

PRESS RELEASE

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SAN MATEO GIRLS FIND INNER STRENGTH THROUGH CALIFORNIA'S MINERVA ARTS PROJECT FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

San Mateo – A roomful of teen girls dressed in pink, white and grey worked quietly on small quilts adorned with the bust of Roman warrior goddess Minerva recently in San Mateo while in summer school. It was difficult to imagine that any of them could have committed crimes. Yet, all of the girls are serving time in the juvenile justice system as residents of The Margaret J. Kemp Camp for Girls, a minimum-security facility and rehabilitation program. This particular week they were taking part in The Minerva Arts Project – a collaboration between The Art of Yoga Project, the California Governor and First Lady's Conference on Women, the California Arts Council and the Alameda County Arts Commission. A statewide program, The Minerva Arts Project is designed to encourage at-risk youth to see the traits of Minerva reflected in themselves and to highlight the importance of the arts in the development and education of all young people. This year, San Mateo joined Alameda, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties in the project and added its own distinctive twist – two yoga symbols incorporated into the quilts: the peaceful warrior pose in honor of Minerva's symbolism, and the tree pose, which represents strength and flexibility.

A primary partner with the San Mateo County Probation Department, The Art of Yoga Project initiated the project at Camp Kemp. "The Minerva Arts Project was a perfect opportunity to enhance our day-to-day work at Camp Kemp," stated Lisa Pedersen, Executive Director of The Art of Yoga Project. "We are honored to have been the project lead in San Mateo County and to have been able to contribute the principles of yoga and meditation to the Minerva curriculum."

"The girls at Camp Kemp truly are everyday Minervas," said Mary Lynn Fitton, Founder and Program Director at The Art of Yoga Project. "They've had tough lives and really resonate with Minerva as both warrior and peacemaker. A few were even familiar with her."

The Minerva Arts Project - Creating Youth Empowerment is an arts education program designed to provide a way for California youth in detention centers and state facilities to explore the leadership traits of the Roman goddess Minerva, who graces the California state seal. It is also a means for these young people to learn about the winners of The Minerva Award, California First

Lady Maria Shriver's recognition of women who reflect the potential in everyday Californians to make a positive impact on their communities.

Each day began with a discussion about leadership followed by a yoga practice to relax, energize and inspire the creative process. By the end of the week, many aspects of what it meant to be a great leader had been identified. Compassion, strength, trustworthiness, being real, courage, staying true to yourself, wisdom, not giving up, uniqueness, and being able to understand the people you're leading were just a few of the qualities that were named by the girls. One participant wisely noted, "A good leader needs to know a lot about love."

"The yoga practice, discussions and art projects often break down the tough outer "bravado" of these girls," said Sarah Barnard, San Mateo Site Director for The Art of Yoga Project. "It helps them to see that many of us are engaged in a struggle as warriors seeking our own inner peace. We try to teach them that we can "battle" our negative self-talk and impulses by using self-awareness, breathing and meditation as "weapons" for change and positive decision making. We encourage each one of them to be her best self."

After the yoga practice and discussion, the class transitioned into the quilt project. "We played inspirational music to provide a calm, upbeat working environment. The overall experience and the mood were very positive," observed art teacher Tina Mizukami.

As the completed quilts were placed in the center of the room, the girls took a silent walk around to view each other's artwork, reflect on the collective work, the process and its challenges, and to think about their own potential to become a Minerva. Then the project, day and week came to a close with the reading of the definition of the Sanskrit work *namaste* by one of the girls. "I honor that place in you in which the entire universe dwells. It is a place of love, light, truth and peace. When you are in that place in you and I am in that place in me, we are one. Namaste."

About The Art of Yoga Project

The Art of Yoga Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to lead teen girls in the California Juvenile Justice System toward accountability to self, others and community by providing practical tools to effect behavioral change. The cornerstone of The Art of Yoga Project is the Yoga and Creative Arts Curriculum, a secular course that combines health education, character development, yoga, meditation and creative arts. This gender-responsive program teaches at-risk girls to identify the issues that cause them to make poor choices; manage their anger and impulses; become accountable for their actions, to themselves and their communities; and develop a productive outlet for their emotions and dreams. www.theartofyogaproject.org

About Camp Kemp

Camp Kemp is a gender-responsive facility for girls in the California juvenile justice system. The first of its kind in this state, it provides sustainable resources and programs that promote the process of healing, educating, and empowering each girl to achieve her greatest potential. Camp Kemp's philosophy is guided by its belief in and commitment to gender-responsive service delivery and restorative justice which centers on blending accountability and treatment to repair harm done; to heal personal and interpersonal relationships while forming positive connections with the larger community. www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/portal/site/Probation

About the Alameda County Arts Commission

The Alameda County Arts Commission is a division of the County of Alameda and believes that the arts and creativity are an essential part of every successful and thriving community. The goal of Creative Power: Alameda County Arts Commission's Arts Education Program is to empower youth to make positive changes in their lives, families and community. www.acgov.org/arts

About the California Governor and First Lady's Conference on Women

The Mission of The Women's Conference Organization is to create Architects of Change – people from all walks of life who see a problem and seek to create the solution, be it in their home, their community, their state or our world. Led by California First Lady Maria Shriver, The Women's Conference has created a global community of Architects of Change who gather every year at the nation's premier forum for women in Long Beach, CA. www.womensconference.org

