

# Evaluation of Mental Health First Aid Training (Wales)

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### **1. Background to project – What is MHFA (Wales)**

Front line workers in Wales often have to deal with people with experience of mental distress but may lack the skills and confidence to support them appropriately.

With one in four of us affected by mental health problems each year, service providers across Wales are being offered a new short training course to deal more effectively with these challenges.

In an ambitious project, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, Mind Cymru has trained trainers to teach Mental Health First Aid MHFA and co-ordinate the roll out of MHFA throughout Wales. Last year they began recruiting and training people from across Wales to become Mental Health First Aid (Wales) Instructors. Now Instructors are delivering the two-day course in their area of Wales.

In a mental health crisis situation people often do not know how to respond, yet the helper's actions may determine how quickly that person gets help and/or recovers. On the 12-hour MHFA (Wales) course participants learn ways to be calm and confident and to give the best help, as in Emergency First Aid where members of the public offer immediate aid to support the person while appropriate help is on its way.

The MHFA (Wales) course covers common mental health problems including alcohol, drugs and depression, crisis first aid for suicidal behaviour, first aid for anxiety and panic attacks and other issues including self-harm. This first aid training aims to help preserve life where a person may be a danger to themselves or others; provide help to prevent the mental distress developing into a more serious state; promote recovery of good mental health; and provide comfort to a person experiencing mental distress.

MHFA (Wales) was launched in Wales in April 2008, and six cohorts of Instructor training has taken place in locations across Wales. Of the 100 people selected to receive the MHFA (Wales) Instructor training, 56 have fully completed the extensive training programme and have been formally 'Approved', with the others close to completing the programme.

## **2. Main aims**

The aims of this study were to evaluate the effectiveness of Mental Health First Aid (Wales) training during its first 12 Months. The evaluation set out to answer four main questions:

- Who are we reaching with the training?
  - In what capacity are participants attending?
  - What are their professional backgrounds?
  - What is their experience in the field?
  - How prepared do they feel to help at the start of the course?
  - What (if any) previous training have participants had?
  
- How well is the training being received?
  - How much better prepared participants feel at the end of training?
  - How highly participants recommend the training?
  - How highly the participants rate the training?
  - What improvements could be made to the training?
  
- What impact has the training had on the knowledge, skills and behaviour of participants?
  
- How has the training changed the culture and behaviour within an organisation/workplace since the training?

### **3. Approach and methods**

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used to capture the breadth and depth of the impact the MHFA (Wales) training has had across Wales in its first 12 months of delivery of the 12hr course. The Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation has been used to evaluate the training and its impact on four levels:

1. Participants reactions
2. Participants learning
3. Participant behavioural changes
4. Impact of the training on organisations

The evaluation was in the form of five parts as follows:

**3.1 Background forms** – On arrival at a MHFA course participants were asked to complete these. 1684 participants have completed a background form.

**3.2 Feedback forms** – at the end of a MHFA course participants were asked to complete these. 1744 participants have completed a feedback form.

**3.3 Follow up** – a form similar to the feedback form but focusing on the impact that MHFA (Wales) training has had on the individual since the training. Only those participants who provided their email address on registration were sent a follow up questionnaire.

- The questionnaire was E-mailed to 643 participants
- A return rate of 11.5% was achieved

**3.4 Interviews with individuals** – In the follow-up questionnaire individuals were asked if they would be willing to take part in a telephone interview. 43 said yes to participating in a telephone interview. Of those 43, we were able to interview 18 individuals.

The purpose of the interview process was to explore the effect that MHFA (Wales) has had on individuals' attitudes regarding mental health, both at work and in their personal life.

**3.5 interviews with organisations** –a selection of organisations were contacted that had had the 12-hour MHFA (Wales) course delivered in-house to their employees. These interviews intended to explore the effect that the MHFA (Wales) training has had on the culture of the organisation.

#### **Additional information to note regarding methods of data collection:**

Only data regarding to courses that ran between the start date 10<sup>th</sup> July 08 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 09 were used in this evaluation. During this period 1864 participants were trained.

## **4. Main findings**

### **4.1a Who has been trained?**

- Since the Mental Health First Aid (Wales) course began, up to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009, 1744 individuals have been trained across Wales along with 120 trainers and staff of the project.
- Of those trained 87% attended in a work capacity, 8% in a volunteer capacity and 5% in a personal capacity.
- Those that attended the training had come from a wide range of services. The most significant being Mental Health with 21% of attendants. 10% had come from Education/Training workplaces and a further 6% from Physical health services. 51% of participants put a tick in the box 'other' (these include housing associations, drug and alcohol services, fire services, social services, carers services amongst others). The remaining 12% of attendants had come from human resources, counselling, police/probation/criminal justice, pastoral care/clergy and the service industry.
- The course has been advertised widely in all sectors and regions across Wales, with 62% finding out about the course through their Employer, 16% through a friend or colleague, 3% via the website and 6% by word of mouth only. The remaining 13% discovered the training through other means.

### **4.1b Experience prior to training**

- 46% of individuals said that they had helped more than 15 people in mental distress prior to having received the MHFA (Wales) training. 15% of attendants had helped between 6 and 15 people, 24% had helped between 2 and 5 people, and a further 6% had helped 1 person. 9% of attendants had never helped someone in mental distress. When asked 46% individuals had received no previous mental health training.
- The level to which attendants felt prepared to help someone in mental distress, prior to the training varied greatly. 18% of attendants said that they feel fully prepared as compared to 6% of individuals saying that they do not feel prepared at all. The remaining 76% were spread out evenly between these two.

## **4.2 Participants reactions**

When asked How they would recommend the MHFA (Wales) training, 96% said they would do so highly (score of 4 or 5 out of 5). Results from the 'follow-up' questionnaire show that 88% still give the training the same score.

96 of participants rated the training highly (score of 4 or 5 out of 5). Results from the 'follow-up' questionnaire show that, 88% of individuals still rated the training highly (score of 4 or 5 out of 5).

What participants had to say about the course:

- *"This course needs to be rolled out to all services."*
- *"I think a lot more people should do this training to help them understand mental health."*

- *“Training was very comprehensive & covered more than I expected it to.”*
  - *“Very professional and well presented. Course structure very logical and easy to follow. “*
  - *“This is the most informative and useful course I have ever been on.”*
- Overall the feedback received is very positive, and participants highlighted some themes around improvements as outlines below:

- *Spread the course over 3 days to allow for further discussion*
- *Involve service users as guest speakers*
- *Linked the course to further training*
- *Refresher course*
- *Subtitles on the videos and more of them*

### **4.3 What did participants learn**

Results from the feedback questionnaire show that at the end of the workshop, 94% gave a score of 4 or 5 out of 5 for feeling better prepared as a result of the training. 46% of participants gave the same score at the beginning of the training; this is a 48% increase in feelings of preparedness. What participants had to say about their learning;

- *“My skills and knowledge have improved dramatically as a result of attending this course.”*
- *“I’ve gained insight into mental health and feel confident to use the techniques I have learned”*
- *“I knew nothing of mental health issues before this and now feel confident to help someone in mental distress.”*

### **4.4 MHFA in practise – changing participants behaviour**

The follow-up questionnaire shows that 77% of individuals have helped someone in mental distress within 6 months or less since attending the MHFA (Wales) workshop. Of this, 48% had helped between 1 and 5 individuals, 17% had helped between 6 and 15 individuals and 12% had helped more than 15 individuals.

94% of individuals said that the MHFA (Wales) training had changed their attitudes towards mental health, of which 70% gave a score of either 4 or 5 out of 5 for the extent to which their attitude has changed for the better. This is a clear positive attitude change.

In the phone interviews we asked participants what difference the training has made at work. The following themes emerged:

- More awareness of mental health issues in the workplace
- More sound knowledge about mental health issues making individuals more at ease broaching the subject of mental health
- Easier to talk about mental health – less of a taboo since attending the course (less stigma)
- More awareness of trigger points of becoming unwell
- Increase in confidence to act and help
- Better able to help, not scared of making it worse anymore

- “I know now what to ask and do if someone is in distress – I have steps to follow”
- Greater confidence
- More awareness of different types of mental distress, more understanding
- More awareness in to staff issues and feel more able to help with arising issues

We can see that the training is changing attitudes by creating awareness and reducing stigma around mental health issues, whilst also increasing confidence levels to help through providing the necessary knowledge and skills.

We also asked what difference the training has made personally. The following themes emerged:

- More able to give time and attention to people and being more patient
- Greater ability to identify one’s own issues and symptoms
- Ability to recognise signs and situations
- Greater understanding of how the mind works
- Greater ability to understand one’s own mental health
- With the information received it is easier to discuss things
- Have more confidence in one’s actions

The training is creating awareness and understanding amongst individuals around their own and others’ mental health, making it easier to talk about and approach issues.

One of the questions in the interview was around gauging the shift in stigma by looking at how easy is it to talk about mental health. The following themes emerged:

### **In General**

- Ability to give and receive more information
- Reduction in the tendency for repetitive behaviour
- Understanding of the contacts that one could get in touch with and details about different therapies
- It is now very easy to talk about mental health openly
- Encourages a more holistic way of dealing with clients

### **Your own mental health**

- More confident to talk about personal experiences in order to get past stigma
- Opportunity to realise that one isn’t alone in their experiences
- Easier to talk about mental health issues to family
- Greater awareness to recognise some of the things that one has been through

### **At work**

- Able to talk more openly about it in the office now everyone has had the training
- A greater perception to potential problems
- Easier to talk to colleagues

We can see a positive shift in stigma surrounding mental health. The training is increasing participants' confidence to talk about mental health and ones' personal experiences openly with family, friends and colleagues. This in turn will have a further positive effect on stigma in those surrounding the participants and the wider community.

#### **4.5 Impact on organisations**

Two very different organisations were interviewed, who had significant staff numbers trained in-house. One medium size organisation operates in the field of disability support, the other a large company in the financial sector. In both organisations, employment officers, training co-ordinators, support workers, customer service representatives and team leaders were trained

The results from telephone conversations were very positive. One organisation was much smaller in size than the other and stated that the main impact of the training was a raising of awareness around mental health issues, and that adaptations were made to operational methods. As a result it is felt that their service delivery has improved and that they are now more robust in client services.

The larger company felt that the full impact on the team had not yet been felt. However they were soon to have a mental health awareness week to alert staff that colleagues were trained in MHFA. A positive change had been reported in the way that trained staff interact with customers, improving the overall service.

## Conclusion

- The MHFA (Wales) training is reaching a wide audience with some room for continued improvement in extending the reach within the non-mental health sector.
- With the knowledge and skills gained, individual's levels of preparedness increased. We can see an overall increase of 33% at the follow up stage compared to that of prior to the training. At the end of the training this was 48% compared to prior to the training. This slight drop may represent an opportunity for refresher courses.
- The training is being well received and well rated over time. At the time of training we can see that 96% of individuals rate the training highly (score of 4 or 5 out of 5) and 88% gave the same score in the follow-up questionnaire, this is very consistent.
- When asked how experienced individuals are prior to the training 88% had helped someone over a lifetime. In between zero and 6 months following the training, 77% of individuals have put their skills into practice. This is significant, further indicating that the training is giving individuals the confidence and awareness as well as the skills to help. Having put the training into practice, 88% of individuals keep on feeling that the training is beneficial and worthwhile and would recommend it.
- It is clear that there is a positive impact on participant learning and as a result a positive impact on participant behaviour. From the telephone interview results we can see that the training is having an impact in terms of staff support, attitudes, and client support around mental health on an organisational level. This evidence suggests that the MHFA (Wales) training is bringing about a cultural change within organisations.