



Richmond City Sheriff's Office
Sheriff C. T. Woody, Jr.



PRESS RELEASE

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RICHMOND CITY SHERIFF'S OFFICE RECOGNIZES THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF YOGA AND MEDITATION

RICHMOND, VA--- Sheriff C.T. Woody, Jr. continues to realize the importance of providing therapeutic and rehabilitative opportunities for those in his custody at the Richmond City Justice Center, so they are returned to the community as better citizens. One such initiative geared toward physical exercise, self-reflection, and spiritual healing is through the regularly offered yoga and meditation classes. Through the Sheriff's Internal Program Department, several yoga classes are available each week for interested and qualifying male and female residents, as well as a weekly meditation class.

"When you apply these benefits to a prisoner population, it is evident why this is the exact setting where yoga and meditation are necessary," says yoga instructor Chris Kresge. "Having a positive, safe space, such as this while incarcerated, allows the residents to deal with their negative emotions and frustrations, and ultimately let them go. As individuals and as a society, we often define ourselves in very limiting terms. Yogic philosophy, on the other hand, is based in the search for the "true" self, and is predicated on the idea that the mind is a diamond; it is just covered in the dirt and grime of our poor choices" continued Kresge.

Volunteer instructor Cynthia Henebry agrees: "Many of us share the misconception that meditation and mindfulness practices are a way of "achieving" inner peace - something to be added to the list of self- improvement projects we should probably employ. What we find when we finally sit down with ourselves however, is something quite different. Instead, we are confronted with everything we've been running from-- fear, sadness, aggression, judgment, and so on. In meditation, we begin the practice of witnessing the mind and body from awareness. Habitual reactions that harm ourselves and others naturally begin to subside, and we have the opportunity to live more fully in the present, as it truly is."

Jim Theobald, another volunteer instructor, who has focused on meditative techniques for over a decade adds, "I began teaching at the jail for the same reasons and to hopefully provide these tools to those involved in the REAL Program - to create awareness and perhaps some balance in the lives of the participants as well as giving back to the community." Ellie Burke, instructor for

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the females, agreed and added, “The way that I teach yoga and meditation to the women is as a tool to help them gain self-awareness, learn how to become less reactionary, regulate their emotions, and find a sense of calm regardless of the external stimulus. We intentionally use breath awareness and body awareness to access the self-awareness and to begin to discover the ways in which we respond to the external world. I also integrate Yoga Nidra, which is a deeply restorative practice that systemically relaxes the practitioner, helping to undo deep levels of physical and emotional tension.”

Sheriff Woody also commented on the yoga and meditation program, “the RCJC is very fortunate to have these yoga and meditation instructors who are volunteering their time to assist in the rehabilitative efforts we and the residents of the RCJC make every day. The benefits of yoga and meditation to offenders who practice these disciplines while incarcerated is clear. The residents are always eager to participate in these programs when they are made available, and the feedback from them is routinely positive. I look forward to the results of the study being conducted by professors from VCU, in partnership with our instructors.”

Research has revealed that yoga and meditation has proven to be an effective rehabilitation tool for many offenders when delivered while following a directed and disciplined program via an instructor. Through a partnership with VCU Professors, the yoga program is being researched to determine its effect on those participating in and residing at the Richmond City Justice Center.

The yoga program is a component of the RCJC’s REAL Program, which has purpose of reducing recidivism through ensuring the individual is prepared for re-entry into society. REAL does this by assisting residents of the RCJC to positively and comprehensively address their addictions and behaviors, while appropriately modifying their thinking.

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