

# Local organization reaches fundraising goal to help school kids find their ‘inner rhythms’

By Justin Bigos  
Staff Writer

The children's wellness organization Inner Rhythms recently raised over \$4,400 in a holiday auction, part of a final push to reach the \$50,000 needed to unlock a matching grant — now providing the nonprofit with a grand total of \$100,000 to continue its programs of mindfulness and social-emotional learning in the Mountain Views Supervisory Union school district. Accord-

ing to Inner Rhythms founder Kelley Boymer, the fundraising process was assisted by the Woodstock Community Trust, which became an umbrella institution for Inner Rhythms to apply for and gain nonprofit status in September of this year. The initial \$50,000 was raised through a private donation of \$35,000, a Halloween dance party, and the most

recent holiday auction. The matching grant was provided by the generosity of the Jack & Dorothy Byrne Foundation.

“Mindfulness isn’t just a sit-down-and-be-quiet thing. Sometimes it gets a bad rap with kids. They’re like, ‘Oh, here goes the teacher again

rejuvenating the body. And there are ways to modify and make it exciting for kids, like creating little yoga stories,” she said.

Boymer began Inner Rhythms just last year. “I ended up creating this four-part program that I decided to call

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— Jacquelyn Thomason,  
Inner Rhythms project team member

with this mindfulness thing — they’re going to make us be quiet.” Boymer told the Standard about how her mindfulness techniques expand and push beyond simple reflection and peacefulness. “It could also be dancing and somatic movement. And it could be jumping around and being silly, different breath work for calming the body, but also for

gravitated toward it, to see the growth of certain students over the course of the weeks while I was there, to get really wonderful feedback from teachers, [who] saw a big change in their students. They saw students that were more focused, that were better able to learn.”

Not only did teachers notice the difference in students’ behavior and peace of mind during and after mindfulness practices at school. “Parents were reporting that their kids were able to fall asleep independently, or their kids were suggesting breath work to the family when things would start to get escalated in their house,” said Boymer. “Or they were asking to listen to some of my online recorded ‘imagination vacations’ to help fall asleep. It was kind of amazing to see how quickly it caught on and rippled throughout the community.”

The success of the program prompted the school district to bring back Inner Rhythms for a second year — and into all of its schools. Willis now teaches in three of the schools, and



The children's wellness organization Inner Rhythms staffed a booth on The Green at the Woodstock Pride event in June.

Courtesy of Kelley Boymer



Kelley Boymer leads a mindfulness activity in a Pre-K classroom at WES, with student Quinn Hubbell.

Courtesy of Kelley Boymer

hired two teachers who cover the remaining three schools in the district. One of those teachers, Abbie Levison, told the Standard, “Each week I lead fifth- and sixth-grade students in mindfulness sessions where we practice movement, breath work, yoga, and guided meditation/relaxation. The techniques used in the sessions help them create an imaginary toolbox to access when they are having big emotions, need help with stress, or want to understand something better. I wish Inner Rhythms had been around when I was in elementary school.”

Jacquelyn Thomason, Inner Rhythms project team mem-

ber, pre-K teacher at WES, and parent, said, “The Inner Rhythms program has been a wonderful addition to our Pre-K SEL curriculum. It helps children build the skills to connect their emotional state with how their bodies feel, allowing them to recognize that emotions create physical sensations — and that even uncomfortable sensations are okay. The structured lessons give children opportunities to move their bodies through different states of energy in order to learn how to regulate themselves and return to a more comfortable state. In schools, teachers are often telling children to ‘calm their bodies’ or

‘focus their attention’ without explicitly teaching them how to achieve a calm and focused state. Kelley’s program fills this gap by showing children how to check in with their bodies and to identify the tools they need to regulate their bodies, minds, and emotions.”

The kids seem to love the program, too. Johnnie Mae Porter, second-grader at WES and daughter of Thomason, said, “I look forward to writing in my journal because it helps me express my feelings and feel that magical moment. I’ve learned that my emotions, like my sad emotions, can be happy if I let it sit and give it room to be.”