

# Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS Questionnaire Report 2021/22

## Introduction

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS (SYME) offers a unique service to adults in Sheffield who endure a debilitating, long term condition. The service is for people with ME/CFS, a condition where sufferers experience a range of physical and cognitive symptoms, including profound fatigue. The consequences of this are profound in terms of loss of income and social isolation. In many cases, very few activities, social or otherwise, are possible for people because of the severity of their illness. SYME has recently embraced people with 'Long Covid' (Post Covid CFS), a very similar condition, whose daily lives are similarly affected.

The aim of the organisation is to provide physical, social and emotional support through provision of specialist adapted yoga sessions and supplementary resources. Ordinary yoga classes are unsuitable for most people with ME/CFS. The yoga classes are specially adapted for ME/CFS and taught by specialist yoga teachers who gear their teaching towards gentle mainly lying postures (optional), breathing and relaxation.

The Covid-19 pandemic inevitably presented challenges to these services. As government restrictions prevented the occurrence of regular classes, they were replaced with virtual sessions. Venue classes were later reintroduced, in accordance with current guidance, to run in parallel. This has offered a choice to service users and enabled those too unwell to travel to participate.

## The Survey

A short, online questionnaire was distributed in March 2022 to all participants registered for the online classes and to recent regular attenders of the venue classes who had internet access. This was to gain their views relating to the aims of SYME. The survey formed part of wider evaluation and monitoring processes to assist SYME to continue to meet the needs of its members.

Questionnaires were completed by 14 people. Responses indicated that 9 (64.3%) regularly attended the virtual classes, 5 (35.7%) the venue classes and 2 (14.3%) both. The majority usually attended weekly (8, 57.1%) or monthly (4, 28.6 %) and 2 (14.3%) rarely.

The majority of participants selected positive responses ("a great deal" or "quite a lot" or "slightly") to each of 5 multiple answer questions regarding the potential benefits of the classes; improving symptoms (12, 88%), increasing general wellbeing (13, 93%) managing the condition (13, 93%), reducing social isolation (13, 93%) and

practising yoga independently (12 , 88%). Details are illustrated in the following table:-

(n = 14)	A Great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all	NA/ Prefer not to say
Improving Symptoms	3 (21%)	5 (38%)	4 (29%)	2 (14%)	0
Increasing General Wellbeing	9 (65%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	0
Managing their condition	4 (29%)	5 (39%)	4 (29%)	1 (7%)	0
Reducing social isolation	4 (29%)	6 (43%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)	0
Practising yoga independently	4 (29%)	5 (38%)	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	0

## **Comments**

Participants were given the opportunity to write additional comments and from the 10 (62.8%) that did so, a number of themes emerged. Gratitude for the classes was generally expressed and many conveyed the importance of them in their lives. The style and skills of teachers who “understand the nature of the condition” was also notable and described as “helpful”, “reassuring”, “crucial” and “amazing”.

Comments reflected the tick box responses that classes helped with management of the condition and physical and mental wellbeing:

“Have improved my quality of life, helping me to pace more effectively and manage symptoms and mental health better”.

"I feel these classes help to maintain muscle and joint function and general physical wellbeing."

They were also described as welcoming and friendly and helpful from a social perspective:

“helps enormously with my anxiety and isolation”.

Several references were made to Covid concerns and feeling “safe”; one participant described themselves as “extremely clinically vulnerable”. In this respect, the virtual classes were referred to as “ideal” and the recordings were appreciated. The value of the venue classes was also valued with one participant stating “it gets me out of the house” and another that the “benefits outweigh the effort of getting there”.

## **Summary**

The questionnaire results demonstrated the value of the specially adapted yoga classes and the positive effect on participants’ physical, mental and social wellbeing. They highlighted the significance of Covid 19 to people’s involvement and endorsed the adaptations made by SYFME to ensure the continuation of services.