

# Effects for BeKindr Foundation Programs in Prisons

## Program 1:

### *How Love Wins Workbook (Mindful Kindness Program) for Incarcerated: Effects*

#### **Effects of the Mindful Kindness Program on the Mental Health of Adults in Custody**

Bonnie Grossen, Evaluation Director, BeKindr Foundation

February, 2025

We evaluated the effects of the Mindful Kindness Program on the satisfaction with life and mental health of 107 inmates in 27 prisons in several states, mostly California, using a pre-post design and a quasi-experimental comparison group. Of these inmates, 82% were serving a life sentence. The comparison group included 107 inmates who took the pre-survey on the same date that a matching individual in the experimental group took the post-survey. Matching by date ruled out the influence of seasons and factors outside the prisons. The fact that both groups came from a large number of prisons (control group, 28; MKP group, 27) reduces the error resulting from external within-prison factors.

The MKP intervention was the workbook *How Love Wins* by Doug Carnine. Inmates completed the book independently, then mailed their written responses to the questions and exercises to the office. In return they received a certificate. The average time to complete the MKP program was 220 days (sd=84 days), which is 7 to 8 months. Completing a long independent study does require some skill. Of the inmates included in this analysis, 69% had attended some college.

With a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons ( $p \leq 0.005$ ), the results indicated that the MKP group significantly improved and did significantly better than the control group on the following measures:

Satisfaction with Life (happiness): Control group (ES = 0.48,  $p < 0.001$ )

Pre-post (ES = 0.61,  $p < 0.00001$ )

Mental Well-Being (resilience): Control group (ES = 0.58,  $p < 0.000014$ )

Pre-post (ES = 0.58,  $p < 0.000014$ )

Outreach (teaching others about kindness): Control (ES = 0.48,  $p < 0.0005$ )

Pre-post (ES = 0.53,  $p < 0.0012$ )

The Trust item just missed the Bonferroni criterion in the pre-post comparison:

Control (ES = 0.48,  $p < 0.0009$ )

Pre-post (ES = 0.47,  $p < 0.006$ )

One item measuring mindfulness and meditation practice indicated very high levels for the MKP group and relatively high levels for the Control group. Many have found mindfulness and meditation practice to be a causal link to better SWL and mental well-being (Han et al., 2022; Per et al., 2020). Less research has found that kindness improved SWL and mental well-being. Yang and associates (2018) found positive effects for a simple kindness intervention on SWL and general well-being. The strong difference in the scores of the MKP and control groups on these dependent measures (Satisfaction with Life, Mental Well-being, Outreach) would suggest a

factor in addition to mindfulness is contributing to the MKP group's strong positive outcomes. The comments of participants would suggest that the kindness focus of the curriculum, that is, the exercises engaging participants in building kind habits, decreasing bad habits, expressing gratitude, engaging in kind behaviors and so on, is a necessary additional component of strong change. Details of the analysis and further findings can be found using the link: [Results mkp.pdf](#)

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## **The Effects of the “Mindful Kindness” Intervention on Satisfaction with Life and Mental Health of Adults in Custody**

October, 2023

Ted McCuddy, Christopher M. Loan, Bonnie Grossen, & Doug Carnine

**Background:** The high rate of recidivism within the United States demonstrates that rehabilitation, one of the goals of incarceration, has largely failed. Conditions within carceral settings increase stress and diminish satisfaction with life, two factors linked with offending. Although mindfulness programs and kindness interventions have been shown to improve certain dimensions of mental health, less is known about their impact on satisfaction with life and how this compares to other positive and negative indicators of mental health.

**Aims:** To test the impact of the “*Mindful Kindness Program—How Love Wins*” (MKP) on incarcerated individual's mental ill-being, propensity for positive action, desire for relationships, anti-social tendencies and knowledge of mindfulness techniques.

**Methods:** Data were collected from 234 prisoners from 34 correctional institutions in California who completed [How Love Wins](#) workbook over a 28-week period. Confirmatory factor analyses are used to identify dimensions of mental health and use of mindfulness techniques. A structural equation model was fitted to the data to assess differences in these constructs from pre-test to post-test.

**Results:** After completing MKP, participants reported higher satisfaction with life, higher positive indicators of mental health, and lower negative indicators of mental health.

**Conclusion:** MKP has the potential to improve mental health conditions of those who are incarcerated, while simultaneously targeting factors linked with crime, such as satisfaction with life. Future work should aim to identify mechanisms of action linking mindfulness and satisfaction with life to identify areas for intervention. These are highlights of the results. Details of the analysis and further findings can be found using the link:

[Effects MKP onSWL andStress 11.11.23.pdf](#)

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## **Improving Satisfaction with Life Among Incarcerated Populations: Targeting Perceived Stress as a Mechanism of Action**

October 2023

Bonnie Grossen, Christopher Loan

**Purpose:** To assess a possible mechanism of action by which prisoners' satisfaction with life may be influenced by two subscales of a modified Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (1983). These mechanisms serve as key criminogenic and protective forces linked with deleterious consequences of incarceration and reoffending.

**Methods:** Data were collected from 234 prisoners from 34 correctional institutions in California who completed the "Mindful Kindness Program" over a 28-week period. Path analyses are used to trace how mindfulness practices impact satisfaction with life through dimensions of stress via positive and negative indicators of mental health.

**Results:** Higher knowledge about mindfulness techniques contributed to higher use of mindfulness practices. These practices increase positive indicators of mental health, which lead to greater increases in satisfaction with life. Negative mental health indicators were not associated with satisfaction with life.

**Conclusions:** Those who are incarcerated may benefit from improved mental health through participation in the Mindful Kindness Program, which is linked with increased satisfaction with life. These mechanisms can be targeted in future interventions to help improve conditions of incarceration and reduce recidivism. These are highlights of the results. Details of the analysis and further findings can be found using the link: [PathAnalysis\\_MKP.pdf](#)

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## **The Effect of the *Mindful Kindness Program*—*How Love Wins* on Mental Health and Happiness of Incarcerated Individuals**

November 2023

Bonnie Grossen, Evaluation Director

The effectiveness of the Mindful Kindness Program (MKP) was evaluated for its effectiveness in motivating incarcerated individuals to adopt a new way of living centered on the principles of kindness. MKP is a 12-step program based on the workbook *How Love Wins* (Carnine, 2021). To teach the "kindful" pathway to a happy life, the book uses exercises and specific examples of how kindness leads to happiness, of how meditation and mindfulness can help with self-control and provides strategies for increasing kind habits and decreasing unkind habits. Given Covid restrictions, the original MKP delivery plan of group-facilitated delivery was retooled to provide a mail-in course where participants worked on their own, sending in their written responses to each step. However, no feedback was sent, only the material for the next step after receiving the response to the first step. The group-facilitated course required 7 months to complete. Some groups were led by prisoners, other groups were led by facilitators from outside the prison. The mail-in course required an average of 16 months to complete. (Prison mail processing is very slow.) MKP participants completed a 51-item survey at the start and end of the course. Table 1

lists the 39 items that showed a statistically significant change from pre to post. All the change was in the desired direction. (Note that the first five items indicate significant changes toward the described outcomes but do not indicate that they have reached that outcome. For example, in item 2 participants did not indicate that the conditions of their life were excellent. Rather the results indicated that after taking the MKP they felt their life was moving closer to excellent conditions, even if still far from being excellent.)

Table 1. List of items that changed significantly from pre to post survey. (All changes were in the desired direction with significance level adjusted to account for multiple comparisons.)

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.
6. How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
7. How often have you felt unable to control the important things in your life?
8. How often have you felt nervous or stressed?
9. How often have you felt confident about your ability to handle personal problems?
10. How often have you felt things were going your way?
11. How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?
12. How often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
13. How often have you felt that you were on top of things?
14. How often have you been angry because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
15. How often have you felt that difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?
16. Being in groups makes me anxious.
17. I have some close friends but would like to have more.
18. I have many close, meaningful relationships.
19. I feel overwhelmed a lot of the time.
20. It's difficult to calm my thoughts and focus.
21. I'm easily distracted.
22. I feel anxious and worry about the future.
23. I am often troubled by my regrets and past mistakes.
24. I still feel angry about the way others have treated me in the past.
25. I get upset when something happens unexpectedly.
26. I feel that I am unable to control the important things in my life.
27. I feel confident about my ability to handle any personal problems.
28. I feel that things are going my way.
29. I can control irritations in my life.
30. I feel that I am on top of things.
31. I get angry because of things that are outside of my control.
32. I feel difficulties are piling up so high that I cannot overcome them.
33. The Mindful Kindness Program improved my decision-making.
34. I would like to learn how to use mindfulness, meditation, and other techniques to calm my mind.

- 35. I use mindfulness and meditation in my daily life.
- 36. I know some techniques to calm myself down when I feel upset.
- 37. I make an effort to be kind to those who are ignored or discriminated against.
- 38. I like volunteering to help others facing difficult situations.
- 39. Talking about kindness feels uncomfortable.

The effects of the group-facilitated course (n=48) were compared with those of the mail-in course (n=188). One item resulted in a significantly more desirable outcome for the group-facilitated instruction: I'd like to move out of my comfort zone more often so I can help others.

Those who participated in the mail-in course only showed statistically significant positive change on 35 of the 51 items measuring satisfaction with life, stress, relationship health, mental well-being, behavior control and mindfulness. Those who participated in the group-facilitated sessions showed statistically significant positive change on 21 of the 51 items. (Significance is more difficult to achieve with the smaller sample.)

A comparison of inmate-led versus outside-led group effectiveness showed no statistically significant differences in the level of change for all items but 1. The one item with a significant difference favored the inmate-led group. Most large, nonsignificant differences favored the inmate-led group (10, versus 3 favoring the outside-facilitated group). The cost-effectiveness and time efficiency of the inmate-led groups over both outside-facilitated groups or mail-in course, further endorses the efficacy of the inmate-led groups. Details of the analysis and further findings can be found using the link: [EvaluationReport Effects on Happiness MKP--Nov2023.pdf](#)

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# **The Transformative Power of Mindful Kindness: Overcoming Barriers through Awareness, Empathy and Right Action**

December 2023

*By Shawn McWeeney*

## **Story of Frank Lopez**

One incarcerated individual whose life has been dramatically impacted by the Mindful Kindness Program is Frank Lopez. His journey from a life of violence to a life of empathy and right action serves as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of the Mindful Kindness Program. Through his participation in this program, Frank not only learned to cultivate mindfulness and empathy within himself but also how to translate these qualities into tangible acts of kindness towards others.

Prior to finding the Mindful Kindness Program, Frank's life was marred by violence and aggression. Raised by a father who abused both him and his mother, Frank learned violence at an early age. Growing up in such an environment, Frank learned violence as a means of survival and self-expression. This early exposure to aggression shaped his worldview and influenced his choices later in life. Frank attempted to kill his first wife after stalking and harassing her for years and abused his second wife. Frank has served 23 years of his 7 years to life sentence.

His change began when he started reading aloud *How Love Wins* to an inmate who couldn't read and wanted to take the course. His audience became larger as he continued reading the book aloud to more and more inmates. Seeing the impact on himself and others, he became interested in getting to know Doug Carnine better. With greater contact with Doug, Frank overcame personal obstacles and became a Mindfulness Ambassador. Frank spread news of the Mindfulness program and recruited inmates from several prisons to take the course. Details of Frank's story can be found at this link: [Lopez Story.pdf](#)

**Program 2:**  
**INSIGHT Parole Prep—self-analysis for incarcerated: Effects**

Evaluation of INSIGHT Parole Preparation Program  
February 2023  
Bonnie Grossen

The INSIGHT program was evaluated for its effectiveness in motivating incarcerated individuals to adopt a new way of living centered on the principles of kindness. The 5-part INSIGHT program is a correspondence course that requires an average of 7.3 months to complete. The parts are designed to guide participants in exploring their childhood traumas, character defects, responsibility and remorse. After completing each part, participants submitted their essay responses to the questions for that part. The participant received in return the next part and usually very personalized feedback. Here is a small sample of feedback:

“I totally understand how your parents’ absence created an unhealthy need for acceptance, but how do you deal with that today? How did you heal from that? Do you still have a need for acceptance? I know that healing is not easy, it takes a minute to learn how to soften that blow, but if I may make a respectful suggestion, I share this because it helped me understand my parents. I explored their individual childhoods, sometimes we forget that our parents had childhoods, I discovered that they experienced traumas in their individual lives, for once in my life, I got introduced to my parents as human beings, it’s unfortunate their combined brokenness that was entwined when they got married wasn’t healthy, but I learned never once did they mean harm to me, they just raised me the way they only knew how.”

Program evaluation surveys were sent to 130 participants who completed the program. Of the 103 returned surveys, all rated the program as helping them act with more kindness toward self and others, deal effectively with their character defects and to not act on impulse. 90% gave the INSIGHT program the highest rating—helping a lot. 10% rated it as helping some. Comments about the program were very positive:

“Insight has helped me understand my past, the now, & the future. This alone affects my daily self to be a positive, safe person, to others and myself”

“This course has facilitated a positive change in my life, it also has allowed me to bridge the gap between my family, friends, and peers. Applying these lessons learned about how I became me, has truly set me free...it has changed my beliefs, habits, and attitude.”

These are highlights of the results. Details of the analysis and further findings can be found using the link: [EvaluationReport INSIGHT--Nov2023.pdf](#)

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