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Transforming Lives and Healing Communities

Evaluation of Yoga Program at San Jose Job Corps

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Executive Summary

Niroga Institute conducted an hour-long program of yoga, breathing techniques and mindfulness, once weekly at San Jose Job Corps for the past several months, and recently the program was expanded to twice per week. Single-session cognitive shift was evaluated from two sessions in October and December, using self-reported data from participating youth. The quantitative and qualitative feedback indicates that the yoga program has been well received by participating young people, whether younger or older, male or female. Reported program benefits after a single session include reduction of stress and anxiety, and an enhancement of self-esteem. These preliminary results are encouraging indicators of improved health and well-being.

Summary of Findings

Five measures were used to assess changes in participating youth and young adults: Stress (I feel relaxed), Anxiety (I feel calm), Self-esteem (I feel strong), Depression (I feel happy) and Secure Attachment (I feel safe). Each measure had three possible values: (1) No, not at all; (2) A little bit; (3) Yes, a lot. Participants indicated values for the five measures before and after an hour-long yoga session, and they could also draw or write how they felt about the yoga session that day.

Quantitative feedback: pre-post data on 5 measures, taken on two days: 10.28.10 and 12.9.10
[Total number of respondents = 39; 16 females and 23 males; age range 17-25 years]

- **Cognitive Shift:** 37 of 39 participants (95%) reported improvement (positive cognitive shift) in at least one measure after a single yoga session. The two females (or the same one twice?) who reported negative cognitive shift said that they found the session enjoyable but challenging because they were out of shape, and that they felt that doing yoga regularly would be beneficial. 34 of 39 youth (87%) reported improvement in at least two measures. One third of the young people (33%) reported a substantial improvement (two values, not at all => a lot) in at least one measure. The average total reported improvement was 3.1, averaging 0.8 (not at all => a little, or a little => a lot) in each of three measures: stress, anxiety and self-esteem. There was a ceiling effect for depression and especially for secure attachment, both measures generally starting out very positive and remaining very positive.
- **Effects of Gender:** Females reported a greater reduction in stress, while males reported a greater reduction in anxiety and a higher increase in self-esteem. Average improvement in depression was small but comparable, and for secure attachment a small but perceptibly larger improvement was detected in males.
- **Effects of Age:** We looked at the age effects by separating the young people into two age groups: (Y) Younger: 20 and under, and (O) Older: 21 and over. While 100% of Y reported improvement in at least two measures or by two values, that number for O was 69%. The average reported improvement was almost twice as much for the youth (3.9) compared to the young adults (1.9), and was consistently higher in each of the five measures.



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Qualitative Feedback: written comments from participants

October 28, 2010

- It was good; I always enjoy the stretches. Thanks!!
- It made me feel more clear minded. Thank you! I love it. ☺
- I like the session, but my body is in more pain than before because I am out of shape. I have weak knees. With more practice the easier it will become.
- Fun, something new. I like it a lot. ☺
- I was still a little sick so it was a little harder to concentrate and give my full attention. I do feel it helped me relax a little more and I tried not to think about being sick. If I came and tried yoga again to master the moves, I feel like it would help me relieve stress in my life. I really enjoyed it. Thank you.
- I feel more relaxed and also more alert. Wish there was more ‘dessert’ (final relaxation) time!
- Very nice. Session was super! Thank you ☺
- Was a good session; I feel good. It was great. I really enjoyed it. Thank you ☺
- Today’s yoga session was outstanding. I am yoga!

December 9, 2010 [note: two students engaged in a verbal altercation towards the end of class]

- It was pretty cool for my first time. I enjoyed it. The teacher was very descriptive about the moves she was telling us to do.
- My yoga session was good, fun and exciting; made me work muscles I haven’t worked out in a while. Love it.
- Yoga today was good. It had me well relaxed and calm. Yoga was awesome!
- It could have been better today. However, it wasn’t really anybody else’s fault other than those who were causing trouble. Overall, I enjoy yoga class twice a week. Thank you.
- It was good. I really like the yoga class.
- Yoga was great, despite some students feeling the need to act out. ☺
- It was a distracting class today, but I still enjoyed it.
- Yoga was great. Thank you.
- Eventful and hard. ☺
- It was good but some people were not taking it seriously.
- I wish my knees were stronger. Then this wouldn’t be so hard.
- It was fantastic. I feel so much more relax[ed] and happy. ☺

Suggestions for Follow-up

Evaluation of sustained program effects requires sufficient program dosage; at least 15 hour-long sessions for each participant is recommended, e.g. thrice weekly for a 5-week module. Valid psychometric youth resilience measures would be selected and administered at the beginning and end of the 5-week module, and again for a 3-month follow-up. Students would be encouraged to develop a regular personal yoga practice using the Yoga for Youth DVD: *Do Yoga, Do You!*

Feedback from staff would also be regularly collected to document behavioral changes among participants. If all new young people coming into San Jose Job Corps would go through this 5-week module, we could assess systemic shifts in the Center learning environment, as well as participant health, behavior, academic success and retention/graduation rate. Independent evaluation of program efficacy could establish a model for Job Corps that could be replicated nationally.