



Yoga moves mix with songs at Zeeland afterschool program

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By **Greg Chandler | The Grand Rapids Press**

ZEELAND — Deb Weiss-Gelmi stood on a rubberized pad in an activity room of Cityside Middle School, with eight children, some as young as 4 years old, in front of her.

In a soft soprano voice, she began to sing a familiar children's tune, with lyrics she had written:

"For a tree pose stand on one strong leg,

"Lift one foot and put it on that leg,

"My knee points out to the side of me,

"Hands together to enjoy the tree."

Weiss-Gelmi is the creator of Sing Song Yoga, a program that introduces 4- to 11-year-olds to yoga through music.

An elementary school teacher at Zeeland Public Schools' Innocademy, she teaches Sing Song Yoga on Wednesday afternoons at Cityside as part of the Zeeland Community Recreation program.

Weiss-Gelmi, 35, developed verses that instruct children on yoga poses, using descriptions such as a tree, a frog or an eagle.

The concept grew out of her experiences teaching kindergarten in Hamilton Community Schools.

"I taught kids to read using songs and motions," Weiss-Gelmi said. "It just seemed natural to come up with songs and motions to teach yoga. It's been a blast."

Four-year-old Allison Pestun, of Zeeland, looks forward to her Wednesday class with enthusiasm.



Mark Copier | The Grand Rapids Press Follow the leader: Sing Song Yoga instructor Deb Weiss-Gelmi leads a class at Zeeland's Cityside Middle School.

Sing Song Yoga

Deb Weiss-Gelmi, an Innocademy teacher and former Hamilton Community Schools kindergarten teacher, teaches the musical yoga

"I like the butterfly," she said of her favorite pose.

Allison's mother, Robyn Parks, notices a difference in her daughter after she's completed a class.

"She's very fast-paced. She doesn't slow down a lot," Parks said. "This (class) forces her to slow down."

Parks also likes the atmosphere and individual attention Weiss-Gelmi gives each student.

Jennifer Nagelkerke, a Cityside math teacher, enrolled her daughters, Anna, 6, and Kate, 4, after she noticed their interest in yoga.

"I do some yoga, and soon I found the girls were following along with it," she said.

Weiss-Gelmi took up yoga nearly 10 years ago after being introduced to it by a friend who was a holistic care provider.

A mother of a 5-year-old, she says yoga has many healthy benefits for children, and can even help with success in school.

"It can help them gain self-esteem while they build coordination and skill level," said Weiss-Gelmi, who has a master's degree in reading and literature from Central Michigan University.

"It can calm the nervous system. It can help with stress reduction and blood flow to the brain, which enhances mental functioning," she said.

Weiss-Gelmi also teaches Sing Song Yoga at the Yoga Studio, 955 Cherry St. SE in Grand Rapids; and has a DVD for \$19.95 available at her Web site, singsongyoga.com.

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program she developed.

Who: Ages 4 to 11

When: From 4:30-5:15 p.m. Wednesdays. A new session starts Feb. 24.

Where: Cityside Middle School, 320 E. Main Ave., Zeeland.

Cost: The fitness class is offered through the Zeeland Recreation program. It costs \$15 for residents of the Zeeland school district; \$27 for nonresidents. For more on the class or to sign up: 748-3230 or recreation.zps.org.