ANNUAL REPORT - YOGA ON SOCIAL PRESCRIPTION IN WESTER HAILES - JUNE 2024

Since September 2023 we have been running a chair and mat-based yoga class for people affected by substance use and their families.

After 10 months of classes, we have run 83 yoga classes, have received 63 referrals, which have resulted in 22 regular attendees across the classes. Referrals have come from 15 unique referrers, across 7 organisations. We currently have 22 regular attendees.

Moving on to positive destinations, is something we have started to discuss, how can we encourage those who have been flourishing in our class to explore other options so that they don't become reliant or over dependant on our service? In repones to this, we have created a signposting doc with details of other trauma-informed, community based and financially accessible yoga classes with teachers we know and recommend. Also, as a way of harnessing the interest in yoga and meditation as a support for recovery we created a document of points of interest and resources – YouTube videos, podcasts, books etc which people can refer to when they want to practice at home or learn further about a certain element of yoga.

We have 22 regular attendees over the two classes. Of the 17 who have completed our evaluation form, **88.2% reported having learned useful tools for managing stress. 70% report improved flexibility, strength and balance** which can have a positive impact on day-to-day activities for example one participant said he can now pick up his dogs poo and this has been life changing! **52% reported improved emotional stability and a sense of resilience**.

Many people report noticing in an immediate c**hange in their mood/sense of self or levels of stress after the class.**
Below are some examples.
"The ability to move from tiredness to being energised is remarkable as well as calmness from jittery and irritable."
"I love the class, its brought me a sense of peace and relaxation in times that would have stressed me out before."
"I always feel better. More energised with a clearer mind after attending class. I really benefit from the guided meditation and use it for sleep."
"Its not often I feel like myself, but when I do, it's usually during yoga."

People also report **recognising how the learning happening in the class, can be applied in the rest of their lives and their recovery**. For example,
"I've tried to do a little bit of yoga when I feel particularly stressed. I've done some yoga in the past, but since attending the class I've been more accepting of myself and where I'm at rather than striving to do more, be better."
"I can move more safely from high to low and low to high. <3 Thank you. I am here. I am safe. Healing has already begun. All of me is welcome. Forever grateful."
"This is a fantastic resource and I'm very grateful for the chance to participate. I will arrange other things around it because it is very important to me, and I find it beneficial. It is useful to be prompted to move under instruction and I always feel better for it. Even if I've cried."
"Feelings of bleakness alter dramatically with the yoga space that has been created. Pelvic pain has reduced. Safe to feel my feelings for the first time. I have a newfound quality of life!"

"I love this class very much. I feel accepted and its ok to not feel great/get upset and the staff are supportive. I'm pleased to get to move but if my long covid is bad if feels acceptable for me to adapt to still do something but in a way I can manage. I also love learning why some yoga things help me feel better e.g. forward folds are calming. So, I can then use this technique when I need it."

52% of participants report an improvement in their quality of life since attending the yoga class. Much of this is to do with the impact of the group, as well as the yoga practice itself. **58% reported experiencing reduced isolation/loneliness** due to being connected to the group. Many people report the importance of the group dynamics and the atmosphere of the class in creating safety and supporting connection. Below are some examples.

"Kindness shown by everyone is so important".
"Feel welcomed by staff and others in the group. Love the chats and time to relax after the class. Feel connected to others. Feel safe to be emotional which is really important."
'The compassion the staff show is invaluable."
"Always such a welcoming and calm atmosphere. Gentleness and kindness in everything in class."
"Meeting others and learning from others. Learned a lot about recovery and how others work theirs. Really look forward to the class as going through a stressful time."
"I love the community aspect of the class and the holistic approach."

Impact on wider health issues is harder to evidence, however **70% of participants reported reduced physical pain since starting the yoga, 70% also reported improved mental health symptoms and 64% improved physical symptoms**. Here are some examples,

"This class has benefited my wellbeing in every aspect."
"This class is a lifeline for me. Laura is the sweetest soul I have ever met. She is the best teacher. Always made so welcome and Dalvina is the most caring loving soul to us. I am so grateful for this class and the people in it."
"Before I started, I believed I was getting old and seizing up. And now that is gone, and I know if I keep it up things will get better."
"My flexibility has improved and I'm more able to shower. Turning to get items is much easier as my core strength has improved. This also helps crossing roads etc. I have also learned breathing techniques to deal with stress."

We continue to be blown away by the level of commitment our peer support worker shows the project. She has offered more than 180 hours of volunteering time in the past year and continues to uplevel her skills in 'holding space' for people and supporting them to 'ground' and feel safe. We are delighted that she has been shortlisted for the Social Enterprise Volunteer Champion' in the 2024 Social Enterprise Awards Scotland!

Lived experience at the heart of the project is one of the reasons it has been so successful. Most of our teaching and volunteer team have lived experience of substance misuse, addiction, recovery, and mental health issues. This focus on the importance of representation allows the 'us and them' mentality of teacher/student to be lessened and for the group dynamic to become more democratised. Stigma and shame are huge barriers to attend and in offering these spaces which offer 'unconditional positive regard, are tolerant and accepting of everyone's situations and which centre the individual's autonomy we work to reduce the harm the stigma associated with being in recovery or a family member of someone in recovery.

So much of the feedback we have is about the importance of being a part of a group, forming friendships and feeling understood. In his case study one participant writes *"They have given me space and hope to discover myself and for that I am eternally grateful. I also believe I have found friends and find myself becoming a friend which I have never done in any meaningful way that enriches my life."* We are proud of our resilient and skilled workforce and work hard to ensure they feel supported. We offer regular opportunities for reflection and mentoring as well

as CPD opportunities. We also recognise the additional skill set required to teach in the way we do and are proud to pay what we feel is a fair fee for this additional training and experience. By having two teachers at each class, we are also creating a safety and support network for the teaching and volunteer team which allows for a wider safety of the group.