

PARK YOGA

EVALUATION REPORT OCTOBER 2022



Park Yoga is for everyone. Our mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of the public by providing free yoga sessions in an open space for the public benefit. The beneficiaries will extend to those living throughout the UK regardless of age, disability, gender or ethnicity.

*Park Yoga Registered Charity No:
1183253*

Introduction

Park Yoga provides free yoga outdoors in public parks in the UK. The sessions are open to all to attend, regardless of experience, age or gender.

Park Yoga runs for one hour on Sunday mornings, between May and September. Since starting in 2017 in two parks, Park Yoga has expanded to deliver at 26 venues (and two pilots) across the South West. Park Yoga is a registered charity funded through donations and grant giving trusts and foundations.

This report reviews the achievements, impact and learning from delivery in the 2022 season across all venues.

Evaluating Park Yoga

Shephard & Moyes Ltd have worked with Park Yoga since 2018, producing annual evaluation reports. The evaluation aims to:

- * Review the effectiveness of the model and explore the potential for improvements
- * Demonstrate to potential funders/ corporate sponsors the difference the project makes
- * Promote the concept to new park/ greenspace landowners
- * Support marketing and promotional activities for potential new participants
- * Identify the benefits to those attending

To evaluate the project, we collected data from participants, instructors and partners, as detailed in the diagram below. Yoga instructors were asked to keep a log of participant numbers and estimated demographic data, and we created a participant survey and promoted this on Facebook. This has been supplemented with data collected by Park Yoga, including social media and website analytics.

This report summarises the results of the evaluation, and provides some recommendations for consideration when developing the project further.

Participation

Over the 20 weeks of Park Yoga delivered in 2022, 505 individual sessions were delivered, resulting in 29,114 individual attendances, an average of 1,456 per week across all venues. This is a considerably increase in participation from 2021, due to the removal of Covid-19 related restrictions and pre-registration process. For example, at Upton Park in Poole participation has increased from an average of 76 people attending per week in 2021, to 141 per week in 2022. Overall, the number of sessions have increased by 49% and attendances have increased by 138% since 2021.

Average weekly attendances in 2022 ranged from 19 at Swindon, to 141 in Poole, with over half of the venues (57%) seeing an average of 50+ people per week.

Park Yoga has continues to successfully bring in new audiences, and encourage repeat attendance. 60% of survey respondents had never taken part in Park Yoga before the 2022 season, and 44% took part in 6 or more sessions. Repeat attendance is an indicator of how much people enjoy Park Yoga, but more importantly, the more regularly and frequently people attend, the more likely they are to develop positive habits around participating in physical activity.

2022 Headlines

- * **26 venues (and two pilots)**
- * **505 sessions delivered; an increase of 49% since 2021**
- * **29,114 attendances; an increase of 138% since 2021**
- * **60% of participants are new to Park Yoga**
- * **44% took part in 6 or more sessions**

Charity Awareness and Donations

The survey explored the extent to which participants are aware of Park Yoga being a registered charity and donation preferences. Overall 78% of respondents were aware that Park Yoga is a charity, with:

- * 60% finding out through the instructor
- * 35% finding out through Facebook posts, and
- * 17% finding out through the website

Continuing to ensure that instructors promote the charity each week, along with ongoing social media campaigns will help increase these numbers.

Most participants would prefer to donate after the session (52%), with around a third preferring to donate before (28%) or at (32%) the session. This would require the charity to create a system to prompt people after each session to donate online.

66% of participants would prefer to donate online through the website, 39% through a contactless transaction on-site and 25% cash on-site. As administering on-site payments (either cash or contactless) will require administration costs and time, increasing efforts to promote online donations would seem more feasible. However, the Charity does need to consider participants who do not feel comfortable making online transactions, or lack the skills to do so.

On average, participants are happy to donate between £2-£5 per session.

Although most people are willing to donate, the general consensus is that any donations must feel optional, and based on what people can afford. Raising awareness of what each Park Yoga session costs, current sources of income, and the need to fundraise to keep it going may help persuade people who can afford it to donate.

"This is really difficult as I do Park Yoga because it is free. I can't afford classes right now so it would probably depend how much money I had at the time...maybe £3-£5"

Who takes part?

One of the aims of Park Yoga is that it is inclusive to all. Demographic data for Park Yoga is collected in two ways; observation by instructors at sessions and through the participant survey. We use two different methods to increase the accuracy of the data; although observation will never be 100% accurate, we are conscious that more women than men will complete surveys, and children and young people are very unlikely to, so some groups are likely to be missed through a survey alone.

Traditionally, yoga is more popular amongst women than men. Although Park Yoga does attract all genders, the majority are female; 92% of people who completed the survey identified as female, and instructors estimated that between 70-95% of participants were female. Park Yoga may wish to consider ways to engage more men.



The majority of Park Yoga participants are also of working age; 92% of people who completed the survey were aged 25-65, and instructors estimated that on average, 75% of participants were of working age. Only 2% of people who completed the survey were young people (aged 16-24), however instructors estimated that around 10% of participants were children or young people. The ability to bring children makes Park Yoga accessible for parents without childcare.

“As a single parent it is hard to find childcare to attend yoga classes so I don’t....or at least I didn’t until Park Yoga came along. It has been a joy to bring my son and I managed to encourage my friends with children to come too. This has improved my social life, the kids played in the park afterwards and dipped in the river, my son has discovered a new love of yoga and it meant he didn’t spend Sunday morning in front of a screen.”

A slightly larger proportion of participants were older people (65+), with approximately 20% of participants observed by instructors, but only 6% completing the Facebook survey.

10% of participants who completed the survey were from ethnic minority communities and 16% reported a disability or life limiting health condition.

“It is a friendly atmosphere, my son is severely autistic and is fully accepted!”

Only 11% of participants live in disadvantaged communities (the top 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in England using the Index of Multiple Deprivation and postcode data); more could be done to target these groups through outreach work with local organisations.

Creating more referral links with partners or local social prescribing projects that support these target groups would also help engage a greater proportion of people who would not traditionally choose to participate in physical activity.

How do people hear about Park Yoga?

Park Yoga is predominantly promoted through individual Facebook pages for each site, and 62% of participants found out about Park Yoga from Facebook; an increase from 2021. Word of mouth is the second most popular way of finding out, with a third of people hearing about it through friends or family. 15% found out through previous attendance.

Although the existing marketing methods are successful at reaching large numbers of people, more targeted marketing may help to reach more, and a more diverse range of people.

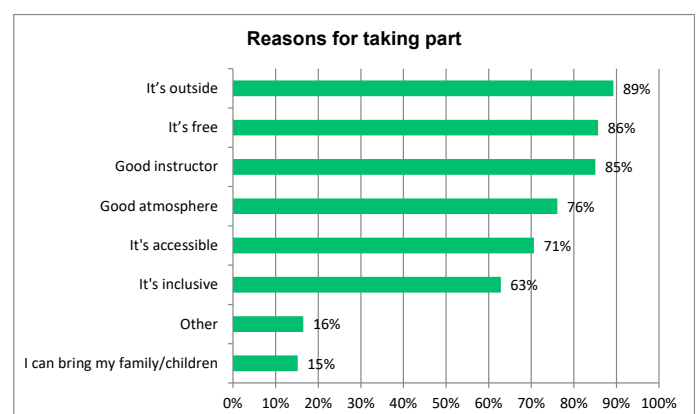
Reasons for taking part

The participant survey asked why people chose to take part. As shown in the chart below, the most popular reason was because it is outdoors (89%), followed by the fact it is free (86%) and the good instructor (85%).

Being outdoors is important both for the appeal of connecting with nature, but also the reduced risk of contracting Covid-19 compared to an indoor class.

“Initially, because its outside and therefore highly unlikely to contract Covid-19, which is far more likely when doing yoga indoors. It is also fantastic doing yoga outside.”

“I love yoga but the combination of a great instructor and doing the class outside in a beautiful setting makes the session really special.”



Being free as a main reason for attending has increased from previous years; the cost of living crisis which has affected people's spending decisions is likely to be the cause of this.

"I love doing yoga outdoors. I feel so connected to nature and really enjoy the fresh air. After a park yoga session, I feel relaxed, content and positive. Most yoga classes around me are £10 a session and to go regularly, say once a week, is just not affordable for me at this time. I love it cos not only is it outside, it's also free and a 10 minute drive from my house. Win win."

Participants also appreciate the flexible nature of the sessions and the relaxed and inclusive atmosphere.

"I had never tried yoga before but it's got me moving and stretching and gently back into exercise in what has been a very tricky year for me. I love being able to turn up without booking or thinking about it and the completely non-judgemental atmosphere. All body shapes and sizes and abilities just enjoying the yoga. Keep it going next year please!"

31% of Park Yoga participants had never or infrequently tried yoga before, and 32% had never or infrequently visited the park before. This demonstrates that Park Yoga continues to reach new audiences to both yoga and local greenspaces.



Impact on participants

The survey asked the extent to which participants agreed or disagreed with a number of statements, as a result of taking part in Park Yoga.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction rates are extremely high, with 99% satisfied overall, 98% enjoying yoga and 82% agreeing that their yoga skills have improved.

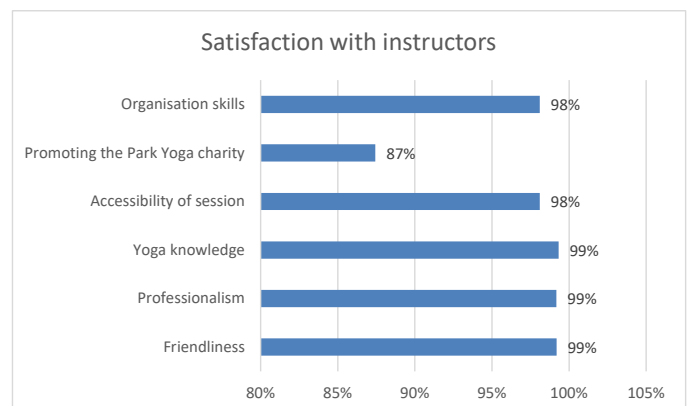
"I love Park Yoga, it's given me my first experience of Yoga in a totally safe, friendly and natural environment. It's also one of the first times my wife and I have ever taken a group exercise class together."

Satisfaction rates with the instructors is also very high, with 99% of participants rating the friendliness, professionalism and yoga knowledge as excellent or good. The lowest rating (albeit still high!) was 87% of participants rated the instructor promoting the Park Yoga charity as excellent or good.

Participants appreciate how welcoming and approachable the instructors are, and their ability to make yoga accessible to all. The only areas of criticism are around ability to hear at some large sessions.

"She took the 'fear' from yoga- made everyone feel good and welcome."

"All the instructors have been welcoming and given alternative postures which gave a feeling of inclusion for all."



Community

One of the most cited benefits of taking part in Park Yoga is the sense of community it instills in participants.

Inspired by this sense of community spirit shown at Park Yoga events, yoga instructors at 8 venues organised "Park Yoga Picnics" in 2022. These were informal and inclusive community events, held in the parks after Park Yoga sessions where people came together to meet, greet and build connections. People were invited to socialise and given opportunities to ask instructors any queries about their new yoga practise. Some hosts asked participants to bring food to share, others collected food for local foodbanks. In all cases, these events were a celebration of a season of yoga forming a new community.

"It's been a relaxing way to start the day on Sunday and has helped me feel more connected to people in my local community. The class is great for people of all ages etc and feels less intimidating as it's open to everyone."

"I am more flexible and have enjoyed the community connection through yoga. It is an uplifting session to attend and realise just how lovely the park is"

"It's given me a new interest and I love the community vibe."



Health

Yoga has a number of health benefits, including strength, flexibility, bone health, posture, balance, mobility. The survey results show that, as result of taking part in Park Yoga;

- * 83% of participants feel more flexible/mobile
- * 76% feel fitter or stronger
- * 83% feel healthier
- * 74% are more physically active

"Park yoga gets me out of bed on a Sunday, puts me in a positive mood and has encouraged me to be more active"

"I have Fibromyalgia and osteoporosis in my lower spine and now after one session the burning that I experience in my thoracic spine has eased"

"It has played a big role in getting me active again and assisting in recovery from COVID."



Wellbeing

There is a strong evidence base showing the benefits of access to greenspace and in particular outdoor exercise on wellbeing and mental health. For example, MIND, the mental health charity, published a report in 2007, which concluded that *“green exercise has particular benefits for people experiencing mental distress. It directly benefits mental health (lowering stress and boosting self-esteem), improves physical health (lowering blood pressure and helping to tackle obesity), provides a source of meaning and purpose, helps to develop skills and form social connections”*.

The Nature Connections handbook, published by Natural England goes one step further, stating that *‘connecting with nature is much more than just being in nature, it is how we interact with it that is most important.’* Park Yoga provides an opportunity to connect to nature in a meaningful way, by helping people relax, be mindful and therefore take more notice of the sights and sounds that surround them.

The survey results show that as a result of taking part in Park Yoga 92% of participants feel happier and 91% feel more connected to nature/outdoors. In addition:

- * 68% feel more optimistic about the future
- * 91% feel more relaxed
- * 62% feel better able to deal with problems

“It was such an amazing experience. I haven’t done yoga outside before and with so many people, it really helped me to feel connected to others and nature. It taught me new yoga techniques. It made me feel really hopeful for the future, and gave me a much needed burst of energy on a Saturday morning.”

“I love spending mindful time outdoors doing something that makes me feel good.”

“I have been joining park yoga since it began. It’s now my favourite part of summer. As an individual who has anxiety and adhd, I’ve learnt so much from coming to park yoga and all the benefits of practicing yoga to keep my mental health in check. I now do yoga as often in the week as I can.”



If it were to continue, 100% of participants would be interested in taking part in Park Yoga next year and 76% would encourage their family/friends to take part. This demonstrates continued demand for the project.

Impact on the park

Park Yoga is also benefitting the greenspaces in which it takes place. 51% of participants visit the park more often, and 61% are more satisfied with their park as a result.

"My husband and children will often play in the park or walk the dog whilst I attend park yoga. We would not have done this prior to the park yoga sessions"

Yoga outdoors is a particularly beneficial experience that participants' value considerably.

"It's been great to be able to use the park in a different way, and to practice yoga outside for a change"

Long-term impact

The survey explores with participants what they might consider doing once Park Yoga ends for the season. 64% say they will join a local yoga class or do yoga at home, 29% say they will use the park more often, and 27% are keen to try other physical activities.

"I really look forward to Sunday mornings through the summer and feel sad when it ends. Have now found a local class to attend through the winter"

"It is something I can do at home when I can't afford classes or don't have time after work to do other forms of exercise"

"I used to do lots of yoga but got out of the habit since having children. Park Yoga has helped me get back into practicing yoga and has made it part of my life once again. Once it finishes I am going to find a local class to join so I can continue with it."



Conclusions

Park Yoga in 2022 has returned to in-person delivery with no restrictions (event/attendance limits or pre-registration), which has resulted in a significant increase in attendances.

Park Yoga has continued to grow and expand, and was successfully delivered across 4 additional venues in the South West, taking the total to 26 (plus two pilot venues) overall.

Satisfaction rates and the impact on participants' health and wellbeing continues to be significant; Park Yoga has provided people with an opportunity to take part in physical activity and people are reporting improvements in their physical activity levels, happiness and overall health as a result.

The strengths of Park Yoga remain unaffected despite the considerable impact of the pandemic, and its growth. It remains inclusive, accessible, free, offers excellent quality yoga instruction by skilled and personable teachers and offers a different experience to indoor classes by enabling people to better connect to nature.

Park Yoga has continued to introduce new audiences to yoga and local parks. As a result of Park Yoga, more people are using their local parks and many are joining yoga classes in their local communities. The vast majority of participants and partners are keen to continue next year.

Recommendations, or areas for consideration for 2023 include:

- * Explore opportunities for targeted engagement, particularly for young people, people from lower socio-economic communities, men and people with disabilities
- * Ensure that areas and venues selected are those that would best support people from these under-represented groups
- * Consider more opportunities for partnership working to build connections with more vulnerable groups who may

benefit from Park Yoga but would be unlikely to attend without support

- * Support instructors to ensure the Park Yoga charity is promoted at all sessions and online
- * Ensure there are a range of publicity methods used; particularly for engaging people who do not use Facebook
- * Consider and implement a range of methods to generate income through donations

Key Achievements

- * 505 sessions delivered over 20 weeks at 26 venues and 2 pilots
- * Total of 29,114 attendances, with on average 1,456 people attending each week
- * 60% had never taken part in Park Yoga before 2022 season
- * Park Yoga encourages repeat attendance – 44% took part in 6 or more sessions
- * 99% are satisfied overall
- * 82% agree yoga skills have improved
- * 83% feel healthier
- * 74% are more physically active
- * 92% feel happier
- * 92% feel more connected with nature/ outdoors
- * 61% more satisfied with the park
- * 64% are keen to join a local yoga club or do yoga at home