

Special needs kids discovering yoga

HEALTH BENEFITS
FOR AUTISTIC
CHILDREN AT
STOUFFVILLE CENTRE

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Yoga calms the mind, reduces stress and creates a greater awareness of one's body.

Adults have long practised yoga for these very reasons, but only recently have programs been created for children, in particular, for those with special needs.

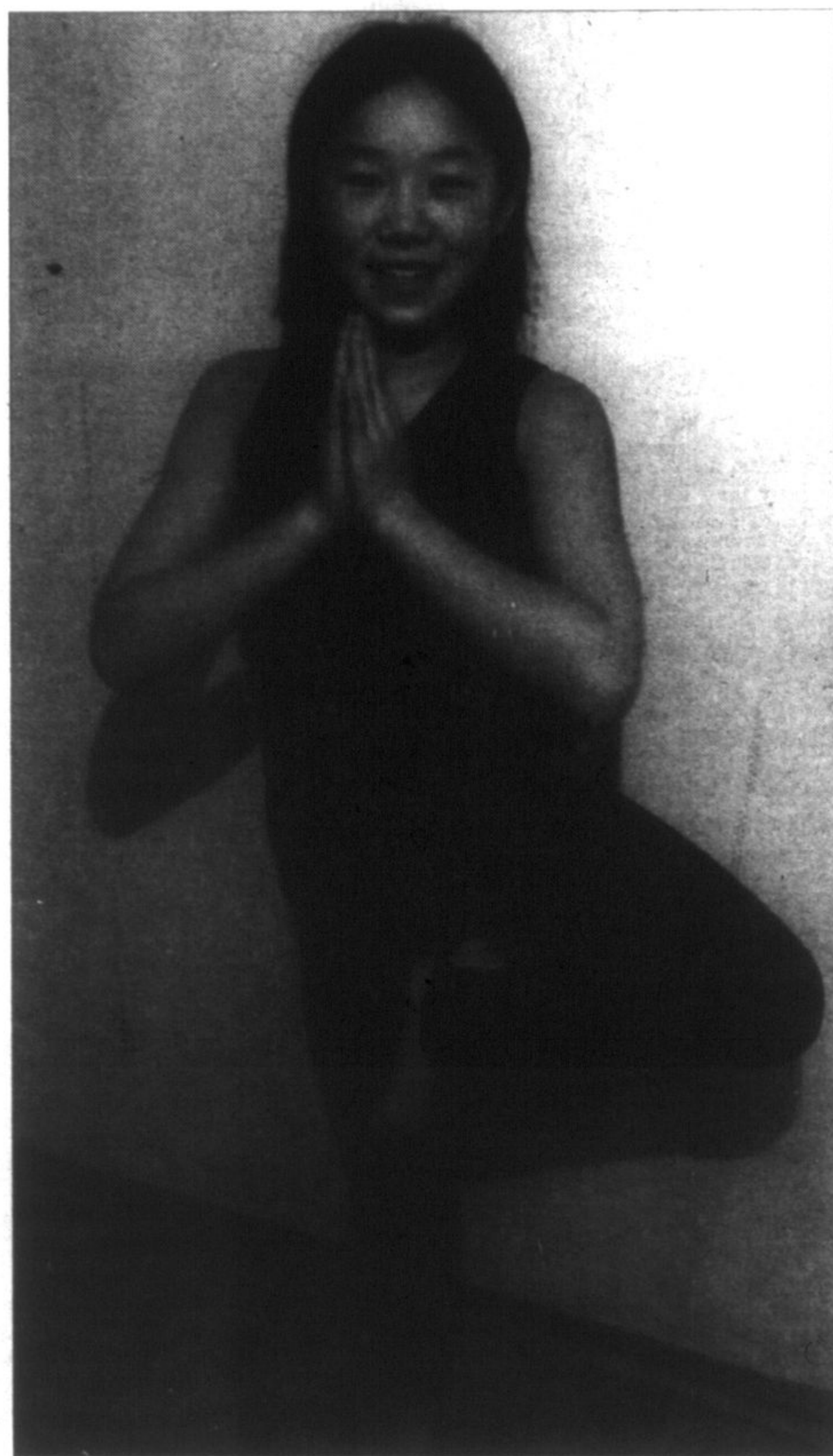
Although much of the evidence is anecdotal, parents of autistic children who participate in specially created yoga programs, find the combination of poses, breathing exercises and deep relaxation techniques strengthens an autistic child's nervous system.

It also increases the child's overall health, while facilitating the development of body awareness and concentration.

An autistic child has very little awareness or control of his or her body, which is often why they will act out in inappropriate situations or exhibit behaviours such as hand flapping when stressed or overwhelmed.

"By incorporating yoga (into an autistic child's therapeutic program) it gives these kids new skills they can take with them to the rest of their lives," said Amanda Clarke, a Stouffville-based certified yoga instructor who specializes in classes for special needs children. "Hopefully the end result is an overall improvement in their quality of life, but that can be said about anyone with yoga."

As part of its effort to teach an autistic child to successfully function in society, Let's Communicate, a Stouffville-based behaviour therapy centre, will be offering yoga to special needs children start-



Olivia Clarke, daughter of instructor in Stouffville program, demonstrates a basic yoga pose.

ing the week of March 23.

"The ultimate goal is for every child to self regulate," said Tracey Grenstead, owner/operator of Let's Communicate. "If you don't have any coping tools, you can't self regulate."

In order to make the classes enjoyable and doable for autistic children, Ms Clarke utilizes stories, music and breathing exercises that would, for example, have the children roar like a lion.

"We do it in a fun way so they're doing yoga with-

out knowing they're doing yoga," Ms Clarke said.

Let's Communicate will initially offer classes to children aged six to 12. Classes will be \$10 each and on a pay-as-you-go system. "It takes about nine classes before the body physically gets used to the routine or change," Ms Clarke said, noting parents should be patient when it comes to seeing the results.

For more information, go to www.letscommunicate.ca.



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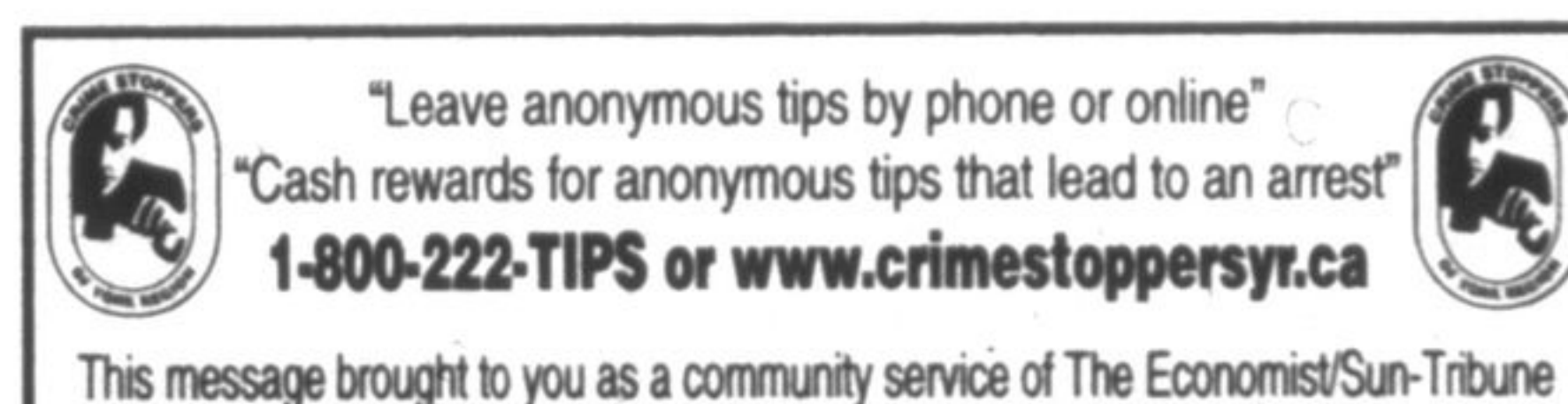
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