



**SPORT
ENGLAND**



brighton
natural
health
foundation



Brighton & Hove

Evaluation of yoga classes for carers

Healthy Communities, Healthy City, Healthy Planet



Report August 2024

Each session has been like a care package," S, course participant

This feedback relates to a 12-week free yoga course funded by the Brighton Natural Health Foundation in conjunction with the Carers' Centre, running from April - July 2024. The course was funded by Sport England. It followed a consultation with the community on what mindful movement activity they would like and suitable timings.

The participants were all unpaid carers for people with mental health difficulties who are part of the Changes Ahead Programme. It is common for carers to neglect their own mental and physical wellbeing leading to 'carers' burnout' - a state of mental, physical and emotional exhaustion.

14 people signed up for the course which was held in central Brighton and all continued to the end. Although the retention rate was encouraging, attendance varied (reasons for not attending are listed below).

We worked with a trained local yoga teacher who is also a qualified occupational therapist.

Who we are

Brighton Natural Health Foundation

A charity that is passionate about empowering people and communities to embrace mindful movement for a happier, healthier lifestyle. We offer accessible classes, events, and training, especially for people facing health inequalities.

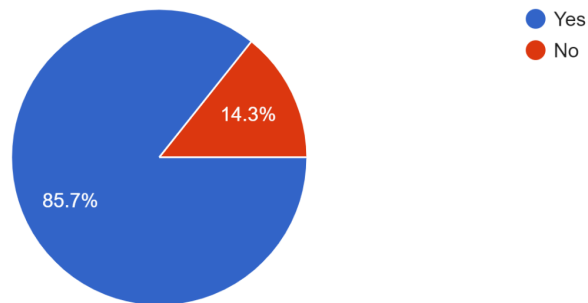
Carers Centre, Brighton

A charity that provides family carers with emotional support, advice and a well-deserved break from their caring role. They run regular groups, activities and other support.

Evaluation Results

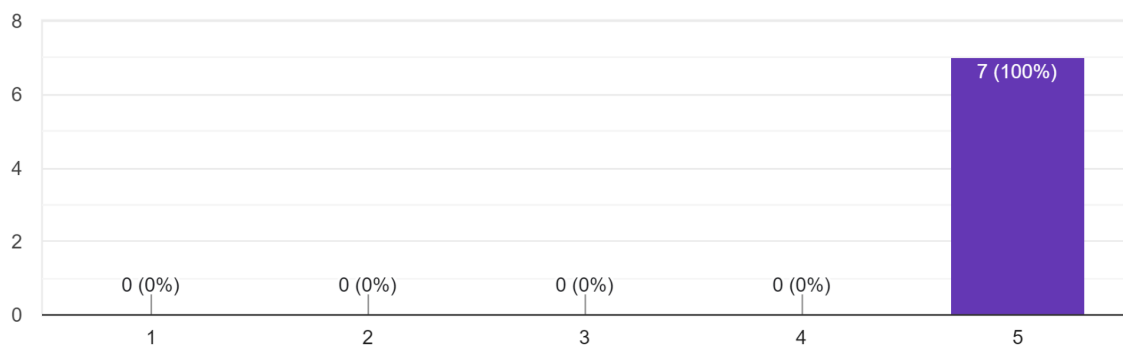
Had you ever done a regular mindful movement/ yoga class before this course started?

The majority of people had attended mindful movement classes in the past but cited reasons such as lack of money, time and suitable classes nearby as reasons for struggling with regular attendance.



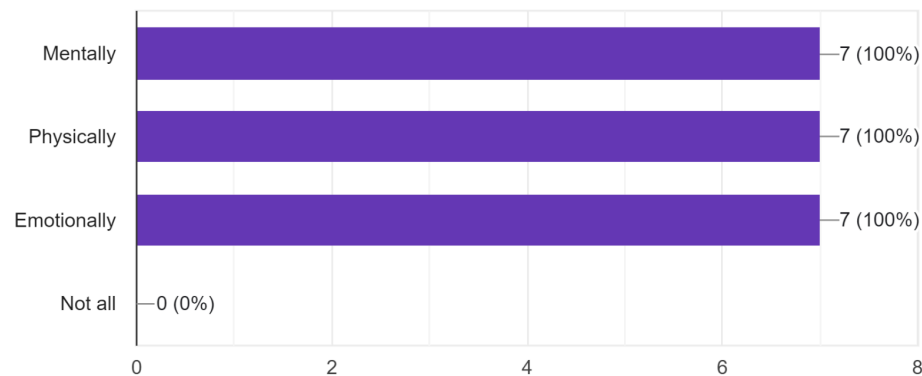
Overall, how was your experience of this course?

100% of people said that they found the course to be entirely positive.



In which ways did you benefit from the sessions?

100% of participants felt they had benefitted mentally, physically and emotionally.

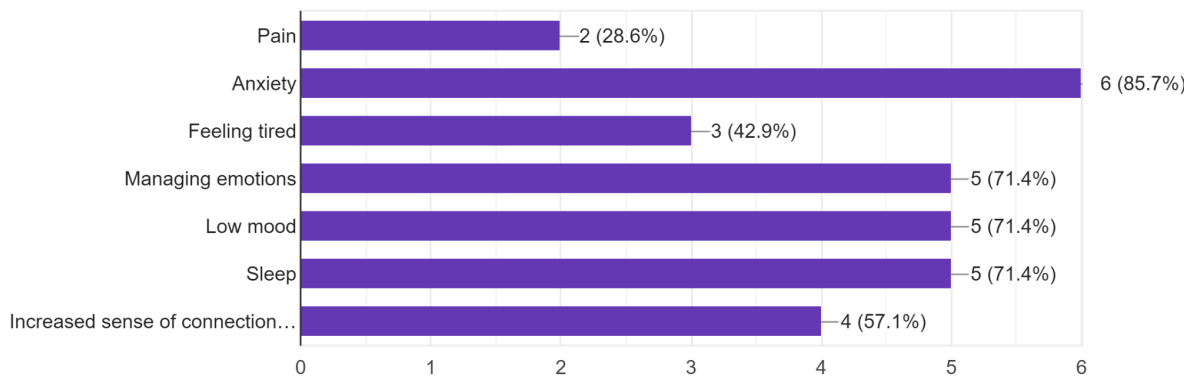


Could you say a bit more about what the benefits were?

- Taking time out to break away from everyday thoughts, to connect physically and emotionally with breath and being more aware of surroundings and being more aware of posture and the impact on my mind and mood.
- After just a few sessions I felt less stiff, less back pain and my balance improved. I found the sessions calming and looked forward every week to an hour that felt very nurturing. Megan created a very inclusive feeling in the class. I have always given up on yoga in the past because I've found the postures and co-coordinating my breathing very difficult, but this class was especially encouraging and I stopped thinking about 'doing it right' and just tried to tune into my own body. It was lovely doing a class with other carers, there was such a feeling of fellowship without having to say anything. I was doubtful about coming along at the beginning, but I'm so glad I joined.
- An hour of calm at the end of a usually stressful day.
- I always felt calm and relaxed after each session and always slept well that night too.
- Having a dedicated time and space to focus on improving my own well-being, rather than the people I care for, that was facilitated in such a caring and supportive way.
- As a carer for my daughter with a serious mental health disorder, I live in a stressful environment. Three quarters of the way through the course my daughter was Sectioned again (and my best friend died). These weekly sessions have been a lifeline for me and I have gone out with reduced stress, renewed energy and peace. I know there is a different goal and dynamic here; for everyone is a carer and understands if I'm not chatty. It's been a time, just for me, to rest, to stretch, to reset, to take 'time out' before going back into the fray. Each session has been like a care package. I am so very grateful to Changes Ahead for organizing these in the evening, as I work and can't attend day events and it was helpful to meet other Carers.

- It was nice to be able to create a bit of space to be calm in the presence of others shared experience of loss

Did the sessions help with any of the following (tick the ones that apply to you)?



If you weren't able to attend regularly, could you say what the difficulties were?

- Unexpected bereavement
- I missed only 1 class when I was unwell. The timing and the venue were perfect for me and manageable because I work during the day.
- Caring responsibilities.
- The sessions I missed were mainly due to unexpected caring responsibilities and having Covid.
- One week I was at my friend's funeral and couldn't attend.
- One week my daughter was taken into A &E and couldn't attend.

Is there anything that could have been improved? If so, what?

A longer practice!

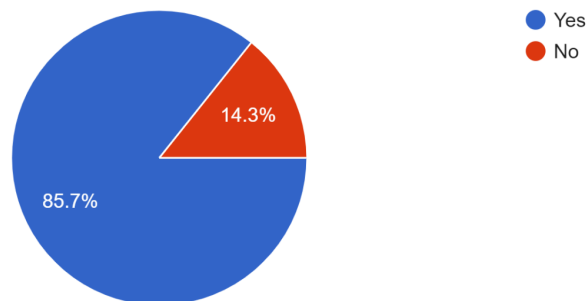
I would have loved the class to continue.

It was a very beautiful course, and I am very grateful for that. Even better would be for there to be some progression to some (only) slightly more challenging yoga poses.

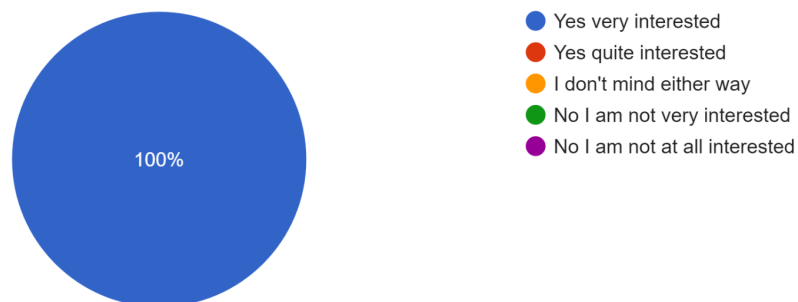
No

Venue with free parking

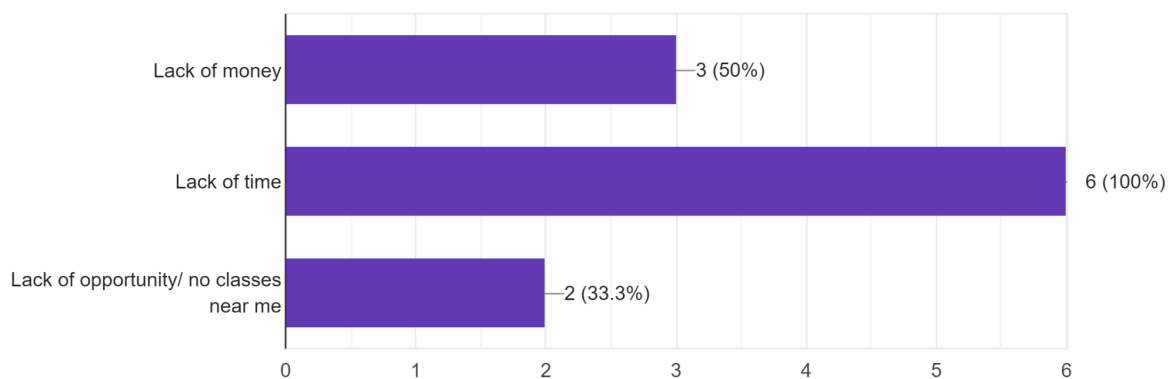
Did you practise any of the techniques you learned in class at home (for example - breathing/ stretching)?



Would you be interested in taking part in future mindful movement sessions?



Which of these reasons might prevent you from taking part in future sessions?



Is there anything else you would like to say about the course?

- The course was really good and Megan was a fantastic teacher, making everyone feel valued, able and provided options for each movement/activity to suit all abilities. Having the fixed commitment each week was great to get out, be with others but mostly to do something beneficial for myself, which can be applied to daily life.
- It was a revelation to me, because I had always thought of yoga as a kind of exercise rather than mindfulness.
- Thank you so much for providing this course for mental health carers, the emotional toll is enormous and these sessions felt like an oasis of calm in my week. It was great to be in a group with other people who have similar caring roles too.
- Thank you so much for the course - the teacher was wonderful.
- So grateful to Jacs (senior worker at Carers Centre) for organizing this. The instructors were so supportive.
- The teacher was very good and welcoming

Conclusions and Learning

The course was clearly well-received and benefitted the participants in numerous ways. The biggest perceived benefit for this group was managing anxiety - followed by managing emotions, lifted mood and improved sleep. Physical benefits scored lower. One person at least was surprised by the mindful elements of yoga as she had perceived it to be just a 'kind of exercise.'

The qualities of the teacher were clearly very important with respondents valuing her inclusive approach.

It also seemed important to some carers that they were practising in community with people who had similar experiences because they could just be who they were 'without having to say anything'.

Taking time away from caring responsibilities to focus on themselves and their own care needs were deemed to be an important part of the course too.

It was encouraging that most of the participants said they were regularly using some of the techniques learned on the course in their everyday lives.

One of the participants said she would have liked (slightly) more challenging poses and one person mentioned the difficulty of parking.

All carers wanted to do more classes. The biggest barrier to this was lack of time followed by financial reasons.

Ways Forward

- More challenging options for people who want to take them
- Offering a venue that has parking spaces
- The emotional and mental benefits of yoga could be emphasised more when marketing courses
- Videos and other resources to enable students to continue their practice
- Exploring ways of making the courses sustainable. This might involve:
Finding a free venue, asking participants to contribute to the class on a 'pay what you can afford model'.