



Independent impact report: Ourmala's trauma-informed yoga programme

15 August 2018

By Lily Kelly-Tarrant

Introduction

This report was compiled in August 2018 following six weeks of monitoring and evaluation research with clients.

Our specific planned objectives were to:

1. Enable refugees and asylum-seekers to understand and experience the benefits of health-enhancing physical activity.
2. Create immediate and lasting physical and mental health benefits for refugees and asylum-seekers through therapeutic care, educational services and access to critical resources.

This report sets out how these objectives were achieved. It is provided by Lily Kelly-Tarrant, a yoga teacher and student of Gender, Violence & Conflict at the University of Sussex who voluntarily conducted this round of monitoring and evaluation for Ourmala.

Ourmala's integrated evidenced-based programme centres around trauma-informed yoga, which is also sensitive to gender, culture and the UK context of asylum policy, process and its impact on our clients. We adapt the practice to suit all beneficiaries, whether they have a prosthetic foot, are heavily pregnant, can only practice while sitting in a chair, or are completely physically able. Our focus is on enabling clients to make the practice their own, so they are central to their own healing, and therefore encouraging agency at all times, which is especially important for people recovering from difficult experiences.

Ourmala provides specialist yoga classes, social time, educational services and access to critical resources and empowerment activities to people who are asylum seekers or refugees. Many of Ourmala's clients are survivors of gender-based violence, torture, trafficking, modern day slavery or a combination of these cruelties. Over 2017 Ourmala commissioned a year-long independent research project as part of their monitoring and evaluation, summarised in the January 2018 Impact report. As a part of this research a survey on mental health was conducted with 27 clients. At the time of writing Ourmala was working with approximately 250 clients. While this data may not be representative of all of Ourmala's clients, it does provide some idea as to the general wellbeing of Ourmala's clients and provides some context from which to reflect on the results of the current study (August 2018). The January 2018 Impact report suggests that approximately 66% of Ourmala's surveyed clients experienced moderate-severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The January 2018 report also indicates that in the month preceding the data collection 96% of those surveyed experienced a depressive episode, with 48% experiencing suicidal ideation nearly every day for at least two weeks preceding the data collection.

Guiding Principles & Ethics

The M&E framework and data collection methods were guided by fundamental principles of informed consent and confidentiality. The design of the methodology and the data collection was also trauma-informed and prioritised a feminist ethics of care. Prior to asking participants to take part in a survey or focus group the researcher explained what the research was for, who will have access to the data and how it will be written up. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and it was stressed that participants could opt out and were under no obligations to take part in the research.

Methodology

The research comprised questionnaires and a focus group. The questionnaire was designed by Emily Brett, CEO of Ourmala, based on good practice for questionnaires for this beneficiary group and lessons learned from Ourmala's year-long evaluation over 2017. The questionnaire comprised 18 statements and asked participants to rank how accurate a statement felt to them before and after a yoga class. For example, question 11 was 'Happy'. Participants could choose a ranking of agreement from 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Lily explained the questionnaire to participants and asked if they were happy to fill it in on their own or if they would like assistance filling it in. For the vast majority of participants, English is their second language. A few participants said they could not read so Lily, or another volunteer, would go through the questionnaire with the participant. Lily was assisted in conducting questionnaires by other regular volunteers at the yoga classes.

On a few occasions, when participants had to leave class early for an appointment, they would fill in both the before and after sections of the questionnaire before the focus group. This option was only allowed for those participants who had practiced yoga with Ourmala at least once before and remembered how they felt after their last yoga class.

The focus group was designed by Emily Brett and Lily Kelly-Tarrant based on previous focus groups Ourmala has held, prioritising a trauma-informed ethics of care. The focus group involved discussion questions, a short activity and mindful breathing practices at the beginning and end. Participants had the option to attend a yoga class before the focus group. Participants were reimbursed for their travel to and from the focus group. There was tea, coffee, fruit and snacks available to participants at the focus group. All female participants who did not usually attend a mixed gender yoga class were informed beforehand that the focus group would be a mixed gender space.

Sampling

Over a six-week period Lily attended nine of Ourmala's yoga sessions. Ourmala runs seven yoga classes each week, as can be seen in table 1. Some classes are women only spaces, while others are mixed gender. At each yoga class Lily attended, as many clients as possible were asked to participate in the survey by filling in a questionnaire. On some occasions it was not possible to speak to all yoga practicing clients, and a few clients chose not to participate.

Ourmala provides women only yoga classes because many of their clients are survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. For some clients, attending a mixed gender class may be uncomfortable and trigger feelings of vulnerability, potentially re-traumatising the survivor. While people who do not identify as women can also experience gender-based violence, Ourmala does not deliver yoga classes exclusively to people who identify as non-binary, trans gender or cis-men because there has not been demand.

In total, 44 different clients filled in a questionnaire. Of these, ten clients filled in a questionnaire on two occasions, and an additional two clients filled in a questionnaire on three occasions. A total of 58 questionnaires were completed. No more than five participants filled in both the before and after sections before the yoga class.

A total of nine participants attended the focus group, one of whom identified as male while all other participants identified as female. All focus group participants had already filled in a questionnaire at least a week prior to taking part in the focus group.

Participant Demographics

Participants ranged in age from 20-69. The number of participants who identified as female was 40. The number of participants who identified as male was four. Twelve participants described themselves as having a disability. Participants were given a blank space to write down their religion, if they were religious, the results of which is displayed in table 2. Similarly, participants were offered a blank space in which to write down their ethnicity rather than being offered tick box options. The frequency of the ethnicities identified by participants themselves are displayed in table 3.

A blank space was used instead of a tick box option because a blank space enables participants to choose how to describe their ethnicity and religion rather than offering a pre-demarcated list of options which may or may not feel accurate to participants. This can therefore be seen as an attempt to imbue agency into the lives of participants. This effort is significant since the quantitative research method of a survey tends to reinforce power hierarchies between the researcher and research participants and so by offering a blank space Ourmala is attempting to create more equitable research relationships.

Table 1

Monday	Hackney Venue 1 (women only)	Camden (mixed gender)
Tuesday	Hackney Venue 2 (women only)	
Thursday	Euston (women only)	Camden (mixed gender)
Friday	Croydon (women only)	Kensington (women only)

Table 2

Christian	Muslim	Atheist	Catholic	Other
25	13	1	2	3

Table 3			
Ethnicity	Frequency	Ethnicity	Frequency
African	3	Kurdish Turkish	1
Albanian	1	Middle Eastern	1
Asian	2	Muslim	1
Black African	6	Nigerian	1
Black Caribbean	1	Other Mix	1
Eritrean	12	Pakistani	3
Eritrean African	1	South American	1
Ethiopian	1	Turkish	1
Georgian	1	White	2
Iraqi	1	White British	1
Kurdish	1	White Russian	1

Limitations

For almost all participants, English was their second language. This means that despite the best efforts of Lily and other volunteers to help communicate each question/statement in the questionnaire and discussion questions in the focus group, there is the possibility that the true meaning of a question was, in some cases, lost or misunderstood in translation. For example, participants commonly asked for clarification on the meaning of question 10 of the questionnaire which asked if participants feel hopeful.

Some questions can be considered personal, such as question 2 of the questionnaire which asks if participants feel depressed. It is possible that some participants did not want to share with the volunteers assisting them with the questionnaire their true response to such a question.

It is also possible that participants gave the responses they think the researcher wants to hear which would affect the validity of the survey data. However, this is a limitation of many social research methods.

Targets:

1. Service users experience improved health and well-being, both mental and physical. Indicators:

- 90% of surveyed service users can report a reduction in at least one mental health related question (Q1, Q2, Q8, Q10 of questionnaire).
- 90% of surveyed service users can report a reduction in at least one physical health related question (Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7 or questionnaire).

2. Service users experience an increase in confidence or a reduction in isolation which enables them to integrate into London society. Indicators:

- 90% of surveyed service users report a reduction in feelings of loneliness and isolation or an increase in confidence generally, confidence making friends or an increased sense of having a support network (Q5, Q9, Q15, Q17)

Data Analysis

For participants who filled in multiple questionnaires over the six-week period of data collection, only their first questionnaire was included in the data set analysed in this report. The additional questionnaires may be used as part of future research on ongoing and long-term effects of yoga. Some participants left a question blank if they were unsure. In total, 28 questions were left blank of the 792 questions asked across all the questionnaires. Therefore, the sample size for each question varies slightly from 40-44, but nonetheless remains substantial.

Owing to the large sample size, it was decided that a mean difference test would be appropriate, provided that the data met certain parameters for skewness and Kurtosis. An acceptable range of -1 to 1 for skewness and -2 to 2 for Kurtosis was deemed appropriate. If results for each question were within these ranges, a one-tailed paired t-test was used to assess differences in responses before and after yoga, otherwise a one-tailed Wilcoxon signed rank test was used instead. Questions 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 met the set limits, whilst questions 2, 3, 6, 11, 12 and 13 did not. All analysis and graphing were carried out in Microsoft Excel.

Audio recordings of the focus group were transcribed. Relevant key quotes were chosen from the transcript and are discussed below. A photograph of the results of the interactive post-it note activity is also attached and discussed below, see photo 1.

Results

Reduction in	Increase in
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stress, anxiety and nervousness 53% reduction in mean average rating ($t(42)=9.9$, $P < 0.001$)• Depression 42% reduction in mean average rating ($Z=60$, $P < 0.05$)• Tiredness 33% reduction in mean average rating ($t(42)=5.5$, $P < 0.001$)• Loneliness/isolation 32% reduction in mean average rating ($t(40)=4.8$, $P < 0.001$)• Pain in one's body 32% reduction in mean average rating ($Z=34$, $P < 0.05$)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling strong 44% increase in mean average rating ($Z=45$, $P < 0.05$)• Concentration 28% increase in mean average rating ($t(41)=3.7$, $P < 0.001$)• Confidence 28% increase in mean average rating ($t(41)=4.6$, $P < 0.001$)• Hopefulness 16% increase in mean average rating ($t(40)=3.2$, $P < 0.01$)• Happiness 29% increase in mean average rating ($Z=76$, $P > 0.05$)• Feeling relaxed increase in mean average rating ($Z=29$, $P < 0.05$)• Feeling comfortable in one's body 41% increase in mean average rating ($Z=41$, $P < 0.05$)• Good Posture 36% increase in mean average rating ($t(42)=5.2$, $P < 0.001$)

- **Headaches**

41% reduction in mean average rating
(t(40)=5.5, P<0.001)

- **Confidence in ability to make new friends**

23% increase in mean average rating (t(43)=4.9, P<0.001)

- **Confidence in ability to use yoga tools, such as the breath, in one's daily life**

29% increase in mean average rating (t(39)=4.5, P<0.001)

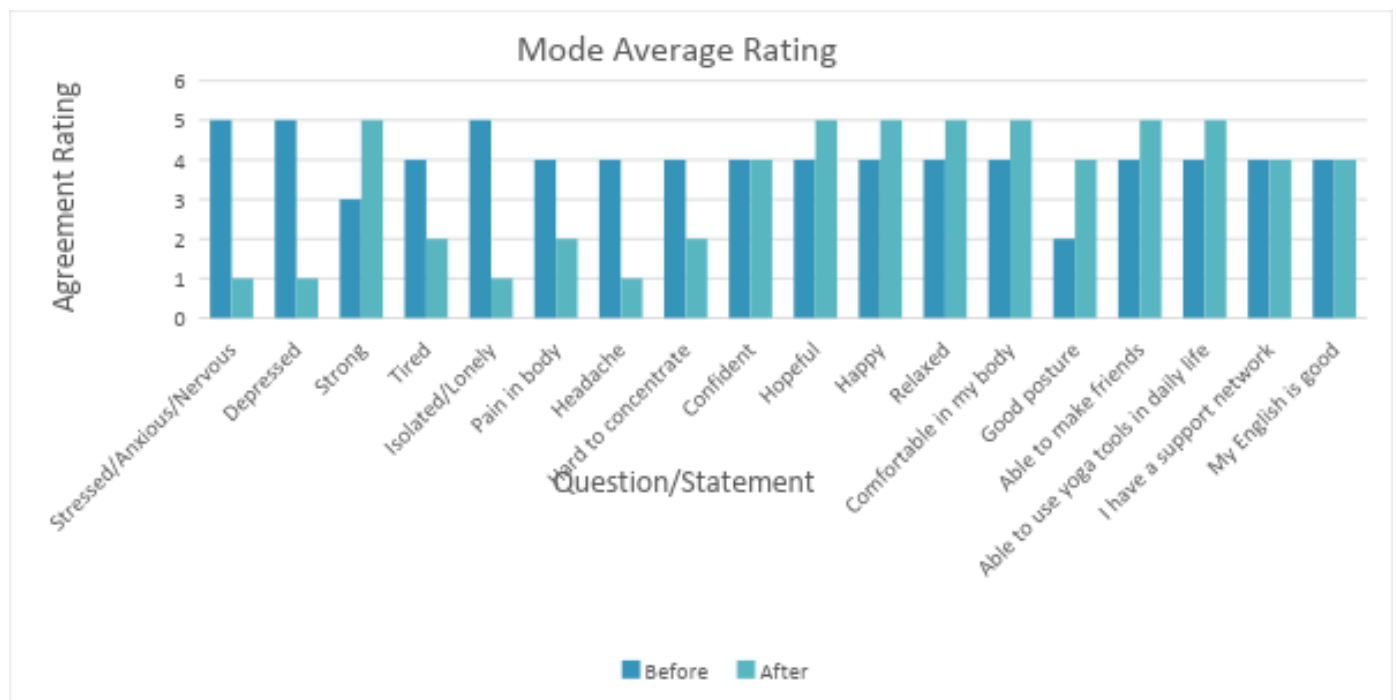
- **Feeling as though one as a support network**

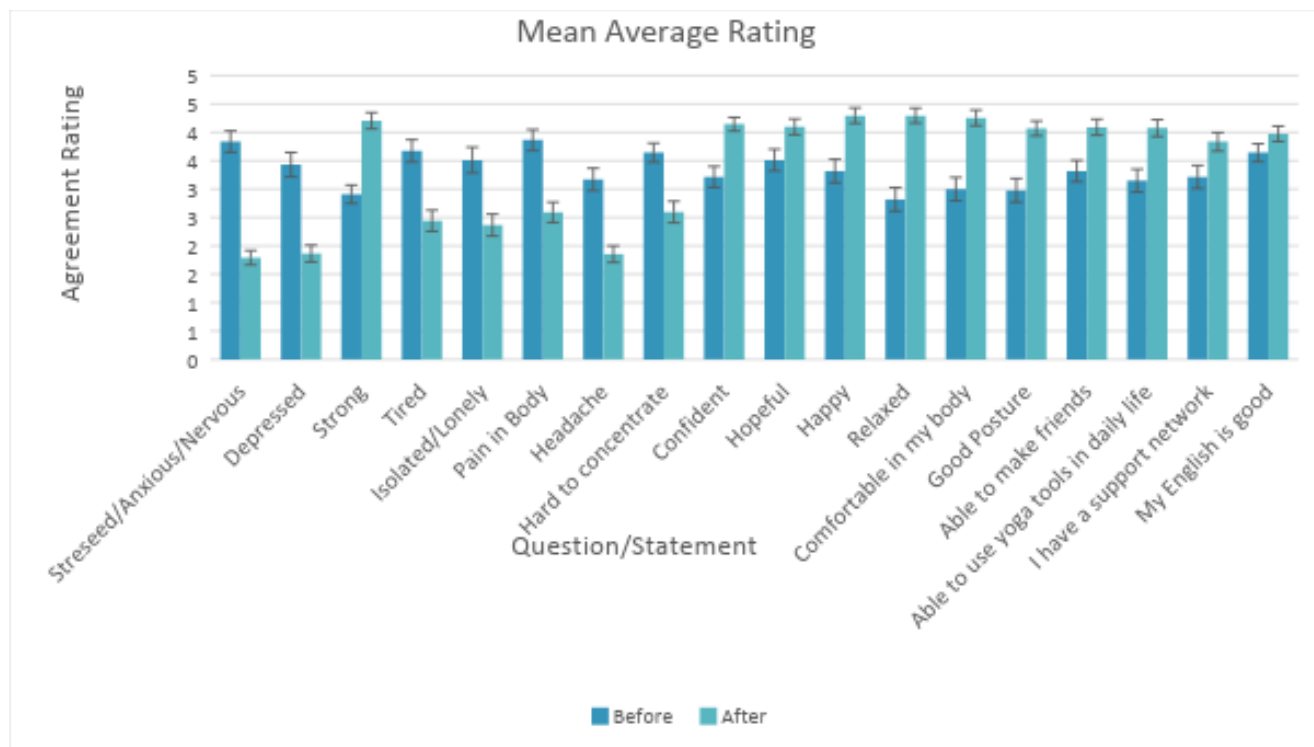
19% increase in mean average rating (t(41)=3.3, P<0.01)

- **Confidence in one's English language skills**

9% increase in mean average rating (t(41)=3.3, P<0.01)

Statistical results From Questionnaires with 44 Participants, before and after yoga.





Meeting Targets?

Improved health and well-being, both mental and physical. Indicators:

- Do 90% of surveyed service users can report a reduction in at least one mental health related question (Q1, Q2, Q8, 10)?

Result: 93% of participants reported a positive change in response to at least one of the mental health focused questions. E.g. a reduction in depression (Q2) or an increase in hope (Q10)

- Do 90% of surveyed service users can report a reduction in at least one physical health related question (Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7)?

Result: 95% of participants reported a positive change in response to at least one of the physical health focused questions. E.g. an increase in feeling strong (Q3) or a reduction in pain in the body (Q6)

Service users experience an increase in confidence, and a reduction in isolation which enables them to integrate into London society. Indicators:

- Do 90% of surveyed service users report a reduction in feelings of loneliness and isolation or an increase in confidence generally, confidence making friends or an increased sense of having a support network? (Q5, Q9, Q15, Q17)

Result: 95% of participants reported a positive change in response to at least one of the confidence and integration focused questions. E.g. a reduction in feelings of loneliness (Q5), or an increase in feeling confident (Q9)

Ourmala therefore achieved all of their targets in terms of delivering a service which improves the mental and physical health of their clients, as well as decreasing isolation and an increase in confidence and integration. This demonstrates that Ourmala's trauma-informed yoga classes are effective and beneficial for clients. The focus group data, analysed below, offers further insight into the experiences and perspectives of individual participants. The qualitative focus group discussions support several of the quantitative findings from the survey.

Results from Focus Group:

Focus group participants were asked how yoga impacts on their mental and physical health. Some responses to this question were:

P1: "I think mentally it will give you peace and relax..."

P2: "Yeah for me, it's mostly been helpful in de-stressing, because we obviously have all our problems on our shoulders and sometimes it can feel too much. So when you come for yoga, you're kind of reminded to be in the moment and stretch your body, relax, breathe in, breathe out, even simple things like that actually does help you destress and switch off from your problems temporarily ... It does feel a little bit empowering at times, you know, when you've done a bit more than just the basics. You've done your three-legged dog and things like that. You kind of feel a bit proud about what you achieved at the end of the class and you think to yourself, *'Ah I was able to do that. Great.'* So yeah."

P3: "I want to talk lot more about yoga it makes me forget a lot of my thinking, it makes me focus whenever I come to yoga, I see friends around me, I am happy, I don't no longer think of my situation so I'm just really happy to carry on. Like the breathing aspect of it, it relaxes my nerves and makes me feel younger. [Laughter] Because there are certain things I don't feel like I can do, you know, you know when you don't practice exercises all the time, you feel like just, you know, you are nothing but as soon as I continue to come to yoga, I now believe that these short arms can go backwards and stretch so much. I can do so much, like, you understand? My body can, *I can* adjust to so many things which I thought I never can do. So like, bridges on hand down like this, I thought my hand cannot reach back here, but I love it, it's okay."

P4: "Makes me strong. I feel happy."

P5: "... I start to care about my body and me more. I started practice these words being gentle with myself and taking care of myself because my mind will be more open, you know."

P6: "Yeah. As far as concerned from my own experience, I've been under depression cycle for years and I started yoga six months ago, I can see the impact and the difference I go through, because I can try now to manage my depression from what I'm gaining from yoga. And yoga have some ups, because it eases all my muscles, whereas I have tension as I go through depression or a lot of stress and the impact of it is meaningful because I can see the change on my mind and how to breath. This is very positive impact ... so I'm very grateful about where I know I came from up to now. "

P7: "... sometimes I have depress and I don't want to go out any more and these things. When you start yoga, more like this, carry on, quickly quickly come to the yoga. More of yoga for everybody. Yoga is good. Many things move ... I have asthma too... before I do three inhalers in the day, but now I use it once."

These responses indicate that yoga affects participants both physically and mentally and supports the quantitative results of the questionnaire. Participants noted a sense of empowerment and enjoyed being able to reflect on the changes they have observed within themselves over time, especially when having achieved something they initially thought they were incapable of.

Participants explained how using tools from yoga such as the slow and mindful breath enables them to be active in managing their wellbeing. One of Ourmala's goals is to empower clients to be active in their own healing, and these responses suggest this goal is being achieved. When asked what the most important tool was which participants had learnt during yoga, many responses again support this assumption.

P2: "Grounding. Because, you know when you're panicking, things are happening and you receive bad news, because that's all you receive, when you're an asylum seeker you're being given bad news left, right and centre and you obviously go into panic attack and stuff so you try to gain a bit of self-control and try to like breathe in and think okay, I'll just have to let that [panic] go."

P8: "Yeah, sometimes when you are [distressed], just lie down and breathe... yeah, I just lie down. I close my eyes and breathe."

Seven participants raised their hand when asked if they practice yoga at home at least once a week. Participants explained the differences they felt between practicing in an Ourmala group class and practicing alone at home.

P8: "Yeah you feel like it's together [in a group class]. [Practicing at home on your own] You forget sometimes one thing, or you miss one thing, but yeah, it's still good."

P2: "It is good but it's also shorter because what I tend to focus on is more of the hard-core poses like the dog and all that stuff. I don't do so much of relaxation by myself. It's easier in a group than doing it by yourself."

P7: "That's a big difference because on your own, and the group and the big difference. You can see the power doing it together."

Several participants expressed strong agreement: "Yeah, yes!"

P4: "Yeah, there is more power, more energy when you do it together than when you are doing it... alone doing anything you like."

P1: "And the teacher helps you."

P4: "That is good."

P1: "Pressing your hands and then help, just help, look, and then we feel we can do it, when always with me, when she did...oh she said, your hand is going this...oh yes thank you, I've have got it like that to make more happier, yes we can do it."

P6: "The trick to the yoga, to make my body relax, you know, the tension and the stress, and I think is it's five minutes every day when you wake up. I check my body before I go out, you know? That I can do at home, but I didn't do all the exercise at home."

There was variation in terms of which elements of yoga people practiced at home. Some preferred to practice physical postures (asana) while others used relaxing grounding exercises and mindful breathing techniques (pranayama). From this discussion it seems participants felt greater impacts when practicing as a group with a yoga teacher to guide them through their practice. The physical touch of a teacher was also noted as being reassuring which is significant considering many of Ourmala's clients have survived violence at the hands of others.

There was variation again in responses to a question about the impact of yoga on sleep.

P8: "Before I did yoga I didn't sleep well. I can't sleep like especially at night, because I have a lot of nightmares and I can't sleep the whole night. I just watch TV the whole night, 'til six o'clock. When I see the light I just open the window and everything when I see the light, I can sleep. Otherwise I'm so scared if it's too dark. I can't sleep. I also have like a lot of stress and everything and that's why I can't sleep. I told someone I can't sleep, and she told me, why don't you try yoga? Yoga is really expensive, I can't afford it. No, if you like to try it go down, and I said, no I can't, and she did wrote to Ourmala. That's why I found out about this and also since I came here, I am so excited to come every Tuesday... I'm so excited because I can sleep like until, after midnight I can sleep now. At least I can sleep. After midnight I would be tired and sleep. Before I sleep, I do some stretching and everything, I do I'm tired and I sleep. Before I can't even sleep until like six o'clock."

P5: "Oh yeah, sleeping, wow. I sleep, I don't sleep for long but now about three months, I'm sleeping and it feels amazing, you know. I sleep for hours. ... I sleep in the mind because before my body was tired but my mind..."

Lily: "it keeps going?"

P5: "they [mind & body] don't work together. Now, I sleep."

P2: "I've not noticed it, because you know because we do it at Helen Bamber in the mornings, so I'm always, when I finish yoga I'm running off to other appointments and stuff. So we kind of have to get back into the panic mode again, so I think it kind of offsets that relaxation that you do in Shavasana. I think if you were to do it at night, I maybe would actually feel more benefits but the problem is..."

Lily: "So like an evening class might..."

P2: "An evening class might be more helpful, to notice help with sleeping but I haven't noticed it because I've been doing it in the mornings."

Participants observed a difference between yoga and other classes they might attend, such as Zumba, or exercise they might do at the gym.

P6: "The difference is about your mind, how to travel to escape about the stress, about the depression and a couple of differences about the breath."

Lily: "The breathing?"

P6: "Yeah, when you breathe. That's the true impact, I can see."

P5: "But when you talk about yoga, you ask about the shape in yoga because yoga has many shapes, because relax doesn't work for me and Zumba makes me happy because I love music. Box puts my anger out, because how I've been through I can be very aggressive, and I need to let too much anger out and put it out but if I don't have the yoga, I do not do Zumba because now I have more, my mind has more focus."

Lily: "More focus? More space?"

P5: "I say more space, you know, and the yoga, when you do it with Ourmala, moves me to that place."

Lily: "It got you able to do the other ones?"

P5: "Yes, I'm able to do that as well. For me, just doing boxing and Zumba, I think for me doesn't work."

Here, both participants five and six describe how yoga connects them to an internal space where they are able to detach from their stresses and depression. Participant six explains how connecting to this space enables them to feel more confident to try new things and manage more activities in their day to day life. This demonstrates how yoga has many positive knock-on-effects in other areas of participants' lives, empowering them further. It also supports the quantitative findings that yoga helps to decrease isolation and improve confidence.

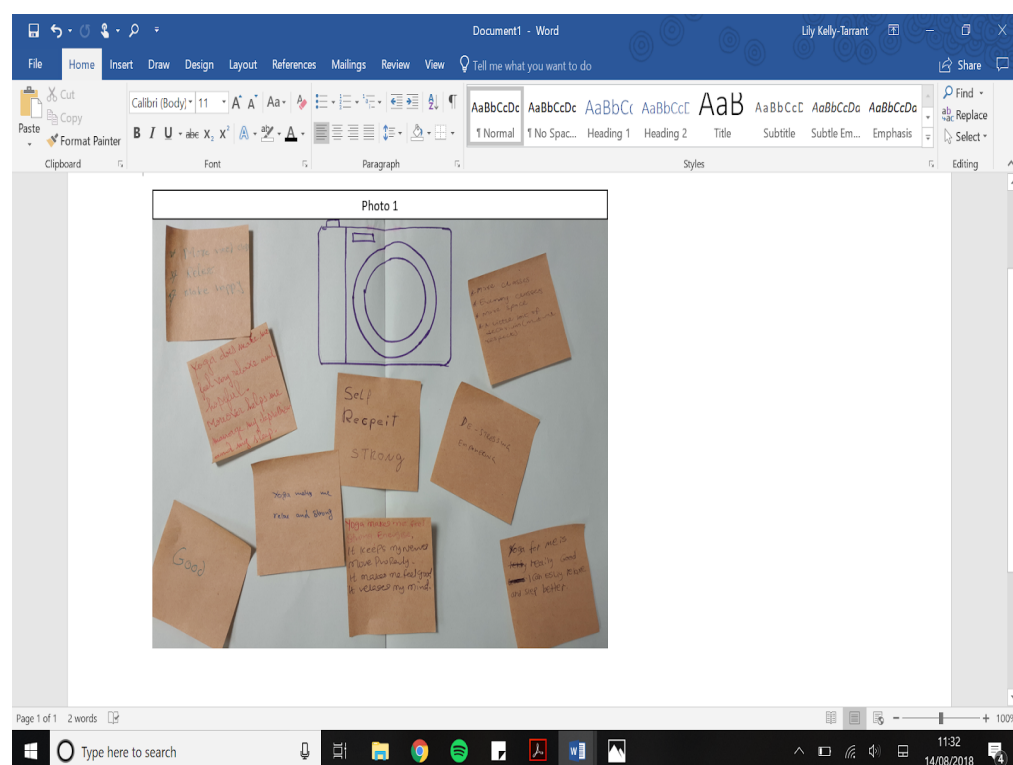
Participants were appreciative of some of the other wrap around services which Ourmala offers. For example;

P8: Yeah because this one is not just like meditating. Also they have lunch, a *nice* lunch, you can't even do that sometimes [as an asylum seeker] you can't do these kind of things. Also they pay for your bus pass, you don't have to pay for that and yoga [outside of Ourmala] it's just too expensive to do it. This is really nice.

When asked how Ourmala could improve their services several main pieces of feedback were repeated. Feedback included requests for more yoga classes, more space for more people in yoga classes, as well

as the suggestion of evening classes noted earlier. One participant noted that travelling to yoga classes can be hard, but that they still love to come despite the long journeys. Ourmala currently provides the option of having lunch at three of their seven weekly classes. Participants who attend the other classes were keen on the idea of lunch or food being provided.

Finally, participants were asked to note down a few words which summarise what yoga means to them or the impact yoga has upon them. A few participants also noted down their feedback for Ourmala. All participants consented to their writing being photographed, see photo 1.



Transcription of Photo 1

Location of Post-it	Participants' writing:
Top Left	"More need class. Relax. Make happy."
Second to Top Left	"Yoga does make me feel very relaxed and hopeful. Moreover helps me manage my depression and my sleep."
Bottom Left	"Good"
Left of Centre	"Yoga makes me relax and strong"
Top Centre	"Self Respect and strong"
Bottom Centre	"Yoga makes me feel strong energise. It keeps my nerves more properly. It makes me feel good. It releases my mind."
Top Right	"More classes. Evening classes. More space. A little bit of decorum (mutual respect)"
Middle Right	"De-stressing empowering"
Bottom Right	"Yoga for me is really good. I can easily relax and sleep better."

Conclusion

The findings of this round of monitoring and evaluation research, conducted in summer 2018, are positive. The qualitative results of the focus group support the quantitative results from the questionnaires. In summary 93% of survey participants noted an improvement in their mental health after yoga, 95% felt an improvement in their physical health, and 95% noted that they felt more confident and/or less isolated following a yoga class.

This research illustrates how Ourmala's model of trauma-informed yoga classes is affective at improving the wellbeing of clients. I would strongly encourage potential funders to consider donating to Ourmala so that they can increase access to their services and reach more people who could greatly benefit from Ourmala's yoga classes and other wrap around services.