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From Self-Loathing to Self-Loving

Transforming Rhode Island's Women, Girls and Communities

by Wendy Lewis

"I'm fat." "My boobs are too small." "I hate the way I look." Countless times daily, women and girls engage in such self-talk. Shaped by an increasingly media- and advertising-driven culture, the message is clear, and harmful: "There is something wrong with me." Embody Love Movement, a transformative program for women and girls, is helping to change the powerful conversations they are having with themselves, each other and our communities.

Melody Moore, a Dallas-based clinical psychologist and yoga instructor, created Embody Love Movement in 2011 after several years of helping clients recover from eating disorders. Moore combined the powerful modalities of yoga and psychodynamic therapy to create programs that build empowerment and positive body image in women and girls. Trained volunteers now lead Embody Love Movement workshops at sites in Canada, England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S., including Laughing Elephant Yoga in East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

Native Rhode Islander Debbie Valois, yoga instructor and co-owner of Laughing Elephant Yoga, became a certified Embody Love Movement facilitator in 2015. With the support of Lori Mancini, Valois'

"business partner and BFF," she has since led 15 three-hour workshops at Laughing Elephant.

Valois, a lifelong fitness professional and enthusiast, initially signed up for Embody Love Movement facilitator training for her own personal development. A fitness trainer in her twenties, yoga instructor since her thirties, and aerialist for the past two years, Valois didn't intend to add Embody Love Movement workshops to her already busy schedule but quickly changed her mind. She says, "I was so moved by it, I decided I just had to teach it because it's something that women and girls need." To date, Valois has led more than 150 women and girls through the program.

Valois' own personal life journey gives her a special perspective from which to share the program's philosophy with her students. She has faced her own battles with body image and eating disorders at various stages of her life, particularly during periods of stress and transition. Valois deeply understands the challenges many women bring to her



Debbie Valois

workshops and the value of the program in helping to transform them.

"It addresses a lot of the negative self-talk that women do," she says. "Not just about physical standards but also societal standards—that women are supposed to be quiet, meek and adhere to traditional roles. It's a very empowering program." Valois says the knowledge gleaned from her Embody Love Movement training has spilled over into other areas of her life, including the words, guidance and support she gives in her yoga classes.

The growing popularity of Embody Love Movement comes at a time when it appears to be sorely needed. A recent National Geographic article, "A Challenge for Girls Today: Moving Beyond 'How Do I Look?'," explores how young women are forming their sense of self-image in an era driven by social media and advertising.

Retouched images, celebrity selfies, virtual bullying and more send hundreds of daily messages to women and girls that profoundly impact self-perception and help create unattainable, appearance-driven expectations.

Valois feels most strongly led to share Embody Love Movement workshops with adults, but through facilitator training she is helping others to bring healthy self-image development and empowerment directly to young women. Valois conducted her first Embody Love Movement facilitator training class at Laughing Elephant in February 2017. Many of the 19 participants work with teens and girls and plan to lead future Embody Love Movement programs specially designed for these age groups at schools, camps and community centers. Valois says, "It's important to start infusing girls with positive messaging when they need to start hearing it, and fortify them against the negative things they start to hear as they enter adolescence."

The program also helps shift the



Melody Moore

"beauty dialogue" away from isolation and toward interdependency. Participants consider their own impact on the collective consciousness surrounding lovability and purpose, and join together to support each other and create a world where all can feel unconditionally loved and valued.

Valois will lead her next Embody Love Movement workshop (for adult women ages 19 and up) from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m., March 4, at Laughing Elephant Yoga. Other upcoming events at the studio will include workshops led by Embody Love Movement creator Melody Moore and Laughing Elephant instructors Lori Mancini, Jessie Dwiggins, Sharon McGuire and Aerial Arthur.

Laughing Elephant Yoga is located at 4372 Post Rd., East Greenwich. For more information, call 401-398-2616 or visit LaughingElephantYoga.com. Learn more about Embody Love Movement at EmbodyLoveMovement.org. See ad on page 35.

Wendy Lewis is a frequent contributor to Natural Awakenings. Connect at WordsmithWendy@yahoo.com.

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