

Sheffield Yoga for M.E./C.F.S Monitoring Evaluation Report 2016

Introduction

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS provides remedial yoga classes for people with ME/CFS.

This is a serious debilitating chronic illness, often rendering sufferers ill and disabled for many years. The consequences of the illness are profound; with loss of income and social isolation. Often, many sufferers can only manage very few activities, social or otherwise, because of the severity of the symptoms of the illness.

In order to meet the needs' of people with this incapacitating illness, the group's yoga classes are carefully organised, and help to provide important physical, social and emotional support for members of the group. Ordinary yoga classes would be unsuitable for those with the illness. No other yoga classes are available in Sheffield that are tailored to the needs of people with ME/CFS.

Specialist remedial yoga tutors focus their teaching, in their adaptation, towards gentle, often lying postures, breathing and relaxation. Classes are run twice, weekly with contrasting types of remedial yoga; Hatha yoga and Iyengar yoga. The varied approaches, different venues and class times make the classes open to a number of people with ME/CFS. The venues for the yoga are quiet and warm, with car parking next to the buildings, which also have disabled access.

The Iyengar yoga classes are taught in a specialist yoga centre where all the necessary equipment is provided. Since loss of earnings often results due to the illness, for class attendance an optional donation is suggested, to help those in financial need.

Additionally, the provision free of transport (taxis or volunteer drivers) make the classes accessible to those with limited finances, as well as to those who are too ill to drive or to manage public transport.

New members receive a free information pack about the classes. Regular newsletter bulletins (via post or email) of information are distributed free to all members.

The group website (www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk) provides information to members about the classes and yoga for ME/CFS. A postal lending library is available for members to borrow resources (yoga books/CDs/tapes) for yoga practice at home.

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS is a registered charity (Registered Charity Number: 1117464).

Most of the trustees/management committee who help to organise the classes have ME/CFS themselves, and several able-bodied volunteers have important roles.

The written survey questionnaire for yoga session attendees organised by Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS

During September 2016 Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS conducted a monitoring exercise as in previous years. This was carried out in the form of a short written survey available at the yoga sessions for regular attendees (more than three sessions) to complete if they wished

The formal monitoring acts to determine whether the group's priority aims are being fulfilled:

- Providing a service that meets project users' needs

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- Evaluating whether the project is achieving its desired aims and outcomes
- Identifying any improvements to the services provided

The survey questions were constructed from the previously identified outcomes and aims of the project.

Full text of key questions:

- Do you find the social aspects of the yoga group helpful?
- Do you find the yoga has a positive effect on your wellbeing (how you feel & function, e.g. mood, confidence, self-esteem, happiness)?
- Do you think the yoga helps you to manage your illness better (e.g. by helping to achieve the right balance between rest & activity)?
- Do you think the yoga practice has led to any improvements in your symptoms?
- 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)?
- How useful do you find the following group resources: Website; Bulletin; Yoga & relaxation CDs/Books/Tapes

In total nineteen class attendees completed the written survey to give their invaluable feedback on the yoga sessions and group provisions and they were analysed as below.

Potential yoga session attendance aim	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all
1. Social benefit	53%	16%	21%	11%
2. Positive effect on wellbeing	68%	32%	0%	0%
3. Better management of illness	68%	32%	0%	0%
4. Improvements in symptoms of illness	42%	37%	21%	0%
5. Helped with yoga or relaxation practise at home (where applicable)*	40%	40%	20%	0%

*21% responders did not practice at home, of the 79% of those that did

The usefulness of resources to class attendees (for whom they apply)	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all	Percentage of Responders Not Applicable
Lending library of CDs/tapes	40%	20%	20%	20%	47%
Website	20%	47%	13%	0%	21%
Newsletter Bulletin	44%	38%	19%	0%	16%

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Percentages are rounded to whole numbers for ease.

Comments from responders on survey forms

On the back of the survey forms responders were invited to make comments and people left positive feedback. The illustrates the appreciation of the yoga and provisions by project users. To quote some examples:

- ❖ “KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!”
- ❖ “Lovely yoga, my life would be so much poorer without it. Long may the class continue.”
- ❖ “Teachers are excellent. A v. supportive class.”
- ❖ “Yoga definitely has a great deal of positive effect on wellbeing; I feel much more able to cope after the yoga session. Yoga definitely helps a great deal with management of my illness. Yoga has lead to a great deal of improvement in my symptoms; [I] ..cope better with the effects of tiredness after a session. Taken from question response elaborations.”
- ❖ “Having tailor made yoga classes for ME/CFS are invaluable as normal classes are too strenuous. The classes help me with energy levels, breathing regularity, muscles, joint stiffness and spinal flexibility.”
- ❖ “I find yoga very crucial in my ME recover and helps with managing my M.E.. As I can’t do regular exercise it is important to be able to keep joints supple and this gentle yoga class helps me do this without making me ill or worsening my symptoms. Thank you to Sheffield ME yoga group. ☺ ”

Discussion

The overall evaluation survey findings are very positive and confirm that the project provisions meet the group aims/outcomes as well as the needs of the majority of project users who attend the classes.

The social opportunities for many yoga session attendees is vital, as for many being chronically ill for many years they feel socially isolated, with the majority of responders (89%) benefitted from the opportunities with 68% reporting they benefit a ‘great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ from the chance to interact with others facing similar challenges and symptoms with their chronic illness.

A very encouraging survey finding is that all of the surveyed yoga attendees felt that that the specially tailored yoga provided enabled them to manage their illness better to either ‘quite a lot’ of an extent or “a great deal” of an extent. More so encouraging is that for the majority of them (68%) the benefit of the yoga to this was actually “a great deal.” This shows that the yoga provided by the group has enabled the attendees to learn not to exhaust all their available energy reserves, to listen to their bodies needs and adjusting their activity accordingly. This is a very important thing to learn because it will enable them to content with the challenges of daily activity with a less of a exacerbating effect on their health.

Not only did all benefit with better management of their condition, all responders reported that the yoga had a positive effect on their wellbeing to either “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of an extent. Once more most (68%) agreed that it also led to a “ a great deal” of a positive beneficial effect on

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their wellbeing. Both of these will have a really important impact on attendees lives and how they contend with daily life with a chronic illness.

A very significant outcome for the yoga attendees highlighted by the survey evaluation is that all of the responders found the yoga led to improvement in their symptoms. Just under a quarter of responders (21%) reported their symptoms improved "slightly". Encouragingly for most of the session attendees (79%) found there was "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of improvement in their symptom. For the majority (42%) of responders the symptom improvement was "a great deal" which is key when symptoms of the condition affect all the major systems within the body and are both mental and physical and can be very limiting. A considerable positive impact on symptoms to those who attend the yoga sessions is a great positive outcome, one which was hoped to be achieved by the sessions and shows meeting the needs of the session attendees as intended as well as benefitting them also.

Over three-quarters (79%) of survey responders who attend yoga sessions indicated that their attendance also helped them to practice relaxation and yoga within their own home to some extent; for 80% of responders this was equally to either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of an extent. This is another heartening outcome achieved from attendance at the yoga, especially when the above findings illustrate just how beneficial relaxation and yoga is to sufferers. It is great that our sessions enable them to continue to gain this benefits at home.

The survey also determines the usefulness of the group resources to responders who attend the yoga sessions. All of those those who use the project website (www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk) indicated they find it useful with 81% of responders finding it rather useful (either to "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of an extent.

All of those surveyed who receive the written bulletin (via post or email) find it useful. The majority (81%) value it as either "quite a lot" or "a great deal" useful with 19% finding it slightly useful. Over three-quarters (80%) of the responders who use the lending library of resources (books, tapes, CDs) indicated it as useful the majority of which(40%) finding it "a great deal" useful .

The benefits to health and wellbeing of the yoga provided during classes to CFS/ME sufferers cannot be overstated, especially due to the lack of provision of accessible and beneficial alternatives for sufferers.

The importance of these statements should not be overlooked when the condition can be so debilitating and restrictive to daily life. This combined together with the fact that actual beneficial therapies and service provisions (NHS and private) to sufferers are so limited means that the group provisions are vital to project users/members.

Not only is the yoga provided tailored to suit ME/CFS sufferers but the sessions are held at accessible venues with nearby parking, with an assistant for help with bags and equipment and the venues are quiet too. The free transport provisions offered by the group enable the yoga sessions to be more accessible to all project users/members who wish to attend (they can be too poorly to drive themselves or cope with draining public transport). The accessibility to all project users/members is continued with the voluntary donations from those who can afford them.

Additionally, the group resources aim to include all the group project users/members, by outreaching to those who are not yet well enough to attend the sessions, by making the feel

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involved and providing them with the potential goal of future yoga session attendance at the time when their health allows.

The group really does make a difference to people's lives, especially where there is a gap in beneficial and affordable & accessible provisions.

The wider community benefits from the project due to possible volunteering opportunities. The group currently has four volunteer drivers who transport members to and from yoga sessions. The drivers greatly appreciate being able to enable sufferers to attend the yoga, so they can engage with others & gain benefits. Also, the running of the project enables members (& others) to volunteer their assistance in a way that is flexible and understanding of their condition. Such voluntary roles are hard to find for members. All our volunteers gain better wellbeing through helping others. Additionally, the group suspects that the families and carers of the members benefit from seeing their family/friend gaining benefits as reported above through yoga attendance.

Conclusion

Members are very lucky to be able to attend these therapeutic yoga classes. All the teachers are well trained and sympathetic to the needs of our group. Classes help with muscle stiffness and are energising, but relaxing. The social aspect is also very important as some members are not able to go out and socialise other than coming to classes. The provision of free transport enables them to attend with the least effort as many members cannot cope with public transport.

Very positive written survey findings confirm that project provisions meet project aims/beneficial outcomes expected. The social opportunities available at yoga sessions were found beneficial to 89% of yoga attendees. All surveyed yoga attendees felt that the specially tailored yoga provided enabled them to manage their illness better; 'quite a lot' (32%) or for most 'a great deal' (68%). Also, the exact same extent of benefit for positive effect on wellbeing from yoga attendance was reported by all. Plus, the yoga led to improvement in health symptoms for all; this was 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of improvement for 79%. The lending library was found useful to 80% of users. The website & newsletter resources were reported useful to all surveyed who make use of them