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## For Immediate Release

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# Chronic Illness Support Group Influences Outlook on Life Glenwood Park Y Offers Group to Community

Erie, PA - Surrounded by faces that share a similar story, participants in the Glenwood Park Y's Chronic Illness Support Group know the most important step they can take in living with a chronic disease is to cope with the physical and emotional changes that accompany such diseases as cancer, cystic fibrosis, fibromyalgia, multiple sclerosis and countless others. They gather weekly in the Holistic Center finding comfort and peace in knowing they can open up about their experiences.

"Chronic illness does not necessarily mean these class goers are disabled or immobile," says volunteer class moderator Barbara Edwards, Licensed Psychiatrist. "The participants are finding a new way of living their life fully – but with the pain, fatigue and stress that are associated with chronic disease."

Along with YMCA Yoga Instructors Ledys Negrón and Erin Fleming, the Chronic Illness Support Group provides an atmosphere for a strengthening of the body, mind and spirit through weekly discussion topics and Restorative Yoga sessions. Each week allows participants the opportunity to open up to the group about their fears and personal stories and gives perspective to class goers like Michelle Hagerty. It's in this program that she has the ability to cope with her condition in ways she was previously unaware of. There is no talk of specific Dr.'s, medication, or other therapies. They strictly deal with the emotional and psychological issues that are attached to having a chronic illness. "Here we bond over the same experience, not the same illness" says Hagerty. "In elementary school I knew I was different from all the kids because I was not allowed to do anything physical; when they went to gym class I went to the library". As she explains that her heart condition has been with her since birth, she says "I had a Cardiologist who was very honest with me, who told me I wouldn't have children; I probably wouldn't live to go to college. Unfortunately I listened to him and agreed with him, and I shouldn't have. So my whole life has been a 'when is it going to happen', then as I got older and started having heart failure the fear came back tenfold." Journaling and relaxation techniques learned in class have helped Michelle, now 38, show control of her emotions that can ordinarily lead to high anxiety and stress.

According to Edwards, stress can build and influence how you feel about life. "Prolonged stress can lead to frustration, anger, hopelessness, and, at times, depression. The person with the illness is not the only one affected. Family members are also influenced by the persistent health changes of a loved one."



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Class participants are provided with yoga mats, back pillows, blankets, and a lavender scented eye pillow, needing only to bring themselves. Restorative Yoga is a gentle practice that uses soft but supportive props to aid the body into relaxation postures designed for depression, stress release, back pain, migraines, and other symptoms of chronic conditions. The idea to blend supportive discussions and Yoga came to Edwards and Negron, a YMCA Yoga instructor and caregiver, in conversation. "I feel that yoga not necessarily the physical aspect but the awareness, the meditation, the breathing; it keeps your mind focused and clean, you're able to heal and deal," says Negron. "Chronic illness can be a difficult journey, but staying grounded and connected to your emotions can lead you towards a more peaceful path. Anybody thinking about taking this class should not feel they don't have the experience in Yoga or be fearful of sharing their story," says Hagerty. "They should feel comfortable in this class not fearful."

"By incorporating the deep relaxation poses and breathing techniques you bring alignment to your emotional state," says Negron, as she focuses on the success and benefits she has seen with recent participants in the class. "Once the emotional state is in balance, the physical strengthening can begin."

The Chronic Illness Support Group meets every Thursday afternoon at the Glenwood Park Y. If you are interested in joining the class please call (814) 868-0867 to register, next session begins May 2<sup>nd</sup>. The class participation fee for members is free, \$80 for non-members.

## About the Y

**The Y's Mission:** To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

**The Y's Cause:** At the Y, strengthening community is our cause. Every day, the Y works side by side with our neighbors to ensure that everyone, regardless of age, income or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

**The Y**, founded in 1860, is one of Erie's leading nonprofits (501 c-3), committed to strengthening our community in the areas of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility:

### **Youth Development: Nurturing the potential of every child and teen.**

The Y believes that all kids deserve the opportunity to discover who they are and what they can achieve. That's why, through the Y, thousands of Erie's youth today are engaged in programs that encourage Y core-values – character, honesty, respect and responsibility. Unique community partnerships with the City of Erie and the Erie Housing Authority serve Erie's most at-risk, underserved kids and teens directly in their neighborhoods. In our membership and program centers, award-winning childcare, before & after school care, summer camp, youth sports, swimming, youth fitness, leadership, mentoring and

volunteerism, are all Y programs that are helping Erie's kids and teens reach their full potential.

**Healthy Living: Improving health and well-being.**

Through advocacy and leadership, the Y is a leading voice on health and well-being. With a mission centered on balance, the Y brings families closer together, encourages good health and fosters connections through fitness, sports, fun and shared interests. As a result, thousands of Erie's youth, adults and families are receiving the support, guidance and resources needed to achieve greater health and well-being for their spirit, mind and body.

**Social Responsibility: Giving back and providing support to our neighbors.**

Across Erie County, the Y helps people give back and assist our neighbors by offering them opportunities to volunteer, advocate and support programs that strengthen community. At the Y, we are volunteer-founded, volunteer-led organization. Volunteers are found at every level of the Y – in childcare, health & wellness, youth mentoring, board leadership and more. Through the Y's We Build People annual scholarship campaign, the Y provides financial assistance and income-based membership rates so that everyone can benefit from Y programs and membership. Additionally, the Y partners with other area non-profits enabling our members to support the community through donations and volunteerism.

**Involvement at the Y:** The Y strives to engage more people in the communities it serves whether it is as a member, volunteer, supporter or advocate. Each YMCA association is an independent, autonomous organization with its own governing board, professional staff and assets.

**The Y By the Numbers:**

The Y has 5 membership branches: the County Y located in Edinboro, the Downtown, Eastside, Glenwood Park, and UPMC Hamot Ys. Eighteen award-winning childcare centers provide care to children as young as six weeks. Unique community partnerships with the City of Erie and the Erie Housing Authority serve Erie's most at-risk, underserved kids and teens directly in their neighborhoods.

35,000 people of all ages, incomes, backgrounds and abilities are served by the Y and Y programs. Financial assistance is available for all Y memberships and programs.

To learn more about the Y, [www.ymcaerie.org](http://www.ymcaerie.org).