Wellbeing
Surrounded by the comfort of nature, Radiance Restaurant serves delicious healthy gourmet meals featuring carefully selected ingredients, with over 80% of the fruit, herbs and vegetables coming from our own Certified Organic Farm.
The Pavana Chiang Mai Resort is located in the Mae Ann valley, which is five minutes' drive from Prem Tinsulanonda International School. The Pavana Chiang Mai Resort provides guests with spacious guest rooms in a peaceful atmosphere, with a refreshing swimming pool just a few steps from the rooms. We make guests feel pampered by providing Essential Spa Massage at the Bamboo Spa, and the Radiance Restaurant offers an exceptional range of food and drink, including several healthy raw dishes.
Wellbeing is many things to different people. For one person, having good physical and mental health may be what makes him feel good. Another may be happy knowing that she is financially secure and that the bailiffs will not be knocking at the door that evening. For others the strong bonds of family will contribute to feelings of wellbeing. This edition of the Traidhos Quarterly magazine examines some of those elements.

A quiet walk in the countryside (see page 14) is, for one of our contributors, a chance to enjoy the marvels of nature and to lead a less busy and fast-paced life. Others examine the practices of mindfulness and yoga meditation in the classroom and in life (pages 8 and 20), while a reflective moment sitting under a tree (page 6) allows another writer to see things from a different perspective. Dieticians and innovators may be amused by the many uses for the humble banana (page 10) in their quest for richer lives.

Wellbeing is one of the driving forces at Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning – others include sustainability, the arts and innovative approaches to education and life. Deepak Chopra writes, “Wellbeing changes as we move through life, which is why a child’s version of it cannot be the same as an old person’s.” This edition of the magazine looks at many different aspects of wellbeing – and from the perspectives of school children as well as from the “grown ups”.

The Three-Generation Community is a unique educational centre. It offers Prem Tinsulanonda International School (an IB World day and boarding school), several sporting academies, a dynamic Visiting Schools Program, the exciting Traidhos Camps, an artists’ residency program, an educational farm, and a converted rice barge used for environmental educational studies of the Chao Phraya River in and around Bangkok.

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Prem School’s mission statement challenges its community members to be “inspired by meaningful relationships”, and this has always rung true for me. I believe meaningful relationships are the foundation of personal happiness and wellbeing, with which students and all of us are better equipped to achieve success and to face the world. It is my personal sense of wellbeing and good fortune that has fuelled my increasing interest in "Mindfulness", both in terms of what it can offer me and my family, and in its benefits to students in a school setting.

Last academic year was a year of mindfulness. My experiences began in October 2014 at a three-day workshop in Phuket. Leaving my family behind, I went to "Re-Treat" myself at a course designed to expose participants to the benefits of mindfulness - personally and in a school setting. I learnt the history of mindfulness and its development in schools, and how to practise it myself. Though I was at the time unaware of the wealth of evidence pointing to the benefits of mindfulness, I felt I had actually been practising some of the skills in my own way, through yoga and positive thinking, for a number of years. The workshop reminded us of the importance of taking time to stop and to be deliberately aware of the present moment, as these actions reduce stress and improve concentration.

On my return to Chiang Mai it seemed a lot of people were buzzing with thoughts about mindfulness, and its benefits personally and in the field of education. I joined in weekly conversations with staff from the wider school community to share experiences and to consider how this area of wellbeing might be developed at Traidhos. Compared to the other members in the group, I was a real novice. I was further inspired to read more in this field, and promptly bought a number of books to share with my own children, and perhaps later, with my students.

The enthusiasm grows

Term 3 started with a personal project of my own: a six-week online course 'Mindfulness Fundamentals' run by Mindful Schools (www.mindfulschool.org). Again, I was one of many of my community who embraced this opportunity. We benefitted from a weekly face-to-face discussion and practice to support our online forum discussions and homework assignments. My more experienced colleagues were also planning a community forum entitled "Applied Mindfulness" (see above) that took place in March. The five panellists drew on a wealth of experience as meditation facilitators, yoga instructors, lifestyle coaches, and mindfulness teachers.

Following the exciting seminar I was looking forward to developing my own practice and to read more widely in this area, when a chance arose to complete another six-week course on "Mindfulness in Education". Though I had always considered how the mindfulness techniques I was using could be used by and be beneficial to our students, this course was specifically designed to train individuals to teach a mindfulness curriculum. A small group of students in Grade 8 volunteered to work with me for six weeks, to explore what mindfulness could do for them.

The new school year has started with a burst of mindfulness practices going on at Traidhos. Grade 12 students had a session focused on the benefits of mindful practice during their orientation program, and students have also signed up for an after-school activity that combines yoga with mindful philosophy and practice. Our little Traidhos group has also re-formed to meet weekly for further shared development in this field. As a teacher of literature and a lover of nature, I feel I have a new appreciation of the first two lines of William Henry Davies’ famous poem Leisure:

What is this life, if full of care,
We have no time to stop and stare.

Melanie Dickerson

Melanie teaches International Baccalaureate Diploma English at Prem School and has also taught at international schools in Kenya, Argentina and India.
Listen to the Falling Rain

S
can the shelves of well-known bookstores and your eye will soon fall on the most recent offering for our coffee tables – the adult colouring book. The increasingly popular publications, full of patterns and intricate line drawings, boast calming properties designed to release stress and to improve the colourers’ wellbeing. It seems to me a metaphor for our inner need to be safe, secure and happy and epitomises the growing awareness for wellbeing in popular culture.

Not only is the act of carefully shading and blending colour designed to bring pleasure, but the material is frequently designed to connect to the natural world with flowers and trees, insects and birds filling the pages. It is as though we have an ancestral urge for order and beauty and as the modern world removes us from nature, we seek its healing calm to balance our well being through colouring.

Wellbeing concerns the state of being happy and healthy. Writing in the 14 July 2015 Journal of the American Medical Association, Huseyin Naci and John Ionnidis say wellbeing “… includes choices and activities aimed at achieving physical vitality, mental alacrity, social satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment and personal fulfilment.” The Traidhos Community uses AtKisson’s Compass of Sustainability to help give direction to thinking about sustainability. Within this systems-thinking approach to living and working sustainably, wellbeing is an important component suggesting that our individual health, happiness and quality of life is fundamental to living sustainably.

Three O’clock Fridays

Traidhos staff working on the Barge Program in Bangkok reviewed different models of promoting wellbeing in the workplace, and decided to adopt “wellbeing hours”. Recognising the long hours a residential program demands, staff are allowed up to two hours each week to use for personal benefit. They may use the time to arrive later than usual office hours, or take breaks during the day to relax or to conduct personal business. Staff are also given "3 o’clock Fridays" to promote wellbeing and relaxation. Staff feel positive about these opportunities to stimulate wellbeing and have commented that wellbeing time allows them to relax and recoup between trips, to get chores completed, and to be able to attend events in Bangkok that they otherwise wouldn’t have time to join.

The creation of a leafy green campus environment in Chiang Mai, where staff and students can jog or walk in fresh air without the problems of busy roads, attracts many students to consider boarding and is a factor when visiting schools are selecting Traidhos for their camps or fieldtrips. Studies have suggested that exposure to trees and nature aids concentration by reducing mental fatigue and also reduces violence, both of which contribute to us being happy and healthy.
In February, The Nation newspaper reported that Thailand’s spa industry was expected to grow 15%. Globally, travel and tourism contributes an estimated seven trillion dollars to the world economy with wellness tourism accounting for nearly half of this. The rush and tumble of our working lives, driven by deadlines and meetings, is leading to holidays to address the balance, with a growth in the popularity of spa and yoga retreats, and of the “adult summer camps” that allow adults to taste or develop new interests and to discover new skills as part of a caring group.

**The Sounds of Silence**

Student camps and outdoor education opportunities also have the potential to address wellbeing as they offer a sense of belonging, personal development and security. Earlier this year I was working with a Year 6 class on a week-long residential field trip. The week had the usual components of a residential camp: team-building, group investigations, visits and environmental awareness games.

The group was meaningfully busy from breakfast to bedtime. They had prepared for the trip with classroom work at their home school, but it had taken a while for the students to feel safe in this strange outside world. Now that they were comfortable with grass and insects it was time to let them become really aware of their surroundings.

To focus students on the task of being aware, we provided a series of sensory awareness tasks that students could use to focus their attention. Before sending them out to find their special space, we talked about how we might get to know the special spot. Students suggested how they might sit or lie, how they could use their hands to capture sounds by placing them around their ears, how we could experiment with eyes open or eyes closed. This short discussion served to excite the curiosity of the learners to try different things.

Students spread out within the designated area, following the suggestion that no one should be closer than three meters to another student.

They settled quickly, the different characters showing themselves as some sat in the warm cool-season sun while others tucked themselves on logs under the trees. Some sat upright while others reclined but what was noticeable was the sense of stillness - as if the world had really stopped.

Some students barely moved – wrinkling their nose to become aware of the smells, cupping their ears to focus on the sounds and then scribbling down a response.

We could have carried on sitting there, mindful of birdsong and sunlight, insects and tiny plants, but after about half an hour we quietly reassembled. The students were keen to share but remained calm and respectful of each other. We discussed how the special space had made them feel, and also what feelings remained with them. Without exception the words reflected feelings of peace, calm, happiness and of being relaxed. We discussed how we might recreate the feelings of **Special Spot** in other places when we wanted to feel calm and happy. The children were thoughtful and enthusiastic about this idea agreeing that if they were still, quiet and mindful they could find special spots anywhere they chose.

Whether it is in the home, quietly colouring elaborate patterns, feeling trusted and valued in the workplace, taking time to make space to relax at a spa or exploring personal potentials in an outdoor or camp setting, being aware of wellbeing and giving time to develop it contributes to our sense of happiness and fulfilment, helping us to participate positively in sustaining both ourselves and our world.

**Lynda Rolph**

Lynda Rolph is Head of Community at the Traidhos Three-Generation Community for Learning and has been working with the company for over fifteen years. She is a highly respected environmental educator, with teaching experience in United Kingdom and Thailand. She is former Director of the Traidhos Three-Generation Barge Program.

Mindfulness Demystified

Mindfulness has recently been gaining more and more media attention, aided perhaps by a number of celebrities - Angelina Jolie, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Oprah Winfrey, Rupert Murdoch - who have declared that mindfulness practice is part of their daily routine. Last year a number of US publications dubbed 2014 as “The Year of Mindfulness”.

Proponents have claimed that mindfulness can be used to help people cope with a myriad of modern ailments including stress, anxiety, pain and depression. Inevitably after its rapid, hype-driven rise to popularity, critics began to emerge and this year some publications have questioned whether 2015 would be “The Year of the Mindfulness Backlash”. Some detractors have labelled mindfulness as the latest obsession of the white upper middle class. This article is less concerned with arguments for and against mindfulness but will endeavour to clarify what mindfulness is at its core.

In a nutshell, mindfulness is a modern, secularised variation of classic Buddhist meditation techniques that are more than 2500 years old. In their contemporary form, mindfulness techniques first started becoming popular in the 1990s thanks to the work of an American professor of medicine, Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn (above). In his early days, Kabat-Zinn was a student of prominent Buddhist teachers and a learned practitioner of yoga. He began investigating whether these ancient techniques could be applied to the management of stress and chronic pain in some of his patients. In 1979 he founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School where he developed an eight-week program known as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR). His program was able to help patients manage their chronic pain and find moments of peace and calm despite their debilitating conditions.

At around the same time, psychologists and psychiatrists at the University of Oxford also began investigating meditation techniques to see whether they could be used to treat patients suffering from depression. Scientific research on both sides of the Atlantic followed, including the use of newly developed brain scan imaging technology. As the evidence for the benefits of meditation began to be published, its popularity as a means for managing the stresses of modern life began to grow.

In order to broaden its appeal and to avoid the association of meditation with a particular religious belief or with the counter-culture “hippie” movement of the 1960s, the programs were secularised. Rather than a means to achieving enlightenment or nirvana, the techniques were promoted as skills for raising attention and present-moment awareness, leading to greater calm and centeredness. In addition, the word “mindfulness” was used in preference to “meditation”.

Since mindfulness is based on classic Buddhist meditation techniques, it is important to understand some of the underlying principles of meditation. At its core, meditation can be described as any process that slows down the fluctuations or “oscillations” of the mind. Buddhist and yogic teachers maintain that our minds are rarely focused on the present moment for any length of time. Instead, our minds tend to “oscillate” between the past and the future. Typically we have a tendency to regret what may have happened in the past and worry about what might happen in the future. In times of stress, this constant fluctuation back and forth can trigger what physiologists refer to as the “fight or flight response”.

During this physiological response the adrenal glands release adrenaline and cortisol (the two main stress hormones), which cause a series of physiological changes in the body including increased heart rate, dilation of the pupils and dilation of the blood vessels in our limbs. Human beings have evolved with this response and in times of genuine threat and danger this response is necessary for survival. It prepares us to assess the situation quickly and make a split-second decision either to flee from the danger or to prepare to fight it. After the danger has passed, the fight or flight response is meant to subside and the body return to a relaxed state.
However, in our current frenetic, over-stimulated, always online world, many of us are constantly in this fight or flight response without being aware of it. Chronic over-stimulation can lead to chronic overarousal - a state of constantly being alert, a feeling of constant body-mind buzz. Studies have shown that extended periods of chronic overarousal can lead to various metabolic imbalances and eventually chronic illness.

Meditation and mindfulness techniques at their core can be used to reduce overarousal and the fight or flight response. Central to all meditation techniques is focussing attention to the body’s sensations in the present moment. In yoga this involves drawing attention to the precise movements of the muscles during the poses. In classic sitting meditation this involves drawing focused attention to the characteristics and sensations of the breath.

Being able to manage and reduce overarousal can be particularly useful for students preparing for their final high school exams. Exam anxiety can all too easily trigger the fight or flight response at a time when calm, focused attention is required. This may cause some students to underperform during examinations.

In 2007 British teachers with backgrounds in meditation used Kabat-Zinn’s eight week MBSR program as a model to develop a mindfulness program specifically tailored for high school children. The program, called “.b” (pronounced “Dot-be”) is an eight-lesson course designed to introduce students to the potential benefits of mindfulness. Early research conducted by UK universities has indicated that mindfulness can help students feel calmer, concentrate and learn better and manage stress and anxiety more effectively. As part of its commitment to empowering all students to perform to the best of their abilities, Prem offers yoga and mindfulness training as part of the after-school co-curricular program.

**Borys Maciburko**

*Borys is a drama, Theory of Knowledge, yoga and mindfulness teacher. He has a Diploma in Yoga Education from Yoga Vidya Gurukul, India, and has been certified by the Mindfulness in Schools Project, UK to teach the eight-week “.b” mindfulness program.*

Images: storyside.se, vietwakeupoc.org and others
Bountiful Bananas

Thailand has almost thirty varieties of bananas, ranging from the seedy hard wild forest bananas ("Gluay pa") to the most popular "Gluay nam wa" or Ducasse banana. There are the Monkey Finger and Lady Finger bananas, Manini, Goldfinger, Cavendish and so many more. Many people consider bananas to be the best fruit for a healthy lifestyle. Some varieties offer edible flowers while others offer leaves to be used as "plates". A slice of the trunk can be used as the base for a festive krathong. Bananas can be eaten raw, flambéed, deep fried as fritters, turned into banoffee pies or topped with ice cream and nuts to make delicious banana sundaes.

And then there are other ways of using this humble fruit ...

Make a face mask

You can use a banana as an all-natural face mask that moisturises your skin and leaves it looking and feeling softer. Mash up a medium-sized banana with some plain yoghurt and honey, and gently apply to your face. Let it set for ten to twenty minutes, then rinse off with cold water.

Tenderise a roast

Banana leaves are commonly used in Thailand to wrap meat while it is cooking to make it more tender. A ripe banana added to the roasting pan is said to tenderise the roast.

Polish silverware and leather shoes

Remove any of the leftover stringy segments from a banana skin and rub the inside of the peel on your shoes or silver. Test a small section first before tackling the whole job. When you are finished, buff the object with a paper towel or a soft cloth.

Brighten up house plants

Are the leaves on your house plants looking dusty or dingy? Don’t bother misting them with water – wipe down each leaf with the inside of a banana peel. It will remove all the dust from the leaf surface and replace it with a lustrous shine.

Deter aphids

Bury dried or cut-up banana peels two or three centimetres deep around the base of aphid-prone plants and soon the aphids will leave the infected plant. Note – do not use whole peels or the bananas themselves as these may attract rabbits or squirrels that will dig up the food and possibly your rose bush as well.

Frozen banana-sicle

As a summer treat, peel and cut four ripe bananas in half (across the middle). Insert a wooden ice-cream stick into the flat end of each piece. Place them all on a piece of wax paper and put it in the freezer. After a few hours they are ready to serve as frozen banana-sicles. You can also go all-out by dipping the frozen banana in melted butterscotch or chocolate – with optional chopped nuts or shredded coconut – and returning to the freezer.

Attract butterflies and birds

Place over-ripe bananas (and other fruit such as mangoes or papayas) on a raised platform in your garden. Punch a few holes in the fruit to make it more accessible to butterflies. As the fruit may also attract bees and wasps ensure the platform is above head height, and be sure to remove the fruit before nightfall so that nocturnal creatures are not encouraged.

Use as a fertiliser

Banana peels and the fruit are rich in potassium and phosphorus. Dry the skins during winter months and in the spring grind them up in a food processor or blender to use as a mulch, giving new plants and seedlings a healthy start. Roses in particular benefit from the nutrients found in banana peels.

So there you have it – not just a humble fruit that you can pluck, peel and eat – the banana is a veritable powerhouse of nutrition and variety. Just make sure you do not discard the banana peel on the footpath in front of an unsuspecting pedestrian!

[Adapted from an article in What's Out Addis April 2014]
Do you have a favourite ice tea lady? For fifteen years I have enjoyed tea made by a very dedicated tea lady. In the rainy season she shelters under a rather inadequate umbrella attached to her cart while in the hot season she uses a generous handkerchief to mop her brow from sunrise to sunset. Imagine standing every day for the fifteen years I have known her - and who knows how many years before that - on the same paving slab making and serving tea. All day. Every day. Just tea and coffee and pink milk.

She has taught me it is possible to have passion for anything, and if you work with dedication you can be happy. Every time I see her, she is smiling, laughing and chatting, and constantly wiping down her cart. In the early days that I knew her, she used to supervise her children’s homework against the noise of the traffic, and seemed perfectly content with her life. She has trained the next generation to make tea too, and now is caring for her granddaughter on that same paving slab, under possibly the same umbrella while she makes the same tea.

For many years I understood that when I asked for lemon tea, it was lemon tea that I got, but recently I realised that great-tasting well-crafted lemon tea contains much more than tea and lemon juice.

I watched carefully as she expertly blended the components. Mysteriously it began with a teaspoon of coffee granules. Was I very embarrassed the first time I saw the spoonful because I thought I had not made my wishes clear, “No ... sorry ... I want tea ... not coffee.”

Then several teaspoons of sugar, more sugar in fact than any dentist or dietician would approve of. Then salt. Half a teaspoon of it, usually followed by nearly another half spoonful, as though those two halves perfect the concoction better than a single spoon would have done. Then there is the lemon juice: freshly squeezed in a contraption that in other places would belong in a museum. Finally, and with a great deal of stirring, the tea is ready for the last ingredient, which had been kept kept warm in a metal jug until the right moment, is poured through a muslin sock. Further stirring happens then the special mixture is poured over a huge bag of ice and expertly spun around and trapped by an elastic band punctured by a straw. The masterpiece is then handed over.

Drawing the orange liquid through the short pink plastic straw, I thought about what wellbeing might mean for this ice-tea lady. I cannot be sure, but over the years, my observations suggest she is surrounded by a close-knit family, that she has a reliable group of returning customers providing a steady income, that she is well-respected by those around her, and that she is bright and cheerful, appearing happy in the work she does well. She seems proud of her stall, keeping the cart clean and shiny, always smiling, all day, every day, as she hands over those bags of tea, or coffee or pink milk or ... but whatever it is, it makes tea time a special treat.

Lynda Rolph
Exercise, Movement and the Mind

Neuroscientists Chaddock-Heyman and Erickson have discovered that children who exercise regularly tend to do better in mathematics. Until recently, little research existed to explain this relationship, but a team of scientists at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has made the major discovery that aerobic fitness results in a thinner layer of grey matter in the brains of young children. This difference in brain structure, they propose, leads to better cognitive control and working memory and key skills related to ability in mathematics. Other researchers note that many students are growing up in a society that does not permit the same activities and freedom that once allowed the discovery of self and the exploration of the environment. We carry our children to the car, to the shopping trolley, back to the car, and then carry them inside to watch television screens and to play games on devices. This is leading to a generation of children who have poor perceptual motor awareness, are overweight, and are repeatedly misdiagnosed with ADHD or other cognitive issues.

The importance of regular exercise and its connection to wellbeing and cognitive development drives the Prem School PE department to ensure a comprehensive sports program is offered for its students. A key element of the Physical Education curriculum is the Perceptual Motor Program (PMP) designed to support the development of fundamental movement patterns and perceptual awareness of Early Years students.

The PMP focuses on the basic movement patterns that precede moves associated with sporting movements such as kicking a football or dribbling a basketball. It is likened to getting back down on the floor and learning once again how to crawl and roll. In the PMP, students move from activity to activity revisiting movements such as rolling, balancing, cross-walking, caterpillar crawling, pencil rolling, climbing, hanging, swinging, catching, trying to sequence events in order, and experiencing patterns and rhythm in music.

Why is Perceptual Motor Programming so Important?

The Williams and Shellenberger “Pyramid of Learning” diagram shows that for children to function at an intellectual level they must first have been exposed to a world of movement opportunities. This gives them the sensory and perceptual awareness and brain development required for cognition.

Research shows that the space between the left and right sides of the brain is filled when babies are stimulated with cross lateral movements such as crawling, touching opposite parts of the body, dancing and various midline activities. Effectively the left side of the brain (our logic side) talks to the right side (our creative side) better than before, and sends messages from the brain to the body and back at a faster and more efficient rate. If children’s tactile, visual, olfactory, auditory and other senses are well developed, this sensory awareness lays a strong foundation for developing greater perceptual awareness with better eye-hand coordination and auditory language skills.

A worrying phenomenon is the arrival at schools around the world of students displaying the absence of properly developed ocular motor control and a lack of awareness of the two sides of their bodies. This inadequate sensory and perceptual development frequently means that the students will struggle to cope with the demands of academic learning and appropriate behaviour.

A child who looks clumsy or lost navigating the classroom, has trouble gripping his pencil, reverses his letters so that ‘b’ looks like ‘d’, or writes down the page instead of on the lines, is spending much of his time locked in the physical world, stressed by his inability to follow basic instructions, and approaching cognitive tasks with a blank look.

Parents have an important role to play ensuring that all children have opportunities to experience each stage of development. Encouraging children to experience creative play and movement time each day is a vital element of a child’s daily ‘work’.
Children learn through play and their ability to learn is actually strengthened through specific types of play. Activities that encourage children to move their arms and legs across their mid-line (cross lateral movements) have a dramatic effect on learning. Imagine an invisible line drawn down the centre of the body. This is the mid-line. The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body, and the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body. When a person’s right arm or leg crosses over to the left side of the body, it forces the left and right side of their brain to work together.

The right and left sides of the brain also process different types of information. The left side uses logic, facts and rules. It governs language and words, mathematics and science, pattern and order. The right side uses feeling, and sees the big picture, it recognises symbols and images. The right side processes spatial perception and object function. The right side allows us to imagine possibilities.

By encouraging cross lateral movement, we are bringing together the “dreamer” and the “doer”. We are strengthening the part of the brain that will enable children to do activities that require crossing the mid-line like reading and writing. More and more educators in preschool and elementary classrooms are incorporating activities that encourage cross lateral movement and strengthening the corpus callosum.

What can you do?

Get your child moving! Most infants begin to do this naturally, finding the midline by sucking on their hand. By the age of six months they are reaching across their highchair for food, or following you with their eyes as you walk across the room: each of these is an example of cross lateral movement. A surprisingly important developmental stage for brain development is crawling. When an infant crawls, she uses her left knee together with her right hand to propel herself forward. As children get older, there are many ways we can encourage these types of movements, such as rhythm activities to music, friendly wrestling on the bed, climbing, martial arts, playground play, juggling, dance, yoga, swimming, building an obstacle course, letting them jump on your bed and couch, gymnastics, and allowing your house to become a playground. That play can involve you too, but does not always have to be organised, just let them play!

What will you do?

Mark Bower

Mark Bowyer is the Deputy Junior School Principal at Prem Tinsulanonda International School, and also the PYP Coordinator and Physical Education teacher. He has a Master’s degree of Education in TESOL, with specific interests in Educational Psychology and Human Development.
Walking – the Best Medicine

Recent studies have suggested that spending time in a natural environment can make you happier both in the short and in the long term. Indeed the merits of walking can be traced back to Hippocrates who claimed over two thousand years ago that it was man’s best medicine.

Though I used to regularly walk the local fields and coastline as a teenager, I rarely admitted it to my peers as I suspected that the majority of my friends would have thought it strange. During my university years my suburban environment prompted me to get around on two wheels and by the time I had graduated and found myself a full-time job, I was commuting sixty kilometres by bike each week – favouring a picturesque yet muddy towpath and a quick change of clothes over a five-minute train ride.

Now working in Mae Rim, twenty kilometres north of Chiang Mai, I am proud to announce that I am a full-blown nature lover: on weekends you are likely to find me exploring caves, climbing waterfalls or just taking my scooter up into the mountains to see what adventures are awaiting me. But I’m still a strong advocate of the good, old-fashioned country walk and ask that you consider – if you don’t already do it – adding walking to your repertoire of hobbies.

First of all, there’s the scenery. I’m sure you’ve noticed the ubiquitous beauty of Chiang Mai and the Mae Rim campus but how often do you take the time to really enjoy it? Go on – indulge yourself! After all, what’s the point in it being there if all you’re going to do is take it for granted? You might even notice something new just by slowing down for a while, as even a familiar route can feel like a new journey when you walk it for the first time.

Take the path less-travelled

As a small challenge you might like to try one of the many dirt roads in the nearby countryside and go exploring. Near the place where I work are lots of possibilities – and I am sure that similar opportunities exist wherever you live. As an example, I can go all the way to the village of Mae Ann by leaving through the back of the Traidhos farm and cutting through the woods following one of several different routes. Have you ever seen that sign for Kangaroo Hill on the way to the Spa Resort? You can walk to the hill in a few minutes if you know the way. The panoramic view that awaits you is well worth the effort.

Or how about the road next to Tub Usa? That will drop you off just a few kilometres short of Tard Mork waterfall, or it can lead you on a back road to the X-Centre, though both of these walks will take more than a few minutes.

One of the often-understated benefits of walking is its social value. With few major distractions but plenty around you to talk about, I find that conversation with old friends and new acquaintances flows easily when desired, and that silences are often appreciated rather than awkwardly avoided. I once spent twelve days walking with a man I had never met before and we barely spoke until it was time to rest in the evenings. We had a mutual understanding that whilst it was good to have the company, neither of us was there to make small talk. For me he was the perfect trekking partner.

That may sound a little extreme, especially for the more talkative, so how about this? If you take a walk around your neighbourhood it’s actually a great way to meet and get to know people, especially useful for anyone who struggles with a language or cultural barrier and has yet to form meaningful relationships with their neighbours. While I will always smile at my mine, I don’t often stop to chat unless I am on a stroll – often with my dog, a local rambler himself, and who provides a good conversation starter. The first time I walked to work I was surprised by someone I didn’t recognise asking me where my bike was. Having now broken the ice, every time that he happens to be outside as I whizz past we cheerfully exchange greetings and he adds a little to my day.

So why not put the research to the test and see you can lighten up your own day just by taking a little walk?

Michael Horrocks

Mike is a Senior Staff and Programs Coordinator at the Traidhos Visiting Schools Program. He has been working with youths in a variety of settings since the age of nineteen and has done so in the UK, Ireland and for four years now in Chiang Mai. He occasionally runs community walks and bike rides from the Traidhos campus.
Happiness and Emotional Well-Being

A healthy diet and exercise are great for your body, but don’t neglect your emotional health and well-being. Reducing stress, getting enough sleep, and having fun are all ways to find happiness. When your mind is frazzled and stressed, and your emotions are taking over your thoughts and affecting your everyday activities, it’s time to take a step back, take a deep breath, and relax. Of course focusing on your physical health is crucial, but so is treating your mind and spirit to the same attention. Your happiness goes a long way in protecting your overall well-being.

Why It’s Important

Emotions are one aspect of a person’s health that often get neglected. But if your emotional health is suffering, your physical health will too. Your emotional health is just a term for how you feel — your overall happiness and well-being. Are you stressed? Unhappy? Unsatisfied? Worried and anxious? Then your emotional health needs some serious attention, or your body will start paying the price.

How It Feels

Being emotionally healthy is a huge plus. People with good emotional health:

- Believe that there is a good balance to their life between leisure time, activity, and work
- Feel good about themselves, and don’t suffer from self-esteem issues
- Believe that there is a purpose to their lives
- Are able to accept changes better and just go with the flow
- Enjoy living, and know the value of fun and laughter
- Have less stress, and are better equipped to deal with stress
- Have better relationships with others
- Are contented with their lives

When All’s Not Well

“If we do not care for ourselves, frustration, tension, anger, and poor health can develop,” says Sally R. Connolly, a clinical social worker, therapist and co-founder of CounselingRelationshipsOnline.com, an online counseling service. Even when you know how important it is to take good care of your emotions, it can still be a tall order. It can be tough to find time for yourself, and some people may feel guilty about pampering or spoiling themselves from time to time. Others may just ignore their feelings and stressors and hope they just go away. However, they usually don’t — and at some point, unaddressed emotional problems often result in serious consequences, from illness to relationship problems to harmful behavior.

“Many of us, women especially, have the irrational belief that caring for ourselves or putting our own mental and emotional health first is selfish,” says Connolly. “Women are reared to be caregivers and usually put themselves last.”

Getting Started

Make a decision to do something nice for yourself every day and stick to it.

“For many people it has to be a conscious process,” says Connolly. “They must take time to do it. I often recommend some simple ritual as a way of honoring themselves.” She recommends something as simple as daily meditation to inspire peace and relaxation.

Other rituals might involve:

- Getting up a few minutes early to drink your morning coffee in peace
- Taking a walk every day
- Having regularly scheduled events with close friends or family
- Finding time to be alone with your spouse

Tips for Emotional Health

Focusing on your emotional health isn’t hard, but it may be an adjustment for you. Some simple — and really enjoyable — changes are all it takes to boost happiness and well-being. Follow these ideas to strengthen your emotional health:

- Exercise. It protects physical and emotional health, relieves stress, and makes you feel good.
- Make time for laziness. Spend a little time each day or each week doing something you enjoy that is completely frivolous: watch TV or a silly movie, chat on the phone, play a game, or just listen to music.
- Spend some time in the sun, with sunscreen, of course: sunlight is a great way to boost your mood.
- Deal with your emotions. Learn how to properly deal with stress, anger, and anxiety instead of keeping them bottled up inside.
- Be healthy inside. This means avoiding junk food and sticking to a healthy diet. You should also steer clear of smoking, drug use, and too much alcohol.
- Treat your senses. Do little things that make you happy and stimulate your senses, like lighting a scented candle, buying some fresh-cut flowers, indulging in a massage, or treating yourself to your favorite food or drink.
- Sleep. Everyone gets cranky without enough sleep, so dedicate adequate sleep time every night. Or treat yourself to a nap every now and then.
- Be creative. Spend some time learning new things, like a new language or skill (for example, music or knitting). Even just working in your garden can help you relax and feel satisfied.

The bottom line is pretty simple: take time for happiness. Allow yourself to enjoy life, fun, and relaxation. Be thankful for what you have, and enjoy it.

Diana Rodriguez
Everydayhealth.com
Authentic Swiss Cuisine, Bakery and Pastry
in Doi Saket, Chiang Mai
Many people say that in the West you wait for three hours to see the doctor for five minutes, but that in Chiang Mai it takes you only five minutes to make an appointment to see the doctor for three hours.

While this may not be totally accurate, it is true that the healthcare offered in Chiang Mai is often more accessible and less expensive than in many other parts of the world – and in particular the USA. Chiang Mai Province has a population of approximately 1.5 million people, of whom under 200,000 live in Chiang Mai city. Some 20,000 expatriates are included in these numbers. Yet with such a relatively small population, we are positively spoiled for choice when it comes to selecting a hospital or a dental surgery.

There are almost a dozen hospitals to choose from – depending on your need – and around twenty dental clinics. At many of these are doctors and dentists with excellent English who can assist non-Thai-speaking patients, and most offer world-class facilities and treatments, at Chiang Mai prices.

Having a baby in an American or Australian or British hospital can cost up to US$10,000 – or THB 360,000. Depending on the Chiang Mai hospital chosen, and the type of delivery – natural or Caesarean – the local bill is likely to be less than THB 60,000 and it could be as low as THB 15,000. It is a similar story with dental work, where a crown treatment in the USA may cost as much as $1500 (THB 54,000), while using one of Chiang Mai’s excellent local dentists the final bill may be THB 14,000 or THB 15,000.

A fresh fruit smoothie in hand, scented aromatherapy massage oils wafting through the air, and with a pulse rate deliberately slowed down through focused breathing and meditation – who could ever be afraid of a trip to the dentist’s surgery again?

Christopher Hall

Christopher Hall has many years’ experience teaching in Australia, the UK and Thailand. He is a graduate of the University of Queensland and holds post-graduate qualifications from Queensland University of Technology, Trinity College London and Cambridge University.

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FOOT MASSAGE

120 Baht/Hour

Foot and Thai
INN

120
Yoga in the Classroom

The ancient yogis believed that flexibility equalled longevity, and that people with supple bodies naturally lived longer. The older we get, the stiffer we get. If you were to ask any adult who regularly practises yoga they would all agree: it makes us feel great. Practitioners keep coming back to practise yoga because it gives them energy, makes them feel agile, dexterous, more flexible and strong.

Children have naturally high energy levels and seek out a wide array of activities to keep themselves busy from when they wake up until they fall asleep. As any parent knows - it’s quite difficult to keep up with the vigour of a child. As we age we lose our vitality, and our energy levels naturally decrease. Practising yoga postures helps us stay healthy, alert and strong well into old age.

A life-long skill

By introducing yoga to the school curriculum, we are teaching students that this is something worth doing from an early age. When students witness teachers more than twice their age executing yoga postures with ease, they become curious, they see with their own eyes the value and benefits of the practice. By teaching yoga to school children they are more likely to embrace this ancient discipline and continue practising it well into adulthood. As students’ interests often change over time, they may decide to take time off from their practice for a few years, but if a solid base has been established during their school days, it will not be difficult to recommence practising yoga later in life. One thing is for certain: we all have bodies, and we all want to feel comfortable, flexible, and strong in our bodies. Practising physical yoga postures provides students the necessary tools to do this.

The philosophy of yoga has many branches, similar to the branches of science. Yoga is much more than a physical exercise, just as school is much more than academics. In mainstream schools students learn etiquette, morals and appropriate forms of conduct that help them prepare for the real world. According to the system of Astanga Yoga, students are not taught the physical postures until they can familiarise themselves with, or master the moral codes of conduct. Some of my greatest memories of secondary school were the profound life lessons I learned along the way, as my learning was not confined to academics. I always took valuable lessons home from my co-curricular activities and social experiences with friends. Yoga teaches students to consider all of their actions, and to look at their world through a more compassionate lens. We consider diet, for example, and how what we put in our bodies affects not only our physical and mental health, but the planet as well. In this respect yogis are globally minded people who constantly strive to be more conscious and sustainable - exactly what the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile strives to do as well.

As the Prem Intensive English Program enters its second academic year, students are familiar with meditation - the final branch on the tree of yoga - as part of their weekly curriculum. Anyone who practises meditation diligently knows that meditation is not easy, as it requires a strong upright posture and an alert mind. Yoga prepares the body so practitioners can enter and sustain deep states of meditative absorption. Yoga postures were designed to open, strengthen and detoxify the body, preparing students’ bodies for unencumbered periods of meditation practice.

Strong Bodies and Good Breathing

If the body isn’t strong and healthy, it is nearly impossible to focus on mental disciplines such as meditation. With the introduction of yoga as part of their weekly regime, students have a chance to cultivate the physical element of their practice, which in turn compliments the mental. It’s like putting the pieces of a puzzle together: the yoga postures help to improve circulation and respiration, increasing stamina when it comes time to meditate. In fact the yoga postures are not separate from the meditative aspect, as ultimately they are one and the same. By working with our body and breath in all postures, it is possible to enter into meditative states at any time, anywhere, although these types of advanced practices and concepts usually occur only after years of discipline and practice.

Schools are miniature societies, and all schools and societies experience trends. The current trend in schools is mindfulness in the classroom. Administrators, teachers, parents and students are beginning to recognise the importance of wellness and the role it plays in a student’s academic success. Too often with trends we experience something that might be good for us, but it’s here and gone too fast, replaced by yet another new trend. Yoga and mindfulness have been valuable tools for centuries, and are practices that really work. In order for them to work, we need to establish continuity. For example if we practice yoga in the classroom once a week, for one year, it’s better than nothing. But in order to benefit from the more long-term results of yoga and meditation, it is necessary to establish a regular practice, and to continue that practice on a regular basis.

Incorporating yoga classes as part of the mainstream curriculum, and providing students a chance to practise yoga after school as well, gives students a chance to practise yoga with more consistency, to make progress, and to experience longer-lasting results – not only as student yogis, but as better-performing students in their academic work as well.

Casey Gramaglia

Casey Gramaglia is a teacher in the Prem Intensive English Program and a certified Jivamukti Yoga teacher. It was a deep love for Buddhism and Vipassana meditation that first brought Casey to Thailand where he immersed himself in meditation retreats at Wat Rampoen and Wat Chomtong meditation temples. Casey has been teaching meditation and yoga in northern Thailand for seventeen years.
Prem Alumni News

Gabriela Degan, Class of 2010

Upon graduating from Prem, I aspired to be a diplomat ... but through the summer work experiences I soon realised that I wanted to be part of “hands-on-grassroot-change”. I haven’t found the specific name of the job or the thing that I want to do yet ... maybe there isn’t one and I might end up creating it. For now life feels like a journey of discovery, one where I keep exploring and harnessing new talents and skills. I have learnt to not be afraid of ‘not knowing’ what I will become since the only constant there is in life is change. As a Third Culture Kid, I am very familiar with change and with it comes an inexplicable thrill and excitement of the unknown - which keeps my imagination busy thinking of numerous possibilities of ‘what could be’. ... do it that matters”, is what I tell myself constantly to improve and challenge myself.

Since leaving Prem I have earned a BA in International Relations from the Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris and I am currently at Cambridge University completing my Master’s degree in Politics, Development and Democratic Education.

Ami Okuno, Class of 2012

Hello! I am Ami Okuno although people here in the USA call me Amy. I graduated from Prem in 2012 and I went to Furman University in South Carolina in the United States, where I am studying a Biology pre-medicine track. I have done research in London and Osaka University in Japan. This summer I worked with Doctors without Borders (or MSF) in Tokyo and I also went to a clinic in Northern Thailand for about a week to get medical and clinical experience.

The IB taught me a lot of things and the biggest things that it taught me was to organise my time well, and how to write good essays. It is always nice coming back to Prem because of its natural beauty and all the teachers who remember me and talk to me. Some other students still remember me, so it’s really nice to come back and say hello to the teachers and the students.

Chris Clarici, Class of 2014

Following graduation in June 2014, Chris entered the University of Arizona where she studied Global Studies and French, with a minor in Art History. During her year there she learned a lot – about herself and growing up and being independent. In 2015 she transferred to San Francisco where she will continue her passion by studying theatre at the Academy of Art University.

Hello Prem Graduates!
Share your news by emailing the editor with details of where you are and what you are doing:
christopherh@ptis.ac.th
We have succeeded a “DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE” step in the craft of baking.

THE TASTE OF 2 CENTURIES
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