



NIROGA® NEWS

A newsletter for integral health and development

Niroga® Institute is a non-profit Center for Integral Health, dedicated to providing affordable, high quality Yoga instruction and Yoga therapy to hundreds of at-risk and underserved individuals and families. Niroga's supporters are making a world of difference by funding programs that improve, enhance and enrich our communities.



Participants at the Forum

Niroga Convenes Youth Development Forum

Over a hundred people gathered at an Oakland Church on May 10 to discuss what we can do about losing our children to crime and violence, guns and gangs, drugs and death. Experts in criminal justice, public and behavioral health, education and social justice spoke eloquently about the challenges we face and how Transformative Life Skills (TLS), a multi-modality intervention including yoga, breathing techniques and meditation, can complement, enhance and enable our efforts in effecting systemic change, with the potential for a profound impact on generational transformation. Thought leaders and key influencers, including school teachers, health care personnel, social workers and juvenile hall staff, participated animatedly in the discussions and left informed and inspired.



Discussion

Lynette Lee, Professor of Criminal Justice at Sacramento State University, was one of the panelists, and wrote after the event, "Thank you for the opportunity to make a small contribution to such a grand ideal. The energy gathering around this noble cause is quite apparent ... Keep taking care of so much and so many." One of the attendees, Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, was there during a brief experiential taste of Transformative Life Skills and she said, "I felt what it did for me! We need these programs for our children and families in Richmond!"

Launching Life Corps

El Cerrito High School will see the launch of Niroga's Life Corps program this Fall. Extracting the essence of Transformative Life Skills, Niroga teachers will bring 15-minute interventions right into the classroom. We will be in 10 classrooms twice a week. Five of the classrooms will be with the lowest-performing students, helping them with self-control and self-esteem. The other five classrooms will be with the highest-performing students in AP classes, with a focus on stress management and self-awareness. Seed funding for this program is being provided by Full Circle Fund and Passport Foundation.

Principal Jason Reimann expressed great enthusiasm for the program and Jennifer Rader, Director of the Health Center, said, "This should get our students ready to learn; it will strengthen their focus, increase their capacity to cope with stress and anger, and help them to engage successfully with their academic work." All school teachers and administrative staff will be trained in Transformative Life Skills so that they are empowered to sustain and disseminate these practices throughout their school.

Director's Corner

We teach them how to breathe!

Matin Abdel-Qawi, Principal, East Oakland School of the Arts, sent out a plea, "... I am experiencing extreme difficulties with reaching a significant portion of our student body ... the young brothers I am referring to have so consistently disrupted the teaching and learning that in many cases the only way the teaching and learning can continue is when they are removed from the class. Each time I remove one of these young brothers from a class, I am moving him one step closer to becoming a high school drop-out or put differently, a slave of the prison industrial complex..."

Over a hundred community members gathered at the school one Thursday evening in response to Matin's plea. During break-outs, I went with the group that wanted to discuss solutions for the highest-risk youth. Several brought up the need for academic mentoring, individually or in small groups. Some talked about job skills training. Yet others talked about inculcating awareness of their cultural heritage. When asked what we could do, I said, "We can teach them how to breathe." As I noticed a few raised eyebrows and rolled eyeballs, I continued, "As these kids learn how to breathe they learn to calm down, they learn to let go some of their stress and anger, they learn to focus and to engage. Everything that has been proposed will not be effective if these essential tools haven't been taught; and yet, if these life skills have been learned, whatever we are trying to teach them will be done a little more effectively and efficiently."

With 52% of Oakland high school students dropping out, a Harvard University study calls Oakland a 'dropout factory,' estimating the societal cost at \$14 billion/year for each annual cohort of drop-outs, after factoring in lost wages, crime and jail time. Even as these challenges feel overwhelming, let us remember the substantial return on investment of such a deceptively simple intervention as our TLS practices and explore opportunities for wider dissemination.

Bidyut (BK) Bose



Integral Health Fellows

Serving Two New Schools

Thousand Oaks Elementary is a beautiful, tree-lined campus on the corner of Colusa and Solano in Berkeley. The student body is quite diverse, and the yoga class consists of 10 boys and girls, grades K to 2. On the first day, as they were led to their mats, it was a joy to see smiling faces eager and willing to learn. With lots of play, yoga games and fun breathing exercises, these youngsters are taking little steps towards mindful attention at quite an early age.



Fun Yoga

Oakland High's vibrant colorful mural painted across the front wall welcomes all to the campus. Just below the basketball courts lies the Health Center where the youth in Jennifer Lacey's class come down for Yoga class Tuesday and Thursday mornings for an hour. Mostly 11th graders, these students are dealing with addiction, truancy, behavior problems and lack of focus. We kicked off the program the first week of April. Although it took a while for the students to settle down, by the end of the session they were totally relaxed, probably the most relaxed they have felt in their lives. Afterwards one of the youths said, "Wow, I actually saw the chaos in my mind get quiet."

Building A Solid Base

Early this year Niroga moved into an office located in a church in Oakland. Niroga has also hired a new office manager, Cynthia Carpathios. She has worked with nonprofits for over a decade. She brings significant skills and experience as an administrator, manager and community organizer, as well as a deep interest and many years of practice in yoga and meditation.

The creation of a central location for Niroga's work and the hiring of a full-time office manager are little landmarks in Niroga's development as an organization. It puts us in a position to increase the scope of our work and supports us in our vision of reaching an entire generation of children with yoga.



Cynthia in Niroga Office

Niroga in Juvenile Hall

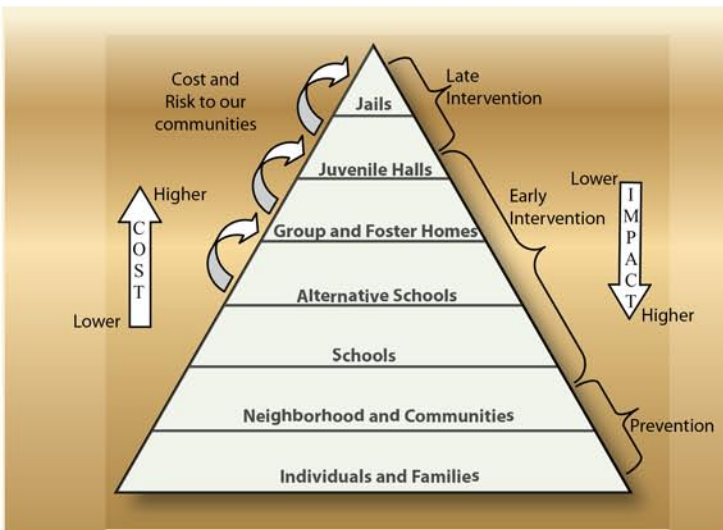
Two-year Anniversary

Niroga's daily Yoga Program at Alameda County's Juvenile Hall has been a huge success and has generated a great deal of media interest. After releasing our annual report detailing a significant increase in self-control and a decrease in stress among the incarcerated youth, the model is being recognized for its effectiveness. An article ran on the front page of the Metro Section in the Oakland Tribune on February 28th, 2008 featuring Niroga's program in Unit Six. The students welcomed and cooperated with the reporters and gave heartfelt replies when asked what effect yoga has had on their lives. There is no greater joy for Niroga as an organization then to see the transformative power of yoga reflected in our students. Not only did the youth praise the Niroga program, but many expressed an interest in continuing their study of yoga to eventually become instructors!

We are in our tenth month since expanding the program to a second unit in Juvenile Hall. The response from youth and Mental Health staff in Unit Three has been enthusiastic. One girl in Unit Three said, while in Dancer Pose, "I feel like Lady Liberty." Remarkd one male youth at the end of his first session, "When I came in here, I was all stressed out about court. Now I am just ready, like I was able to get rid of some of that stress or something." Describing yoga to a newcomer, one youth articulated, "This stuff will blow your mind!"

Transformational Pyramid

Several thought leaders have come together with Niroga to hone a vision and plan for the execution of an architecture for lasting change in vulnerable youth. The team has come up with a pyramid, illustrating the potential stages for Transformative Life Skills prevention and intervention.



Notice that as youth become more of a risk to society, their numbers become fewer while the cost to society becomes greater. Prevention programs, such as Transformative Life Skills, are essential at the lower levels, with early intervention programs needed in the middle and late intervention towards the top of the pyramid. Note that there is progressively higher social return on investment (SROI), heading down towards the base of the pyramid, over a thousand-fold! Significant program impact is enabled as we are able to smash the links between alternative schools, group homes, juvenile halls and jails, ultimately between juvenile delinquency and adult criminality.

Niroga Yoga

Vertical Trunk Twist

Simple spinal movements such as vertical trunk twisting can help with back pain, stress and fatigue. This twisting action helps lubricate the disks in between your vertebrae, helping your spine to stay supple. Practiced every morning for just a couple of minutes and then again in the afternoon, can make a huge difference to your body, mind and spirit.



Vertical Trunk Twist

Stand relaxed with a neutral spine, feet shoulder-width apart and feel the ground beneath your feet firmly supporting you. Now, gently place your hands behind your head, keeping your elbows back and your chest open. Start with gentle twists to each side, slowly and with ease, preserving a vertical axis. Gently nudge yourself to the edge of your range of motion without strain in your lower back or neck. As you loosen up a bit, begin to move to the rhythm of your own breathing, exhaling as you twist to each side. Gradually, you can add a little more momentum, with each twist going a little further. Try to follow your gaze, keeping your eyes soft and steady. After about 12 repetitions on each side, begin to slow down the movement and then relax your arms by your side. Standing tall and relaxed, close your eyes and listen to your breath.

Letters to the Editor

I am so excited about what Niroga is doing. I believe this work is extremely important, and I want to help in whatever way possible. I truly hope that I can see the transformative effects of your work in this very lifetime.

Jane Binder

Please let me know what I might do to facilitate working with any of the youth programs Niroga is working on. I was a high school teacher for almost 20 years in San Leandro and I feel very strongly that yoga and meditation could be a very positive influence in the lives of our students. I am willing to participate voluntarily in any way that could be helpful to your efforts.

Kay Kidder

I enjoyed our meetings. I am doing some voluntary work with the Youth Emergency Assistance Hostel in Berkeley and have suggested that they contact you. I hope that will happen before long. ... I continue to admire the work you do and as I learn more about meditation and other spiritual practices, the relevance to recovery and resilience becomes clearer to me.

Prof Bart Grossman
School of Social Welfare, UC Berkeley

I have taken a few of your yoga classes and respect the work you are doing so deeply. I am a lawyer, but my dream is to follow a path consistent with the work Niroga is doing. I have done lots of volunteer work with kids, and have seen the power of yoga in helping at-risk youth. What can I do to further the efforts of Niroga and become involved in the organization? I would love to discuss my dreams with you. Thank you, and Namaste,

Eric Hill

YES! I want to help Niroga provide integral development programs to underserved communities

Enclosed is my gift:

- I pledge \$_____ per year for _____ years
- \$100 (gives 30 at-risk youth increased self-control and self-esteem)
- \$250 (allows our Healing Yoga DVD to be donated to 15 cancer survivors)
- \$500 (helps Niroga forge new partnerships for community outreach)
- \$___ Use your imagination!

Event Calendar

- Presentation of Transformative Life Skills during training of 180 Probation Officers. Requested by Deborah Swanson, Deputy Chief of Juvenile Services, Alameda County Probation Department
- Presentation of Transformative Life Skills at monthly Education Series talks at Juvenile Justice Center this Fall. Requested by Gail Brewster Bereola, Presiding Judge of Juvenile Court, Superior Court of California, Alameda County
- Presentation of Healing Yoga, Healing Journeys Conference, Sacramento, Sept 14. Expected attendance of over 1,000 cancer survivors
- Niroga Yoga Teacher Training Course. Nine month certified course on the study, practice and philosophy of Raja Yoga. Begins Sept 20. Check Event Schedule on our website

We Need Your Help!

Sponsor a young African American adult to become a Certified Yoga Teacher. Each year 16 students will be trained in a 2-year course. Niroga collaborated with Bay Area Black United Fund (BABUF) for funding the first group of 16 with help from Alameda County Department of Public Health. Now we need funding for the second group of 16 to start this Fall.

For \$3000 you can sponsor a yoga teacher-in-training to learn job skills that will bring Transformative Life Skills to thousands. Sponsored teachers will keep the sponsor informed of their teaching activities and experiences in transforming the lives they touch.

Donation Method: VISA MC CHECK

CARD NUMBER

EXP. DATE

CARDHOLDER'S NAME

ZIP CODE

SIGNATURE

E-MAIL

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- Please contact me about paying with stock, or my company matching my gift

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