

## Results of Survey by Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS Spring 2011

### Introduction

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS runs remedial yoga classes for people with ME/CFS. This is a serious debilitating chronic illness and people are often ill and disabled for many years. 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.

The classes are carefully organized to meet the needs of people with this illness and provide important social, emotional and physical support for members of the group. The provision of yoga classes specifically for people with ME/CFS is not available elsewhere in Sheffield and ordinary yoga classes are unsuitable for most people with ME/CFS.

The yoga classes are taught by specialist remedial yoga teachers who, in their adaptation, gear their teaching towards gentle, often lying postures, breathing and relaxation. There are two styles of remedial yoga available; Hatha yoga (Friday mornings) and Iyengar yoga (Tuesday afternoons). The varied approaches, different venues and class times open the classes to a number of people with ME/CFS. The premises for the yoga are quiet and warm. There is parking next to the buildings and the venues have disabled access. The Iyengar yoga classes are held in a specialist yoga centre, where all necessary equipment is provided. However, the number of attendees at Iyengar classes has been variable and so a trial period to open these classes to groups with other illnesses which present with similar symptoms was started in March 2011, in conjunction with the management of Sheffield Yoga Centre.

A profound consequence of the illness is loss of earnings. Classes are free to those attending, but donations to the charity are encouraged from those able to pay.

Many people with ME/CFS are too ill to drive or use public transport and the provision of taxis or lifts from volunteer drivers make the classes more accessible to a greater number of people. This is an important use of the group's funding.

The group provides regular bulletins by post, information on the website ([www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk](http://www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk)) and resources such as yoga books/CDs/tapes which are available from a postal library. These resources are available to all those on the mailing list. Previous surveys have consistently shown that this aspect of our service is highly valued by the large majority of members.

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS is a registered charity. (Registered Charity Number: 1117464)  
The majority of trustees who organize the classes have ME/CFS but there are also several able-bodied volunteers who do an invaluable job.

## The Survey

Trustees of Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS receive regular verbal feedback from members but also aim to carry out regular formal monitoring. The purpose of this exercise is to ensure that our priority aims are:

- Providing a service that meets our members' needs.
- Identifying improvements to the service.
- Checking that the group is achieving its aims and objectives.

It was decided that the 2011 survey would be sent to all those on the group's mailing list. In February, 254 questionnaires were posted to members and were 88 completed forms were received.

Questions were a result of outcomes that have been previously identified and also a reflection of verbal feedback during the previous year. These questions can be seen on page 3, together with the results which are arranged in 5 columns, according to the frequency with which respondents attend yoga classes, (ranging from more than once a week to never).

It is impossible to include all the comments on the results forms but here are some which reflect the overall tone.

### Regular Attenders

"Really appreciated the warm welcome and friendliness of the group, and the quality of the teachers..."

"I am extremely appreciative of the hard work, commitment and organisation put into the yoga classes. It has made an enormous difference to my ME and how I manage it. It's wonderful that we continue to have funding provided year after year. Thank you very much."

"I have seen an improvement in my condition since starting the classes in Autumn 2010. I think this is due to a number of factors, including attending yoga classes. One of the things I struggle to do is relax and the classes have definitely helped with this."

"Yoga helps with muscle stiffness, tightness and general achiness. It is really helpful to be in a group where everyone understands your situation. Everyone is really friendly and approachable."

"Yoga is one of the very few things that has made a difference during my illness. An ordinary class would be far too strenuous for me, so this class is ideal. I doubt I would maintain consistent practice at home without the class's existence."

### Occasional Attenders

"When I first attended, I was severely ill....I believe my yoga practice to be one of the things which has enabled me to get to this point in my recovery.....as my health improved, I started to take up other activities and commitments. I think it (yoga) is a fantastic support for people's recovery and I'm grateful for it-especially the free service (without which I never would have been able to go). Thank you Sheffield Yoga for ME!"

### Non-Attenders

"Although a severe sufferer- bedbound, I do find your bulletins very helpful to me and I am able to keep up to date with yoga and relaxation techniques. I practise the relaxation in bed and find it very useful to me and my constant pain. I would love to attend yoga one day in the future. Thank you."

"I have not been well enough to attend classes but am so appreciative of being on the mailing list. It gives me a connection, however slender, with something positive and life-enhancing."

"The classes were great when I was very ill. I would have benefitted from an intermediate class....back towards mainstream yoga classes. Yoga benefits me spiritually, physically, psychologically and socially."

## Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS 2011 Questionnaire Results

How often have you been able to attend classes during the last year?	1+per week	1+ per month	Every few months	rarely	never
	13	12	12	17	34
Are you .....male?	1	1	4	1	5
Are you female...?	11	8	7	13	23
What's your age group?					
18-29	1	0	1	1	0
30-44	1	2	1	7	7
45-49	8	8	6	6	21
60+	3	2	4	3	6
Is your ME/CFS....?					
Mild	3	2	3	5	4
Moderate	8	8	8	8	19
Severe	1	2	0	3	9
Which classes do you usually attend?					
Iyengar	5	1	1	5	N/A
Hatha	13	11	11	10	
<b>These questions were answered by people who had attended a class on 3 or more occasions in 2010</b>					
1. Do you find the social aspects of the group helpful?					
A great deal	6	3	2	0	N/A
Quite a lot	5	7	3	2	N/A
Slightly	2	2	4	2	N/A
Not at all	0	0	1	3	N/A
2. Do you think that yoga helps you to manage your illness better?					
A great deal	7	5	4	3	N/A
Quite a lot	5	6	4	1	N/A
Slightly	1	1	3	3	N/A
Not at all	0	0	0	1	N/A
3. Do you think yoga practice has led to any improvements in your symptoms?					
A great deal	7	1	5	3	N/A
Quite a lot	4	7	4	0	N/A
Slightly	2	3	1	2	N/A
Not at all	0	0	1	3	N/A
4. Do you practise yoga or relaxation techniques at home?					
A great deal	4	2	5	3	N/A
Quite a lot	4	4	3	1	N/A
Slightly	4	4	4	4	N/A
Not at all	1	2	0	0	N/A
<b>Everyone was asked to answer these questions</b>					
5. If you practise yoga at home, have classes or other information from us been useful?					
Yes	12	12	10	13	16
No	0	0	2	2	2
6. If you're too ill to attend classes, is future attendance a goal?					
Yes	3	4	8	12	16
No	0	0	2	1	2
7. Have you bought a copy of our yoga nidra cd by Rebecca Allen?					
Yes	6	6	7	3	4
No	6	6	5	14	27
8. Which resources do you find useful? (Tick as many boxes as necessary)					
Bulletin	10	11	8	14	22
Website	7	6	3	4	5
Yoga & relaxation CDs/tapes/books	5	3	5	6	12

## Conclusion

The majority of respondents were female, aged between 45 and 60+. This had been noted at classes but it also reflects the make-up of the overall membership. Of those who answered the question, 16% are male and 84% are female. 76% are more than 45 years old, 24% are aged between 18 and 44.

The trustees are also aware that the Hatha yoga classes on Fridays are better attended than the Iyengar yoga classes. (See page 1) A few members attend both classes.

Although there were more people assessing the effect of their illness to be "severe" among people who never attend classes, the overall majority of respondents (61%) consider their ME/CFS to be "moderate".

Question 1 asked, "Do you find the social aspects of the group helpful?"

100% of people who attend classes more than once a month, find the social aspects helpful, with 84% answering a great deal or quite a lot, compared with 0% not at all. 77% of those who attend less frequently (every few months or rarely) find classes socially helpful, with 41% answering a great deal or quite a lot, and 23% do not.

Question 2 asked, "Do you think that yoga helps you to manage your illness better?"

100% of people who attend classes more than once a month find that yoga helps them to manage their illness better, with 92% responding a great deal or quite a lot. 95% of those who attend every few months or rarely find that yoga helps them to manage their illness, with 63% responding a great deal or a lot and 5% do not.

Question 3 asked, "Do you think that yoga practice has led to any improvement in your symptoms?"

100% of people who attend classes more than once a month find that yoga leads to improvement in symptoms, with 79% responding a great deal or quite a lot. 79% of those who attend every few months or rarely, find that yoga led to an improvement in symptoms, with 63% responding a great deal or quite a lot, and 21% do not.

Question 4 asked, "Do you practise yoga or relaxation techniques at home?"

88% of people who attend classes more than once a month practice yoga at home, with 56% responding a great deal or quite a lot, and 12% do not. 100% of those attending every few months or rarely practiced yoga at home, 60% responding a great deal or quite a lot. On reflection, it would have been helpful to ask everyone to answer this question.

Questions 5 to 8 focus on the resources which the group makes available to all its members. It indicates that information provided about yoga, which is incorporated in the information pack for new members and in articles in the bi-monthly bulletin, was helpful to the vast majority people who practise at home. The bulletin is the most popular of our readily available resources, although many members do not have access to the internet or are unable to use a computer because of their illness. 90% of those rarely or never attending the classes because they are too ill, find the yoga classes are a goal for the future.

It is interesting to note that the majority of all respondents practise yoga at home and find its effects beneficial and help them to manage their illness better. The majority of respondents also found the social aspects of the group helpful.