



## Evaluation report – Reflexology for The Carers Project

### Executive Summary

Between February and August 2019 reflexology was provided to a small number of carers as part of a project supporting their mental health and wellbeing. Seven carers completed a course of multiple reflexology sessions with Hand to Heal. Each carer recorded some basic evaluation data before and at the end of the block of reflexology sessions.

All seven carers reported an improvement in how they felt at the end of the project compared to at the start. Six out of seven said they were managing better being a carer at the end of the project.

Qualitative feedback was also very positive with carers saying how much they valued the time reflexology afforded them for relaxation and to regain perspective.

**“I am so grateful for the opportunity this therapy has given me - I feel renewed”**

**“I now feel less anxious and am able to cope with the difficulties I have to face as a carer”**

### Introduction to the project

Reflexology was offered as part of a project provided by Platform (previously Gofal) supporting unpaid carers at the Breathe wellbeing centre. Carers self-referred on to the project as a result of becoming aware through Breathe’s networking and general marketing promotions. Carers were invited to an initial one-to-one short assessment with the lead counsellor at Breathe and once admitted to the project each carer was offered up to 8 hourly complementary health and 8 counselling sessions. Some beneficiaries chose more than one complementary health therapy, so in these cases they had fewer than 8 reflexology sessions with other therapies making up the number.

N.B. Two reflexologists provided services for the project – this short paper reports only on those beneficiaries seen by Jane Lorimer of Hand to Heal Reflexology.

The beneficiary profiles were as follows;

<b>Total number of carers seen for reflexology by Hand to Heal;</b>	10 carers
<b>of which:</b>	
<b>Attended 8 sessions</b>	5 carers
<b>Attended 4 sessions</b>	2 carers
<b>Attended 1 session</b>	3 carers





<b>Women</b>	7	<b>Men</b>	3
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<b>Total number of reflexology sessions delivered by Hand to Heal</b>	57 hours
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Adherence was excellent; only one person attended an initial reflexology appointment and did not return – and this was because of a change of circumstance which prevented him being able to attend. Two other carers came only for one session because they tried all the therapies on offer at Breathe and decided to continue with massage therapy rather than reflexology. For all seven other beneficiaries to complete their full entitlement is testament to much they valued and appreciated the therapy. This is particularly significant for carers who notoriously find it difficult to be able to attend regular commitments for themselves because of the demanding and random nature of the caring commitment.

## Project Evaluation

At the start of the project each carer was asked to fill in a very short form asking them to evaluate their current outlook towards their role as a carer.

Q1. How do you feel today? (Circle Number)											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Q2. How do you think you are managing as a carer?											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Q3. What are your expectations of this treatment?											
(Write in your comments)											

In addition, a short confidential questionnaire asking carers if they had any health conditions or were taking any medications was completed by each beneficiary. This also checked for contra-indications for reflexology. At this point it was explained that the primary purpose for reflexology through the project was for relaxation but if people had any specific health conditions which they hoped would benefit this could also be a focus of the treatments.

At the final session carers were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire with the same questions 1 and 2. In the interests of not influencing their judgement they were *not* reminded of the scores they gave these questions at the start of the project.

The before and after scores for the seven carers who completed a full course (4 or 8 sessions) of reflexology with Hand to Heal were as follows;

## Quantitative results

**Q1. How do you feel today? (number of people who circled each score is given in the row below)**

☹️ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☺️

Number of beneficiaries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Score at start	0	0	1	1	0	4	1	0	0	0
Score at end							1	6		

Increase per person;

2 people reported a one point improvement

3 people reported a two point improvement

1 person reported a three point improvement

1 person reported a five point improvement!

Note that all seven beneficiaries classified themselves in the green shaded zone of the scale of happiness at the end of the project compared with only one person at the start.

It is a very positive outcome for the project to see that all participants reported an improvement in how they felt over the course of the project. Anecdotal evidence from interactions with the carers over the months add to this picture – it was noticeable how people relaxed and became more chatty over the weeks. Initially people mostly talked about the difficulties they felt with their caring responsibilities and feeling concerned that they often lost their cool or had short tempers. By the end of the project it was noticeable that the conversations were more about wider life and things people liked doing beyond their caring role.

**Q2. How do you think you are managing as a carer? (number of people who circled each score is given in each row)**

☹️ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☺️

Number of beneficiaries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Score at start	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	1	0	0
Score at end	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	0	0

Again there was significant movement within the overall measure of how well beneficiaries feel they are managing their caring role – at the project end the majority rated themselves within the upper green zone of feeling they are coping well. This contrasts with only one person saying they felt they were managing well at the start of the project.

Change per person;

1 person reported no change

2 people reported a one point improvement

3 people reported a two point improvement

1 person reported a three point improvement.

### **Qualitative results and outcomes**

Carers were invited to provide comments at the start and end of the project, initially about their expectations from the therapy and at the end what changes the therapy allowed them to make in their lives.

#### **Expectations at the outset**

In general carers quoted similar expectations about what they hoped to gain from reflexology, these centred around having help to manage anxiety and negative thoughts, reduce stress and have time for themselves. One carer hoped reflexology would also help reduce the chronic lower back pain they experience. It was made clear to carers that the primary purpose of the reflexology through this project was for relaxation and mental health wellbeing, so it is not surprising only one person stated hope for a physical health outcome.

#### **Benefits as a result of reflexology**

The changes people felt as a result of the reflexology therapy were all very positive, these comments are provided in full at Appendix 1.

Several carers talked about the benefits of taking time to look after themselves and that this helped them cope better with the responsibilities of being a carer. Others said they felt their mental health had improved and one carer said they thought their physical health condition had been positively affected by the reflexology.

Two of the carers mentioned that they have experienced challenging times during the duration of time coming for reflexology but felt they were able to react in a much more positive way than they would have done previously. In other words they felt their resilience had improved over the course of the project.

#### **Next steps**

Everyone was very appreciative of the opportunity to be part of the project and they were grateful both to me as their reflexologist but also to Breathe and the organisation providing the project. Six of the seven carers said they would like to continue having reflexology. Having received the benefit of an intensive course of therapy they would like to maintain the benefits by attending monthly or bi-monthly. Of course cost will be a factor in whether people do book when they are paying for their own sessions.

It would be interesting to explore whether other complementary therapists involved with the project report similar concerns, and perhaps whether a subsidised rate could be offered to carers who were part of this project to enable them to continue with maintenance of their improved wellbeing.

## **Appendix – Qualitative comments from carers**

### **Project start**

#### **Q3. What are your expectations of this treatment?**

- To release some stress and negative emotions
- To be more patient and not get too stressed
- To feel more relaxed and more capable of dealing with the stresses of being a carer
- Relax : an hour to myself. Hopefully longer term some relief from pelvic pain
- Not sure, just hopeful it will help
- To be able to relax on a more profound level
- To feel relaxed, a bit of me time

### **End of project**

#### **Q4. What changes has this course of therapy made to you as a carer?**

- I feel far more relaxed and able to cope with what has been an extremely stressful period of several months. Reflexology has been so helpful in bringing strategies. Thank you for all you've done.
- Learning to relax more and be more patient I now feel less anxious and am able to cope with the difficulties I have to face as a carer.
- Has given some time for me - time to completely relax and switch off. Is also giving some pain relief to my condition.
- This therapy has reminded me that I need to take some time for myself in order to be able to care effectively. I am so grateful for the opportunity this therapy has given me. I feel renewed. Thanks so much!
- Alongside counselling, attending my weekly support group and pursuing regular exercise reflexology has become a major and significant part of my strategy to alleviate the profound difficulties anxiety and depression present to me. Jane has a magical touch! The act of reflexology itself, the caring attention provided to the body, the feet and their sensitive and integral connection to the rest of the body does tend to instil a caring and affection in oneself. Reflexology promotes confidence, sensitivity, caring for oneself.
- I've really enjoyed the sessions, it's been great to escape for an hour and be looked after.
- I feel better for it and sleep has improved.