**Summary Report: “CommuniTEA” Chair Yoga & Tea Program for Seniors Promoting Social Engagement/Inclusion**

***Fall 2019***

**I. Project Background:**

Yoga, meaning union or connection, can encourage social inclusion along with improvement of overall health and wellness. By allowing for time after yoga class for participants to socialize and engage in topical discussions over a cup of tea, it can allow friendships and common interests to emerge.

Studies have suggested possible benefits of yoga for several aspects of wellness, including stress management, mental/emotional health, promoting healthy eating/activity habits, sleep, and balance.

This project aimed to explore the potential of using yoga class and post-yoga tea as a platform for social engagement. Desired outcomes were as follows:

* + Increased health and wellness (including stress management, mental/emotional health, promoting healthy eating/activity habits, sleep, and balance)
  + Increased confidence
  + Increased social engagement
  + Participants form friendships
  + Seniors learn how to meditate and start to practice at home
  + Participants are inspired to sign up for more yoga

**II. Project Description & Deliverables:**

* A series of 6 Beginner Chair Yoga & Tea sessions were offered at the Seniors Connect Centre (no longer in operation as of December 2019) in Nanaimo, BC. The class was offered to maximum of 8 participants, all genders were invited to attend. There was no cost to attend, but pre-registration was required. Chairs, mats and props were provided. Liability waivers were signed by all participants, and appropriate instructor and location insurance was in place.
* The class design was based on Integrated Yoga Therapy format and included guided body awareness and guided meditation along with a brief roundtable sharing at the beginning of each class to allow participants to get to know each other better. There was a theme for each class along with a handout(s) for participants to work on throughout the week.
* The classes were approximately an hour of yoga, and a half-hour following for tea and snacks. A selection of tea and healthier snacks were provided.
* A feedback survey was administered at the end of the 6 weeks.

**III. Summary and Feedback:**

* Average attendance each week varied between 4 and 8 participants. It was mostly the same people attending each session. Participants were not asked for their age, however, based on self-sharing, one participant was over 80 years old, the rest likely from 60 – 70 years old.
* No men attended, although one did sign up, he never showed up.
* The tea and snacks portion of the program was popular. It was an open, casual visit with no topics or led discussion. Participants always stayed for tea, and in fact several participants asked if they could just come just for tea (if they weren’t up for the yoga on that day due to injury, etc.).
* The weekly printed handouts seemed to be a valued part of the program experience. Participants wanted something to take away that they could work on throughout the week.
* Participants enjoyed learning mudras (The term mudra applies to the use of hand gestures during meditation that carry specific goals of channeling your body’s energy flow.). As well, participants enjoyed learning breathing techniques (some were challenging to learn, but improvements were noted as the series progressed), 3-part yogic breathing, Breath of Joy, Bumble Bee breath, etc.
* The afternoon timing seemed to work well. It was offered 1:30pm – 3pm on Thursdays.
* Surveys were optional and filled out by the participants in attendance at the last of the six sessions. See attached scans of full survey feedback. Overall, the feedback was very positive, a few comments noted below:

**What has been the effect of the classes to your practice and health? And/or testimonial:**

* + “Flexibility has improved a wee bit. More mindful of my body and more confident to try postures.”
  + “Better balance. Wow. All of the above improvements” (focus/concentration, flexibility, strength, ability to relax, ability to breathe deeply, social engagement, etc.)
  + “Balance and social engagement with group. Relaxing.”
  + “I’m incorporating many of the stretches, the mudras, and breathing techniques into my daily activities.”
  + “I am so grateful for your gift of yoga. I feel better every session. This is good socializing time with the tea.”
* **Did you enjoy the social tea after class?** 
  + “It gives me a chance to slow down, not feel rushed as I normally do”
  + “I just started this class, but I felt welcome and I enjoyed the social aspect. I felt very relaxed also”
  + “For sure”
* **Least favourite part of the class:** 
  + “Meditation – don’t find so helpful right now, but I do feel relaxed at end of class.”

**IV. Sustainability:**

* An additional series was offered after this 6-week session at another community location (Nanaimo Family Life Association). The instructor volunteered to lead the class, and a local organization offered free space. This class was on Friday afternoons 1:30 – 3pm and even greater attendance due to less other activities happening at that time/day.
* Based on success of this program and model, additional funding for once weekly sessions running for the balance 2020 has been tentatively approved and is planned to start up in February 2020.