

Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS Questionnaire Report - Summer 2019

Introduction

This report presents a descriptive survey undertaken to evaluate services provided by Sheffield Yoga for ME/CFS (SYFME). It forms part of wider evaluation and monitoring processes, including ongoing verbal feedback and attendance monitoring. The purpose of the was to determine if the project continues to provide services that meet users' needs.

ME/CFS is a serious, debilitating illness which renders sufferers unwell and disabled for many years. The severity of the illness, and its myriad of symptoms, mean that many with ME/CFS are severely limited in their activities and even essential daily tasks can be challenging. Sufferers are usually unable to work and many are socially isolated. SYFME organises therapeutic yoga sessions, specifically designed for ME/CFS sufferers, that are otherwise not available in Sheffield and the surrounding areas.

The project offers two kinds of yoga sessions; Hatha and Iyengar. These are held at different venues on different days to increase availability to people with ME/CFS. Tutors have specialist yoga training and expertise to provide tailored sessions as typical yoga would be beyond the capability of sufferers. Sessions involve therapeutic breathing and relaxation with postures that are gentle and performed lying or supported.

Due to the restrictive nature of ME/CFS, many with the condition live on a low income. Many are also too unwell to drive and find public transport too mentally and physically demanding. The project increases accessibility to yoga sessions by providing taxis or volunteer drivers for those requiring transport.

In addition to yoga classes, SYFME provides information through its website (www.sheffieldyogaforme.org.uk) and regular postal or electronic newsletters. It also offers other resources (for example, books, CDs and tapes), via a postal library, to supplement the classes and support those who are unable to attend.

Aims

- To establish if SYME is achieving its objectives of offering social, emotional and physical support to service users through provision of specialist yoga sessions and supplementary resources.
- To discover potential improvements to the services.

Method

Self-report questionnaires were used to gain the views of regular attenders. They were distributed to participants, by hand, at yoga classes during May and June 2019. The questionnaires used tick box, multiple answer questions to obtain participants' views and basic demographic data. Participants were also invited to provide additional comments on the back of the document. Questions were based on the project's previously identified objectives as shown below:

Questions Regarding Participants' Views

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 that yoga helps you to manage your illness better? (e.g. by helping to achieve the right balance between rest & activity)?

Do you think that 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 are the following group resources? Website; Bulletin; Yoga & relaxation CDs/Books/Tapes

Results

Questionnaires were completed by 17 participants. A large majority indicated positive outcomes from attending the yoga classes by selecting “a great deal” or “quite a lot” to the questions regarding potential benefits (Table 1). 82% found the social aspects helpful, 100% indicated improvements in wellbeing, 100% found classes helped them to manage their illness and 77% reported improvements in symptoms. Where applicable (10 participants), 70% indicated that the yoga classes, bulletin, website or library helped with yoga practice at home.

Table 1: Benefits of yoga practice (n=17)

	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all
Social benefit	5 (29%)	9 (53%)	2 (12%)	1 (6%)
Wellbeing	11 (65%)	6 (35%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Management of illness	14 (82%)	3 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Improvements in symptoms	4 (24%)	9 (53%)	4 (24%)	0 (0%)
Practise at home (where applicable) n=10	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	0 (0%)

Table 2 illustrates that participants who attended yoga classes used the other resources in varying numbers; 47% used the website, 64% the bulletin and 29% the library. Of these, a majority responded “a great deal” or “quite a lot” regarding their usefulness.

Table 2: Usefulness of group resources (n=17)

(percentages calculated to numbers applicable)

	A great deal	Quite a lot	Slightly	Not at all	Not Applicable
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Website (n=8) (47%)	3 (37%)	4 (50%)	1 (13%)	0	9
Bulletin (n=11) (64%)	2 (18%)	7 (64%)	2 (18%)	0	6
Library of CDs/tapes (n=5) (29%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	0	12

Demographic data (Appendix 1) revealed that the majority of participants were female (76%), over 45 years old (94%) and attended the Friday classes (76%). Responses indicated a range in severity of the illness but most (56%) reported their level as moderate. Numbers were too small to draw any conclusions through association with other data.

In addition to the quantitative data, 9 participants wrote comments (Appendix 2). These were consistent with the results from the tickbox section of the questionnaire. The comments below are typical:

“it helps me socialise and lessens the isolation of chronic illness”

“The yoga classes have taught me invaluable relaxation and meditation techniques that have helped me to manage the pain and fatigue much better.”

“I have noticed an improvement in my ME directly afterwards for several hours and have started to do small bit at home around bedtime.”

“ have developed a special understanding of living with ME and so are able to provide appropriate instruction”,

and reference was made to the importance of funding, transport and the volunteers.

Summary

The survey clearly demonstrated that yoga sessions provided by SYFME have a positive impact on participants' wellbeing, illness management and symptoms. It also highlighted their role in facilitating social contact and, along with other resources, home practice of yoga. Findings revealed that the website, news bulletin and library were useful to those that used them and, therefore, continuation is justified. Overall, the survey validated the importance of services provided by Sheffield Yoga for ME and demonstrated that the organisation is achieving its outcomes by meeting needs of the those suffering with the illness.

Appendix 1 insert %

Demographic Data (n=17)

Gender	Female	Male	No response		
	13	2	2		

Age Group	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	No Response
	0	1	9	7	0

ME/CFS Level	Severe	Moderate	Mild	No Response	
	5	9	3	0	

Sessions Attended	Iyengar (Tuesday)	Hatha (Friday)	Both	No Response
	1	13	2	1

Appendix 2

Comments include

I have fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue which at times is severe but also moderate. I was unable to do any exercises due to joint and body pain and fatigue. I joined the Yoga for ME/CFS in 2018 and the benefits to me are life changing. The classes are extremely well conducted providing patient centred care and unstructured adaptive yoga that is so professionally conducted that I have much improved joint movement and muscle strength. Yoga classes have also taught me invaluable relaxation and meditation techniques that have helped me to manage the pain and fatigue much better. The yoga group also has helped me to improve in confidence and provides time to socialise and meet people that have similar health issues I think the support with transport is a brilliant help as the distance to travel is difficult as I cannot drive and my income has changed since I can no longer work due to the health constraints. I can't thank everyone involved in providing this service enough, it is the support I never thought existed.

This yoga class is the best thing in my life. It gets me out of the house. It's the only exercise my sick body can tolerate. It helps me socialise and lessens the isolation of chronic illness. It helps me manage my illness. It encourages me to practice at home what I learn in class. I hate to think what my life would be like without it (very much poorer).

Excellent yoga group!

I have been coming to you about 10 to 12 weeks. I have noticed an improvement in my ME directly afterwards for several hours and have started to do small bit at home around bedtime. I sometimes find it difficult to sleep (even with meditation) and I'm sure yoga has helped me to relax.

It is so important to get funding to help keep the classes going. A lot of our members are unable to work due to ME and would not be able to come to the classes if they weren't subsidised. I found all our teachers excellent and understanding of the necessity to keep the yoga practice gentle.

Our teachers have developed a special understanding of living with ME and are able to provide appropriate instructions for members. Yoga is proving invaluable tool for helping manage my ME. It does me a lot of good. While I do practice of yoga at home the quality of the teaching and supportive environment of the classes means that they are far better than simply doing something at home.

Volunteers very helpful. Teachers excellent.

Yoga is the one consistent thing that has a distinct improvement in my symptoms and condition. 10 years ago, this class helped me to full recovery I always say it "saved or rather gave me back my life"

The yoga classes are very often the only time I leave my house. It is so good to have somewhere we can socialise lying down as I can't sit for very long. The yoga really helps my breathing, muscles, joints and spine. It also helps to make me more mindful and self-aware of how much I can do so I can pace myself properly.