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# Mindfulness and Emotional Literacy Training for Homeless Youth

New Beginnings  
Lewiston, Maine



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## Introduction

New Beginnings has served runaway and homeless youth and families in crisis in Maine for 35 years. For many of these youth, childhood histories of poverty, abuse or neglect have left lasting trauma and mental health problems.

As part of an effort to integrate mental health services into the agency's system of care for runaway and homeless youth, New Beginnings pilot-tested an adaptation of the Power Source Program developed by the Lionheart Foundation. Power Source is an 11-module group education curriculum designed to help youth develop emotional literacy and key assets such as conflict resolution, impulse control, self-motivation, empathy and social competence.

Power Source incorporates elements of cognitive behavioral therapy with mindfulness training. Previous research found that incarcerated youth participating in the program experienced gains in cognitive control, an important asset for youth with trauma histories. New Beginnings adapted Power Source into a 12-session group program focusing on the needs and experiences of youth in its emergency shelter, transitional living, and outreach programs.

The focus of this pilot was to determine whether participation in Power Source groups would increase these youths' coping skills in the areas of emotional literacy and interacting with others.

## Methods & Measures

New Beginnings staff conducted group sessions with youth in emergency shelter, transitional living, and outreach settings. Co-facilitators led the sessions at each service site. Staff administered pre-and post-program surveys measuring six domains of emotional intelligence to group participants and a control-group of youth who had attended fewer than 9 program hours. Participants completed pre-test surveys prior to their participation in the Power Source groups, and post-tests at the conclusion of their participation in their respective New Beginnings program.

Program evaluation utilized the **BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory**, a test reported to have high validity and reliability when used with youth from 7 to 18 years old. The pre- and post-tests given to all youth included questions to assess:

1. Intrapersonal skills
2. Interpersonal skills
3. Stress Management
4. Adaptability
5. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) total
6. Positive Impression

Youth in the Transitional Living Program sites were given a longer form of the BarOn Inventory which also included subscales for general mood and an inconsistency index.

## Results

The pilot test of the PowerSource curriculum had positive outcomes for RHY youth at New Beginnings. Significant improvements in intrapersonal competencies and adaptability were found in the shelter completers group. While not statistically significant, results among completer groups showed improvements in five subscales and were greater than changes in control groups.

Fifty-nine youth completed nine or more program hours and the pre-and post-program surveys. They were designated as the "completers" or intervention group. Eighty-two youth completed less than nine hours (Mean = 3.4 hours) and completed the pre-and post-tests. They comprised the control group.

The average age of those in the completer or intervention group was 17.2, with a gender composition of 56% female and 44% male. The control group had an average age of 16.8, with 46% females and 54% males.

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was run on a sample of 59 completers and 82 control group participants to determine if there were any differences across subscales measuring six dimensions of emotional intelligence.

The results showed that the psychoeducational program elicited statistically significant differences among completers in the emergency shelter in intrapersonal competencies,  $F(1, 24) = 3.66, p < .005$  and in adaptability,  $F(1, 24) = 5.99, p < .05$ .

As part of a formative evaluation, youth feedback forms indicated that skills taught in the program, such as the use of "I" statements, recognizing and identifying their own and others' emotions, thoughtful emotional expressions, and mindfulness activities were being accepted by the majority of youth as valuable additions to their set of prosocial behaviors

### Are youth better able to relate to others?

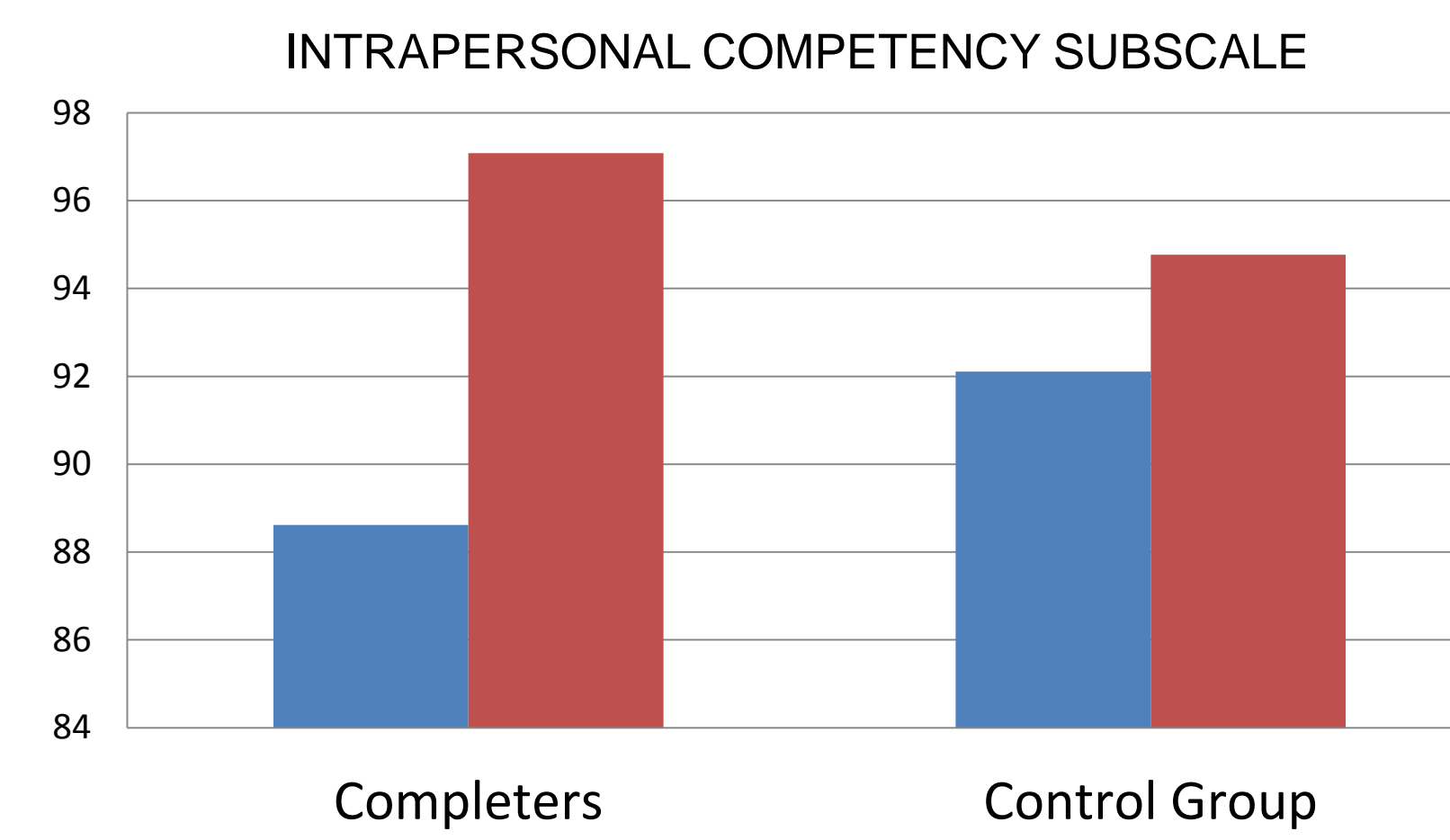


Figure 1.  
64% of youth completing the program showed improvement in intrapersonal competencies from pre-test to post-test compared to 52% of control group.

### Are youth more emotionally adaptable?

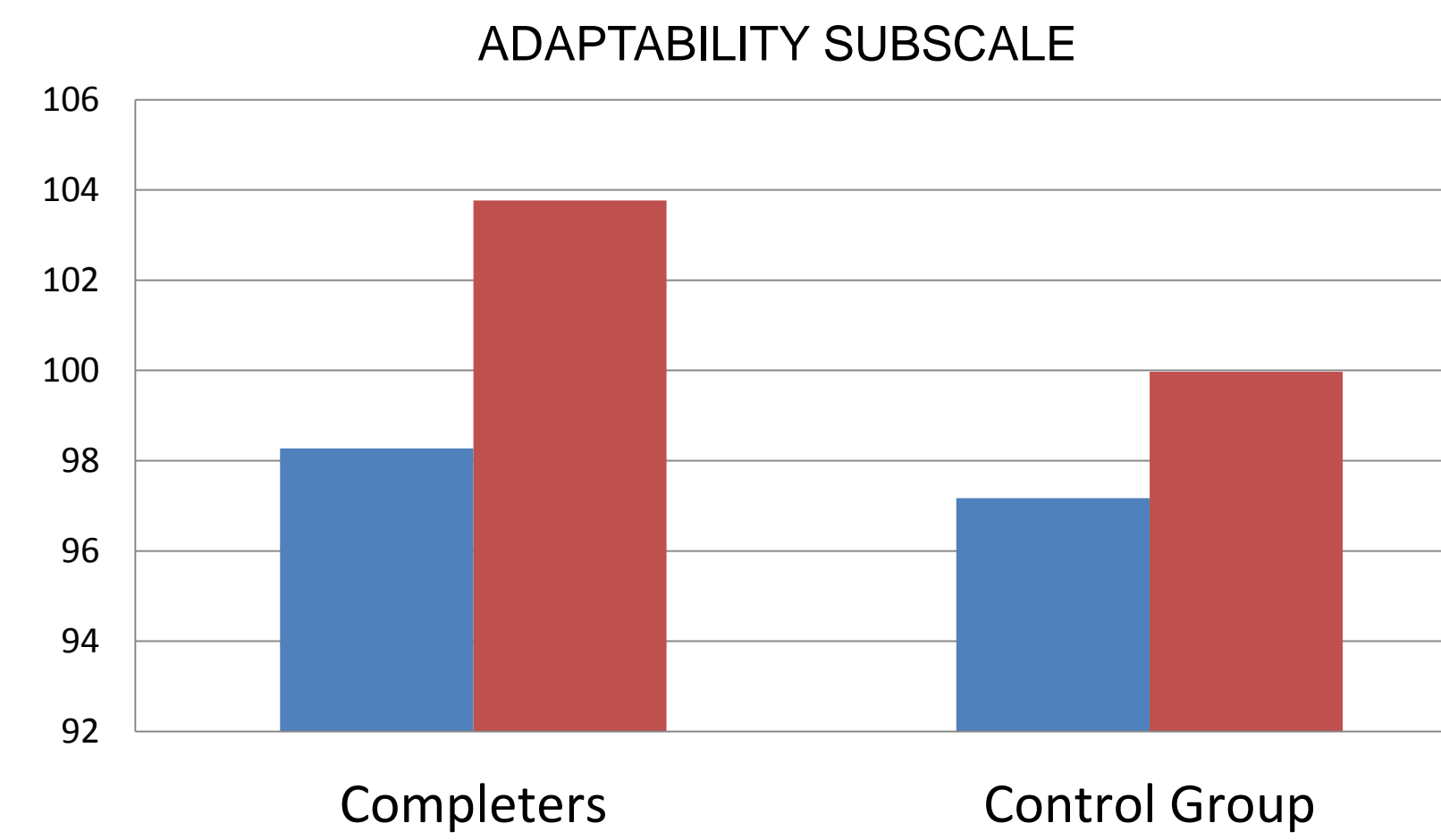


Figure 2.  
56% of youth completing the program showed improvement in adaptability from pre-test to post-test compared to 47% of control group.

### Did youths' emotional literacy improve overall?

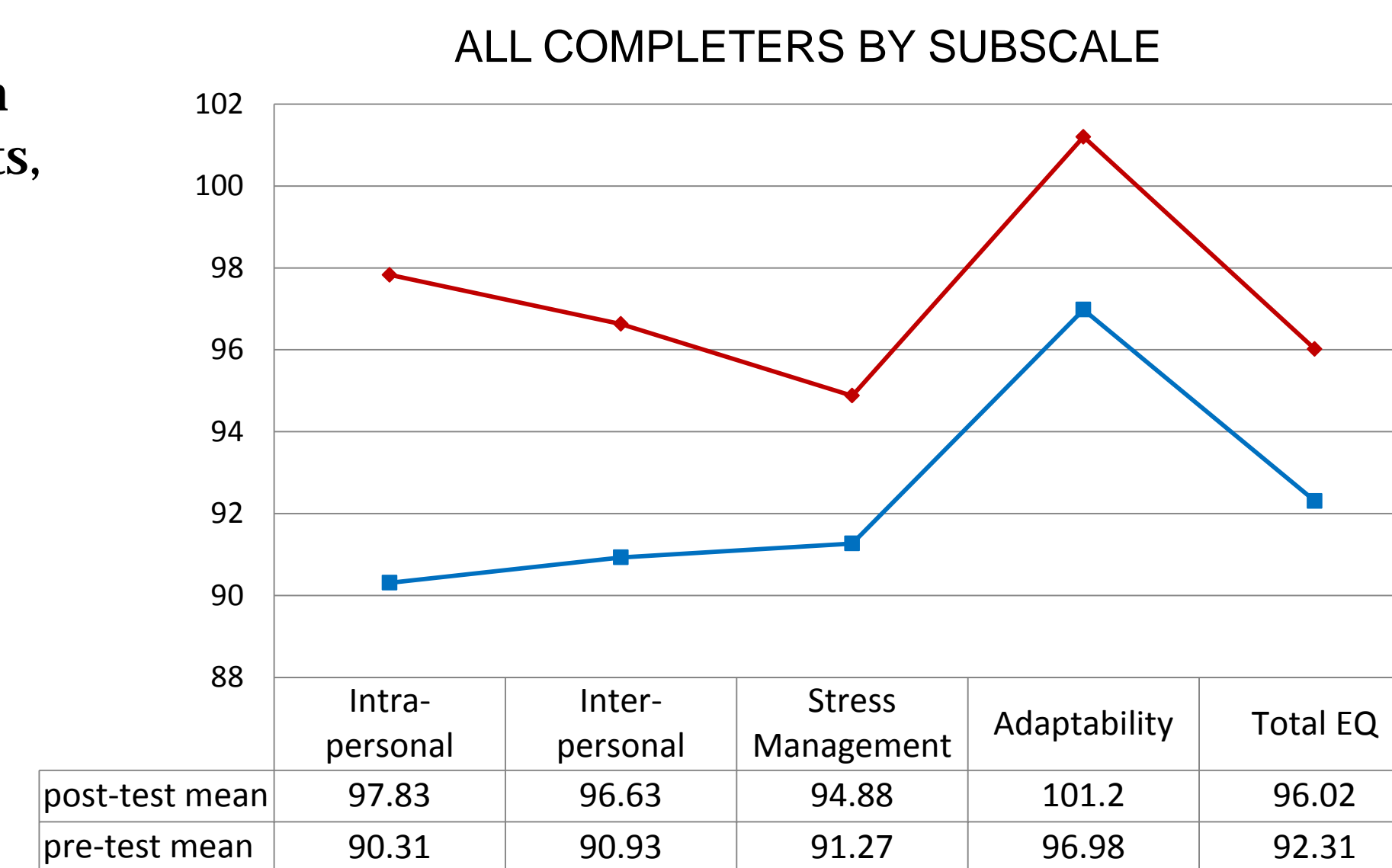


Figure 3.  
Mean scores for all of the youth completing the program showed improvement from pre-test to post-test in five subscale areas of emotional literacy.

## Conclusions

Results suggest that the Power Source program shows promise for being integrated into New Beginnings' service model which utilizes trauma-informed care, harm reduction, and stages of change frameworks.

Due to the troubling circumstance of their lives, homeless and runaway youth often lack opportunities to achieve the developmental milestones necessary to survive and thrive in the world. Research reports that most homeless youth experience multiple traumatic events, further compounding their developmental delays. Positive youth development provides a useful framework for identifying developmental competencies, while the Stages of Change Model guides the process for youth-directed behavioral changes for acquiring such competencies.

New Beginnings' core services seek to blend an awareness of trauma-informed care with these developmental and behavioral change principles. This project involved pilot testing an important component of a larger effort to integrate mental health services into the agency's system of care. It involved testing whether the psychoeducational group program can provide youth with a means of acquiring competencies for achieving developmental outcomes.

Preliminary results from the outcome and formative evaluations are encouraging. **Youth experienced significant improvement in intrapersonal and adaptability skills.** They also demonstrated keen interest in participating in meditative and active mindfulness strategies.

Challenges exist in presenting a coherent, complete, and sequential multi-session program to a population that is transient, vulnerable to abrupt changes, and lacking resources for committed participation that the program is intended to help them develop. Integrating it with other service components, including individual counseling, interactions with staff while engaged in other agency programs, and utilizing opportunities to reinforce competencies and concepts addressed in the psychoeducational program is essential.

## Acknowledgements

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