

Project Title

Mindful Immersive Nature Therapy for Persons with Dementia

Project Lead and Members

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Organisation(s) Involved

Apex Harmony Lodge

Healthcare Family Group(s) Involved in this Project

Allied Health

Applicable Specialty or Discipline

Dementia Care

Project Period

Start date: April 2022

Completed date: Jan 2023 & ongoing

Aims

Introduce a specially curated wellness programme that integrates the therapeutic benefits of both nature and mindfulness for the early-stage or young-onset dementia

Background

See poster attached

Methods

See poster attached

Results

See poster attached

Lessons Learnt

See poster attached (Reflections section)

Conclusion

See poster attached

Additional Information

Accorded the Clinical Experience Improvement Award: Team Award (Silver) at AIC's
Community Care Excellence Award (CCEA) 2023

Project Category

Care Continuum

Intermediate and Long Term Care & Community Care, Population Health, Mental
Health, Social Care

Care & Process Redesign

Value Based Care, Patient Satisfaction

Keywords

Persons with Dementia, Early Stage Dementia, Young-Onset Dementia, Wellness
Programme, Cognitive Impairment, Sensory Benefits, Nature Engagement

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Mindful Immersive Nature Therapy for Persons with Dementia

Apex Harmony Lodge (AHL)

Team Members: Diana Goh, Sarah Tang, Barry Pek, Benjamin Lim, Eddie Lam, Jacob Poh, Laurence Sutrisno, Siti Arsat

Introduction/Background

Mindful Immersive Nature Therapy (MINT) is a specially curated wellness programme that integrates the therapeutic benefits of both nature and mindfulness for the **early-stage or young-onset dementia**.

MINT was designed in response to emerging trends of young-onset dementia and the **“new-old” profile of PWDs** (i.e., those who are well-travelled, educated and technologically savvy). Some could be as young as in their late forties. **MINT provides a dignified level of challenge** where intentional sharing of thoughts, feelings and stories with the group is an important aspect of self-expression and storytelling and utilizes their remaining intellectual abilities from their educated background, which is especially meaningful to the “new-old” profile.

Problem Analysis

With greater prevalence of young-onset and early-stage dementia, **conventional dementia day care and residential care may not promote the right level of meaningful engagement** for this profile. They require meaningful engagement that:

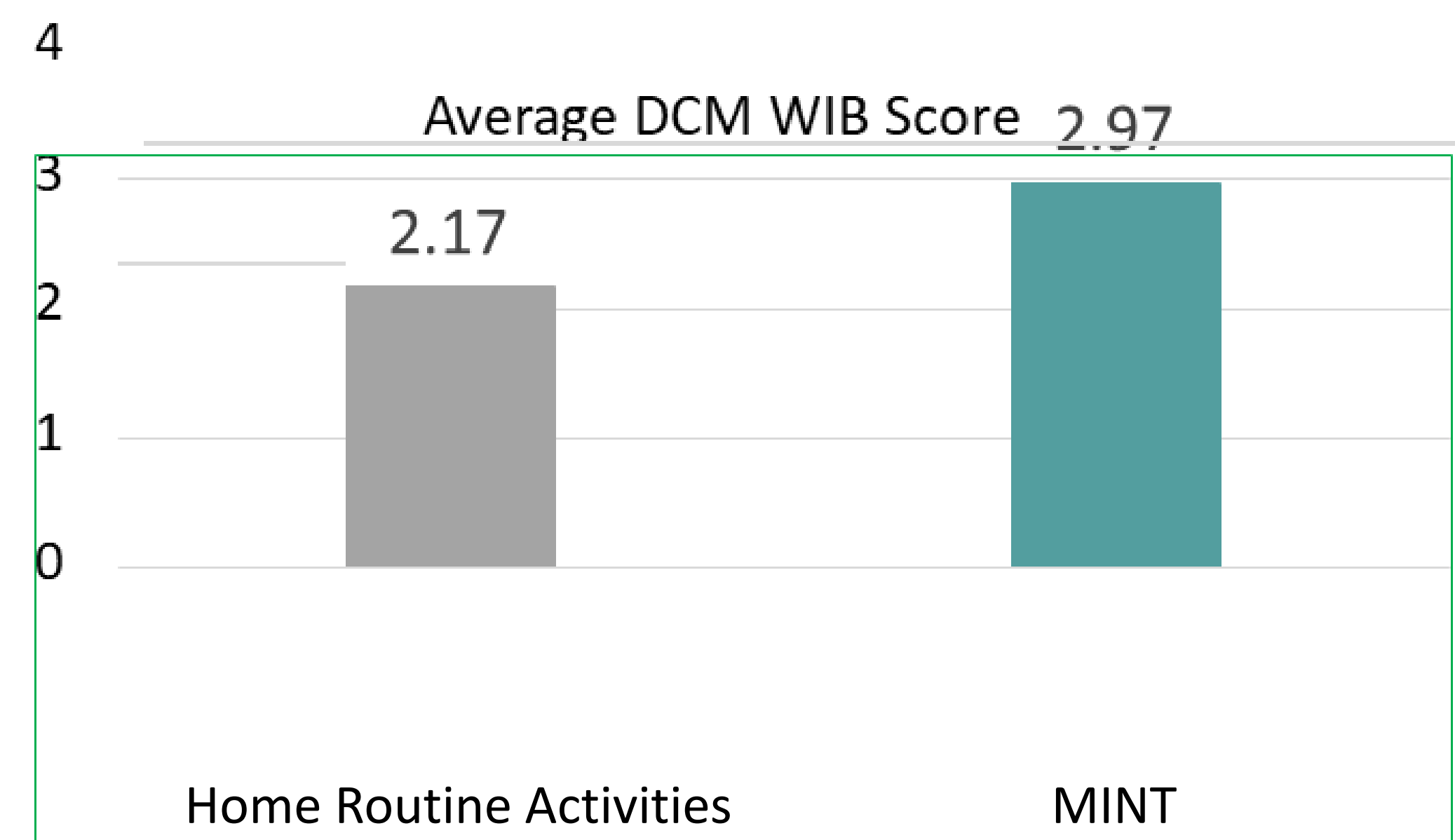
- Utilizes their social, communicative, intellectual and reflective abilities, due to previous experience in high-level work or educational settings;
- Explore different nature spaces in Singapore, due to many of them being well-travelled and dislike being confined to a singular space;
- Provides opportunities for relaxing, resort-style and organic space for self-expression and self-storytelling, due to their vibrant life story.

Goal/Objectives

- PWDs exhibit **higher mood, engagement and positive behaviour** when engaged in MINT, in a different outdoor nature environment.
- PWDs embody **a positive, mindful approach towards life**
 - a) Being willing to share their stories and self (self-expression and communication)
 - b) Openness to explore new things, more reflective and mindful towards their everyday joys (intellectual and reflective)
- **Strengthen rapport** with staff, other residents, family members and the community, **with nature as an enabler** (social).

Benefits/Results

Using Dementia Care Mapping (DCM), the average WIB (well-/ill-being) score of PWDs during the MINT pilot was **2.97** compared to their average WIB score of 2.17 when engaged in other routines and programmes at AHL. This indicates that the **PWDs had higher mood and engagement during MINT** compared to other programmes.



Based on input given during the focus group discussions, the following observations were made:

- a) PWDs enjoyed **greater social interactions**.
- b) PWDs had an **improved relationship with nature**.
- c) PWDs could **express their individuality and explore their abilities**.
- d) PWDs **experienced mindfulness through MINT**.

Overall, PWDs were highly engaged in MINT. We observed the main drivers for positive, mindful attitude towards life include **social interactions, direct sensory experiences with nature and individual expression**. Moreover, the **positive effects spilled over to the staff** where staff grew closer with our PWDs, through mutual sharing.

Implementation Plan

1. Staff Training (Apr – Dec 2022)

- 8 AHL staff underwent 10 sessions of training to be MINT facilitators, which was conducted by a certified Forest Therapy Guide and Trainer
- Just-in-Time training and reflective learning approach adopted to allow staff to apply learning and clarify doubts with the trainer.

2. MINT Pilot (May – Dec 2022)

- 10 PWDs participated in MINT pilot
- 8 sessions in total — each session was 1 hour of activity and interaction with PWDs + 1 hour of debriefing between staff and the MINT trainer
- 4 sessions in AHL's Garden, 4 sessions at the Therapeutic Garden in Pasir Ris Park
- Children aged 5 to 6 from Little Shepherd Schoolhouse participated alongside the PWDs in the pilot

3. Data Collection & Analysis (May 2022 – Mar 2023)

- Dementia Care Mapping (DCM) tool was used during the pilot to assess PWDs' wellbeing, mood and engagement
- Qualitative data was collected from trained staff via focus group discussions

4. MINT beyond the Pilot (From Jan 2023)

- MINT is implemented as a weekly signature activity for the PWDs in AHL with continuous improvement reviews
- Learning from the pilot, enhancements made to the MINT structure and activities
- AHL is working on publishing a MINT Facilitation Guidebook for PWDs and families staying in the community to facilitate MINT nature spots

Sustainability & Reflections

MINT with Community Care clients and caregivers

AHL plans to facilitate MINT sessions for our **Community Care clients** (PWDs and those with mild cognitive impairment living in the community) **and their caregivers**. MINT has potential to strengthen the **dyadic engagement** between caregivers and PWDs through being mindful of the sensory benefits of being in nature, and providing a safe space for sharing thoughts and feelings. Caregivers can also pick up skills for nature engagement with their loved ones in their own time.

MINT with Mindfulness Intergenerational Bonding Programme (IGBP)

As preschoolers from Little Shepherds' Schoolhouse joined MINT for 2 sessions, teachers found **stronger bonding** between the children and PWDs which unleashed their potentials socially, during MINT. PWDs and children were more talkative about their nature surroundings. Both PWDs and children also **showed more initiative** to take the lead for each other (e.g., “Come and see this”). Mindfulness in MINT also helped children and PWDs to share with each other the gift of attention, building patience and empathy for each other's needs and sharing. Moving forward, MINT will be included in IGBP sessions to **strengthen school curriculum in Social-Emotional Learning**.