



May 2007

USHA YOGA FOUNDATION

BRINGING THE BENEFITS OF YOGA TO LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITIES

Scholarship Recipients Share Their Stories

Kennedy Owino, Nairobi, Kenya; Street Children, HIV homes

I would like to offer my experience to street children centers in the slums of Nairobi where I grew up, and in homes catering to the aged and to H.I.V positive children. With so many negative images out there for children to identify with, sharing a holistic message of peace would offer a meaningful path that will help build the children's self esteem.

I would also like to help the street children access yoga training from me (as their teacher) which at the moment is reserved for the affluent here in Kenya. I see myself using the skills as a bedrock of community development.

Anonymous, Los Angeles, California, USA; Woman's Shelter

Almost twenty years ago, my family and I escaped Vietnam on a boat built to ship rice that instead carried one hundred and eighty refugees out of present day Ho Chi Minh City. For two years, we lived in the refugee camps of Malaysia and the Philippines with very little food and medical care.

For many, myself included, a transition into a life free of violence does not happen overnight, but I am living proof that with time and effort it is possible. For me, it happened when I discovered yoga, not only as an outlet, but a way of believing and living.

I now help underserved and economically disadvantaged women achieve self-sufficiency and inner peace. With each day I realize their need for assistance beyond economics. It is a battle of mental and physical strength. It is also a battle that can be won through unity of body and mind.

Through physical expression and self-realization I instill in others the belief that life's seemingly unavoidable sufferings can be, at the least, controlled through yoga. My yoga classes at the Asian Pacific Women's Center offer survivors of violence a means of nurturing their bodies and minds. For those faced with the challenge of building a new life from the pains of violence it is important to have such an outlet.

Elana Omari, Baltimore, Maryland, USA; Inner-city School, Juvenile Detention Center

Exposing at-risk youth to yoga creates a world of difference and will possibly save many lives. I pray that my classes in juvenile detention centers, shelters and inner city schools will help to decrease the number of violent acts amongst teenagers that occur too often in Baltimore City.

The teenagers in this region do not have much to look forward to. Their high schools and elementary schools are being shut down. The majority of youth get into mischief due to the lack of neighbor recreations centers, no nearby parks or even playgrounds. A Youth Yoga Group reaches, teaches and inspires students to enjoy the beauty, power and potential of their minds, bodies and spirits.

Being a teenager is, for the most part, challenging. Through yoga, you become more aware of your true nature and purpose. As opposed to what someone taught you, you discover who you are on a deep level. Yoga allows you to view the world with a clearer and a more precise vision.

Once you learn and practice yoga, before you know it, you have participated in a self-healing process. This powerful healing puts you in a place to create something meaningful in your life.

Marie-Claire Jenkins, Norwich, England; Hospital

Three years ago I was diagnosed Bipolar II (manic depression). Medication made me very sick and gain weight. When I came across a yoga, I went through a purging process emotionally and physically. One year later, my psychiatrist could not believe the progress I had made. I was described as calm, confident, self-sufficient, and strong mentally. I no longer needed doctors and was sent off to live my life.

Yoga gave me my life back first, and then gave me more. One of those things was to run the Yoga Space group sponsored by the Usha foundation. Here I can extend a steady hand to those who step up, and enable them to experience the healing effects of yoga. They see that so much more is available to them in their lives. I take immense pleasure in supporting others who experience depression, anxiety, stress and other emotional issues and I feel grateful for this gift.

Ellie Kaufman, Chicago, Illinois, Eating Disorders through Theatre Company

I remember the exact moment I began to believe I was fat. Fourth grade, ten years old. Where did this come from? No one had ever called me fat because I wasn't. *And yet* an obsession began which lasted over a decade until I found yoga..

I do not know any woman who has not dealt with body image issues in her past. Not one. I want to teach yoga to counter a society that convinces young people that they are the sum of their external parts. I want to live in a world where girls do not start dieting at the age of ten and where the energy of young people is not spent obsessing over numbers, but rather on figuring out what they love to do, and finding ways of changing the world for the better by doing it.

A year ago I couldn't do kapotasana. Two years ago I couldn't do chaturanga. And more importantly, five years ago, I could never have looked in the mirror with a quiet mind, without

criticizing what I saw. Through nothing but my own dedication and determination, I have done these things that I once thought impossible. This is something I will learn how to teach.

I will work with Eudaimonia Professional Theatre to begin community-based yoga programs in different neighborhoods in Chicago, open to female at-risk youth. Eventually, I will have a database of service-minded yoga teachers who will rotate teaching these programs so that we keep them going year-round.

Usha Yoga supports projects around the world. www.ushayoga.org