

### **Participants**

The following section will provide a detailed description of the student participants and groups, and their reasons for joining the group. There were initially 23 students who chose to participate in this study. Two students who had confirmed their enrolment in the program never came to any of the sessions. I reached out to them and they both informed me that they were not able to attend the first couple of sessions due to illnesses and that they planned to attend future sessions, however, they both never ended up attending any of the groups. Their data was not included in the study. Of the remaining 21 students, 16 were female, 4 were male, and one identified as genderless. They ranged in age from 18 to 47 years old with a mean age of 27 years. Two of the participants did not provide their exact ages, however, they did not continue with the program, as one only attended one session and the other one attended two sessions before discontinuing the program. Of these two participants, one indicated that she was over the age of

50 years and the other one indicated that she was over the age of 40 years. Pseudonyms were selected for participants by using the initial of their first name. The students are identified as Phoebe, Fae, Katie, Sophia, Jack, Noah, Mateo, Charlotte, Katharine, Janice, Sonia, Dale, Jarrett, Laura, Shauna, Donna, Tabatha, Tiana, Erin, Grace, and Debbie. Due to attrition, complete data was collected from 15 of the original participants.

Figure 1 below depicts how attrition occurred throughout the groups and how attendance varied in each session.



**Figure 1. HAP Group Attendance**

Group one was originally comprised of nine students, however, the group ended with seven participants. Six of the students identified as female, Phoebe, Fae, Katie, Sophia, Charlotte, and Katharine, and three identified as male, Jack, Noah, and Mateo. Phoebe only attended two sessions, therefore not completing the program. I reached out to her via email and she replied that she had personal health issues and other commitments and was unsure if she would be able to continue to attend groups. Sophia was unable to continue attending the groups

after the Christmas holidays due to class scheduling conflicts in her second semester. She did, however, attend seven sessions and still completed a post-interview. The lowest amount of sessions attended by a participant in this group was two sessions and the highest was 12 sessions.

Group two was originally comprised of 12 students, however, attrition occurred quickly after the first session and seven participants remained in the group. Ten of the students in the group identified as female, Janice, Sonia, Laura, Shauna, Donna, Tabitha, Tiana, Grace, Debbie and Erin, one as genderless, Dale, and one as male, Jarrett. Debbie only attended one session and she explained through email correspondence that she realized that she could not devote time to the program due to the demands of her course load. Grace attended one session and she explained through email correspondence that the group environment was increasing her social anxiety and that she was overwhelmed with school assignments. Shauna attended two sessions and I attempted to reach out to her via email, however, I did not receive a response. Sonia attended three sessions and explained through email correspondence that she was feeling anxious in the group setting. Janice attended three sessions and I attempted to reach out to her via email, however, never received a response.

The students were enrolled in various full-time programs at the university. One of the students enrolled was a science communications master's student, however, she only attended one session. The remainder of the students were all full-time undergraduate students in first, second, third, and fourth-year studies. Five of the students were enrolled in the English social work program, two were enrolled in the French social work program, five were enrolled in the Indigenous social work program, two were enrolled in the psychology program, two were enrolled in the education program, one was enrolled in the architecture program, one in media studies, and one in the zoology program. During the pre-group interview, participants discussed

several reasons behind their decision to participate in the HAP program. Several motives were revealed which included: hoping to experience professional development by gaining knowledge that they can use in their future career, educational incentives (such as being offered bonus marks to participate or participating in research was a class requirement), previous exposure to mindfulness, to learn coping skills, to increase mindfulness skills (such as empathy, self-awareness and emotional awareness), had an interest in arts-based activities, to improve their mental health, to gain self-confidence, and finally to experience self-care.

Additionally, participants discussed several personal challenges that prompted them to partake in the program. In particular, many students specified that struggling to maintain balance in their lives which included challenges with time management, and juggling work, family, friends, and school was challenging. Students also reported that they frequently experienced feeling stressed and anxious, and had overwhelming thoughts. They often had difficulty processing emotions and had the tendency to overreact. Additionally, challenges included a lack of a social support network as many participants were away from friends and family. Furthermore, struggling to connect and communicate with other people was another factor leading to feelings of isolation.

Almost all of the participants except one did have some understanding of mindfulness prior to participating in the group. However, some participants had a very limited understanding of mindfulness concepts. For instance, one participant felt that mindfulness was about always remaining positive and eliminating negative thoughts as opposed to accepting all thoughts and emotions. Another participant felt that mindfulness was acquired solely based upon life experiences. Primarily, participants expressed that mindfulness could bring them into present moment awareness, that it can help improve their mental health, it can help to facilitate self-

expression, and it can improve their reactions to stressors in their life, thus enhancing their ability to cope.

### **Facilitation**

The two concurrent HAP groups allowed me to accommodate participants' individual timing preferences and school schedules. HAP was delivered on Wednesdays and two different groups were offered. Both of the groups began on October 24, 2018, and ended on February 6, 2019. The groups were discontinued for five weeks over the Christmas Holidays and examination period as participants felt that they would not be able to commit to attending groups during that time. Group one was held from 9:30 am to 11:30 am in the MQRL lab, and group two was held from 5 pm to 7 pm in the School of Education Building at the university. There were three facilitators allocated to both groups. I was the lead facilitator in both of these groups in order to allow for consistency and ensure increased internal validity, as it is important to ensure that all variables in the research are consistent as having different lead facilitators could effect study results (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Similarly, my secondary facilitator also facilitated both groups, however, my third facilitators were different in both groups.

I am a social worker with experience in developmental services, child welfare, and medical social work. My secondary co-facilitator, Heather was a master of social work student who was also employed at the university's counseling center, and she had plenty of experience facilitating HAP groups with youth populations. My third co-facilitator, Stephanie, in the morning group, was also a master of social work student who had previous experience facilitating HAP with youth groups. Her work experience consisted of supporting female survivors of domestic violence. Likewise, my third co-facilitator, Julia, in my evening group, was a fourth-year bachelor of social work student who was just beginning to facilitate HAP

groups. During the period of April 2018 to June 2018, I co-facilitated HAP group sessions delivered to vulnerable youths at Laurentian University in order to learn and gain experience with the program. I prepared by reading all relevant published literature pertaining to the program and the HAP manual as well as some books by Dr. Jon Kabat Zinn, a leader in mindfulness. I attended bi-weekly HAP supervisory group meetings with Dr. Coholic and other facilitators.

HAP is facilitated in a group format because a group setting has helped participants to learn interpersonal skills and cooperate towards achieving a shared goal. It can alleviate social isolation and enhance resilience-building efforts (Coholic et al., 2012). I hypothesized that a group setting with university students would also yield the same benefits.

I followed the standardized curriculum which was created by Dr. Coholic and colleagues and is outlined in Dr. Coholic's program manual which provides details and activities for each session of the group (Coholic, 2019). Each HAP session began with an icebreaker activity, followed by a series of arts-based mindfulness activities. Halfway through the group, a 15-minute break occurred and participants were provided with snacks and beverages. The second half of the group included a mindfulness activity such as a meditation or tai chi, a group cohesion activity followed by a closing activity. Group activities included “drawing, painting, making collages, creating with sand, using music to express one’s feelings, practicing Tai Chi movements, sculpting with clay, listening to guided imageries, and creative writing” (Coholic, Oystriick, Posterano & Loughed, 2016, p. 158) to name a few. See Appendix C for an example of the structure of HAP and Appendix D for a more comprehensive list of activities.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

Researcher reflexivity is related to the integrity of the research. It is a process whereby the researcher reflects critically on themselves as a researcher and declares their personal biases, assumptions, and world views. This clarification allows the reader to have a better understanding as to how the researcher interpreted their data and how their personal values may influence the study (Merriam, 2009). Researcher reflexivity is one of the ways that researchers demonstrate quality in their work and show trustworthiness (Teh & Lek, 2018). The credibility and the understanding of the researcher are increased when a researcher analyzes elements of their background such as their race, socioeconomic status, age, and cultural background as it demonstrates intersecting relationships between the participants and themselves (Berger, 2015). In the following section, I will provide details of my personal and professional background, assumptions, and my journey with the research process, which will demonstrate transparency and may unveil any potential biases which could impact my research study.

I will begin by providing personal details about myself, including my experience as a social worker in order to demonstrate how my experiences have affected my research. According to Berger (2015), researchers need to focus on self-knowledge, have a thorough understanding on the role of the self in the creation of knowledge, and critically self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences in the creation of their research. To begin with, I am a Caucasian, middle-class, spiritual, non-religious female in my late thirties in the process of completing the Master of Social Work Program at Laurentian University. I have resided in Northern Ontario for over 25 years. I spent the first 10 years of my career working as a developmental service worker with adults with developmental and physical disabilities who had behavioral challenges. An inner longing prompted me to return to school to pursue my

undergraduate degree in social work. I had a desire to learn fundamental social work skills and I longed to have the education that would provide me with alternative career options.

Promptly following my graduation from my bachelor of social work, I was immediately employed in child welfare where I worked as a child protection worker for two and a half years. This role provided me with a strong foundation of social work skills and experience, however, I quickly realized that this was not my passion and I felt unsatisfied with the job. Although I thought child welfare was very important work, I longed to do more therapeutic work with the children and families that I was working with. I often felt the pressure of tight time constraints due to a very high caseload. I expose these feelings as I am aware that my own values, motives and previous experiences cannot be separated from the research process (Gabriel, 2018). Later these experiences that I had in child welfare led me to have the desire to work with children in a more therapeutic setting when I was invited to become a part of the HAP team, which I will later explain.

While I was working at Children's Aid, I began to work towards my master's degree on a part-time basis. My interest in the HAP program began after having discussions with a close friend who was also pursuing her master in social work and was a HAP facilitator in Dr. Coholic's research team. Similarly, during my career at Children's Aid, I had referred several youths to the program and had the opportunity to sit with them during their pre-and post-interviews. My curiosity about the program grew as I had discussions with these participants and recognized how much of an impact the program had on their lives. I remember one of the youth speaking to me about breathing exercises, and how she had overcome self-judgment and was less inclined to judge others. I also remember working with a very resistant youth who was involved in the criminal justice system and attended HAP. Despite her resistance, she was still able to

benefit from the program and learn new skills. In fact, her father told me a couple of years later that she still practiced some of the arts-based methods when she was experiencing stress in her life.

In April of 2018, I was invited to become a part of Dr. Coholic's research team and I became a co-facilitator of a group of 11-13 year old girls. I had no prior experience working with groups and it was here that I experienced transformation as a social worker. Prior to facilitating this group, my experience with children was under the lens of a child protection worker and my work with them was often conducted under tight time constraints with an investigative approach. Hence, I did not have any experience working with children in a therapeutic setting. HAP allowed me to spend quality time with children, get to know them on an intimate level, and teach them new concepts and skills. Also, I did not have much prior knowledge of arts-based methods and how they can facilitate self-healing and expression. I began to quickly see how the girls were benefitting from the group in several ways. I saw how the safe non-judgemental environment allowed for them to become vulnerable and authentic, and group cohesion quickly occurred. I saw how the girls began to increase their level of self-awareness, self-esteem, and learn new mindfulness skills. After participating in this group, I could fully appreciate the transformative benefits of HAP and I knew that I wanted to continue to be a part of the HAP research team and pursue my thesis in the realm of HAP. I recognized that mental health challenges were very predominant in university students and I thought that this population could benefit from HAP, therefore I proposed that I complete the HAP program with university students.

In the summer of 2018, I began to start the process of my research with university students which consisted of obtaining ethics approval and extensive recruitment efforts. After this lengthy process was completed my groups were finally formed and the program began at the

end of October 2018. Facilitating the group with young adults was a totally new experience for me. Having only ever co-facilitated one HAP group with children before, I lacked some confidence and I was hesitant about my ability to facilitate a group. Luckily, my co-facilitator was very experienced with leading groups and provided me with great feedback and was very helpful. After the first couple of groups, I started feeling much more comfortable and at ease. My confidence as a facilitator began to soar, and I was much more comfortable being in a leadership role. In fact, one of the participants mentioned to me at the post-interview that he had also witnessed me grow as a facilitator throughout the groups and several of the participants commented to me that they enjoyed my leadership style and felt comfortable in the group. I feel very grateful for this experience to facilitate a group as it is a valuable skill to have as a social worker.

I remember being completely awestruck after my first group with the university students. My previous experience with the HAP program had been limited to female youths and I was unsure as to how the arts-based methods would be applicable with a young adult population. The art-based activities promoted a deep and rich dialogue between participants. It became clear to me how the arts-based activities prompted the participants to look deep within themselves and make new discoveries. The safe non-judgemental environment allowed for the sharing of these insights amongst each other in a raw and authentic manner. Throughout the groups, I noticed the strong connection amongst group members; they offered each other mutual aid and would help each other overcome obstacles in their lives and suggest coping skills. Quite often participants would comment that the group was "healing" and they felt as though they could be authentic. Participants quickly learned the mindfulness concepts and were able to provide concrete evidence as to how they used these skills in their lives. I had wondered if the participants would

find some of the activities childish, however, they commented that they thought that the activities were fun and that they enjoyed connecting with their "inner child." I quickly recognized that this was my own bias and my unfamiliarity of using the methods with adults, as previously I had only facilitated the program with youths. I learned to let the process of the group unfold and let go of my expectations. I began to recognize the merit in using these arts-based methods with adults as they were engaging and encouraged them to have fun. I quickly began to see participants transform as they increased their sense of self-awareness, learned new mindfulness skills, and increased their confidence. I looked forward to facilitating the sessions each week as I felt a sense of connection with the group and I felt like my role as a facilitator had purpose and meaning as week by week I witnessed the healing power of the group and arts-based methods.

Part of my role as a researcher and facilitator involved participating in group activities with the participants. I also would become immersed in the activities and the dialogue that occurred and as a result, I would also reveal personal aspects about myself to the participants. For example, I noticed that some participants were struggling to share with others in the group. I disclosed to the group my own journey with talking in front of others. I provided examples of how previously in groups I would become uncomfortable and embarrassed when I was asked my name, and how I had overcome this obstacle by applying mindfulness principles such as non-judgment of myself, acceptance, and present moment awareness in conjunction with participating in groups when afforded the opportunity. This process eventually allowed me to finally gain the confidence to become a group facilitator. Sharing with the group also allowed me to learn from others as I was able to relate to them as a fellow student and understand that I was not the only one who had felt a certain way. However, as a facilitator, I was careful about what to disclose about myself to the group as self-disclosure can blur the boundaries and shift the focus

of the relationship away from the group. That being said, if self-disclosure is handled skilfully, it can support the therapeutic alliance, enable trust, normalize the client's challenges, validate human frailty, and offer the client a powerful role model (Reamer, 2011). I felt that the purpose of my self-disclosure was to create a deeper sense of unity with the group as I unveiled to them that I was also human with my own struggles, which normalized their own challenges. However, I was careful to ensure that the discussion did not become about me and that I was still able to maintain my role as a facilitator. Becoming immersed in the study was typical for my role as according to Allan and Arber (2018) "researchers in health and social care setting like other researchers are part of the social worlds they study. They may have multiple identities such as practitioner, counselor, and researcher...."(p.1). By being immersed in the group, I developed an intimate relationship with the participants and a deepened sense of connectivity. Allan and Arber (2018) also report that sometimes the researcher is no longer the outsider and they share the experiences with the participants. This is how I began to feel as I felt as though I was not only a researcher but also a group member and I felt sorrow when the group ended.

After each session, I scheduled a time to reflect on my thoughts and feelings and write a journal on my experiences with HAP. I shared these reflections with my co-facilitators and we brainstormed on ways to overcome any difficulties that we were encountering such as how to provide additional support to a participant who was struggling with her emotions, and how to address a participant that appeared to be deliberately challenging the concepts at times. In addition, I met bi-weekly with my supervisor, Dr. Coholic, and other facilitators to provide one another with support and to analyze the processes that were occurring. I felt that this process was essential as a researcher's reflexivity is a conscious and deliberate effort to be attuned to their own reactions and to identify how any personal or circumstantial aspects have an impact on the

process of the research and study findings. Strategies for maintaining reflexivity include member checking and forming a peer support network (Berger, 2015). I wanted to ensure that I had an outlet to process my own reactions and ensure that I responded to participants in an appropriate manner.

Additionally, I kept a weekly research diary where I journaled about my experiences with the groups, the research process and any challenges that I had. For example, I noticed that week by week participants were struggling with meditation. Naturally, I was inclined to use meditations that had worked for me, however, as a result of my reflections, I presented several different types of meditations to the group to demonstrate to the group that different types of meditation may resonate with them. For instance, I brought my Tibetan bells to one session and had participants become present and listen to the sound. I tried meditations that included nature scenes, body scans, and progressive muscle relaxation in an attempt to demonstrate different techniques to participants.

This journal served as a tool to reflect on my experiences with the groups which enabled me to become more aware of my own personal biases and areas where I required improvement. For example, through my reflections I became more aware that I was uncomfortable with conflict. For example, one participant would often challenge some of the mindfulness concepts. Originally, I would have the tendency to allow my co-facilitator Heather to address his comments. However, I recognized that this was an area where I required improvement. Additionally, there were times when Heather could not attend group, so I had to be able to manage this conflict myself. My increased sense of self-awareness enabled me to develop the tools to manage conflict. I began to address the conflict without relying on Heather and developed the ability to confidently redirect the individual when necessary and answer his

questions. Additionally, at times I had to speak to individuals in the hallway to address any concerns. This increased my confidence as a facilitator as I experienced personal growth.

Similarly, my journal promoted further incidences of self-reflection. At the onset of the groups, there were a large number of participants. Attrition occurred and the groups became much smaller. I recognized through my reflections that I had a personal bias as I thought that a larger group would be more beneficial. I felt that it could potentially allow for a more diverse dialogue and participants would be more inclined to find someone within the group that they could connect with. I recognized that this was my own personal bias as participants commented that they enjoyed the smaller group size as they felt that it was more intimate and less intimidating. I also noticed that Tiana began to share more with others once the group size became smaller. Based on this feedback and observations, I ensured that I removed physical barriers by using a smaller table or less tables to create stronger feelings of connectivity. This diary acted as a reflection tool to facilitate the construction of research knowledge (Engin, 2011). It provided me with the opportunity to re-interact with my thoughts and understand my role as a researcher and the research process (Engin, 2011).

I have maintained a mindfulness practice for several years which consisted of yoga and meditation, and I feel that it enhanced my sense of well-being, therefore I always had an interest in teaching it to others. According to Gabriel (2018), a researcher is aware that their research can be an expression of their own values and have an impact on their choice of subject, therefore they seek transparency in expressing their values. I recognized that my own values had an impact on my choice to pursue a research project which included mindfulness.

My mindfulness practice deepened when I became a facilitator for Dr. Coholic's HAP groups and I began to generate a deeper understanding and learning of mindfulness concepts.

Prior to becoming a part of Dr. Coholic's research team, my mindfulness practice was limited to a 15-minute daily meditation practice. Although this can yield great benefits, I quickly realized that mindfulness is more than just meditation. I began to incorporate mindfulness into all aspects of my life and in particular, I began to become more aware of my thoughts, feelings, and emotions and the importance of expressing them. My self-awareness expanded and I began to have a more intimate connection with myself and as a result, I increased my self-confidence. Prior to facilitating the group, I read several of Dr. Coholic and colleagues' books and articles in addition to books on mindfulness by Jon Kabat Zinn.

I feel that my individual mindfulness practice and thorough knowledge of the concepts contributed to the success of my facilitation of the program. Throughout the process of the group, despite my busy life, I remained devoted to the practice of mindfulness. Each day, I would wake up and engage in meditation before I began my day. Additionally, throughout the process of the research, several fears related to the research process arose, such as fearing that attrition would not allow for me to have a sufficient sample size and that participants would judge me as a facilitator. The practice of mindfulness allowed me to let go of the things that I could not control, witness fearful thoughts, and recognize that they would pass. My own mindfulness practice provided me with lived wisdom of the concepts and I was also able to share my own struggles with the participants. I felt much more confident leading the group when I had a thorough knowledge of the mindfulness concepts.

Additionally, I feel that my mindfulness practice also contributed to how I successfully delivered the HAP sessions. I was able to reflect and be authentic with myself and understand areas where I required improvement in my facilitation skills. For example, at the onset of the group, I felt very uncomfortable about my ability as a facilitator as I lacked experience in this

domain of practice. I experienced feelings of uneasiness in my body. As a result of my own mindfulness practice, I was able to witness my thoughts and feelings without letting them take over, which enabled me to transform these feelings and become a more confident facilitator. Additionally, I was authentic with myself and recognized that I needed to develop my skills as a group facilitator. I ensured that I was the lead facilitator in my group and I did not rely on my more experienced co-facilitator, Heather, to lead the activities. This helped me to gain confidence in my leadership skills and experience personal development as a facilitator. Additionally, I experienced a deepened sense of empathy for the participant's individual experiences as I was able to listen to them attentively, be present, and understand where they were coming from. I often found myself trying to rush through all of the program activities as quite often the deeper dialogue would not allow the group to complete all of the scheduled activities. My mindfulness practice allowed me to witness these feelings of time urgency and recognize that the rich dialogue that occurred between the participants was more important than the number of planned activities. I found that my active participation in the group activities prompted a deeper sense of connection with participants.

Overall, I believe that my personal mindfulness practice, a strong sense of empathy and open-heartedness in conjunction with my lived experience contributed to my successful facilitation of the group. I believe that I was able to provide a safe and non-judgmental space for the participants by allowing them to feel heard and supported during their own personal journey. I believe that the space allowed the participants to delve deeper into self-discovery, and exploration as they could be authentic and vulnerable. This may have impacted the students' experiences of the program as they were provided with a comfortable environment.

Facilitating HAP has contributed to my personal growth as I have witnessed the transformative and healing powers of both mindfulness and arts-based methods. My newfound experience with group work has shown me its power to enhance connectedness and mutual aid. I feel a sense of honor and privilege for having been provided with the opportunity to facilitate these groups and be a part of Dr. Coholic's research team. Becoming immersed in the group as part of my research allowed for me to be more in tune with my analysis as I had a connection to the participants and I understood them on a deeper level. This allowed me to generate a greater understanding of their perceptions, feelings, and experiences. I watched them grow and transform throughout the group process, and I could relate with their struggles. I could better understand what they were communicating in the post-interview as I had witnessed their experiences. Furthermore, I feel that I am now equipped with another essential skill for my career as a social worker. Moving forward, I plan to incorporate mindfulness-based practice and group work in my realm of social work practice.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

#### **Qualitative Data Collection**

Individual interviews were conducted pre-and post-group because qualitative interviewing added an additional dimension and allowed me to answer my research questions (Mason, 2013). The qualitative interviews provided real-life examples of how participants perceived the program and how it was beneficial (if at all), and what the challenges were with its implementation.

Data collection consisted of face to face semi-structured interviews which is similar to a conversation with a purpose (Mason, 2013) prior to the group and immediately after the group. My questions were open-ended, pertinent, and meaningful to the HAP program, ethical and

sensitive to the interviewee's rights, and they ensured that the interview flowed and the focus remained on topics relevant to my research questions (Mason, 2013). The pre-group interviews were completed with participants anywhere from a month to one week before the program began. I started to invite interested participants to come for a personal interview at the end of September 2018 and this continued until late October 2018 when groups were full. The interviews occurred over this wide time span because recruitment was a lengthy process. I already had experience with research interviews from assisting with Dr. Coholic's research, however, my experienced co-facilitator, Heather, assisted me with the first interview to offer guidance. The rest of the pre-group interviews were completed by me.

I began to prepare for the post-interviews during week 11, when I asked group members to commit to a time to complete their interview. Additionally, I consulted with Dr. Coholic to secure additional space at the university so that the majority of the post-interviews could be completed simultaneously by me and the three other co-facilitators. I did this to ensure that I was able to complete the majority of the interviews as I worried that I may have difficulty having participants commit to an interview once the group was completed and we lost weekly contact. I completed 10 of the post-interviews and my co-facilitators assisted with five interviews for a total of 15 interviews. The majority of the post-group interviews occurred immediately following the final group session (week 12). However, there were some exceptions to this as some participants had expressed to me that they were unable to attend the last group or there were some scheduling difficulties, therefore their interview was scheduled at a time after group 11. Sophia was an exception to this as she was unable to attend HAP sessions after the Christmas break, therefore she completed these measures in January 2019. She attended seven sessions in total. Both Charlotte and Katharine were unable to stay after the last session therefore both of

their interviews occurred within two weeks after the last group session. Please see Appendix E for an example of interview questions.

The interviews were anywhere from 12 minutes to one hour in length. The interviews were recorded using the equipment in the lab which consisted of a digital audio recorder. For confidentiality purposes, once the interview was complete, the audio recordings were transferred to a computer in the lab and then immediately transferred to a Google drive, which was password protected and only accessible by me. Once the audio recordings were securely transferred to the Google drive, they were then deleted from the computer. Hard copies of the consent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at the university and will be stored there for a period of five years after my thesis is complete and accepted.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

Two standardized self-report measures were used. The pre-group measures were completed anywhere from a month to one week before the program began. Once a participant emailed me and expressed interest in the program, I invited them to come to a personal interview where they also completed both the Ryff Psychological Well-Being scale and the Five Facet Mindfulness scale. This data collection started in late September 2018 and ended in late October 2018. The post-group measures were completed at the last session (group 12). There were some exceptions to this as some participants had expressed to me that they may not be able to attend the last sessions, therefore they completed their post interview and both scales prior to session 12.

The first measure used was the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). It is an instrument which measures five facets of mindfulness which include observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience.

Thirty-nine test items using a 5-point Likert scale were used to measure how participants feel about each statement provided (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). This test took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Scoring was achieved by adding up scores in each individual category (some items required reverse scoring) to achieve a score for each section, then dividing the total scores by 39 to achieve a single mindfulness score. Higher scores were associated with a higher level of mindfulness. Reliability and validity of the scale is demonstrated by Christopher, Neuser, Michael and Baitmangalkar (2012) who explored the psychometric properties of the scales. The aim of their study was to evaluate the factor structure of the scale in a sample of both meditators and non-meditators. They used a confirmatory factor analysis to examine the structure of the scale and found that reliability and validity of each of the five facets in the scale were acceptable. This measure was available for use on the public domain of the internet and was readily accessible. Please see Appendix F for an example of the FFMQ.

The second scale was the Ryff scale which measures psychological well-being. This tool consists of 42 items that measure multiple facets of psychological well-being including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Villarosa & Ganotice, 2018). It uses a Likert scale ranging from one to six so that participants can strongly disagree or strongly agree with a statement. Reliability and validity of the scale is demonstrated by Villarosa and Fraide (2018) who investigated the psychometric properties of the scale with teachers in the Philippines and found that it was an adequate measure of psychological well-being, and that the six different measures as listed above are distinct and support the six-factor psychological well-being scale. This measure took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Scoring was achieved by adding up scores in each individual category (some items required reverse scoring) to achieve a score for each section,

then dividing the total scores by 42 to achieve a single psychological well-being score. Higher scores were associated with a higher level of psychological well-being. I obtained permission to use this measure from its original creator Dr. Carol Ryff.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Data collected from the audiotaped interviews were transcribed with no modifications and then coded. This process allowed for the development of themes that were embedded in the personal verbatim interviews (Van Manen, 1990). A thematic analysis was used to analyze my data because it is a widely used method that allows for the identifying, analyzing, and reporting of patterns in qualitative data while offering flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2008). I followed the six steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2008):

Step 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data,

Step 2: Generating initial codes,

Step 3: Searching for themes,

Step 4: Reviewing themes,

Step 5: Defining and naming themes,

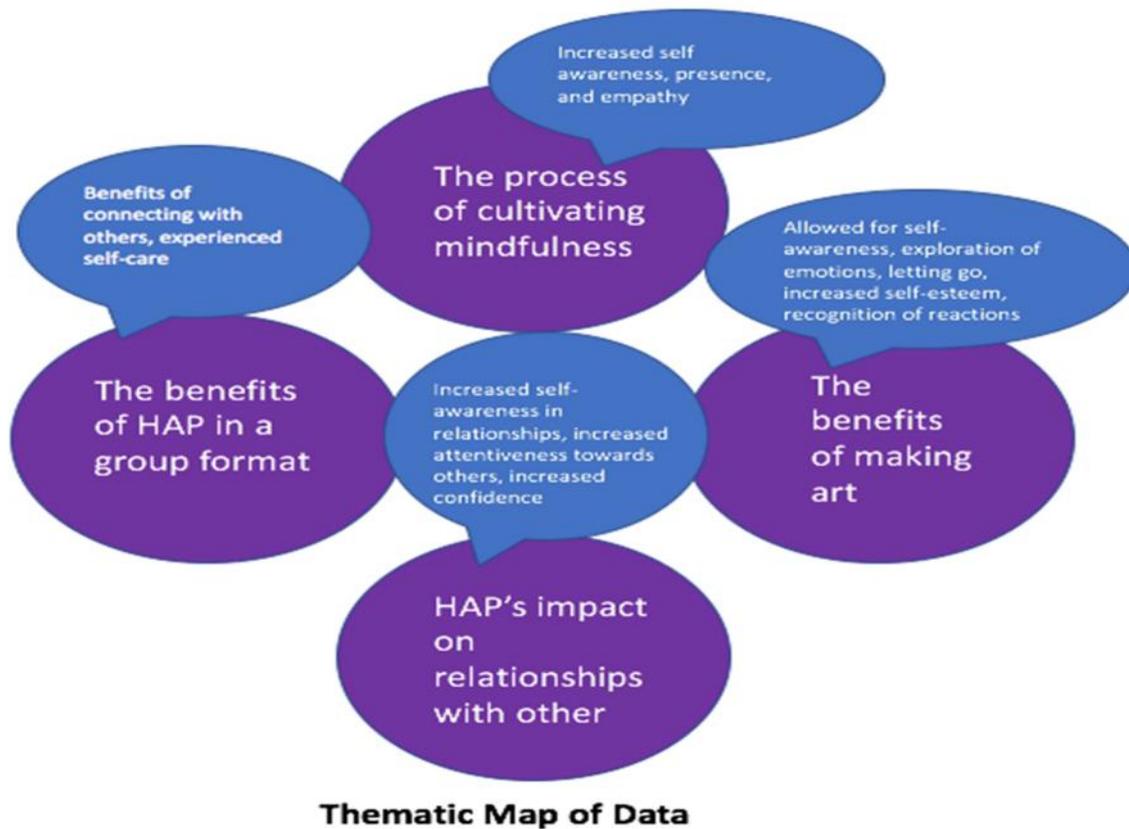
Step 6: Producing the report (p.87).

I began the analysis by familiarizing myself with the data by immersing myself in the transcription process. Through this process, I became very familiar with the content of my data. I would repeatedly read the data and search for meaning and patterns. I started to take notes that would be used later on for coding (Braun & Clarke, 2008). During phase two, I started to generate initial codes by considering several different patterns and themes, and organizing my data into meaningful groups. I coded for as many potential themes as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2008). I coded my data in Microsoft Word by creating a table with two columns. The left side of

the table was occupied by my transcriptions and the right side of the table contained notes and coding extracts. I highlighted sections to identify potential patterns. Once all of the data had been coded, I focused on the broader level of the themes and sorted the different codes into potential themes. I started to consider how my different codes could form an overarching theme. I ended this phase with a collection of main themes containing sub-themes containing all relevant coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). During this phase, I generated a total of seven main themes. Phase four began by reviewing my themes and refining them. I recognized that some themes were not really themes as there was not enough data to support them and they were related to other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2008). During this phase, I sought assistance from Dr. Coholic who provided me with guidance on how to refine some of the themes. Phase five began when I defined and named the themes. I further refined some of the themes as per the suggestions of Dr. Coholic. Once again, I consulted with Dr. Coholic and decided on the final themes that I would present for my analysis. My themes were further collapsed into a total of four main themes containing 15 subthemes within them (Braun & Clarke, 2008). I defined the themes and provided the story of my data in order to clarify the process and offer a final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

The final four themes decided on were: (1) The benefits of HAP in a group format which encompasses the sub-themes: the benefits of connecting with others, and experiencing self-care; (2) The process of cultivating mindfulness which encompasses the sub-themes: increased self-awareness, increased presence, increased empathy, letting go, challenges with learning mindfulness, navigating the challenges; (3) The benefits of making art which encompasses the sub-themes: allowed for self-awareness, exploration of emotions, letting go, increased self-esteem, and increased recognition of our reactions; (4) HAP's impact on relationships with others which encompassed the sub-themes: increased self-awareness in relationships with others,

increased attentiveness towards others, and increased confidence in interactions with others (see Figure 2 below for a thematic map of the themes).



**Figure 2. Thematic Map of Data**

### Quantitative Data Analysis

I hypothesized that students participating in HAP would experience an increase in both psychological well-being and an increase in dispositional mindfulness. Microsoft Excel was used to complete the statistical analysis of the data and achieve a summary of the results. Paired t-tests were used to compare the means of the data scores from the two measures taken before and after participation in the group. Paired t-tests can be used to tell if there is statistical evidence that the mean differences between two sets of observations is significantly different from zero (De Veaux, Velleman & Bock, 2009). Additionally, paired t-tests can be used to determine whether

or not the before and after means of a sample have changed as a result of an intervention (Harmon, 2011). The raw data was entered into Excel Microsoft to achieve a data summary.

The quantitative analysis confirmed my hypothesis as the data scores showed statistical significance on both measures (see Figure 3 below). More details about these quantitative findings will be described in the following chapter.

**Figure 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Participants Pre- and Post-Intervention (n=15)**

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Pre-Intervention</u>	<u>Post-Intervention</u>	<u>p</u>
<b>Mindfulness</b>	<b>2.83 (0.49)</b>	<b>3.41 (0.58)</b>	<b>0.00019</b>
<b>Psychological Well-Being</b>	<b>4.15 (0.82)</b>	<b>4.48 (0.57)</b>	<b>0.02904</b>

*All raw scores were converted into standardized scores (t scores). \*Significant difference*

*(p<.05)*

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Rubin and Babbie (2010), ethical considerations in social work research can include voluntary participation and informed consent, no harm or deception to participants, anonymity and confidentiality, and benefits. I obtained ethics approval on July 23, 2019, through the Laurentian University Ethical Review board for research in the social sciences involving human subjects. Please see Appendix G for a copy of my ethics certificate. Additionally, I am a member of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) and I have a code of ethics that I must adhere to which includes ensuring that personal information remains confidential. To ensure ethical practices, I assigned pseudonyms to participants to ensure that they would not be identified. Raw data has remained secured on a Google drive only accessible by myself, and I ensured that hard copies were kept under double lock and key at Laurentian University in the MQRL lab. Additionally, I ensured that I had permission from

participants prior to taking any photos of their artwork and I did not take any photos of artwork containing their names. Prior to the commencement of the HAP program, I discussed the associated risks and benefits with study participants and ensured that they read over the signed consent form and had the opportunity to ask questions. Please see Appendix H for my consent form. During the first group session, we derived a list of “group rules” in order to create a safe, confidential, non-judgmental environment. Group confidentiality was discussed at the beginning of the sessions to ensure that information that was disclosed during the group was treated with dignity and respect. Before the program began, I provided participants with a list of additional resources where they could receive local supports and services (please see Appendix I). During the group, some participants explored difficult emotions that arose and expressed difficulty processing them. As the lead facilitator of the group, I had experience in helping people work through these difficult emotions. At times, I or another facilitator took group members aside to provide additional assistance to process emotions and ensure that they had access to proper resources and supports.

### **Methods of Verification**

Triangulation was applied by way of collecting data that was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Each method has its own unique strengths and each are vulnerable to its own set of errors, therefore this method makes use of more than one imperfect data collection method (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Triangulation can increase the credibility of my findings as I am using more than one data collection method (Merriam, 2009).

I personally transcribed and analyzed the transcripts from the participant interviews and consulted with my thesis supervisor as a way to check my interpretations which provided further validation of my results and increased investigator triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Additionally, as a way to address research bias, I kept a journal and reflected on my own personal biases and prejudices.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described my study design which articulated specifics such as the methodology, setting, recruitment, participants, group facilitation, and ethical considerations. The section on researcher reflexivity offered my background as a researcher which explained transparency and uncovered some of my biases. Furthermore, I expressed reflections on the process of creating the research, how I prepared to conduct the research, and the importance of having my own personal mindfulness practice. Finally, the qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis were shared and I offered several diagrams to clearly demonstrate the process and provide a brief description of my findings including the four main themes that transpired from my qualitative data. In the next chapter, I will further discuss my study findings and their relevance.

## **Chapter Three**

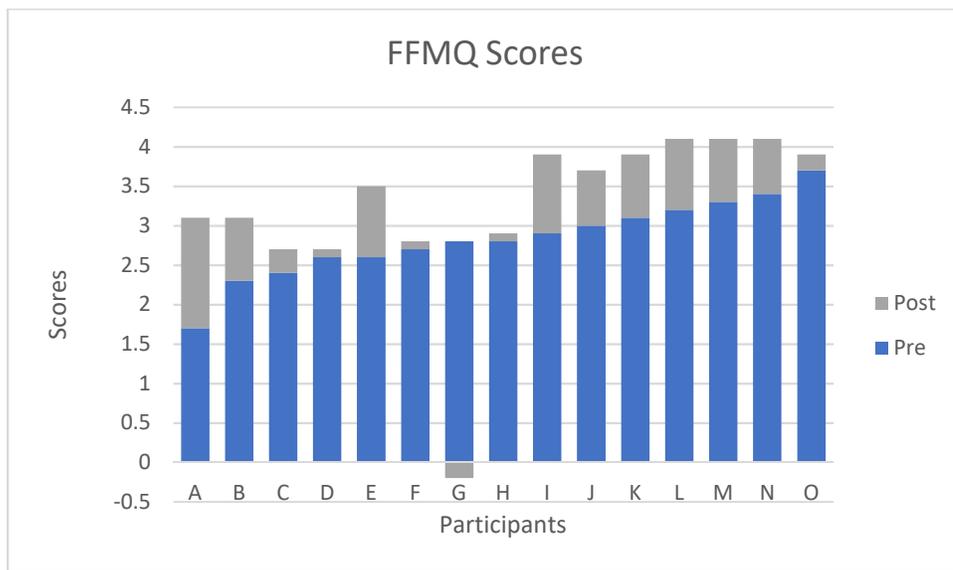
### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

The previous chapter provided a summary of how a thematic analysis allowed for a thorough analysis of participants' semi-structured pre-and post-group individual interviews. The following chapter will provide a detailed overview and discussion of the findings from this mixed-methods design, and will explore the benefits of a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group with university students at Laurentian University. I will provide a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis allowing for an in-depth discussion of the four main themes and their sub-themes derived from the qualitative data.

### **Quantitative Data Interpretation**

Participants completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) before and after the program. Fourteen out of the 15 participants experienced an increase in their level of mindfulness after partaking in the program. One participant experienced a slight decrease in their level of mindfulness after partaking in the program. A paired t-test was performed on the data collected from the FFMQ and it produced a p-value of 0.00019. These results demonstrated that there was a statistically significant change in participants' FFMQ scores after partaking in the program ( $p < 0.05$ ). A small p-value ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis (Rumsey, 2016). A hypothesis is a speculation which is taken for granted and does not have sufficient evidence. It is required to demonstrate proof of the theory in question. Further testing can prove a hypothesis to be true or false (De Veaux, Velleman, & Bock, 2009). In this study, the hypothesis was used to test whether or not the HAP program had an impact on participants' scores related to their psychological well-being and mindfulness (as described in the following paragraph). A null hypothesis is a starting

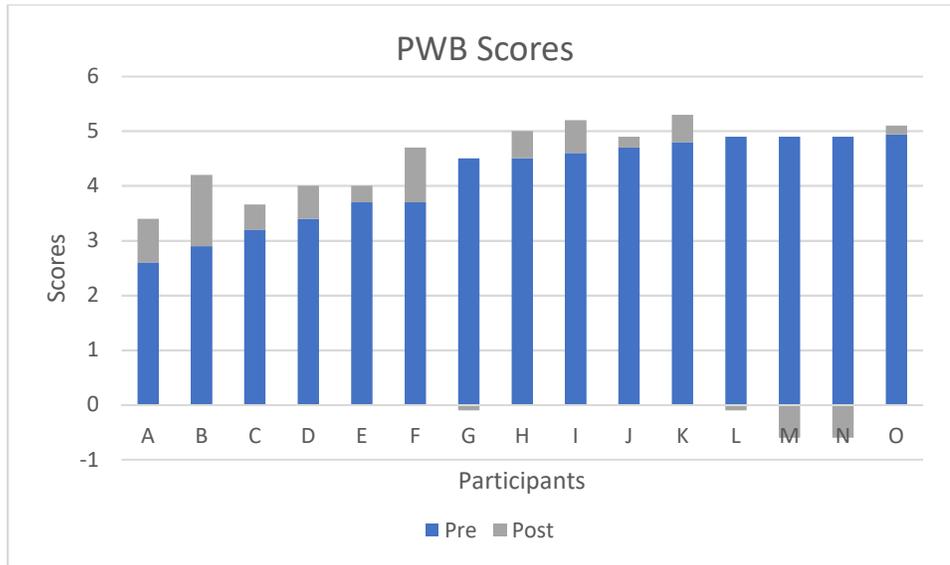
hypothesis and indicates that there is no relationship between the two variables. An alternative hypothesis demonstrates that there is statistical significance between the two variables that were measured (Surbhi, 2017). In this case of this study, there was statistically significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The following chart demonstrates the value of the increase or decrease in a participants' FFMQ scores after partaking in the program.



**Figure 4. FFMQ Scores**

Similarly, participants completed the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) before and after the program. Eleven out of the 15 participants experienced an increase in their psychological well-being after partaking in the program and four participants experienced a slight decline in their psychological well-being after partaking in the program. A paired t-test was performed on the data collected from the PWB and it produced a p-value of 0.02904. These results demonstrated that there was a statistically significant change in participants' PWB scores after partaking in the program ( $p < 0.05$ ). A small p-value ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis (Rumsey, 2016) as study results

demonstrated that the HAP program had an impact on participants' FFMQ scores. The following chart demonstrates the value of an increase or decrease in a participant's PWB score after partaking in the program.



**Figure 5. PWB Scores**

In summary, participants demonstrated a statistically significant increase in both their level of mindfulness and psychological well-being after participating in the HAP program. In particular, there was a larger increase in their mindfulness scores in comparison to their psychological well-being scores. This confirms that the HAP program had an impact on participants' psychological well-being and mindfulness scores. However, given that the sample size was small, further testing with a larger sample and control groups is required in order to determine if results are significant and consistent with the findings reported herein. More importantly, the quantitative results can be used to better understanding the qualitative analysis of pre- and post-group interviews.

### **Qualitative Data Interpretation**

A qualitative data analysis from pre-and post-group individual interviews allowed for the unfolding of four main themes that describe participants' experiences of participating in the program. The four main themes are: (1) The benefits of HAP in a group format; (2) The process of cultivating mindfulness; (3) The benefits of making art; and (4) HAP's impact on relationships with others. The following section provides a detailed description of these four main themes and their subthemes which demonstrates the students' experiences of participating in the program.

#### **Benefits of HAP in a Group Format**

The benefits of HAP in a group format refers to the construction of the group whereby participants felt a sense a connection with others, and experienced self-care. Further categories that support the sub-themes include experiencing increased empathy and understanding of others, experiencing normalization, and benefitting from having access to a safe and non-judgmental group environment.

According to Coholic (2019) social work has a long history of using group work to enable change. Facilitators play a deliberate role in encouraging group cohesion, a sense of belonging, and mutual aid (Coholic, 2019). Groups operate as social systems which are formed when group members interact with one another (Garvin, Gutierrez, & Galinsky, 2017). These group dynamics may hold particular importance for university students who may be feeling socially isolated due to being away from home for the first time and lacking a social support network. Group environments such as HAP encourage group cohesion, support, and mutual aid where group members can offer help to one another. The following sections describe the sub-themes and their categories that comprise the main theme of the benefits associated with delivering HAP in a group format.

### **The Benefits of Connecting with Others**

According to Coholic (2019), group work promotes a sense of belonging and inclusion and it provides an opportunity to form positive relationships with others and experience connectedness. Human beings are social creatures and have a yearning to feel supported, connected, and valued by others. Connecting with others encompasses participants' experiences of feeling supported by group members and facilitators alike. Fae provided an example of how the group acted as a support group for her. She stated: "I think the most helpful is having a support group, it is like a support group to help you get through the hard times in your life."

Furthermore, group members described the group experience as a warm and welcoming environment and experienced a deep sense of connection with other members. Fae revealed that at the onset of the group she struggled with trust issues, and had difficulty expressing herself to other people. However, she felt that the group fostered a non-judgmental environment which enabled her to feel comfortable enough to express herself, and she experienced a sense of connectivity with others. She stated:

I just feel like... I can't explain it, but it is just a really good feeling to be in this group of people like I really connect with them and I am really going to miss them. We are all on the same wavelength almost, like we are all on the same level and I like it a lot. I am just really happy to be here. It is different one on one but when you have everyone together you can really feel that atmosphere and just the way that everyone feels about each other, you can feel that it is like a sensation that goes into your body... it is like an aura that everyone has and it mixes together and it works together. That is how I feel, the second I walk in that door and I see everybody, everything just goes away and I am like "yes I am here" and I look forward to it every week.

She further expressed that she experienced a sense of community within the group:

I think having a community to go to, when you are feeling stressed or when you just don't feel like yourself. I find that this group is this really good to bring you out and to have positivity and happiness like even if I am having a bad day, this group just makes me feel so much better after and sometimes I am even smiling after.

Furthermore, Noah further demonstrated how the group environment invited participants to feel comfortable expressing themselves to one another. He stated:

... it was a joy [being part of the group] it was just this amazement because here in this group ...because of the environment that we are in...we open up...we don't usually open up in this way unless it is like someone really close to us....

These findings are consistent with Coholic and Eys (2016) who examined the benefits of HAP with vulnerable children and found that children reported that HAP helped them to gain peer support, make new friends, and that they felt heard and accepted when participating in the group.

### **Increased Empathy and Understanding of Others**

The concept of empathy refers to “the capacity to (a) be affected by and share the emotional state of another, (b) assess the reasons for the other’s state, and (c) identify with the other, adopting his or her perspective” (De Waal, 2008, p.281). Participants expressed that they experienced an increased ability to understand other people and they were able to appreciate their perspective. Fae explained how the group process prompted her to have a greater understanding of other people. She provided the following example: “It has really opened up my eyes to a new way of thinking and seeing other people’s perspectives. I think I am better able to see other people’s perspectives after this group.”

Jarret further explained that the group process enabled him to understand others better, and he experienced an increased understanding of their thought processes. He explained:

Mainly I was just able to listen to other people’s experiences and be able to reflect on what they say and think “hmm I wouldn’t have done it this way.” Five plus 4 is 9 but also  $3 + 3 + 3$  is 9 so there are different ways of getting to the correct answer as opposed to only one way. So, listening to other people’s ways of doing things and getting to the same conclusion or the same outcome as them, but they did it in a different way.

Furthermore, Noah expressed how he was able to learn about other participants beyond their surface level, and understand them in a deeper more authentic way. In the following example, he explained how he began to understand people better over the course of the groups:

What I found is in this 12 weeks is that I have learned who people are better, you can't tell who someone is in the beginning...some people I found that more or less I learned... I saw their soul in a sense...I don't know...but others...I was like who are they? And I was like, "oh I see them now." I don't know if you remember those pictures that were like a scrabble and when you allow your eyes to relax... so I find with certain people it is like that picture... who are they? And you see the image.

These examples provided by participants clearly articulate how they were able to empathize with others. Similar to my findings, Coholic and Eys (2016) have explored the benefits of HAP with vulnerable children and have also found that HAP increases participants' empathy towards others.

### **Normalizing**

Participants expressed that their interactions with others in the group enabled them to recognize that others shared the same or similar experiences, and they were able to identify commonalities with the other person. These experiences made participants feel less excluded and isolated from their peers. Through the ongoing dialogues and conversations that occurred amongst group members, Mateo recognized that he shared some of the same experiences and feelings as the other members. He provided the following example: "Sometimes I feel isolated like I am lonely and it is sobering in a way to realize that other people feel this way."

Furthermore, throughout the weekly group sessions, participants began to become more comfortable with each other and shared more personal details about themselves. This helped them to have a greater sense of connection and relate to one another. They recognized that they all had their own struggles in life. Laura explained that it was reassuring to understand that others were going through similar experiences. She provided the following example:

I think I just noticed how everybody's personalities are and I think that you can also see how people think about themselves and how their thought processes are and then kind of relate it back to your own life and then you see how other people also have insecurities and are pretty much also going through the same thought processes and then you are like... "wow I am not alone."

The non-judgmental group environment allowed the members to share their struggles with one another which promoted normalization. Similar to my findings, Coholic (2019) also reports that the group work process of the HAP program encourages normalization.

### **Benefits Attributed to Having Access to a Safe and Non-judgmental Group Environment**

Non-judgment is at the heart of mindfulness practice. Non-judgment entails accepting people as who they are. Coholic (2019) reported that participants have felt that they can be authentic in HAP and that they do not have to pretend to be someone other than themselves.

Erin expressed her spiritual beliefs during one group session. She explained how she felt that numbers that she saw in a dream were valuable to her and had spiritual meaning. During that session, other participants were very receptive to her explanation of how the numbers held meaning for her. She felt comfortable enough in the group to express this element of herself and stated that:

Whether or not I would have shared that [perspectives on spirituality] at the very beginning, I don't know but because those conversations came up a little towards the end or the middle, I knew that I could share that and I felt comfortable sharing that as I knew that people would be receptive.

Furthermore, Fae expressed that at the onset of the group, she had great difficulty expressing her opinion with others as she lacked self-confidence. She felt that she could be authentic in the group as she was free to express herself without fearing judgment from others. She explained:

At first, it was hard obviously as I have some trust issues when it comes to my deep thoughts, but every time you bring out your opinion, there is never a judgment. It is 100%

never judgmental and I think I started seeing that more and more as people brought out new ideas and new ways of thinking.

Furthermore, she explained that throughout the group process she had increased her confidence to provide her opinion. This increased confidence expanded to other areas in her life, as she was more inclined to express her opinion outside of the group and in online forums.

Similarly, Jack expressed how he also felt that the group was a place where everyone could be their authentic selves. He attributed this feeling to a safe environment that was created by the participants. He explained: "I still think it is the people, I feel like it is a place where you can be yourself and you can see other people's true selves."

Katie expressed that prior to participating in the group she lacked a social network, and had a difficult time communicating and connecting with others. She also experienced difficulties expressing herself to other people. However, during the group, she was able to express herself freely and become authentic. She would often release emotions and become tearful during the group. She reported that in the group she felt comfortable doing so and explained:

They [group members] were so supportive of [my] crying and I would look around the room and everyone was smiling at me and it was so sweet, like not smiling like they were laughing at me but smiling like they feel happy when they see me express myself.

Furthermore, in the following example, she expressed how she was able to become vulnerable and authentic in the group environment as she did not experience any judgment from the other participants. She explained:

It is kind of like taking a piece of my heart and putting it on the table and hoping for the best like I guess I feel like people have not been judgmental at all, so I feel ok about doing that, I feel good about doing that. It always makes me feel vulnerable every time I share an experience in my life and it is really hard to do that, but I feel like I get stronger every time that I do that.

Likewise, Noah expressed how he felt very comfortable in the group environment and that he felt that the group contributed to his personal growth. He explained that during the last

group he could sense an energetic component from the other participants. He explained: “I really felt it ... that healing type of energy... I don’t know... it is like a calm... like a peaceful type of experience and you know that it is doing something deep within.”

Prior to the group, several participants expressed how they had difficulty expressing themselves to others and that, initially, they were hesitant to be authentic and vulnerable within a group environment. However, it became evident how having access to a safe and non-judgmental environment prompted participants to open up and express themselves. In doing so this facilitated inner healing as they could freely express their emotions.

### **Experienced Self-Care**

It is critical for students to practice self-care as they often have a myriad of responsibilities which include but are not limited to school work demands, work, friends, family, and additional extracurricular activities. The participants felt that the HAP group was a safe place where they could take their mind off of what was happening in their lives outside of the group and focus on themselves. They felt that the group provided them with an opportunity to engage in self-care as it provided a place for them where activities were already planned, snacks were provided, and they did not have to think about anything else except for focusing on the activities. The environment that was created allowed them to relax and focus on themselves.

Students expressed that the group provided them with an opportunity to engage in scheduled time for themselves. For example, Charlotte was a social work student who also held a part-time job. She had recently become engaged and was in the process of planning her wedding which took up a great amount of her time. She expressed that she was aware that she needed to do something to take care of herself, but could not always find the time. She explained:

I think the group set it in stone for me [time for self-care] as sometimes I talk about how I should do something or take care of myself, but in the group, I was able to actually practice it, like theory to practice.

Likewise, Katharine explained that she was still able to focus on herself within the realms of a university setting and momentarily forget about her academic demands. She provided the following example:

... because the fact that we are able to go into a room and do arts and crafts and forget that we are sitting in a room in a university that two feet away from us there are students doing science and their brains are like poured into this and they are stressed out about different things that they have to do, but we are able to just slip into this world and at that moment that paper is not what you need and you need to let it go, it is not within your realms of capability right now and stressing about it.

Similarly, Dale explained that they typically did not take much time for themselves and that the group provided an outlet for them to practice that. Dale explained:

The whole point of this group is about taking care of yourself on a more mental health inner way, it is forcing you to take care of yourself, even if you don't do anything outside of the group, at least you are having that two hours a week.

Dale further explained that: "It [group] kept me in touch with myself and I used it as a self-care plan."

In addition, Erin a fourth-year social work student who also held a part-time job reported that during the group she experienced self-care. She explained: "I have learned to take care of myself and that is a really big thing for me and I am surprised as it has only been a few months that something this big has happened to me."

Furthermore, Erin also experienced self-compassion through the process of practicing self-care. Erin explained that she would often take care of other people while inadvertently neglecting her own self. She explained:

I think I learned one of the biggest things... just to take time to myself... normally I tend to go out of my way for other people and forget about me. Since the last few months, even I have noticed a difference where I will just take time for myself.

This demonstrates how Erin was able to incorporate the experience of self-care into her own life outside of the group.

It is clear how the group dynamics provided an environment for the participants to experience self-care. Students are often presented with several challenges as university is typically defined as a time of heightened distress (Bewick, Koutsopoulou, Miles, Slaa & Barkham, 2010). Self-care is a practice that can promote heightened psychological well-being. Psychological well-being has been correlated to a student's engagement, persistence, and performance (Moses, Bradley, O'Callaghan, 2016). Therefore, it is essential for students to engage in this practice as it can enhance their psychological well-being and lead to positive academic advancements.

### **The Process of Cultivating Mindfulness**

Participants reported that the group optimized their learning of mindfulness concepts. Sub-themes to this main theme include how participants began to experience an increased sense of self-awareness, an increased awareness of their emotions, an increased understanding of themselves, an increase in empathy towards others, and letting go. Additionally, they became more aware of their surroundings including their environment and the people around them. Participants reported several challenges that they experienced in this process and they provided examples of how they overcame it, and how they began to incorporate mindfulness principles into their everyday life. The following section describes the mindfulness concepts that were cultivated by the participants which includes the challenges they experienced during the learning process.

#### **Increased Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness occurs when a person becomes aware of their deepest truths. They become aware of what is unfolding in their lives and discover the essence of their authentic selves (Diamond, 2010). The following section will demonstrate how the development of self-awareness led to participants experiencing an increased understanding of emotions as well as an increased understanding of themselves.

### **Increased Awareness of Emotions**

Prior to participation in the group, Katie reported that she would cry frequently. She would feel uncomfortable crying in environments outside of the group, however, the group environment provided her with a safe space and an outlet where she could express herself. The group members were very supportive of each other and provided each other with mutual aid. The group environment and the members contributed to Katie becoming more self-aware of her tears and she began to view them in a more positive way. She expressed that another participant, Noah, helped her to understand this. She provided the following example: “Noah taught me about the power of tears or the gift of tears which makes me look at the fact that I cry about everything in a more positive way.”

In another example, Katie also expressed that she had learned to pay greater attention to her emotions. During group, discussions were held about sitting with your emotions and observing them and participants were invited to practice this skill during some meditations. Katie explained that outside of group she continued to practice this skill. She explained: “[I still continue to] pay attention to my emotions and I try to sit with them and take time before reacting.”

Likewise, Katharine began to recognize her emotions and was able to process them in a more effective way as she developed the ability to witness her emotions. She explained: “I found

that I bottle things less when I was unhappy, I was like well...I am going to sit with this [the emotion].”

Similarly, Dale expressed that they developed a greater awareness of themselves which led to improvements in their life. Dale explained:

I am definitely able to notice things faster or I am noticing things that I would not have noticed before and that is half the battle is noticing that so that you can make a change or learn to know how to cope or do whatever you have to do. I am much more aware of those things.

These examples demonstrate how participants became more aware of their emotions and were able to better understand them. This increased their capacity to cope with emotions and become less reactive. They were able to witness and observe their emotions which enabled them to resist the urge to become entangled in them. Similar to my own findings, Coholic (2011) also found that mindfulness-based principles also yielded the potential to help individuals develop self-awareness. Developing a foundation of self-awareness can lead to “improved coping and social skills, problem-solving skills, and feelings of self-esteem” (Coholic, 2011, p. 314).

### **Increased Understanding of Self**

Kabat-Zinn (1994) explained that mindfulness helps us to understand who we are as human beings, and to contemplate our view of the world and our place in it. Participants expressed how their increased self-awareness led to a greater understanding of themselves as individuals. The process of learning mindfulness allowed them to reflect on what was happening in their everyday lives with a heightened sense of awareness. They became more aware of what was going on inside of them, what was meaningful in their lives, as well as areas where they could make improvements.

Prior to participation in HAP, Dale explained that they have experienced ongoing mental health challenges throughout their life. Dale attributed the group to enabling them to experience inner awareness. Dale provided the following example:

In general, it [the group] has made me a lot more constantly cognisant of [my] spiritual/mental health, stuff that is going on inside. I have attended a lot of therapy in my life...if you're not attending it's kind of just like easy to forget so it [the group] is kind of a constant reminder....

In a further example, Dale also explains how they have experienced an increased awareness of their thoughts and actions and their associated causes. Dale explained:

I am noticing that it is easier to notice something that I do or think, or even think back and find the root of where that part of me is coming from and I am making a lot of observations about myself on an emotional and spiritual level.

Likewise, Laura expressed how she developed the ability to pause and become aware of her thoughts and where she was in life. She provided the following example: “[I am just] thinking about where I am at [more] as I never really paused to think before and now I am kind of more mindful about that. I will think about... ‘ok what am I thinking?’”

Similarly, Noah felt that the HAP program helped him to experience a greater understanding of the meaning and purpose of his life. He explained:

There has been a greater reflection within me during the Christmas holidays because I was sick, I was indoors more often and I had that chance to think, so I find that it was a combination of the HAP program and that I was sick. The HAP program contributed to the thoughts of ... “what is my life? What am I doing? What is the meaning of things? Should I be involved in this or should I be behaving this way or how can I improve myself?” This is really central to me and to this moment and I am still thinking about deeper questions about life and myself so I didn't have that before the HAP program, not to that extent not that detailed.

The above noted examples demonstrate how participants increased their self-awareness. Kabat-Zinn (2016) explains that awareness is an extremely important capacity to develop. He explained that it is equally as important as critical thinking and it rarely gets any attention or

training, yet he feels that it is as useful to us as thinking. He stated that any thought can be held in awareness. This greater sense of awareness, which was learned in the HAP program, prompted participants to reflect on their lives and develop a greater understanding of themselves. This can help them to have a clearer understanding of who they are and what they want in life.

### **Increased Presence**

Coholic (2019) explained that often when we are engaged in repetitive tasks (i.e., doing the dishes) our minds wander elsewhere and we are thinking about other things. Many of us fail to actually feel what it feels like to take a shower, such as paying attention to the water on our skin, the feel of the soap and the sponge, and any accompanying bodily sensations. When we are mindful, we bring our attention and focus on what we are doing in the present moment. Once we begin to do so, we may become surprised at what we notice when we are paying attention.

Present moment awareness was frequently discussed during the HAP groups. Participants were taught meditations such as the body scan which enabled them to pay attention to their body parts and any sensations that arose. Likewise, participants were led on a mindful walk where they were encouraged to become aware of details in their environment. Another exercise that was used to demonstrate present moment awareness was leading participants through a mindfulness eating exercise. Participants were encouraged to pay attention to what they were eating, and take in the smells, textures, and sensations in their mouths as they consumed the food. As a result of exposing participants to these exercises, they also learned to incorporate this skill in other areas of their lives as they were able to increase their awareness of their environments.

For example, Mateo explained how he practiced the skill of presence while taking a shower. He provided the following example:

I just find that when I am doing everyday things like taking a shower I am more aware of what is going on because before I was in auto pilot mode, but now it's like I see and feel everything that is happening.

Similarly, Dale provided an example of how mindfulness can generate a greater appreciation when eating a brownie and explained how this concept can be related to other areas of life. Dale explained:

You go through the motions of eating a brownie so many times, it is almost like you are only enjoying the memory of the brownie, but with mindfulness, you actually taste the brownie again instead of just the memory of it... it is sparking new things in your life that were not actually new, but now you are actually paying attention to them.

Dale further explained that “mindfulness is like remembering to pay attention to the world around you and you end up re-finding joy again.”

Likewise, Noah explained how he learned to pay more attention to his environment. He was able to pay attention to details that he would have otherwise not noticed prior to learning the skill of being mindfully present. He explained:

I was walking once, I remember up a flight of stairs and holding the handrail... I was actually aware of it in a way that I had not been before and I looked at it and I was like “wow this handrail is made up of wood” and I never thought that way before and what it was made of or the fact that it was there... but here I was aware of the material, the texture, how it felt...

The above noted examples clearly demonstrate how the HAP program was successful in teaching the participants the skill of mindful presence and how they were able to use this skill in their everyday life.

### **Increased Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to understand another person's world from the other person's perspective. It requires an individual to pay attention to another person and let a part of themselves flow into the other person in order to see things their way (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2013). Empathy allows a person to identify with another individual, appreciate their reasoning,

and embrace their perspective (De Waal, 2008). Mindfulness can increase empathy as mindful awareness becomes increased. People become less immersed in their own thoughts and emotions. They become more aware of the emotional process which leads them to have a better understanding of another person's emotions (Ridderinkhof, Bruin, Brummerlan, & Bogels, 2016). Another possibility is that when people are mindful they experience less stress. When people are stressed they have less access to higher cognitive processes (Starcke & Brand, 2012) and as a result, they feel less empathetic towards others (Ridderinkhof, Brummerlan, & Bogels, 2016). The following section will demonstrate how participants were able to experience increased empathy towards others and understand them on a deeper level.

Fae reported that the group process had enabled her to become more mindful of what other people in her life were going through. She learned to take things less personally if someone responded to her in a negative way, and she would pause to try to have a sense of appreciation of what was going on in their life. She demonstrated this learning by proving an example of how her relationship with her siblings improved: "I am better able to understand my siblings when they get mad. I am like 'you know what? I know what they have been through and I know what I have been through.'"

She further reported that she has been able to extend this perspective to her other relationships and recognized the importance of seeing another person's perspective. She explained:

I think being able to see their [other people's] perspectives is a huge part of a relationship and a friendship because it can't just be all about you, it is not just you in a relationship or a friendship, it is more than one person.

Similarly, Erin found that she was less bothered by a co-worker that she did not care for as she was able to have an appreciation for what was going on in her life. She reported: "I have a

co-worker at work that I really don't get along with and I have been trying to be more mindful that she has some things going on in her life.”

Likewise, Tiana also felt that it was important to be kind to others because you never know what they are experiencing. She explained: “... You never know what someone is living so just be conscious of that so always be kind because they might be having a bad day.”

During the group process, exercises were used to promote a greater understanding of others. For example, Emotion Mix and Match encouraged participants to work together to match facial expressions with feeling words. This activity prompted participants to have a discussion about how you cannot always assume what another person is feeling. Further discussions occurred in the groups pertaining to understanding others, not making assumptions about others, and not taking things personally. Participants identified that they do not always perceive others correctly and it is important to not make judgments. These discussions and group exercises encouraged participants to develop the skill of empathizing with others.

### **Letting Go**

Letting go is a foundational attitude of mindfulness practice. It entails letting things be as they are, as we let go of the urge to grasp for what we want. We adopt an attitude of non-attachment (Kabat-Zinn, 2016). Participants reported that the art-based activities persuaded them to adopt an attitude of letting go. Many of the participants did not consider themselves to be artistic and experienced self-judgment. During the group process, participants were reminded to practice refraining from judging their art work and to allow the process of creating the art work to unfold. Participants felt that the art-based activities prompted new learning and they were able to understand this concept of mindfulness through the process of creating art.

Noah explained that he was uncomfortable with painting and preferred to use other arts-based mediums. However, he did engage in painting activities. He noticed that his attitudinal barrier of forcing something to be what he wanted it to be eventually shifted and he allowed something new to emerge. He provided the following example:

Some of the painting activities... that is not my gift, so I didn't know sometimes what to do or what to paint... but I just let go and I surrendered and after I let go and I surrendered, there was something there.

Likewise, Laura explained that she struggled internally as she battled with perfectionism. The art-based activities enabled her to experience the process of letting go and she hoped to incorporate this message into her daily life. She explained:

I also found that for a lot of the activities that I was able to not stress about it and be a perfectionist about it because for a lot of things I am, but for this it doesn't matter. Hopefully, I will be able to apply that to my life.

It is clear that the arts-based activities enabled participants to adopt an attitude of acceptance and letting go. The processes of creating art allowed them to learn this concept as they created space for acceptance in order to let things unfold. It is important that participants learn the foundational attitudes of mindfulness as they can be applied to all areas of life.

## **Challenges**

Participants reported several difficulties that occurred when they experienced the process of cultivating mindfulness. Almost all journeys in life are guaranteed to have some difficulties. Mindfulness requires a person to move outside of their comfort zone in order to experience something different. This change can cause a person to feel uncomfortable. It is common for people to feel that they cannot meditate and feel that their mind will never be quiet. However, mindfulness is about experiencing the journey that unfolds during the process rather than the destination (Alidina & Marshall, 2013). The following section will detail the difficulties that

participants experienced during the process of learning mindfulness and how they learned to overcome and navigate these challenges and adopt mindfulness practices into their current lives.

### **Distractions**

Throughout the group process, participants were exposed to several different types of meditations such as a body scan, a walking meditation, an eating meditation, a sound meditation as well as meditations that depicted different sceneries such as a nature and beach scene. This was done to expose participants to different types of meditations that may or may not resonate with them.

Throughout the groups, Jarret always expressed that he found the meditations challenging as he became overwhelmed with thoughts. In his post-interview, Jarret explained that he experienced a multitude of difficulties during meditation. He provided an example to describe his experiences with meditation:

I can't do the mindfulness [referring to the meditation component], I can't do the texture, I can't do the breathing, my mind wanders 100% and even when I try to bring it back it comes back for maybe 10 seconds and I start thinking of different things.

Although Jarret was able to incorporate some of the mindfulness techniques into his life after the groups, such as embracing an attitude of acceptance, non-judgment, and gratitude, meditation was not a practice with which he planned to continue.

On the contrary, Charlotte reported that she enjoyed the meditations, however, distractions in the room took away from this experience. She explained:

I liked the meditation a lot and other people didn't and I would find it difficult if they were not sitting, I don't like that, I understand that they didn't like it, but I wished they would have sat still because I really enjoyed the meditation and they kind of took it from me.

In order to assist participants who were having difficulties with the meditation, they were offered plasticine so they could focus on modeling a word or an image that was depicted in the

meditation. Participants who reported that it was difficult to meditate due to overwhelming thoughts were invited to befriend their thinking and allow it to be there by observing their thoughts. Discussions occurred during group sessions, where participants were encouraged to refrain from suppressing their thoughts during meditation, and they were instructed to simply witness them and let them pass like waves in the ocean (Kabat-Zinn, 2016).

### **Demands of Balancing Life**

All of the participants in the study were full-time students. Many of the students juggled school alongside finding time for friends, family, romantic relationships, and jobs. Several of the participants reported that they found this challenging and they often became overwhelmed with school assignments, which made it difficult to find time for other activities and people in their lives. This led to them feeling distracted and finding it difficult to stay present when they were engaging in the arts-based activities.

Donna was a full-time social work student, who was also in a relationship and juggled a part-time job which required her to work shift work. She reported that at times, she had difficulty engaging in the activities as she felt overwhelmed with what was going on in her life outside of the group and she was experiencing fatigue. She provided the following example:

It just depends on how busy of a day I had before. If I worked the night before and then I had to work that day and I am tired, then sometimes it is harder to engage [in the activities] as much as when you have energy.

Similarly, Fae also reported that she had difficulty practicing the exercises when she was feeling overwhelmed with school demands. She provided the following example to demonstrate the times when she felt it was difficult to engage in the activities:

When there is so much on my plate, sometimes it is really hard to have that mindset because you are really trying to push every other commitment out of your life, like your schooling, your assignments that are coming up, your tests, those things take precedence in my mind and it is really hard to stop it.

Despite the fact that participants had several other important commitments outside of the group, they remained committed to the group and attended on a regular basis. On some rare occasions, I did receive correspondence from some participants explaining that they would be absent for a session due to school assignments.

### **Experiencing Difficult Emotions and Sensations**

During meditations, sometimes students would experience the arising of difficult emotions. According to Alidina and Marshall (2013), when we turn inward, we increase the possibility that we will notice and process emotions, that may have otherwise been suppressed. During one meditation, participants were guided to explore a wide range of different emotions. Erin provided an example of her experience with this meditation: “There was one that I remember, the emotion one [meditation], I remember connecting to that one when you said try to feel sad, like I teared up, so that one really hit me for some reason.”

The meditation enabled Erin to recognize and process the emotion she was experiencing in a healthy way as she was able to express it.

Another meditation that participants were exposed to was the body scan. Some participants reported that they enjoyed this meditation, however, Sophia reported that it made her feel uncomfortable. She explained:

I get too overwhelmed about the sensations that I feel in my limbs and I really don't like that and I can't think about the things in my mind, so I guess I feel really overwhelmed when I do that. Especially my feet, I hate feeling my feet.

Despite feeling this way, Sophia revealed that after her participation in the group that she still continued to practice and experiment with meditation by using a meditation app that she had on her phone, even though it continues to be a struggle. Exposing participants to several different

types of meditation throughout the group process ensured that most participants were enabled to find a particular type of meditation that resonated with them.

### **Navigating the Challenges**

Despite some of the challenges that participants experienced during the process of cultivating mindfulness, participants were still inspired to continue to incorporate mindfulness-based techniques that they were taught in the group into their daily lives.

Donna reported that she found meditation to be very challenging as she would also become distracted by her thoughts. However, during the post-interview, she revealed that she had benefited from being exposed to meditation as she experienced a greater ability to maintain presence. She explained:

The meditation was very difficult, but at the same time, it was the biggest learning experience because if I could do it for two seconds, this was better than what I could do before, as I wouldn't be able to do it before.

She recognized that learning meditation is a process and that even though her changes were small, she had still made some significant progress.

Furthermore, Charlotte explained that she had benefitted from being exposed to several different types of meditations as she had learned new techniques. She stated: "I learned that there were several different types of meditation which I had never learned before, even the tai chi, that was weird for me at first but then I kind of liked it."

Both participants articulated that although the meditations were uncomfortable and unfamiliar to them, they were still able to benefit from the experience of practicing them. The next section details how participants began to incorporate mindfulness and art-based activities into their lives.

### **Adaptation of Mindfulness and Arts-Based Activities into Present Life**

Participants explained that after the program that they still incorporated some of the mindfulness and arts-based techniques into their life. Some participants explained that they were inspired to continue with meditation and use applications such as Insight Timer on their phone to guide their practice. Many participants expressed that they still planned to continue to use art-based activities in their lives.

Dale explained that they had planned to use the Me as a Tree activity to check in with themselves. Dale further explained that the group taught them to be more present with their art. Dale had always enjoyed doing art, but now they explained that when they do it, they bring more presence to the process. Likewise, Erin explained that the group had inspired her to continue to use art and she will often do art with her friends. She explained:

I definitely have started painting more and it is an activity that I suggest for my friend group like instead of going out, I ask that we just stay in and paint instead of going out and just talk, so this is one that I definitely practice more.

Mindfulness is a process and participants were encouraged to be gentle with themselves and not judge themselves when they experienced difficulties. Despite the challenges that were experienced by participants, they still enjoyed the process of learning mindfulness and several participants reported that they had started to incorporate some of the activities and skills that they had learned in their daily lives and planned to continue to do so.

### **The Benefits of Making Art**

Arts-based methods are highly engaging, fun, and enjoyable (Coholic, 2019). Van Lith, Schofield and Fenner (2013) have found that arts-based methods promote self-discovery, self-expression, and are beneficial for relationships and social identity. The following section details participants' experiences with making art. The arts-based activities promoted the learning of

mindfulness concepts, provided outlets for self-exploration and the exploration of emotions, and increased participants' self-esteem.

### **Allowed for Self-Awareness to Unfold**

Mindfulness is closely connected to self-awareness. Becoming aware of our thoughts and feelings allows for a change in our lives. Self-awareness enables us to identify how our thoughts might be unhelpful and once we recognize this we can begin to change our thoughts.

Mindfulness allows us to become curious about our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. We begin to refrain from judging our thoughts and feelings, and adopt an inquisitive attitude towards them which fosters the development of self-awareness (Coholic, 2019). The following activities demonstrate how participants were able to enhance their sense of self-awareness through the process of making art.

### **Me as a Tree**

During one session, participants were asked to draw themselves as a tree. This activity helps participants to discover and talk about themselves (Coholic, 2019). Participants identified that this activity enabled them to discover different elements about themselves that they had not noticed before. Dale explained how the activity promoted them to think about themselves beyond a physical person. Dale stated:

I really liked [me as a tree] because it made you think about your place in the world a little bit because you want a tree that represents yourself but it made me think... you have this idea of yourself, but you are more than just what we think about ourselves, so I was trying to incorporate that and it made me think about a lot physically, I guess which is something I don't do a lot of as I tend to disassociate a lot and I am always in my head so just thinking of myself as more than a physical person.... my mind started to shift after that session I think.

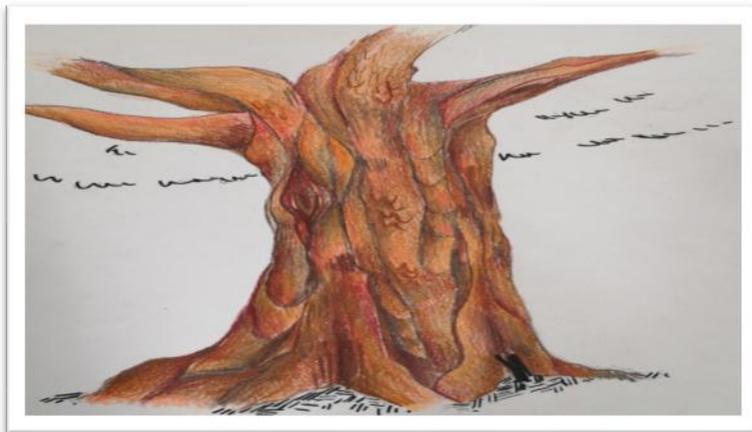
Similarly, Katie further explained that the exercise prompted her to discover new things about herself and stated: “I found [me as a tree] super helpful because it taps into my intuition rather than my logic so I see things come out of me that I did not know were there.”

It is clear how the exercise promoted self-awareness as the activity allowed participants to discover new things about themselves that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

The following images provide examples of this exercise:



**Figure 6. Me as a Tree Group Drawings**



**Figure 7. Me as a Tree Individual Drawing**

The above photographs were taken during the groups and show how every group member represented themselves in a unique manner. For instance, in the top far right photograph of

Figure 6, Katie described how her broken heart was in the water and out of this broken heart emerged branches containing different emotions such as happy and sad. She described how a broken heart can lead you to a different path on life and that it can be an opportunity for growth.

### **Rock Close**

At the end of each session, participants passed around a rock that I had found outside. Each participant held the rock while other group members listened intently. The participant holding the rock would discuss what they liked, what they learned, and what they found challenging during the group. Mateo explained that this tool had increased his ability to self-reflect and that he incorporated this activity into his daily life. He would use the concepts each day to check in with himself. He provided the following example:

I kind of do the same thing every day and think about one good thing that happened today and what did I learn today and what was challenging and not every day there is something that I learned or sometimes there was nothing challenging but it helps.

It is clear how both of the above-noted activities prompted participants to become more self-aware and understand their thoughts and feelings as well as make new discoveries about themselves.

### **Allowed for Exploration of Emotions**

Participants engaged in the activity Painting on a Line where a string was hung across the room which held a piece of paper attached by a clothespin for each group member. Participants were instructed to paint a picture without holding the paper with their hands (Coholic, 2019). Participants often experienced feelings of frustration while engaging in this activity as it was difficult to accomplish the image that they hold in their imagination. This activity often prompts a discussion about how mindful people do not avoid difficult emotions and they express them (Coholic, 2019).

This activity allowed Sophia to explore her emotions and notice how she was blaming other people for hindering the image that she had created in her imagination. Due to the instability of her paper being held on the string by a clothespin, she experienced difficulty allowing it to unfold on the paper as she had imagined it. She explained: “My favourite activity [painting on a line] .... that one was my favourite because it activated a lot of emotions [I noticed] I was angry at other people and like blaming them.”

The activity led her to recognize that she was blaming people in her everyday life and she recognized that she needed to take responsibility for her own emotions as opposed to projecting them upon others. She explained: “I find in day to day life I try to blame things on other people. My struggles are other people’s faults, but really, I should take responsibility for myself and that line painting really illustrated that.”



**Figure 8. Group Two Painting on a Line**

The above image illustrates the activity of Painting on a Line. This image was taken from the evening group.

### **Letting Go**

Painting on the line also promoted participants to understand the concept of “letting go” which is a foundational attitude of mindfulness. Katharine recognized that she had to let go of

the image that she had in her imagination and adapt to what transpired on the paper and embrace acceptance. She explained:

For instance [painting on a line] was one of my favourites because... I still have the picture... it may not look exactly how I imagined but it is still the picture that I desired and it is like flowing and changing with what is around you so I found that very positive.

Likewise, Jack recognized that he could not control what others around him were doing.

He adapted by letting go and going with the flow and allowing the movements of others around him to guide his painting. He explained:

The one I really liked was [painting on a line], what I did for mine is.... I realized I could not control [others], so all I would do is put my brush in a spot and let everyone else's wiggle move it [the page] for me.



**Figure 9. Group One Painting on a Line**

The above image shows a second photograph illustrating Painting on a Line taken from the morning group.

### **Increased Self-Esteem**

Participants participated in Hand Beautiful which is an activity designed to promote self-esteem. Participants were instructed to trace their hands on a piece of craft paper twice. On the left side of the page, they were asked to write words to describe themselves. The second step required them to pass their page around the table and other group members were instructed to write positive attributes about the other participants in the hand on the right side of the paper.

Participants were delighted to see what other group members had written about them when they received the craft paper belonging to them back. Participants commented that others showed them a different way to view themselves and that other participants did not see their mistakes in the same way that they did.

Dale explained how wonderful it was to see what others had written about they when they received the hand artwork back. Dale explained:

We recently did [hand beautiful] where everyone wrote what they thought of you, that was really meaningful to me because we all have this idea of ourselves in our head and it was just like I was not expecting to like feel like that on the inside when I looked [at]what everyone thought of me... I felt like my heart stop and it was so nice.

Mateo reported that he struggled with his self-esteem and was often unable to recognize his strengths. At the onset of the group, he struggled to find positive attributes about himself. Mateo explained that as a result of participating in the group his self-esteem had increased. He reported that prior to beginning the group he would not have been able to find many positive attributes about himself, however, he was now able to find several positive attributes about himself. After the group, he reflected on the activity again and provided the following example which demonstrated his experiences about the activity:

The things we did with the hands, writing stuff out about ourselves and then seeing all the positives people wrote about me, that really put into perspective that my idea of myself is not necessarily other people's idea of myself and that helps a lot with my reactions to the emotions that I am feeling that come about from situations in life.

This activity was essential to assist participants to look deep within themselves and identify and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, it demonstrated to participants that they often unnecessarily judge themselves and other people do not always see their limitations in the same way that they do. The following pictures demonstrate the activity:





**Figure 11. Bad Day Better Group Drawings**

The above picture depicts how participants made their bad day better. On the left participants were instructed to paint a bad day, then fold the page over so that some of the paint would transfer to the other side. They were then instructed to make the bad day better on the right side and then again fold the paper over to the left.

The above section demonstrated how the arts-based activities provided several benefits to participants as they were able to understand the underlying messages behind the activities and incorporate them into their own lives. Furthermore, the arts-based activities facilitated further learning of mindfulness-based concepts. The next and final theme will detail how HAP contributed to participants improving their relationships with others.

### **HAP's Impact on Relationships with Others**

Participants identified that participating in HAP inadvertently improved their relationships with other people. They reported increased self-awareness in relationships, the

ability to be present with others, and finally, they experienced increased confidence in their interactions with other people. Similarly, Bihari and Mullan (2014) reported that mindfulness is correlated with increased fulfillment in interpersonal relationships. Mindfulness increases presence which allows people to “be with” others and it leads to improvements in communication. The following sub-categories demonstrate how HAP impacted participants’ relationships with other people.

### **Increased Self-awareness in Relationships**

Sophia experienced improvements in her relationship with her partner. She reported incidents where she was feeling stressed and she would lash out at him. She felt that participating in the group enabled her to recognize that she cannot blame everything on her partner. She stated: “I have realized that not everything can be blamed on him [participant’s partner] and I used to do that and I think that is the biggest change and that has really helped our relationship.”

Sophia also recognized that her expectations of her partner were unrealistic as she had been expecting him to change things that bothered her overnight. Most of all, Sophia became more self-aware of how her behaviour was negatively impacting the relationship and she was able to create improvements in her communication with her partner.

### **Increased Attentiveness Towards Others**

Tiana explained that she was able to “be with” her friends and family and increase her level of presence. She stated:

[It is important to have] the mindset of being more present [and] in the moment when you are with your friends and your family and not being on your phone when you are with your family.... it could be something as simple as asking my sister how her day was and really trying to be present with her... instead of doing something else when she is answering me.

Increased presence comes with practicing mindfulness and in this example, Tianna demonstrates how the concept can be applied when interacting with friends and family.

### **Increased Confidence in Interactions with Others**

Participants attributed the group environment to enabling them to experience a sense of increased confidence when interacting with others. At the onset of the group, several participants lacked confidence and were reserved in their interactions with other participants. The safe and non-judgmental environment enabled participants to gain skills to interact with others and participants felt that this had a spillover effect on other areas in their life. Mateo explains that he was able to gain confidence through his interactions with group members which led to him being able to talk to people in his classes. He explained:

I gained a little bit more confidence like I am able to talk to people I have never met before, like when I am next to someone in class, I am able to talk to them more as before the group started, I would have only talked to them if I needed to.

Likewise, during the group process, oftentimes participants provided their opinion on something while other group members listened. Fae reported that this increased her confidence and she explained: “Giving my opinion is definitely the biggest thing I have seen ... I am less afraid to give out my perspective on something or to give out my idea on something.”

The above examples demonstrate how participants were able to become more confident by engaging in the group which led to improvements in other areas of their lives.

### **Summary**

These findings contribute to the body of literature of exploring MBIs with university students. Furthermore, it also contributes to the body of literature of exploring HAP with adult populations. Participants found it extremely beneficial to participate in the group and they felt

like it provided them with a sense of community. Participants expressed that they looked forward to coming to the group every week as described by Tabitha:

I looked forward to it [the group]. It was something to do... like to de-stress. I looked forward to it every Wednesday, as it was something exciting....it was a fun time because you get to be a kid and not worry about life.

This example demonstrates the enjoyment that participants felt from attending the group. Furthermore, it is evident that HAP is a suitable and effective way to assist university students in developing their mindfulness skills and increasing their psychological well-being as demonstrated by the quantitative data. Additionally, qualitative data collected from both pre-and post-interviews demonstrate how participants benefitted from participating in a group format; they cultivated mindfulness, they benefitted by creating art, and finally they improved their relationships with other people.

In the following and last Chapter, I will summarize the main findings of the research study, provide the study limitations, and finally discuss the implications for social work and mental health services and supports in higher education.

## **Chapter Four**

This final and concluding chapter will provide a brief summary of the study's purpose, the main findings, and the implications of these findings. I will also highlight the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for future research.

### **Study Summary**

University students face multiple mental health-related challenges. In 2017, a report by Ontario's Universities was published and it stated that the number of students that identify as having a mental health challenge has doubled over the past five years. Universities are also seeing an increase in the number of students struggling with anxiety, depression, and attempting suicide. Student mental health affects more than just post-secondary institutions as it is a social issue which has the potential to impact health care, the workplace, and the economy. It is essential that students have access to services and supports that address their mental health care needs (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2017). Furthermore, individuals residing in Northern Ontario face above-average rates of depressive disorders and higher self-reported rates of mental health. Northern Ontario residents have some of the highest hospitalization rates in the province in addition to facing a fragmented and inadequate system of mental health services and supports (CMHA, 2009). With this knowledge in mind, it is necessary to explore interventions that could be offered in Northern Ontario which could help to address mental health concerns amongst university students.

My research study contributes to the current body of literature that demonstrates the benefits associated with mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) of which the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) is one creative example. Furthermore, it demonstrates how HAP is a suitable and effective mental health promotion and prevention intervention for post-secondary

students. HAP is unique as it easily engages participants and they have fun and enjoy themselves while learning mindfulness concepts. HAP has the potential to become part of a university's strategy to enhance supportive mental health services on campuses.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the feasibility and the suitability of a 12-week arts-based mindfulness-based program with university students in order to help them foster mindfulness skills and improve their psychological well-being. The research questions were: What are the experiences of students who participate in a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group? Does participation in a 12-week mindfulness arts-based group improve university student's skills in mindfulness, and improve their psychological well-being?

The study analyzed qualitative and quantitative data regarding the use of an emerging MBI with university students, which provides further evidence for mental health prevention/promotion supports and services in post-secondary institutions.

A literature review divulged that there have been previous studies that examined the delivery of MBIs to university students, however, the research is limited and there are substantial gaps. The gaps include investigating mindfulness with university students in a Northern Ontario context, the usage of arts-based methods to facilitate the delivery of mindfulness with university students, the effects of HAP on university students' psychological well-being, and the applicability of arts-based methods in social work practice. Furthermore, there is a lack of literature exploring a 12-week MBI intervention as many MBI interventions are eight weeks in duration or less. Therefore, in order to address these gaps in the literature, my research explored the suitability and the benefits of a 12-week art-based MBI with university students within a Northern Ontario context. The following section will summarize the main research findings.

## **Main Findings**

### **1. What are the experiences of students who participate in a 12-week arts-based mindfulness group?**

A thorough analysis of the research data revealed four main themes that highlight participants' experiences with the program. These four main themes are (1) the benefits of HAP in a group format, (2) the cultivation of mindfulness, (3) the benefits of making art, and (4) the impact of HAP on participants' relationships with others. My findings are in alignment with the program goals as previously established by Dr. Coholic and her colleagues which include learning mindfulness skills and concepts; improving self-awareness; developing an understanding of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors; developing self-compassion and empathy; and building strengths (Coholic, 2019).

The main themes in combination with their sub-themes and their categories further illustrate students' experiences of participating in the program. The main theme: The benefits of HAP in a group format encompasses the sub-themes: the benefits of connecting with others, and experiencing self-care. The main theme: The process of cultivating mindfulness encompasses the sub-themes: increased self-awareness, increased presence, increased empathy, letting go, challenges with learning mindfulness, and navigating the challenges. The main theme: The benefits of making art encompasses the sub-themes: allowed for self-awareness, exploration of emotions, letting go, increased self-esteem, and increased recognition of our reactions. The main theme: HAP's impact on relationships with others encompasses the sub-themes: increased self-awareness in relationships with others, increased attentiveness towards others, and increased confidence in interactions with others

These main themes developed through the thematic analysis demonstrate students' experiences in the program. Students improved their psychological well-being and fostered mindfulness skills. As previously explained, university students face a multitude of stressors and participation in HAP offered them a safe non-judgmental place for them to focus on themselves, engage in self-care, and forget about the world around them. Students revealed that they looked forward to attending the program on a weekly basis as they enjoyed connecting to the other participants and had fun engaging in the arts-based activities. The group equipped them with practical skills that they could use in their daily lives to help them mitigate the effects of stress associated with university life and enhance their mindfulness skills.

To further demonstrate group members' experiences with HAP, in session 11 participants were asked to create a group poem where they described their experiences in the group. The following is a poem created by Group Two:

HAP is:  
A place where people are genuine and attentive  
A respectful place where everyone is equal  
A place where people learn from each other  
  
A place to have fun and be creative  
A relaxing, warm, and happy environment  
  
A place where everyone can be unique  
A place where we can learn from others and share laughs  
A place to take care of our inner child and nurture ourselves  
  
A place where we can emerge out of our shell  
A place where we do not feel judged and a place where we belong  
A place where all our worries disappear and we are taken care of  
  
Our past does not define us  
Our unique personalities all mold and create a common goal  
  
Having fun is blissful

The above poem described by participants demonstrates how they felt that the group was a safe and supportive space where they could expose their authentic selves while having fun. It is evident that the group members valued the group experience.

## **2. Does participation in a 12-week mindfulness arts-based group improve university student's skills in mindfulness, and improve their psychological well-being?**

The second research question explored whether a student's participation in HAP improved their mindfulness skills and their psychological well-being. To begin with, the current study findings support the suitability and the effectiveness of HAP for university students as demonstrated by both the qualitative and quantitative data collected from participants. First, data was collected from all of the 15 participants who had completed the program. Therefore, data from all of the participants was represented, providing comprehensive and beneficial feedback.

The quantitative data showed a statistically significant increase in participants' levels of mindfulness after partaking in the study. Furthermore, the qualitative data also supports these findings as the thematic analysis shows themes which supported that the students had developed mindfulness skills and concepts. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative data revealed an increase in participants' level of mindfulness providing further evidence to the effectiveness of HAP's impact on the participant's level of mindfulness. Likewise, quantitative data revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in participants' level of psychological well-being after partaking in HAP. Similarly, the qualitative data supports these findings as a thematic analysis revealed several themes that support the enhancement of participants' psychological well-being. This demonstrates how both qualitative and quantitative data revealed convergent results.

These findings support the suitability and the effectiveness of the program for university students. These results may be indicative of the program's potential to be expanded to the larger university student population as they may also experience similar benefits from participation in the program. Typically, MBIs implemented with university students has typically focused on more traditional mindfulness-based practices such as MBSR. The HAP program is unique as the arts-based methods are fun and engaging. Giamos et al. (2017) found that mental health services on university campuses were inadequate and students experienced long wait times in order to access services. HAP has the potential to address the gaps in student services, as it is an effective prevention and promotion intervention and it is delivered in a group format which has the potential to provide services to multiple students at one point in time.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

#### **Mindfulness and its Relevance to Social Work Practice**

The benefits of mindfulness extend to social workers and the profession as a whole. According to Bindsiel and Kitchen (2017), mindfulness fits perfectly within the helping profession of social work. Mindfulness values self-care, self-acceptance, and being non-judgmental which is a trademark of social work. Mindfulness can improve social work practice as it helps the social worker to reflect on all the layers of experience presented by a situation. It allows social workers to enhance their skills as they are able to stay grounded and be present (Bindsiel & Kitchen, 2017).

Social workers address some of the most challenging social problems in the world and often work in stressful environments where they have to service individuals with high needs with limited resources (Bae et al., 2019). Organizational challenges may include a lack of training, a lack of supervision, high caseloads, and understaffing. Additionally, the system that social

workers work in is complex and multilayered, creating a host of problems, challenges, and frustrations (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). Social workers often hear other peoples' stories about their experiences of trauma, abuse, grief, and mental health contributing to vicarious trauma (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). Social workers face many stressors, such as low pay, extremely high caseloads, and shift work (Thomas, 2016).

Three-quarters of social workers experience symptoms of job-related burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress (Thomas, 2016). Moreover, as a result of job-related burnout, they are prone to experiencing physical and emotional drain, lack of empathy, pessimism, depression (Bae et al., 2019; Diaconescu, 2015), and as a result, they may be emotionally unavailable to their clients (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). Understandably, the social work profession faces challenges in recruiting and training sufficient numbers of social workers to meet the growing need. It is a challenge to retain social workers once they are hired. Oftentimes, social workers become discouraged and leave the profession prematurely (Thomas, 2016).

It is imperative to train social work students to be resilient as they face very challenging work environments. Being an effective practitioner depends not only on knowledge but on the worker's capacity for self-awareness, emotion regulation, and being able to remain empathetic while facing personal distress. Mindfulness training is imperative to help social workers to work in stressful environments. Mindfulness can help social workers increase self-awareness, self-regulate, and increase attentional capabilities which are all required for effective social work practice (Thomas, 2016).

Due to the organizational and client stressors, it is imperative that social workers engage in self-care and develop positive coping strategies. Although, it may be impossible for a social

worker to eliminate the stressors associated with the job, engaging in self-care practices can help to mitigate the high levels of stress (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). Self-care can help an individual to achieve balance in their lives on a mental, spiritual, physical and emotional level, which will enable them to more effectively cope with daily stressors (Collins, 2005).

Implementing self-care can have a positive effect on a person's well-being. Meditation and mindfulness-based activities such as yoga or mindful walking can be effective coping tools for social workers (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011).

Furthermore, HAP can also be used with both social workers and social work students. Several of the participants in the current study were social work students who reported several benefits associated with participating in the study. HAP can help social workers experience self-care as well as learn mindfulness-based concepts. Additionally, HAP offers social workers a place where they can connect, share experiences, and offer insights to one another. Thus, HAP has the ability to equip social workers with coping skills and offer them a safe place where they can learn from one another and express themselves, which will make them more effective practitioners.

In summary, social work can be a very rewarding career as they enhance the lives of others. However, without a regular self-care practice and coping skills social workers are prone to burn out and compassion fatigue (Collins, 2005; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Thomas, 2016). Mindfulness offers social workers a way to become more resilient, to effectively manage their stress, and enhance their own well-being. Mindfulness can help social workers become more effective practitioners as they become better equipped to cope with their own life challenges and struggles in healthy ways (Coholic, 2019), thus enabling them to effectively provide services to others.

## **Therapeutic Presence**

Therapeutic presence is a process whereby the social worker brings their whole self into the interaction with their client. They are present with the client on a physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual level (Bourgault & Dionne, 2019; Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Therapeutic presence is necessary for effective individual therapy or group work in social work practice (Hick, 2010). Mindfulness is a tool which can help social workers to improve their therapeutic presence with their clients as described next.

Social workers are often impacted by their clients' stories of trauma and this can cause them to feel overwhelmed and anxious. They are at an increased risk of experiencing psychological distress due to the helping nature of their profession (Moore & Cooper, 1996). Psychological distress can negatively impact the quality of their interactions with their clients. Mindfulness can help them to mitigate their experiences of stress, anxiety, and depression which in turn can enhance their therapeutic presence with their client (Bourgault & Dionne, 2019).

Additionally, mindfulness helps improve a social worker's capacity to become less distracted (Coholic, 2019), more fully present, and express deep listening towards their clients (Hick, 2010). When social workers are more mindful in their everyday lives, they are more inclined to maintain their presence in a non-judgmental way when interacting with clients (Bourgault & Dionne, 2019). When we practice being present, we allow the client to be just who they are (Aldridge, 2015). In a similar fashion, mindfulness also enables social workers to become more compassionate and empathetic towards their clients (Coholic, 2019) and this is correlated with an increased consideration for others (Bourgault & Dionne, 2019). These critical social work skills enhanced by a regular mindfulness practice can benefit the therapeutic relationship with the client and enhance treatment results (Aldridge, 2015).

Furthermore, mindfulness can harness self-awareness and it can help a practitioner to develop an enhanced sense of self by understanding their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions. In turn, they develop an openness towards clients and a non-judgmental approach (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). This increase in self-awareness can also help a practitioner understand the effects of transference and countertransference in their interactions with clients (Coholic, 2019). Furthermore, self-awareness is also a critical tool for self-reflection. Reflective practice and reflexivity are critical for effective social work practice (Coholic, 2019). Social workers who practice mindfulness enhance their ability to respond to clients more reflectively (Hick, 2010). Critical self-reflection allows social workers to learn from their actions and improve their practice which can lead to improved interactions with their clients (Coholic, 2019). Given these points, mindfulness has the ability to enhance the therapeutic relationship between the social worker and the client, and this can contribute to positive client outcomes and an improved relationship with their client (Hick, 2010).

Thus, it is clear that therapeutic presence is essential in social work practice as it can strengthen the relationship between the social worker and their client, thereby leading to positive outcomes. Social workers who maintain a regular mindfulness practice can develop the skills to improve their interactions with their clients and enhance their own ability to cope with job related stressors. This is essential to ensure longevity in their profession.

### **The Application of HAP in Various Social Work Settings**

The HAP program can be facilitated by social workers in various settings. Social workers are employed in several different occupational settings such as school boards, post-secondary institutions, hospitals, human service agencies, transitional homes, correctional facilities, long term care facilities, and various private and government-funded counseling

agencies for both children and adults. As discussed previously in the literature review, the benefits of HAP have been researched with both adult and youth populations. Therefore, social workers helping clients of various ages may want to consider incorporating HAP into their practice. HAP can be taught to social workers with relative ease. Coholic (2019) published a book entitled *Facilitating Mindfulness* which explored the HAP program with a particular emphasis on social work practice. The book explains the core mindfulness concepts and principles associated with the program, and it provides a detailed outline of the arts-based activities and the delivery of the program. Social workers can be trained in the program by becoming a co-facilitator to an existing group. Once they are fully familiar with the program they can begin to train other co-facilitators to ensure that multiple social workers trained to deliver the program which will ensure its continuity. The HAP program is a strengths-based approach that makes learning mindfulness fun and accessible to people of various ages. The group format allows agencies to meet the needs of several participants at one point in time, which may be beneficial as there is often a lack of available mental health services and long wait lists to access these services. Furthermore, HAP offers a strengths-based capacity building approach which at times may be more appropriate and/or relevant than individualized treatment.

### **Facilitating HAP using Social Group Work**

Social work with groups is a common practice in the profession of social work (Northen & Kurland, 2001), and HAP has been utilized with groups to facilitate change in individuals (Coholic, 2019). Social work with groups promotes a positive way of working with people; it brings out the best in them as it recognizes that each group member has something to offer and contribute to the other members. Effective group work constitutes people interacting together to understand, appreciate, respect, and learn from one another's experiences (Northen & Kurland,

2001). Social work with groups can help to facilitate mutual aid, cohesiveness, create positive relationships amongst group members, promote normalization, help members acquire knowledge and skills (Northen & Kurland, 2001), and provide members with a “sense of belonging and inclusion” (Coholic, 2019, p. 74). In addition, groups provide members with a sense of hope as they become influenced by the optimism of other members (Northen & Kurland, 2001) and it is affirming for participants to be amongst other group members who share common experiences (Coholic, 2019). Also, group work provides members with the opportunity to develop positive relationships. The activities and discussions in group work encourage participants to develop their abilities and understanding of the concepts being taught (Coholic, 2019).

Arts-based methods can merge with social work groups to reveal new strengths and provide powerful benefits to group members. Social workers work with a large variety of diverse groups with different life experiences and verbal abilities. Arts-based activities in a group setting such as HAP provide an effective way for participants to develop an awareness of an internal or personal response. Shared meanings are developed by people interacting together (Shenaar-Golan & Walter, 2016). When arts are used in a group setting this space supports participants becoming acquainted with an activity on a higher more abstract level and enables reflectivity and group discussion (Shenaar-Golan & Walter, 2016). Art used in group work utilizes two communication channels: "the verbal channel, which is more conscious and cognitive, and the visual/kinesthetic channel which is emotional and more subconscious" (Shenaar-Golan & Walter, 2016, p.90).

Artistic creations continue to exist in time and space. During the making and conclusion of the art, the participants are required to engage in a retrospective examination of the creative process. The group space brings together visual, kinesthetic and tangible creative expressions of

the group, which has the potential to bring unresolved trauma to the surface which is often a therapeutic goal of the social worker (Shenaar-Golan, Walter, 2016).

The integration of art in a group setting allows participants to express themselves in tangible ways. They can express themselves as an individual and through collaborative artwork and through relating to one another. The facilitators can evoke the creative process and engage in an in-depth dialogue about the artistic creation. The group process also produces an invitation to create around a common theme and creates an environment of mutual aid, mutual learning, and therapeutic insights (Shenaar-Golan, Walter, 2016).

Social work is an evolving profession and it uses creative methods to work with individuals and communities. By incorporating arts-based methods, social workers can enhance their effectiveness and enrich their practice (Nissen, 2017). There are increasing pressures for social workers to complete treatment in a restricted amount of time. Arts-based sessions and arts-based activities assist an individual to rapidly communicate their problems, which in turn expedites the assessment and intervention (Malchiodi, 2012). HAP is an emergent approach to mindfulness which makes use of both arts-based methods and social work groups while engaging participants in fun and interactive ways. The future of social work practice relies on the profession's ability to creatively adapt to a changing world (Nissen, 2017).

### **Implications for University Mental Health Services**

Providing effective mental health supports to students is one of the most important and pressing issues in post-secondary institutions. Post-secondary institutions are beginning to understand that addressing student mental health concerns should be a priority. However, the need to incorporate more mental health services has created pressures on post-secondary institutions as they are mandated to provide higher education and training, and there is less

emphasis on providing counselling and treatment to students (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2017). Higher education institutions must become proactive in meeting the mental health needs of students. Universities must act to implement effective mental health services for their students as it is essential that students receive timely and effective mental health services in order to prevent their issues from intensifying. Furthermore, prevention programs are critical to addressing student mental health and well-being (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2017).

HAP is a valuable emergent MBI which should be offered in university settings in order to support students' mental health and psychological well-being. It is also a prevention and promotion program as it teaches students coping skills in order to effectively manage their stress which may help students resolve their mental health concerns before they escalate. The program can address long wait times for services as it can be offered to several students at one point in time, putting less strain on valuable resources and also translating to cost savings. Furthermore, the group format allows the students to benefit from mutual aid and the formation of positive relationships.

Universities may want to consider training staff members such as counselors and social workers to facilitate HAP to students. Staff members who are knowledgeable in facilitating groups, and have knowledge of mindfulness-based and arts-based interventions may already have the required skill set to facilitate the program. Coholic (2019) published a book entitled *Facilitating Mindfulness* which explains the 12-week arts-based program in great detail and provides an overview of the activities associated with each session. Universities may want to consider purchasing the book as a reference guide for staff members. Once a lead facilitator is

established, they may want to train other interested staff members in the program which will ensure that the program is sustainable.

### **Study Limitations**

There are some limitations to this study. The study size was small, which limits its generalizability. Furthermore, these findings are distinct to university students. In particular, the majority of the participants were social work students (nine out of 15 participants that remained in the study), therefore the study sample was not diverse and did not include participants attending various programs offered at the university. The small number of participants yields low statistical power of the quantitative analysis. Therefore, this small sample size does not allow the researcher to make an accurate judgment regarding the effect of the intervention. It would be beneficial if the study was replicated with a larger and more diverse sample of students attending various university programs.

Additionally, although full-time students in both graduate and post-graduate programs were invited to participate in the study, all of the students that remained in the program were completing an undergraduate degree. Thus, the study only represents the opinions of undergraduate level students and it may have yielded different results if post-graduate students had decided to participate in the study. Additionally, there was no control group (a group not receiving the intervention) in the study, therefore, the current study was not able to compare its effectiveness against another group.

Furthermore, snowball sampling was one of the approaches used to recruit study participants. There are several limitations to this approach as it fails to recruit from a random sample and there is the potential for the recruitment strategy to be biased and for a certain

population to be overrepresented (Sadler, Lee, Seung-Hwan, & Fullerton, 2010) such as occurred in my study.

The current study used self-report measures to identify participants' level of mindfulness and psychological well-being. There are limitations to using self-report measures as participants may have a bias about answering scaling questions due to their social desirability and personal values. Furthermore, participants may not understand the terms used to define mindfulness and this may extend to terms used to define psychological well-being. Also, there is the possibility that participants may already have previous experience with mindfulness. This may increase their ability to identify their own states of mindfulness on the questionnaires, thus responding to the questions in more meaningful ways (Grossman, 2011). Similarly, when participants answer scaling questions it may remind them of their desire to become more mindful, hence answering the questions more favorably (Bergomi, Tschacher, & Kupper, 2013).

Despite the study limitations, the study's results remain consistent with other researcher's findings. The results support the effective use of MBIs with university students and demonstrate how they can positively impact a student's level of mindfulness and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the current study findings are consistent with other studies that explored the suitability and the effectiveness of HAP with both adult and youth populations. The current study and other studies exploring HAP demonstrate that HAP can help improve a person's mindfulness skills, increase their ability to cope with stress, improve their mental health, as well as enhance their self-esteem and self-awareness (Coholic et al., 2009, Coholic et al., 2012, Coholic et al., 2018, Coholic, 2019 & Grynspan, 2018). It is recommended that the current study's findings be further explored by conducting further research studying the effectiveness of HAP with a larger and more diverse sample of university students. In addition, it would be beneficial to use a

control group for comparison purposes and conduct longitudinal studies in order to determine if the students experienced long term benefits associated with their participation in the HAP program.

### **Recommendations**

Several recommendations can be made for the future implementation of HAP. The chief recommendation made by participants was their desire to incorporate fewer activities into each session. Participants reported that they often felt rushed through the activities and that they would prefer to have time to engage in deeper dialogue and discussion surrounding each activity. Furthermore, some of the participants recommended that the duration of the session was too short and that it should be expanded to allow for more activities and their related discussions. Similarly, several participants reported that the 12-week duration of the program was too short and that it should be increased so that it could be offered for the duration of the school year. Students felt that the group offered them a safe and supportive environment and that they could benefit from having access to the program all year long. However, on the contrary, some participants noted that it was difficult to attend the second semester as their commitments changed, and they found it difficult to have the motivation to attend after the Christmas break. Some participants felt that it would be beneficial to have drop-in sessions, where they did not have to remain committed to 12-weeks.

In the future, it may be beneficial to offer HAP in a variety of formats to meet students' needs such as having a group that began at the beginning of each semester and offering a group that was offered for the entire duration of the school year. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to offer workshops to students who could benefit from the arts-based activities, however, could not commit to the entire duration of the group.

Another recommendation would include video or audio taping each session. During each session, participants provided valuable insights and feedback which could have been included in the research data. Although I journaled about the participants' experiences at the conclusion of each group, valuable information was lost due to memory recall. Additionally, it would have been beneficial to reach out to participants post-group and include their transcribed semi-structured interview questions to ask participants if there was anything that they forgot or would like to add. These extra steps could have enhanced the data collected from participants as several valuable insights that occurred during the sessions were not fully represented in the final report of the data.

### **Conclusion**

Several studies have supported the effectiveness of MBIs with university students as demonstrated by the literature review. Likewise, the current study contributes to the growing body of literature pertaining to MBIs with university students. Additionally, the current study adds to the growing body of literature exploring HAP with an adult population as the literature is sparse in this area. The current study demonstrated how participation in HAP helped enhance students' psychological well-being and improve their level of mindfulness. Moreover, students became more self-aware, increased their self-esteem, increased their ability to manage their stress, experienced self-care and they experienced an improvement in their relationships with others. They also received several benefits associated with having the opportunity to connect with others in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

The study is useful in demonstrating the importance of post-secondary institutions incorporating mental health supportive services for students as part of a prevention and promotion strategy. Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Merikangas, and Walters (2005) reported that

three-quarters of mental health problems occur before the age of 25 years. Universities are beginning to recognize the importance of providing effective mental health services to students. In fact, in 2016, 46% of post-secondary students indicated that their depression hindered their ability to obtain their full academic capacity (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2017). Therefore, universities may want to consider implementing HAP as it may offer students an effective way to manage their stress while enhancing their capability to perform academically. Furthermore, not only can HAP offer support to students with a current mental health problems, it can also help guard students against future mental health challenges.

Equally important, several participants reported that they planned to continue to incorporate mindfulness and arts-based activities into their daily lives. As several of the participants were social work students or in the helping profession, it is imperative that they are provided with foundational mindfulness skills to aid them with the experience of self-care and effective coping strategies in order to mitigate the effects of job-related stress and burn out. In turn, HAP provided them with essential mindfulness skills in which they can build upon to make them more effective practitioners.

In summary, the study findings demonstrate the suitability and the benefits associated with an arts-based mindfulness program for university students. It is recommended that universities adopt this program and implement it as a preventative and promotion strategy to enhance students' mental health. Additional research exploring HAP with university students is recommended to support the current findings and determine if any modifications would benefit this population. Moreover, it would be helpful for future students to explore whether or not students were able to maintain these skills over a period of time. While a small sample size

restricts my findings, it is reasonable to assume that future research with a larger sample would yield similar results.

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**APPENDICES**  
**APPENDIX A- Recruitment Poster**

## Arts-Based Mindfulness Program for University Students

Beginning in September 2018 in collaboration with the Student Life Centre

**Stress**  
Students face academic and other pressures that can cause them to feel overwhelmed. This can hinder academic performance and attendance. We need effective tools in order to be able to better manage our stress.

**Mindfulness**  
Mindfulness is a practice that can be used to prevent stress and enhance our coping skills. Mindfulness-based interventions can reduce stress and feelings of anxiety, and increase health and wellness. Mindfulness helps us pay attention to the present moment, so that we are aware and not overly reactive.

**What is the Holistic Arts-Based Program?**  
The HAP program is designed to teach mindfulness skills and concepts in accessible and enjoyable ways. It can help you to better understand your thoughts, feelings and behaviours and to judge yourself less. Your coping skills and mood can improve. The HAP program is being offered as part of graduate student research project. It will run once a week for 12 weeks beginning in the fall of 2018. If you decide to participate in it, you will be asked to participate in a recorded individual interview before and after the program. During the interview, you will be asked to complete two questionnaires and answer some questions about yourself and your experience with the program to help us understand how suitable and beneficial it is for university students.

If you would like to know more about this program or are interested in being a participant, please contact Danielle Labranche at [dx\\_labranche@laurentian.ca](mailto:dx_labranche@laurentian.ca)

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## APPENDIX B- Student Hand Out

## Arts-Based Mindfulness Program for University Students

### Information Pertaining to the Arts-Based Mindfulness Group Program

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally, to moment-by-moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been shown to improve sleep, self-esteem, focus, attention, self-awareness, self-compassion, self-regulation, emotional regulation and empathy. MBIs help with a variety of challenges such as stress, anxiety, and schooling.

### Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP)

Dr. Diana Coholic (School of social work) and her colleagues have developed a 12-week mindfulness program called the Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP). HAP uses a combination of art-based methods and mindfulness-based practices in a group format. HAP was originally developed for vulnerable youth and children. Dr. Coholic and her colleagues have found that children who have participated in the program have reported benefits in emotional regulation, mood, increased self-esteem, empathy, the ability to pay attention and focus and cope better at home and school.

### Potential Benefits for You

Your participation in HAP will involve fun arts-based group activities that are strengths-based, and engaging. You will learn about mindfulness and gain competences to better manage your own stress. You may become more self-aware, experience increased self-esteem and an enhanced sense of psychological well-being. You may enhance your ability to be mindful, including learning how to pay attention and focus, identify and explore your feelings, thoughts and behaviors, and recognize and develop your strengths.

### Resources

A short film was made with University Education Students who have participated in the HAP program to demonstrate their experiences. The film can be viewed by inserting the link into your web browser: <https://youtu.be/pNPTyG20YT0>

### Details

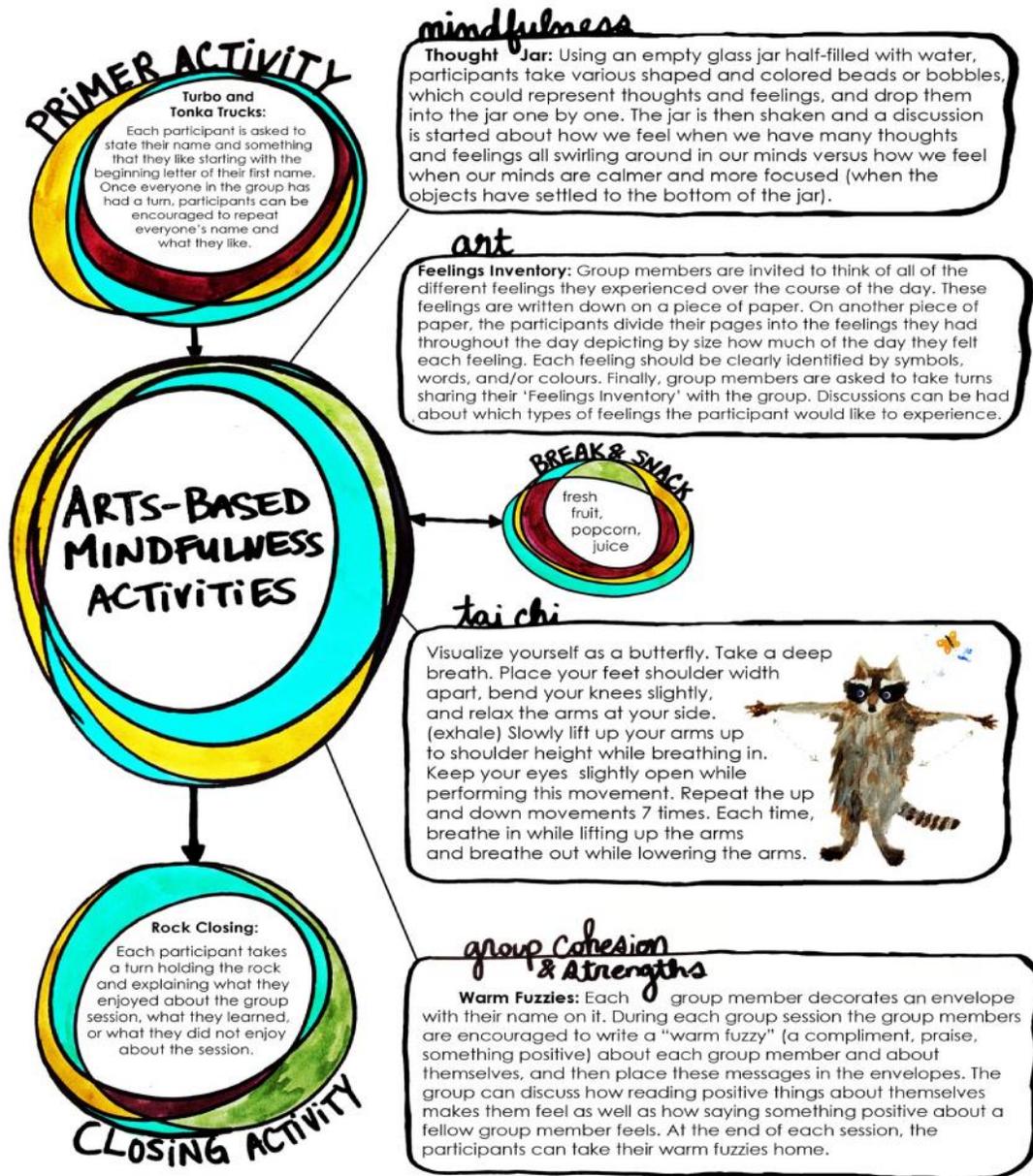
You will participate in a 12-week mindfulness group for two hours a week beginning in the fall of 2018. You will be invited to participate in an interview before and after the group. During the interview, you will be asked to answer a series of questions and be asked to answer some scaling questions pertaining to your psychological well-being and mindfulness. This interview will be a maximum of half an hour.

We have room for 20 students to participate in two different groups comprised of 8-10 participants each. We will compose the groups on a first come first served basis. For more information and to secure a spot in this research project please email Danielle Labranche at [dx\\_labranche@laurentian.ca](mailto:dx_labranche@laurentian.ca)

APPENDIX C- HAP Session Structure

**HAP Session Structure with Sample Activities**

Each 2 hour session consists of 4-8 arts-based mindfulness activities with 1 primer (warm up) activity and 1 closing activity. The following are some examples:



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**APPENDIX D Five Examples of HAP Activities** (Coholic & Eys, 2016)**Thought Jar**

**Goal:** Introduce the concept of mindfulness

**Description:** Using an empty glass jar half-filled with water, participants took various shaped and colored beads, which could represent thoughts and feelings, and dropped them into the jar one by one. Individual jars or one group jar were used. The participants were invited to take turns swirling and shaking the jar(s). Discussion focused on how we feel distracted when we have many thoughts and feelings all swirling around in our minds at once versus how we feel when our minds are calmer and more focused (when the objects have settled to the bottom of the jar). Mindfulness was introduced as a practice that can help us keep our minds clearer and calm. With self-awareness, we can make better choices and decisions rather than acting out a feeling.

**Me as a Tree**

**Goal:** Develop self-awareness & learning about other group members (promoting empathy & diversity)

**Description:** Each of the participants drew themselves as a tree. Everyone can draw a tree but everyone's trees will always be different. Instructions can be kept loose or the facilitators can ask the participants to think about what the tree would look like and what might be around it. By representing oneself as a tree, it enabled the participants to talk about themselves in a more comfortable manner as an introductory activity. The facilitators also discussed the diversity in the group (how the trees were different) and how this was a strength.

**Change 5**

**Goal:** Practicing mindful awareness by paying attention to each other's physical appearance

**Description:** Each group member was encouraged to leave the group room with a facilitator and while outside the room to change five things about their appearance. Some examples were taking off glasses, rolling up pants and sleeves, changing a hairstyle, and removing shoes. When the group members returned to the room, everyone else had to guess what changes were made. A discussion was had about our awareness and how when we pay greater attention, we may notice more things in our environment.

**Emotion Listen & Draw**

**Goal:** Discuss how different types of music evoke feelings; learning to pay mindful attention to thoughts & feelings

**Description:** Before the group, five short segments of music were recorded on a CD (approximately two minutes each). Each group member was provided with five sheets of paper. They were instructed to number their pages from 1 to 5 (writing small numbers in pencil in the corner of the page). Next, the children listened to each piece of music and quickly drew/painted the feeling that they were experiencing while listening to the song. It was most useful to have

five very different songs to ensure that a variety of emotions were evoked by the music. As each picture was completed, they were placed in rows according to the piece of music so that similarities and differences between the participants' drawings were discussed.

### **Bad Day Better**

**Goal:** To discuss how mindful people do not avoid difficult feelings but learn how to experience and express these in helpful ways (developing self-compassion).

**Description:** Each participant was provided with an 8x10 piece of paper, which was folded in half and then opened up again. On the left side of the page, each participant was asked to paint what a 'bad day' looks like. Once this picture was completed, they were asked to fold their paper and press down on the painted picture, which created a mirror image on the right side of the page. Next, each participant decorated the right side to turn it into a 'good day'. When this picture was completed, the paper was folded again and pressed together which created a large picture of a good day. After the bad day had been made better, each group member discussed and explained their painting to the group. This activity enabled a discussion about how we have the ability to make our bad days better depending on what we focus on, how grateful we are, and so on.

Coholic, D., & Eys, M. (2016). Benefits of an arts-based mindfulness group intervention for vulnerable children. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33(1), 1-13. doi: 10.1007/s10560-015-0431-3

## APPENDIX E- Interview Guide

### Pre-Group Interview

- Can you tell me why you signed up for this program?
- What are your expectations of the program?
- Have you ever participated in a group before? If so, what was your experience?
- Have you ever heard about mindfulness, and if so, what do you think it is and how do you think it could help you?
- What is psychological well-being?
- What are some of your daily life challenges?
- How do you usually cope with difficult situations?

### Post-Group Interview

- Can you tell me what it has been like to attend the group from beginning to end?
- What mindfulness skills and activities have you learned from the program?
- Are there any skills or activities that you still practice at home and if so what has it been like to practice them at home?
- What has been useful for you in the program?
- What has it been like to share experiences with others in the group?
- What have you learned from the group experience?
- What has been positive or negative for you?
- What exercises did you find the most helpful?
- What exercises did you find the least helpful?
- Is there a time when you find it difficult to practice the exercises?
- Has anything in your life changed after taking the HAP program?
- Can you describe an incident where you did something different than how you would have done it before the program?
- Did you experience any changes in how you cope with difficult situations?
- Has learning mindfulness changed your relationships with other people?
- How would you improve HAP?

### APPENDIX F- Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire

This instrument is based on a factor analytic study of five independently developed mindfulness questionnaires. The analysis yielded five factors that appear to represent elements of mindfulness as it is currently conceptualized. The five facets are observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience.

Please rate each of the following statements using the scale provided. Write the number in the blank that best describes your own opinion of what is generally true for you.

1	2	3	4	5
Never or very rarely true	Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true	Very often or always true

1. When I'm walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving.
2. I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings. [5]
3. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions. [5]
4. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them.
5. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted. [5]
6. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body. [5]
7. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words. [5]
8. I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted. [5]
9. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.
10. I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling. [5]
11. I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions. [5]
12. It's hard for me to find the words to describe what I'm thinking. [5]
13. I am easily distracted. [5]
14. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way.
15. I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face.
16. I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things.
17. I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad. [5]
18. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
19. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I "step back" and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it.
20. I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing. [5]
21. In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting. [5]

22. When I have a sensation in my body, it's difficult for me to describe it because I can't find the right words. [5]
23. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing. [5]
24. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I feel calm soon after.
25. [5] I tell myself that I shouldn't be thinking the way I'm thinking. [5]
26. I notice the smells and aromas of things. [5]
27. Even when I'm feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words.
28. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them. [5]
29. When I have distressing thoughts or images I am able just to notice them without reacting. [5]
30. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them. [5]
31. I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colors, shapes, textures, or patterns of light and shadow. [5]
32. My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words. [5]
33. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I just notice them and let them go.
34. I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing. [5]
35. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I judge myself as good or bad, depending what the thought/image is about. [5]
36. I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior.
37. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail.
38. I find myself doing things without paying attention. [5]
39. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas.

### Scoring Information:

Observe items: [5]1, 6, 11, 15, 20, 26, 31, 36

Describe items: [5]2, 7, 12R, 16R, 22R, 27, 32, 37

Act with Awareness items: [5]5R, 8R, 13R, 18R, 23R, 28R, 34R, 38R

Non-judge items: [5]3R, 10R, 14R, 17R, 25R, 30R, 35R, 39R

Non-react items: [5]4, 9, 19, 21, 24, 29, 33

Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., Hopkins, J., Krietemeyer, J., & Toney, L. (2006). Using self-report assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment, 13*, 27- 45.

## APPENDIX G-Ethics Approval Certificate



|  
**APPROVAL FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**  
 Research Ethics Board – Laurentian University

This letter confirms that the research project identified below has successfully passed the ethics review by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB). Your ethics approval date, other milestone dates, and any special conditions for your project are indicated below.

TYPE OF APPROVAL / New X /	Modifications to project /	Time extension
<b>Name of Principal Investigator and school/department</b>	Danielle Labranche (PI) Faculty of Health/Social Work; Diana Coholic & Leigh MacEwan (Co-Supervisors)	
<b>Title of Project</b>	Cultivating Mindfulness for University Students	
<b>REB file number</b>	6013843	
<b>Date of original approval of project</b>	July 23, 2018	
<b>Date of approval of project modifications or extension (if applicable)</b>		
<b>Final/Interim report due on: (You may request an extension)</b>	July 23, 2019	
<b>Conditions placed on project</b>		

During the course of your research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment or consent forms may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to the Research Ethics website to complete the appropriate REB form.

All projects must submit a report to REB at least once per year. If involvement with human participants continues for longer than one year (e.g. you have not completed the objectives of the study and have not yet terminated contact with the participants, except for feedback of final results to participants), you must request an extension using the appropriate LU REB form. In all cases, please ensure that your research complies with Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS). Also please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence with the REB office.

Congratulations and best wishes in conducting your research.

Susan Boyko, PhD, Vice Chair, *Laurentian University Research Ethics Board*

**APPENDIX H- Consent Form****Consent Form for University Students**

**Study Title:** Cultivating Mindfulness for University Students: Exploring the Benefits of an Arts-Based Mindfulness Program

**Primary Investigator:** Danielle Labranche, Master of Social Work student

**Supervisors:** Dr. Diana Coholic & Dr. Leigh MacEwan

**Introduction:** I am a Master of Social Work student at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario. I am interested in knowing how helpful an arts-based mindfulness group program is for university students. The Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP) is a strengths-based program that uses arts-based methods designed to teach mindfulness and build resilience. The goals of HAP include learning mindfulness skills and concepts; improving self-awareness; developing an understanding of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors; developing self-compassion and empathy; and building strengths. If you agree to take part in this program, you will:

- Come to 12 meetings of the arts-based group program (every week, you will take part in a 2-hour group session). The group will be held at Laurentian University.
- Before the program starts, we ask that you partake in a personal interview, where you will meet individually with a researcher face to face. The researcher will ask you to answer questions on the Ryff Scale, the Five Facet Mindfulness Scale (see below), as well as a series of interview questions. This interview will help us gain an understanding of the stresses in your life, how mindful you are, and what you hope to achieve from participating in the program. This interview will help us learn about your experiences before participating in the program. The entire interview will take approximately one hour (maximum).
- After the program is completed, we ask that you participate in another personal interview similar to the first one, where you can tell us how mindful you are, help us to understand the program's effects on your psychological well-being, what you liked or disliked about the program, and what skills you learned that you can incorporate in your life. You will be asked to answer the questions on the Ryff scale and the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire again. The entire interview will take approximately one hour (maximum).
- The Ryff scale will ask you 42 questions to measure multiple facets (such as subjective, social, and health-related factors) contributing to your psychological well-being. The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire will ask you 39 questions about how mindful you are. This will let us know if there were any changes in the scores before and after the program.

- Both interviews will be audio-recorded. This will allow me to transcribe the interview, allow for greater accuracy, and ensure that I do not miss any important details. Discussing your viewpoints may cause you to feel tired, and you may experience some anxiety. You can request a break at any time.

**Initial here of you agree to the recording of your voice in the personal interview \_\_\_\_\_**

-Choosing not to participate in this study in no way affects your university status or any services you may be receiving from the university. At any point during the program, you can decide that you no longer wish to participate without any penalty whatsoever. If you decide to be part of the program, and then later change your mind, then you can stop coming. If you stop coming, we will keep the information we already collected because we need to tell a truthful and full story about the work we are doing. For example, the pictures we take of everyone's art-based creations do not have identifying information on them, and we don't keep track of who created what. For another example, once we put everyone's interviews together to tell a story about the group experience, it is not possible for anyone to identify what you said as we take out all identifying information.

-You will not be financially compensated for participating in this program.

-During the group sessions, you may experience challenging feelings, such as being nervous to share something about yourself. If you need to speak to someone about this, you can talk to the facilitators of the program. During your first personal interview, you will be provided with a list of services in the community that may be helpful if you feel that you require additional supports.

We hope that by taking part in this program, you will increase your mindfulness skills, enhance your sense of well-being, and cope better with day-to-day life and school. Hopefully, you will learn mindfulness activities that you can continue to use after the program is done.

**Confidentiality:** All of the information collected for the study will be kept confidential; only people involved with the research project, such as the primary investigator and her supervisors, will be allowed to see and listen to the information. Your recorded interview, photographs, and any artwork will be stored on a Google drive. Any hard copies will be locked up at Laurentian university. After 5 years, this information will be destroyed. Hard copies of any documents will be shredded, and computer data will be deleted from the Google drive. We will want other people to know about our work with university students in the program, however we will never give anyone information so that you could be identified. For example, we might use a picture of one of your arts-based creations, and post it on Facebook to share with others what we do in the program. However, there will be no identifying information on the photos. You are welcome to take your arts-based creations home, but we would like to take a photograph for our records. We ask that you do not discuss other participants' experiences outside of the group.

**Initial here if you agree to have your arts-based creations photographed and posted on Facebook**

\_\_\_\_\_ 

**Contact information:**

If you have any questions, you can email Danielle at [dx\\_labranche@laurentian.ca](mailto:dx_labranche@laurentian.ca) or **Dr. Diana Coholic**, [dcoholic@laurentian.ca](mailto:dcoholic@laurentian.ca) or 705.675.1151 ext. 5053 or [lmacewan@laurentian.ca](mailto:lmacewan@laurentian.ca), 705-675-1151 ext. 5059

If you have any questions about the ethics of this research, you can contact **the Research Ethics Officer**, at **Laurentian University Research Office**, phone: 705-675-1151 ext. 3213 or 2436 or toll free at 1-800-461-4030; email [ethics@laurentian.ca](mailto:ethics@laurentian.ca).

**Consent:** By signing this form, you agree to take part in our program, and you're letting us know that you understand everything on this form. You will receive a copy of this form that you can keep.

Participant's Signature(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like a copy of the results of this study, please provide me with an email address or mailing address, and I will send it to you when I am finished the project.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX I- Resource List****Counselling**

Counselling & Support Services at Laurentian University  
705 673-6506 during office hours or Email supportprograms@laurentian.ca.

Sudbury Counselling Centre 705 524 9629

Inner City Home of Sudbury 705 675 7550

**Cutting/ Self-harm**

Safe 1 800 366 8288

**Eating Disorders**

Eating disorders Program 705 523 4988 ex 4211

National Eating Disorder Info Centre 1 866 633 4220

Overeaters Anonymous 705 207 0877

**Mental Health and Addictions**

Canadian Mental Health Association 705 675 7252

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health 705 675 1195

HSN Mental Health and Addictions Centre, 127 Cedar

Crisis intervention (mobile crisis intervention) 705 675 4760

Central Intake and Referral 705 523 4988

Mood and Anxiety Program 705 523 4988 ex 4242

Mood Disorders Association 1 888 486 8288