SPEAKER:
Good morning everyone and welcome to the YogaAlliance community, I want us to take a moment to honour this day which is Juneteenth in 1865 the people of Texas 2 1/2 years after the passing of the abolishment of slavery were made aware that slavery had ended. And thus began this holiday that many people observe. We look forward to a day when everyone will be observing the national holiday of Juneteenth.

Allow yourself to be comfortable and listen to this official Juneteenth poem from already people are faces our bodies leave, we rose. Skills of art, light, beauty and family crushed by forces we knew nothing of. We rose. Survive we must, we did. We rose. We rose to be you, we rose to be me, above everything expected, we rose. To become the knowledge we never knew, we rose. Dream we did act, we must. We rose.

Breathe that in and just allow yourself to feel this glorious day breathing in to the area below the navel, above the navel and filling the chest as we move through the three-part breath, below the navel, above the navel, filled the chest. Exhale from the top down. Continue to be aware of your breath for one moment, we just have one minute we are going to practice. Let us bring our awareness back into this moment. Again, I welcome you, I also welcome our guests Dante Settles who is here with us, he is an experienced movement specialist and director of a program titled students with aspiring talents. A wellness program that serves individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He is a certified trainer, a personal trainer working with special populations, he is a certified yoga teacher, a tie and yoga massage bodyworker etc., etc., to go on and on.

He is also a trauma informed yoga instructor and Dante has had the experience of being a mentor, coach, and entrepreneur, an athlete and a father. And we welcome you Dante settle's.

SPEAKER:
Thank you for having me and YogaAlliance, thank you so much.

SPEAKER:
Give us a little bit of an overview about how you came to this place of working with special populations which I think you have been doing for quite a few years now. How did you get there? How did you come to this? Oh

SPEAKER:
I have been playing an athlete collegially and playing overseas for some time. Getting an opportunity to understand the body and the importance of wellness for me to be a high intense athlete to reach those levels. I've always been involved with health and wellness over the course of my adult life, I had, I have a child that was born in 2012 which was born with a rare genetic condition called muscle I bring which is part of the muster go dystrophy genetic gene there was a time where being an athlete, we expect to always want our children to be born well and to grow and she is defined-- defied all the odds. In the process of running to understand
more of her condition and the community that we would all be part of not just myself when her mother and the rest of our family, I decided to expand the health and wellness that I was doing with athletes for many years and to the special needs population. And in that course of me learning more about the connection that we all have with one another, no separate identity that is there, I am you and you are me.

We started the journey and to learn more in the process of a lot of the things that YogaAlliance is offered such as the 200 hour training through some of my mentors, and I like to call them yoga bodywork and so many things. We have been able to develop a team where we have been able to serve our community in the areas of Washington DC and the greater Washington DC area. To serve. This has been a very rewarding. To say the least, it has been extremely fun.

SPEAKER:
Can you tell us a little bit about the program that you offer? I think there are several, but just start with maybe the aspiring talents or whichever program pops up in your mind right now.

SPEAKER:
Sure. We do have different programs were community building is very important. Of course, we are able to provide one-on-one assistance to make health and wellness either through understanding how to utilize the fitness facility, how to utilize a yoga facility and the props, we have been able to introduce them to themselves through movement.

That is one of our biggest stance is to make health and wellness as accessible to them through their range of emotions and understanding of themselves to know that it is always accessible to them.

SPEAKER:
I'm going to stop you, we are referring to people with intellectual and physical disabilities.

SPEAKER:
Yes ma'am.

SPEAKER:
For everyone to know that what you are speaking of is getting them to know themselves. And what they can do. You told me about an individual who had lost a great deal of weight. Through your program, maybe you could give us a little bit more of information about him and we want to know how does the program work? Very curious.

SPEAKER:
Sure. To just your first question, we collectively we do have to start with the process of doing a thorough assessment of seeing what they can do. Understanding their range of emotions, their flexibility, their breath work. Are they able to take deep breaths? Do they have the awareness? Checking what their awareness is within their bodies through a thorough assessment. In that process, we are able to work with different organizations, whether they be individual residential providers that provide service and housing to people with intellectual and develop mental disability and I will say, IDD for short. We have worked with the DC government through the Department of disability services, we have been able to work with, this is across state range. We've been able to work with recreational centres, wherever they usually like to, and also, day providers, day providers are also where they have a community would service them whether it be job searching or professional development, we have been able to connect with the
community of, I like to call them allies.

To be able to provide these services to the population. In the process of having more people being interested in the work that we do, applying to become a certified personal trainer with special needs populations. And then we educate the community that would like to also be the givers of this type of service.

They can always reach out to us through our website and send me an email, if they would like to collect more information and would like to see if they would like to expand that opportunity to them, it's really about building community. I think we all, we all attend you go studios, we love community being one on one and trying times were Social Distancing protocols and everything else where the population can see-- seem to be distance, always coming up with new ideas to create community, whether it be a dance or fitness party, whether we do community service together where they work with me and the young men in the community, with my youth football program, DMV Academy, they are able to come in and help and work with the young men and work out with them. It is really about bringing us all together in community and they get great results from that. Losing weight just for one individual, we find across-the-board that being well, losing weight also is easy to equate with being well. But being well requires how do we feel within ourselves? Are we happy when we are making decisions that felt good to us and making decisions that make our bodies feel good. We tend to make better decisions no matter who we are.

Being able to be there and develop that trust with them, and with us, with all of us, allows us to make better decisions and have some influence for a better experience in living.

SPEAKER:
Perfect. So, where do you begin? Say you go into agency calls you, or organization as one person or group of people where do you begin? Do you begin with breath and yoga? To begin with you said assessment, once you have done your assessment, what are some of the steps you take to connect with the individual or individuals and to plot how you are going to support them?

SPEAKER:
Let's first talk about identifying them, identifying everyone as a human being. Being a part of the nature of the natural course of being a part of this earth. Just connecting and getting an opportunity to know where they are, it's really not about us and our services, it's also about them being open to receiving assistance and help. Connecting with them first and foremost, I think, is very important, before we start any movements or anything, you have to develop that trust and you have to develop that heart centred communication to know that we are here to serve and to be givers in which they also give back to us at the same rate.

And through that process, then we can start on the process of definitely awareness, do they identify with their bodies in certain ways? Meaning let's start with the breath, I think everything breathes on this earth, if it is a living organism, that it doesn't breathe. No matter who we are, we get this opportunity to take in our breath and bring awareness to our breath. And in that process, of just breathing, sometimes they may need auditory things because everyone learns differently.

We may play ocean sounds in the background where they are reading and as the ocean comes in, and they are breathing out with the same flow. That is one way that we are able to help them
identify with their breath and then from there, we can start with slow movements. Circles, with our families of mentor ships and many people that have been able to work with and learn from getting some fluidity within the body. Just making circles, sometimes arms, just raising the arms up and breathing in deeply and lowering them down. Some of the most simple things can be challenging for most, it's not about what I do or anything among those lines, it's more so about them connecting with their bodies. And feeling comfortable there.

SPEAKER:
Really, once you identify them and you are moving them into awareness of their breath, it flows from there. Very individualized program is what I think I am hearing, right?

SPEAKER:
I think these programs can work for anyone. It also works with people that are the wiser generation that are mentors that have lived through age, chair yoga is a big part of a part of the process that we can grow out of the chair because we have developed the muscles and everything that is there. We have been able to think of ways that we can always make movement accessible and that goes for anyone, think about especially for myself, when I first went into yoga, I needed yoga to be accessible for me. Everyone is doing things different that was amazing is that over time, we have been able to have some pretty amazing folks start doing inversions now.

I'm really excited for them, they have been able to explore themselves and so we just have to meet people where they are and that is whether we are teaching a large group of a class or more individual one-to-one heartfelt sessions.

SPEAKER:
Special populations, that is who you are teaching. A question came in, have you been able to work with school districts and state education departments?

SPEAKER:
We haven't gotten there yet. But I will say, since my daughter is a part of the school system in the DC public school area and she goes to a wonderful school called-- and many others, there is Easter Seals, and school within a school with her process. That had been able to work with some of the teachers and the influencers that support this population, I think it's just as important to work with the community that works with or the guardians or the parents of the people that are giving to the special needs population because our awareness and our level of wellness needs to be there too, to be able to stay within the centre of giving as we get to ourselves.

Always working within not just the individual but also working as a collective with the people that work with population of intellectual and develop mental disabilities.

SPEAKER:
And so you use the term influencers, and that is sort of a term that is about there are people who are popular in various industries, are you using influencers in that way or are you using, how are you using the word? I just want to clarify that.

SPEAKER:
Sure, being an influencer within the community. The first part of being an influencer is being able to work on yourself enough that your actions you can reflect that you are often to give. It's
easy to kinda separate going out and actually doing the work when a lot of the work of the influence person is the self work that needs to happen. We have to be able to speak where we live and live in the truth of what we give. That is what I mean from an influence.

SPEAKER:
And influence just to clarify more, it could be a family member and aunt, and uncle, a friend, the teacher and the person in the special population persons school, you use influencer differently so I'm so glad I asked. And someone commented, I would also want the teachers administrative parents and stakeholders to learn this as well. We talked about that. Someone asked also, how have you been able to adapt to the COVID-19 standards for safety and still work with BAP--special populations?

SPEAKER:
During this time, technology has been an amazing friend to us. Now with Zumba, with cell phones and face time in all of these other great technologies that are there, we have been able to use these technologies to connect, we have been able to work with the providers to make sure that they have the technology that is there and that is ready.

We have been able to have this as a group. Even on times we had group sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 2:30 PM where our population comes together, we work out together, we listen to music together, sometimes we just sit there and listen to music together and I have open discussions about what is taking place and how they are not able to have that access to technology, we definitely work with training our trainers to give them a call, sometimes giving them a call and speaking with them for some time practising social distance protocols. Driving by and still keeping our 6 feet and dropping a visit and saying hello. Whether it is definitely being outside of the home to get fresh air, fresh oxygen and all these other nature dynamics that we have, some of these things are really staying strict within the process of how we interact with doing it in the most safest way that we possibly can.

We don't want to leave anyone isolated, isolation can bring some trying times for our brains and our awareness and for bodies. We try to stay intact and stay in touch with them as much as possible. Through the means that we have.

SPEAKER:
Thank you, Donte, here is another question. Have you worked with an occupational therapist as part of your team, whether it be on staff, providing trainings, or consultations, this is an amazing program you have developed, very happy to have learned about it today.

SPEAKER:
Thank you so much. I give a lot of honour to the OT PT feeding specialists, speech specialists, all these wonderful therapies that are there. In DC, my daughter had to start getting therapy immediately at 3 years old. Being inspired by a lot of the therapist that have been getting service and wonderful care to my daughter, has really been a huge slingshot for my inspiration to really provide this program they haven't personally, some of the people we have been able to work with, people, yoga teachers, they have been wonderful just the teachers that are in wellness, people that are just in the position, it's really about heavenly-- how do we target a specific group such as the therapist because we know their caseload can be pretty heavy with their services but they can be many and the people in the community that are willing to give that have grown up with a brother or sister or family member that may have, that may be living, we have been working with people that have a genuineness for wanting to give in this process.
SPEAKER:
That just makes me smile when I hear you. Are any of your programs funded, were you can provide different things, are you seeking funding for your programs?

SPEAKER:
Always seeking funding.

(Laughter)

SPEAKER:
Get it out there. Speaking back

Always seeking funding for a process we have been able to work with people, I like to call them allies again, such as rigid dental providers in the DC government through the Medicaid waiver program these things have been working with us where we were able to provide the trainer the pay rate and the services and keeping things afloat and paying bills. I'm always looking for funding to expand our horizons, I love to do more in person group community events. After this COVID-19, I would love to throw a dance party and a health wellness party because we all love to get together and the type of way. And just always providing new platforms for them in the education. Our next wave is really working with education my brother and mentor who has been training, trainers of yoga teachers for so many years, has been a great mentor and being able to expose this work to the world to be able to develop a team and work with other places in other people around the world to be able to get this out to the community because this is not just something that we would like to just happen in our local area, we want to be able to train and work with people that are also in the homes, the brothers, the sisters, the moms, the dads, the family, we want to make this more of a family community event we all share, share our side so to speak.

SPEAKER:
Someone said, appreciate that question as I am a yoga teacher. And you speak with all the awareness of individualized service and what you are speaking about his awareness of individualized service and maximizing abilities. Excellent. And here is a question from Josephine. His time a factor for some of the people, in other words, does it take longer to begin to move, get into moves, and if so, what techniques do you use to make this fun and more accessible for the people you are working with? You mentioned music, can you give some examples of what you do?

SPEAKER:
Absolutely, music does play a role, I think there was definitely a study were without-- we were able to maximize potential in our movements when music is playing in the background for us to move, some people it does require a little more patience. If they are moving slower that also let you know about their range of emotions. If there range of motions may not be as elaborate as we would like them to be, a few exercises is enough and can be challenging for them if they are already moving slow. If they don't have the disabilities all of their lands of being creative with ways to encourage these movements. For example, working with a young woman who was paraplegic, she had very limited range with her arms and legs and just getting her to pull things and pull herself in her wheelchair, being able to push off of a balance ball and felt herself move. I think we find the excitement when they are feeling more in control of their movements in the process of feeling their bodies and those are the real goals that we can encourage that we can
build upon and be creative in that process. Yes, for some it does take patience, and that is fine, you are there for patients, you are there for awareness, for them. And so I really appreciate that question. Yes.

SPEAKER:
Welcome. I think it would be interesting if we can have a remedy or recipe, if we could give them just say 3 points of how they can, if there is someone who is a special person living with them, how they can begin to support that person at home I think that would be very positive for people to hear what you think about 3 things that they can do within their homes with the special populations individual.

SPEAKER:
Absolutely. The first thing is definitely being able to connect with yourself, only say ourselves, in the instance that we are all one the sense that we are connected with the earth, we are connected with everything that is around us. Being able to have the patience and the awareness with yourself first and foremost. Working on the practices of wellness and making it a part of your personal daily routine that you will be able to get into someone else. Secondly, within the home, connect with the community. Community is always important for your growth, it's always very important for the process of learning, to be able to work with other other parents or other children and being able to feed off of that love and care with one another. And lastly, which is very important to me is how we identified with identifies, will we identify ourselves from the place that already we all one, giving without the thought of reciprocity, once we make a point that we are looking for something because we are giving, now we have made a contract with the universe, the universe is always expanding and it's always giving. We are getting to ourselves these times that we give to another human being or give to another place always know that giving is an infinite process and it's always been to create wonderful benefits for our living and our well-being, we are always in that process of giving.

Those are some of my 3 points, 2nd build a community, and give without contracts.

SPEAKER:
I love it. We have questions coming in, here is another one. This is not a question, just want Donte to know-- Donte did know-- with high special needs population and I am a registered yoga teacher. I am excited to tie my yoga and was on my students, particularly those with IEP goals form ACP students. We could do some type of work to encourage our conversation about their bodies and their minds as they have a lot of anxiety. I need to be creative here, I guess she is asking about do you work with people on the autism spectrum. You could combine those 2.

SPEAKER:
Was interesting is that I have 2 nephews that are autistic. In working with the autistic community being able to captivate their attention can be one of those things that works within our patients. When working with autistic children, what I have found and just through my research and studies are working with the population is being able to hold their attention, making it as fun as possible coming up with games where they can identify that they are not really paying attention to their breath but they are working with their breath, sometimes you have to sneak in through the back door to get the result that you want. In the home. Try to work with these ways of awareness and we children they may have autism their attention can be pretty broad. We need to find ways of what is important to them at that moment keep them in the process.

Again, meeting them where they are with their awareness at that time, if they are into video
games right now, there are ways we can keep them moving and breathing when they are playing video games, if they are listening to music I don't really want to have you, different ways of their-- also the anatomy, learning their anatomy and being close the muscles that is closest to the lungs, which part of the vertebrae's of the lungs that helps us breathe, coming up with ways that we can do, moving things to encourage deeper breathing and awareness that allows us to do that. I appreciate making sure that anatomy is a part of every training course and I'm pretty sure all the other teachers and participants that are part of it have to go through that. That is very important.

SPEAKER:
Thank you. Here we are getting wonderful content, it says, great talk, I can't wait to connect with you and get more information. Namaste.

SPEAKER:
Namaste.

SPEAKER:
I've asked my students to give me some of their favourite songs and we create a playlist. It is amazing, how much their energy increases when their song comes on. And she says we are on zoom during COVID. I just think this has been a wonderful opportunity for people to learn from you and before we close, I wanted to know if you could just share a little bit about synergy yoga because you work with them on a variety of things and I know they have been really supportive of what you are doing in the world. Speaker map absolutely.--

SPEAKER:
Absolutely, it started by one of my mentors and brother, Francisco, he has been again teacher training for a long time within the yoga community and working very closely with YogaAlliance. And we have been able to work in building community of care and love and inspiration. Through our process, we work with the moderate of people throughout the world from 4 continents right now in several different countries. That we have been able to work with one another from workshops on Saturdays to some buzz on our sundaes in different classes during the week. From flow from synergy movement classes, which includes tai chi movements and all these different wonderful movement practices that we like to learn and bring them together. It is a very safe and creative space that we have been able to build, been able to do a lot of training, Thai yoga massage has been a wonderful, wonderful addition to my skill level. I'm not only am I able to give Thai massage people that may have arthritis, but may have a lack of blood flow, moving throughout the body, that has been very wonderful for my special needs, for the special needs population. Then being able to provide the sense of touch to them and they feel different, they feel they are able to fill their legs where they may have felt pain. Get more blood flowing and awareness there. Our trainings are all on there, they can go to the website, www.synergy.yoga, you are able to see all of us.

Our teachers are wide range, we do meditation, and -- from the standpoint, such as the YogaAlliance, that we have been able to bring all these wonderful people and especially our generations within the elders being able to share their wisdom and we are talking about 70 years, 80 years of wisdom of doing work within literacy, within the conservation, within memoirs, and all these other things that I am learning from. It is been a huge blessing being a part of the team, the team is wonderful. We have been able to really bring everything together. I have been having a great time. A great time with my synergy friends.
SPEAKER:
Dante, just wonderful, thank you so much. Thank you for sharing everything with us today, it's been terrific. And top-notch, I have a friend who says that all the time. And someone, Tanya said well done, Dante. Inspiring love, and the scope of your knowledge. It is very inspiring. She loves the breadth and scope of your knowledge, and someone on the West Coast who works with the same populations and we just want to say to our audience, thank you for joining us, and together, Dante, join me in chanting inhale as we end, inhale.

SPEAKER:
Peace, peace, peace.

SPEAKER:
Thank you so much everyone.