

# Yoga is part of child care center's culture

*Greater Expectations Learning Center gives kids a healthy start*

## Community Health Improvement Plan | Year One Spotlight

Friday mornings are special at Greater Expectations Learning Center in Finneytown. That's when Cassie Freed comes to do yoga with children.

### WHY YOGA?

"I happened on research showing that yoga can reverse the effects of trauma on children's brains," said Joy Stover-Plaut, the center's director. "Some of our kids are dealing with horrible situations in their lives that is definitely trauma."

Cassie used to be a teacher at Greater Expectations. Now retired, she decided to become a Certified Yoga Instructor so that she could teach in a different way. "My love for teaching children extended to my love for yoga," she said.

### YOGA TIME

Like any child care center, Greater Expectations was busy and noisy when we visited. But when Cassie turns on music and the yoga mats come out, things quiet down. The kids know that it's time for yoga.

The pre-K children have been taking yoga for three years, and it shows. They start by taking three deep breaths, raising their arms up as they inhale, down as they exhale. They begin to settle down even more.



They do downward dog and child's pose. Some of the kids follow Cassie's movements exactly, while others are a bit wiggly. But they are all engaged. Cassie makes it fun. Cat pose brings a chorus of 'meows,' followed by a round of 'moos' with cow pose.

The kids lie on their stomachs, stretching out their arms and legs to "fly away." When this causes them to get a little rowdy, Cassie tells them to "make a pillow with your hands." Heads rest on hands and things quiet down again. "I see some good yogis out there," she says. "Good job!"



After a little girl asks to do tree pose, it's time to lie on their backs for shavasana. "This is our relaxation time," Cassie announces. She moves from child to child with lavender essential oil, letting them breathe in the calming scent and giving each child a neck massage.

### CASSIE CONNECTS

The connection between Cassie and the children is obvious. One little boy looks up at her with a big smile when he smells the lavender. Another can't stay still as he waits his turn. But as soon as Cassie gets to him, he lies on his back, hands at his sides, palms up, eyes closed. His whole body relaxes with Cassie's touch.

The kids are nearly motionless when she's done with them. Finally, they sit back up and put their hands in the prayer position. "The light in me sees and honors the light in you," they say together. "Namaste."

"Thank you for doing yoga with me this morning," Cassie tells them.



### POSITIVE EFFECTS

Joy has no doubt that yoga helps the children. "An outsider can't see its effects," she said. "But we know the kids and their stories. It's been literally amazing to watch."

"The kids love it," she added. "I think they can feel a difference in their bodies. The root of it is being able to calm their own bodies down."

*Greater Expectations Learning Center is a WeTHRIVE! Child Care provider.*