

PARENTS TALK BACK
Special camps provide a chance to be ‘normal’

Jake Hoffner was 10 years old the first time he went to Camp Encourage in Kansas City, Missouri, more than 200 miles away from his home near St. Louis. His mother, Tracey Gibson, was scared he would hate it. Jake had never even had a play date before. He had never been part of a team. He had never made a friend.

Jake has Asperger’s syndrome, a condition on the autism spectrum. Camp Encourage is a three-night, four-day camp for children on the spectrum.

“I wanted him to experience camp,” Tracey said. “I wanted to see if he could make friends.”

Around this time of year, many parents start planning the summer for their children. The most desired camps and activities fill up fast, so the race begins in the winter or early spring. For the parents of kids with special needs, making summer plans can be even more of a challenge.

But thanks to an increasing number of specialized camps, summer can be a chance for these kids to fit in with a group in a way they can’t the rest of the year.

During the school year, children with special needs — whether social, physical or emotional — are often “mainstreamed” into classrooms with typically functioning kids. The same thing happens in the summer: Many camps find ways to accommodate children with special needs and integrate them with other campers. But there is a growing demand for camps that cater to very specific populations.

Beyond camps for children with physical disabilities, developmental delays or learning disabilities, there are camps for burn victims, bereavement camps for those who are grieving, and camps for children with serious or chronic illnesses such as cancer or asthma.

For some of these kids, these specialized summer experiences help them grow in ways that neurotypical children may take for granted.

Jake, now 15, will be attending Camp Encourage for the sixth summer this year. He wrote a letter about how much those days mean to him.

“Camp Encourage is a very important part in my life. This is because every time I come, I know I’ll meet old friends. And come back with new ones.”

When his mother read this line aloud, she started crying.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I don’t usually hear him talk this way.”

Kelly Lee, executive director at Camp Encourage, says the camp, which costs \$1,200 for a four-day session, offers scholarships to several of the students who attend. For families who may also be paying for therapies during the school year, additional expenses can put these opportunities out of reach.

“Every year we have a waiting list,” Lee said. “Our focus is on meeting needs — knowing how important tiny details can be to this population, and tailoring to those needs.”

The benefits that attract parents to these kinds of camps include a specially trained staff, which has experience dealing with the population they will be serving; the opportunity to get additional services, enrichment or therapy in a camp setting; and the chance for the child to be surrounded by peers who share some of the same challenges.

Some of the kids deal with stares or questions during the school year, like burn victims who have to explain the scars that cover their bodies. Others don’t get invited to birthday parties, or face bullying at school.

Jake captured that in his letter, when he wrote that the camp “lets in the kids that either have trouble making friends or the kids who don’t realize how cool they are.” Meanwhile, “the kids who may have bullied them, tormented them or just ignored them are left out.”

His mother said the drive to Kansas City each summer is worth it for those few days.

“He lights up,” she said.

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Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Why mindfulness has become a trend and how you can do it

By KELLI KENNEDY
Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Drop-in meditation studios are proliferating in major cities like New York and Los Angeles and medi meet-ups are becoming the new book clubs as more people are craving ways to unplug, pushing meditation practices and mindfulness movements from hippie to mainstream. We asked leading meditation and mindfulness teachers to help demystify these ancient traditions.

What is mindfulness?
Mindfulness is staying connected to the present moment. “You start to let go of all the accumulated stress and information. So it’s not only a time to not ingest, it’s a time to let the body let go,” says Emily Fletcher, a former Broadway actress and founder of Ziva Meditation in New York which offers in person and online training.

Mindfulness also can help curb overeating and other unhealthy habits. The reason: Practicing mindfulness makes one feel more satiated — rather than, for example, rushing through a sandwich while continuing to work, practitioners learn to enjoy every bite, says meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg.

What’s the difference between mindfulness and meditation?

While meditating is usually associated with a sitting practice often guided by the breath, mindfulness extends that practice into everyday life and focuses on cultivating awareness in the present. Sometimes compared to mental strength training, mindfulness can be practiced washing the dishes, driving to work, brushing your teeth and during other routine tasks. The point is to prevent your mind from wandering, projecting fear and worry from the past and future and training yourself to accept and enjoy the moment.

Why has mindfulness become such a buzz-word?

Experts say it’s the antidote to the fast-paced tech world we live in. There’s slowly been a backlash against a distracted, multi-tasking lifestyle to one that is more self-aware, live in the moment attitude.



AP Photo/Nick Ut

In this Feb. 21 photo, Lauren Eckstrom begins a session at Unplug Meditation Center in Los Angeles.

“We’re just ingesting, ingesting information all day long,” Fletcher says.

Adds Salzberg: “We get caught in these spirals of addiction. You remain unfulfilled. That’s why we seek more and more intensity and more and more stimulation in order to feel content and it never works.”

Are there any real health benefits?

Experts say mindfulness offers a rest for the brain, increased productivity and the ability to turn off the unfulfilling autopilot of the daily grind and instead live in the present moment.

“The mind body connection isn’t just something you feel. There is a physiology that begins at the molecular level that goes all the way to the organ level,” said Dr. Darshan Mehta, medical director of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. “It challenges this conventional wisdom that as we get older our brains shrink in size. That’s true for most people, but for people who do have a consistent regular mind body practice that may not necessarily be the case.”

I started on my own and it’s

making me feel anxious. Is that normal?

Experts stress the importance of starting with a teacher or one of the numerous apps or online videos. For some, a YouTube meditation video or a mindfulness exercise without guidance might feel forced and unfulfilling at first.

“The more you push the mind, the more it will do the opposite,” says Annelies Richmond, a director at the Art of Living Foundation, who helped bring mindfulness, meditation and yoga to New York city public schools.

Instead, mindfulness should be a natural byproduct of a daily meditation practice.

“When you just tell someone just go close your eyes and meditate, it can become like a torture. There are a bunch of thoughts and you don’t know want to do with them. Sometimes you feel more restless being aware of all those thoughts,” says Richmond.

What kind of classes and apps are out there?

At Unplug Meditation in Los Angeles, students can choose classes to unblock chakras, cultivate intuition or a breathing class set to modern music for \$22. In

Central Park, 1,500 people signed up for a free group meditation this summer called The Big Quiet and 800 people sold out a New York concert venue, paying \$20 to sit in silence.

“It’s one of the most profound experiences you can share with other humans, especially when you’re in the hundreds. There’s something about being in quiet and sharing that with a group that creates almost like a vortex. It’s like the collective energy of the room starts to swirl together,” said event organizer Jesse Israel, whose invite-only Medi Club in New York has grown to 1,000 people who vie for 200 spots at monthly meet-ups.

Emily Fletcher is the host of a new podcast for Gaia’s recently launched app, which offers nearly two dozen teachers from different lineages for \$2.99. Most are between four to 15 minutes and Fletcher’s offering include guided visualization for a first date, sports performance and test taking. 1 Giant Mind’s free app includes sessions between 10 and 20 minutes with a guide, music or silence. Headspace’s popular app offers 10-minute guided meditations.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Pendleton grade school welcomes film star



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

An *East Oregonian* reporter on March 18, 1943, stirred up the town when a story announced that Mickey McGuire, star of “Our Gang,” “Yankee Doodle Dandy” and “Boys Town,” was attending the second grade at Hawthorne School.

But you can’t believe everything you read.

Mickey Ross McGuire was indeed a child actor and singer who inherited his musical talent from his grandfather, an accomplished stage musician. But his

most notable roles included “Danny Boy,” “For the Love of Rusty” and “The Return of Rusty,” all of which were released after he spent time in Pendleton. According to the *EO* story, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. C.A. McGuire, moved to Pendleton where Mr. McGuire was employed with Union Pacific Railroad.

The Mickey McGuire associated with “Yankee Doodle Dandy” and “Boys Town” was in fact Mickey Rooney (born John Yule Jr.), who at age 23 in 1943 was much too old to attend the second grade.

And “Mickey McGuire” was a character played by Rooney in a rival series of short films to the “Our Gang” series in the 1930s.

Young Mr. McGuire did put on a public appearance in his new home, for the Girls’ League date dance at Pendleton High School, accompanied by Darcia Skiff.

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Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Pig gets kisses as part of school’s fundraiser

BLACKMAN TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — A pig named Patti got a bunch of kisses as part of a Michigan school’s fundraiser to help out animals.

The *Jackson Citizen Patriot* reports that this week’s event at Northwest High School was the culmination of an effort to support the Cascades Humane Society. It was organized by students in an economics class at the school in Jackson County.

People contributed money to help select school staff members they’d most like to see kiss Patti during a school assembly. The school’s principal and band director were among those selected, along with the teacher whose class organized the fundraiser.

Combined with T-shirt sales, about \$800 was raised and donated. Sixteen-year-old junior Taylor Schutte says it was “a lot of fun” and reflects that “we all love animals so much.”

Woman bites rare pearl while dining at Italian restaurant

ISSAQUAH, Wash. (AP) — A woman bit down on a rare pearl while eating a meal of clams and other seafood at an Italian restaurant in Issaquah.

KOMO-TV reports Lindsay Hasz and her husband Chris were eating at Montalcino Ristorante



Taylor Irby/Jackson Citizen Patriot via AP

Scott Buchler, the principal of Northwest High School kisses Patti the pig during an assembly at Northwest High School on Feb 18. Faculty kissed a pig after money was raised for the Cascades Humane Society.

Italiano recently when she bit into something hard in her entree.

Hasz says she wasn’t sure what it was but put it in her pocket and went home to do research.

She took it to a gemologist, who determined it was a Quahog purple pearl worth about \$600.

Ted Irwin of Northwest Geological Laboratory says the find is rare, with only one in a couple million being of gem quality.

Montalcino owner Cindy Nardone says she’s happy for Hasz.

Hasz says she may have the pearl made into a necklace.

Twin Utah moms each give birth to their 2nd set of twins

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Identical twin sisters from Utah each recently gave birth to identical twins — again.

Kerri Bunker and Kelli Wall delivered twins within weeks of each other at a hospital in Orem, south of Salt Lake City. Years ago, they gave birth to their first sets of twins, now 4- and 5-year-olds, at the same hospital a few months apart.

Bunker’s newest twins arrived Feb. 13. Wall’s youngest twins were born about three weeks earlier.

Ryan White, spokesman for Timpanogos Regional Hospital, says some of the twins were conceived through in vitro fertilization.

The 36-year-old women say they aren’t just sisters but best friends, neighbors and co-workers. They say all nine kids will grow up together.

Bunker also has a 2-year-old child.

Man sentenced for \$1 armed robbery

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. (AP) — A West Virginia man sentenced for an armed robbery in which \$1 was stolen has been ordered to spend time in a correctional center for young adults.

The *Herald-Dispatch* reports 21-year-old John Bruce Chafin of Huntington agreed to a Kennedy plea on a first-degree robbery charge, which allowed him to plead without admitting guilt.

Cabell Circuit Court Judge Chris Chiles sentenced Chafin to spend at least six months to two years at Anthony Center for youthful offenders after suspending his 15-year prison sentence. Police and jail records show authorities arrested Chafin on Jan. 13 after they say he brandished a revolver at a Barboursville man, demanding the victim to empty his wallet, which contained \$1. Police later confiscated the dollar bill, a jacket and a revolver as evidence.