

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS Monitoring Evaluation for Autumn 2013

In concurrence with earlier in the year, Sheffield Yoga for M.E. / C.F.S conducted a formal monitoring to determine the success of the project at achieving its outcomes and aims. These were particularly to establish:

1. Whether the service provided by the group meets members' needs.
2. The identification of areas where the service may be improved.
3. Whether the group is attaining the outcomes that the group/yoga sessions aspire to achieve.

During July and August 2013, a short written survey was distributed amongst members attending yoga classes (to those who had attended at least three classes). The survey focussed on previously identified aims which were used to construct six key questions (the same as those included in the mid-term monitoring survey exercise). Twenty-five forms were distributed during this time and twenty-four were returned completed. The surveys were analysed and the results can be seen presented below:

Possible Project Aims	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all
1. Social benefit	48%	30%	17%	4%
2. Positive effect on wellbeing	71%	25%	4%	0%
3. Better management of illness	54%	42%	4%	0%
4. Improvements in symptoms of illness	26%	39%	35%	0%
5. Yoga or relaxation practise at home	13%	38%	46%	4%
Which available resources attendees find useful:	Lending library of CDs/tapes		Website	Bulletin
	35%		57%	96%

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers for ease.

Full text of key questions included in the evaluation survey forms:

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?
3. Do you think that yoga helps you to manage your illness better?
4. Do you think that yoga practice has led to any improvements in your symptoms?
5. Do you practice yoga or relaxation techniques at home?
6. Which of the group's resources do you find useful?

Regular Class Attendees Feedback Comments on Written Survey Evaluation Forms

Class attendees were invited to give feedback comments on their survey forms. During this monitoring exercise several members provided us with feedback. It is hard to include all the comments, but this member feedback comment reflects the overall tone:

"I have been coming to Sheffield Yoga for ME since I developed ME/CFS eight years ago - how time flies. I still thoroughly enjoy coming to the classes both for the yoga practice and also to meet up with friends I have made over the years and nice to see new people and exchange stories of our illness and to be with people who understand how we feel.

"The remedial yoga teachers are excellent and responsive to our needs - they plan their classes carefully and make the practice interesting each week. It is also good to have the different teachers alternating as it keeps the classes fresh and it's lovely to have guest appearances from Linda during the summer.

"Thank you to the committee for all your hard work especially with the funding to provide people with ME/CFS in the Sheffield area with these two dedicated yoga classes.

"The Millhouses venue is such a lovely light and airy room to carry out our practice in with its full length glass windows looking out on trees and shrubs - nature is very therapeutic and relaxing, too."

Summary of Written Survey Findings

The written monitoring evaluation report findings have been very positive, as found during previous years as well as earlier during this year. The group finds it reassuring that the previously identified aims and outcomes for the services provided (yoga classes and resources) continue to be met.

Socialising opportunities available for class attendees enable members to overcome the social isolation that results from the debilitating effects of the condition, with 96% of class attendees finding them helpful (*only one attendee reporting them not so at all*). 78% of attendees found the socialising opportunities helpful to a large extent, with most class attendees (48%) found the socialising aspects a great deal helpful. These findings are further supported by member feedback comments such as, "The social aspect of the group has been an enormous help in combating the isolation that comes with this illness. There are almost no other group activities that I can manage..." and "...I find the yoga classes invaluable. I get periods when coming to the yoga classes are the only time I can leave my house..."

The group makes these socialising opportunities available to group members, not only through running of classes carefully tailored to meet members' needs, but also by making classes more easily accessible to members, through the provision of free transport to and from the classes (through funding taxis and volunteer driver fuel mileage). The group sees this as an important aspect of the project since many members are too ill to drive or to travel on public transport, and because often sufferers experience a steep loss of income due to the restrictive nature of the condition. Additionally, due to this the group suggests only a voluntary minimal donation for class attendance. Both these aspects ensure that no group members are unable to attend classes due to reduced income. The group further makes classes more accessible to members by holding classes at appropriate venues (quiet and warm, with parking close to buildings).

The monitoring also found that all class attendees found the yoga available at classes resulted in a positive effect on their wellbeing, with 96% of attendees finding a large positive effect. It is very pleasing to report that the majority of attendees (71%) found the classes had "a great deal" of a positive effect on their wellbeing. Since ME/CFS often renders sufferers feeling particularly unwell due to the spectrum of symptoms and the varying degrees of severity of such symptoms, the group sees the attainment of this aim of the project is an important achievement of the yoga classes. This

achievement is even more significant when the lack of other available services with a positive effect on sufferers' wellbeing, are so limited. This was additionally highlighted by verbal attendee feedback, "It is vital that the classes continue, particularly as there is such a lack of services for ME/CFS sufferers available."

Attendance at the yoga classes also enabled all those surveyed to achieve a better management of their illness to some extent, by enabling them to find the right balance between rest and activity. Sufferers have to achieve a fine balance between enough activity to prevent muscle deterioration, but not too much activity so that overexertion ensues and a deterioration of symptoms results. Such management of the illness is vital, especially as if sufferers take on too much activity past their limits; significant negative impact on symptoms occurs and even can lead to chronic relapse. The group is very encouraged that the majority of class attendees monitored (96%) reported that the yoga helped them to attain better management of their condition to a large degree, with over half finding a great deal of an impact on the management of the illness (54%). This is particularly beneficial to attendees, as this knowledge will enable them to achieve a better balance between rest and activity, thereby having a positive influence on their day-to-day living. Such as one class attendee who stated on the survey form, "...I practise yoga daily at home and it is an enormous help with 'pacing'..." For some attendees, such as those newly diagnosed with the illness, this is likely to be significant.

A further significant finding of the monitoring of class attendees is that the 65% of yoga attendees surveyed reported a large improvement in their health symptoms (either "a great deal" or "quite a lot") since attending the yoga classes. Most attendees reported "quite a lot" of improvement in their health symptoms (39%). Since none of attendees found no benefit from the yoga to their symptoms, it is very encouraging that all those surveyed found some symptomatic relief from the yoga, especially since these health symptoms may often be very restrictive and difficult to manage. Additionally, these findings highlight that the specially adapted remedial yoga provided, and the way in which it is delivered, is working successfully in order to give such benefits to sufferers (rather than making them worse, which most physical activity would generally do). The specialist yoga tutors have adapted their teaching to concentrate on lying postures, which reduce energy consumption and strain in the body. Teachers also focus on breathing and relaxation techniques, which benefit sufferers since the breath is vital for energy production, which is limited in sufferers. Furthermore, these help sufferers to relax which helps to relieve tension within the body. These benefits of the yoga to attendees found are further supported in the attendee written feedback comments, "...The yoga helps me to relax more. It also gives me more flexibility of my spine and joints. I also feel more energised and my breathing is more regular after class." and "I have always enjoyed the yoga sessions and will continue to attend as it is such a great part of my recovery..." A number of tutors rotate teaching the classes, written feedback suggests that attendee like this approach because it increases the variety of teaching styles and areas covered during the classes. Our monitoring of class attendees also found that all but one attendee surveyed practised yoga at home, further indicating the benefits of yoga to their health and wellbeing in order for them to also practise at home.

The available resources to class attendees are also greatly appreciated, only one attendee did not respond to the question (hard to determine whether this was missed due to poor cognitive function resulting from the illness, or whether none of the available resources were useful to them). The website is a popular resource with 57% of class attendees surveyed finding it useful. Members are

able to refer to the website for information on class dates and which teachers. However, as not all members have computer access or due to the extent of their illness are unable to use one, the paper bulletin, sent to members regularly through the post, is the most popular resource with 96% of responders finding it useful. Additionally, 35% of attendees surveyed benefit from the usefulness of the library of CDs and tapes that are available to use for home practice. Since the monitoring evaluation exercise indicates that members find the different available resources useful, the group shall continue to provide all these resources to members.

Class Non-attendees Monitoring Survey and Findings

An additional survey among non-attendees at yoga classes was also conducted during September 2013. A few non-attendee members were telephoned and asked whether they would mind answering some questions on the services provided by the group (yoga classes and resources). Four non-attendees at the yoga classes agreed to participate in this evaluation.

The questions asked and the results of the survey are as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Not Applicable
Do you find the bulletin useful?	100%	0%	0%
Do you find the website useful?	25%	0%	75%
If you are not well enough to attend the classes, are the yoga classes a goal for when you are a bit better?	50%	0%	50 %

Although the small number of non-attendees participating in this evaluation, the group is encouraged to find that those surveyed who unable to attend classes questioned, where applicable, find the resources provided useful. This is the same findings as with class attendees thereby these resources provided are beneficial to both non-attendees and class attendees. Of the resources, the paper bulletin is the most useful, often invaluable to non-attendees at classes (all those surveyed found it useful). Only one of the non-attendees questioned this time found the website useful, with this service not being applicable to the others. As these members/participants often have severe health symptoms, they are probably too unwell to access the internet or do not have internet access.

All non-attendees surveyed, to whom it was applicable, hold future class attendance as a goal they aspire to meet. These members feel reassured that when they are well enough there is a tailored class available, which is not only specific to their needs but also beneficial to their health. The group is reassured that those who are currently unable to attend classes wish to in the future, especially as this shows that there is a current need and future demand for this service. Therefore the group is pleased to offer the yoga class service and shall continue to do so, and reassured that the classes available to these ME/CFS sufferers when they require, particularly as when similar services are so limited. The importance of all this cannot be stressed enough since available alternatives that are beneficial, let alone accessible, to ME/CFS sufferers are extremely limited.

The main feedback comments from the non-attendees surveyed centre around how some are too unwell to attend the classes more often or unfortunately have other commitments on the days the yoga is available, but wished they could attend more often and they are glad that services exist.

Conclusion

Overall, the autumn 2013 monitoring evaluation exercise highlights that the services provided by Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS continue to run successfully, as well as achieving all the outcomes and aims that the group aspires to meet. Regular class attendees reported social benefits from class attendance and a positive effect on their wellbeing. Additionally, class attendees gained a better management of their illness and found an improvement in their health symptoms. The significance of such benefits from the yoga classes to sufferers cannot be overstated, particularly given the debilitating nature of CFS/ME. The importance of all this cannot be stressed enough, especially since available alternatives that are beneficial, let alone accessible, to ME/CFS sufferers are extremely limited.

Both attendees and non-attendees at classes appreciate all the available resources provided to members. Those unable to attend classes are reassured by the hope of the goal of future attendance and that there is a suitable, easily accessible class available to attend when they are well enough. The inclusion of sufferers at all levels on the illness scale is a key aspect of the project, especially as often severe sufferers are overlooked by many different services. The particularly positive findings from the monitoring exercise, supported by positive feedback from members of the group, reflect the importance of the services and support provided to ME/CFS sufferers through this project. It offers the prospect of a more supported future to people often marginalised and inadvertently excluded from mainstream services.

It is clear that the Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS project provides a unique and invaluable service across Sheffield to people affected by a chronic, debilitating illness. The group is very encouraged by the extent of achievement of the outcomes and aims and so shall actively seek to secure funding to continue to run and promote these services in the same way.