

# ***Urban Lotus Project: Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth***

## ***An Innovation Station Promising Practice***

**Purpose:** This document is intended to support MCH professionals to implement a practice found in Innovation Station. This resource provides the information needed to replicate the practice and is divided into two sections: the first section provides a high-level overview of the practice while the second section describes how to implement the practice. For additional information on any of the content provided below, please reach out to the practice contact located at the bottom of this document.

### **Section I: Practice Overview**

<b>Location:</b>	Nevada	<b>Title V MCH Block Grant Measures Addressed</b>
<b>Category:</b>	Promising	<b>NPM # 8.2:</b> Percent of adolescents ages 12 through 17 years who are physically active at least 60 minutes per day
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#### **Practice Description**

Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth promotes physical activity and provides stress reduction tools to high-risk young people, often exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). This specialized yoga instruction and mindful awareness is brought to agencies serving adolescents, inclusive of young people attending public or charter schools, those who are homeless, in foster care, as well as those residing in juvenile justice centers, transitional living homes, and inpatient mental health and substance use treatment facilities.

#### **Purpose**

Nevada’s Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Five-Year Needs Assessment emphasized the need to address obesity through increased physical activity for adolescents. The 2017 Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) reported 14.0% of middle school and 14.8% of high school students engaged in physical activity at least 60 minutes daily, indicating the need for more movement programs for young people. Furthermore, Nevada lacks specialized physical activity programs for high-risk and special needs youth. A 2017 Nevada YRBS ACEs report revealed 51.1% of middle school and 62.2% of high school students were affected by a lifetime prevalence of ACEs which can contribute to negative health outcomes. This indicates the need for prevention and intervention strategies targeting early adverse experiences to reduce mental health consequences into adulthood.

Therefore, the Nevada Title V MCH Program pursued physical activity programs serving high-risk young people and those with special health care needs to address these gaps. Urban Lotus Project provided a seamless fit since the organization offers Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth to

young people impacted by a high lifetime prevalence of ACEs. This specialized yoga practice was designed to increase physical activity, provide resilience, support mindfulness to combat obesity and chronic disease, enhance wellness, and help mitigate other harmful public health outcomes.

This practice allows physical activity to be available at no-cost in a safe environment to high-risk young people without specialized equipment, dedicated space, or a safe outdoor environment. It provides access to physical activity for 60 minutes, often only available at a significant financial cost to youth of all socioeconomic statuses and in restrictive contexts for other physical activity alternatives. Urban Lotus Project provides inclusive environments, regardless of social and cultural factors. Cultural humility is built into the practice since teachers nurture the strengths, interests, and talents of each student, as well as honor each person's beliefs, customs, and values.

### **Practice Foundation**

The Social Cognitive Theory informed the focus of Urban Lotus Project's yoga program on learning through interaction, observation, and imitation of the actions modeled by others and the resulting actions. The model is grounded by several assumptions relating to the high-risk youth population. Learners can gain new behaviors and knowledge by observing a model such as an instructor demonstrating the calming yoga breath. When youth slow down their breathing, they experience the calming of their heart rate and mind. Learning by itself may or may not lead to immediate change. Attendance in weekly classes provides an opportunity for young people to eventually engage in breathing techniques or yoga poses not previously attempted. This theory allows students to self-regulate since they continually observe the instructor's yoga poses, giving them the opportunity to perfect their postures, increase their confidence by mastering the techniques, and notice the benefits of mindfulness, resilience, and their ability to better cope with life's daily stressors.

The Life Course Theory informed the practice since Urban Lotus Project's yoga program is designed to help young people build resilience at a critical period in hopes of improving their future outcomes. The principles taught may serve as a protective factor to mitigate the outcomes of ACEs by fulfilling young people's potential amidst changing conditions or challenges and maintaining their quality of life and healthy lifespan growth. Although the life course perspective asserts development is lifelong, the period of adolescence can exacerbate or buffer against early disadvantages or other childhood experiences in manners affecting adulthood. Problem behaviors associated with adolescence can be deflected since yoga poses and mindful meditation offer ways to discharge acute stress responses to help decrease violent outbursts, self-harm, addiction, and other risky health behaviors.

### **Core Components**

The goal of the program is to improve adolescent health and wellness through yoga poses and mindful meditation. Urban Lotus Project has accomplished this outcome by implementing the following core components in Reno, Nevada and surrounding areas: (1) providing Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth at locations serving at-risk adolescents, (2) increasing the number of agencies offering yoga classes, (3) growing the number of students attending public classes, (4) ongoing training to yoga teachers, (5) continuous quality improvement to enhance agency performance, quality of yoga instruction, and impact of yoga on well-being, as well as (6) development of a sustainability plan.

## Practice Activities

Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
Conduct Yoga Classes	Offer Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth at agencies serving at-risk adolescents	Conducted yoga classes at agencies where youth were present with behavioral/emotional health challenges, as well as youth at drop-in centers, substance and mental health treatment centers, human services entities, and schools.
Expand Program Reach	Contact new agencies to grow the number of locations yoga is taught	Performed outreach to youth-serving agencies and established new agreements with multiple agencies to teach yoga classes. Secured space to teach classes open to the public.
Grow Public Classes	Conduct marketing to increase awareness of public yoga classes	Distributed public class materials to agencies serving adolescents and used social media to increase awareness of the no-cost public yoga classes. Obtained youth input about class location and time offerings to grow attendance.
Yoga Instructor Training	Offer training to yoga instructors	Provided Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth principles and techniques to yoga instructors. A new standardized training was designed with videos and quizzes following the teachings. Ongoing trainings were conducted with existing yoga instructors.
Evaluate Program	Conduct quantitative and qualitative evaluations	Performed ongoing quality improvement plans including Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, pre- and post-test surveys, teacher evaluations, key informant interviews, and student response surveys. Analyzed data from quantitative and qualitative evaluations.
Sustainability Plan	Expand fiscal stability by diversifying funding stream	Successfully sought resources to augment Nevada Title V MCH Program funding through monthly donation programs, foundations/organizations, and fundraising events.

## Evidence of Effectiveness

Since February 2017, 984 yoga classes have been taught to adolescents ages 12-17 years old (y.o.). Initial student counts were duplicated; thus, the reporting period only includes 985 unique individuals partaking in classes.

**Pre- and Post-Test Surveys:** Pre- and post-test surveys were conducted to measure yoga students' ability to cope with life's daily stressors and increase resilience. The Perceived Stress Scale was administered at a four-week interval. A total of 87 students from seven locations completed both the pre- and post-test surveys, representing only a small quantity of those exposed to the program. Confounding issues/biases posed too many challenges to conduct a thorough data analysis such as (1) the four-week interval resulting in a small, non-representative sample, (2) student responses impacted by outside influences affecting risk and resiliency, (3) variations in the number of classes per week per student, and (4) mandatory vs.

voluntary class participation. The challenges were mitigated by discontinuing the survey and adding a short student response questionnaire.

**Teacher Evaluation Surveys:** The evaluation questions were designed to learn about the instructor's ability to help students understand yoga, their responsiveness to youth needs, and how safe the instructor made the students feel. Surveys were analyzed from 12 locations. During the reporting period, 323 responses revealed the yoga classes felt safe (4.9/5.0) and the yoga instructors showed interest in teaching the class (4.8/5.0). Three statements: the yoga instructor was responsive to my needs, the yoga instructor helped me understand yoga and their purposes, and the yoga class was informative/I learned something new were all rated at 4.6/5.0 by the students.

**Key Informant Interviews:** Key informant interviews were used to evaluate the program's impact on student well-being, influence of positive outcomes on student behaviors at host facilities, and suggestions for program improvements, as well as instructor training. Eight teacher and agency staff qualitative interviews revealed positive outcomes in participant well-being, student safety, host facility needs being met by yoga classes, and sufficient instructor training. Urban Lotus Project's core value to ensure health equity was described by interviewees, such as the benefits of classes at no-cost to youth of all socioeconomic statuses in safe inclusive environments, regardless of social and cultural factors, and in what ways students individual strengths, interests, and talents were nurtured. Key positive conclusions were indicated by the responses below:

- Youth satisfaction was reported when students gave a thumbs-up at the end of class compared to the start reflecting how they were feeling, as well as providing encouraging statements at the end of class, such as I can do this, I feel better, I feel lighter. Fulfillment was demonstrated when students returned voluntarily to classes and those in residential facilities completed yoga poses on their own outside of class, as well as encouraged new residents to attend yoga classes.
- Safety was addressed numerous times in responses, inclusive of the classes providing a safe space for students to move, share feelings, feel centered and grounded, as well as helping keep families together and safe. Each host facility staff reported yoga classes provided participants with tools to deal with life stressors/trauma through breathing and benefited non-participating inpatient residents when participating students returned from class in a calm state of mind.
- Host facility needs were met since staff reported yoga instruction and mindfulness training empowered students to improve the quality of their lives, find self-control, build confidence (e.g., seek and/or hold down a job, apply coping skills), as well as incorporate movement breaks throughout the school day to assist learning. Additionally, all facility staff attending yoga classes noted work stress reduction.
- Yoga teachers reported feeling confident in meeting the expectations of students and appreciated the ongoing trainings offered by Urban Lotus Project to increase skills.

**Impact Questionnaire:** Impact questionnaires were designed to learn how yoga supports students thinking differently about themselves, in what way yoga helped them learn their capabilities, and what they have done (or will do) differently since being exposed to yoga classes. The questions were designed to reflect the project's teaching aim: 'youth are able to cope with life's daily stressors in a healthy way.' The student response surveys were implemented in January 2019. During the reporting period, 182 responses were collected from adolescents taking yoga at 10 locations. The predetermined coding scheme placed responses in four categories. A high number indicated the student is close to reaching the impact

statement, 'youth are able to cope with life's daily stressors in a healthy way.' The highest response category was *making healthy choices* (6.5) indicating most students made decisions to use coping skills or choose healthy activities. *Awareness of self/self-discovery* (1.8) presented as the lowest ranked category implying students lacked an ability to show feelings, emotions, or possess confident internal awareness.

## Replication

Urban Lotus Project primarily serves youth since adolescence is an important time to intervene/mitigate ACEs and Trauma-Informed Yoga is an excellent means to accomplish this goal. The agency has successfully replicated the practice to serve young children (ages 5-11 y.o.) and young adults (ages 18-25 y.o.). Elementary school-aged children received yoga classes through Title 1 schools (mostly low-income students), foster care, and inpatient mental health facilities. For the reporting period, 491 yoga classes were taught to elementary school-aged children. Only 435 unique students were tallied due to the initial duplicated counts. Pre- and post-test survey (Perceived Stress Test) data was not reliable from young children and ceased being collected. Young adults engaged in yoga while residing in transitional living homes and inpatient mental health and substance use treatment facilities, as well as those in outpatient treatment programs. In the reporting period, 286 classes were taught to 192 unique young adults. Quality improvement measures were conducted with young adults via student and instructor evaluations.

Urban Lotus Project is planning to expand into neighboring counties this year. Meetings have been held and contracts signed with agencies serving youth residing in juvenile detention centers, as well as behavioral health and substance use treatment centers. Continued discussions are planned with other organizations about contributing space for a no-cost public class for adolescents. Expansion into neighboring counties entails using yoga instructors living nearby to avoid unnecessary travel time while also having an increased connection with those communities. Utilizing the standardized training videos and quizzes will decrease the amount of travel time for teacher trainings, as well as allow for continued education and fidelity to the methodology.

Urban Lotus Project holds a vision for Trauma-Informed Yoga to be conducted statewide. Replication of this nature requires additional funding to support expansion. Staff would welcome teaching other agencies their success models to duplicate services and expand program reach.

## Section II: Practice Implementation

### Internal Capacity

Within the first year of Urban Lotus Project becoming a 501c(3) organization, it was staffed full-time by the Founder/Executive Director and 12 volunteer yoga teachers holding a minimum of 200+ hours of yoga instructor certifications. The Executive Director, an accomplished yoga instructor, learned the principles and techniques of Trauma-Informed Yoga for Youth through prior trainings, allowing for successful teacher training. Year two growth required one half-time Bookkeeper/Office Manager, additional Yoga Instructors (reimbursed by host facilities), and improvements in teacher training methods. By year three the Bookkeeper/Office Manager became full-time, an outreach coordinator was hired to work 20 hours per month, and 31 Yoga Instructors were being compensated for teaching.

Each year the Executive Director attended Trauma-Informed Yoga courses to enhance her teaching skills and knowledge of trauma-informed principles. Training improvements were made to ensure consistency as more yoga instructors were added. A model was created standardizing the student experience and what to expect every class. Teacher training videos were developed providing information on how trauma impacts people physiologically and psychologically. The videos contained location-specific teaching tips for vulnerable populations, such as those who are pregnant, hospitalized, incarcerated, or homeless. Through group training sessions and yoga instructor meetings, Urban Lotus Project staff realized they needed to teach and practice cultural humility for self-exploration and self-critique, as well as a willingness to learn from others about both their own and their students' beliefs, customs, and values.

Nevada Title V MCH staff held monthly meetings with Urban Lotus Project staff to discuss project activities, progress, and outcomes. MCH staff provided program development guidance, suggested implementation sites and potential funding sources for expansion, and assisted with PDSA cycles for quality improvement. This guidance increased the project's value to the adolescents served.

## **Collaboration/Partners**

Urban Lotus Project partners with local agencies serving at-risk young people to complement each organization's empowerment programs and curricula. Prior to placing Trauma-Informed Yoga into agencies, staff assess how well the classes align with the host facility's mission to assist young people to better cope with life's daily stressors. Initially the yoga instructors were not compensated; however, once the agencies started noticing positive outcomes in participant well-being and student safety, reimbursement was provided allowing for program legitimacy and expansion in the number of locations offering yoga classes.

Urban Lotus Project staff work in partnership with the Board of Directors to ensure all yoga programs align with the organization's mission. The program's two full-time staff are responsible for the day-to-day operations; whereas, the Board safeguards the agency's long-term vision.

Urban Lotus Project involves young people's ideas and opinions in program planning and operations. The title of the public yoga class (Teen Chill Lounge) was named by young people and class attendance increased after suggesting changing the location, time, and day of the week. High school and college students shared the public classes through social media resulting in improved turnouts. Additionally, adolescents were asked how to best word the student response survey questions to ensure relatability for quality improvement.

## **Practice Cost**

Start-up costs were minimal since the founder used her personal residence to conduct office work and trainings, yoga instructors volunteered their time, supplies were donated, and yoga mats were shared by being transported to each location. Rapid demand for additional classes required more resources. Funds from the Nevada Title V MCH Program, community donations, and awards from foundations/organizations facilitated Urban Lotus Project's capacity to operate from a commercial office space, increase workplace staffing, produce training materials, print brochures, and advertise public classes.

<b>Budget</b>			
<b>Activity/Item</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Total</b>
Personnel Salary + Fringe Benefits	Executive Director and Office Manager (80% FTE for ages 12-17)	2 FTE @ .80%	\$79,000
Independent Contractors	Outreach Coordinator (1) and Yoga Instructors (31)	32 people	\$34,000
Operating Expenses	Internet, rent, supplies, phone, and software programs	Continual	\$11,800
Public Awareness	Educational supplies and advertisement	Continual	\$1,000
<b>Total Amount:</b>			<b>\$128,000</b>

### Practice Timeline

<b>Practice Timeline</b>				
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of Activity</b>	<b>Date/Timeframe</b>	<b># of hours needed to complete/oversee activity</b>	<b>Person(s) Responsible</b>
<b>Planning/ Pre-implementation</b>	Expand program outreach by researching locations serving at-risk youth	Continuous need to expand	40 hours per month	Executive Director, Office Manager and Outreach Coordinator
	Design of evaluation tools	6 months (ongoing Board involvement)	30 hours to create	Executive Director, Office Manager, and Board of Directors
	Design training materials (handbook and videos)	2-3 months	100 hours to create	Executive Director

Practice Timeline (continued)				
Phase	Description of Activity	Date/Timeframe	# of hours needed to complete/oversee activity	Person(s) Responsible
Implementation	Conduct yoga classes	Continuous	24 hours per month using 31 teachers	Yoga Instructor
	Yoga Instructor training	For each new instructor	5 hours (current), 2 hours (when videos implemented)	Executive Director
	Community outreach to grow public classes	Continuous	10 hours per month	Executive Director and Office Manager
	Enter evaluations into computer	Continuous	5 hours per month	Office Manager
Sustainability	Grant writing	Continuous	10 hours per month	Executive Director and Office Manager
	Community fundraising	3 major events per year	240 hours per year	Executive Director, Office Manager and Board of Directors

### Resources Provided

- Urban Lotus Project website: <http://www.urbanlotusproject.org/>
- “What Is Trauma-Informed Yoga?” Understanding Trauma-Informed Yoga. <http://melissanoelrenzi.com/about/trauma-informed-yoga/>
- “What are ACEs.” ACEs Science 101. ACEs Too High News. <https://acestoohigh.com/aces-101/>
- “10 ACEs, as identified by the CDC-Kaiser study.” Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Joining Forces for Children. <http://www.joiningforcesforchildren.org/what-are-aces/>

## Lessons Learned

Key informant interviews allowed agencies hosting yoga classes to learn about the rigorous evaluations being performed to determine program impact which further increased Urban Lotus Project's credibility. Additionally, input from the interviews helped propel the creation of a female-only yoga class and decreased class sizes allowing for more personal attention to nurture the individual strengths, interests, and talents of each student.

The pre- and post-test data analysis identified discordance between survey responses and students self-reported experiences at the end of each class when participants were asked to provide one word stating how they felt. The positive words spoken, such as *calm*, *good*, *peaceful*, *safe*, and *content*, combined with the yoga instructors' observations of perceived student increase in self-esteem and relaxation on their faces, highlighted the need for the youth voice. Their input resulted in the development and implementation of the qualitative student response survey.

PDSA cycles became valuable components of quality improvement efforts. Several cycles conducted on the pre- and post-test surveys improved the numbers collected and completed. The student response survey underwent a PDSA cycle to include youth voice. Youth input resulted in removal of words for simplicity, as well as placing the teacher evaluation on the bottom of the page, allowing both evaluations to be on the front side of one page.

Urban Lotus Project began as, and continues to be, a place where teachers can serve their community. Site expansion required additional class time from instructors, resulting in loss of accountability to show up and teach class as a volunteer. Once host facilities started paying fees, the teachers felt valued, schedule accountability improved, and student attendance increased. Eventually, Urban Lotus Project was able to collect a small administration fee to assist with sustainability.

As the agency grew and added more yoga instructors, it was evident teacher training improvements were needed for consistency ensuring every student had a similar experience with each teacher and location. Training videos provided information on how trauma impacts people physiologically and psychologically, as well as location-specific teaching tips for vulnerable populations. Staff learned the need to teach and practice cultural humility.

It became important to root the yoga practices chosen in scientific understanding of how trauma impacts an individual on a psychological and physiological level. Trauma-Informed Yoga is a safe and noninvasive approach which combats dissociation and provides tools to help bring the nervous system back into balance allowing for improved outcomes in stress management, controlling impulses, balancing emotions, and positive approaches to life.

Urban Lotus Project developed a sustainability action plan for growth and expansion to diversify its funding streams. The agency successfully sought resources to augment Nevada Title V MCH Program funding, including monthly corporate and individual donation programs, foundation/organization funding from several agencies, as well as hosting multiple successful community fundraisers.

## Next Steps

The Nevada Title V MCH Program proudly continues to fund the Urban Lotus Project since the agency has fiscally matured, leveraged funds for sustainability, expanded numbers served, and created evaluation models to enhance public health interest in trauma-informed principles. The Teacher Evaluation Survey and Student Response Questionnaire will continue to be used by Urban Lotus Project as part of their quality improvement plans.

During 2020, in partnership with Urban Lotus Project, MCH staff will conduct the no-cost *Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health's Partnership Self-Assessment Tool* to evaluate agency and staff collaborative processes, as well as identify specific focus areas to make said processes more efficient.

Urban Lotus Project plans to expand into neighboring northern Nevada counties in 2020. Expansion statewide into Las Vegas would allow greatest reach to the state's largest population of at-risk youth. Replication in the eastern and southern portions of the state requires additional funding to set up local offices and hire support staff. It would please Urban Lotus staff to teach other agencies how to duplicate their services allowing for expanded reach.

### Practice Contact Information

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