

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS Questionnaire Monitoring Evaluation Report Summer 2015

Introduction

Sheffield yoga for ME/CFS organises therapeutic yoga sessions for people suffering with ME/CFS. The condition is a serious, debilitating illness which renders sufferers unwell, even disabled, for several years. Due to the severity of the illness and the myriad of symptoms many people with ME/CFS are unable to undertake many activities. Even daily tasks can be challenging. Yoga sessions specifically tailored for ME/CFS sufferers are otherwise not available in Sheffield and the surrounding areas and typical yoga sessions would be too much for sufferers. Through the provision of specialist yoga sessions the group hopes to relieve suffering, offer social, emotional and physical support to project users/members.

The organisation offers two kinds of yoga: Hatha yoga and Iyengar yoga, which are held on different days and at contrasting times of day, thereby opening the classes to more people with ME/CFS. The venues for the sessions are quiet and warm, with nearby parking and disabled access. The Iyengar yoga sessions take place in a specialist yoga centre which supplies all the equipment required during the sessions.

The yoga tutors have specialist therapeutic yoga training and expertise for them to tailor sessions to consist of gentle, often lying or supported postures, therapeutic breathing and relaxation.

Due to the restrictive nature of the illness many people with ME/CFS lose earnings as a consequence and therefore to help those with constrained finances optional donation is suggested.

Often many ME/CFS sufferers are too unwell to drive and public transport is too mentally and physically demanding for them. Therefore the project provides taxis or volunteer drives for those who require transport, thereby making the yoga sessions more accessible to a greater number of people.

The project also provides regular newsletter bulletins through the post or via email to those who wish to receive them. Information can be found on organisation's website (www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk) as well as resources. For example, yoga books, CDs and tapes are available from a lending postal library, run in collaboration with Sheffield ME Group, to all those on the mailing list. The available resources provided have been found to be invaluable to those project users who are unable to attend classes.

The Questionnaire

In addition to the continual regular verbal feedback from project participants Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS conducted a formal monitoring exercise. This was implemented by regular attendees (those who have attended three or more classes) having the opportunity to complete a short

questionnaire which was available at yoga sessions, during June and July 2015. By the end of the exercise twenty-two class attendees responded by filling out the organisation's questionnaire.

The formal monitoring exercise aims to determine whether the organisation's key objectives/outcomes are being met:

The provision of a service that meets project participants' needs.

Determining whether the desired outcomes and aims of the project are being achieved

Discover any possible improvements to the services provided through the project.

Previously identified key objectives form the basis of the evaluation questions in the short questionnaire (questions can be seen below).

The twenty-two completed questionnaire results can be seen presented below.

Potential class attendance aim	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all
1. Social benefit	27 %	41 %	23 %	9 %
2. Positive effect on wellbeing	68 %	27 %	5 %	0 %
3. Better management of illness	50 %	41 %	9 %	0 %
4. Improvements in symptoms of illness	23 %	45 %	27 %	5 %
5. Yoga or relaxation practise at home (where applicable)	24 %	41 %	35 %	0 %

The usefulness of available group resources to class attendees	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all	Not Applicable
Lending library of CDs/tapes	23 %	9 %	5 %	5%	59%
Website	23 %	27 %	5 %	5%	41%
Bulletin	14 %	32 %	5%	9%	41%

Percentages are rounded to whole numbers for ease.

Full text of key questions:

1. Do you find the social aspects of the yoga group helpful?
2. Do you find the yoga has a positive effect on your wellbeing? (how you feel & function, e.g. mood, confidence, self-esteem, happiness)?
3. Do you think that yoga helps you to manage your illness better? (e.g. by helping to achieve the right balance between rest & activity)?
4. Do you think that yoga practice has led to any improvements in your symptoms?
5. Have the yoga classes, bulletin, website or library helped with home practice of yoga or relaxation (please leave blank if you do not practice at home)?
6. How useful are the following group resources? Website; Bulletin; Yoga & relaxation CDs/Books/Tapes

Written Feedback From Some Participants of Yoga Classes held by Sheffield Yoga for M.E./C.F.S 2015 on the Questionnaire Forms

“I find the breathing exercises particularly helpful as breathlessness is a big symptom for me. The body scanning/awareness exercises and visualisations help me to recognise and manage my symptoms and understand what my body is telling me. It is great to be with people who understand my difficulties.” Female, severe-moderate ME level.

“We are very lucky to be able to attend yoga classes like these. The yoga teachers are excellent and highly tuned in therapeutic yoga. All the people who attend the sessions are grateful to our funders, without whom we wouldn't be able to run the classes.” Female, moderate ME level.

“Yoga helps my flexibility and joints a lot. It also helps with energy levels. It's great that there are several different teachers to give some variety.” Female, severe ME level.

“Yoga practice is now an essential tool in the management of my health.” Male, moderate ME level.

“Since coming to the yoga in January I have noticed an improvement in my condition, I can relax better and I feel energised after a session. As I am not very mobile, the yoga is a good way of keeping joints and muscles moving. I am not able to do regular yoga classes that I used to do when I was well, so to be able to attend these specialised yoga classes is very important to me.” Female, moderately-affected with ME.

“Coming to yoga has made me feel much better in myself and I enjoy talking to the people.” Female, moderately-affected with ME.

“Great to be at something I feel I can keep up with able to manage. Social aspects – I only wrote that because I don't have the energy to engage with anything else other than getting to yoga and doing it. It is my issue not a group issue so I mean I am not looking for social. Thanks it is such a help.” Female, moderate ME level.

“Yoga is a wonderful help and support to my ME. It has helped me to improve my health extensively and the yoga teachings give inspiration and encouragement.” Female, moderate ME level.

“I am quite new to yoga, having never practiced before and enjoy the sessions a lot, especially being in a harmonious, peaceful and relaxing atmosphere which are all vital to my being able to manage my condition of fibromyalgia. It also helps me in my stressful moments.” Female, severe Fibromyalgia level.

Discussion of Results

Overall the questionnaire findings are very positive and determine that through the project the organisation's service provisions fulfil the expectations and requirements of regular class attendees.

The social opportunities available at classes (question 2) benefitted 90% of the respondents, with

68% benefitting either a “great deal” or “quite a lot” from the chance to talk to other participants with whom face similar challenges and frustrations and symptoms as them.

It is not possible to overemphasise health and wellbeing benefits of the yoga provided to attendees, even more so when you take into consideration that the provision of other accessible and beneficial alternatives to sufferers are minimal. The yoga provided had a positive effect on the wellbeing of all the respondents (question 3), and 95% of respondents indicated that this effect on their wellbeing was either to “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of extent. The majority of respondents (68%) reported that the positive effect on their wellbeing was to “a great deal” of extent, which is a very positive outcome for attendees from the yoga.

Furthermore all respondents (100%) also indicated that the yoga provided enabled them to manage their illness better (question 4); 91% of respondents indicated that the effect was “quite a lot” or “a great deal” beneficial to management of their illness. For half the respondents (the largest proportion of respondents) the beneficial effect on illness management was “a great deal.” This is an important outcome of the yoga for participants as illness management is vital to make daily activities achievable through having a less detrimental effect on the body. This can be achieved by learning through the yoga provided to not exhaust all available energy reserves and listening to what their body is telling them at the time and adjusting their activity in accordance with this.

A very important outcome for the session attendees is the beneficial effect on their symptoms. The responses indicate that 95% of participants in the yoga sessions found a beneficial effect on their symptoms. Overall 68% of respondents found the yoga benefitted the symptoms of their condition considerably, either to “quite a lot” of an extent or “a great deal” of an extent; for the majority (45%) the symptom improvement was “quite a lot”. This is very encouraging, since the symptoms of the condition can be very severe and can limit activity substantially.

All the class attendees (100%), for whom it was applicable (77% of respondents) , found that the available resources provided through the project (website, written newsletter/bulletin and lending library) were beneficial to some degree for them to practice yoga at home. Sixty-five percent found the available resources benefitted them “quite a lot” or “a great deal” for home practice, with the majority (41%) finding the available resources “quite a lot” helpful. It is positive to find that the yoga sessions held benefit some participants so much they wish to practice at home. Additionally, two yoga participants informed us that they have bought a CD for home practice but had only just started or were about to start practising at home in the hope that they will gain further benefits from yoga. For other yoga attendees find that the provided yoga is enough physical activity for them for the week.

The final question (question 6) concerns the usefulness of the available resources provided by the organisation to those whom which they apply. Forty two percent of respondents reported that they use the website for the project (www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk), with 78% stating they find it either “a great deal” and “quite a lot” useful to them. Sixty percent of respondents make use of the newsletter/bulletin, which is available through post or by email. For 84% the newsletter/bulletin

was found to be useful to either “a great deal” or “quite a lot” useful.

The lending library of resources (books, tapes and CDs) was found to be useful to the 59% of respondents that use it, with the questionnaire indicating that 77% of them found the resources useful to either “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of an extent.

The resources of lending library and bulletin were found to be “quite a lot” useful to most of those respondents who make use of them (54% and 46% respectfully). For the project website, the majority of those who visit it found it “a great deal” useful (56%).

Summary

The overall findings of the survey have been very positive and confirm that the service providing remedial yoga classes for people with ME/CFS meets the needs of the majority of the project users who attend the classes, with 95% of members having a substantial positive effect on their well being, 90% valuing the social aspects, 95% finding that symptoms were improved, 100% finding that the yoga helped illness management and many finding the available resources useful.

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS provides a unique and vital service to sufferers of these illnesses. The positive impact of the yoga sessions provided on participants’ wellbeing, illness management and symptoms of their illness, as well as the usefulness of the yoga to enable home practice and resources to project uses have been highlighted through the monitoring exercise. This reflects the benefits and importance the project provides to members/project users and the organisation shall endeavour to continue to provide the services offered by the project as a result.