

Child's pose for Durham children

School counselor starts yoga camp to empower and relax children

By Abby Moore
UNC Staff Writer

In the spring of 2009, Eastway Elementary School counselor Ingrid Saddler-Walker decided to go to the gym and take a yoga class. During the class Saddler-Walker had an idea: Yoga would be a great way to calm down restless children.

Three years later, Saddler-Walker is starting her first children's yoga camp to help children learn how to relax, handle behavior problems, such as ADHD, and respond to stressful situations in a nonviolent way.

Saddler-Walker, a single mother of two boys, says her work as a counselor exposed her to many children who struggled with ADHD, and she wanted to find a better way to help them. After her initial yoga class, Saddler-Walker approached the instructor about children's yoga.

"I asked if they had any children's yoga classes, and she said no," Saddler-Walker says. "So I went home, got on the internet and found a class in Virginia."

Saddler-Walker, a Durham resident, drove four hours to Virginia once a month for six months to become certified in Radiant Child Yoga, a yoga program tailored specifically for children.

After becoming certified, Saddler-Walker began teaching yoga to children at after school programs, where she saw how much the children enjoyed it.

"The boys find it difficult at first, but when it comes to a week after doing it, they tend to be the first ones to come get their mats," Saddler-Walker says. "Because I keep it childlike, and I keep it fun, that really helps them to buy in."

And when it comes to shavasana, the resting period at the end of the yoga exercise, Saddler-Walker says the children become so calm that she sometimes has to walk around and wake them up.

Saddler-Walker's Wytha Balance Yoga Camp will last six weeks from June 4 to July 16 and will use art,



Benecia Brooks (left) stretches as yoga instructor Ingrid Saddler-Walker (right) leads an adult yoga class at W.D. Recreation Center in Durham. (Staff photo by Abby Moore)

drama, dance and yoga to engage children ages 7 to 10. The location is to be determined. Saddler-Walker hopes the camp will be fun and innovative, but also help empower the campers.

"Yoga helps the kids to calm down and relax," Saddler-Walker says. "But it almost makes them feel good about themselves."

Saddler-Walker is partnering with Lenora Smith and Joyce Kline to offer campers and their parents more than just yoga classes.

Smith, who began the Partnership Efforts for the Advancement of Children's Health (PEACH) project in Durham in 1996, will educate children and parents on the negative effects of lead poisoning. Kline will provide parenting classes one evening each week of the camp.

"They will learn skills, whatever the topic may be, that will relate to what the children have learned each day," Saddler-Walker says.

Saddler-Walker also teaches an adult yoga class at W. D. Hill Recreation Center on Wednesday at 6:15 p.m. Benecia Brooks, a Durham resident, had her first yoga experience in Saddler-Walker's adult class.

"I've been coming to the class for four

weeks," Brooks says. "And I love it."

Saddler-Walker enjoys teaching adults, but she is excited about the children's yoga camp because she believes it's something the children in the community need.

"Because of the environment and the things going on around the children, knowing how to calm themselves down and how to deal with some of the trauma that they've been introduced to is important," Saddler-Walker says. "They need to know how to respond in a nonviolent way."

And Saddler-Walker hopes yoga will help.

MORE INFO

To register for the yoga camp or for more information, Ingrid Saddler-Walker can be reached through her email address deesawalk@msn.com.

Radiant Child Yoga
www.childrensyoga.com

Wytha Balance Yoga
www.wythabalance.com/children