



NAMCHAK

STEPPING INTO MEDITATION AND COMMUNITY COURSE

Evaluation Report

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T 604 681 4437
E info@atira.bc.ca

#201 - 190 Alexander St
Vancouver, BC V6A 1B5

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Introduction

Namchak is a non-profit organization based out of Missoula, Montana that is dedicated to sharing Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices to help people live happier, more fulfilled lives through practice, community, and retreat.

Namchak offers a myriad of ways to learn Tibetan Buddhist practice and has educational programs for all levels. One of the courses offered by Namchak is the “Stepping into Meditation and Community” program, which consists of two, six-week interactive online courses that guide participants to the most present, compassionate, and connected parts of themselves. Through inner exploration and engaging with community, participants learn accessible, time-tested Tibetan Buddhist practices that allow them to awaken into deeper peace, joy, compassion, and equanimity in their lives.

Namchak considers this course as a starting point for those who are stepping into Namchak practices and/or those who want to deepen their practice and connection with sangha (community).

Atira Women’s Resource Society (AWRS), as part of supporting and nurturing the emotional, mental, and psychosocial wellbeing of its staff, partnered with Namchak to offer the “Stepping into Meditation and Community” course. The partnership started with a pilot of the course with 15 staff participating, from different levels, departments, and positions within Atira.

This evaluation looks at the short-term results of this training course. Atira realizes that assessing long-term impact is something that requires more time however, the results of this report will support Atira’s in planning for upcoming mindfulness and meditation courses for its staff. Atira intends to do a follow-up evaluation with the continuing practitioners, 12 months from the completion of the pilot training course.

Course Objectives

- Introduce staff to meditation practices and how to integrate them into their daily lives.
- Learn how to be mindful of and take personal and collective responsibility for their own biases including the use of language that may “other,” “cancel,” or dehumanize any person, groups of people, and/or their experiences.
- Provide a space for staff to share and express their feelings, brief, and debrief.
- Explore self-love, kindness, and compassion.
- Experiencing connection through practices that can help to understand and feel the interdependent nature of reality, and Atira’s work.

Course Activities

Each week for a total of 12 weeks, staff and the Namchak facilitator would come together for 90 minutes to explore different meditation practices and connect around their experiences during practice sessions.

Staff would engage in large and small group discussions, activities, meditations, and journal writing to help them “chew on” the current material they were learning and digesting.

After each session, the facilitator sent a follow-up email with pertinent resources, discussion and questions that supported the learnings during the session.

The course was divided into two-parts (six weeks each). The first training session was held on January 12th, 2022, while the last training session was held on April 6th, 2022.

- **Part 1**

Week 1	Orientation—Course Overview, Intention Sharing & Body Scan
Week 2	Motivation & Meditation—Deepening Intention & Exploring Shamata
Week 3	Deepening into Shamata & Introduction to Loving Kindness
Week 4	Tonglen—A Compassion Practice of Giving & Receiving
Week 5	Simplified Round Robin & Tonglen for Troublemakers
Week 6	Exploring Our Work in the World & Closing Ceremony

- **Part 2**

Week 1	Revisiting Intentions and Q&A with Lama Tsomo
Week 2	Shamata Using Visual Object of Support & Round Robin
Week 3	Clearing Stale Energies & Shamata Using Sound
Week 4	Working with Difficult Emotions Both On and Off the Cushion
Week 5	Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity
Week 6	Revisiting our Work, Carrying the Gems Forward & Closing Ceremony



EVALUATION APPROACH

Utilization focused evaluation was chosen to evaluate the Namchak pilot. Utilization-focused evaluation begins with the premise that utility and actual use should judge the evaluation; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration to how everything that is done will affect use from beginning to end. Additionally, use concerns about how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and how they experience and learn from the evaluation process.

Evaluation Methodology

A mixed-method evaluation approach, including both qualitative and quantitative data, was used. The collection of data was done through observation (the evaluator attended four out of the 12 sessions of the course) and a designed survey.

The survey was designed according to the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) which is a scale designed to assess a core characteristic of dispositional mindfulness, namely, open or receptive awareness of and attention to what is taking place in the present. The scale shows strong psychometric properties and has been validated with college, community, and patient samples. Correlational, quasi-experimental, and laboratory studies have shown that the MAAS taps a unique quality of consciousness that is related to, and predictive of a variety of self-regulation and well-being constructs. *(Please refer to Annex A for the survey template).*

Evaluation Findings

In general, the training was viewed positively by staff and evidence of positive improvements were noted in staff responses.

Attendance was also reflective of staff feelings of the value of the training. Part one of the training (first six weeks) saw an average attendance of 85% for all session for all 15 staff. While for part two (second six weeks) the average attendance increased to 95% for all nine staff.

A total of six staff chose not to attend part two, leaving only nine (60%) of the original 15 staff attending both part one and two. When asked about the reason for not continuing the training, staff referred to workload being the main reason. All six staff indicated to the evaluator that they understand the value of the training and wanted to attend, but with their current work loads they were feeling they could not commit to the 90 minutes each week, over six weeks.

Namchak facilitator preferred to continue the course with only the nine staff and not invite new staff because part two builds upon part one and she felt it would be confusing for new staff to join at this stage.

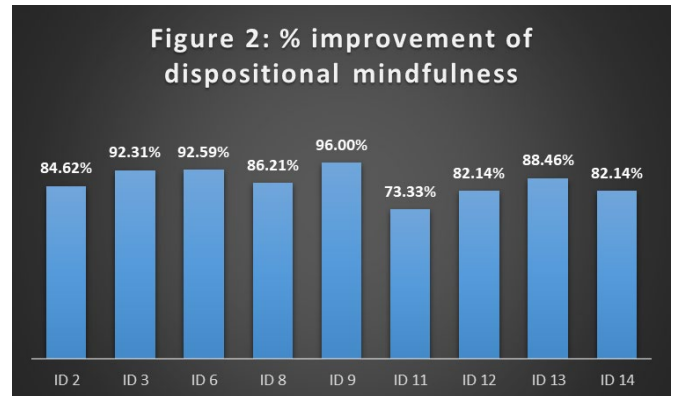
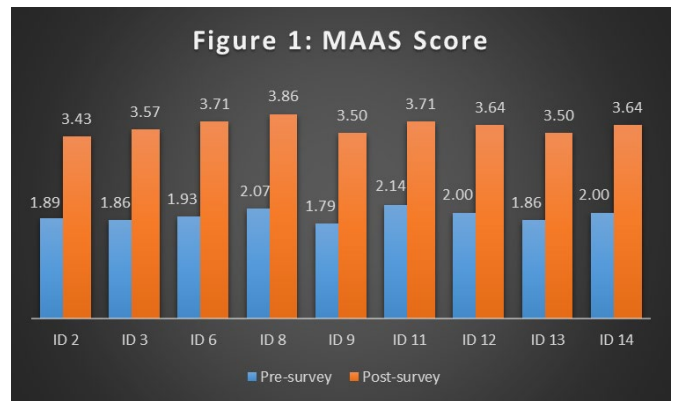
The evaluation focused mainly on analyzing results coming from the nine staff who participated in both parts of the course. Each staff was given an ID number for anonymity.

Finding 1: Improvements in staff mindfulness have been evident as a direct result of the training

This finding comes directly from the MAAS tool analysis. Overall, an average of an 86.42% improvement in the MAAS score was calculated for all nine staff participating in both part one and two.

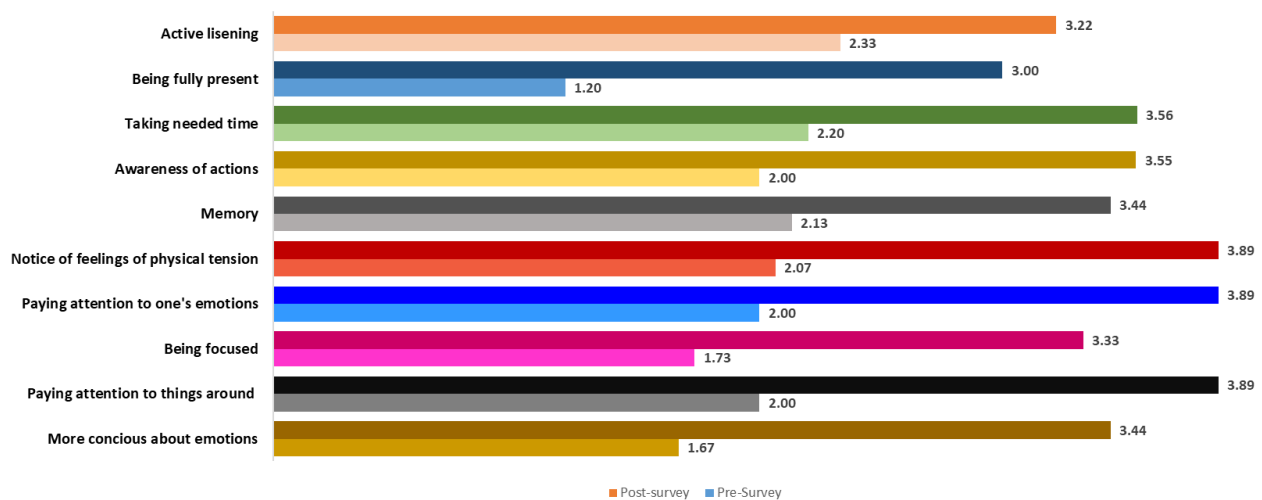
Statistically, those who actively participated in training activities reported having fewer and less intense instances of negative emotional experience and general improvements in the way they practice their daily activities, including attention to tasks performed.

Higher scores reflect higher levels of dispositional mindfulness. With these higher scores also come lower reported negative emotional states. Figure 1 shows improvement for each staff member while figure 2 shows the percentage of improvement.



Now, looking at specific assessment area, results of the MAAS tool was divided into 10 assessment areas. Staff reported improvements in each of the 10 areas with the area related to “Being more conscious about emotions” having the highest percentage of improvement at 106% percent compared with “Active listening” having the least percentage of improvement at only 38%. As active listening is more of a habit that requires more behavioral change interventions, it’s expected that the training would not contribute much to this assessment area compared to other areas of assessment, like supporting staff to be more conscious of their emotions, paying more attention to things happening around them, and paying more attention to other’s emotions, which scored improvements of 106%, 94.44%, and 94.44% respectively.

Figure 3: MAAS Data per assessment area



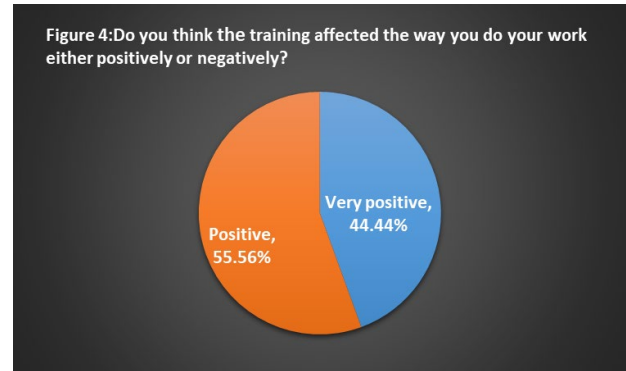
Finding 2: Staff value meditation and mindfulness training and how it positively affects the way they do their work.

Staff rated the training very highly with 100% of staff rating it as excellent and indicating they are willing to attend more similar courses if offered. Staff referred to a variety of reasons for their rating, including but not limited to enjoying the exercises, learning new techniques, listening to other staff experiences, and knowing they are not alone in what they feel and go through.

Staff also indicated that they believe the training had positively affected the way they do their work, with 44.4% indicating it has positively affected their work, while 55.5% indicating it affected their work very positively. Reasons for their answers mainly referred to becoming more aware of their own and others' emotions and feeling more confident.

This was also triangulated when staff were asked about what activities they valued the most within the training and both the body scan and the breathing activities were the top two activities mentioned. Both activities are used to set intentions and be aware of emotions.

The same rating was also applied to Namchak facilitator, as 100% of staff rated her facilitation skills as excellent.



“I enjoyed it so much. I felt I could breathe easier. With COVID hitting us hard, things got so stressful, and I am glad I had the opportunity to join.”

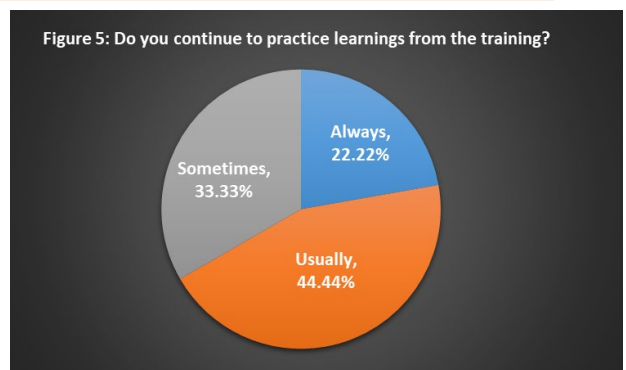
Black, Female, Frontline staff

“Its different from where I come from, I do not think I ever participated in something similar. This is my first time, and it made me realize how important [it is] for me to be aware of my own emotions and feelings.”

Black, Female, Management staff

Finding 3: Staff continue to practice learnings from the training however, a need for more regular and consistent similar support is needed.

Results show that 66.66% of staff continue to practice learnings from the training either always or usually. This is a high percentage considering that the training was completed four months ago. However, staff referred to the importance of having such activities and trainings on a more regular and consistent basis. Staff indicated that this is mainly because of how tiring and emotionally draining their work is, with a lot of incidents happening every day.



As part of the training follow-up, a meditation learning circle that meets once a month and consists of the nine staff who completed the course was formed. The meditation circle had its first meeting in June and the second meeting took place end of July. Attendance rate is considered good with around five - six staff attending both meetings (please note that one of the nine staff has left Atira). Staff believe the learning circle provides an opportunity to share experiences and remind themselves of the learnings they received however, it was not clear for them if this is something that they always need to do, or if it's a matter of few months only.

“We get tired. It is not an easy job; we need to always be present 100% of the time. We need to take care of ourselves so we can take care of the women who need us. It is important to have such trainings more regularly. I used to do the breathing exercise every day, but now its only like twice a week. I need someone to always be there to tell me I need to breathe”

Woman of Color, Female, Frontline staff

Finding 4: Having more options for both in-person and online trainings will provide an opportunity for staff to join in the format that best fits their learning preferences.

When asked if they could change three things about the way the training was implemented, the main response was related to providing an option for an in-person training. Staff also referred to having more activities; not just training but more of exercises or gatherings that are related to meditation.

“It will be nice if we can go out, breathe fresh air, and sit together. We miss these times, and I do not think Atira did any similar activity at least since the covid”

White, Female, Frontline staff

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluator has identified four main recommendations:

1. Explore the possibility of having a regular and consistent training program that includes all Atira staff.
2. Explore the possibility of having a training of trainers to ensure the sustainability of the learnings and the knowledge within Atira.
3. Develop research to assess the impact of the pandemic and working in DTES on the mental health and wellbeing of frontline staff.
4. Include an in-person training and outdoor activities, in addition to the online training.

ANNEX A - SURVEY TEMPLATE

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1- almost always	2- very frequently	3- somewhat frequently	4- somewhat infrequently	5- very infrequently	6- almost never
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Scale	Experience
	I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later
	I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
	I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
	I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.
	I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.
	I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.
	It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.
	I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.
	I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.
	I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.
	I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.
	I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
	I find myself doing things without paying attention.
	I snack without being aware that I'm eating.

After the end of the training, the below questions were added for the post-evaluation survey.

1. From a scale from 1 (least) to 5 (best), how would you rate the training? And why?
2. Would you attend additional training if you had the chance? And why?
3. From a scale from 1 (least) to 5 (best), how would you rate the facilitator?

4. Do you think the training affected the way you do your work on a daily basis either positively or negatively? Please elaborate.
5. What is the activity that you think was the most valuable and helpful to you (if any)?
6. Do you practice any of the learnings from the training?
7. Have you noticed any improvements to the way you pay attention to your emotions and reflections?
8. Would you say that the training had a positive or negative effect on your wellbeing, in general?
9. If you had the chance to change three things about the training. What would you change?
10. Anything else you would like to add.