

BUILDING A CULTURE OF CARE: MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING OUTCOMES



OVERVIEW:

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence-based early intervention program managed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing and the Missouri Department of Mental Health. The program offers courses that equip participants with skills to identify and respond to mental health or substance use challenges and crises. At Saint Louis University (SLU), MHFA training has been provided to a diverse group of community members, including faculty, staff, and students, empowering them to support individuals in need. To assess the impact of MHFA courses, the Health Promotion and Education Team within the Department of Campus Recreation and Wellness conducted post-training surveys from April to August 2024. This report summarizes key findings on the knowledge gained and the application of skills learned through MHFA.

INTRODUCTION:

The MHFA post-course survey, designed to assess the lasting impacts of the training, was initially distributed to 1,380 individuals who had successfully completed the program since its introduction in 2019. Among the 315 respondents, the time elapsed since completing the training varied: 15% reported completing it within the past six months, 54% between six months and one year, 27% between one and two years, and 4% more than two years ago.



Regarding demographics, survey data revealed that 76% of participants identified as female, 17% as male, and 3% as non-binary. Most respondents (77%) identified as white or Caucasian, while 10% identified as Black or African American, 6% as Asian or Asian American, 3% as Hispanic or Latino, 2% as another race, and 1% as American Indian or Alaskan Native. These demographics closely align with those of Saint Louis University faculty, staff, and students.

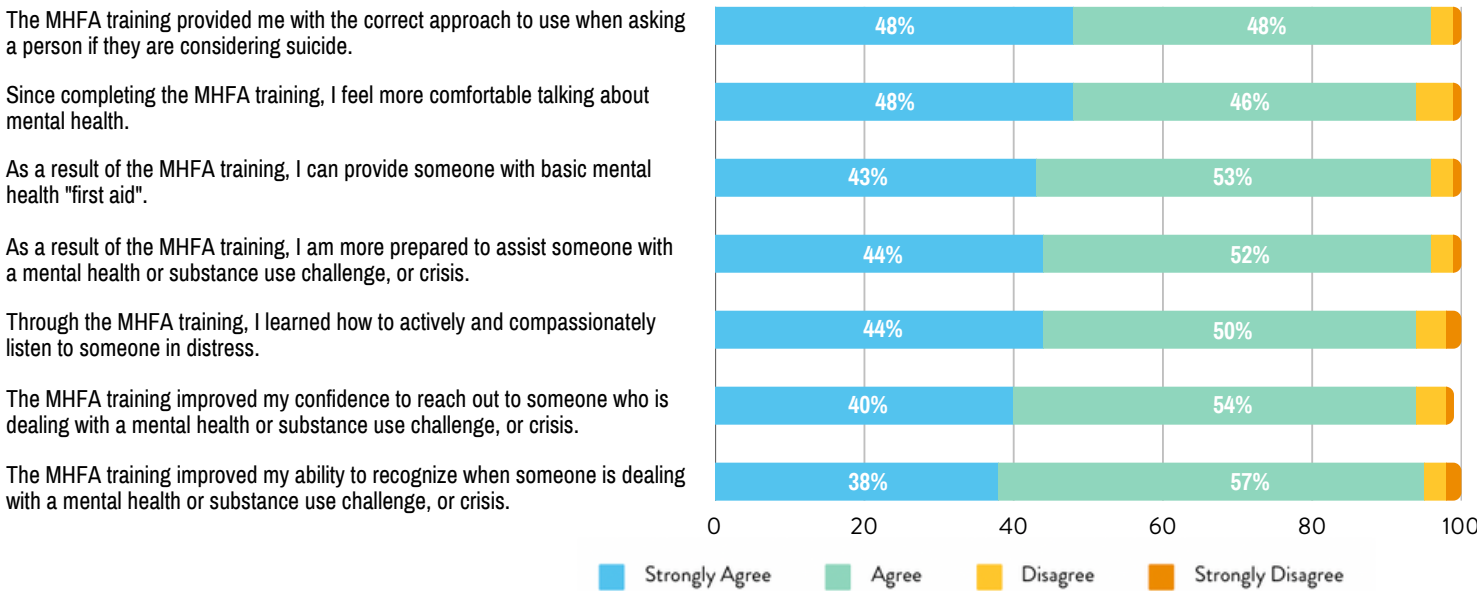
In terms of age, participants ranged from 18 to 80 years old, with the largest age groups being 25–44 years old (33%), 18–24 years old (31%), and 45–60 years old (25%). Additionally, respondents were asked about their roles on campus, with the majority identifying as staff members (63%), followed by students (36%) and faculty (11%).

COURSE KNOWLEDGE:

One primary focus of the follow-up survey was to evaluate the efficacy of MHFA training in improving participants' ability to identify and respond to mental health or substance use challenges. An overwhelming majority (95%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the training enhanced their ability to recognize when someone is experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge or crisis. Similarly, 94% reported feeling more confident in reaching out to someone facing a challenge or crisis, and 94% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned to actively and compassionately listen to someone in distress.

Regarding preparedness to respond to challenging situations, 96% of participants felt the training had equipped them to assist someone with a mental health concern. Additionally, 96% endorsed feeling prepared to provide basic mental health first aid, and 95% indicated the course taught them the correct approach for asking someone if they are considering suicide. Beyond crisis intervention, the training also improved participants' comfort discussing mental health overall, with 94% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt more at ease having conversations about mental health since completing the training. These results are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Confidence in MHFA Knowledge & Skills

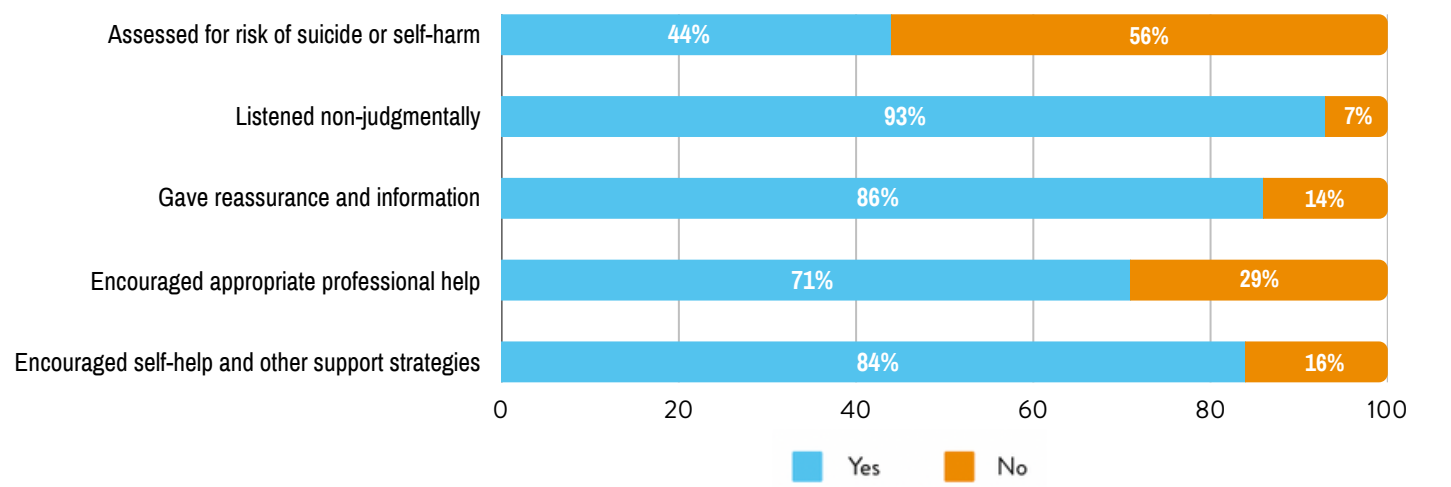


IMPLEMENTATION OF MHFA SKILLS

In addition to evaluating confidence in MHFA-related topics, the survey assessed participants' application of MHFA skills in real-world settings. Nearly half (48%) of respondents indicated they had assisted someone using MHFA techniques in the past six months. Among the five key steps of the ALGEE Action Plan taught in the training (assess, listen, give reassurance, encourage professional help, and encourage self-help), the most frequently used skill was listening non-judgmentally, with 93% of participants reporting they had done so since completing the training.

Additionally, 86% of respondents reported providing reassurance and information, and 84% promoted self-help or other support strategies. Encouraging professional help was also common, with 71% guiding someone toward mental health services. However, only 44% of participants had assessed someone for the risk of suicide or self-harm, suggesting that while most participants feel confident in MHFA skills, fewer have encountered crisis situations requiring this specific action. These findings related to the ALGEE Action Plan are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Implementation of ALGEE



As highlighted in the ALGEE Action Plan, a key component of MHFA is emphasizing the importance of engaging professional supports to address mental health concerns. Survey results show that since completing the training, 70% of participants have provided information about mental health services and resources, while 50% have taken an additional step by directly connecting someone to appropriate mental health supports. These findings suggest that while many participants actively use their training to link individuals with professional help, opportunities or comfort levels in doing so may vary depending on the situation.



PARTICIPANT TESTIMONY

The impact of MHFA training at SLU is further demonstrated by participant endorsements, with 99% of survey respondents indicating they would recommend MHFA training to others. Qualitative feedback also highlighted the program's real-world impact, as participants shared stories about how the training helped them assist others during mental health challenge or crises. In one open-ended question, participants were asked to describe situations in which they referred someone to mental health services after completing the training. Responses revealed a wide range of outcomes, with many participants successfully guiding individuals to on and off-campus resources such as counseling services, crisis hotlines, or SLU's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Several participants described using a "warm handoff" approach, remaining present to assist in connecting individuals to the support they needed. For example, one respondent shared that they, "walked two students to University Counseling Services" and "sat with one as [they] were scheduled."

Participants were also invited to share other examples of how they have applied their MHFA training and the results of their actions. One respondent noted that they, "felt much more willing to call 988 [a crisis hotline] when a friend needed help," while another stated that they, "now approach interactions with students actively listening to expressions of concern." The respondent added that, "while most students seem to be coping with stressors in positive ways, [they] have encouraged several students to seek the next level of assistance or support." These examples illustrate how MHFA training has equipped participants to intervene effectively in various situations, fostering the well-being of individuals within the community.



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CONCLUSION:

In prioritizing well-being and mental health, assessing the success of interventions like MHFA training is essential to ensuring the SLU community is equipped with the necessary skills to recognize and respond to mental health challenges and crises. The findings from the post-MHFA training surveys at SLU demonstrate the program's positive impact, with many respondents reporting significant confidence in using the skills gained through MHFA training to identify and address concerning situations.

These results reinforce the importance of continued mental health education and training within the SLU community, ensuring that faculty, staff, and students are prepared to intervene in challenge or crisis scenarios and foster a supportive, proactive environment for mental health. Furthermore, MHFA training promotes a culture of care by guiding participants to act as compassionate first responders, reducing stigma, and encouraging open dialogue about mental health. By empowering individuals to take meaningful action, the program helps create a community where members feel supported, valued, and connected.

For more information, please visit <https://www.slu.edu/wellbeing/mental-health-first-aid.php>