

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS 2014 Annual Survey Report

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. Additionally, 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, but several able-bodied volunteers have important roles.

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

As in previous years, Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS conducted a formal monitoring exercise (in addition to the ongoing regular verbal feedback). This was in the form of a short written survey available at the yoga sessions (during June and July 2014), for regular attendees (more than three classes) to complete if they wished. Sixteen class attendees completed the written survey in total.

The purpose of the formal monitoring is determine that our key aims are being fulfilled:

- Providing a service that meets the needs of the project users.
- Checking whether the project is achieving its desired aims and outcomes.
- Identifying and improvements to the service provided.

Questions in survey were the result of previously identified outcomes/aims of the project. These can be seen on page 3-4, together with the results of the survey questionnaire.

Some of the comments on the questionnaires which reflect the overall tone of feedback from members attending classes can be seen below:

"I feel comfortable to attend yoga sessions specifically for CFS/ME sufferers. I would not attend a yoga class for the general public. The yoga teaches are excellent & clearly understand the needs of CFS/ME sufferers."

"(I) am totally confident in attending the classes. The teachers are knowledgeable in ME/CFS and do not 'push' participants too far. They are friendly and very approachable. I would not attend a general/regular yoga class."

"The yoga helps a lot with things like joint stiffness, muscles, breathing, and flexibility. I usually feel like I have more energy after class and am more relaxed."

"Enormous help to have taxis..the sessional assistant and other volunteers are greatly appreciated."

"I am especially grateful for the help with transport costs - without it I just couldn't afford to go. Although I find I'm too 'spaced out' after a class to socialise capably, it's an invaluable boost to my wellbeing to get out of the house and do something positive in a supportive environment."

"We are very lucky to have these therapeutic yoga classes held locally in Sheffield. Our team of teachers are all excellent, are specially trained and their classes are tailored to take into account of the different needs of sufferers with CFS. They encourage us to work at our own level, enabling each person to pace themselves accordingly. I enjoy the classes and am sure they are beneficial."

"These classes are a lifeline. Sometimes, when symptoms are bad, it's the only social activity I can manage - rest of the week I am housebound. Because these classes are taught by specialist teachers, it's the only physical activity I am able to do. They help me to work within my limits. They also help me to honour & respect my body as it is now - not how I wish it would be. This is so important for self-esteem, and for successful management of the illness. Without these classes, my life would be very much the poorer."

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS 2014 Questionnaire Results 2014 for Classes Attendees

Tick one box per question:

1. Which yoga sessions do you usually attend?	Tuesday (Iyengar) 2	Friday (Hatha) 9	Both classes 3
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Please see below for a full text of questions.

	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all	n/a
2. Social aspects	5	6	5	0	-
3. Positive affect on wellbeing	12	4	0	0	-
4. Better illness management	6	7	2	1	-
5. Improvements in symptoms	4	5	7	0	-
6. Home yoga or relaxation practice	5	5	1	0	5
7. Usefulness of available group resources:					
Website	4	6	1	1	4
Bulletin/newsletter	4	8	1	0	3
Lending Library	3	5	1	1	6

Full text of questions:

1. Which Yoga sessions do you usually attend?
2. Do you find the social aspects of the yoga group helpful?
3. Do you find the yoga has a positive effect on your wellbeing (how you feel & function, e.g. mood, confidence, self-esteem, happiness)?

4. Do you think the yoga helps you to manage your illness better (e.g. by helping to achieve the right balance between rest & activity)?
5. Do you think the yoga practice has led to any improvements in your symptoms?
6. 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)?
7. How useful do you find the following group resources:
 - Website
 - Bulletin
 - Yoga & relaxation CDs/Books/Tapes (from Sheffield ME group Library)?

Discussion of Results

The overall findings gained from the survey have been very positive and confirm that the service provided meets the needs of the majority of the project users who attend classes.

The social aspects (question 2) provided by class attendance, benefitted all those who completed the survey; no one found this aspect of class attendance as “not at all helpful”. Of the respondents, 69% valued the social aspects either “quite a lot” helpful or helpful to “a great extent”.

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. All the respondents find the yoga at classes a highly positive effect on their wellbeing (question 3). None of the respondents reported that this positive effect was only to a “slight” extent, but all of them (100%) reported that this effect on their wellbeing was substantially positive; either to “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of an extent. It is particularly encouraging that the majority, 75% of these respondents, find the yoga classes have “a great deal” of a positive effect on their wellbeing.

Additionally, the majority (94%) of respondents find the yoga provided is helpful to the management of their illness (question 4), with 81% of respondents reporting they find the yoga either “a great deal” or “quite a lot”) helpful in managing their illness. Furthermore, the survey responses (question 5) highlight the beneficial effect of the yoga provided to project users, with all of the respondents (100%) indicating that it led to improvement in the symptoms of their illness to some degree. Over half of the respondents (56%) found their symptoms improved considerably, with either “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of improvement. To an ME/CFS sufferer being able to manage the illness can be key to enabling daily activity with the least detrimental effect on the illness.

For the class attendees who also practice yoga and relaxation at home, the survey found that all the available resources (website, written newsletter/bulletin, lending library) were beneficial to their home practice (question 6). Nearly all of these respondents (91%) find the resources greatly useful for their home practice; valuing the resources as "a great deal" and "quite a bit" useful. This is important as these resources provided by the group enable them to continue their yoga and relaxation outside of the classes, as well as when they feel able to. Thereby members also gain benefits outside of class.

The last question (question 7) concerned the usefulness of available resources to those whom they were applicable. For those who use the website for the project (www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk) over three-quarters (83%) of respondents stated it was rather useful (either "a great deal" or "quite a lot"). All of the respondents who receive the written bulletin (available via post or email) find it useful. The majority (92%) value it as either "quite a lot" or "a great deal" useful. The lending library of resources (books, tapes, CDs) was also deemed useful by most of those who use it; with 80% of respondents reporting they find it "a great deal" or "quite a lot" useful.

Survey Questionnaire Results for Class non-attendees

During August 2014, a short written survey was sent to a sample of project users who are non-attendees at the yoga classes but who wish to remain on our mailing list. Eight completed surveys were received.

A table of the findings of these surveys can be seen on the next page.

These project users all indicated that they found the information pack provided when they first joined the project/group was useful. All of these non-attendees find both the written bulletin/newsletter and the group/project website useful also. A small proportion of these non-attendees use the lending library (38%).

A large proportion of these non-attendees (88%) practice yoga, meditation or relaxation practices at home. All of these non-attendees reported that they are unable to attend classes because they are too unwell to manage to participate in them at present. However, they all stated that they view class attendance as a future goal for them, at such a time as when their condition will allow. This outcome is highly valued by the project, as it vital that there is a service available for CFS/ME sufferers that is beneficial and accessible to sufferers once they have improved, as well as important that sufferers have something to work towards.

Results of class non-attendees written survey questionnaire 2014

	Yes	No	Not applicable
1. Usefulness of bulletin	8	0	-
2. Usefulness of website	6	0	2
3. New member information pack usefulness	8	0	-
4. Use lending library of resources	3	5	0
5. Practice yoga at home	7	1	0
6. Future goal of class attendance	8	0	0

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS provides a unique and invaluable service to sufferers of these illnesses. The positive feedback gained as a result of our monitoring exercises reflects the benefits and usefulness of the service it provides to its project users/group members and therefore we feel it is important to maintain the services provided to all members.

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 100% of members having a substantial positive effect on their well being, 100% valuing the social aspects, 100% finding that symptoms were improved, 94% finding that the yoga helped illness management and many finding the available resources useful. Non-attendees of the classes also find the resources such as the bulletin useful and all who were too unwell to attend classes said attending the classes was a goal for when they were well enough to attend.