

Bolstering the community

Local yoga teacher Skye Swan helps those working on the frontline deal with post-traumatic stress.

Story and Photography: Michelle Meehan

It's an ancient Indian tradition that has been practiced for thousands of years to help heal the body and soothe the soul. Now the meditative art of yoga is being used to support frontline personnel, such as police officers, struggling to cope with the trauma experienced in their working lives.

Nelson Bay yoga teacher Skye Swan is partnering with not-for-profit organisation, Frontline Yoga, to deliver weekly trauma awareness classes for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The classes are free for current and former frontline workers, including firefighters, paramedics, police officers, Defence Force personnel, healthcare workers, lifesavers and SES volunteers, as well as their support network.

Classes are taken by volunteer yoga teachers in locations across Australia, with three in the Hunter, including Skye's Monday night sessions at the Tomaree Community College. Skye's husband serves in the Australian Army and they have a wide network of friends involved in the Defence Forces so it's a cause close to her heart. "I found yoga through a health issue myself," she said. "After I started doing yoga and saw the benefits I was receiving for my own health, I thought it needed

to be shared with everybody, so ten years ago I did my teacher training."

Skye married a Defence Force veteran from the Afghanistan and Iraq generation of conflicts and was dealing with some PTSD in her own family and in other families they were close to. She originally began teaching yoga and meditation to a group of people with PTSD when her husband was posted in Townsville, but on moving to Nelson Bay she was introduced to Frontline Yoga, which at the time was only being offered in Newcastle and Maitland.

After receiving a \$1000 scholarship from Port Stephens Council as part of this year's International Women's Day celebrations, Skye partnered with Frontline Yoga to bring the classes to Nelson Bay. Since their launch in April the classes have received a lot of interest, with numbers steadily growing as the word continues to spread.

CLEARING THE WAY

Feedback from participants has also been positive and Skye believes the benefits come from allowing people to escape from their own thoughts while they concentrate on the yoga moves, breathing exercises and yoga nidra, which is a guided sleep meditation, used to finish the class.

"I think what it mainly does is provide people with something else to think about, having a whole hour of their week dedicated to something other than their own thoughts," she said.

"I guess any activity is the same, but taking instruction from someone, and listening to someone else, having to focus on that person visually and audibly keeps them busy in the sense that they don't fall back into their own thoughts or their own heads."

"I always ask people to tap in tomorrow morning and see how they've slept that night, because I tend to get a lot of positive feedback about people's rest when they've done a yoga nidra session. I have two clients who, after their first session, said it

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A traditional pose used in the hatha style of yoga, which is suitable for beginners through to more experienced participants.

was the first time they'd slept seven hours in a row in a very long time. And they've been coming ever since."

"Some of the emergency services squads have more of an observation role, which I can appreciate would make your anxiety quite high; seeing something terrible in front of you and knowing that it is not your job to approach the situation until it's your turn, so to speak. And I've had a lot of clients say that the breathing exercises have helped them... it's become a coping mechanism for them while they're waiting."

GIVING BACK

While Skye also works as an instructor teaching yoga courses to members of the general community, it's clear the free Frontline classes are her true passion. "I never really had a plan to open a studio, or to make money from teaching yoga, or anything like that. My motivation was more about giving back to the community," she said. "It is very gratifying and sometimes I feel quite humble because for me it's my baby, my whole life revolves around my Monday evening class. My husband's very supportive because he appreciates the benefits I guess, so I'm very lucky."

Skye says she's grateful to be able to provide her community with this kind of service and to have a skill that she can share with people, which they can benefit from.

Lastly, she adds, "I see those frontline workers as heroes... so to be able to provide them with anything, it's pretty special."

All classes are taught with trauma informed guidelines and are therefore suitable for those with stress, anxiety and PTSD. The classes focus on developing mental and physical strength and resilience and are suitable for all levels, including beginners. ◇

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Frontline Yoga provide Yoga classes within the community as a means of supporting our guardians at the frontline. Those who step up to deal with the often difficult and sometimes traumatic situations that arise.

What is Green Slip insurance?

The NSW Government has advertised its Green Slip refund. What a Green Slip is, and what it covers is not widely known and certainly not widely advertised. Tom Goudkamp from Stacks Goudkamp explains.



Tom Goudkamp OAM
Managing Director

What is a Green Slip and what does it cover?

A Green Slip is an insurance policy that you have to buy every year in order to register your car and drive it lawfully on NSW Roads.

Your Green Slip policy covers drivers, passengers, pedestrians and other road users injured as a result of your fault (as the owner) or anyone who drives your car (even someone who steals it).

If people are injured in a car accident, they may need medical and allied health care, time off work, home nursing or domestic assistance for a few weeks, a few years or for life. Your Green Slip covers all of that (with no excess) and is therefore great value when compared to the cost of your car's comprehensive insurance or your home and contents policy.

Who sells Green Slip insurance and what does it cost?

The Government licenses six insurers to sell Green Slips. The cover is identical regardless of which insurer you choose because the benefits available to injured people are set by the Government in legislation.

The cost of your Green Slip will vary according to where you live, how many kilometres you drive, the age of the youngest driver, the driving record of all regular drivers, the age of the vehicle and so on.

For example, a Green Slip for a new Toyota Corolla garaged in Maitland will cost between \$300 - \$472 if driven by a 40 year-old woman with no demerit points, no accidents in the last 2 years and a license more than 6 years old.

You can compare prices by ringing the State Insurance Regulatory Authority on 1300 656 919 or by going online to greenslips.nsw.gov.au.

While Green Slip prices have come down, the Government has changed the compensation scheme that it funds. In the next issue Tom Goudkamp will explain the steps you need to take if you, or someone you know is injured in a car accident.



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