

2021 Finalists for IAYT's Seva Award

Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy Classes and Private Sessions for At-Risk Immigrant Populations

Gina Barrett, E-RYT 200, C-IAYT



In recent years, thousands of asylum seekers have attempted to enter the United States, many of them young families and LGBTQ people fleeing gang violence and human trafficking. Waiting at the border to cross into the country, they shelter in Mexico and U.S. border towns. Casa de Paz SLV (www.casadepazslv.org), for which Gina Barrett is executive director, provides holistic support in the form of Trauma-Informed Yoga as well as art, massage, music, and narrative and play therapy for this population. The non-profit organization also serves at a center for differently abled young adults. Casa de Paz SLV partners with shelters in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and in Matamoros, Mexico, and offers classes and private sessions in all of these locations, from long- and short-term shelters to public space like the Brownsville, Texas, bus station. In summer 2021 the organization will begin offering 3- to 10-day retreats in Crestone, Colorado, for asylum seekers and new immigrants, many of whom have experienced not only the displacement and stress of their journeys but also racism, sexual assault, poverty, homelessness, hunger, and disease.



Project Breath

Lucilda Dassardo-Cooper, C-IAYT

Project Breath brings weekly yoga classes to organizations primarily serving people of color through a partnership with the Iyengar Yoga Association of New England (IYANE) (<https://iyane.org/project-breath-we-need-to-breathe/>). Props and experienced teachers are provided to enable a focus on health and wellness for people who cope daily with both racism and COVID-19 risk. Startup funds from IYANE, a grant from the Boston Public Health Commission, and an arts auction enabled Project Breath to provide active and restorative classes.



Many of the project's students, who range widely in age, are affected by health disparities worsened by living in areas where healthy food choices are scarce or nonexistent; people living in these communities are at risk of health issues related to their lack of access to nutrition and health education. This population is also at increased risk of COVID-19 compared to those not living in such areas. Many have never been exposed to the benefits of yogic practices for calming the mind and creating health and beneficial resilience, and Project Breath emphasizes the experience of yogic exercises as a means to strengthen the lungs and awareness of breath. Feedback after the first round of online classes referenced how much the classes helped participants with mobility issues and improved health awareness and well-being.

Yoga for Scleroderma "Wednesday Wind-Down" Podcasts

Lori Pierce, RYT-200, and Kathy Randolph, E-RYT 200, C-IAYT



Lori Pierce of Yoga for Scleroderma (www.yogaforscleroderma.com), left, prepares guided relaxations, breathwork, and meditations that may ease the symptoms of scleroderma while avoiding contraindications for an online, prerecorded format. Having lived with scleroderma since 2002, Lori can reach others with the condition who think they can't do yoga, most recently through free podcasts.

Scleroderma, an autoimmune disorder, causes the body to generate collagen (scar tissue) in the skin, organs, and fascia, potentially affecting all aspects of daily life. The condition's symptoms stand to benefit from a complete yoga practice, but because no two scleroderma patients present in the same way, general group classes are often not suitable and can be dangerous. COVID restrictions have affected the scleroderma community greatly and will continue to do so: Many will not be able to receive vaccines, and stress—heightened for everyone during these times—can trigger symptom flares. As those with scleroderma may already be isolated because of




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Wednesday Wind-down
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| <p>हर महीने के तीसरे बुधवार मुफ्त निर्देशित विश्राम क्रिया अंग्रेजी और हिंदी में 30 से 45 मिनट 6:30pm भारतीय समय अनुसार</p> | <p>Third Wednesday of Every Month Free Guided Relaxation in English and Hindi 30 to 45 minutes 6:30pm IST</p> |
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immunocompromise, often without good internet, the project's podcasts employ a Zoom presentation with a phone-in option, no internet or cell phone needed. What started as a COVID stopgap has become the organization's most far-reaching program, one that connects with those who have the fewest resources. Yoga for Scleroderma plans to continue to upload weekly podcasts, and to increase the reach of existing content through aligned organizations and by translating the work into additional languages.

Iyengar Yoga Therapeutics for Sisters in Motion, a Black Women for Wellness Program

Michaela Reis, C-IAYT, Marla Apt, C-IAYT, and Arlene Zeichner



Iyengar Yoga Therapeutics (IYT) teachers work to improve the quality of life of people with health problems. The organization offers free classes in at-risk and low-income communities, which often have high rates of conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes—diseases directly linked to chronic stress, poor diet, and lack of physical exercise. Black Women for Wellness (BWW; www.bwwla.org) is a community nonprofit in Los Angeles that addresses the health of Black women through education, empowerment, and advocacy. This multigenerational, member-centered, volunteer-driven organization uses civic engagement, community education, and policy and media outreach to address the health inequities of African American women and their children. One of

BWW's programs is Sisters in Motion, which offers education, lifestyle change, and physical activity to aid those with heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity.

BWW hopes to partner with IYT, whose president is Arlene Zeichner. IYT's ongoing classes would support the Sisters in Motion initiative to help African American women with chronic or complex health conditions; these students require therapeutic attention that cannot be provided through common variations in a general yoga class. A series of at least eight 1-hour classes are planned, and students would keep the provided props to support home practice.

WINNER OF IAYT's SEVA AWARD FOR 2021: Project Susthiti

Arnab Bishnu Chowdhury, C-IAYT



The winning project of the 2021 John Kepner Seva Award artfully applies a range of yogic tools to address an urgent need of the day: burnout and overwhelm in healthcare providers on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19. Supported by Arnab Bishnu Chowdhury's Know Your Rhythm training program (www.ninad.in), Project Susthiti operates in India, where the pandemic has hit hard.



Arnab's practices astutely blend yoga therapy with music therapy for hospital-based COVID workers. "Caregivers need healing to raise their caregiving capacity," he explains. The project's target population is stressed medical workers helping those with COVID-19, including nurses, therapists, doctors, and managers in public and private healthcare facilities,

many of whom work long hours in isolated conditions. Arnab plans to track the workers' progress on stress, anxiety, burnout, and depression with participation in the project.

Arnab says he feels blessed to have been brought up at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, where he serves as member of the Research Committee, and to be part of a musical lineage from master teacher Baba Allaudin Khan. He is part of the third generation of a family of classical musicians who pass down the yoga of music, mantra, and sound from one era to the next.

Musical Healing in Practice

The uniqueness of Project Susthiti lies in combining gentle asana with pranayama, mudra, Yoga Nidra, mantra, and *raga chikitsa*, the ancient yogic therapy that employs *raga* (a framework of specific melodic modes in classical Indian music), *tala* (rhythm), and *rasa* (emotional archetype) to create melodic healing modalities. Sessions, which take place after the providers go off duty, include online live therapy and prerecorded audiovisual content that features workshops and original raga-based musical compositions.

Arnab and Project Susthiti’s other volunteers aim to offer restorative sessions that lead to better-quality rest and sleep to support caregivers’ immunity and well-being—*susthiti*, or healthy stability. They created an orchestral composition, based on the Raga Maru Bihag, to express empathy, positivity, peace, and bravery during Yoga Nidra (www.ninad.in/Orchestral_Maru_Bihag_excerpt_applied_as_therapy.mp3).

To implement their program in hospital settings, the Project Susthiti team contacts a senior member of the COVID care team, often the chief COVID medical officer, to determine whether they are open to yoga therapy. If so, they discuss the development of a yoga protocol, which varies from hospital to hospital depending on the workers’ availability. The yoga protocol leads to a proposal from the project team to the hospital’s ethics and research committee, which underscores the noninvasive, nonpharmacological nature of the yoga therapy intervention. Project Susthiti also invites the facility’s psychiatry team to develop a questionnaire to measure the well-being and wellness of the workers before and after sessions. Once approved, the intervention is delivered through a pilot program. Initial feedback guides fine-tuning of the online therapy sessions, and eventually a statistician consultant helps to analyze results.

Telling the World About Encouraging Beginnings

Given the current economic state in India, says Arnab, funds are not readily available from any hospitals, public or private. He therefore funded the first successful pilot himself, offering therapy to 30 medical workers at Shree Krishna Hospital, Pramukhswami Medical College, in western India. The project team plans to next offer the program to a group of 40 doctors, nurses, and paramedics in four hospitals in the southern city of Madurai.

That first pilot, a 3-hour online program, reached 280 COVID warriors, as Arnab calls the project’s subjects. In fall 2020, the team presented the results at the conference of the Department of Medicine, Christian Medical College, Vellore: 68% of participants recorded beneficial changes in alertness. The next most frequently reported results were increased calm and anger control.

Arnab and his team have presented aspects of Project Susthiti at various international conferences. In September 2020, they presented an online workshop, “Know Your Rhythm—A Program for Caregivers to Develop Integral Personality,” for the International Association for Music & Medicine, of which Arnab is a member. In June 2021, the World Organization of Family Doctors invited him to speak on music and mental health. The following month, the team, which includes Karen Miscall-Bannon, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT, offered a paper at the National Conference on World Peace Through Indian Music, hosted by Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur. Their presentation “Composing Raga-Based Music and Applying it to Yoga and Music Therapy for COVID Warriors to Evoke Susthiti” discussed the yoga of music, design, and esthetics and how this focus can bring peace for stressed healthcare workers.

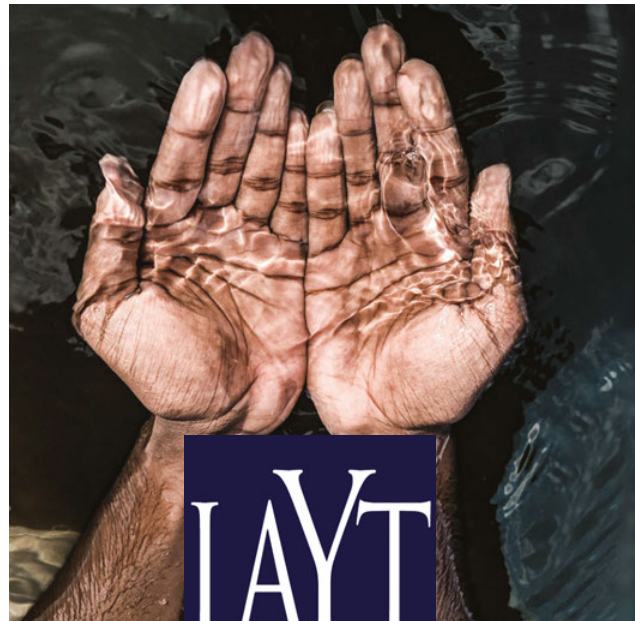
Next up for Project Susthiti: creating content for additional outreach, including research and case reports, social media pieces, and short videos to let healthcare professionals of all kinds know that yoga therapy can support them. They will also include a short report on the pilot mentioned above in the 2020–2021 Sri Aurobindo

Ashram Trust’s Annual Report of Research Activities, which will reach the Indian government’s Ministry of Human Resource Development. **YTT**

Please join us in congratulating all of the finalists for IAYT’s 2021 Seva Award, which recognizes meaningful service in the field of yoga therapy. Get a taste of Arnab’s work at yogatherapy.health, IAYT’s site for the public. Look for the blog post “IAYT recognizes 2021 Seva Award recipient.”

The John Kepner Seva Award recognizes yoga therapists who are committed to serving under-resourced communities. Through this award, IAYT and Give Back Yoga Foundation are dedicated to honoring and amplifying the voices of people of the global majority and/or LGBTQIA2S+ members* working to make yoga therapy accessible to all. This focus will be highlighted in the coming years.

**People of the global majority, or PGM, refers to the more than 80% of the world’s population who are Black, indigenous, and of color. LGBTQIA2S+ indicates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and two-spirit; the plus acknowledges self-identifying members of the community who are not included in the LGBTQIA2S acronym.*



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