



CASE STUDY

Utilization of Breaking Free Online
as a self-help program by Canadians
during the COVID-19 pandemic

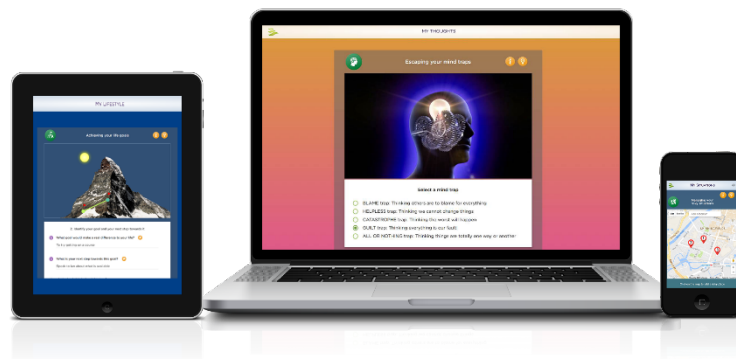


About the Breaking Free COVID-19 initiative

- In the Spring of 2020, Breaking Free Group launched an initiative to help Canadians whose access to addiction treatment services had been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic by providing them with free access to Breaking Free Online.
- This initiative was supported by Ontario Health, Provincial Health Services Authority of British Columbia, the Opioid Response Team at Health Canada, the Canadian Centre on Substance Misuse and Addiction (CCSA), and the Community Addictions Peer Support Association (CAPSA).
- This case study reports data from a cohort of 1,000 Canadians who used Breaking Free Online as a self-help program during this initiative.

About Breaking Free Online

- Breaking Free Online is an evidence-based digital behaviour change intervention for Substance Use Disorders (SUD) that is tailored to meet the needs of Canadians.

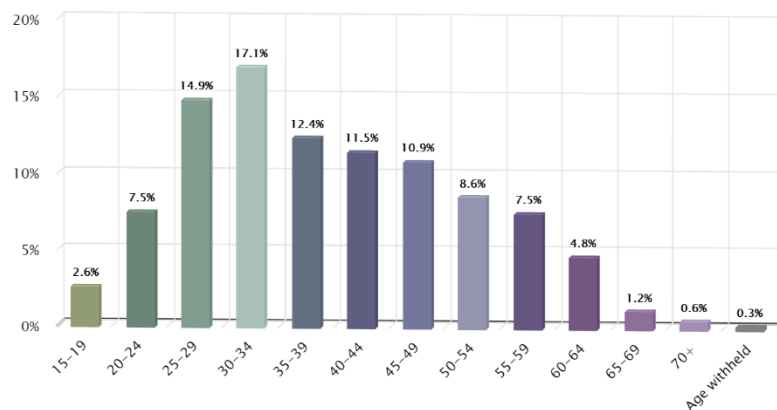


- Developed by an expert team of clinical psychologists, health psychologists and behavioural scientists, the program is utilized widely across the UK and has been localized for Canada and the United States.
- Breaking Free Online delivers Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for SUD in a scalable and consistent way, and seamlessly integrates other proven therapeutic approaches such as mindfulness, relapse prevention, motivational enhancement and harm reduction.
- It has been demonstrated by extensive peer-reviewed research published in UK, Canadian and US peer-reviewed scientific journals to be highly effective across multiple settings.
- The program is designed to be interactive, engaging, visually impactful and personalized to the needs and circumstances of each individual person that uses it.
- It empowers people to achieve and maintain recovery from dependence on alcohol and over 70 substances - including opioids, stimulants and prescribed medications - whilst also targeting associated co-morbid mental health difficulties.
- Breaking Free Online can be used very effectively as a self-help program because it has an intuitive user journey, uses a range of multimedia formats (including video, animation and visual imagery), and provides professional voiceover on every screen to engage and support people with low levels of literacy and/or impaired concentration.

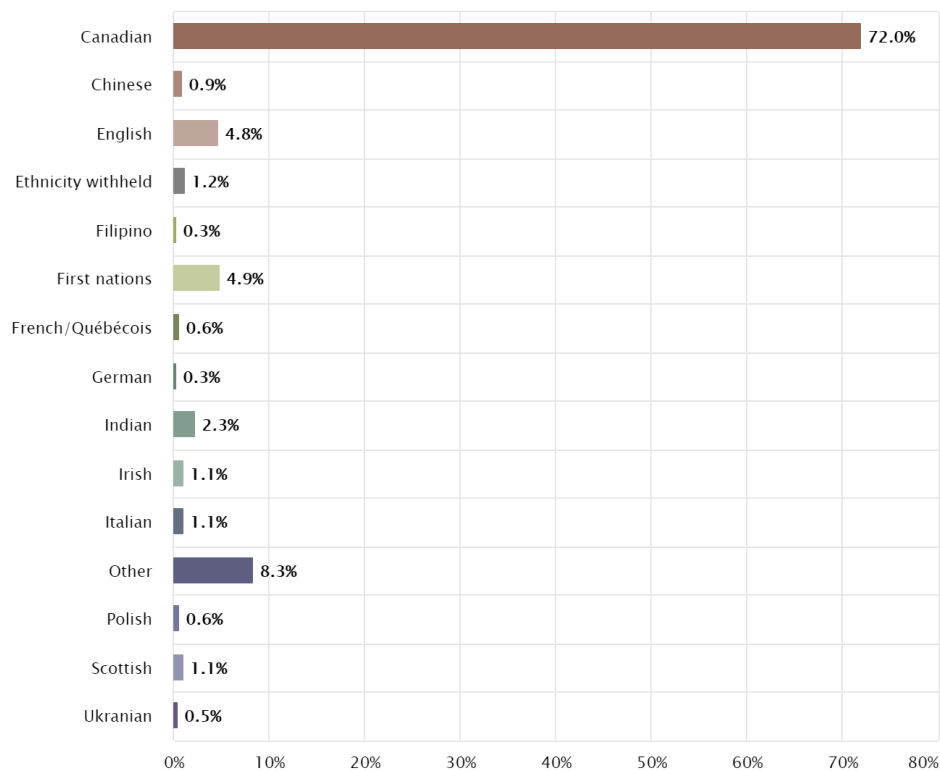


Demographic profile of people using Breaking Free Online

- This case study reports on data from a sample of **1,000 Canadians** who accessed Breaking Free Online as a self-help program during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020.
- The age categories with the highest proportions of people using Breaking Free Online were 25-34 and 35-44, although one third of the total cohort were over 45 years of age.



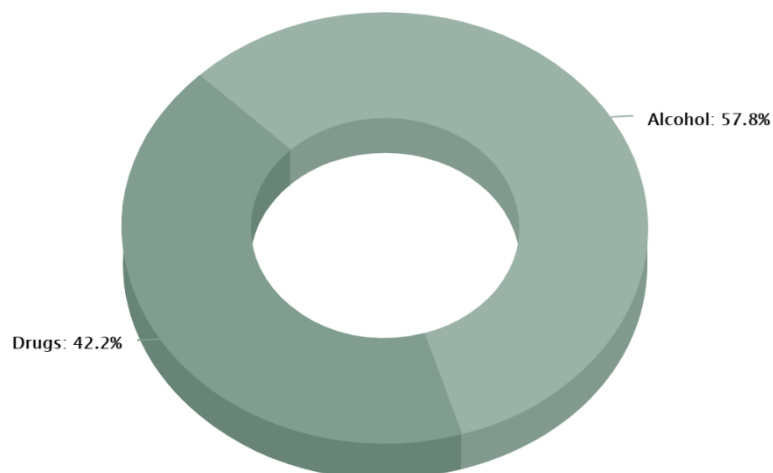
- Most of those using Breaking Free Online identified as being Canadian, accounting for 72% in total, with a total of 13 other ethnic categories also being represented, including 5% from First Nations communities.



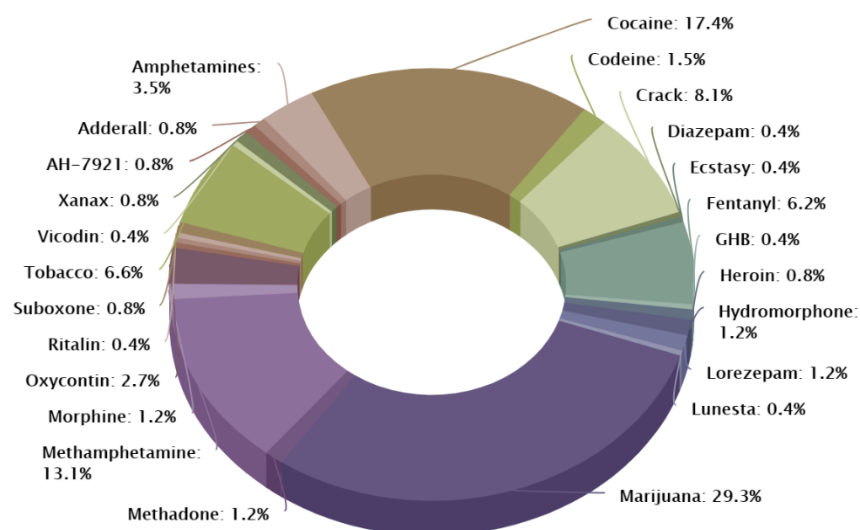


Substance profile of people using Breaking Free Online

- While 58% of people were using Breaking Free Online to address problems with alcohol, 42% were using the program to target addiction to drugs.



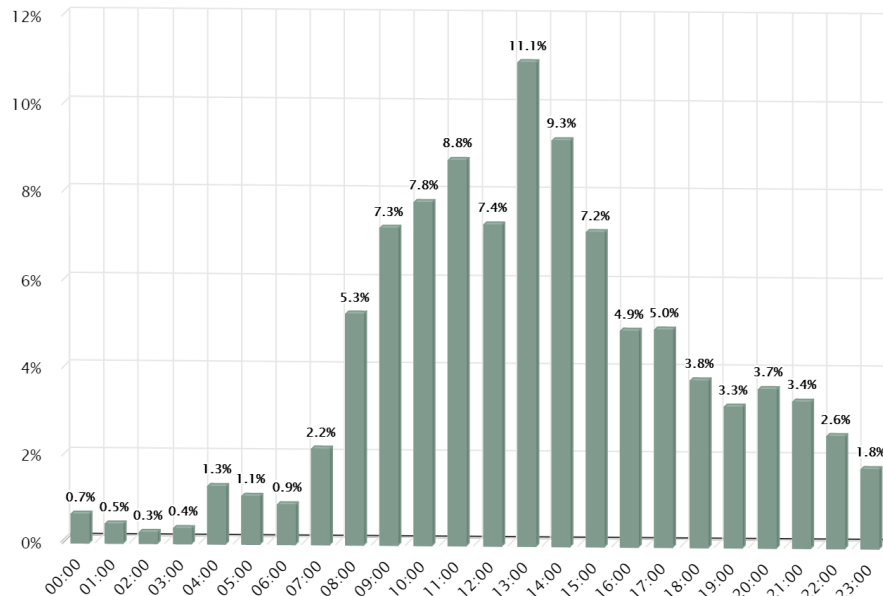
- Within the cohort of people using the program to overcome drug dependence, 29% identified marijuana and 16% an opioid as being their main problem substance.
- Additionally, there were significant percentages for stimulant substances such as cocaine (17%), methamphetamine (13%) and crack (8%).





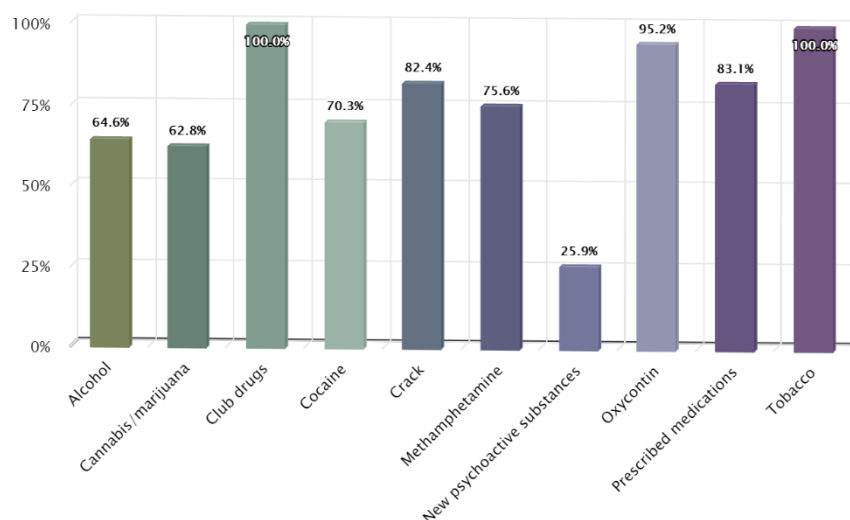
Times when people accessed Breaking Free Online

- Canadians accessed behaviour change interventions via Breaking Free Online at every hour of the day and night.
- This ability to provide people with support whenever they need it most, 24 hours a day, is a key strength of digital interventions such as Breaking Free Online. It means that if, for example, people experience difficulties sleeping, intense cravings or heightened emotions late at night, they can instantly access evidence-based strategies in the program that will enable them to cope in positive and effective ways.



Measurable reductions in substance use

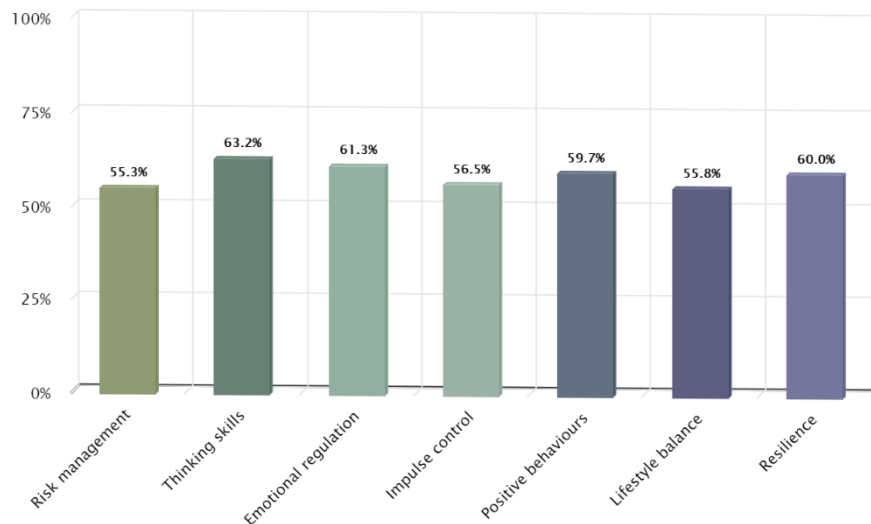
- The average percentage reductions in substance use achieved by Canadians using Breaking Free Online varied widely across the different classes of substance.
- Please note: these data relate only to reductions in consumption of substances identified by people as being their main problem substance, and not any secondary substances.





Improvement in factors promoting recovery capital

- The people using Breaking Free Online showed demonstrable gains in relation to seven key areas of recovery capital, including risk management, thinking skills, emotional regulation, impulse control and resilience.
- The percentage of those showing improvement on these factors ranged from 58% to 77%, highlighting the program's ability to strengthen recovery capital and facilitate recovery progression when used in a self-directed way.

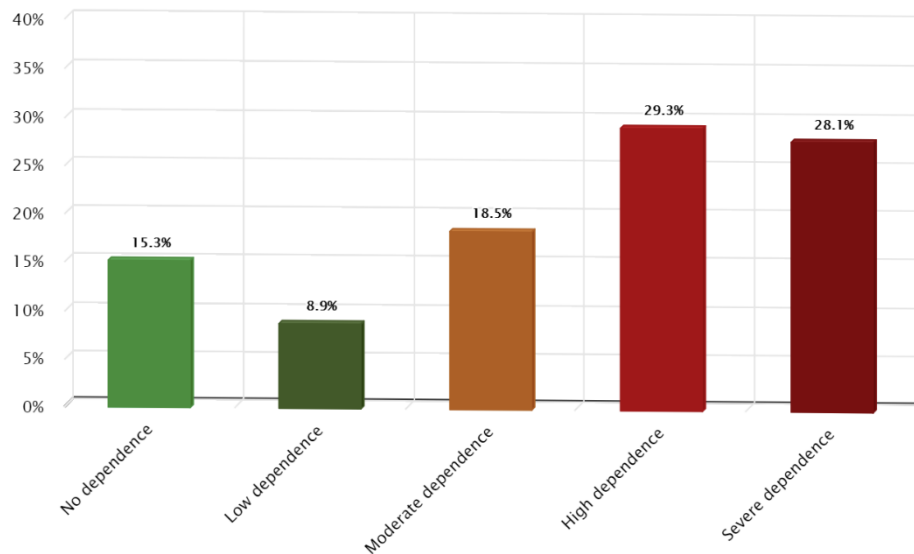


Improvement in substance dependence

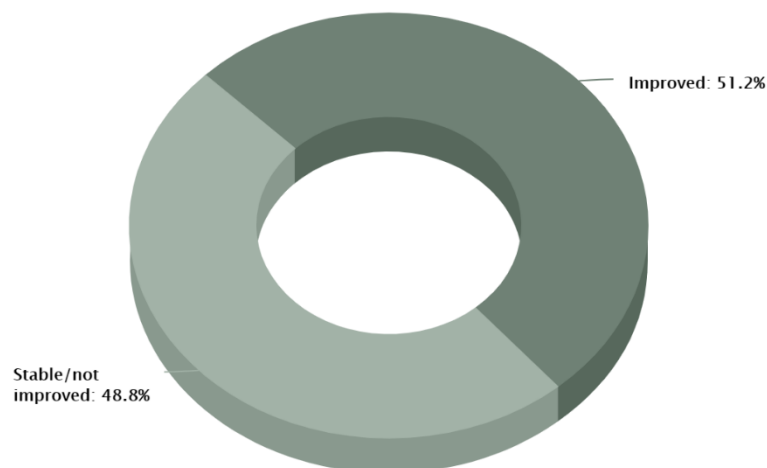
- To gauge the progress of clients, Breaking Free Online contains numerous standardized psychometric measures. These include the Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS; [Gossop et al., 1995](#)), which allows organizations and commissioners to gain valuable insight into the levels of substance dependence among those using the program.
- The SDS is a clinically validated measure of the psychological aspects of substance dependence, including impaired control over drinking/drug taking, preoccupation with alcohol/drugs, and anxieties about alcohol/drugs. It categorizes people according to five clinical thresholds: *severe dependence*, *high dependence*, *moderate dependence*, *low dependence*, and *no dependence*.



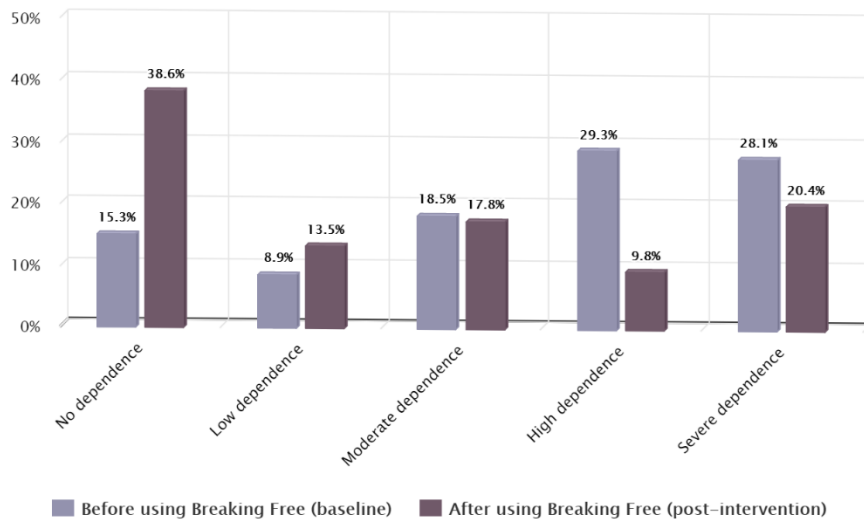
- At baseline assessment (when people first started Breaking Free Online), 28% were severely dependent, 29% highly dependent, and 19% moderately dependent on alcohol and/or drugs.



- At the time the analysis for this case study was conducted, 51% of those using Breaking Free Online as a self-help program had shown improvement in their level of substance dependence.

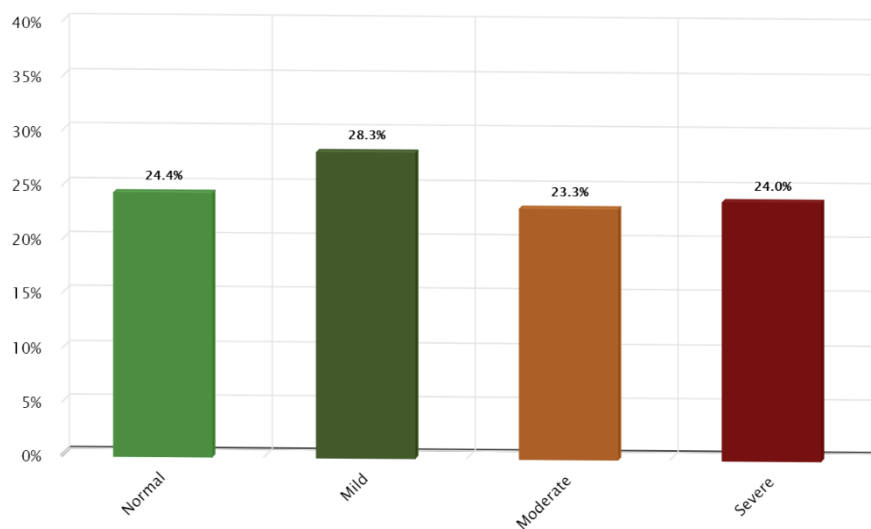


- Comparison of scores on the SDS at baseline and post-intervention (at people's most recent progress check) showed the extent to which they had moved in a positive direction between the clinical thresholds.
- This indicated that the percentage of people experiencing severe dependence had decreased significantly from 28% at baseline to 20% after using Breaking Free Online; and that those experiencing high dependence had decreased greatly from 29% to 10%.
- Furthermore, there was a very significant increase in the percentage of people with no substance dependence, from 15% at baseline to 39% after using the program.



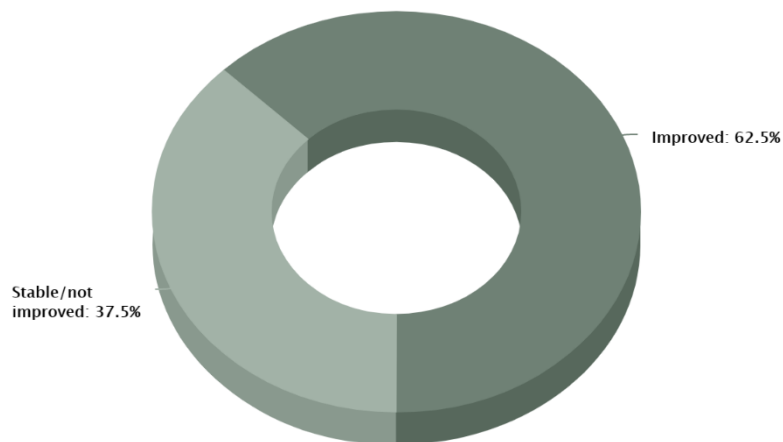
Improvement in mental health

- Breaking Free Online contains several behaviour change techniques that are designed specifically to address mental health issues that are commonly associated with addictions.
- Moreover, the program assesses mental health using the Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4; Kroenke *et al.*, 2009), so enabling organizations and commissioners to gauge the mental health status of those accessing it.
- The PHQ-4 is a clinically validated measure of mental health difficulties, and specifically anxiety and depression. It categorizes people according to four clinical thresholds: *severe*, *moderate*, *mild*, and *normal* (i.e., no anxiety or mood problems).
- At baseline assessment (when people first started Breaking Free), 24% were experiencing severe, 23% moderate and 28% mild mental health difficulties.

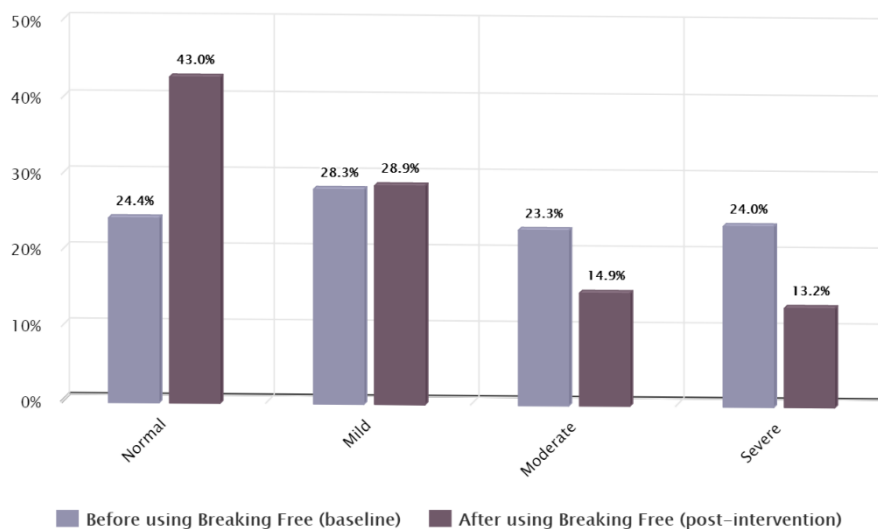




- At the time this analysis was conducted, 63% of those using Breaking Free Online as a self-help program had shown improvement in their level of mental health difficulties.



- Comparison of scores on the PHQ-4 at baseline and post-intervention (at people's most recent progress check) showed the extent to which they had moved in the expected direction between the clinical thresholds.
- More specifically, there had been significant reductions in the percentage of people with severe mental health difficulties (down from 24% to 13%), and moderate mental health difficulties (down from 23% to 15%).
- In addition, there was a highly significant increase in those reporting no mental health difficulties (up from 24% to 43%) following the use of Breaking Free Online.





For more information:

breakingfreegroup.com

breakingfreegroup.ca