

Setting up a Community Yoga Project

How to guide

UK
**Community
Yoga
Network**

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Introduction

This is a brief guide on preparing to set up community yoga work.

This document has been put together as an initial guide and is based on a series of interviews and research conducted by Jacqueline Mitrovic with additional material and editing by Davy Jones.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY YOGA?

Any yoga classes or programmes specifically targeted at people who would not normally have access to yoga – for economic reasons (cost); health reasons (recovering from illness, addiction, mental health episodes / trauma, lack of mobility); cultural (“yoga is not for people like me” – age, size, ethnicity, faith). Usually the classes would be provided free or at a very low cost.

WHY IT IMPORTANT?

Yoga is a huge multi-billion pound international industry aimed primarily at the affluent, fit and young. It is increasingly expensive and exclusive to many people. This is against the basic tenets of yoga that it should be for everyone. So, providing yoga to those who would benefit from it the most, but do not have access to it, is a key task for those of us in the yoga community committed to yogic values.

UK Community Yoga Network

ABOUT US

The UK Community Yoga Network (UKCYN) was set up by some of the pioneering community yoga providers (national and local) in the UK as a voluntary learning network. It combines providers from across the UK (from the Highlands of Scotland to the English South Coast) as a way of sharing good practice, along with others who wish to start delivering community yoga projects, but do not yet have the skills, knowledge or experience to do so.

Section 1

What already exists & what is needed in my community?



HORIZON SCAN

There might already be a teacher(s) doing community yoga in your area! Many yoga teachers round the country have been quietly providing this type of yoga for years with little publicity, and they will have gained trust from local communities. It's important that you identify them in your area and work with them, learning from their experience and knowledge. They are also potential future partners. You could also approach local yoga centres to see whether they are interested to help.



RESEARCH

Local councils and health bodies in most areas work together to identify the local priorities for tackling physical and mental health challenges. There may even be a report on their websites, which would be invaluable for identifying local groups/communities that may benefit from yoga. The more your proposed work aligns with the priorities identified by the local council, health bodies and other statutory agencies, the easier it is likely to be to raise the funding for it.



PARTNERS

You may wish to simply work on your own – which is fine. But it is likely to be easier to work with others. Get to know your local community and voluntary organisations – mental health groups, women's and community centres, ethnic minority and older people's groups, youth clubs etc. They may welcome an approach to deliver yoga sessions to their clients. Remember – don't expect the community(ies) to come to you, you need to go to them, where they are in the places and organisations they relate to.



SEEK ADVICE

The members of the UKCYN have years of experience. They all had to start from scratch and have learnt a lot along the way. Join the UKCYN's informal learning network to connect with others who may have answers to the problems you are grappling with. There are also others abroad who may be able to help – such as Accessible Yoga USA.

Section 2

How to fund and deliver your project



STRUCTURES

There are many options for how best to deliver community yoga. Each local situation is different, and how it is best done for one person or in one area may not suit another. This is one of the most important decisions you have to take, so take your time on this and think carefully!

[Gov.uk - charity structures](#)



PARTNERS

Depending on the decisions you have taken about delivery structures you may wish to partner with other organisations to bid for funding. Collaboration with others may strengthen your case for support. The same is true for delivery of the community yoga work. Working with an established community organisation enhances the credibility of your offer, until you can demonstrate a successful track record of delivery.



FUNDRAISING

You may wish initially to offer to deliver yoga sessions in the short term without receiving any payment. But this is NOT sustainable in the medium or long term. Properly trained yoga teachers deserve to be paid appropriately. So you need to find ways to fund your proposed work. Fundraising (sponsored events, raffles etc) can be fun but are also hard work for modest returns. Longer term, you will almost certainly need to approach national or local funding bodies to raise the amount of funding you need.

Your local Council for Voluntary Service will have more information.



DELIVERY

Do not under-estimate the amount of time and energy required to actually deliver your proposed yoga project, over and above teaching the classes themselves. You need to market the offer to your target communities. You need a bank account and to keep accounts. You need to keep on top of all aspects of the organisation and administration of the projects. You need to be sure you have enough funds. All this takes time and is a tough job for one person to handle on their own on a voluntary basis. You may need more volunteer help or even paid part-time support.

Section 3

What skills do you need?

TRAINING

Teaching community yoga requires additional specialist training, over and above the normal yoga teacher training. Health and care organisations will almost certainly insist on it. Acquiring such training needs to be factored into your plans. There are experienced organisations that provide it and we believe that this investment of time and money is essential. Eventually you may find that participants from your sessions wish to become yoga teachers, possibly even becoming an ambassador for your work!

OTHER SKILLS

The more ambitious your plans are, the wider the range of skills and experience you will need to acquire. Some are obvious – marketing, finances & accounts, administration & organisation. Others less so - GDPR (data protection laws) – for your lists of clients; safeguarding law – dealing with vulnerable participants; monitoring – being able to demonstrate the effectiveness of your work. Few people have this wide range of skills – hence the advantage of developing a team of people to help you deliver your plans.

POLICIES

You will need to demonstrate that you are aware of the safeguarding issues involved in such work and have an appropriate policy in place. You do not need to invent this from scratch. Other providers in the network will have one and you can use that as a basis for developing your own. And you may also find that you need to develop clear policies on the recruitment of teachers and the allocation of work to them.

MARKETING

Almost by definition the people you want to benefit from your proposed work are “hard to reach / traditionally under-served”.

You need to familiarise yourself with the local community and the organisations that already operate within it. Working with and through them and publicity in community centres, supermarkets, GP surgeries will be more successful than general social media posts and information on your website.

Section 4

Towards sustainability



MONITORING

From the outset you need to ensure that you can gather feedback from those participating in your sessions/programmes. This is a good thing in itself to help you improve your offer. But it is also essential for funding bodies and statutory agencies that you work with. They will want to know how many people attended, how often, the gender/ethnicity breakdown etc. They will also want qualitative feedback: did it make them feel better, do they want it to continue, and what impact it has had. This is how initial “pilot” sessions can translate into longer-term programmes.



PARTICIPANT LED

One under-appreciated aspect of providing community yoga is the extent to which it can build friendships and supportive communities. So another option is to see if the participants in a class have the resources and skills to take over the management of the class themselves – including raising the necessary finances. This is unlikely in most instances but where a strong sense of community has been built up over time around a class, it may be possible. This empowerment of local people would constitute a really positive outcome for your work.



PARTNERSHIPS

If you are working with a statutory or community organisation to deliver your class, and you can demonstrate from feedback how valuable it is for their clients, you may find that the organisation is willing to take on the financial responsibility to maintain it. You may still be asked to provide the teacher, and possibly the equipment needed. But you do not need to raise the money for running costs.



MODELS

At first, your priority will be to set up the first classes and the necessary infrastructure to deliver them. But it is important also to be thinking about the longer-term issue of how to make the classes sustainable. It can become soul-destroying to be constantly seeking funding for a successful class as it runs out of its initial funds. Identifying longer-term funding (over 1 to 3 years) to continue classes makes a huge difference.

Further information

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