

Queen's Park Yoga Mental Well Being Impact Assessment

Introduction

Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA) is a tool which has been developed by Well London to assess the effect of community projects and services on the mental wellbeing of the community. The aim is to

- Raise awareness and understanding of mental wellbeing
- Enable stakeholders to begin to identify the impact a particular policy, service, programme or project may be having on mental wellbeing
- Encourage stakeholders to explore ways to maximise potential positive impacts and minimise potential negative ones
- Enable stakeholders to explore and develop local indicators to monitor and evaluate progress on promoting mental wellbeing.

A MWIA workshop was held at the Beethoven Centre on the 27 April 2009. The focus of the workshop was a yoga class which is run at the Centre on a weekly basis. There is a crèche for parents with young children, which is subsidised. It is a mixed class.

The participants were members of the class and their teacher, and the manager of the Centre. The facilitators were the community health development worker from Queens Park Forum, a facilitator from Well London, and two assessors who have participated in training with Well London.

The MWIA went through the following programme:

- Definitions of mental wellbeing
- A community profile
- Protective factors for mental wellbeing

The group then split in two to discuss

- Resilience and community assets
- Participation

The group then shared some action points out of the discussion.

Definition of Mental Wellbeing

There was a lively discussion of mental wellbeing which included a smiley face, mental and physical relaxation, getting out and about, learning techniques to cope and getting enough sleep!

Protective factors for Mental Wellbeing

There was a brief outline of four factors that have been identified through research as protective factors to enhance or maintain mental wellbeing.

These factors are

- Enhancing control eg. People who feel in control of their everyday lives are more likely to take control of their health.

- Increasing resilience and community assets eg. Resilience is usually defined as the extent to which a person can adapt to and / or recover in the face of adversity, and is both an individual attribute and a community asset.
- Facilitating participation eg feeling useful, feeling close to other people and feeling interested in other people are key attributes that contribute to positive mental well-being
- Promoting inclusion eg the extent to which people are able to access opportunities to feel involved and engaged and to participate in their community

Due to a shortage of time (most of the participants had children in the crèche so were only available to take part for a limited period) the workshop chose to discuss two protective factors in particular. The group split into two with an assessor and a scribe for each factor.

Resilience and Community Assets

Emotional Wellbeing

The group felt that yoga was particularly good for bringing mind and body together and grounding emotions. It represented a 'time out' where people could feel away from difficulties with home, work or family.

Learning and development

The group said that yoga taught them new techniques, particularly around breathing, which helped them to learn respect for their bodies. It was satisfying to learn new skills.

Ease of access to services

Access was made possible because the classes and crèche were subsidised, otherwise it would be too expensive. However, on the negative side, some groups of people weren't accessing the classes. Some people found the idea of yoga strange or didn't know what it was. Others found the class too hard and felt they needed an easier class. There were advantages and disadvantages to women only or mixed classes. Muslim women might come if it was restricted to women only, but on the other hand, there were men who would also like to benefit from the class, but who were unlikely to go to a men only class.

Participation

Cost and affordability

This was a very positive factor. Most of the people who attended had small children and could not have come if the crèche wasn't subsidised. The group felt that more crèches were needed as a community resource.

Involvement

It was difficult to get more people involved with the class. The participants wanted a wider range of ages and ethnicities. They had taken an active role in promoting the class, telling friends and neighbours with limited success. The group felt that yoga had a too 'up-market' image and was not seen as real exercise.

Social contact

The group felt that the class provided them with the opportunity to meet people, see familiar and smiling faces which helped them to feel better. They said that they were

feeling very lonely, isolated or stressed when they came to the class. But now they feel strengthened from within, stronger mentally and felt they could cope much better. Many said that even though they did not talk too much during the classes, while they were in the hall exercising, they felt that they were a part of the community. They felt this was very important for young mothers. Participants felt that the class helped them feel better about themselves and helped some people to tackle problems like insomnia. They also said that Yoga was a collective activity that brings people together. However, there was also a discussion about mixed versus women only groups in terms of bringing people together.

Action points

These are some of the action points that came out of the separate discussions and were shared by the whole group at the end of the workshop

Resilience and Community Assets

- Need to keep the numbers up so that the class could be sustained after March 2010.
- Need to increase the publicity, both in quantity with more flyers and using different methods, such as visiting schools and childrens centres to give demonstrations and explain what yoga does.
- Need to provide taster sessions at different community events
- Need to make sure that all the Beethoven Centre staff understood the benefits of the class so that they could describe it in positive terms when visitors ask for information
- Radhika, community health development worker, to talk to local health professionals about the benefits of the class.

Participation

- To lobby Westminster City Council to invest in crèches
- To lobby to maintain NHS funding for the class
- To approach local supermarkets and other businesses to see if they would sponsor the classes
- To actively encourage participants to 'pass on the message' and recognise the importance of informing people about the classes
- Ask people to talk about the class as well as giving out flyers
- Give demonstrations of yoga in local schools and youth clubs
- Finding a source of modest clothing for exercise that might make it possible to have Muslim women in mixed classes
- More explanation of the benefits of yoga, both physical and mental
- Holding the class at different times of the day
- Holding two classes, one mixed and one women only

Conclusion

Thank you to all the participants who gave up their time for this MWIA workshop, and helped to draw up a list of action points. There will be a fuller report at a later date.