



The Wellness Initiative

Change on the Horizon

a note from the new Executive Director, Mara Rose

As autumn descends on the Rocky Mountains and the changing of the seasons is palpable, big changes are also underway at The Wellness Initiative (TWI). In early September, I embarked on an exciting journey as the new Executive Director of TWI. I am honored to be part of an organization that works to improve the lives of students in Colorado through yoga and wellness instruction and I am motivated by the organization's enormous potential.

I have a professional background that is deeply rooted in education—inside and outside of the classroom. I have created school-based gardens in San Francisco, run a community technology center in Harlem, managed an after school and summer program for low-income students in New Orleans, and helped build hundreds of new small schools and charter schools in New York City.

I believe that yoga has enormous potential to motivate, inspire, and connect students of all ages and I look forward to bringing my long-held commitment to education to my work with TWI.

I am dedicated to ensuring that each and every student we reach is impacted in a meaningful and lasting way. The recurring themes I see as I meet with the dedicated teachers and generous supporters of TWI are “impact” and “sustainability.”

Why impact? TWI has undertaken a year-long evaluation that will give us very tangible, quantifiable information about how yoga impacts the lives of our students. This information will help us know beyond the powerful, but anecdotal, information we get every week, how we are changing the lives of



the students we reach. The more we understand how to maximize our impact, the better able we will be to

plan programs that change lives.

Why sustainability? I want to be sure that even during this time of economic difficulty, we are able to continue TWI's important work. We must grow the organization carefully, building long-lasting relationships, and getting creative about how to fund the programs we offer. TWI is lucky to have tremendous support from generous individuals and foundations, but the more we are able to prove that we have a meaningful and lasting impact, the more sustainable we will become.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to Debbie Huttner, the founder and previous Executive Director of TWI, for the wonderful foundation she laid. I look forward to working with all of you to build upon that strong foundation.

TEACHER PROFILE

Amy McMaster

The first time Amy McMaster tried to take a meditation class during college, the facilitator advised her to “start with yoga instead.” The facilitator was pointing out what McMaster would later learn: that her mind wouldn’t quiet until her body learned to rest.

After moving to Boulder in 1998, McMaster embarked on her own yoga journey, looking to heal and find more meaning in life. When she and her husband moved to Los Angeles in 2003, McMaster, a high school science teacher, dived deeper into her yoga practice. Two years later, armed with a strong practice and a desire to work with teens on a deeper level, she began to teach yoga in a local charter school. “I feel that adolescence is such a sensitive, critical time of exploration,” she shares. “With a tough past of my own, I feel that I can connect with and share something positive with my students, inspiring their own self-exploration and reflection.”

In 2006, McMaster returned to Colorado, and welcomed her son, Santiago, into the world. When she connected with

TWI in 2007, she felt she had found her perfect fit, especially once she began teaching classes at Florence Crittenton High School—classes for pregnant teens and adolescent moms.

“I absolutely loved my own prenatal teacher and experience. [Prenatal yoga] provides a source of community, women’s wisdom, and personal power that can serve women on their journey to motherhood and beyond.”

Teaching these young women is both challenging and rewarding for McMaster, but says that ultimately, “It is so powerful to witness when a student can feel in her body a mood shift from negative to positive and can share her awareness of that shift. Seeing their happy faces, glowing eyes, and energized bodies is pure happiness for me.”



BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Leslie Kimerling

Leslie Kimerling’s passion for wellness is evident by the numerous activities she enjoys, including yoga, Pilates, squash, and adventure travel. But it’s her expertise in management combined with her passion for wellness that has led her to create such diverse programs as StreetSquash in New York City—an after-school enrichment program that blends tutoring with squash instruction and community service, as well as retreat/workshops for cancer survivors. As the founder of Isis Partners, an advisory firm that specializes in the health and wellness markets, Kimerling has had the opportunity to create an even larger impact on public health. So, it really comes as no surprise that after meeting TWI founder, Debbie Huttner, Kimerling made a commitment to serve on the TWI board.

Says Kimerling, “I had seen and experienced

the power of practicing yoga on kids through my work with StreetSquash and on adults through my work with cancer survivors. I believe that bringing physical exercise to kids is essential to their health and to helping them focus their energy to be more effective in the classroom. Yoga offers an additional mindful dimension that can be quite powerful.” As TWI has grown, expanding its programs throughout the Denver area, Kimerling is further encouraged. “TWI is reaching out to kids who currently do not have or have limited access to organized physical activities. TWI is equipped to work with kids of all ages—from elementary school to teenage moms-to-be—on a sustained and impactful level.”

Ultimately, Kimerling sees TWI as a role model, hoping to see the program go national and help serve other communities.



TWI KIDS!

How has Yoga Helped or Changed You?

In their own words – Quotes from TWI students, ranging from the first to twelfth grade

Yoga has made me a stronger person by believing in myself more. It made me feel more confident.

Yoga has helped me in numerous ways. One big way is the breathing. It helps me control my anger.

It makes me feel relaxed. I feel like I am in a peaceful world. I feel calm inside of my body. I sometimes do yoga at home with my mom to help her relax.

Yoga has changed me as a person. The relaxation it brings and the comfort it brings from just breathing is a life changing experience.

Yoga helped me a lot. It helped me lose weight and helps me with my focus. I could do a lot of poses I didn't even know I could do. Every day after yoga I feel really relaxed and with more energy.

Yoga is really a good way to just let everything go and focus on the good, or even bad, and work it out in your head. When I'm feeling bad I just do yoga and it really helps.

Yoga has made me feel better about myself, to participate in things, and to be more respectful to everybody that is different from me.

After my second quarter of taking yoga I can really tell that it is going to continue being in my life later on and even now. Coming from the perspective of someone who does a lot of physical activity, yoga really puts me in a different place.

Now, I put my foot on the other one and balance while I brush my teeth.

When I do yoga I feel happy like when I go home.

CHILD'S POSE

Notes and Musings from TWI students

I have a 1½-year-old son and I do a lot of activities with him. Before yoga, I never had balance and [now] I keep my balance with warrior pose. My favorite yoga pose is Warrior.

Yoga has affected my life in good ways! I am more calm, relaxed, and happy with my mind and soul. I've learned how to use my breath, body, and mind to be happy. I am able to use yoga outside school. When I am angry, I can take time in—some time for myself.

— Crystal Caudela,
pictured with her son, Julio
student at Florence Crittenton, Denver



Tools for Teachers Program Expands

Through TWI's Tools for Teachers program, which is based on the curriculum developed by Yoga Ed., classroom teachers are taught basic breathing exercises, yoga poses (that require no equipment or extra space), simple movement games, and visualizations to help improve and enhance student learning and behavior. These workshops help fulfill TWI's mission to help improve the physical, mental, and emotional health of children and young adults by giving classroom teachers the tools they need to not only bring more balance and focus to their classrooms, but also to their own lives.

Says TWI teacher, Allyson Levine, who leads many of the Tools for Teachers workshops, "Through these trainings, teachers become more aware and in tune with their own breath, body, and the connection between the two."

As research has shown, yoga in the classroom increases physical fitness, boosts self-image, and increases academic performance, communication skills, and attention spans of the students. By giving teachers their own toolbox of yoga tools, students will have more opportunities to utilize these techniques, and further enhance their understanding of mind/body awareness. Adds Levine, "[Tools for Teachers] offers them simple ways to impact the energy of the classroom."

Thanks to a generous grant from Denver Public Health, three more Tools for Teachers workshops are currently scheduled for high-need West Denver schools with more planned in 2009. Interested in bringing Tools for Teachers to your school? Contact Mara Rose at mara@wellnessinitiative.org



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TWI NEWS

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A Note from the Founder:

The vision of bringing yoga to children—especially those who are high risk and under-served—has been at the heart of the TWI mission from its inception almost three years ago. The organization has grown exponentially thanks to the hard work and support of so many people. What began simply in 2006 with Gila Steinbock (founding board chair) and me teaching ten after school kids has grown to reach more than 500 students each year in Boulder County and Denver, as well as many teachers and administrators. Thanks in large part to the efforts of TWI, yoga as a tool to improve the lives of children has become accepted by districts, foundations, and education experts.

At the same time, I find myself in the wonderful, yet demanding, position of having two young babies and the true desire to practice the yoga of parenting. I am thrilled to have our new Executive Director, Mara Rose, lead TWI into the next chapter of its life-cycle. I'm excited to serve on the Board and offer my vision and assistance going forward. Being a parent now, I am even more convinced that the lessons of emotional intelligence are invaluable to our children's future.

There are too many people for me to thank by name in this small space. However, I need to extend a special appreciation to Melissa Williams and Jennifer Wert who each respectively led TWI during my two maternity leaves. They guided TWI through critical junctures in its growth and allowed me the comfort of knowing my professional baby was being well cared for. Thanks to their efforts and those of so many others, the seed of yoga has been planted in many schools and is now rooted in the hearts of those children we have served. I am certain that the vision of having yoga as a healing and balancing part of children's lives will continue to grow.

*In the spirit of yoga and with deep gratitude,
Debbie Huttner (TWI Board Member)*

ABOUT THE WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Students of all ages suffer from increasingly stressful lives and they often lack the opportunities and tools to relax, reflect, strengthen, and focus. This reality negatively impacts their self confidence, relationships with others, physical health, and academic performance.

In response to this persistent and growing problem, The Wellness Initiative was founded in 2006 to deliver secular wellness programs to elementary, middle, and high school students through public schools in Colorado. We bring yoga and stress reduction programs into Colorado's public schools to improve the physical, mental, and emotional health of children and young adults. We also offer trainings to help classroom teachers integrate simple yoga techniques and exercises into their classrooms.

We have worked in more than 20 schools since 2006 and served more than 1,500 students.

