



Sunflower
Wellness

Living through cancer with exercise

**Sunflower Wellness provides
therapeutic movement and exercise
for people living with cancer.**

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**November - December 2010
This issue: a focus on our Clients**

Client spotlight: Krista Walker



Sunflower Wellness client Krista Walker strikes a pose with yoga instructor Aliza Sutker at Bay Club Marin.

If you doubt the healing power of modern medicine, guided imagery, community and family support, prayer and exercise, you might want to reconsider.

Krista Walker's journey shows how there is hope in having hope. Krista, aka "Mrs. Walker", is a well-known pre-school teacher at Belvedere-Hawthorne in Tiburon, CA, the oldest nursery school in Marin County. Six months ago Krista was diagnosed with an incurable type of cancer. When they heard about it, the Tiburon community, pre-school alumni, and parents came together instantly.

Emails went out and a website was set up to coordinate Krista's groceries, rides to appointments and even walks with Krista! A believer, Krista says she has people "who are praying and lighting candles locally and around the world in churches I've never even heard of. Even if you don't believe in prayer, the power of positive energy going out into world has to have an impact." The support Krista has received continues to be incredible and emotionally overwhelming in the most positive ways. It is this support that Krista believes contributes to her ability to keep things in perspective and stay afloat.

Krista first heard about Sunflower Wellness when her friends and pre-school parents began to research what was out there to help her keep her edge. She says, "I first heard about Sunflower Wellness from Stacy Achuck. Simultaneously, friends were calling around to see what was out there for me. They too had heard of Sunflower."

It wasn't long before Sunflower Wellness became part of Krista's regimen on her path to finding balance free of dissonance. "Yoga and personal training are places that I know are good. Other areas are wishy-washy and I get frustrated – for example, the regimentation around food, nutrition and diet. Some people will try to tell me I have to have a macrobiotic

diet or a raw diet while other people will say that's the worst thing for me. So...it's kind of nice that there isn't any question or frustration when it comes to exercise. There is no question it's good as long as I don't overdo it, as long as I tailor it. It's nice to have something that doesn't make me go wacko inside!"

Krista also speaks very highly of her doctors and feels the aggressive protocol and chemo treatment agrees with her. She is clearly being "given the right poison," as she puts it. Very soon after the treatment began, Krista said parts of her body began to feel healthier. Early on, she began visualizing herself as a mid 9th century Celtic-Viking Warrior. She then began to see herself as the warrior fighting the cancer in order to let the healthy cells survive. "I am a fighter and I don't give up. I've really never asked, 'why me?' I can go to a dark side but I don't let myself. It's just lousy luck. I don't want to give the cancer an edge so I'm not giving into that. I am at war."

Sunflower Wellness has helped Krista take her mind off of her diagnosis while at the same time focus on healing. Krista said Sunflower Wellness was the right fit for her. As she puts it, "I'm not a real joiner. I don't join groups. It's not who I am and it wasn't who I was before the cancer. So, the chance to be able to work my body and hold onto flexibility and lung capacity was important to me. When I was given the gift of exercise with Sunflower Wellness, it was a miracle, an incredible gift, magical. Like I said, I am not a joiner but I like going into a room with 12 other people who have had or have cancer and cancer is NOT the topic. We are all there to expand our lungs, flex our muscles and maintain health. Some people are 'cured' and I am there with an incurable diagnosis, but I am there. I am there and I am here."

While some days Krista isn't able to get up, she does know how to listen to her body and knows when to push herself. Krista explained how fatigue can have an impact on her, "The exhaustion is so pervasive. The house could be burning down and I wouldn't get up. But I do get up, and I meet Regan (personal trainer and Program Director for Sunflower Wellness at Bay Club Marin). I may not do anything after but I've done that half-hour!"

Today, Krista's "cancer count" is significantly reduced. Krista is walking several times a week, working out with Regan and attending Aliza Sutker's yoga classes at Bay Club Marin when she can. Although she is no longer teaching she says, "it's really hard not to be teaching because I love it so much; but I like being alive and with my family more."

With the community behind her, a vision of herself as a Celtic-Viking Warrior, treatment she agrees with, doctors she trusts and a tailored exercise program that is accessible and available to her, Krista is in this battle to win. Krista defines winning as living life to its fullest, finding balance and being here now. Sunflower Wellness is honored and proud to be a part of Krista's journey just as we're proud to be there for the more than 150 people affected by cancer who have participated in our exercise class programs throughout the Bay Area.

UCSF Exercise Counseling update

The novel Sunflower Wellness Exercise Counseling program we started in April 2010 at UCSF Medical Center's Cancer Resource Center has really made a difference! To date, under the direction of CRC manager Mimi Roth, our cancer-exercise trainers, Jane Clark and Regan Fedric (who are now on staff weekly at UCSF) have provided consultations to **over 140 UCSF cancer patients**. (Current UCSF cancer patients can call 415-514-6430 to set up an Exercise Counseling appointment.)

But you want to know what *really* blows us away? Regan and Jane make weekly follow-up calls to track how many of these counseling patients start (or continue) to exercise. The results so far? **Patients have maintained a rate of 80% adherence to exercise** for most of the year – a level we could never have imagined. Obviously, we’re doing something right!

Our UCSF patients speak

Our efforts are making a difference. Here’s some of the feedback we’ve received from UCSF Exercise Counseling patients:

- **“This program is saving my life.”**
- “I really loved the session and am very appreciative that there is such a program for cancer patients!”
- “I found the session very productive and informative. Exercise is a critical component of my cancer fight and this really took it to the next level.”
- “Actually, I hope this kind of session remains available to those with limited incomes.”
- “I am not very strong right now. Jane helped me to see how I can use the exercises I do to build an exercise program appropriate for me, and hopefully become stronger and healthy again. Thanks for this program!”
- “I look forward to implementing what Regan and I discussed and following up. I feel this is an important component to cancer recovery and prevention. Thank you.”

Exercise class feedback

We thought you might be interested in hearing what participants in our cancer exercise classes at The San Francisco Bay Club and Bay Club Marin had to say about their experiences with Sunflower Wellness programs:

“Exercise has helped me enormously since cancer treatment. In particular, it has all but eliminated the 'chemo-brain' that was so distressing to me. The classes I attend have me feeling healthier than I have in decades.”
56-year old non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma survivor, San Francisco exercise class participant, September 2009

“I know that exercise is key to my recovery, to regaining my strength, to my emotional well-being and to doing all that I can to stay cancer-free and avoid a recurrence. I want to live a long and healthy life for both myself and for my kids. I really believe that exercise is what will help me achieve all of this.”
53-year old single mother of four, breast cancer survivor, San Francisco exercise class participant, August 2009

“Exercise continues to be my motivation and hope. When I was diagnosed five years ago, I was immediately overwhelmed with so much information, it was as if I was getting a medical degree in one week. Exercise was the only topic that everyone unanimously agreed would be the right course of action. I was lucky to have an oncologist who encouraged me to exercise. Doing the exercises while on treatment truly was my magic pill. It was astonishing how quickly I could feel a difference.”
Breast cancer survivor, San Francisco exercise participant, June 2010

“Keeping in good physical condition has been very helpful in the six years since I was diagnosed [with Stage 4 breast cancer which metastasized to bones and brain]. When I participate with others (group sessions, etc), I do much better than trying to keep up an exercise program solo. Although I am still receiving chemo every three weeks, I feel that it is very beneficial that I stay physically active and as in-shape as possible.”

We want to hear from you! Please visit our website at www.sunflowerwellness.org and take a few moments to provide us your ideas and feedback on our programs.

In our clients' own words



Because of the beautiful weather in late August 2010, our Monday San Francisco Bay Club group exercise class chose not to stay inside. Instead, their fearless instructor, Jane Clark, suggested that the group of women march up the stairs to Coit Tower.

From the bottom near the Bay Club, which is at the same level as the Embarcadero, that's nearly 400 steps up.

At first, several of the women entirely doubted their ability to complete the climb. (It's a LOT of steps.) Jane called to say that all of them made it up, and that more than one burst into tears when they reached the top. The picture of their courageous triumph (Jane is in red) and the testimonial we received below sum it up. All we can say is: Wow! Well done!

August 23, 2010 - Higher Heights! I'm a part of the Monday class where Jane challenges us weekly at the SF Bay Club. This morning I woke up a little sluggish, but the sun was shining. That was the beginning of a new beginning. On the way to class I heard a song on the radio called, "I Believe I Can Fly" – little to my knowledge that today I was going to soar!

With the help of some sunshine, Jane's great ideas of keeping us moving and challenged, I, "M", a native of SF, for the first time climbed the stairs to

Coit Tower. It was an awesome and emotional experience and I had the support of Jane and a great group of women. None of this would have been physically possible or even a thought of mine - two months ago. Because of Sunflower Wellness programs and a great instructor - I Believe I Can Fly! Thanks Sunflower Team.

Closing notes: Club One Fitness

Sunflower Wellness is pleased to announce an exciting new partnership with Club One Fitness in the San Francisco Bay Area. In early October we started offering a yoga class for people with cancer at Club One Fillmore Center. We hope to announce Sunflower Wellness classes at additional Club One locations soon, including in the East Bay.

A Nantucket Fourth

A special shout-out and special thanks to the lovely **Annie Stackhouse!** Annie spotlighted Sunflower Wellness at a gathering she hosted a of some of Nantucket's finest residents during Fourth of July week

We also send our thanks for the amazing hospitality and support of **Mary and Craig Henderson, MD;** for the unflagging support of **Melinda Irwin, PhD,** a cancer-exercise researcher at Yale; to **Gary Danko** from **Restaurant Gary Danko** in San Francisco for treating us to incredible appetizers; and to **Chanticlear Restaurant** in Nantucket for supplying us with beverages.

Thank you for your support!

Sunflower Wellness scholarships and programs depend on generous giving, including your donations. We kindly request your support. Please visit our website to donate.

Sunflower Wellness gratefully acknowledges all of our donors for your support of our work. As we further expand in 2011, it means everything to us. Thank you for your help!