

# The Effects of Yoga Therapy for Children with Special Needs

瑜伽對有特殊需要  
人士的益處



# Research Aims

- Yoga therapy is a mind-body intervention increasingly used in health practices
- Limited research exists on the effects of yoga therapy on children — fewer studies still involve children with disabilities/special needs (C-SEN)
- The objective of this study was to assess the effects of yoga therapy on C-SEN and to explore its viability as an alternative form of therapy

## Questions

Can structured yoga therapy:

1. Effect positive change in range of motion, motor coordination and/or body awareness?
2. Improve focus, engagement and attention span?
3. Enhance mood and sense of wellbeing — improving quality of life?



# Overview of Study

- 60 C-SEN were selected to participate in this study, from January 2021 through September 2023

## *Participant Profile*

- *Ages 2 to 29 (median age: 7)*
  - *Moderate to severe disability or special need*
  - *Priority given to those from low-income backgrounds and/or receiving little to no other therapeutic support*
- Each participant received 10 sessions x 1:1 adaptive yoga with trained therapist over 12 weeks
  - Participants were assessed by an early intervention specialist, before and after the intervention – to measure developmental changes



# Research Methodology

- Prior to the intervention, a qualified Examiner assessed each participant for **Baseline** results. During the intervention, therapists **tracked progress**, qualitative changes and participant self-reports. Upon completion of the intervention, participants were assessed again by a qualified Examiner, producing **Final Assessment** results.



# Research Highlights

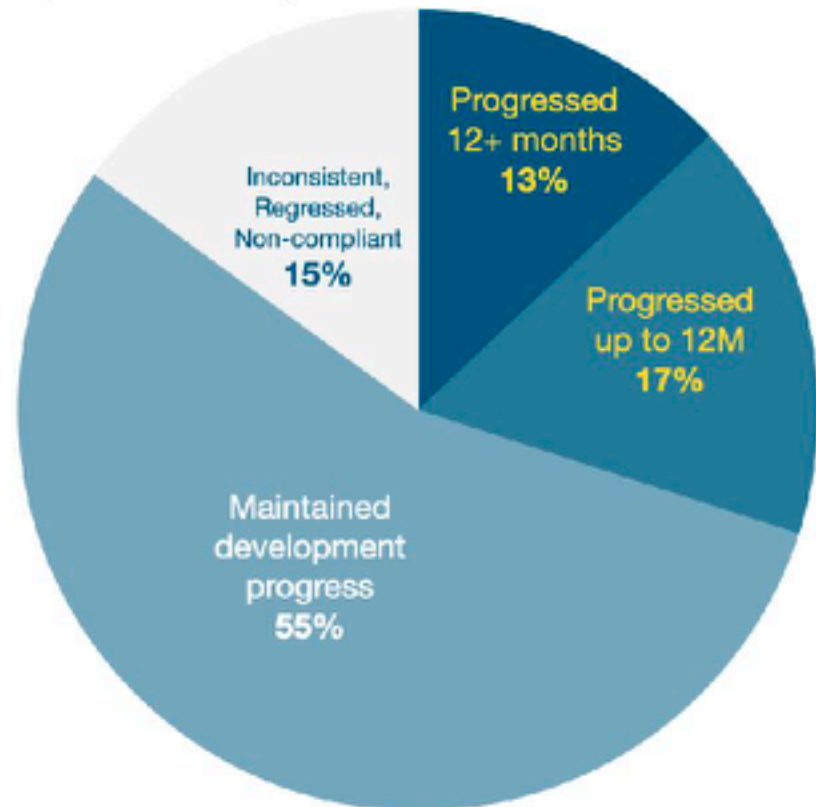


- Participants also showed measured **improvements in body awareness and motor skills** after the intervention
  - Younger participants displayed more progress in motor development
- Participants **self-reported improved physical wellbeing and enhanced mood** after therapy sessions
- Benefits not originally targeted were also recorded in some participants, such as **improvements in communication and daily living skills and reduction in sensory-seeking behaviours**



# Motor Development

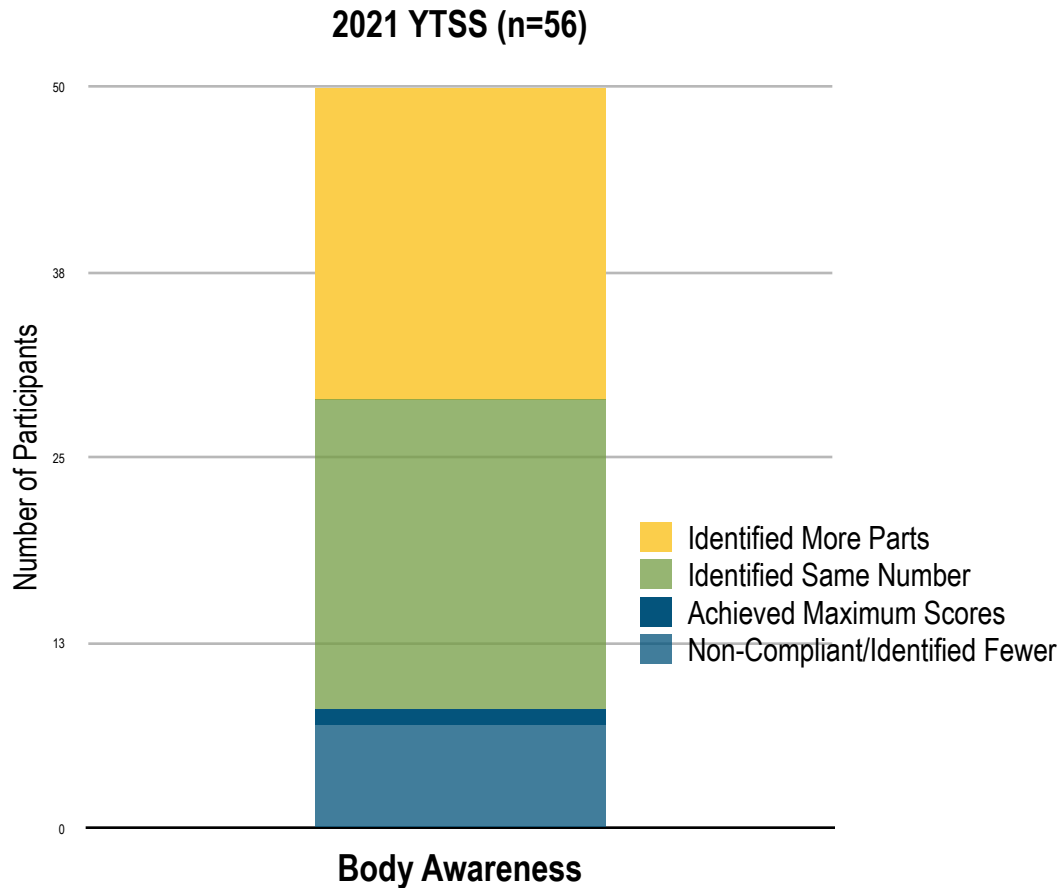
△ Gross Motor Development  
(2023 YTSS, n=60)



- **30% of participants showed improvements in gross motor development after the intervention**
  - 13% achieved developmental milestones >12M higher than baseline
- Approximately half of the participants maintained a “normal” rate of development over the intervention
  - Given the short intervention period (10 weekly sessions), this was expected and judged to be a positive outcome



# Body Awareness: Identify Body Parts



- **58% of participants assessed were able to identify more body parts** after the intervention, showing a great improvement in body awareness
  - 23% identified same number of body parts, but in some cases these were different body parts from the Baseline indicating an increase in body awareness



# Communication

**22% of participants showed significant improvements in Language development.**

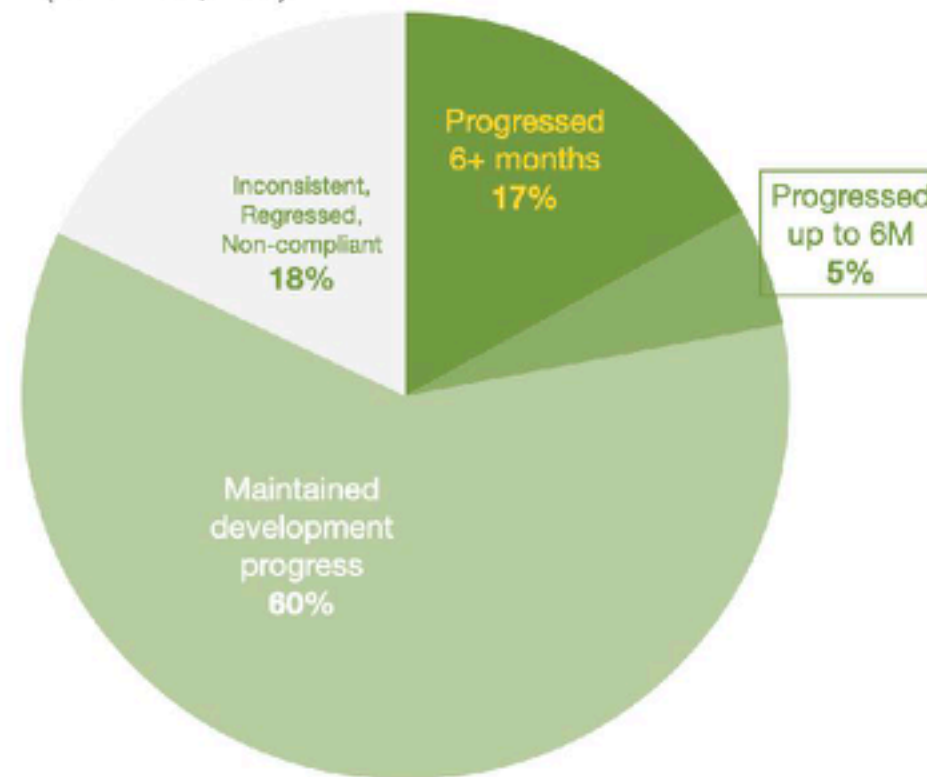
**12% of participants showed marked improvements in Personal-Social development.**

We considered this to be a secondary benefit of the intervention.

*One parent reported that her “previously mute” child gained confidence in communication, suddenly becoming “a chatterbox”.*

*Another parent reported that her non-responsive child started vocalising and interacting more with the yoga therapist.*

△ Language Development  
(2023 YTSS, n=60)

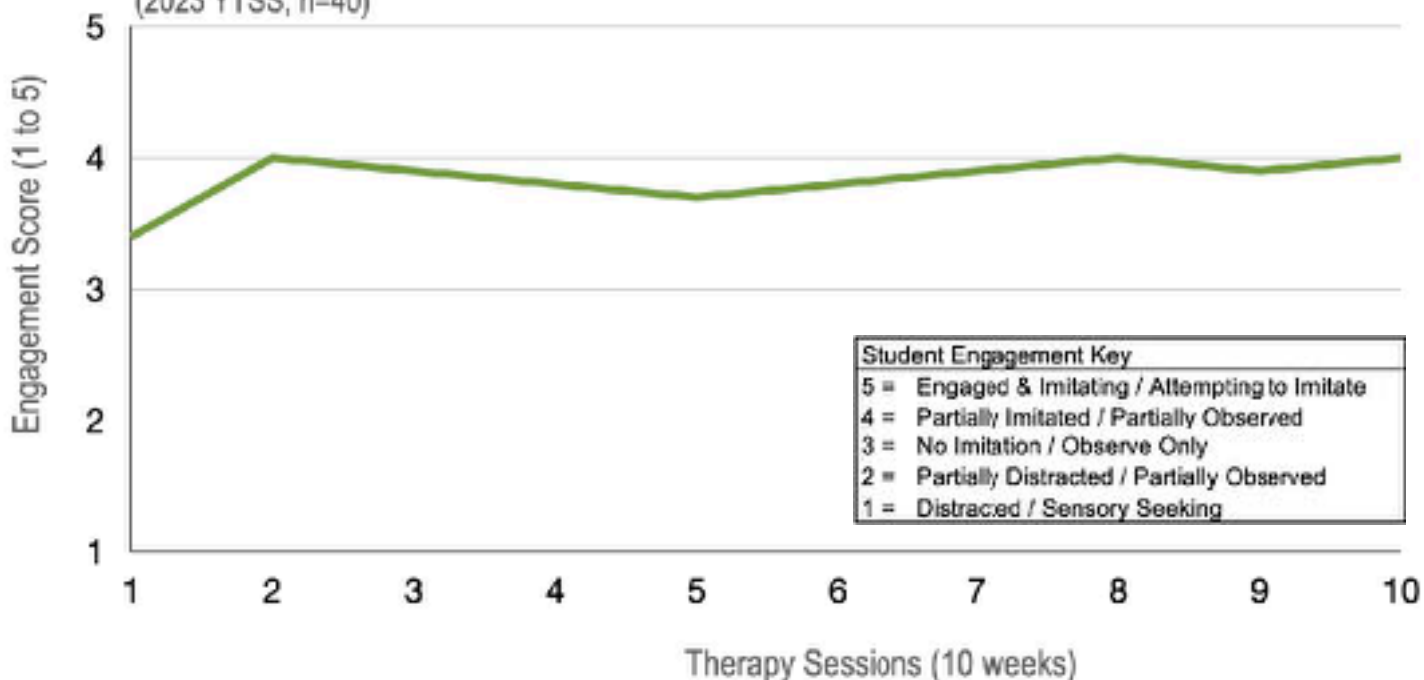




# Participant Engagement (Intervention)

## Average Student Engagement

(2023 YTSS, n=40)

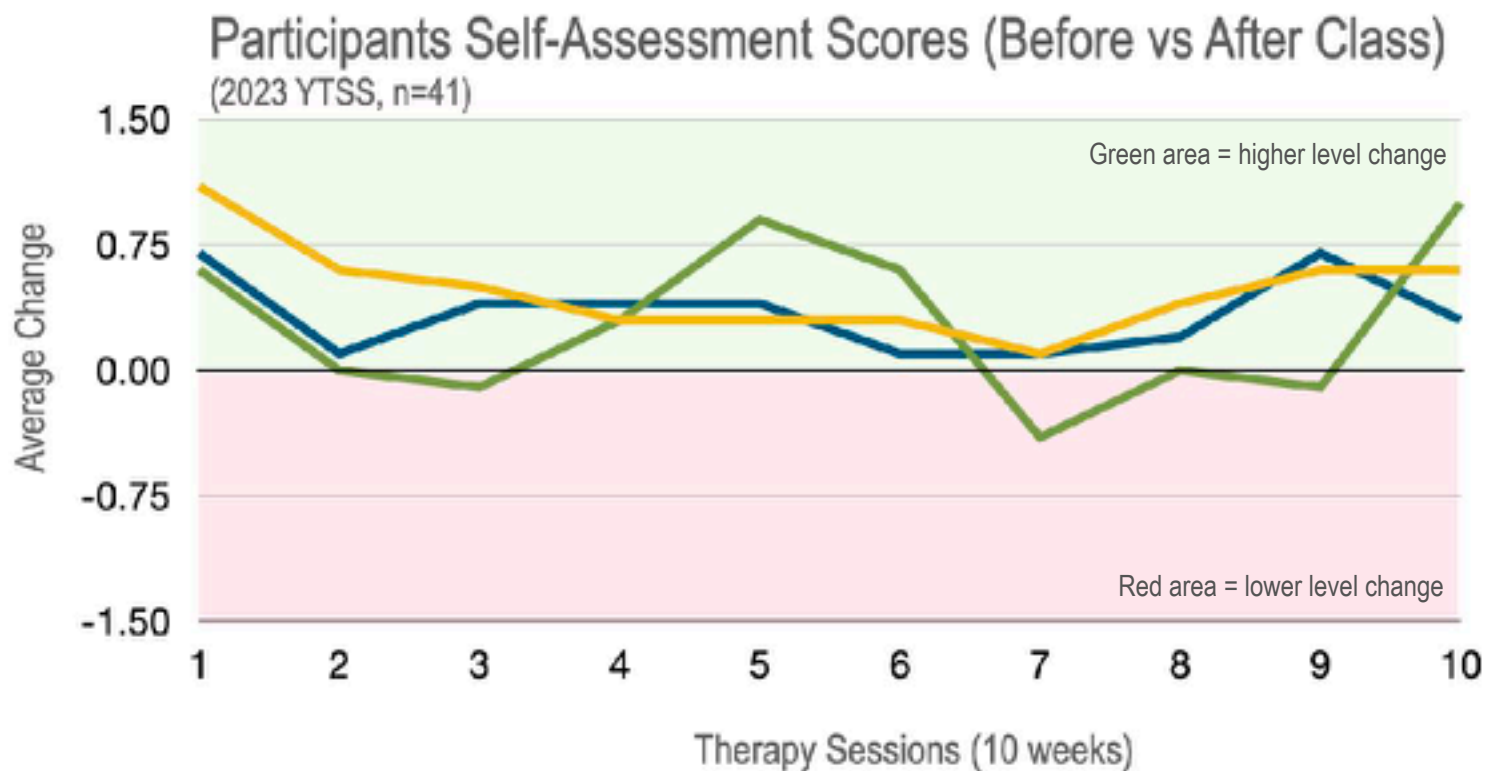


**Average engagement shows gradual upward trend (12% improvement) over the 10-session intervention.**

Therapists noted that engagement depended largely on participant's mood upon arrival at class.



# Participant Self-Reporting



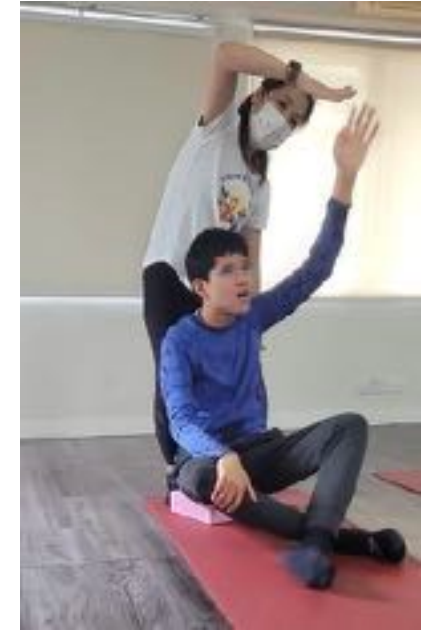
***All participants report a positive change in physical wellbeing and mood.***

***Energy levels varied greatly in participants after the yoga sessions.***

- How is your **BODY** feeling right now?
- How is your **ENERGY** level right now?
- How is your **MOOD** right now?



# Yoga Therapy Sessions



# Qualitative Reports

Teachers also noted qualitative improvements over the course of the intervention

- Increased body awareness
- Improved self-regulation
- Increased confidence

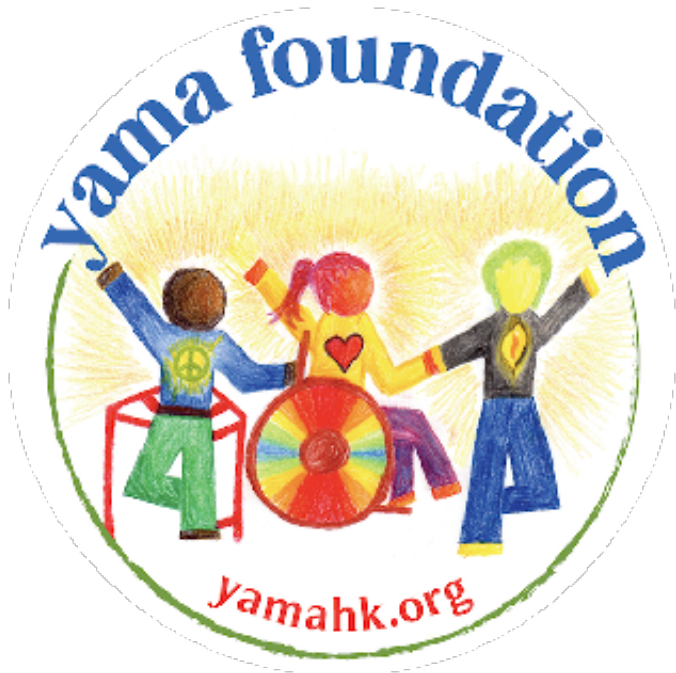


# Conclusions

***Study findings suggest yoga therapy can be an effective form of alternative therapy for children with disabilities/special needs.***

- Effects on motor development are most pronounced in younger participants, alluding to viability in early intervention
- Presence of secondary benefits indicate that yoga therapy contributes to improvements in quality of life





## Yoga Therapy Subsidy Scheme 瑜伽治療補助計劃 (YTSS)

[www.yamahk.org/yoga-therapy-subsidy](http://www.yamahk.org/yoga-therapy-subsidy)

For more information on YAMA  
Foundation's programmes and services,  
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