

## VOICING THE CONCERNS OF CHILDREN

As an elementary school teacher, Elena Olivieri wanted not only to be a voice for children but to help them cultivate their inner voices in battling the pressures they encounter in today's world.

But that need was really brought home to her after a year and a half of teaching abroad at the American International School of Budapest.

"I decided to come home to re-ground myself," she says. "But I wasn't as excited to get back into teaching here as I thought I would be. I'd been hearing about a lot of stress in American education, and I thought it'd be nice if children had a place to re-center themselves."

So Olivieri created just such a place, Child•cor, which opened its doors in Thornwood this past August. Renting a space in the American Legion building that looks out onto a brook and nature's constantly shifting scene, this wellness program provides children ages 7 to 12 with the tools to deal with stress – yoga, meditation and improvisation. Olivieri, who teaches fourth grade at Concord Road Elementary School in Ardsley, is certified in all three. There are eight students in the program with a goal to add four more. Students can take two types of "journeys," or series of classes – four two-hour sessions on Saturdays or eight one-hour after-school sessions. There is also an option for private sessions in the home.

"This is not about making money. My price point (\$125 per journey) is low. I have kids from every economic class."

What Child•cor is about is helping youngsters become more confident,

focused and relaxed to cope with stresses that range from a Matterhorn of homework and stringent state testing to bullying. In yoga and meditation, the students work with the breath, inhaling on a count of four, holding it for four and exhaling on four. Or they'll do a lion breath – inhaling and then exhaling explosively. The meditation is guided, with Olivieri suggesting an image or scene for the students to concentrate on, one that they may later draw.

The yoga asanas are simple, classic poses, such as child's pose, a great relaxer in which, sitting on your calves and heels, you fold forward, drawing your arms out or bringing them back to rest beside your legs.

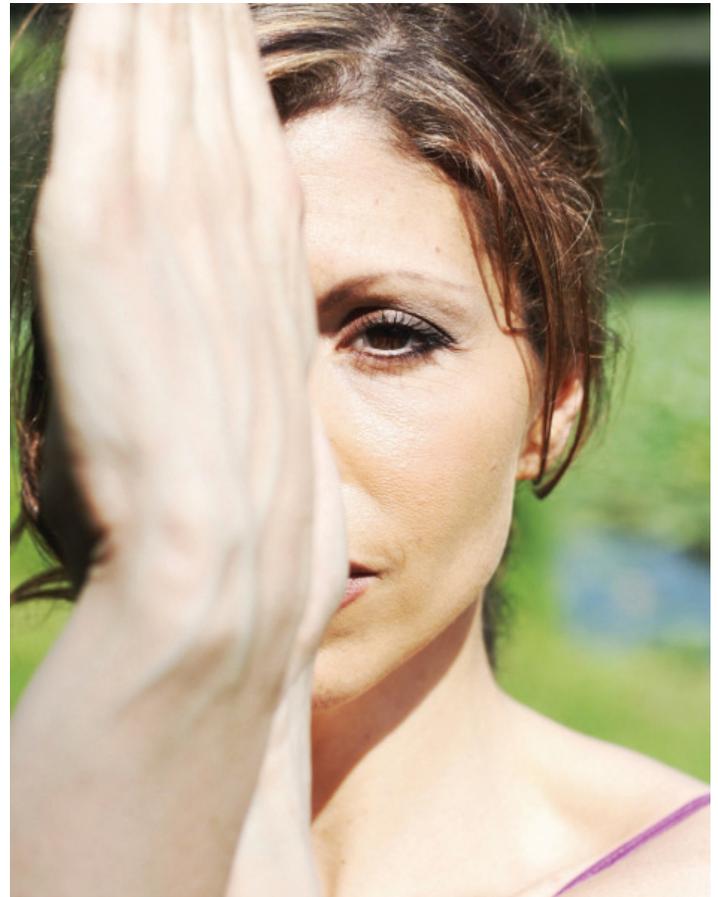
Olivieri describes improvisation as "boatloads of fun," with students suggesting ideas or scenarios that lead to lessons in team-building.

Child•cor touches her where she lives. She has a background in drama, having studied it at the University of Miami and at a conservatory in Manhattan. At 21, she was diagnosed with panic disorder.

But it wasn't until she got a job teaching third grade at the American International School of Budapest that the ideas that would guide Child•cor began to crystallize.

"I saw an 'Oprah' episode on affirmations and put a Post-it note on every child's desk, asking him to write an affirmation anonymously." At Christmastime, she made a video of the kids with their affirmations.

As the elementary drama teacher during her second year in Budapest, she incorporated relaxation techniques and yoga into the classes and started an after-school improvisational group for first-through fifth-graders.



"I definitely thought I bit off more than I could chew. But it turned out beautifully."

That's what parents are saying about Child•cor on its website.

"My daughter, Danielle, had a lot of self-esteem issues in school and developed anxiety," writes Kristina M. "She got so discouraged and felt that she wasn't able to succeed in school. She had failing grades until she had Elena Olivieri.

"Elena gave Danielle the courage to succeed and achieve her academic dreams."

**For more, visit [childcor.com](http://childcor.com)**

