

Heart & Soul Care Retreat - November 2023 - Blog

Heart & Soul Care's November 2023 retreat was held in the beautiful grounds and facilities of Govinda Valley, in Otford NSW. The retreat is held bi-annually and aimed at empowering women to heal from past trauma through holistic practices (such as yoga, art therapy, sound healing to name a few) in a supportive environment. The theme for this retreat was Self-Love and the content was inspired by the work of Akal Pritam and her book "Self Love, Finding peace and happiness".

Day 1 - Friday 3rd November 2023

Welcome Circle with Nancie

Joining together as a circle of women for the first time, practitioner Nancie led our newly introduced group through some journaling upon arrival by helping the women to identify their established strengths as well as their developing ones. Then a group practice of 'cultivating lifeforce energy' proceeded, sharing the energy created within the group as everyone linked hands in the circle. Concluding with an introduction to chakra's (points or wheels of energy within the body), mantras (sounds and words that help create focus) and yantras (sacred symbols). The gorgeous creation of a flower mandala with everyone's contribution to its design resulted!



Crystal Bowl Healing with Barbara

Barbara, our experienced sound therapist, shared at the start of our session that we are all 'vibratory beings', meaning that our frequency is often different everyday and how this affects many aspects of our life. She explained that sound helps us focus on our own 'attunement' allowing choices and decisions we make to come from a place of self-love. The group stood once again in a circle as Barbara asked them to consider what was needed from the imminent sound therapy session? After a beautiful dedication to the practice, Barbara shared the benefits of humming, which everyone practiced together (humming enhances the parasympathetic nervous system and calms the sympathetic system) before beginning a magical crystal bowl healing session while the group rested and relaxed themselves in comfort on their mats.



Day 2 - Saturday 4th November 2023

Trauma Informed Yoga with Ro

Yoga with Ro was a welcoming and inclusive practice which was accessible to everyone. This is the beauty of 'trauma informed yoga' - everyone is encouraged to feel supported and safe in their practice. The movements were therapeutic and nourishing for the groups bodies, with lots of the practice sensitively designed around less weight bearing through smaller joints and instead gaining more support through intelligent sequencing using the floor to stretch and build stability. A healing and deeply restorative practice that left the group calm and vibrant - ready for a new day!



Root chakra with Heleen

Heleen introduced us into the practice of 'our senses meeting the chakras'. She invited the group to 'get unstuck' through sound, colour and movement. They learned a bija (seed) mantra and practiced meditation with the chakras. Heleen taught the group about the root chakra by accessing movement and dancing inside and outside barefoot! She also shared 'Ho'ponopono' the Hawaiian Practice of reconciliation and forgiveness. Clay work began,

and the group created seeds, displaying the creations and the group sharing with everyone what they saw in each other's work as part of an unfolding group process. After some drawing an interpretation of the process, the group put their work on show, displaying their art for all to see! After all the creativity the whole group had a break for fruit, chocolate and tea.



Sacral chakra with Heleen

"For change to take place, a seed must transform. What needs to happen for this change to occur?" Heleen led the group into the beginning of the sacral chakra session with a poignant question to ponder. As the group sat with this new beginning Heleen inspired them to re-model and re-create the original clay work they had made in the representation of seeds. Heleen encouraged them to model their new pieces on what they 'need it to become'. The group of women who were initially so in awe of their root chakra creations carefully restructured and remade their clay work to reveal (with significant contrast in their design) a freshly expressed sculpture truly honouring their new beginnings. Something new is created...mirroring the life journey of change through growth and letting go.



Free time

An opportunity for free time allowed the women the chance to explore how to best spend time for self-care. Some of the lovely women joined together to work on some art, completing illustrations through the use of colour and craft to tap into their creative side. Others embarked on walks in nature, taking the opportunity to immerse in the beauty of the natural world that the retreat centre is based within and recharge their energies. One group of beautiful women came together to express their shared love of music by forming a 'trio of sound' with the help of some musical instruments and the melodic tunes of their voices. Quiet time was also a bonus for some women who rested, journalled and took the time to remind themselves to fill their own cup.



Solar plexus chakra with Nancie

In this session led by Nancie, we explored the solar plexus chakra and learned about the qualities of self love, self worth, power, ambition, the astral force and the seat of emotions. Nancie assisted the group to identify words, labels, unhelpful beliefs and to symbolically burn them into the handmade cauldron. The power of meditation was also practiced, and the womens 'power animal' and resonating colour was recognised. The group stood together in the circle, becoming a 'tree of life' with their roots deep and their branches connecting with each other. Art work followed, filling out the tree of life page/stencil and naming their strengths within the alignment of the tree's limbs.



Heart chakra with Nancie

The Heart Chakra session led by Nancie opened up the discussion about our fire ritual, talking about the combination of the elements of fire and air and their purifying components. Sweeping away, evaporating, recognising strengths. At this stage of the retreat the women resonated and were able to recognise these strengths within themselves. The group crafted 'heart blossoms' as an addition to their tree of life stencil, the coloured paper allowing a beautiful 3 dimensional effect bringing the craft to life. To finish, the group gathered in a circle viewing their work together and acknowledging each others' strengths.



Tibetan healing bowls with Annie (Tej Sundri Kaur)

The second evening session was hosted by Annie, who introduced her session with a warm and welcoming smile. Annie's experience as a sound healing practitioner allowed her offering of a beautifully relaxing session through sounds, vibration and energy. Feeling the resonance of the tibetan bowls that Annie held over the women as she skilfully played them, the women's level of harmony increased. Deeply connected to this state, the beginnings of stress reduction, recovery from trauma, ease from physical and mental discomfort as well as improved quality of sleep resulted, inviting the group into a purposefully conscious yet relaxed phase to enter into their second evening on retreat.



Day 3 - Sunday 5th November 2023

Yoga + Throat chakra with Moira

Immersing in the creativity of Moira's Dru Yoga the session commenced with movement. Allowing the group to shift the energy and breathe deeply, Moira included the 'Humming Breath' to further help the group regulate their nervous systems. Changing gears, the session unfolded into a creative art space - where the goal was to make a 'Chakra Card Wall Hanging'. Working with crafting materials the group created their chakra shapes using tracing and cutting techniques to make the petals of each chakra. Moira shared that 'counting the petals is in itself a sacred practice for those wishing to still the mind, and was originally practiced by yogis'. The group worked with Heart energy through Moira's encouragement.



Ajna & Crown chakra with Moira

Moving into the ascending chakras, Moira led the final touches on the crafting part of the session. The women shared the interesting things they noticed about what the crafting brought up in them "I way over-thought that!" one participant shared, "I was scared of getting it wrong!" to which the whole group responded with "You can't get it wrong!" As their fears were shared, the group realised how much of an art 'therapy' session this really was! Completing the time with another session of Dru Yoga, Moira invited the group to hold 'sweet mudras' with their hand positions, allowing the 'high forces to meet the grounded forces' and sharing that "The Dru still point represents the North Star". This courageous group of women are already moving in its direction...



Aura chakra with Akal

“Self-Reflective love heals” Akal Pritnam, the author of our guiding text “Self-Love - Finding peace and happiness” led the final session for the retreat. She discussed many aspects of self love including cultivating the ‘devotion to shift the patterns we have developed’ through self-ritual. Akal spoke of her own journey and offered the group many valuable insights in terms of doing healing work as individuals. Akal’s own practice of the blend of Tai Chi, Qi Gong and Breathwork was demonstrated through an online session and followed by the group. Using breath as a mindfulness tool and bringing presence to the group field, the session closed with the question “What would beauty do?” and the statement “I am grateful for my life”, followed by question time and an abundance of gratitude for such a heartfelt session from Akal.



Closing circle with Nancie

Nancie closed the session with a standing circle inclusive of all who attended the retreat as guests, facilitators and support staff. The question was asked “What is the biggest thing you are taking with you?” We placed our hands on our heart, moving to linking our hands together as the whole circle took turns in sharing. An emotional and deeply moving way to end such a beautiful experience on retreat with such an amazing group of women. Deep gratitude and thanks to all, we look forward to connecting with you all again soon!

