

Karen Keast finds out what's tickling Daylesford Laugh Club laughter leader Greg Govinda's funnybone.

HOW does the Daylesford Laugh Club work? We meet once a month, on the second Saturday of the month, on the oval at the Daylesford Primary School at 10am. It's a free community activity and runs for about 30 minutes. The club is one of about 80 in Australia and 5000 worldwide.

How did the club begin?

The club has been running for three years. It was established on March 5, 2005, by my partner Shanti Dass Portia and myself. I saw a laugh club on television about 10 years ago and Shanti had the initial idea to start one. At the time, I had a few challenges in life and a few stresses.

I had some deep, personal grief that I was working through. I did a laugh class in Geelong. I spent six months studying it and practicing it. I found by laughing that the stresses evened out — even the major ones were dissipating. I just realised how powerful it was.

Then we established our laugh club. We always get six or a dozen people who come along. It's just a simple get together. You don't have to join. You just have to feel like it.

What is a laugh club?

Laugh clubs are non-profit, non-religious and non-political associations of people. We laugh to create good health, happiness and inner peace. Laughter is a natural mechanism in the body to release stress and maintain balance.

It has been used therapeutically for many centuries dating back at least 5000 years. The laughter yoga we work with in the laugh clubs was inspired by medical practitioner Dr Madan Kataria, of Mumbai, India, who began a worldwide laughter movement in 1995.

What is laughter yoga?

Laughter yoga is the practice of choosing to laugh in order to activate the release of endorphins, give the body a gentle aerobic workout and assist emotions to move.

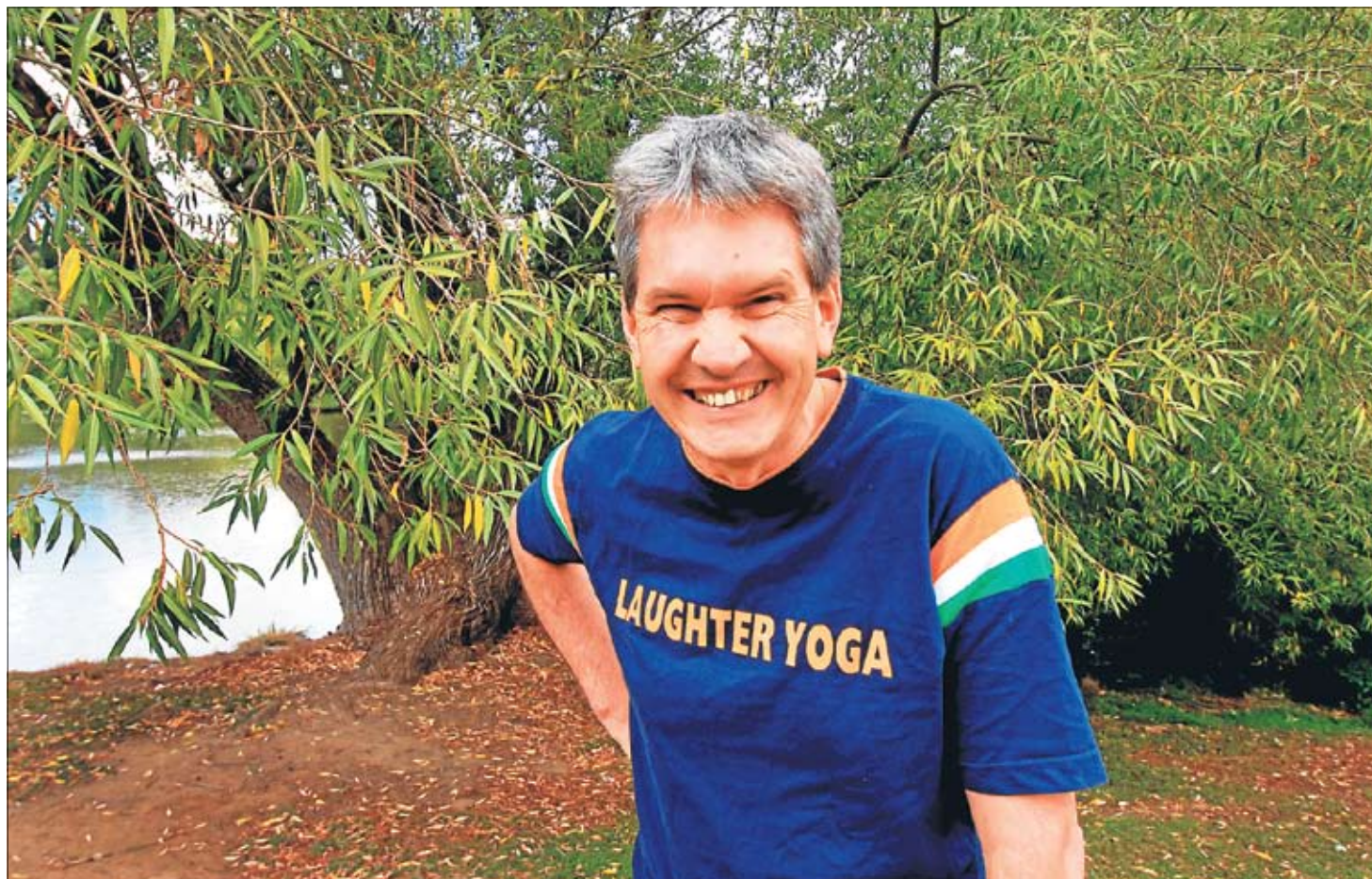
Do you use jokes?

No jokes, we just laugh, play and have fun. Laughter yoga uses a perfect blend of playful, tension-releasing simple laughter exercises, interspersed with very gentle breathing and stretching exercises.

It begins as easy vocal exercises, like "ha, ha, ha", and soon becomes infectious, relaxing and uplifting chuckles. There is nothing forced and the people who come along feel great afterwards.

When you hold a laughing session, what kind of a reaction do you get from people going past?

We get people walking past or



A HEALTHY SMILE: Greg Govinda has turned laughter into a business which is helping people to reduce their stress levels.

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Life's a laughing matter for Greg

jogging. Some will start walking faster, usually not sure what we are doing! Some people stop and just watch and often people join in.

What are the benefits of laughing?

Many studies have shown the benefits include an improved immune system and increased general health and wellbeing. It also acts as a natural stress release.

It has been tested that aerobically, one minute of laughing freely is equal to 10 minutes on a rowing machine. Laughter is used in some hospitals and in palliative care. I have met a lot of people who have been given a short time to live or are incurable and through laughter they are rebuilding their health.

How has laughing changed you, personally?

It's given me a lot of confidence and a sense of myself.

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I have got a stronger sense of inner peace. I have a positive attitude. I don't laugh every day but I try and sing or smile every day or sit quietly and meditate every day.

For me, to laugh is to let go of that stress so that you can sit quietly more often and be more at peace and accepting of life. It's important to have a balanced stress. We stress in excess.

You may still feel stress but at least you are laughing about it and letting it go. You are not

hanging onto it and trying to repress it. I am learning to accept life and just treasure it.

Laughing has also changed your life professionally. Tell us about your business.

I was a professional photographer. Then, about a year ago, I started my business; Greg Govinda Building Healthy Teams. I tailor sessions and workshops in laughter and personal skill development for business, organisations and community groups.

I have a background in education, counselling, drama and therapeutic movement. I have worked with groups of up to 100 people. The response is always really positive. Generally, very focused and stressed businesspeople just find this enormous release.

It's a chance to let go and experience their joy and their wellbeing. It helps people find joy again.

How do people incorporate the laughing technique into their every day life?

People will choose to laugh. Some will say "every time I see red light in traffic, I will laugh". You choose something that stresses you. It could be "every time I get the credit card bill I will laugh and not worry".

Problems in your life can be laughed about. Some people go into a state of thinking that life too hard. I have been studying happiness and wellbeing. Some people say "I will be happy who or if I have this."

Why not just choose to be happy. It's a choice, I think. You choose your friends and you choose your activities and you choose how busy you want to be.

Laughing is a very simple technique. It really is just to laugh and enjoy life.

● **For more information, visit www.laughclub.org**