

## **Effects of a Healing Yoga Protocol on Stress Resilience in Incarcerated Youth**

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### **Objective**

Alameda County has one of the highest rates of incarcerated youth in the US. As part of a county-wide violence-prevention blueprint, Niroga Institute began a year-long Yoga program at Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center in June, 2006. A Healing Yoga Protocol was designed to:

- improve general health
- reduce stress, anxiety and depression
- increase self-control, self-esteem and self-awareness

The hour-long program is being administered to 20 youth (12 boys and 8 girls) in the B2 Unit, 5 days a week. Additionally, Juvenile Hall staff is offered a Yoga class twice a week. The nature and magnitude of this intervention makes this program unique nationally, and several neighboring Probation Departments are awaiting program results.

### **Methods**

We are using two psychometric tools for evaluation: PSS10 (10-point Perceived Stress Scale) and Niroga's IHS30 (30-point Integral Health Scale). Staff administers IHS30 and PSS10 to each youth entering and leaving B2. Additionally, all youth complete a qualitative program evaluation.

### **Results**

Within only 3 months into the year-long program, statistically significant decline in stress and perceived stress was evidenced in PSS10 scores, and improvement was noted in general health and self-awareness as evidenced in IHS30 scores. Additional insights into program effectiveness were gained from the program evaluations. Yahru Baruti, Senior Psychiatric Social Worker and a 19-year veteran of the Juvenile Hall said, "I'm noticing so many opportunities to redirect kids by having them come back to their breath. If more staff use this, it will be better for all of us." When asked what they had learned from the Yoga program, incarcerated youth said:

- "I've learned to go to Yoga instead of flashing on people."
- "To get in contact with your inner self, and take one step at a time."
- "I learned a lot from it – whenever I get mad, just start breathing; and I actually like Yoga!"

### **Conclusions**

Quantitative and qualitative results for B2 Unit are extremely encouraging to date, with measurable improvement in stress-resilience for youth exposed to the Niroga Healing Yoga Protocol. For further research:

- Compare results in B2 Unit with results from other Units of this Juvenile Hall, if this program is pervasively applied institutionally; see if the results correlate with similar interventions in Juvenile Halls in other counties in California, as well as nationally and internationally.
- Investigate the effects of this program as reflected in recidivism rates and juvenile justice statistics on crime and violence, as long as there is follow-up and continued exposure (within and outside detention) to this and other programs that teach life skills and facilitate self-transformation.

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