

# EVALUATION OF TRANSFORMATION YOGA PROJECT PROGRAMS WITHIN THE PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF PRISONS

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Transformation Yoga Project's (TYP) Justice and Reentry programs are designed to be healing alternatives to the effects of mass incarceration. Prison populations have disproportionately high rates of PTSD and individuals affected by the criminal justice system have likely experienced trauma, either before their incarceration or during. TYP's programs seek to increase access to yoga and mindfulness so that people who are incarcerated can discover tools to heal from trauma and improve their overall sense of wellbeing.

TYP has provided trauma-sensitive yoga classes to over 3,000 people who are incarcerated in the Philadelphia Department of Prisons since 2014 and began collecting data on the programs in 2017. Out evaluations look at results from five locations: House of Corrections, Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center, Detention Center, Riverside Correctional Facility, and Cambria Community Center. Class participants have included men and women ranging in approximate age from 18 – 60. Between 2017 and 2018, 130 participants of TYP classes completed TYP program evaluations. The evaluations revealed that participants enjoyed the TYP classes and felt they had learned skills that benefited their wellbeing beyond the class. Specifically, participants reported that they learned tools and techniques to help manage stress, anxiety, quality of sleep and anger management, all of which can be factors that relate to the effect of trauma.

## SAFE CLASS EXPERIENCE

All participants who completed the first round of evaluations at PDP revealed they were satisfied with the yoga classes and that they felt safe and welcomed during the practice. This suggests that all classes were taught according to our trauma-sensitive methodology. Additionally, all the participants indicated that their yogic needs were met, demonstrating they felt they benefited in some way from the yoga class.



## CREATED CALMNESS & RELAXATION

When asked to describe how they felt after participating in a TYP yoga class, **92% of the 2017 participants selected "relaxed" and 80% chose "calm."**\* No negative descriptors were selected. In 2018, **100% of respondents reported that they felt more relaxed and/or calmer after they attended class.\*** The evaluation in 2018 included open-ended responses, and the responses indicated the numerous benefits and ways that yoga had affected them, personally, including comments such as:

*"I feel physically loose, energetic, light, humble, peaceful and happy"*

*"I feel enlightened, stress free, relaxed and free"*

*"I feel a sense of relief. Less stress. Inspiration"*

*"I feel a burden has been lifted"*

*"I feel rejuvenated after each class... also optimistic"*

These responses seem to suggest that the yoga class helped to temporarily relieve the stress of being incarcerated and provided them a respite from what can often be a harsh environment.

\*Data from the 2017-2018 TYP PDP Program Evaluations  
Proprietary Data - Transformation Yoga Project, a 501c3 non-profit,  
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## PARTICIPANTS REPORTED HIGH MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL AWARENESS

The TYP team designed scales to measure self-reported awareness of thoughts, breathing, body/bodily sensations, and feelings about resources available to deal with stress, anxiety and emotions. The evaluations indicated that a higher percent, **60-70%**, of participants surveyed were “always” aware of their thoughts, their breathing, and sensations in their bodies.\* In addition, approximately **60%** of people responded that they felt they had tools and resources to deal with their stress, anxiety and emotions.\*

Statement	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Not Often	Never
I am aware of my emotions	40%	35%	23%	0%	2%
I am aware of my breath	34%	21%	29%	16%	0%
I am aware of my body	40%	29%	23%	6%	2%
I feel I have tools and resources to deal with my stress & anxiety	29%	29%	34%	5%	3%
I feel I have resources to deal with my emotions	29%	26%	35%	6%	3%

Statement	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Not Often	Never
I am aware of my thoughts	57%	24%	14%	2%	2%
I am aware of my breathing	49%	14%	31%	6%	0%
I am aware of sensations in my body	49%	18%	33%	0%	0%
I feel I have tools and resources to deal with my stress & anxiety	35%	12%	37%	16%	0%
I feel I have tools to deal with my emotions	35%	16%	41%	6%	2%

## CLASSES PROVIDED USEFUL TOOLS

In the 2017 evaluation, the respondents were asked if they “believed they developed tools that empowered them to create more comfort and ease in their daily life, and if so what were they?” **Of the 34 people who answered this question on the survey, 33 people (97%) believed they learned tools to help improve their wellbeing,\*** while only 1 person indicated they did not know if they had. The majority of the responses revealed they had learned breathing techniques that aided them in creating more ease in their day-to-day life. As one person remarked, *“(I learned) the tools to focus on my breath, the main thing I need to stay alive.”* In addition, many people indicated that they learned patience and/or control, which enables them to be more calm or relaxed - *“(I learned) to take my time, think, be humble, and control myself.”* Others responded saying they learned many tools from the practice: *“Yes, I do it (yoga) all the time. Breathing, relaxing, being calm about things so I can handle life better.”*

The 2017 evaluation also asked: “Will you or have you used tools developed through yoga to shift old habits and behaviors, and if so can you explain?” Of those who answered this question, **89% of the people (23 out of 27) indicated an affirmative response\*.** The majority who answered this question described situations in which they used yogic tools for anger management. One person wrote, *“breathing & meditation helped me in times of stress to not act out violently so I won’t regret my actions.”* Another wrote, *“Now I can have something positive to do so I won’t go back to my old habits.”*

## PARTICIPANTS FELT CHANGE

**89% of participants who answered the question responded in a way that indicated they had noticed changes in themselves from yoga.\*** The responses were varied; but the majority indicated that yoga affected them either physically, mentally and/or emotionally. Often, individual’s responses suggested they perceived benefits across all three factors of wellness.

### Physical Wellness

- o “I felt more flexible”
- o “It helps me feel a lot better”
- o “More flexible & sleep better”
- o “More in tune with my body”

### Mental Wellness

- o “I noticed that my mind isn’t racing as much”
- o “A little more clear headed”
- o “More centered with myself”

### Emotional Wellness

- o “Consistent calming effect”
- o “I am not as stressed or angry as I was before”
- o “I know how to make myself relax when I feel myself getting upset”