



Sarah Barnard, right, site director for the Art of Yoga Project, assists a girl in the relaxation pose.

Using yoga and art to help incarcerated teen girls

Submitted by *Mary Lynn Fitton*, founder, *the Art of Yoga Project*.

Have you seen Nike's campaign called the "Girl Effect?" It aims to improve the lives of adolescent girls in developing countries. "Why girls? Because when we all invest in girls, everyone wins," the website reads.

At the Art of Yoga Project (AYP), we completely agree. But we believe it's important to start with girls who are at-risk in our own communities, right here in east Menlo Park, Redwood City, and East Palo Alto. Because girls here need us, too. They need to know they matter to us and that there is hope for them to become productive members of society.

The Art of Yoga Project uses an innovative year-round curriculum combining health education, character development, yoga, meditation, creative expression, and writing to give girls in the San Mateo County juvenile justice system tools to prepare for a positive future.

Simply said, the goal is to reduce recidivism, to keep teen girls out of adult women's prisons. Each year, AYP serves more than 500 girls in county detention, and last year began mentoring the girls after they are released.

"Most of the girls in the juvenile detention centers have been abused and neglected at home," says Lisa Pedersen, AYP executive director. "They run away and turn to gangs for a sense of community. On the streets, the girls commit what we call 'survival crimes,' like prostitution and selling drugs, to get by. A cycle of victimization continues.

"A girl's eventual arrest is an opportunity to stop the pattern and

to begin to address her many and complex needs."

How can yoga and creative expression turn a girl around? Through a disciplined and rigorous regimen, AYP focuses on building self-awareness, self-respect and self-control. Backed by judges and probation, AYP helps girls become accountable to themselves, to others, and to their communities. This changes behavior and it changes lives.

"Serena" studied with AYP four days a week for seven months while incarcerated. Since her release last year, she has been mentored by an AYP teacher.

"I'm more aware of what I'm feeling inside," Serena says. "I want to be a lot more than what I thought I could be. I just have to focus."

Recently, the Art of Yoga Project was invited to attend the Governor and First Lady's Conference on Women in Long Beach. AYP was asked to display some of the girls' artwork as part of a California Arts Council project.

"The girls were thrilled to have their art appreciated by so many inspiring women and leaders," says Ms. Pedersen. "I think it gave them a stronger sense of self-worth."

After the event, Maria Shriver told us: "Your work is truly changing lives... I look forward to working with you all to continue to change lives, one woman, one girl at a time." ■

Visit theartofyogaproject.org for more information. Address: *The Art of Yoga Project*, 555 Bryant St., #232, Palo Alto, CA 94301-1704. Phone: 650-996-1904.

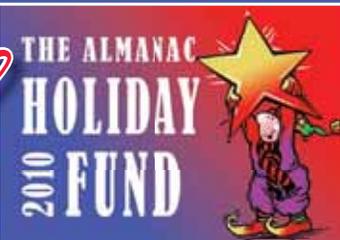
HOLIDAY FUND

Donations to the Holiday Fund benefit the Art of Yoga Project and nine other community-service organizations.

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Your gift helps children and others in need



Contributions to the Holiday Fund go directly to programs that benefit Peninsula residents. Last year, Almanac readers contributed about \$100,000, and with available matching grants, nearly \$130,000 was raised for 10 agencies that feed the hungry, house the homeless and provide numerous other services to those in need.

Contributions to the Holiday Fund will be matched, to the

extent possible, by generous community corporations, foundations and individuals, including the Rotary Club of Menlo Park, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. No administration costs will be deducted from the gift, which are tax-deductible as permitted by law.

All donations to the Holiday Fund will be shared equally among the 10 recipient agencies listed below.

This year, the Almanac's Holiday Fund will support these nonprofit organizations in the community

- **Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula**
Provides after-school academic support and enrichment activities for 1,000 youths each day, ages 6 to 18. Operates clubhouses in Menlo Park's Belle Haven neighborhood, East Palo Alto and Redwood City, and after-school programs at schools in these communities designed to extend the learning day and supplement the school's curriculum.
- **Ecumenical Hunger Program**
Provides emergency food, clothing, household essentials, special children's programs and sometimes financial assistance to families in need, regardless of religious preference, including Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets for more than 1,500 households.
- **Project Read-Menlo Park**
Provides free literacy services to adults in the Menlo Park area. Trained volunteers work one-to-one or in small groups to help adults improve their basic reading, writing and English language skills so they can achieve their goals and function more effectively at home, at work, and in the community. In 2007-08, a total of 120 tutors assisted more than 300 students.
- **Ravenswood Family Health Center**
Provides primary medical care, behavioral health services and preventive health care for all ages at its clinics in Belle Haven and East Palo Alto. It also operates a mobile clinic at school sites. Of the 22,700 registered patients, most are low-income and uninsured.
- **St. Francis Center**
Provides services for families in need with the goal of helping them to live in dignity and become self-supporting community members. The center assists some 2,000 people each month with such services as low-income housing, food and clothing, shower and laundry, counseling, community garden, and education.
- **Second Harvest Food Bank**
The largest collector and distributor of food on the Peninsula, Second Harvest Food Bank distributed 30 million pounds of food last year. It gathers donations from individuals and businesses and distributes food to some 162,000 people each month through more than 700 agencies and distribution sites in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.
- **St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room**
Serves hundreds of hot meals six days a week in a social and friendly atmosphere to anyone in need. Funded entirely by contributions from the community, St. Anthony's is the largest soup kitchen between San Francisco and San Jose. It offers groceries to take home and distributes clothing to families.
- **Shelter Network**
Provides short-term shelter and transitional housing services to more than 3,700 people and children each year. Offers programs for families and individuals to become self-sufficient and return to permanent housing.
- **The Art of Yoga Project**
Offers incarcerated teen girls a rehabilitation program of yoga and creative arts to instill greater self-awareness, self-respect and self-control. The project serves over 500 girls annually at four local sites, including San Mateo County's juvenile detention centers.
- **Youth and Family Enrichment Services**
Provides many programs to help people who struggle with substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health, relationship and communications issues. Helps strengthen youth, families and individuals to overcome challenges through counseling, education, and residential services.

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The Almanac will make every effort to publish donor names for donations received before Dec. 31, 2010, unless the donor checks the anonymous box. All donations will be acknowledged by mail.