

Changing how people feel – in just 90 minutes

By Louise Rachlis

At opposite ends of the country, Alison Finney, 42, and her mother, Josephine, 69, unbeknownst to each other, began practising yoga at the same time.

Speaking on the phone one night, Alison told her mother, "guess what I did this week?" "Guess what I did this week?" replied her mother.

Now, 11 years later, they are both still heavily into yoga.

Alison is owner and director of PranaShanti Yoga Centre on Armstrong Street, and her mother takes classes and helps her with the business – doing reception work and fulfilling the "glorious title of retail manager."

Starting yoga in Victoria, B.C., Josephine moved to Ottawa in 2003. Alison had just graduated from a yoga teacher training program, and her mother joined her classes.

"Osteoporosis" is what drove Josephine to yoga in the first place. "Yoga seemed a natural thing. It has kept it at bay, and it keeps you nice and flexible," she says. "When you know it works for you, it's easy to explain it to others."

"We're both on the same wave length when it comes to the business," says Alison, also known by her spiritual name in the Kundalini tradition, Devinder Kaur. She is a certified Hatha and Kundalini Yoga Teacher, a registered member of Yoga Alliance, IKYTA and a KRI Professional Kundalini Yoga Teacher Trainer.

She dresses in the Kundalini yoga tradition of light colours to help you feel "lighter and brighter." For teaching Kundalini, it's recommended that the teacher's head is always covered.

She wears her dark brown hair up, to cover the crown of



Alison Finney and her mother, Josephine, practise yoga at PranaShanti Yoga Centre on Armstrong Street.

Feel Good

the head. "The turban is cotton underneath, wrapped with silk. The idea is to use a natural fibre to cover your head ... It's a reminder to be uplifting, a reminder to have compassion, a reminder of what you're going to bring to your teaching."

She began her yoga journey by taking a Friday night "yoga

basics" class after work. "Like many people, I was stressed out at my job and had sore wrists from being on the computer too long. I'd walked past a yoga poster on a lamp post for months, before I finally decided to heed its message and went to the class."

After just a few classes, she found herself feeling better all week, and "generally happier." "I became more aware of how I

was feeling, and I just wasn't feeling the best I could feel."

Meditation helped her, and she changed her diet as well. "Yoga and meditation make you more aware of what you put in your body. I noticed I was sleeping better at night, and I was a calmer, more relaxed person overall."

She signed up for teacher training, with no intention of teaching, just to broaden her

knowledge. Half way through the program, her father passed away, and she found herself grateful for the techniques to handle change.

She was asked several times to teach a couple of classes, and finally, she reluctantly agreed. "And then, I absolutely loved it! It was 'wow, in 90 minutes you can really change how people feel.'"

She expanded her teaching, enrolled in more training, and started a PranaShanti (Prana means breath, Shanti means peace) newsletter. Her classes grew, and she was teaching in many locations.

They finally found the perfect location, a warehouse which they renovated with their own look, "a friendly but serene and peaceful place to come, where you can meet other people."

PranaShanti Yoga Centre has around 30 teachers, two teacher training programs, and more than 70 yoga classes and specialty workshops each week. "It brings it full circle," says Alison.

Many of her participants are breast cancer survivors. One man who is blind comes with his guide dog.

"You totally take a class at your own pace, you sit and breathe or you lie down if you're tired. It's not competitive at all."

If you're already fit, yoga complements the activities you already do, she says. "If you're not physically active, everything can be done with supporting props. "It's accessible for everybody."

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The Men's Project helps men and their families build better lives

By Louise Rachlis

The Men's Project's "fathering program" is a unique Ottawa program.

"It's a therapy-style program that allows men to provide their children with greater emotional attachment in all aspects of their lives," explains Rick Goodwin of The Men's Project. "From discipline to play, clients learn to become better dads. It focuses on the theme that 'all fathers are sons,' and explores models of fathering that the men have experienced – and it will work for men who have experienced an absent father, or possibly an abusive one."

The fathering program is offered by the agency without an outside funding source, and they don't turn down any man from attending due to financial circumstance.

The Men's Project is a non-profit charitable men's counselling agency that has been providing services to men and their families since 1997.

"Our community needs a place for men to turn to for counselling and support," says Goodwin, "and The Men's Project offers this in a myriad of ways. Many of our donors want to give



Rick Goodwin, The Men's Project

Charitable Corner

back to the community as an appreciation for the help they've received. They want to pay it forward to other men in the community."

The Men's Project provides individual and couple counselling, as well as a specialized healing program for men who have experienced sexual or physical abuse as children, anger management, emotional intelligence and fathering.

Services are specifically designed for men and professional-

ly facilitated by accredited psychotherapists. Individual programs are tailored to specifically meet men's needs in a way that speaks to men.

All programs are open to straight, gay and bisexual men.

The creation of the Men's Project was led by its two founders, Larry Gauthier, MSW, and Rick Goodwin, MSW, MSW, and the National Capital Region YMCA-YWCA.

Goodwin received two awards on behalf of the agency in 2007; the inaugural Attorney General's Victim Services Awards of Distinction (for innovative service programming) and the Canadian Mental Health Association's Mental Health Award.

TMP was founded to address the existing gaps in community-based counselling resources for men, which were confirmed in a needs assessment that was conducted.

Christy Green of the YMCA-YWCA played a critical role in the initial formation of this partnership.

A major expansion and renovation of the agency's offices was completed in 2007.

The Cornwall Public Inquiry granted research monies for a handbook on service delivery for

male survivors, an investigation into safe peer support services for survivors, a concept paper on an ombudsman for victims of sexual violence, and funding for five training workshops for Cornwall and area service providers.

From what was initially a volunteer-run initiative, TMP has grown to become one of Canada's leading counselling and educational agencies for men and their families, and in particular for male survivors. There has been a significant expansion of the agency's funded services, fee-for-service programs, and training and consultation services.

As TMP moves forward, it remains rooted in its mandate: "Helping men and their families build better lives."

For more information, call (613) 230-6179, toll free in Ontario at 1-877-677-6532, or e-mail counselling.services@themensproject.ca.

View www.themensproject.ca.

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