

**StreetGames and
Yoginis Yoga &
Mindfulness™
programme**

Pilot



BACKGROUND

Through funding from the Sport England Together Fund, StreetGames and Yoginis Yoga developed a Yoga and Mindfulness programme for young women and girls from lower socio-economic groups. This document provides a summary of the project.

Why did we develop this pilot?

- To help combat some of the detrimental effects COVID-19 had on young people from lower socio-economic groups.
- To maximise the valuable contribution Yoga & Mindfulness can make to support young people's emotional regulation.
- To maximise the valuable contribution Yoga & Mindfulness can make to enable young people to develop coping skills.
- To invest in, build capacity across, and enhance skills in Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs) and Local Delivery Partners. (LDPs)
- To develop a focused approach to supporting LTOs with the development of emotional regulation, coping skills and self-care for young people.
- To embed thinking about how best to enable Yoga & Mindfulness delivery within the StreetGames network, to empower young people & LTOs, in a Trauma Informed way.

WHY YOGA AND MINDFULNESS

Yoga has numerous benefits for wellbeing. Delivered in supportive group settings Yoga and Mindfulness can develop a sense of calm and belonging for young people, helping to foster healthy friendships and develop compassion towards each other. Self-control is a key feature of Yoga, in a world where many young people may feel they have little control, Yoga can, contribute to improving mental health, by slowing down the pace of life, enhance deep calm breathing and making space for choice and control to be contemplated. Engaging in regular yoga practice can result in significant life changes, such as increased self-awareness and a more positive outlook on life, leading to a greater sense of joy and fulfilment.

The practice of yoga and mindfulness works by counteracting the fight-or-flight stress response in the sympathetic nervous system. By interrupting this stress response, yoga and mindfulness promotes balance and union between the mind and body, leading to a state of relaxation and restoration. This is achieved by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for regulating rest and promoting a calming state. Through sustained practice, yoga and mindfulness can help to generate important physiological changes that promote overall health and wellbeing.



Rationale

Exploring the therapeutic effects of yoga and its ability to increase quality of life.



Impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic on Young People's well-being (a further ACE)

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) refer to a wide range of stressful or traumatic experiences that may occur up to the age of 18. In the U.K. 18 signifies the age at which adulthood is legally recognised as beginning, however, the impact of ACEs can last a lifetime. The Covid-19 pandemic, which is an ACE in itself, has had a disproportionate impact on low-income and ethnic minority populations, who are already at increased risk for ACE-impacted chronic conditions. This increased risk is an outcome of experiencing intersectional disadvantage such as living in food, fuel, housing and opportunity poverty, and intersectional discrimination such as racism and xenophobia.

Due to the likelihood of young people from areas of high deprivation experiencing ACEs, further compounded by the pandemic, there is a significant opportunity now to maximise the benefits of yoga and mindfulness for this audience.



Research to back this

Is COVID-19 an adverse childhood experience (ACE)?



Historically, young people have been less likely to engage in yoga and mindfulness, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are even less likely to do so. However, as a result of the pandemic, there has been a noticeable shift in mindset, which has shown to be more receptive to activities such as yoga, mindfulness, and meditation.

A catalyst for this shift has been the need to access physical activity online, with yoga being an activity that lends itself easily to being undertaken at home, and also as a means to support the greater emphasis and need to support young people's mental health and well-being throughout a complex and challenging period of time.

Building local capacity to enhance yoga and mindfulness for young people in lower social economic groups (LSEGs)

Young people from lower socio-economic groups (LSEG) often lack access to yoga in their local area, which means they are unable to reap the many benefits of the practice. An aim of this project was to begin to bridge this gap and develop capacity locally for young people to take part in yoga.

In doing so, the project began to incorporate more tailored support that aimed to address the issues facing young people at this time and stage of their life. Yoga is an effective vehicle for encouraging and instilling resilience in young people through creating safer opportunities for discussions about their fears, developing self-coping strategies, and utilising their full range of emotions. Yoga and mindfulness can equip young people with tools that are easily accessible throughout their lives, helping to build healthy habits and skills to navigate challenging situations in the future, ultimately contributing to enabling them to thrive throughout their lives.

HOW/WHAT WAS PROVIDED

Aims of the programme were to:

<p>Improve overall wellbeing and resilience of young people</p>	<p>Increase access to tools for better life outcomes</p>	<p>Develop skills and coping strategies for the young people in underserved communities</p>
<p>Enhance skills and coping strategies for the future workforce</p>	<p>Ensure Young Women & Girls between 13-25 years old directly benefit</p>	<p>Devise a programme of training to expand local capacity to facilitate yoga and mindfulness</p>

Project scope to:

 <p>Devise & deliver a 6/8-week programme of Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™ & emotional regulation techniques.</p>	<p>Research the methods of delivery and the value of using Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™ as valuable restorative coping strategy for emotional regulation during & post covid for underserved communities.</p>	 <p>Integrate tools, top tips and coping strategies into the sessions.</p>
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Proposed outcomes:

<p>Increased tools, skills and coping strategies for managing distressing feelings.</p>	<p>Increased ability to cope with distressing feelings.</p> 	<p>Reduction in feelings of anxiety, stress & low mood.</p> 	<p>Improved feelings of wellbeing and relaxation post activity.</p> 	<p>Increased confidence to use & pass on learning of yoga as a tool for positive wellbeing.</p>
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The Yoginis & StreetGames 'Gateway to Yoga' Programme and Training

The training for this pilot was specifically developed for practitioners working with young people of all abilities. The training sought to facilitate the delivery of yoga and mindfulness schemes of work. The pilot was designed for those with existing youth work and delivery skills (a pre-requisite of a Level 2 was asked for, in either coaching, counselling, youth work or personal training), but little or no yoga experience. The training was created by highly qualified and experienced yoga and mindfulness professionals (approved and certified by the CPD certification service and the Children's Activities Association).

The 6-week programme of Yoga and Mindfulness was designed to meet young people 'where they are at', such as co-creating moving mindfulness sessions based on routine, repetition, and structure; the way the brain learns new skills.

The full eight-week programme included: six weeks of yoga and mindfulness sessions 1 hour per week) together with an initial introduction session and a final celebration/evaluation session.



The format provided each week included:

 <p>ARRIVAL CHECK-IN</p>	 <p>SESSION OVERVIEW</p>	 <p>CENTERING</p>
 <p>BODY SCAN</p>	 <p>WARM UP</p>	 <p>MAIN POSTURES</p>
 <p>BREATHING</p>	 <p>RELAXATION</p>	 <p>CHECK OUT</p>





Embedding Trauma Informed Principles

A Trauma Informed Approach (TIA), with the principles of safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment and choice were embedded within both the design and delivery of the programme. The need for a TIA reflects the experiences of many of the communities in which StreetGames LTOs and LDPs are based, and the intersectional disadvantage and intersectional discrimination many of the young people may have faced.

As an example of how the Trauma Informed Approach was delivered:

An Induction Session took place ahead of session one to help create a **sense of safety**, provide an opportunity for learners to explore and express any perceptions of yoga, to explore their motivations to be involved and to familiarise themselves with the session's structure and delivery lead.

Invitational language was used throughout, emphasising options within the session to participate and to find variations which felt good. Empowering participants to go at a pace that feels safe and aligns to their individual journey.

Wrap around support and safeguarding

Foundational ACEs & Mental Health awareness training was delivered and embedded to widen understanding of how this approach could support restorative outcomes, alongside providing some safeguards for staff and young people to support emotions that surfaced whilst taking part. Additional recommendations included each organisation having an identified and trained, Mental Health First Aider.

12
Locally Trusted Organisations Delivered

220
Young People Engaged

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

Key insights gathered from the pilot project included:

- There is a significant demand for *Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™* among this target audience.
- Young people have different motivations for participating in yoga, and it's important to tailor the programme to their individual needs and preferences.
- The wrap-around support and customised training provided to staff were instrumental in building their confidence and problem-solving abilities when delivering the programme.
- Smaller group sizes proved more effective in engaging young people and maintaining their interest.
- Many young people have taken the practice of yoga home with them and have shared it with family members. Some even requested yoga mats for Christmas and used yoga to manage anxiety and stress, or as a way to relax and unwind at home.
- There is wider interest from family members in the program, including young boys.



Immediate outcomes resulting from participation in the pilot project for young people included:

- Positive changes in behaviour, such as setting aside regular time and space for themselves where they can switch off and focus on their well-being.
- Improved physical and mental well-being, including increased happiness and the ability to recognise and harness the benefits of yoga for their overall health and wellness.
- Positive attitudes and values, such as increased confidence, collaboration, and commitment to physical activity. A project in Stockport, for example, has successfully bid for funding to continue delivering the program as their group strongly believes in its value.
- Enhanced skills and knowledge, such as the ability to identify and manage their emotions and the skills needed to switch off and relax.
- Improved sense of identity, including increased self-belief, self-efficacy, and positive relationships with others.



Yoga for me is a way to relax and calm my anxiety levels down. Every time I take part I feel centred and relaxed.

Participant



Yoga is a relaxing class which helps with stretches and makes you aware of your body. it also teaches you gratitude.

Participant



However, there is still a real sector-wide challenge, in terms of the lack of wider, accessible opportunities to take part in yoga within underserved communities across the country.

Challenges identified:

- Cost and access - as the average **cost of yoga** classes is prohibitive for many of the communities LTOs work with, this presents a challenge in terms of making the programme available to both girls and boys, as well as to wider family members who could benefit from the activity. Plus a **lack of 'activity know-how'** among these communities also means that some may not even consider yoga as an option.
- The importance of delivering the program in the **'right style'**, with a relational-based approach that considers the unique needs and barriers of the communities we work with. The *Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™* programme was designed with these considerations in mind and during training, we emphasised the need for a good balance between space to chat and digest as well as space to be active and practice relaxation and centring skills.
- **Misconceptions about yoga and mindfulness**, particularly amongst some of the Muslim-only groups who in some instances needed support to understand the philosophy of yoga & how it's not attached to religion and can be used to support mental health and wellness, as well as physical activity and health. Developing a tool to help share what yoga and mindfulness can help with and what they are and aren't would be valuable in enabling participation and continued use of the practice after directly delivered sessions have finished.



Enablers

A Needs-based approach

We identified the specific needs of our network and carefully designed a programme and training to meet these needs. This involved delivering the "right content" in the "right style" while being flexible enough to use the 5 rights effectively in a Trauma-Informed manner. We embedded safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment and choice to remain person-centred throughout.

Collaboration with sector professionals

We worked collaboratively with sector professionals, Yoginis Yoga Ltd, to design a trianguar approach specifically for our network based on: the StreetGames '5 Rights', Yoginis' empowerment model (for both young people and the workforce) and embedded with Trauma Informed Principles. Helping our community-based deliverers to gain technical knowledge while building confidence and bringing the content to life.

Support for projects

We provided support to our projects by building their confidence, offering guidance and giving permission to experiment with different approaches. This support has led to a significant ripple effect in how opportunities are growing and the content is being utilised. We also understood the importance of wrap-around support for groups with specific needs, such as Bio-Gender non-binary groups with known Mental Health susceptibility. This allowed for wrap around Youth Work sessions to be added to expand on topics brought up during the programme, or 1-1 mentoring to pick up conversations of feelings shared in the check-ins/outs at the start and end of the session.



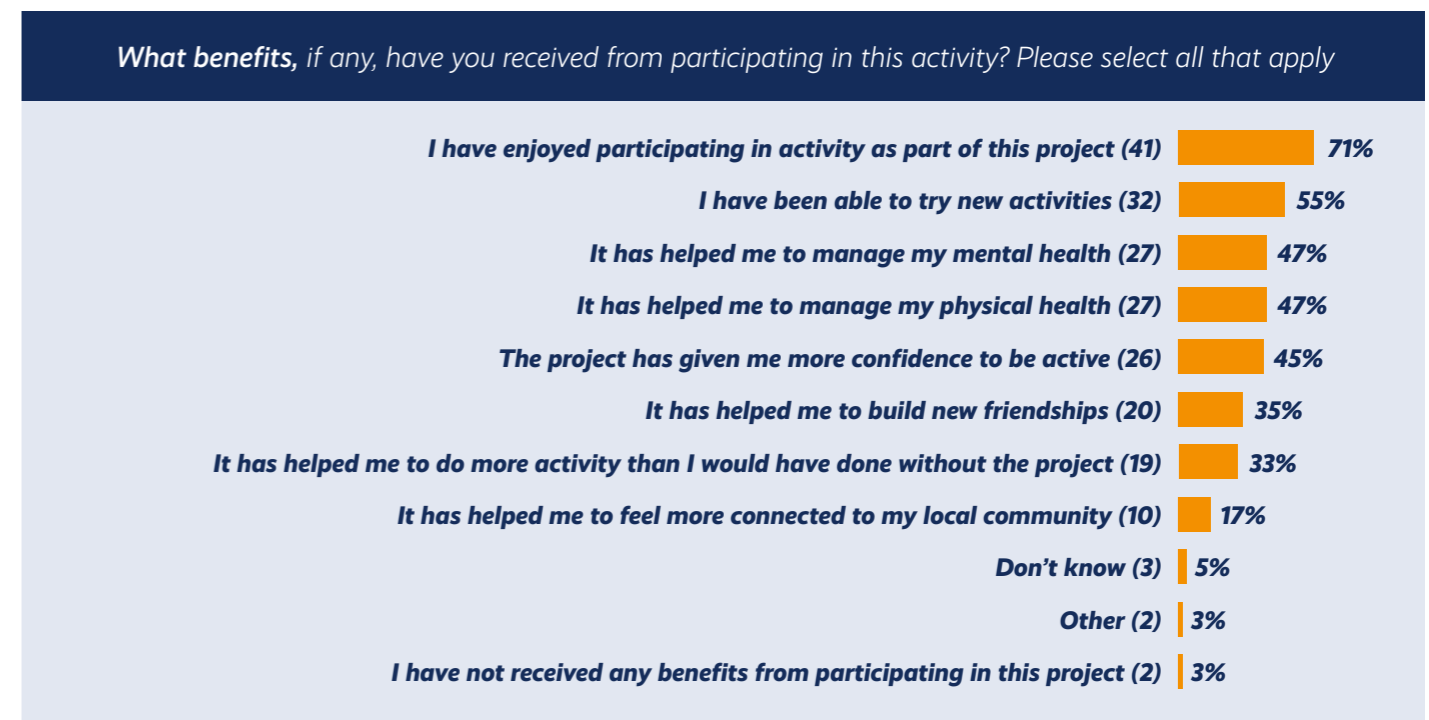
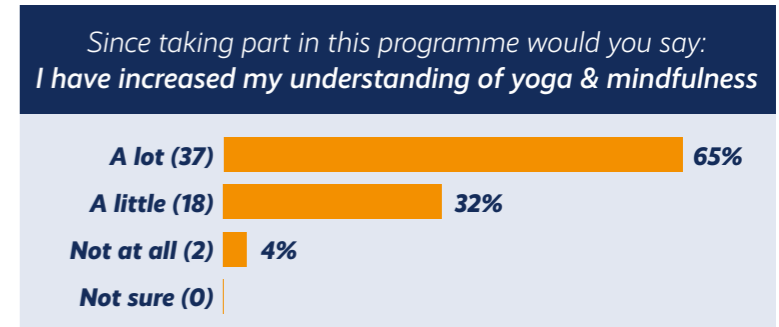
IMPACT

Data captured from both participants and staff highlighted the positive impact on both the young people involved and the participating LTOs. The Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) for the pilot project involved 60 participants completing an end-of-programme survey to provide feedback on their personal experience. Additionally, project leaders were interviewed by the StreetGames Research and Insight team to gain a deeper understanding of the programme's impact on the young people they worked alongside and also attended group learning events.

The key themes that emerged from this process are outlined below:

Increased understanding from young people about what yoga and mindfulness are

The participant survey data reveals that the respondents have developed a significantly improved understanding of yoga and mindfulness, along with a better grasp of the benefits of participating in these activities.



“
I feel like I am confident and feel more accomplished because if I succeed it gives me drive to carry on.
”
 Participant

“
When I practise mindfulness, I appreciate things around me in a positive way with gratitude and look for the positive in my day.
”
 Participant

“
(I feel) ...At peace, finally taking the time to switch off from all thoughts and technology to listen to my body.
”
 Participant

Increased opportunities for young people to take part in Yoga

Before participating in this pilot project, only a few of the LTOs involved had included yoga in their regular schedule of activities. However, after the successful completion of this pilot project, the majority of project leaders expressed their enthusiasm to continue delivering Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™ programme sessions in the future.



“

I would really like to deliver to a completely new group too. There is demand from our teen boys whom we would love to take on the challenge of delivering to and also our younger children under 10. There is also interest/our group for family sessions which we think would be amazing.

Project Leader

”

In addition to LTOs now looking to include Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™ sessions more regularly, project leaders also reflected that they felt many of the young people who took part now had the confidence and skills to continue yoga independently and were still doing activities at home and in their own time.

“

Yes, they have been following content on YouTube at home in their own time - something they would not have done previously. Shows they are keen and interested, and also know how to facilitate the activity themselves and where to find information.

Project Leader

”

“

Yes - some of the girls are, they use the booklets. Have used the centring techniques to help be calm. Some of the girls shared that they had used what they'd learnt to be calm at school.

Project Leader

”

However, whilst there was a definite interest for young people to continue taking part in yoga, beyond either the LTO continuing sessions or young people taking part at home – opportunities to take part elsewhere in their locality was still extremely limited.

“

Very limited for places to go elsewhere for their age group (if any). Definitely have the skills to do it though, they grew in confidence a huge amount throughout the programme.

Project Leader

”

Enhanced coping skills/tools

“

They are now noticeably much happier as young people than thinking back to when the project started, which is a reflection of them being able to apply the skills they have learnt into life outside of sessions.

Project Leader

”

“

They are much more aware of this and how yoga itself can contribute to alleviating these feelings when they occur.

Project Leader

”

Increased capacity/knowledge and skills built into the Doorstep Sport workforce

During interviews with the project leaders, it was observed that the young people themselves did not demonstrate a significant shift in their perception of yoga, as they were already enthusiastic about participating in this activity. However, it was apparent that the project leaders themselves experienced a more noticeable shift in their views of yoga. Many of them had never included yoga as an option in their delivery, however upon witnessing its effectiveness in supporting the mental wellbeing of participants, they expressed much more motivation to incorporating it more broadly in their delivery going forwards.

A large part of this was due to the effectiveness of the training project leaders received prior to starting delivery, but also the on-going support they received throughout the pilot. As mentioned previously, the majority of LTOs had not delivered yoga before so the training was very important as it was for the most part, a completely new skill set. Project Leaders stated they had found the Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™ approach to the training and programme design to be very helpful in terms of giving them a foundational knowledge. The step-by-step guide in the manual, in particular, broke the process down so that it felt manageable to pick up alongside their existing skill set working with young people.



“

Yes- the training was really good, really informative. The expectations were set out but it was made clear that there was some flexibility - based on the cohort you are working with. The manual was really clear - all the sessions were set out in order and very easy to follow and all very relevant. Gave more knowledge.

Project Leader

”

Enhanced Feelings of wellbeing

Data from the participant survey also showed that the respondents scored above the national average in terms of their feelings of life satisfaction and that the things they do in their life being worthwhile, but slightly below the national average in happiness, anxiety and resilience.

Subjective Wellbeing & Resilience

	Project Total	National Avg
Subjective wellbeing (happiness)	6.47	6.83
Subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction)	6.52	6.44
Subjective wellbeing (worthwhile)	6.91	6.60
Subjective wellbeing (anxiety)	4.42	3.12
Resilience (proportion that strongly agree)	16.95%	34%

ONS Well-being scores (range between 0-10)

It's important to note that the results are mixed and may be attributed to the fact that the target audience had a lower starting point in terms of their baseline data. Additionally, the pilot project had a relatively short time span, which could have influenced the results and how much the participants progressed towards higher wellbeing scores.



NEXT STEPS?

The pilot project has shown that there is clearly demand for Yoginis Yoga & Mindfulness™ as an activity amongst this target audience, and that with the right training and support, LTOs with limited prior experience of delivering yoga, have been able to successfully achieve a range of positive outcomes with their young people in a relatively short timeframe.

Despite these encouraging findings, there remain significant barriers to participation for young people wishing to take part in yoga beyond these sessions, most notably because of the typical costs associated with participating and the limited access to yoga facilities locally as well as accessing yoga delivered in a style that meets the needs of young people 'where they are at', which may impede their ability to sustain their involvement in yoga in the future.

As such, we are looking for opportunities to continue delivery, expand reach and upscale a programme to the wider StreetGames network and are currently open to exploring this with various partners who wished to collaborate.



