He thought he’d been duped.
That’s all Devonte Mitchell could figure when he found himself in the Dorchester County Detention Center’s gym with several others listening to some woman talk about yoga.

“I felt like I got tricked,” Mitchell said.
“They said it was an anger management class, I didn’t sign up for this (yoga).”

Mitchell gathered with five other guys around a table inside the gym to talk yoga just ahead of the weekly 90-minute Anger Management/Mindful Movements class. Mitchell, a 21-year-old from Salisbury, is the youngest in the group; the oldest is 54.

All of the participants are fathers of minor children and thus are eligible to participate in the Prison Yoga Project (PYP) in the detention center that was launched in January. It’s an unusual marriage, but one that is working well for these men being held at the

Dorchester County Detention Center. PYP is an evidence-based program that was implemented in January following several months of preparation, which included Dorchester County Health Department employees Sue and Mindy completing a weekend training at the Omega Institute in New York in August 2017 to bring trauma-informed/trauma-sensitive yoga into prisons and jails.

They were trained by Kath Meadows, former coordinator of PYP Maryland, and current director of Women Prisoner Initiatives and former coordinator for PYP, launched the first Yoga Alliance-recognized 200-hour Yoga In-Prison Teacher Certification Training the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women in 2016. Sue also completed a 200-hour training to become a registered yoga teacher (RYT).

Teachers who have completed training then launch programs in prisons and detention centers nationwide. The PYP program was founded in 2002 by James Fox at San Quentin Prison in California. PYP programs are now in place in 24 states and Canada, India, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands—as well as DCDC in Cambridge. The PYP organizers note that little effort is made by prisons to help offenders gain insight into their behavior and take personal accountability for harm caused. They often leave custody with few social or life skills and scant understanding of the fundamental issues that first got them into trouble. This demands attention because 90 percent of all prisoners are eventually hardened and without the means to succeed outside. The PYP solution was founded on proof of experience—plainly visible, positive behavioral change—seen in work with several thousand prisoners over the years.

Training was the easy part for Sue and Mindy, Dorchester County Health Department employees whose grant-funded yoga initiative falls under the department’s Connecting for Success program. Next, they had to pitch implementation at DCDC to Director Joe Hughes. His initial reaction was

And then it happens. One day you wake up and you’re in this place. You’re in this place where everything feels right. Your heart is calm. Your soul is lit. Your thoughts are positive. Your vision is clear. You’re at peace, at peace with where you’ve been, at peace with what you’ve been through and at peace with where you’re headed.
Our Mission  
To continually improve the provision of behavioral health services for residents of Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne’s and Talbot counties through effective coordination of care in collaboration with consumers, their natural support systems, providers, and the community at large.

Our Vision  
A rural behavioral healthcare delivery system that is clinically and culturally competent. This system will ensure access, have a community focus, be cost-effective, and be integrated to serve the community as a whole.

Committee members sought  
The Mid Shore Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) seeks members to join its steering committee, which is a small working group consisting of seven to 15 members who volunteer their time and expertise to ensure that the mission and objective of the program are achieved.

Committee members will help to develop strategies to both strengthen the program and move it forward as more law enforcement officers, dispatchers and first responders are trained to better work with and understand individuals experiencing behavioral health crises.

Contact CIT Coordinator Brandy James at bjames@santegroup.org.

Fatal synthetics hit Marylanders  
Maryland health officials reported last month that four people from western and central regions had been hospitalized after using synthetic cannabinoids and experiencing side effects that include a risk of severe internal bleeding.

The Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland Poison Center issued a statement citing that the four cases were similar to 131 cases reported since March, three of which resulted in death.

State officials said that synthetic cannabinoids that may contain rat poison can cause severe bleeding whether they’re legally or illegally bought and sold.

Symptoms include bruising, nosebleeds, bleeding of the gums, bleeding out of proportion to the level of injury, coughing up blood, vomiting blood, blood in urine or stool, or excessively heavy menstrual bleeding and back pain.

Synthetic cannabinoids are chemicals sprayed onto dried plant matter. They’re sold under brand names including Spice, K2, Bliss or Scooby Snax, and it’s also called fake weed. They’re sometimes referred to as synthetic marijuana, although some researchers say the two substances are very different.

Anyone who has used synthetic cannabinoids in the past three months and develops any of the symptoms listed are advised to call 911 or have someone take them to an emergency room immediately.
disbelief mixed with a healthy dose of skepticism.

“I just didn’t think the inmates would want to do it,” Hughes said. “But it turns out, they were right about it.”

He agreed to give it a try. First, Sue and Mindy had to school every correction officer at DCDC on the program that centers on trauma-informed/trauma-sensitive clinical training. It’s basically brain science education and yoga. By January of this year, all officers had been trained and the first class participants for the six-week, 90 minutes classes were enlisted.

Like Mitchell, they knew they would be participating in anger management. They weren’t so clear on the yoga part, though. But it didn’t take long for them to embrace the class.

“When I come to this class, this is the only time of the day in the whole facility where I feel like I am not locked up, said Charles Dennis, 50, of Salisbury. “I used to have a lot of aches and pains until I started doing this.”

Dennis is one of two men who signed up for a second round of classes. And when they aren’t in class, they practice yoga on their pods — and they’re teaching fellow inmates the benefits of yoga.

Sue, a certified yoga instructor, leads the class in the gym while colleagues Mindy and Lavonnia keep an eye on things to ensure safety. Touching is prohibited, so the women are unable to help participants adjust yoga poses. Karl Young, 38 of Church Creek, said like Mitchell he believed he was signing on for an anger management class. In prisons and detention centers, individuals are often happy to break the routine so class are a welcome distraction in their day.

“It’s the only place that you can block out your surroundings,” Young said about the class. “You get into the breathing and it makes you calm.”

Timothy Thompson, 53, of East New Market, said initially, the notion of yoga was “weird” for him. Still, it offered relief from the pod and now he finds more “peace and calm” thanks to what he has learned.

The men all agree on that. They also say they’ve learned about how trauma affects them and about the function of the vagus nerve and how better to be aware of controlling impulsive behaviors. Most of the men said they knew of yoga, but assumed it was not anything they would ever do. Now they say they hope to continue practicing once leaving the confines of the detention center. It’s something all say is valuable, something to pass on to their children and families.

And it’s not just the yoga that has impacted them.

“There are a lot of people who act like they care, and you can tell when they’re fake,” Mitchell said. “(Sue, Mindy and Lavonnia) are genuine and they do care. They take time to help us. It helps to know someone is on your side.”

A new class begins in May.

Nineteen men are on the waiting list.

Learn more at https://prisonyoga.org/
As the Buddha advised, we need to be alert to the possibility that death meditation could be detrimental if we overdo it, or do it in the wrong spirit or state of mind. But why do it at all, if we’re not Buddhists or Stoics? Not everyone is convinced that preparing for death is a good idea. In On Physiognomy (1580), Michel de Montaigne muses that it’s a bit like putting on a fur coat in summer because we’ll need it at Christmas: “It is certain that most preparations for death have caused more torment than undergoing it.”

Why weigh ourselves down with thoughts of our demise when we can choose to enjoy life and leave the end to take care of itself?

While that is an appealing perspective, there are reasons to keep mortality towards the front of our minds. According to the existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom’s *Staring at the Sun* (2008), the fear of death is with us all the time, whether we realize it or not. Even if we are not racked with it, death anxiety sneaks into our life in many disguises. It is what causes us to distract ourselves through the pursuit of wealth and status, for instance, or seek comfort through merging with another, or a cause. But such denial ‘always exacts a price – narrowing our inner life, blurring our vision, blunting our rationality. Ultimately self-deception catches up with us. Sometimes, we are shaken out of our denial by a great crisis, such as terminal illness or bereavement, or by another significant life event. Unexpectedly, Yalom argues, such experiences can evoke a sense of awakening, leading to a dropping away of trivial concerns, to reprioritizing what matters in life and a heightened perception of the beauty around us: “Though the physicality of death destroys us, the idea of death saves us.”

But we needn’t wait for pivotal experiences, says Yalom. By confronting our finitude through therapy, or reflection on death, a lasting shift in perception can arise. Yes, the process might evoke some anxiety, but ultimately it is worth it, as it can make our life richer and more vibrant.

By highlighting the fact that time is short, death meditation can help us to put things in perspective and appreciate the present more. It can remind us that the things we get so worked up about are not worth it – our appearance, career, how our achievements compare with those of our peers, the satisfaction of material desires, disputes with neighbors and tradespeople. Marcus Aurelius draws out this aspect of it well: “think of the list of people who had to be pried away from life. What did they gain by dying old? In the end, they all sleep six feet under.”

Death can happen at any time, as Seneca is fond of reminding us: “There’s no way to know the point where death lies waiting for you, so you must wait for death at every point.” But this thought need not lead us to brood on the unsatisfactory quality of the human condition. Instead, it can open the way to a deep acceptance of it, together with the awareness that we had better make the most of what we have here and now. This is no glib hedonism, but a bittersweet recognition that any joy in life is always and necessarily intermingled with death and transience.

Read this essay in its entirety at [https://aeon.co/ideas/is-meditating-on-death-like-putting-on-a-fur-coat-in-summer?utm_source=Aeon+Newsletter&utm_campaign=66fc02cd9c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_26&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_411a82e59d-66fc02cd9c-69464021](https://aeon.co/ideas/is-meditating-on-death-like-putting-on-a-fur-coat-in-summer?utm_source=Aeon+Newsletter&utm_campaign=66fc02cd9c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_26&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_411a82e59d-66fc02cd9c-69464021)
May 2018

Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat
---|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-----
|     |     | 1    | 2   | 3    | 4   | 5   |
| 6   | 7   | 8    | Roundtable on Homelessness 1:30 Consumer Council 3-4 @ CVI |
| 9   |     |      | BHSN C&A 3-4 |
|     | 10  | 11   | BHSN Forensic 9-11 @ Talbot DSS |
| 12  |     |      |      |
| 13  | 14  | 15   | BHSN Aging 11-12 |
| 16  | 17  | 18   | 19  |
| 20  | 21  | 22   | 23  | 24  | 25  | 26  |
| 27  | 28  | 29   | 30  | 31  |

**Summer WRAP training**

A free WRAP (Wellness and Recovery Action Plan) training course will be held at Chesapeake Voyagers, Inc. Wellness & Recovery Center at 342 N. Aurora St. in Easton, MD.

The classes will be held 4 to 8 p.m. on Thursdays, June 14, 21 and 28, and July 5. CVI urges individuals to attend all four classes but if for some reason one is missed, keep in mind that in order to receive a WRAP certificate, at least three of the four classes must be completed. Dinner will be provided at each class; all class materials will be provided.

Call 410-822-1601 for more information and to register.

Mid Shore Behavioral Health is located at 28578 Mary’s Court, Easton, MD 21601. To participate in BHSN workgroups go to [https://www.midshorebehavioralhealth.org/bhsn](https://www.midshorebehavioralhealth.org/bhsn). Contact the individual listed with the group that interests you.

Do not be dismayed by the brokenness in the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.

—L.P. Knost