

Pilates

Pays it Forward

The method can help so many, but when students can't afford it, generous teachers step in to donate their knowledge and help. Here, some of the most touching stories of the many ways Pilates pros give back.

by Anne Marie O'Connor

"After surviving a sexual assault, I now offer private pro-bono Pilates sessions to those who have a history of sexual trauma." —*Emilie Miller, founder of Pilates Embodied in North San Diego County, CA*

After suffering a brutal sexual assault, I desperately struggled with PTSD for years, unable to find a successful path to recovery.

Pilates offered empowerment for what had long felt powerless: my body. Once I began doing it, I felt more grounded in my body and therefore less anxious, a goal I never reached in years of talk therapy. Pilates also connected me to an area of my body from which I had become completely disassociated; I called it my "blackhole": my pelvis.

I noticed that some Pilates sessions were less successful than others, however. In the beginning, being on my back on the Reformer was more appealing as it offered me essential stability and safety. Less helpful, though,

were certain words commonly used in class. For example, mentioning the "pelvic floor" can be triggering.

So I started offering pro bono mat sessions to survivors, which I teach in their homes. As building safety is my first priority, I am open with survivors about my own past. Ultimately I

empower the survivor and let them control the session based on what their needs are. My hope is by offering these sessions free of charge, it will enable survivors to identify the possibility of blossoming when it comes to bodywork and helping them excavate their power through Pilates.

"I started a nonprofit to award Pilates scholarships to cancer patients." —*Jill Hinson, owner of Core Studio Pilates and Yoga in Indian Trail, NC*

I was inspired to start a nonprofit, Core Compassion Project, in 2012 after two clients came to me with breast cancer. I began to think about how many women may not be able to afford Pilates due to missed work and medical bills. With Core Compassion Project, each recipient receives 10 private Pilates sessions with one of our qualified teachers. To date, we have awarded 72 scholarships. We raise money to pay for these scholarships





PHOTOS COURTESY OF JILL HINSON AND AMY ROST

by hosting a Girls Night Out fundraiser every year. The medical community has referred multiple patients to my studio after seeing our work.

We have spent the past six years working to improve our program, working with a medical team for feedback and creating a program to share with other teachers in hopes of helping more people who are fighting breast cancer. I have a dream of having the Core Compassion Project program offered in more states and studios. This is why I have created a teacher training affiliate program to educate teachers called the Jill Hinson Method for Breast Cancer (go to corecompassionproject.org for more information). I currently have a training program in the works to expand our program into other states.

My six-year-old nephew just completed treatment for leukemia, my mother is a colon cancer survivor and my father is now fighting stage 4 adenocarcinoma, so the cancer fight is very personal to me. The project has helped me grow as a teacher and as a person. I am inspired by these women. I also believe that my business has been blessed by the work we do.

“Over the years, I have worked with cancer and MS patients, people in chronic pain, parents who are caregivers to children with special needs, the elderly, as well a variety of sports teams.” –Amy Rost, owner of Arc Pilates in Cochrane, Alberta

My son has a rare neuromuscular disease, and I know firsthand how there is a lack of access to treatments and education about other options, like Pilates. I typically offer one to two private sessions a week. I find these clients through my network of medical professionals, community events and really, just my willingness to tell anyone and everyone what I do.

I also offer a mat class for caregivers that includes movement and community support. I charge a nominal fee for these sessions. These clients feel as though they can trust me

as I am a caregiver myself for a child with special needs.

These [volunteer efforts] do pay dividends, first being word of mouth, second being education to a greater population about Pilates and finally, it is some of the most rewarding work I get to do as a teacher: knowing that I am making a huge impact in someone’s everyday life.

“Twenty-five percent of the teaching at our studio is pro bono.”

–Julie Erickson, owner of Endurance Pilates & Yoga in Boston and New York City

We work with a variety of people pro bono: I train six of the folks who were injured in the Boston marathon bombings; a teenager who lost his leg in an accident; and a doctor and runner who was suddenly afflicted with an MS-like condition that caused him to lose all feeling in his legs. We also recently paired with a nonprofit in Boston to provide patients undergoing treatment with complimentary training sessions

OPPOSITE: JILL HINSON WORKS WITH CORE COMPASSION PROJECT TEACHER (AND BREAST CANCER SURVIVOR) SARAH SAWTELLE ON KEEPING HER CORE ENGAGED WHILE WORKING TO IMPROVE HER RANGE OF MOTION.

ABOVE: AMY ROST DOES SCISSORS WITH THE COCHRANE WATER NINJAS, A COMPETITIVE JUNIOR LIFE GUARD TEAM.

including nutrition, meditation and Pilates.

One of our lovely students is in her third session of chemotherapy and broke down in tears after her session yesterday as she feels Pilates is helping her to feel in control and more normal. Pilates isn't medicine but we do our best!

"I offer free classes at an addiction clinic called Greenhope Services for Women." –Brittany

S. Crosby, owner/founder of The Co Pilates in New York City

After the election, I was so motivated to volunteer somewhere; it was important to me to have a socially responsible business. I realized that connecting with the local community and using what I know I'm good at would be the highest and best use of my [knowledge and efforts]. That led to my partnership with Greenhope; I now teach a mat class with small props for anywhere from 3 to 12 women in a room at the clinic.

So many of the women I work with are mothers. Some classes are spent just providing anatomical information about what happens to your body during and after childbirth and how to take care of yourself if you have a diastasis or pelvic floor issues.

Many women have also reported understanding after one or two classes how much being in their bodies changes their mood for the better. We also talk about how body awareness and movement can interrupt the stress response, which can lead to consistently making better choices.

After teaching for 13 years, I've learned over and over again what a beneficial gift it is to know how to use your body and have the tools necessary to make it feel good. It's like passing on a magical secret every time.

I see this work as the beginning of a dream to have a non-profit arm of my studio that provides instructors to shelters and clinics throughout the city.

"I have Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, and now use my experience to reach out to other people who have been diagnosed with it." –Kelly H. Roberts,

founder of Beach Pilates & Wellness Studio in Bethany Beach, DE

A few years ago, I was diagnosed with EDS, a connective tissue disease that breaks down the collagen in the body. Doctors told me that if it wasn't for my Pilates background, I would have had multiple surgeries and I might possibly be in a wheelchair. I know maintaining a Pilates practice can be expensive for most people, so I do pro bono Pilates sessions, as well as free webinars, healthy eating demos and free recorded workout videos for people with EDS.

I figure if I give back where I can, I know I'm making a difference in someone's daily life and helping them feel better about themselves and their bodies.

"I issue a 'healing pass' to people who are recovering from cancer treatment, spousal deaths or other life tragedies." –Jana Weis,

owner of 28th Street Barre in Boise, ID

One client was a dear friend who was on her third bout of breast cancer, financially stressed and needed to learn how to stretch her chest and lat muscles.

Another had a neighbor who lost a child, so she asked if she could start bringing her. A high school friend passed away and I sent his wife a healing pass. The healing passes range from three months to one year.

We also host several classes for schools, both as an elective (Anser Charter School) and as part of school clubs (North Junior High School yoga club) to bring awareness to young adults

and hopefully make them feel empowered regardless of their size or shape.

I love to watch my clients disconnect from the world, find strength in their mind and bodies, and leave feeling better about their day. It's so very gratifying to me that they choose my studio over so many others, so I always like to make their experience fun, challenging and fulfilling.

"I gave a teen with cancer, and her mother, a breast cancer survivor, pro bono sessions."

–Terri Todd, founder of Precision Pilates in Syracuse, NY

One of my good friends told me about a benefit she was going to for a local teenager named Taylor, who had a rare kind of childhood cancer, Ewing's disease. I didn't know Taylor personally, but I grew up in a small town and knew her family. I reached out to one of Taylor's uncles about offering a package of 25 duet sessions pro bono to Taylor and her mom, who I had learned was a breast cancer survivor.

They drove 45 minutes each Saturday morning to their session. The most gratifying part of working with Taylor was working with an athlete (she played basketball and softball) who was stripped of her strength, going through chemo and fighting like a warrior. I never once heard a complaint from her, just beautiful smiles, gratitude and a drive to do better. When she and her mother continued to thank me, I asked them to please not to, that having the gift to help them gave me so much gratitude. I also gave her a STOTT PILATES® DVD to supplement her workouts.

I have grown greatly as a teacher and as a person from this experience. I believe in my heart that my love of people and trying to reach out and truly heal through Pilates is why I receive and maintain my clients. **PS**

So Many Great Causes

The sheer breadth of the way Pilates teachers help others is awe-inspiring.

DANA LIM, owner of Real Pilates in Dubai

"I volunteer twice a week with teens who are on the autism spectrum. For many of them, exercise is a real challenge; each week, though, they are improving slowly and the excitement in their eyes when I arrive gives me so much joy. Their incredible energy and eagerness to work out with me is often greater than my regular clients! I've always wanted to help my community and this is a way I could do it using my skills as a physical therapist and Pilates teacher. It's something I'm most grateful for."

BRIAN-ANTHONY CARROLL, owner of The Pilates Studio Barcelona

"I run a project in my studio called 'lillie project' that I named after my Mum. I put aside two hours each week and each of my teachers put aside one hour a week. We provide private Pilates sessions to people who are recovering from illness. After completing the 10 [free]

lessons, they can continue taking lessons with my student teacher. One of the best things is we have 'angel clients' who buy lessons for the project. This has brought so much joy to the studio and to my work."

TYRA LOVATO, owner of Trainer Tyra in Portland, OR

"For my mat class, I offer donation-based fees to the underemployed and free admission to the unemployed or those on assistance."

CLARA GELATT, owner of The Pilates Collective in Denver

"We have a Pilates for MS [multiple sclerosis] program that is pay what you can. About half of the students pay full price because they can, while the other half pay whatever they can on a monthly basis. Our philosophy is that if someone can benefit from Pilates and is dedicated to working on it, we'll work with them on price."

Monica Paiva and Daniela Borodin, co-founders of the 100 Pilates in New York City, are also both retired dancers. Realizing the importance of core work for dancers, they teach pro bono mat classes to a group of student dancers at the H+ The Hip Hop Dance Conservatory (plus they raffle off a private session on the apparatus). "Pilates is a very necessary cross training modality for dancers of any kind, hence our motivation to support this group," says Borodin.

