

Y Mind Youth: Evaluation Report

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Evaluation by:

McCreary Centre Society
www.mcs.bc.ca | evaluation@mcs.bc.ca



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OVERVIEW

McCreary Centre Society is evaluating the YMCA's Y Mind program from November 2017 to December 2022.

The evaluation includes separate analyses for Y Mind youth groups (for those aged 18 to 30) and teen groups (for those aged 13 to 18; and separate analyses for community-based and school-based teen groups).

This evaluation report focuses on findings from Y Mind youth groups. It builds on data from two earlier evaluation reports in April 2019 and April 2020. This report is based on youth and facilitator surveys collected from January 2018 to December 2020.

In March 2020, Y Mind groups shifted to a virtual format in response to COVID-19 physical distancing requirements. All evaluation surveys became available online at that time.

Y Mind

Y Mind supports participants who experience mild-to-moderate anxiety symptoms to learn effective skills to cope with their symptoms and improve their overall well-being. Program components include educational workshops and experiential activities; practicing mindfulness techniques; learning about evidenced-based tools and strategies grounded in Acceptance & Commitment Therapy; and take-home resources to help manage anxiety between sessions. Participants who take part at a YMCA are also provided with a complimentary YMCA health and fitness membership.

The groups are taking place in all five health authorities across the province (Vancouver Coastal, Fraser, Vancouver Island, Interior, and Northern). Groups for youth (seven sessions per group) take place at a local YMCA in each of these regions as well as through community partner agencies. YMCA regional managers support and train staff at their partner agencies to deliver the program.

Evaluation

The evaluation of Y Mind involves a mixed-methods approach of participant surveys administered at intake (Time 1), the end of youth's program cycle (Time 2), and three months after completing the program (Time 3); facilitator surveys; and interviews with YMCA managers/staff and partner-agency staff.

The evaluation is assessing both outcomes and process, and is measuring the following:

Expected outcomes

- The extent to which participants' anxiety symptoms decrease, and their skills to cope with anxiety increase, because of their involvement in Y Mind.
- The extent to which participants' overall well-being improves.
- The degree to which participants demonstrate improved mindfulness.

- The degree to which participants incorporate the skills and techniques they learned in Y Mind once their involvement in the program ends (assessed at Time 3 follow-up).
- Any effects of number of sessions attended on outcomes.
- Any differences in outcomes between groups run at regional YMCAs compared to partner sites.

Process

- Participants' reasons for wanting to take part in Y Mind (at intake), and their reasons for staying engaged (assessed at Time 2).
- Their intent to use the skills and techniques they learned in Y Mind once their cycle ends (assessed at the end of their involvement).
- Any barriers that prevent participants from applying the skills and techniques they had learned through the program (assessed at Time 3).
- Characteristics of those who complete the program compared to those who disengage (comparisons of Time 1 data).
- Y Mind facilitators' feedback about the curriculum, and their sense of confidence and perceived competence delivering the curriculum.
- The YMCA's and community agencies' partnership experience (including challenges and successes).
- Changes made to the Y Mind curriculum and/or how it is administered, and the YMCA's and partner agencies' views on these changes (e.g., a shift from trained clinical counsellors to youth workers and others administering it; any adjustments made in rural communities, etc.).
- Partner agencies' and YMCA's perceptions of challenges, successes, and lessons learned relating to the initiative overall.
- Any suggestions from participants, YMCA staff/managers, and partner agencies on how the initiative could be improved.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Data Sources

Participant surveys

Youth have the opportunity to fill out evaluation surveys before starting the Y Mind program (baseline measures; Time 1) and upon completion of the program (Time 2). In addition, participants have the opportunity to complete follow-up surveys three months after their program cycle ends (Time 3).

The surveys assess changes over time and the degree to which healthy behaviours and functioning established during participants' involvement in the program are maintained after their involvement ends.

The surveys (developed in consultation with the YMCA) include some measures that have been previously used in Youth Mindfulness Groups, and contain additional items the YMCA were interested in including. Based on feedback and suggestions from the first two evaluation reports, the surveys were shortened in September 2020.

The surveys are available in paper format and online through SimpleSurvey, which stores all data in Canada.

The following core measures are included at each time point:

- **Outcome Rating Scale (ORS;** Miller & Duncan, 2000) measures well-being in four domains (individual, interpersonal, social, overall). Respondents mark on a 10cm line how well they have been doing in each of the four areas over the past week. Marks toward the right (values nearing 10) represent higher levels of well-being, whereas marks toward the left represent lower levels. The purpose of the ORS is to measure changes in functioning over the course of an intervention.
- The **Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7;** Spitzer et al., 2006) is a screening tool for Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Respondents answer how often they have been bothered by various symptoms in the past two weeks (e.g., "*feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge*"). The GAD-7 is sensitive to detecting changes in anxiety symptoms pre- to post-treatment (e.g., Dear et al., 2011). Further, one of its identified purposes is to monitor symptom changes, or effects of treatment, over time.

Each GAD-7 item is answered on a 4-point scale (ranging from 0 'Not at all' to 3 'Nearly every day'), with total scores ranging from 0 to 21. A higher score reflects greater severity of generalized anxiety symptoms, and further assessment for GAD is recommended when a score is 10 or higher. Anxiety severity is classified as Minimal (total score = 0–4), Mild (5–9), Moderate (10–14), or Severe (15–21). A separate question, measuring global impairment due to anxiety, asks respondents how difficult their anxiety symptoms (if any) have made it for them to function properly (4-point scale ranging from 1 'Not difficult at all' to 4 'Extremely difficult').

- The **Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM;** Greco, Baer, & Smith, 2011) is a 10-item measure that assesses mindfulness. Studies have found promising psychometric

properties (Eklund et al., 2017) and promising sensitivity to pre-post changes (Lechtenberg, 2012). Respondents mark how often each sentence is true for them (ranging from 0 ‘Never true’ to 4 ‘Always true’). In September 2020, this measure was modified and reduced to three items, based on results of a factor analysis.

- The **Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II)** is a seven-item measure that assesses psychological inflexibility. Some research (Wolgast, 2014) has suggested that the AAQ-II might be a more accurate measure of distress as opposed to psychological inflexibility. In September 2020, this measure was removed from the Y Mind evaluation, based on feedback from facilitators and YMCA managers.
- Measures McCreary has used in the past (e.g., in the population-level BC Adolescent Health Survey), which tap mental health ratings (poor, fair, good, or excellent) and how well youth feel they manage their stress (poorly, fairly well, well, or very well).

Other measures include the following:

- The intake survey (Time 1) includes demographic information and assesses what participants hope to gain from taking part in the program.
- The Time 2 survey assesses the reasons participants stayed engaged and the degree to which they intend to use the skills and techniques they learned in Y Mind after their program ends. In addition, the Time 2 survey directly asks participants how much their involvement in Y Mind has improved their understanding of anxiety, their healthy coping skills, overall well-being, their peer connections, and support network.
- The Time 3 survey assesses the extent to which participants have applied the skills and techniques they had learned through the program, and barriers that may have prevented them from doing so.
- The surveys also include open-ended questions canvassing participants’ feedback about their involvement and any suggestions they might have for Y Mind.
- In September 2020, questions assessing physical activity and sleep were removed from the surveys.

Each participant is assigned a unique identifier so that their survey responses can be linked across time-points in order to track changes over time. Y Mind staff distribute Time 1 and Time 2 surveys to participants (either in person or online), while McCreary staff contact participants (who agreed to be contacted) to ask if they are interested in taking part in a follow-up evaluation (Time 3). Those who take part at Time 3 can choose to enter a draw to win 1 of 10 \$20 gift cards.

Not all participants who complete Time 1 evaluation measures go on to complete measures at subsequent time-points. Reasons might include not proceeding to take part in the program after participating in an information/intake session where they complete Time 1 measures; taking part in the program but choosing to not be involved in the evaluation; taking part in the program but missing their final session when the Time 2 surveys are distributed; or leaving the program early (e.g., after completing only a few sessions).

Youth are informed that their involvement in the evaluation is voluntary, that they can skip survey questions they do not feel comfortable answering, and can stop taking part at any time.

Facilitator survey

Y Mind facilitators are asked to complete a survey at the end of their involvement in each program cycle. The survey, developed in consultation with the YMCA, asks facilitators for their feedback about the curriculum and the ‘train the trainer’ delivery model, and assesses their sense of confidence and perceived competence delivering the curriculum. The survey also canvasses facilitators’ views on the successes and challenges of implementing the program, and asks about any changes they made to the curriculum or how it was delivered. In addition, they are asked about the impact of the program on participants.

Interviews

McCreary will carry out interviews (or focus groups) with YMCA managers/staff and partner agency staff toward the end of 2022 to canvass their feedback about the partnership experience (e.g., challenges, successes) and their views on the initiative’s overall successes, challenges, and lessons learned. These interviews will also capture changes in how the curriculum has been administered (e.g., shift from trained clinical counsellors to youth workers and others administering it; any adjustments made in rural communities, Indigenous communities, etc.), and their views on these changes.

Session attendance forms

Y Mind facilitators document the number of sessions that each participant attends. This information is used to assess whether the number of sessions youth attend is associated with program outcomes.

Analyses in this Report

Survey data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Repeated measures statistics were used to assess changes across time-points (i.e., paired-samples *t*-tests when comparing outcomes at the first two time-points; GLM repeated measures ANOVA when comparing across three time-points; McNemar test when comparing two categorical data points over time; and Cochran’s Q when comparing three categorical data points over time).

To examine whether the number of sessions participants attended affected their outcomes, number of sessions was entered as a covariate in a regression, along with a given Time 1 measure (i.e., to control for scores at Time 1), and the corresponding Time 2 measure was entered as the outcome variable. Similar analyses were carried out when examining other variables that might influence outcomes (e.g., regional YMCA vs. partner site; age; gender).

Comparisons were also carried out between youth who took part in in-person sessions and those who took part virtually, as well as between those who participated before the COVID-19 pandemic started and those who took part during the pandemic. However, based on the data available for this report, outcome findings for in-person delivery compared to virtual delivery were the same as findings for taking part pre-pandemic compared to during the pandemic, because these groupings represented the same youth (youth who completed both Time 1 and Time 2 surveys in person were the same youth who completed these measures pre-pandemic).

For analyses based on gender, the percentage of youth who identified as neither male nor female (e.g., non-binary) was relatively small. Therefore, while non-binary youth were considered in all gendered analyses, it was not possible to report the findings due to the risk of deductive disclosure or to the possibility that the percentage estimate was unreliable.

Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$, which means there was less than a 5% likelihood the results occurred by chance.

The reported effect size represents the strength or magnitude of an effect. For continuous variables, Cohen's d was used (around .2 suggests a small effect, .5 a medium effect, and .8 or higher a large effect). For categorical variables, Phi/Cramer's V was used (.1 suggests a small effect, .3 a medium effect, and .5 or higher a large effect).

Sample sizes (n) are noted in the findings, as not all participants completed all measures at all time-points, and only those who completed a measure at every time-point were included in the analyses examining changes over time (e.g., changes from Time 1 to Time 2 were assessed only among participants who completed a given measure at both Time 1 and Time 2).

Limitations

Session attendance information was not available for around a quarter of youth participants (23%). Therefore, findings pertaining to session attendance should be interpreted with this in mind.

Also, given the gap in session attendance information, it is unknown how many youth chose to not complete the evaluation surveys. This includes youth who chose to not complete a Time 1 survey after the information session and then did not proceed to take part in the program, or left the program early. The experiences of these youth would not have been captured in the evaluation findings.

EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS

Surveys Completed

A total of 1073 youth completed at least some evaluation measures at Time 1. Over half of these youth (57%) did so through a regional YMCA, while the remaining 43% did so through a partner site.

Most Time 1 surveys (80%) were completed before mid-March 2020 when the COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions came into effect. Similarly, most surveys (81%) were completed in paper format, while 19% were completed online. The vast majority of youth who completed a Time 1 survey during the pandemic did so online, while less than 10 youth who completed Time 1 during the pandemic filled out a paper version (a few groups that took place during the pandemic were carried out in-person when physical distancing restrictions were eased).

Based on available data from 826 participants, most youth who completed Time 1 measures (65%) continued in the program and completed Time 2 measures, while 8% continued in the program but did not complete Time 2 measures (e.g., they missed the final session when the measures were distributed or they chose to not take part in the evaluation). Another 21% who completed Time 1 measures did not proceed to take part in Y Mind, while 6% left the program after a few sessions.

Compared to youth who did not take part in Y Mind after the information session, Youth who completed the program (and Time 2 measures) had higher scores at Time 1 on the ORS subscales of interpersonal well-being (average of 5.1 vs. 4.3 among youth who did not take part) and social well-being (average of 4.4 vs. 3.8).

Among youth who completed Time 1 measures, females were more likely than males to complete the program and Time 2 measures (69% vs. 53%). Males were more likely than females to have not gone on to participate in the program after the information session (28% vs. 20%) or to have left the program after taking part in a few sessions (10% vs. 4% of females). The pattern was consistent when examined exclusively among youth who took part in virtual sessions.

There was no age difference between those who continued in the program after the information session and those who did not.

A total of 608 youth completed at least some Time 2 measures (some of these youth had not completed Time 1 measures), and 155 youth completed Time 3 measures. Moreover, 539 youth completed measures at both Time 1 and Time 2, and measures for 126 youth could be matched across all three time-points.

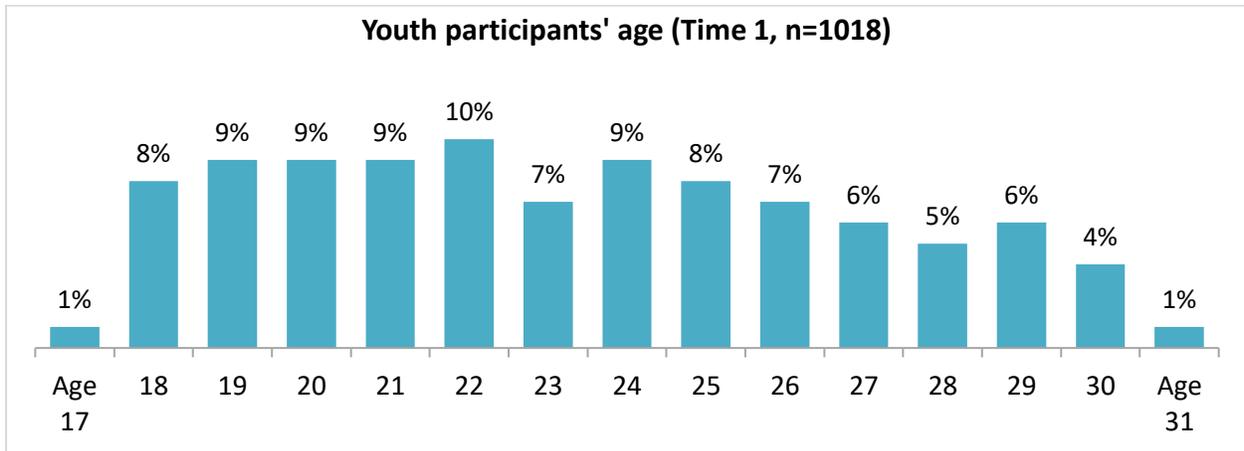
Youth measures completed to date at regional YMCAs and partner sites			
	Regional YMCAs	Partner sites	Total
Time 1	614	459	1073
Time 2	348	260	608
Time 3	96	59	155

Among youth who completed both the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys, the majority who filled out the Time 1 survey in paper format also filled out the Time 2 survey in this way. However, 8% of youth who completed both surveys had filled out the Time 1 survey in paper format and the Time 2 survey online. These were youth whose groups started in-person a little before mid-March 2020, and then due to the pandemic transitioned to a virtual format for the remainder of their sessions.

Demographic Information

Youth who completed demographic questions at Time 1 (n=1018) ranged in age from 17 to 31 years, with an average age of 23.3.

Youth who took part through a regional YMCA were slightly older than those who took part through a partner site (average age of 23.9 vs. 22.4 years). This difference was accounted for (controlled for) in all analyses pertaining to age and site type.



Note: Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Around 7 in 10 youth (69%) identified as female, 27% as male, and 3% as non-binary. The gender distributions were similar in groups carried out at regional YMCAs compared to partner agencies.

Youth most commonly identified their family background as European. Six percent indicated a background not among the list of options, and they most commonly specified “Canadian,” followed by Caribbean and Jewish. Another 6% did not know their family background.

Youth’s family backgrounds (Time 1 survey, n=997)	
European	65%
Indigenous	14%
East Asian	9%
South Asian	7%
Latin/South/Central American	6%
Southeast Asian	5%
African	2%
West Asian	2%
Australian, Pacific Islander	1%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Mental Health & Stress Management

On the Time 1 survey (n=715), 12% of youth rated their mental health as good or excellent, while 57% rated it as fair, and 31% rated it as poor.

When asked how well they managed their stress, around half of youth (49%) felt they managed it poorly, while a minority felt they managed it well or very well (8%). The rest (43%) felt they managed their stress fairly well.

There were no differences in ratings of mental health or stress management between youth who proceeded to take part in Y Mind after the information session and those who did not take part in the program. There were also no differences based on youth's gender, age, site type, or on whether they took part in-person or online (or pre- vs. during the pandemic).

Participation Goals

When asked at Time 1 what they hoped to gain from taking part in Y Mind, youth most commonly identified healthy coping skills, improved overall well-being, and reduced anxiety symptoms. Also, 7% specified a reason not among the list of options, such as to gain mindfulness skills, to improve their self-awareness, and to gain control over their maladaptive thoughts and habits.

What youth hoped to gain by taking part in Y Mind (Time 1, n=1001)	
Healthy coping skills	91%
Better overall well-being	86%
Reduced anxiety symptoms	82%
A better understanding of anxiety	63%
Emotional support	59%
Connections/friendships with other young people	53%
Access to other community programs or services *	22%
I don't know	6%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

* Among youth who indicated 'access to other community programs or services,' when asked to specify, common responses included access to counselling services and other community programs or resources.

Youth who filled out Time 1 measures and completed the program were more likely than those who did not take part in the program to indicate wanting to gain healthy coping skills (94% vs. 81%), improved well-being (90% vs. 90%), and reduced anxiety symptoms (85% vs. 72%) through their involvement in Y Mind. Those who did not proceed to take part in the program were more likely to indicate not knowing what they hoped to gain from taking part in Y Mind (11% vs. 6% of those who completed the program).

Females were more likely than males to report wanting to gain healthy coping skills (93% vs. 85%), emotional support (63% vs. 50%), and reduced anxiety symptoms (85% vs. 77%). Males were more likely than females to indicate not knowing what they hoped to gain from taking part in Y Mind (11% vs. 4%).

Older youth were more likely than younger ones to indicate wanting to gain healthy coping skills, improved well-being, reduced anxiety symptoms, and increased access to other programs or services through their involvement.

Youth involved during the pandemic were more likely than those involved pre-pandemic to indicate wanting to gain healthy coping skills through the program (96% vs. 89%).

Number of Sessions Attended

Most groups consisted of seven sessions but one group recorded eight sessions. Based on available information (n=557), youth who took part in Y Mind participated in six sessions on average, and 69% took part in six or more sessions.

The average number of sessions was slightly lower for males than females (5.4 vs. 5.9 sessions). Also, older youth tended to take part in more sessions than younger youth.

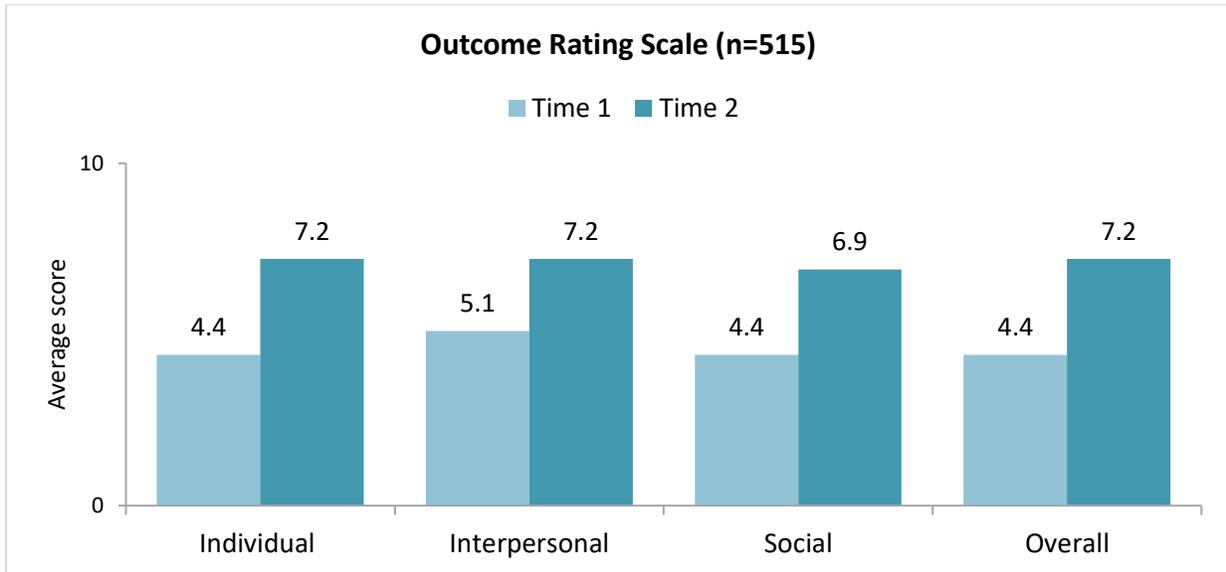
Youth who took part online participated in slightly more sessions, on average, than those who took part in person (average of 6.2 vs. 5.7 sessions).

There were no differences in number of sessions attended for youth who took part through a regional YMCA compared to a partner site.

OUTCOMES

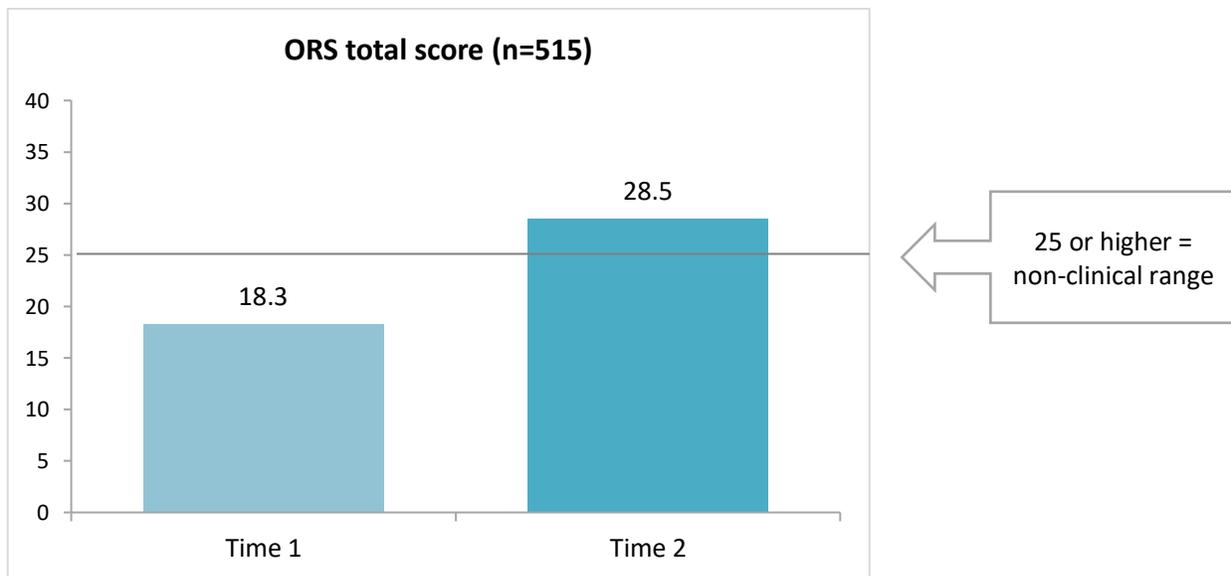
Outcome Rating Scale (ORS)

Youth who completed the ORS at both Time 1 and Time 2 (n=515) demonstrated improvements in all domains—i.e., individual, interpersonal, social, and overall well-being—by the end of their program cycle (p 's < .001; Cohen's d ranged from 0.93 to 1.41).

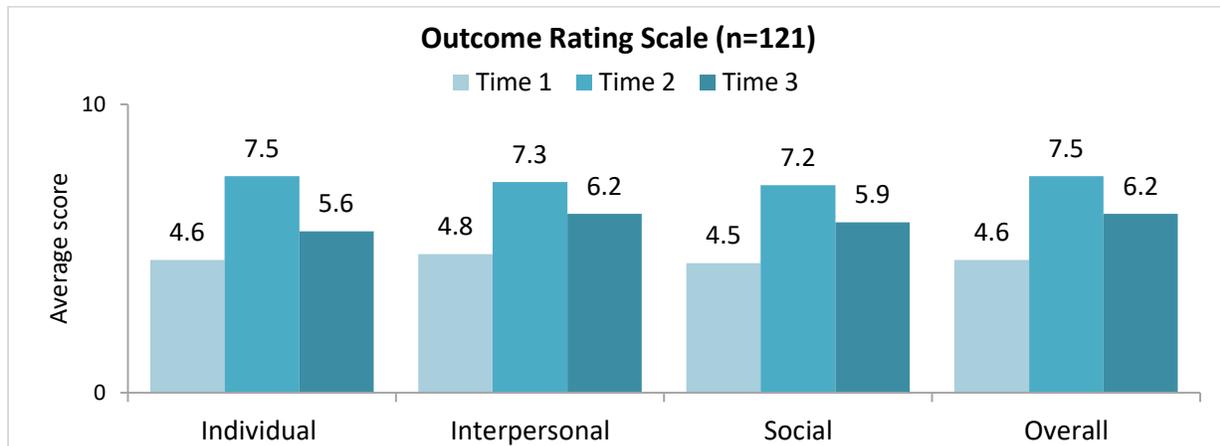


Note. Increases from Time 1 to Time 2 reflect improvements.

The corresponding increase in the ORS total score (sum of the four items) from Time 1 to Time 2 (p < .001; Cohen's $d=1.41$) shifted the average total score from one that is typical of a clinical population to one that is typical of a non-clinical population (a score of 25 or higher is considered within the non-clinical range; Quirk et al., 2012).



Among youth who completed the ORS at all three time-points (n=121), their scores three months after completing the program (Time 3) were slightly lower than their scores in their final Y Mind session (Time 2). However, youth's scores at Time 3 were still higher than their scores before starting the program (p 's < .001; effect sizes ranged from 0.42 to 0.78).



A similar pattern was seen for youth's ORS total score (18.6 at Time 1 vs. 29.5 at Time 2 vs. 24.4 at Time 3).

Some of youth's comments at Time 3 seemed to account for their decrease in well-being scores from Time 2 to Time 3. For example, they explained they had experienced challenging circumstances after the program ended, such as the dissolution of a romantic relationship, death of a loved one, and/or loss of their job. A few also mentioned the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They stated that these events had a negative impact on their well-being. However, some noted that their experience in Y Mind, and the skills they had learned in the program, helped them to navigate through their challenges.

Youth's reflections on their Time 3 survey responses...

"My survey results are impacted by some recent events. In the last 3 weeks my life has had some big and difficult changes. It has been extremely stressful for me."

"I was more relaxed after finishing the program. This feeling of relaxation got disrupted by COVID, but it really helped me back then."

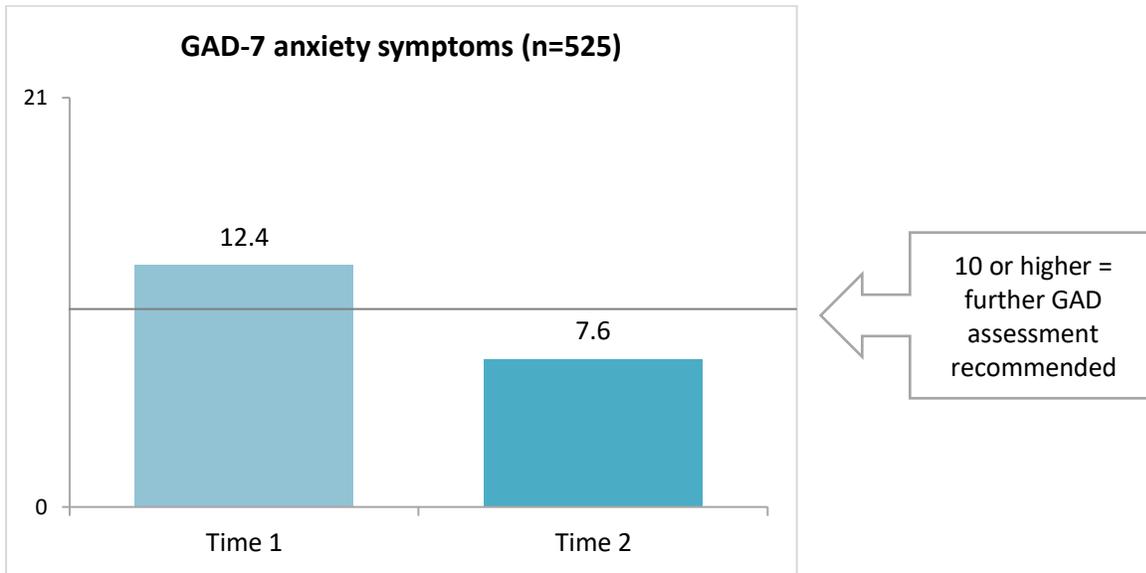
"My mental health took a turn way for the worse about a month ago but I'm doing better."

"Very recently, my boyfriend and I broke up. I wanted to share this information as I feel it may have affected my answers to the first few pages of the survey. After the program I felt very fresh and able to take things on. I still feel this way, I am just distracted right now."

"My current rates do not reflect the entirety of my experience in the last three months. I experienced a very unexpected and hurtful break up about six weeks after the program ended and am still recovering. Other than the grieving process, I am doing considerably better than prior to the program. And I'm very happy to note that the skills I learned have been helpful in moving on."

Generalized Anxiety Symptoms

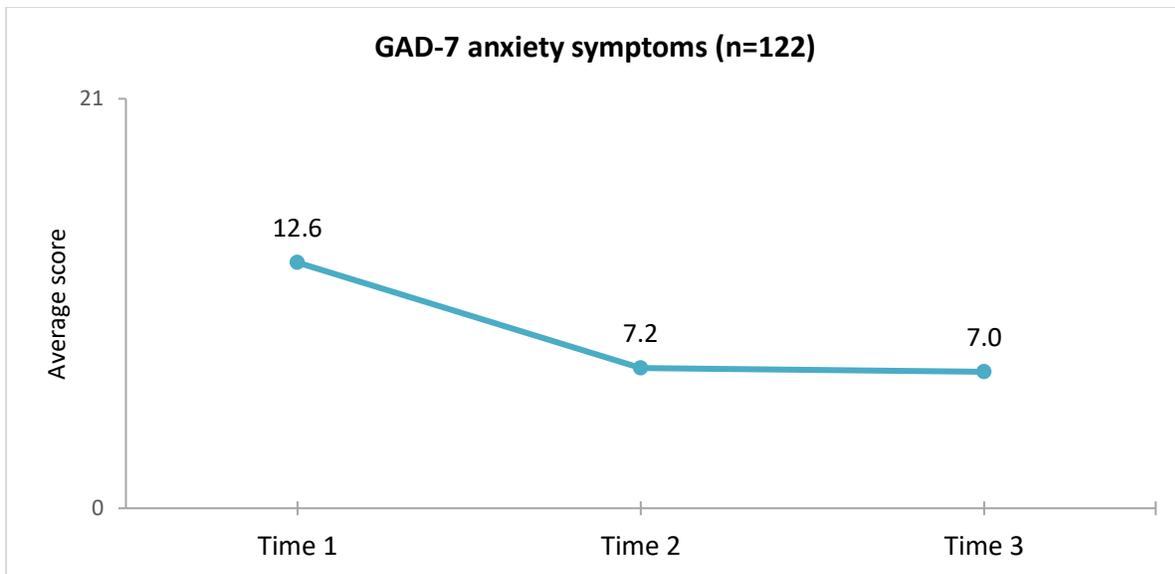
Youth who completed the GAD-7 at both Time 1 and Time 2 (n=525) reported lower severity of generalized anxiety symptoms at the end of their program involvement than at the start ($p < .001$; Cohen's $d=1.10$). The average score decreased from the Moderate range at Time 1 to the Mild range at Time 2, and shifted below the cut-off score of 10 (i.e., a score of 10 or higher warrants further assessment for Generalized Anxiety Disorder).



Note. A decrease from Time 1 to Time 2 reflects an improvement.

Youth who completed the GAD-7 functional-impairment rating scale at the first two time-points (n=508) reported less impairment at Time 2 compared to Time 1 (average score of 2.0 at Time 2 vs. 2.5 at Time 1, out of a possible score of 4.0; $p < .001$; Cohen's $d=0.77$).

Among youth who completed the GAD-7 at all three time-points (n=122), severity of anxiety symptoms decreased from Time 1 to Time 2 ($p < .001$; Cohen's $d=1.30$), and this decrease was maintained at Time 3. Similarly, functional impairment scores (n=117) decreased from Time 1 to Time 2 (2.5 to 1.9; $p < .001$; Cohen's $d=0.86$), and this decrease was maintained at Time 3.



Note. The difference between Time 2 and Time 3 was not statistically significant.

Comments about reduced anxiety symptoms and coping with anxiety, as a result of involvement in Y Mind...

Time 2:

"I now know how to actually manage my anxiety. It seems doable and I am doing it. Y Mind has helped me create a better life for myself, and I don't feel overwhelmed anymore."

"I have learned how to better live with anxiety."

"My experience in this program has helped me cope with my anxiety and improve my mental health."

"It has helped me take action to slowly overcome anxiety."

"My experience in this program has helped me accept my symptoms of anxiety and has helped me understand that other people experience the same symptoms as me."

"I think now I understand much more about anxiety and stress. I learned many techniques that are helping me to lower my anxiety level."

"This program is something that anyone who goes through their life with anxiety should participate in. This program helps to lower your anxiety levels."

"This program allowed for me to recognize different triggers of my anxiety and helped me to cope through anxiety provoking times. It helps me now to prevent 'spiraling.'"

"My anxiety has gone down, not completely, but I'm more at ease."

"Taking part in this program has helped me enact coping strategies for stress and anxiety and in turn has reduced it. My overall well-being has improved."

“This program has lowered my overall anxiety and given me many coping skills. I am happier and I find ways to enjoy life a bit more.”

Time 3:

“My life changed from 3/10 to 9/10. I no longer experience anxiety every single day. I sleep better and I wake up feeling so free—free from years of anxiety.”

“It helped give me skills to help combat anxiety and OCD symptoms.”

“I have been able to have a different point of view of my mental health. I am able to recognize when I am feeling anxious.”

“The program helped to not make me spiral more into my anxiety.”

“The experience of Y Mind introduced me to very good skills.... For example, I am able to change my thoughts into something less anxious.... Since the program I am able to relax myself and my thoughts when external stressors occur.”

“I am better able to objectively review my thoughts, and work through any barriers I might experience. I have gained the ability to manage my anxiety, and to experience living in the moment, not focusing on what has been, or will be.”

“Slowed my anxiety down a lot so that I can go out and follow my dreams/goals.”

“My anxiety has gone down in certain areas and I know how to deal with it better and in a healthier way when I feel it.”

“Anxiety is much less of a factor when it comes to doing the things I value and enjoy.”

“I slowly began to master my anxiety before my midterms and my grades started to improve as a result! I finally began to feel like I had control over myself again and it really helped to rebuild my self-confidence which was so nice to be able to do!”

“My experience in Y Mind has affected my life in a very positive and beneficial way... Being able to learn ways to manage my anxiety has reduced my anxiety. Now, I still do get anxious but because I am more aware of being mindful, I take into consideration how to decrease the level of anxiety I may be feeling at that moment.”

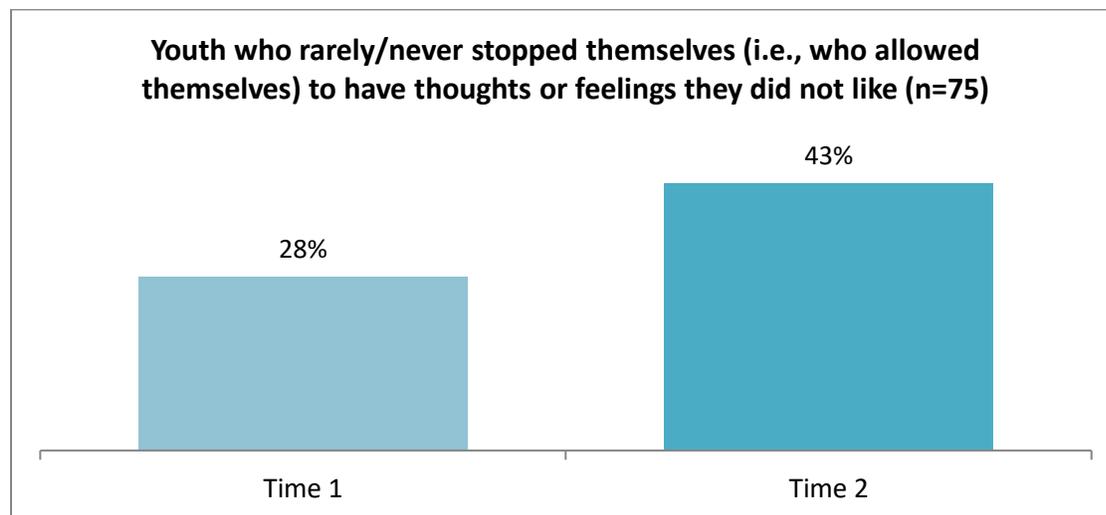
Mindfulness

Previous evaluation reports included findings from the CAMM (mindfulness measure). Those findings indicated that participants' mindfulness scores improved from Time 1 to Time 2, and those improvements were maintained at Time 3.

In fall 2020, the mindfulness items were modified and reduced from ten to three questions. Youth who completed the revised items at both Time 1 and Time 2 (n=75) reported greater mindfulness at the end of their involvement in Y Mind than at the start (p 's < .01). Specifically, they were less likely to get upset with themselves for having certain thoughts or feelings (average score of 2.4 at Time 1 vs. 1.7 at Time 2; Cohen's $d=0.86$); to stop themselves from having thoughts or feeling they did not like (1.9 vs. 1.6; Cohen's $d=0.42$); and to have difficulty paying attention to only one thing at a time (2.6 vs. 2.2; Cohen's $d=0.40$). Findings at Time 3 cannot be reported because, to date, an insufficient number of youth have completed the items at all three time-points.

Reduced avoidance

Youth's responses to open-ended questions about what they gained from taking part in Y Mind were consistent with the quantitative findings showing that over time they were less likely to stop themselves from having thoughts or feelings they perceived as negative. Youth commented that their involvement in the program helped them to understand it was not adaptive to try to avoid certain feelings. They also stated that the program helped them to gain skills to effectively cope with those feelings.



Note: A higher percentage reflects greater mindfulness.

Comments about reduced avoidance, as a result of involvement in Y Mind...

Time 2:

“My experience in this program has...impacted my life very positively in that realizing my anxiety is not a bad thing that I need to fix or get rid of, and instead providing me with strategies to make room for my anxiety and to cope with it in a more effective way.”

“The Y Mind program...reassured me that negative feelings are a natural occurrence, so I’m now less inclined to avoid negative thoughts.”

“[The program] has helped me be able to sit with my anxious thoughts rather than use avoidance techniques—allowing me to live a more purposeful & present life.”

“Confirmed that it’s healthier to let emotions come and go than to try and push them away.”

“Previous to the course, I would push myself to be busy with school and push away my feelings. Now I have a mindful approach and still get everything done that is important.”

“I am able to let my feelings show up and can identify how I feel instead of avoid them. Mindfulness has help me so much.”

Time 3

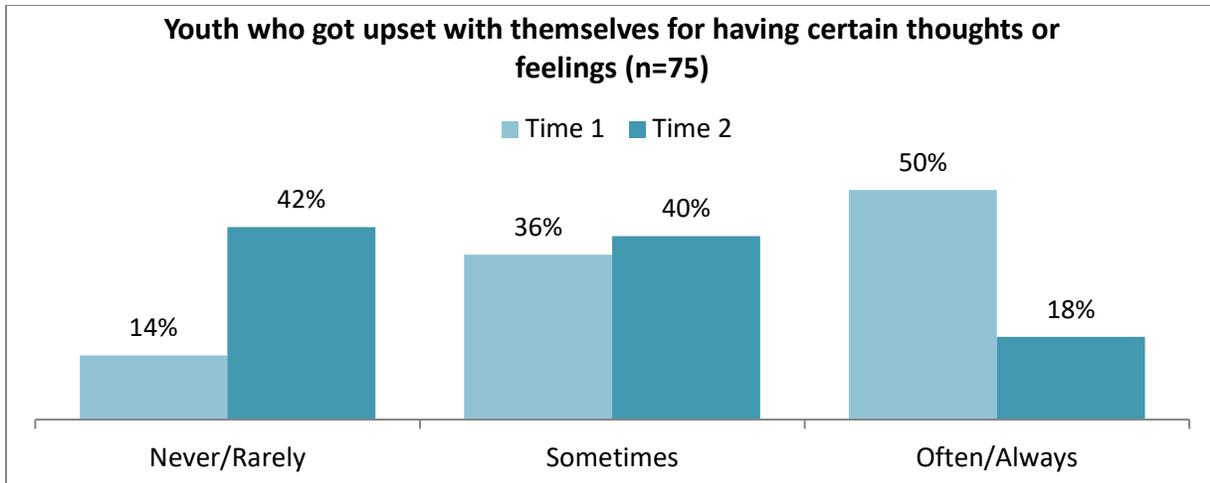
“My experience with the Y Mind program showcased the important value of sitting with your emotions. I consciously give myself more room to feel unwanted feelings more (such as sadness or anger) which actually allows them to dissipate instead of festering inside of me when I try to ignore them.”

“It made me realize that pushing away your feeling only builds them up and makes them stronger for another day to come. I can’t do that because it is not healthy.”

“I learned some great new skills about how mindfulness can improve my life, and also learned a different approach to utilizing anxiety instead of suppressing it.”

Increased acceptance

In line with the quantitative findings, youth stated they started accepting their thoughts and feelings, and became more compassionate and accepting toward themselves, over the course of their involvement in Y Mind.



Note: “Never/Rarely” reflects greater mindfulness, while “Often/Always” reflects lower mindfulness.
 Note: The difference for “Sometimes” was not statistically significant.

Comments about enhanced acceptance, as a result of involvement in Y Mind...

Time 2:

“This experience has taught me a lot about my anxiety and understanding it. I learned it’s ok to feel the way I feel and not to fight the feeling but simply let it pass. This is my most treasured piece of knowledge I was taught and I am so grateful for it.”

“I accept myself more, I know what to do if my anxiety/sadness/anger seems to carry me away. I understand now how to accept these feelings and let them be. I am more kind to myself in letting myself feel, and acknowledging that these feelings are ok.”

“This experience has allowed me to be more patient and compassionate with myself and given me the motivation to actively work on that self-compassion. It has also helped me to be more accepting of the anxiety that I experience and its role in my life.”

“This program was very helpful in allowing me to be more accepting of my anxiety and making me feel as if I was not alone.”

“It helped me through a period when I was looking for a job which is an area in my life that causes me a lot of anxiety. Learning to acknowledge and accept my feelings and thoughts played a big part in getting me through applying for jobs and going to the interviews.”

Time 3:

“[My involvement in Y Mind] has affected my everyday view of my life. I am able to have emotions, good and bad, and struggles, without becoming absorbed into them, which helps me cope tremendously in day-to-day stresses.”

“I now know that it is okay to have certain feelings and they should be recognized rather than avoided or pushed down.”

“I am much less afraid of my emotions. I’m more empathetic towards myself.”

Improved attention

Youth's comments suggested that Y Mind taught them how to focus on the present, which helped to increase their awareness of their external surroundings as well as their internal state (e.g., feelings).

Comments about improved attention, as a result of involvement in Y Mind...

Time 2:

"I enjoy noticing simple things and do so more often now. It's difficult to ascertain what exactly the program has impacted in my life, but things like food taste better when you pay attention to it, and horrible feelings are easier to move away from when I remember to be kinder to myself."

"The program has taught me greater appreciation for the smaller pleasures in everyday life. I now take pleasure in cooking and eating, whereas before these were activities I did just to ensure my survival."

"I am more present, and I make a point of grounding myself in the present now so I can fully experience day-to-day moments."

"The program has allowed me to live a slightly more meaningful life by choosing to be in the present."

"This program taught me to be more mindful by slowing down, being present with the moment, giving me more awareness of my thoughts and feelings and accepting them without judgement."

Time 3:

"I wish I was more mindful [at the start of the pandemic] in March, but other than that the program helped. I have been going out for walks and I've been taking it all in but also seeing what's around me."

"Being mindful of all emotions gives me greater perspective and helps me focus on what feelings I ultimately want to cultivate."

"[The program] made me more aware that I can be mindful and not rush around all the time."

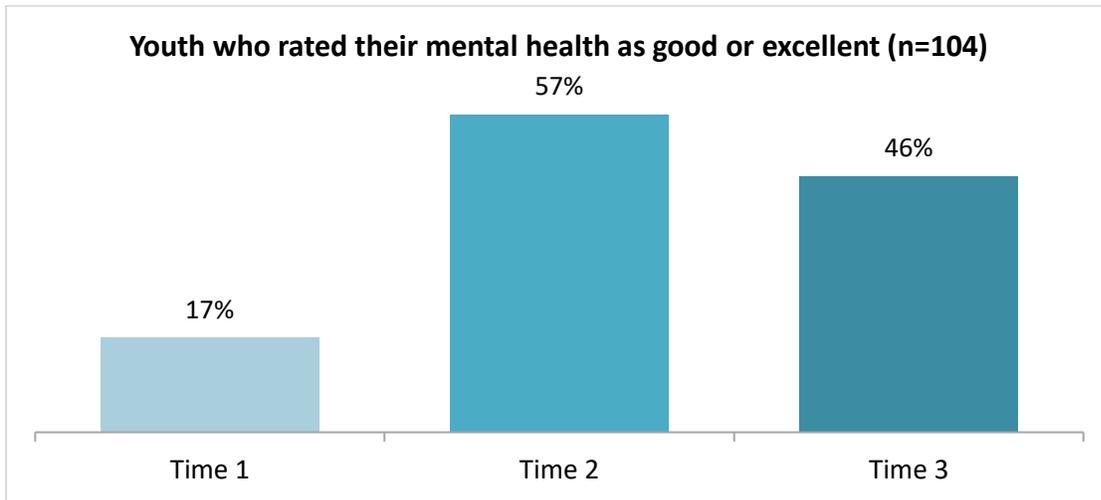
"I have become more mindful of my everyday life and have brought meditation in as a large part of my help with anxiety."

"Learning mindfulness has created a type of awareness for myself that I did not know I had in me. I will take what I learned from Y Mind with me everywhere I go."

Other Mental Health Outcomes

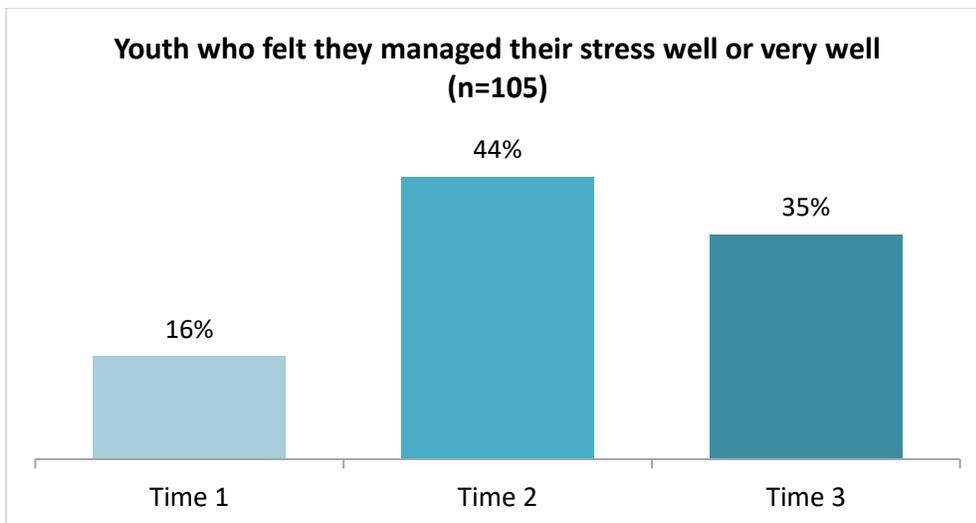
Youth were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent at the end of their involvement in Y Mind than at the start (53% at Time 2 vs. 13% at Time 1; McNemar < .001; Phi=.2; n=475).

Findings were similar among those who answered the question at all three time-points (n=104), and the improvements at Time 2 were maintained at Time 3.



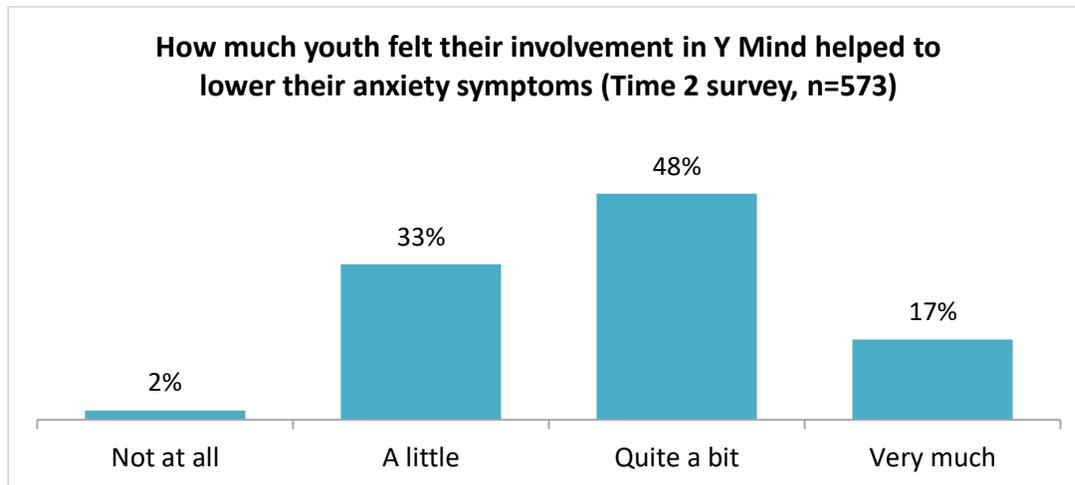
Note. The difference between Time 2 and Time 3 was not statistically significant.

Youth’s ratings of how well they managed their stress were better at Time 2 than at Time 1 (e.g., 36% managed their stress well or very well at Time 2, compared to 7% at Time 1; among those who answered at both time-points; n=479; McNemar < .001; Phi=.2). The pattern was similar among youth who answered the question at all three time-points, and improvements in stress-management seen at Time 2 were maintained at Time 3.



Note. The difference between Time 2 and Time 3 was not statistically significant.

By the end of their program cycle, most youth felt their involvement in Y Mind helped to reduce their anxiety symptoms quite a bit or very much. Most also felt their involvement in the program helped quite a bit or very much to improve their understanding of anxiety (88%), their healthy coping skills (91%), and their overall well-being (79%).



Youth were asked an open-ended question on the Time 2 and Time 3 surveys about how their experience in the program has affected their life (if at all). Many identified improvements in their mental health, including reduced anxiety symptoms and improved coping skills, due to the knowledge and skills they had gained through Y Mind. They also reported feeling more self-confident, happy, and hopeful for their future, and experiencing an improved quality of life.

Some participants who took part in Y Mind during the COVID-19 pandemic commented that they appreciated the support they received through the program during this particular time in their life.

Comments about improved mental health and well-being, as a result of involvement in Y Mind...

Time 2:

"[Involvement in this program] has made me far more aware of my thoughts and feelings, and new ways to see them and deal with them! It has also been an immense help during this Coronavirus period!!"

"I'm very glad to have the tools learnt from this program to assuage my anxiety/depression. I think I would be much worse off if I hadn't had learnt these skills going into the extra dejecting holiday and winter [due to the COVID-19 pandemic]."

"I sincerely believe this program has changed my entire mentality with regards to negative thoughts and feelings. This understanding has increased my self-compassion and allowed me to feel comfortable with who I am. As a result, I have begun to feel better—less anxious and better mood. Through this difficult time with Covid, my anxiety has been raised but I don't feel like it can overpower me anymore."

“I had believed that being happy all the time is the normal, so with this program I learned it is okay to not feel positive all the time which is good especially with covid-19 and the stress behind it (I might have gone under a rock and not been myself but instead I am functioning and appreciating the life I have).”

“My life has completely transformed. I went from going through a mental breakdown to feeling more in control of myself and my life.”

“The program has changed the entire outlook of mine towards life, work, anxiety, mental health. It has cleared so many doubts for me and processed hard feelings. It made me accept myself more and judge less. It has given me skills to deal with anxiety, difficult situations, do stuff in my free time for wellness and health.”

“It has clarified and normalized negative as well as positive emotions, which takes a LOT of pressure off of me to feel like I SHOULD always feel wonderful. Without that pressure, it is easier to roll through emotions, and come out better than I used to be after negative thoughts/feelings occur in me. This gives more energy and emotional availability to take pleasure in my life and my family, which is a very big deal to me, and them.”

“I feel much more grounded and confident that I can manage my anxiety with the new coping mechanisms I have learned. I also have a clearer vision of my values which allows me to act more authentically.”

“It has given me the freedom to just be and not rationalize everything. My energy has been improved and my time has been spent doing things that bring me more joy. My ability to see the positive things has improved. I have become much better at being sensitive and compassionate to myself which has improved my confidence which has a ripple effect to the other aspects of my life.”

“I have been on a mental health journey for 8 years.... That being said I don't think I've grown so much as a person and have seen improvement in my well-being in those 8 years than I have in these 7 weeks!”

Time 3:

“[Y Mind] changed my life for the better. I feel alive now, and better than ever. Through practicing meditations with [the facilitators], I was able to find my purpose in life, and increased my sense of belonging in the community. I wake up inspired and motivated every single day.”

“It has had a hugely positive impact. I find myself able to do things I never would have thought possible six months ago. I have slowly become more comfortable with discomfort, and find myself seeking out situations where I can grow and be challenged.”

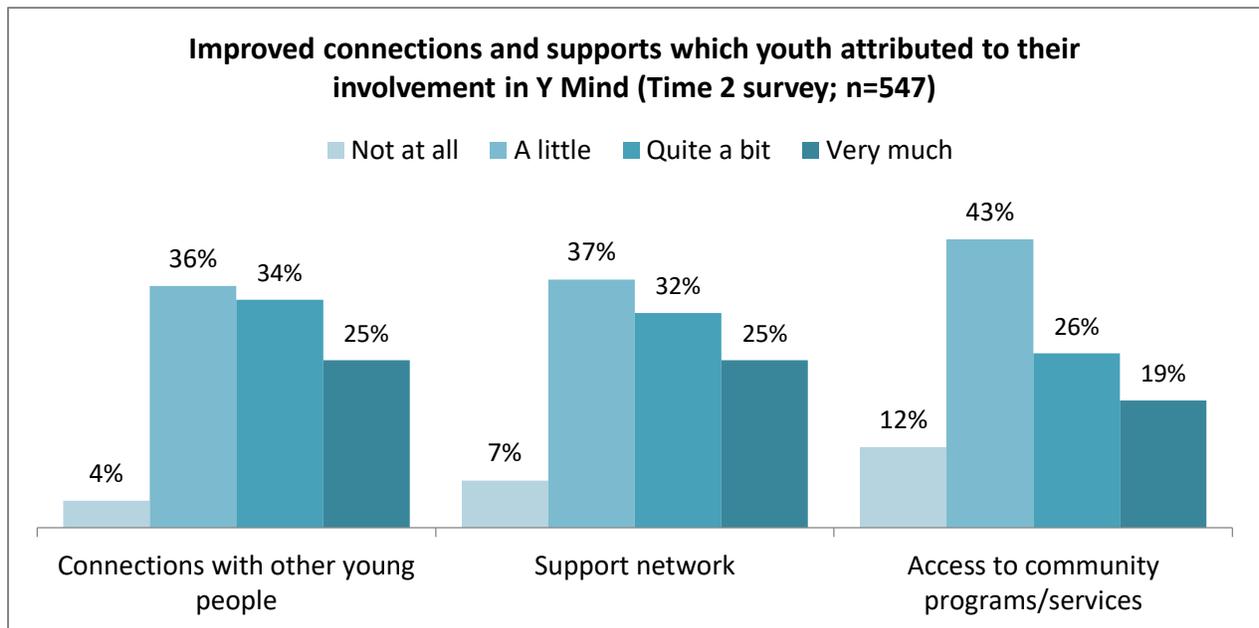
“Y Mind gave me the tools to stop letting my anxiety and depression rule my life. During the program I began to feel optimistic but I've experienced the most growth in the months following the program. As more time passes and I get better at filtering my thoughts, I enjoy greater happiness and self-confidence.”

“I manage my emotions way better and I am seeing the after-effects of it now that it has been some time. I didn't realize until last week how much better I am at handling my anxiety.”

“I really do think the way I see problems or stress/anxieties in my life has changed. I’m more accepting of them and don’t try to change or avoid/hide them as much. I feel like I’m more honest with others as well as myself about what I’m feeling.”

Connections & Supports

By the end of their program cycle, most youth felt their involvement in Y Mind helped to improve their connections with other young people, their support network, and their access to community programs or services, at least a little.



Note. Percentages within each category do not all equal 100% due to rounding.

In response to the open-ended questions at Time 2 and Time 3 about how their experience in Y Mind had affected their life, youth commented that taking part in the program helped them to feel less alone and enabled them to socialize and make connections with others. Some noted their involvement in Y Mind helped them feel connected to a supportive community, and they learned how to ask others for help when needed.

A few respondents commented at Time 3 that they were still in touch with the peers they had met through the program, and that the connections they had made through Y Mind were key to their success in the program and afterwards.

Comments about improved connections and supports, as a result of involvement in Y Mind...

Time 2:

“I spent every Tuesday looking forward to [the Y Mind group]. And now have a community and friends who know and understand my experiences. I hope we can stay in touch as a group and

keep each other in check with all our techniques that we learned. I've also recommended it to several people already!"

"I really benefited from the group aspect. As a highly anxious person, group settings aren't for me but this program was different. It was extremely helpful to hear that other people have similar struggles with their mental health as I do."

"The sense of community was awesome as I got to connect with new people going through the same life struggles as me."

"It made me realize I wasn't alone in what I was experiencing and had other people to support me."

"I've gained confidence in my ability to reach out for help. I've been in contact with other programs to continue improving my life."

"This program gave me the courage to ask for help and I now see a counsellor."

Time 3:

"The program helped me to see a way out of the painful circle of mental self-abuse. I met other young people who shared my difficulties and participated in thought-provoking conversations that have made a huge impact in my life."

"Made me believe I wasn't the only one going through this and made me feel like I belong in the community."

"I got to know some people with similar problems and I felt better knowing I was not alone. Besides that, we could support each other emotionally during the program and even after the program ended."

"My group still connects every week or so. And we connect on WhatsApp."

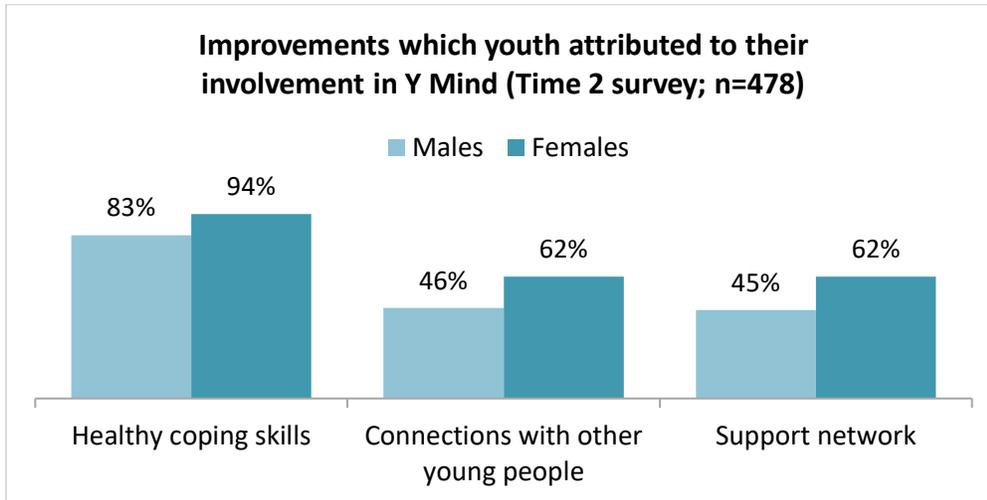
"The program helped me to believe that opening up and asking for support can truly change my life. I really felt not alone anymore and have carried that feeling with me. This is an invaluable outcome."

"Even after the Y Mind program was over, we kept in touch helping each other as we could. Beyond the skills we learned, finding people that can understand without judgment I think was fundamental for my success in the program."

Factors that Might Influence Outcomes

The number of sessions youth attended did not show any effect on outcomes. Similarly, whether youth attended sessions at a regional YMCA or through a partner agency did not appear to influence outcomes, nor did youth's age.

Gender did not seem to have an effect on the core outcomes. However, at Time 2 females were more likely than males to directly report that their involvement in Y Mind improved their healthy coping skills, connections with other young people, and their support network.



Findings indicated that taking part in the program pre-pandemic compared to during the pandemic impacted well-being outcomes on the ORS measure. Upon further examination, both groups demonstrated improvements from Time 1 to Time 2 on all the ORS subscales, but the magnitude of effects (effect sizes) were larger for youth who took part pre-pandemic than for those who took part during the pandemic.

Some youth who took part in Y Mind during the pandemic commented on their Time 2 survey that the pandemic had negatively affected their well-being, which they noted was reflected in their evaluation results.

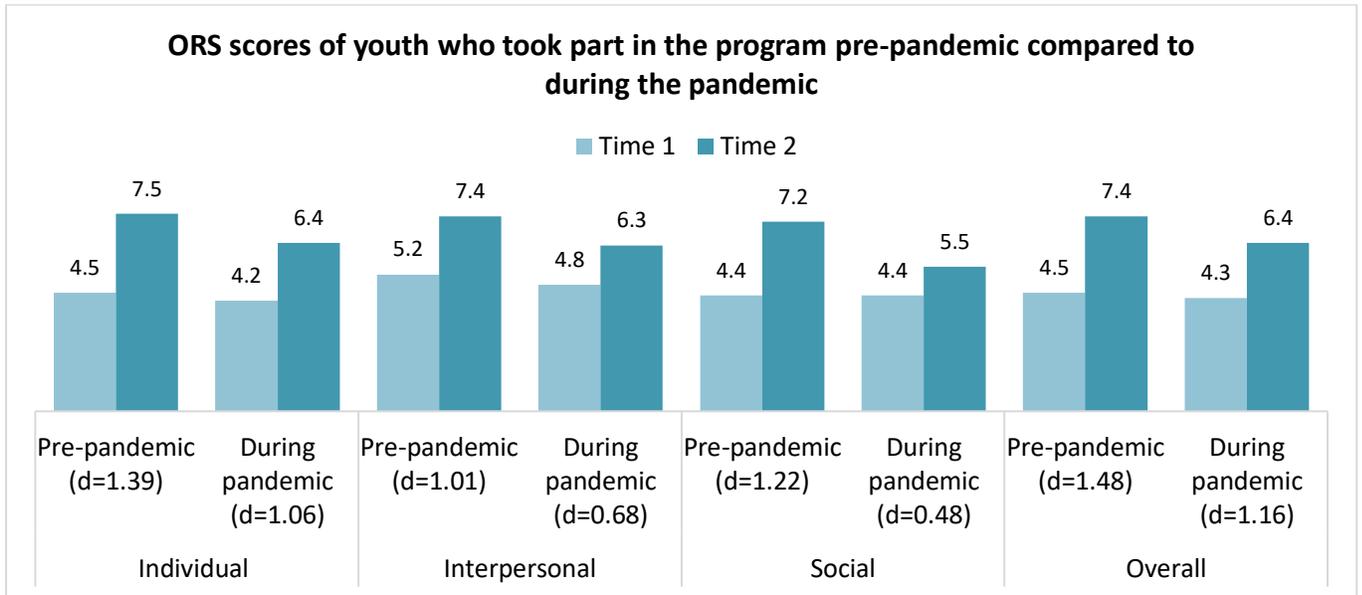
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth's Y Mind evaluation scores (Time 2 survey)...

"I don't think that my pre and post intervention scores are an accurate reflection of the effectiveness of this program. My anxiety levels have increased and my wellbeing has decreased since my first completion of this survey due to COVID 19."

"While I answered the survey questions honestly, I don't believe my result is a fair evaluation of the program...Personally, I've been negatively affected by [the COVID-19 pandemic] and my overall well-being is a reflection of that."

"My scores would be better but COVID-19 is affecting my mental health unfortunately. I really loved this program."

However, it is important to note that among youth who took part in Y Mind during the pandemic, overall there were medium to large effect sizes from Time 1 to Time 2 on the ORS subscales.



Note: These results are for youth who both started and finished the program pre-pandemic or during the pandemic (i.e., they exclude youth who started pre-pandemic and finished during the pandemic).

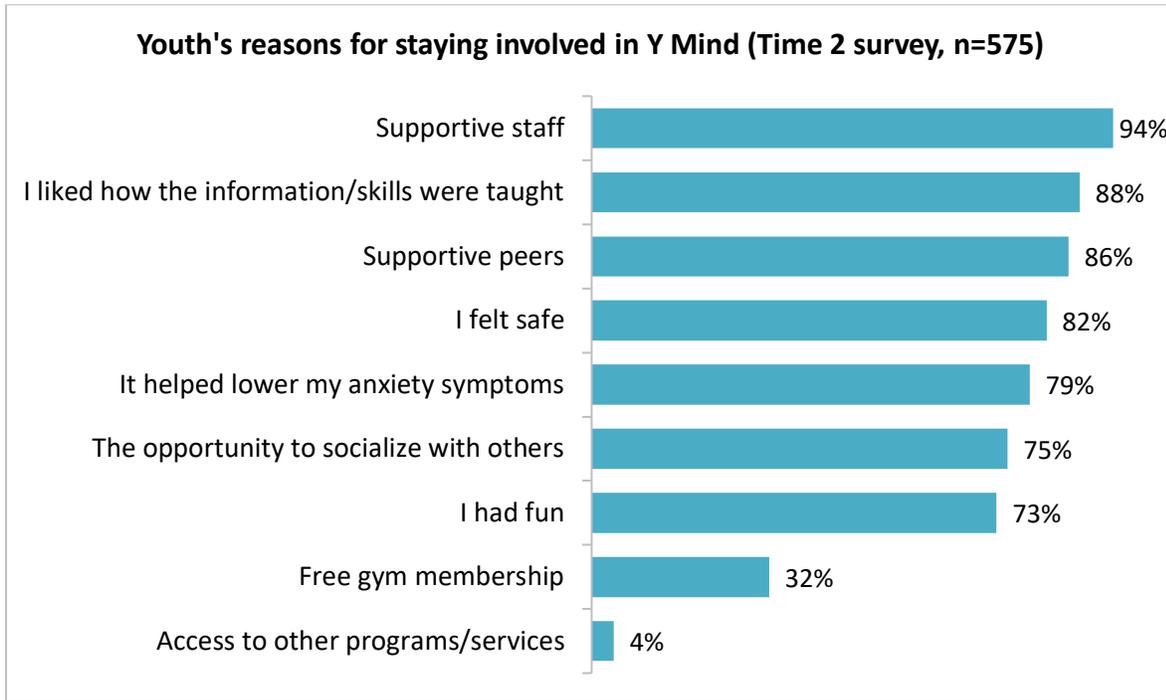
Note: “d” refers to Cohen’s *d*, a measure of effect size.

Among youth who took part in Y Mind during the pandemic, the change in their ORS total score (sum of the subscales) from Time 1 to Time 2 reflected a large effect size (from 17.7 at Time 1, to 24.5 at Time 2; Cohen’s *d*=1.05), as did the change in ORS total score among youth who took part in the program before the pandemic started (from 18.5 at Time 1, to 29.6 at Time 2; Cohen’s *d*=1.54).

ADDITIONAL YOUTH FEEDBACK

Reasons for Staying Involved

When asked at Time 2 about the reasons they had stayed involved in Y Mind, youth most commonly identified the supportive staff, followed by appreciating how the information and skills were taught, and supportive peers.



Note. Youth could mark all that applied.

Youth who attended the program through a regional YMCA were more likely than those who attended through a partner site to report staying involved in Y Mind because of the free gym membership (37% vs. 24%), supportive peers (90% vs. 82%), and access to other programs or services.

There were no age differences, with the exception that younger youth were more likely than older ones to report staying engaged in Y Mind because they had fun.

Females were more likely than males to report staying involved because they liked how the information and skills were taught (91% vs. 83%) and because they felt safe (86% vs. 73%).

Youth who completed Y Mind in-person before the COVID-19 pandemic started were more likely than those who took part virtually during the pandemic to report staying engaged in the program because of the free gym membership (36% vs. 19%) and to gain access to other programs or services.

Feedback at Time 2 & Time 3...

Supportive facilitators & safe space

“The leaders of the program were wonderful. They were easy to talk to, explained the information very well, and gave great real-life examples of when, why, and how we could use the tools provided from the program.”

“[The facilitators] created such a warm, welcoming environment consistently every week. I’m so grateful this resource is available for students and I think more people need to know about it.”

“I can’t thank the facilitators enough for the incredible work they did and the safe container they created for us as a group. Bless everyone who made this program offering possible.”

“The sessions and the space made me feel safe even on days when I felt low but it was okay to feel that way.”

“[The facilitators] were pretty much the perfect instructors. They genuinely cared. They made everyone feel valid in the points they were making. They made me feel comfortable and fostered a warm, welcoming environment in the group. They negotiated difficult situations tactfully.”

Curriculum and approach

“Excellent program. Great, measurable skills. We were actually taught HOW to apply different techniques, as opposed to just being given the techniques.”

“The book was wonderful, and so were the facilitators. It felt empowering and encouraging to be part of this program. Thank you.”

“I really enjoyed the diversity in programming - worksheets, mindfulness practices, videos, feedback portions etc. It was a nice way to engage in different ways and expand the knowledge base as you got to follow along using your own shared experience.”

*“Thank you so much for putting this group on, I will keep the lessons I learned for the rest of my life. The books *The Happiness Trap* was also a huge plus and taught me so much.”*

“Thank you so much... awesome facilitation! I really enjoyed this group. The book and the workbook are also great tangible resources that I can take with me and remind myself about what I learnt! I also appreciated the lack of jargon and all the brainstorming on the [virtual] whiteboard exercises to define concepts.”

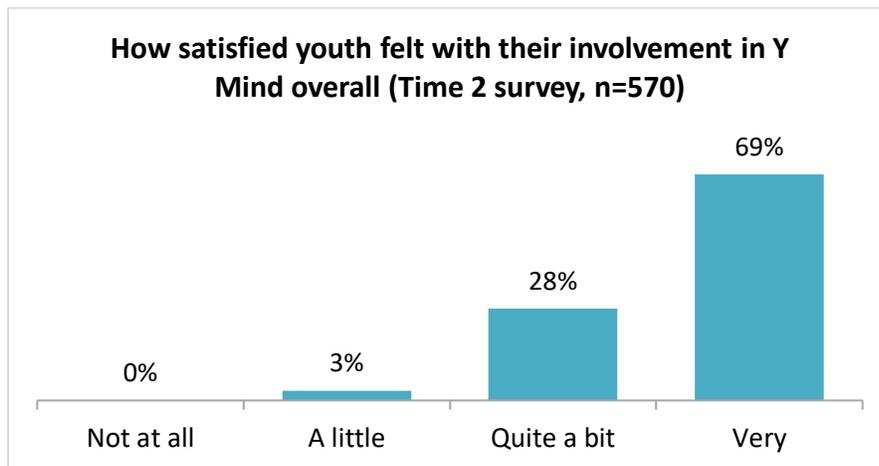
“My favourite part of the program was the hands-on approach to learning, rather than just lectures. We acted things out, made drawings, sculpted things out of playdough and talked openly in small groups. I think this resulted in our group becoming quite close.”

“Honestly, I do not think I can say enough about the Y Mind program. It was absolutely incredible, the tools and activities presented were helpful and were easy enough to engage with whilst at the same time pushing a person's internal boundaries.”

“What an absolutely amazing program. I am so glad to have had this opportunity. The weekly mindfulness practices were really helpful and the life exercises were really easy to follow. This group was definitely magic.”

Satisfaction with the Program

The majority of participants who completed a Time 2 survey were very satisfied with their involvement in Y Mind, and none were dissatisfied. Percentages were similar among youth who took part at a regional YMCA and those who participated through a partner agency, and between those who took part pre-pandemic and during the pandemic. There were also no differences in level of satisfaction based on gender or age.



Consistent with findings at Time 2, the majority of youth who completed a Time 3 survey (91%) were quite or very satisfied with their experience in Y Mind.

Many youth added comments at the end of the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys, expressing how grateful they were for the opportunity to take part in the program. They particularly appreciated the supportive, caring, and genuine staff; the safe environment; and how the skills were taught to support them in coping with their anxiety symptoms. Many also commented that they appreciated the consistency and structure of attending weekly sessions, and that their involvement in Y Mind changed their life for the better.

Some youth who took part in virtual sessions during the pandemic commented that they felt the sessions would have been more effective in person, because it would have been easier to connect with other participants and to maintain focus during the sessions. However, others felt that offering the program online was a strength, because it made attending the sessions more convenient and less stressful for them.

More feedback about Y Mind (Time 1 and Time 2 surveys)...

“Even though it was online, I did like that it was still offered and structured really well.”

“The program helped the anxiety of COVID-19 from becoming too much. It helped level the nightmare of self-isolation and social distancing. I am grateful that the staff were able to adjust the program to an online platform.”

“I know that this [program] was online due to COVID-19 but it was very convenient and made the environment even more comfortable and safe.”

“I think the online setting worked out really well. Commuting to YMCA every week would actually add on to anxiety for me, so it's really nice to be reminded of some silver linings from the COVID situation.”

“I loved this program and will highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in mindfulness or struggles with anxiety. I've gone through other forms of therapy for anxiety but nothing clicked as well as the information provided by this program.”

“This program has changed my life.... in 7 weeks this group has provided me with tools and nourishment that has had profound effects on my ability to navigate and manage my own mental health. Words don't seem enough. The group we had was exceptional, and the trainers are doing profound work. This free, accessible program is a radical and vital offering to young people in our community.”

“Overall, I really enjoyed this program. I felt that it was exactly what I needed at this time in my life and it provided me with support that I otherwise felt I did not have. It gave me tools that I can utilize moving forward to help improve my relationship with my anxiety.”

“Really needed this course and got wayyyy more from it than I thought I would... Very grateful for the experience.”

“Thank you so much for everything! It was the support I needed at a time I really needed it. Also, I love that the program was free as otherwise I would have not been able to participate due to limited financial abilities. Resources like this are so important to allow everyone to access it, so thank you!”

“I joined this program when I was at my lowest point ever. I had trouble understanding my feelings and coping with them and it really gave me a place to be okay. Having a group and seeing you're not alone really does help. [The facilitators] were amazing and I appreciate this program so much. Thank you so much.”

“I believe that the Y Mind program is something that most people should get to experience because it seriously improved my life.”

Application of Skills after Program Completion

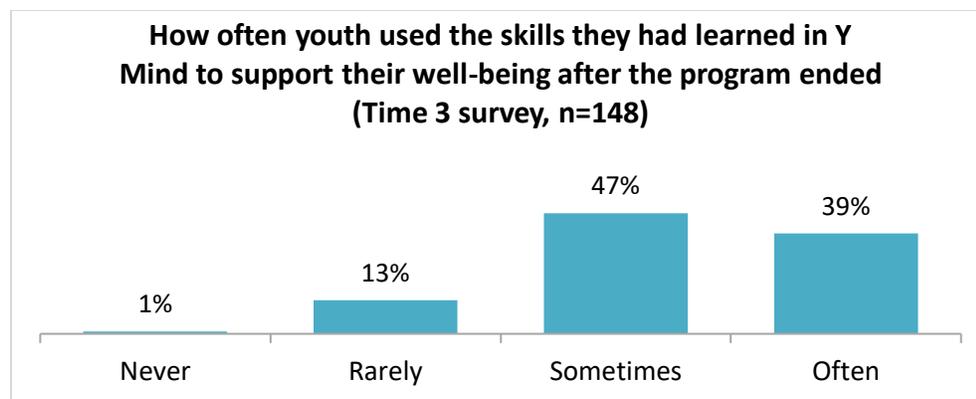
Almost all youth who completed a Time 2 survey anticipated that after the program ended, it was at least a little likely they would apply the skills they had learned in the sessions to support their well-being. This included 39% who felt it was quite likely and 55% who felt it was very likely.

Comments at Time 2 about planning to apply the skills after their group ended...

"I have learned new skills on how to cope with my anxiety. These skills will be really beneficial as I carry on with life outside of the program. I have learned a lot about different techniques and have tried some that will work with my lifestyle."

"I loved this program and everything it had to offer and I will hopefully use what I have learned for the rest of my life."

Among youth who completed a Time 3 survey, most reported they had used the skills they had learned in the program to support their well-being.



Further, most youth (66%) reported that using the skills helped to reduce their symptoms of anxiety quite a bit or very much, and another 32% felt that applying the skills had helped them a little in this area.

Application of skills after their group ended (Time 3 survey)...

"I could recall many tips that I had learned from the group during my anxiety moments."

"I really took the teaching to heart and did all the homework and practiced. Some information was new to me and it was very useful and I have fallen back on the practiced skills automatically a few times."

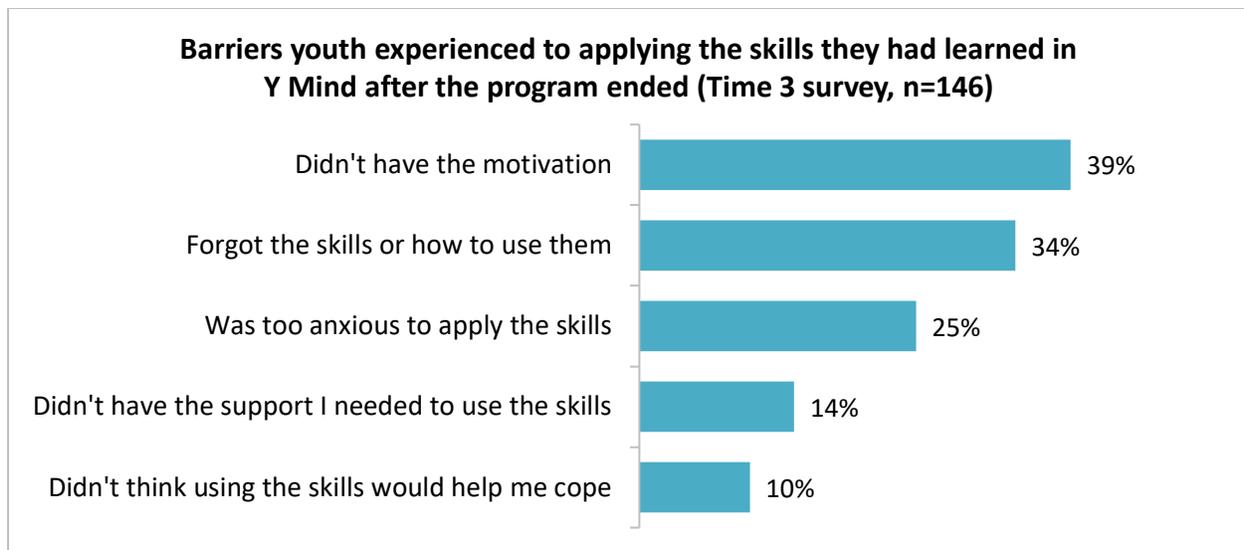
"It's a wonderful program. Despite missing the last two meetings due to Covid, I feel like I've learned a lot, and often use the techniques in my daily life."

"I loved all techniques that we covered. Very helpful and I am still doing some today."

Barriers to applying the skills

Youth who completed a Time 3 survey were asked about any barriers they had experienced in applying the skills once the program ended. A third (33%) indicated they had not experienced barriers, and 14% felt they did not need to use the skills they had learned. Other youth identified barriers to applying the skills, and most commonly not having the motivation to apply the skills and/or forgetting the skills or how to use them.

Some added comments that they sometimes forgot how to apply the skills in the moment (i.e., when experiencing a stressful situation). Others commented that it was more difficult to motivate themselves to apply the skills after the program ended because they felt less accountable once they stopped attending the weekly sessions. In addition, some participants who completed the program during the pandemic stated that the added stress of the pandemic made it difficult for them to focus on applying the skills.



Note. Youth could mark all that applied.

There were no differences based on gender, age, site type, or when youth completed the Time 3 survey (pre-pandemic or during the pandemic) in terms of application of skills or barriers to applying the skills after the program ended.

Comments at Time 3 about barriers to applying the skills they had learned in Y Mind after program completion...

“Something I noticed after the program was just how much I had leaned on it as a routine for practicing mindfulness instead of doing it in my own time.”

“Covid 19. Massive changes in my life.”

“It was slightly unfortunate that the program ended at the start of Covid which has been a high stress period for me personally and it has made it hard to stay consistent with what I learned.”

YOUTH'S SUGGESTIONS

When asked at Time 2 and Time 3 if they had suggestions to improve Y Mind, many participants indicated they had none because they were very satisfied with how the program was run. Others offered the following suggestions since the last evaluation report in April, 2020:

Virtual environment

- There could be more opportunities for participants to get to know one another, such as by having more breakout sessions through Zoom.
- If participants want to comment during the virtual sessions, they should be encouraged to raise their hand (through the Zoom function) instead of going to the chat box because it can take time for a comment in the chat box to be noticed.
- Participants should be asked to mute their microphone when not speaking in order to reduce extraneous noise.
- When COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions are eventually lifted, it would be beneficial to continue to offer virtual Y Mind groups (in addition to in-person groups).

Length & duration of sessions

- The program should be extended by adding more sessions.
- Each session could be a little shorter (e.g., 1 ½ or 2 hours instead of 2 ½ hours).

Curriculum

- Participants appreciated the activities, and some felt that more activities should be incorporated into the sessions.
- Some felt the program should address depression in addition to anxiety, to better support youth struggling with symptoms of both conditions.

Supporting physical activity

- There could be more of an emphasis on physical activity and an explanation of how it can affect mental health.
- Simple physical exercises and stretches could be introduced in the sessions, which participants could incorporate into their daily lives.

Supports after completing the program

- It could be beneficial to offer follow-up group or individual sessions after youth's program cycle ends (e.g., one and two months later), to help participants feel supported and connected, and to remind them of the skills they had learned in the program.

- Participants who complete a cycle of Y Mind should have the opportunity to take part in a second cycle, or a similar follow-up program where skills are addressed in greater depth.
- There could be an ongoing drop-in group for young people who completed Y Mind. This would allow youth to access support when they feel they need to, after their original Y Mind group ends.

FACILITATORS’ FEEDBACK

A total of 71 facilitator surveys were completed (79% completed by females). Just under half (47%) were completed by facilitators who had taught one Y Mind cycle, while 49% were filled out by facilitators who had taught two or more cycles, and the remaining small minority by those who had been trained but had not yet facilitated a Y Mind cycle.

Around half were completed by those facilitating the program through regional YMCA’s whereas the other half were completed by those facilitating Y Mind through partner sites. Findings were similar across site type (regional YMCA or partner agency).

Thirty-two percent of facilitators had taken part in other mindfulness-based training, aside from the training they had received through Y Mind. These included training through MBSR, MB-EAT, Mind Fit, MindUP, Mindshift, Bringing the Body into Practice, Outward Bound Canada, SMART, and specific yoga teacher training courses.

Y Mind Facilitator Training

Most respondents provided positive feedback about the Y Mind facilitator training they had taken part in. For example, the vast majority felt safe taking part and that the training was easy to follow.



Common suggestions collected up to the last evaluation report (April 2020) were that more hands-on components should be integrated into the training. Since the last report, only a few suggestions were offered. One was to ensure that the page number was mentioned when referencing exercises in the workbook, to make it easier to follow along. Another suggestion was to focus the training on how to facilitate online delivery of Y Mind, given the shift to virtual sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Y Mind Curriculum & Program Manual

When asked about the Y Mind curriculum, the vast majority of facilitators (97%) were quite or very satisfied with it overall. They felt it was easy for youth to follow (97%) and that youth seemed engaged in the curriculum (96%).

In terms of the program manual, 83% of facilitators were quite or very satisfied with it overall, and 83% felt it was easy for them to follow.

Most facilitators (81%) had made changes to the curriculum while facilitating. Since the last evaluation report, changes entailed adjusting the in-person activities to accommodate a virtual delivery format. For example, some facilitators added guided meditations and videos into the sessions instead of doing some of the activities. Also, flipchart activities were replaced with an online whiteboard.

Program Challenges

Most facilitators indicated they had not experienced challenges to implementing the Y Mind program, while 44% reported they had experienced such challenges. Identified challenges since the last evaluation report revolved around the virtual delivery format and the need to adapt the activities as a result.

Program Strengths & Successes

In previous evaluation reports, facilitators identified the curriculum as a program strength, and appreciated how detailed the manual was. They explained that the manual helped to make the program easy and straightforward to facilitate. Another identified strength was the opportunity for facilitators to meet quarterly with one another, as they valued the discussions and felt it was an effective way of learning from and supporting one another.

A program strength identified since the last report was the youth-friendly way in which the skills were taught. Facilitators felt that how the skills were taught was an effective way for participants to become engaged in the sessions, learn the skills, and incorporate the skills into their lives.

All facilitators (100%) indicated they had noticed changes among participants in their Y Mind groups. These included youth having greater awareness and acceptance of their feelings; improved skills in managing their anxiety symptoms; reduced anxiety; and a better ability to use mindfulness as a tool. Facilitators also noticed improved self-confidence among participants and an increased sense of connection with others, stemming from a realization they were not alone in their struggles with anxiety.

Some comments from facilitators...

“It’s a great program, I enjoyed it as a facilitator but most importantly I think it talks about anxiety in a very youth-friendly way, and I genuinely believe the skills we taught these youth will have a significant positive impact on their mental health.”

“Participants were more and more engaged each week. Good group, motivated, and material and content seemed to resonate.”

“Open, engaged, perceptive! Wonderful to watch them take in the material.”

“Participants have been saying that they became more aware of their feelings and are managing their anxiety better.”

“Youth reported feeling reduced anxiety and increased feeling of confidence in themselves and their ability to manage their anxiety.”

“After learning to ‘befriend anxiety’ and practice mindfulness, participants really start to engage and gain confidence in themselves.”

“Youth felt like they were able to be with their emotions more and use mindfulness as a useful tool. As well as imagery to unhook.”

“Youth appeared more confident and also opened up more about their anxiety as the sessions went on.”

“Improved overall well-being and social engagement.”

Other Suggestions from Facilitators

Facilitators were satisfied with Y Mind overall. They also offered the following suggestions since the last evaluation report:

- It would be helpful for facilitators to have a copy of the participant program manual.
- There are some inconsistencies between the facilitator manual and the participant workbook. Ensuring those inconsistencies are resolved would be helpful.
- More online-friendly activities should be included in the manual to further support online delivery of the program.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Findings in this third interim evaluation report were consistent with findings in the previous reports. Participants demonstrated improvements in well-being (ORS measure) from the start of their involvement in Y Mind (Time 1) to the end of their involvement (Time 2), as well as improved mindfulness, and reductions in generalized anxiety symptoms (GAD-7). They were also more likely to report better mental health and stress-management ratings over the course of their involvement in the program.

Moreover, most youth who completed a Time 2 survey attributed their reduced anxiety symptoms, greater healthy coping skills, and improvements in overall well-being to their involvement in Y Mind. They also reported at least a little improvement in their connections with other young people, their support network, and access to community programs or services because of their participation in the program.

Improvements from Time 1 to Time 2 were maintained three months after program completion (Time 3) when it came to generalized anxiety symptoms and ratings of mental health and stress management. These results continue to highlight the positive and sustained impact that involvement in Y Mind can have on youth. An exception to sustained improvements at Time 3 was that scores relating to well-being (ORS) were somewhat lower at Time 3 than at Time 2, but were still higher than at Time 1. These findings were similar to results in the previous evaluation reports, and youth's comments suggested that situational factors after their program cycle ended likely contributed to lower well-being scores at Time 3. For the new mindfulness items, insufficient Time 3 data was collected to date to draw conclusions about sustained improvements over time.

Similar to findings in the previous reports, females were more likely than males to take part in the program, while males were more likely to leave the program after taking part in only a few sessions. This pattern was consistent when examined only among youth who took part in virtual sessions, and suggests that it may be more challenging to engage males in the program regardless of delivery method (in person or virtual). Also consistent with previous reports was that no differences in outcomes were found between youth attending Y Mind sessions at a regional YMCA or through a partner agency, pointing to the effectiveness of the train-the-trainer model in contributing to desired outcomes.

Findings unique to this evaluation report involved comparisons between youth who completed Y Mind before the COVID-19 pandemic started and those who completed the program during the pandemic. Youth who completed a Time 1 survey during the pandemic were more likely to indicate wanting to take part in the program to gain healthy coping skills, and many added comments that they were experiencing heightened anxiety due to the pandemic. Findings indicated that Y Mind was effective for youth who took part during the pandemic (e.g., to help them gain healthy coping skills and improved well-being). Although the magnitude of effects on the ORS was greater for youth who took part pre-pandemic, the effects for those who took part during the pandemic were still within the medium-to-large range.

The majority of youth continued to be very satisfied with their experience in Y Mind, and they appreciated the opportunity to take part. Some suggested that the program should continue to offer virtual groups (as well as in-person groups) once physical distancing restrictions were lifted. Evaluation participants also offered suggestions to improve delivery of the program, as well as suggestions on how to best support participants after their program cycle ended (e.g., offering a drop-in group).

A limitation of this evaluation is that reported outcomes are only representative of youth who chose to take part in the evaluation and of Y Mind participants who did not leave the program early (i.e., before the end of their program cycle). Also, youth who chose to complete the Time 3 survey might not be representative of all youth who have taken part in Y Mind, and the results should be interpreted with this in mind.

The next Y Mind evaluation report will build on findings in this report. If more outcome data become available that reflect in-person delivery during the pandemic (or virtual delivery post-pandemic), future analyses could assess if the mode of delivery has an effect on outcomes, independent of whether the program took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.