

What's Up with Wellness



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The Wellness Initiative

WINTER 2008



from the director

As Deputy Director, I feel as lucky every day when I come to work as I feel each time I find myself on my own mat. I couldn't be more proud to be in this position nor happier to be by Debbie's side in realizing the vision of The Wellness Initiative (TWI).

Having practiced yoga for the past twelve years, I'm just starting to 'get' it. As I weave my yoga practice, my work, and my world into one, I'm beginning to experience the infinite ways in which yoga is a lifestyle. Directing TWI, I find what I believe in, what I do, and what I am working to build all harmoniously resonating.

As more and more schools are requesting our wellness

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Yoga for Learning

When many people hear yoga, they think immediately of its physical benefits. However, through yoga, students also can learn self-awareness, which stabilizes relationships, increases focus, and boosts confidence and motivation.

When asked, these kinds of positive benefits are what our students allude to first. A senior in one of our classes wrote, "I have to be honest, this is the first PE class I've taken that I don't feel self-conscious



about not being able to do it all. Yoga doesn't put that kind of pressure on people. It encourages us to recognize our boundaries and makes us more comfortable with what we CAN do, in ourselves."

In our high-tech world, with the push to achieve and the increasingly serious threat of violence, students are struggling with self-esteem and managing their emotions.

Yoga teaches mindfulness, which is a proven learning-readiness skill.

Studies show both stress-reduction and academic improvement through mindfulness practice.

Body awareness is a gateway to self-awareness, which leads to more self-control, respect for others, and effective problem solving. According to Daniel Goleman PhD, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, self-awareness is the act of recognizing a feeling as it happens and this, he considers, to be the keystone of emotional intelligence.

With a calmer nervous system, students are less quick to anger, less likely to fight, and are more in control of their behavior. By increasing emotional balance, fears and feelings of helplessness dissipate. Self-confidence and attitudes improve. If we can teach kids to find an inner strength to deal with the stresses in their lives, we will build their self-esteem, encourage their imagination, and allow them to release their emotions—all of which will lead to a healthier youth, and hence, a healthier future.

TEACHER PROFILE

Erin Cameron

Ten years ago, while teaching English in Santiago, Chile, Erin Cameron stumbled across a flyer for a yoga expo. The expo, while only a few minutes in length, showcased the different traditions of yoga, during which Cameron became intrigued by Ashtanga. From there she found an instructor to guide her through her beginning practice. Hooked, she decided to travel to India to study. During this time, says Cameron, “my mother kept asking me when I would be returning to ‘real life’. But my teacher in Santiago reminded me: ‘Why leave when you are happy where you are?’”

Several months later, Cameron was summoned back to the U.S. to care for her sick grandfather. While the experience was difficult, Cameron notes, “it was remarkable for me to put into practice some of the tenets of yoga so immediately: selfless service, dispassionate awareness, and paying attention.”

Upon returning to Portland, Cameron received her Master of Arts in Teaching and started teaching yoga to adults and the children in her classrooms. “I love sharing



yoga with children because they are so ‘in’ their bodies; they are also very quick to laugh and find joy in the smallest things. Children have a lightness in their bodies that we adults grow out of.”

Working with The Wellness Initiative has been a perfect fit for Cameron, who is able to integrate her teaching skills and Spanish knowledge into the classroom. In fact, in some of the schools Cameron assists the students in crafting their yoga journals bilingually. Says TWI Deputy Director, Jennifer Wert, “Cameron represents exactly what we’re looking for. She is a seasoned yoga practitioner and teacher, but also has experience working with at-risk youth as well as the Hispanic community. We are so lucky to have her on our team.”

TWI DVD DEBUT!

Creating Balance: Yoga for Teens

Creating Balance: Yoga for Teens is The Wellness Initiative’s very first DVD. The yoga DVD is geared for at-risk sixth to eighth grade students enrolled in Hope Online learning centers in Denver.

By providing a yoga DVD, TWI is able to stream yoga into multiple learning centers, reaching up to 600 mostly Hispanic students who otherwise would not have any sort of movement, breathing or social-emotional learning in their school day. Students will watch the video approximately twelve times over the course of the semester while also using the teaching materials, which include a workbook and evaluation.

The video is focused on balance, chosen because it is the most repeated theme in the YogaEd curriculum for Middle School students, the curriculum that TWI utilizes in delivering classes. With a focus on balance in one’s body as well as in one’s life, and careful attention to the needs of ELL learners, TWI believes the end product is accessible, thoughtful, and fun!

The video is comprised of a five-minute breathing class, a thirty-minute yoga class, a few testimonials, and then a few real yogis doing some

‘hot-shot’ poses to get the kids enthusiastic about yoga in general.

Jen Ross, one of TWI’s very talented teachers, as well as six volunteer yoga students from the New Vista High School program, starred in the video. An anonymous donor funded the project; it was directed by Little Voice Productions and sponsored by Be Present, a local clothing company.



Jen Ross

Over the next year, TWI is hoping to produce more videos for subsequent grade levels and reach even more students receiving an online education.



Black Bean Soup with Chile, Coconut Milk, and Lime Serves 6

From *Vegetable Soups* from Deborah Madison's *Kitchen*, Broadway Books, 2006

- 2 tbs. sunflower seed or olive oil
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 1/2 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. ground chipotle chile or other chile
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro
- 2 15 1/2 oz. cans black beans, preferably organic
- 2 cups water
- 1 can coconut milk
- salt
- juice of 1 to 2 limes, to taste

1. Heat the oil, add the onion, cumin, chile, and cilantro, and cook over medium heat, stirring every so often, for about 5 minutes. Add 1/2 cup water, lower the heat, and continue cooking until the onions are soft, about 12 minutes in all.
2. Pour in the beans plus their liquid, 2 cups water, and the coconut milk. Bring to a boil and simmer for 15 minutes. Puree a cup of the beans and return it to the soup. Or puree all of the beans if you prefer. Season with salt and stir in the lime juice, to taste.

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Schools 2008

- Brown Elementary
- Colfax Elementary
- Colorado Academy
- Columbine Elementary
- Creekside Elementary
- Crestview Elementary
- Fairview High School
- Florence Crittenton School
- Frederick Elementary
- KIPP Sunshine Peak Academy
- Lake Middle School
- New America Schools
- New Vista High School
- Mesa Elementary
- Peak to Peak Charter School
- University Hill Elementary

Fuel Your Studies

Finding it hard to eat a healthy breakfast or pack a good lunch when you're rushing out the door in the morning? Unfortunately, skipping meals makes it more likely that the A you would have earned on your physics exam might turn into a B (or worse!). You need energy to study and learn, so be sure to add energy-inducing foods to your meals every day. Here are some tips from Elizabeth Somer, R.D., author of *Food & Mood*:

- Breakfast eaters have more energy, think more clearly during the day, and are less tempted by the vending machine. A healthy morning meal is as easy as 1,2,3—that is: 1. a whole grain, 2. a fruit, and 3. a protein.
- You wouldn't expect your car to run forever without stopping to refuel. Your body needs the same frequent fuel stops, too. Healthy carbs mid-day supply fuel for your brain and muscles, while protein keeps you feeling full through the afternoon. You also need a fruit or vegetable (remember, you've got to get at least 5 a day!).
- Craving something salty mid-day? Dunk baby carrots in Ranch dressing, chug a can of V8 juice, or dip baked tortilla chips in salsa. Got a sweet tooth? Dip strawberries or orange slices in chocolate syrup or have a cup of sugar-free, low-fat hot cocoa. Need to refuel after sports? Grab a granola bar and a banana.



from the director (continued from Page 1)

classes, I'm regularly reviewing our diverse resources and potential district alignment. Nurturing these relationships is about balance and timing and we hope to one day be able to serve all schools who show interest. As I continue to hire more teachers from all different backgrounds to represent TWI, I am consistently humbled and touched by their commitment.

When I observe our classes and experience first-hand students of all ages and backgrounds practicing respect and awareness, I find myself inspired. By making decisions that reflect TWI's mission while expanding upon it as we continue to learn, I too am learning. As I work to thoughtfully integrate cultures, curriculum, and wellness, I'm offered the chance to practice.

In this position, I embrace the opportunity I have to practice yoga, both on my mat and off—really, to practice yoga as a way of life. It's been said that yoga is a practical method for making one's life purposeful, useful, and noble. In this spirit, I'm thrilled to be on board.

Jammit

DONOR PROFILE

Denver Public Health

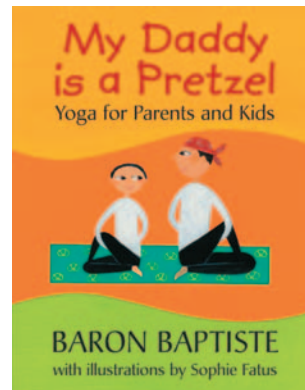
Denver Public Health (DPH) has quite a mission: to promote, improve, and protect Denver's health through disease prevention and health promotion activities. In conjunction with this mission, in the fall of 2005, they decided to partner with The Wellness Initiative, enabling TWI to reach more students in West Denver Schools while simultaneously achieving DPH's higher goal of improving Denver's health.

Says Jennifer Wiczorek, DPH health program administrator, "Denver Public Schools often face competing demands between adequate physical activity and academics. The TWI program is able to address both the deficit in physical activity as well as 'improve focus, concentration, creativity, responsible behavior, and academic achievement.'" (Yoga Ed. 2004, Tools for Teachers Handbook)

Through various grants, DPH has enabled TWI to bring programs to a wide array of youth in the Denver Metro area, specifically focusing on six neighborhoods in West Denver. The program, which focuses on the goal of increasing both the physical activity as well as the nutrition awareness of the community has been quite a success. In fact, adds Wiczorek, "many Denver Public Schools in West Denver have now initiated 'Wellness Teams,' which complement the mission of TWI, promote healthy changes within schools, and support the sustainability of such programs as The Wellness Initiative." For more information on DPH, visit www.dhha.org



BOOK REVIEW



My Daddy is a Pretzel

Barefoot Books
By Baron Baptiste

Baron Baptiste grew up with yoga: his parents opened the first yoga center in San Francisco in 1955. More than fifty years later, Baptiste has three yoga studios and three sons of his own. He also has published a number of books on yoga, including the charming *My Daddy is a Pretzel: Yoga for Parents and Kids*.

In this colorful children's book, Baptiste introduces kids and their parents to basic yoga postures and philosophy. "Today in class," a teacher says, "we're going to say what jobs our parents do each day." Baptiste goes on to compare each parents' vocation with a yoga posture: "Chang says his mom's an architect," Baptiste writes. "Sometimes, my daddy's a triangle." Baptiste then reveals an illustration of the triangle pose with step-by-step instructions for the reader.

The book is fun to read, the yoga postures are well described, and even little ones will jump up to fly like an airplane and balance like a tree.

—Ashley Simpson Shires

Get in Touch!

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