

Alumni Entrepreneur - Leslie Keough '96

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The 1996 Chaminade Julienne graduate experienced a near-fatal motorcycle accident that resulted in a serious head injury and partial paralysis when she was just 23 years old. Not long afterward, Keough discovered yoga – a life-changing discovery. Less than two years later, she was a certified instructor.

“Healing from the accident forced me to turn inward and focus on what was most important,” Keough said. “Life can be hard and unfair, even punishingly cruel, but it’s imperative to remember that it’s temporary and there are ways to reduce suffering.”

Since the launch of Meditate Montclair in 2017, Keough has been helping others do the same. Keough established Meditate Montclair to share natural methods of finding wholeness using ancient and contemporary wellness practices from around the world.

“Meditation can be a roadmap to get through hard times,” she said. “When you feel like you’re in a low spot, it’s a way to help balance your mood.”

The wellbeing business – based in the New York metropolitan area --initially focused on sharing the benefits of mindful movement (yoga) and meditation with in person classes. During the pandemic she took her company online and offered mediation and yin yoga classes via zoom where a few CJ students, graduates and parents participated regularly. In recent years, the business has evolved and Keough is now a certified health and wellness coach and has expanded services to include consulting, health and wellness coaching, public speaking, writing, and Podcasting.

The wellness professional offers three simple strategies in addition to meditation to incorporate mindfulness into an accessible wellness plan to mitigate stress and maintain wellbeing: practice self-compassion, plan consistent physical exercise, and schedule social interaction.

Practicing self-compassion

“Neurologically we are exhausted from trying to associate current events to known experiences, and since there are none, our brain continuously scans for reference leaving us depleted and in turn thin-skinned. We are living in indisputably stressful times, so the first key is to practice self-compassion. Acknowledging our feelings, their validity, and holding space for them, will help us process them quicker in a healthy way. Plus, we should find solace in the fact that everyone is feeling exhausted and a general sense of malaise from the state of affairs because we are having trouble making sense of the world. For neurological reasons, we are tired, which in turn makes us thin skinned. So be kind to yourself. Practice self compassion and extend kindness to others.”

Scheduling social interaction

“Though our natural instinct might be to retreat from others and isolate, extended periods alone are not good for our mental health. Planning social interactions with supportive friends and family can stave off depression. In addition to employing introspective modalities to check in with yourself, check in on your people regularly.

The value of community cannot be overstated as we all felt the loss during COVID’s lockdown period. People need people.”

Planning consistent physical exercise

“It’s imperative to exercise regularly. While many health professionals advocate regular exercise for the physical benefits, commensurate are the mental benefits of consistent movement. Whatever healthy forms of movement temporarily distract one from stressful issues, do it. Then do it again and again. Our positive experiences and thoughts get tagged with positive emotions which get logged in the subconscious. The more uplifting morning runs with a training group, jovial pickle ball matches with friends, or empowering weightlifting sessions with online contacts, the more positive emotions logged. Over time, as positive experiences/emotions accumulate, our baseline shifts toward glass half full, and the periodic highs become not just a mood but our personality.”

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