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THE WORLD'S FAVOURITE YOGA MAGAZINE



# Michelle Georgeson meets Tatty Bumpkin on a mission to bring yoga to the under-fives

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obble Farm was one of those places where the sun always shone and the grass was forever green. It was home to a unique individual who went by the name of Tatty Bumpkin. Tatty was well-known within her village for being particularly bendy, giggly, clever and strong. In fact so bendy was Tatty that she decided to use her special talents to teach young children and release their inner yogi energy.

In reality, Tatty Bumpkin is actually a doll that has been created to demonstrate yoga postures. Children have the most wonderful imaginations and are more susceptible to the power of suggestion. So for them, Tatty offers a role model they can readily connect to and acts as a visual re-enforcement. She also helps thread together related stories within the class and helps to keep the fantasy alive.

A class with Tatty and her friends might take them to the bottom of the sea to swim with mermaids and seahorses, or perhaps they might trek to the depths of the jungle to solve the mystery of a lion's lost roar. The common thread linking the sessions together is that the children are having fun and the teachers are working with their natural love of movement.

The self-proclaimed "mother" to Tatty Bumpkin is Sam Peter, a Sivananda and BirthLight trained yoga teacher. The idea for the doll first came to her three years ago just after the birth of her son. At the time, she was looking at ways to make classes fun to encourage youngsters to try yoga, as she says: "I think yoga can be so alienating. I wanted to approach it in a different way."

From this, a concept has grown



that draws on animal-inspired yoga postures and interweaves them with storytelling and relaxation. Philip Davis, the author and composer of the *Beat It* series (music to accelerate learning), has also worked with Sam on producing unique sound beats for the sessions. The songs give an auditory anchor to what the children are learning in class, giving mood and atmosphere. Drawing on the idea is that all learning should have an emotional resonance.

With an abundance of companies and products on the market promoting children's yoga, you could be forgiven for assuming Tatty Bumpkin is just another in a long line. Yet there is something different about this venture – a deeper dimension than just making money. There is a positive ethical foundation that underpins everything Sam has set out to achieve.

"I live on an organic farm," she says. "I believe in the whole ethic of organic clothes production, for example conventional cotton manufacturing ruins the environment." The clothes, mats and even the Tatty Bumpkin doll itself are produced by a women's co-operative in Sri Lanka that guarantees a fair wage is paid to its workers.

At the same time, Sam sponsors

a disabled worker in the region who was tragically involved in a car crash. She explains how this came about. "As a result of the crash she lost both her legs and her husband never wanted to see her again. He wouldn't even let her see her children, including her youngest who was only nine months. It was devastating for her, but now, she's doing the sewing for us and has been able to piece her life back together."

Sam has put her heart into ensuring that this organic, social-conscious philosophy runs through the core of the company. All the leaflets and promotional material they use are recycled and as part of her teacher training weekends she invites along experts in the field to talk about the ethics behind cotton production.

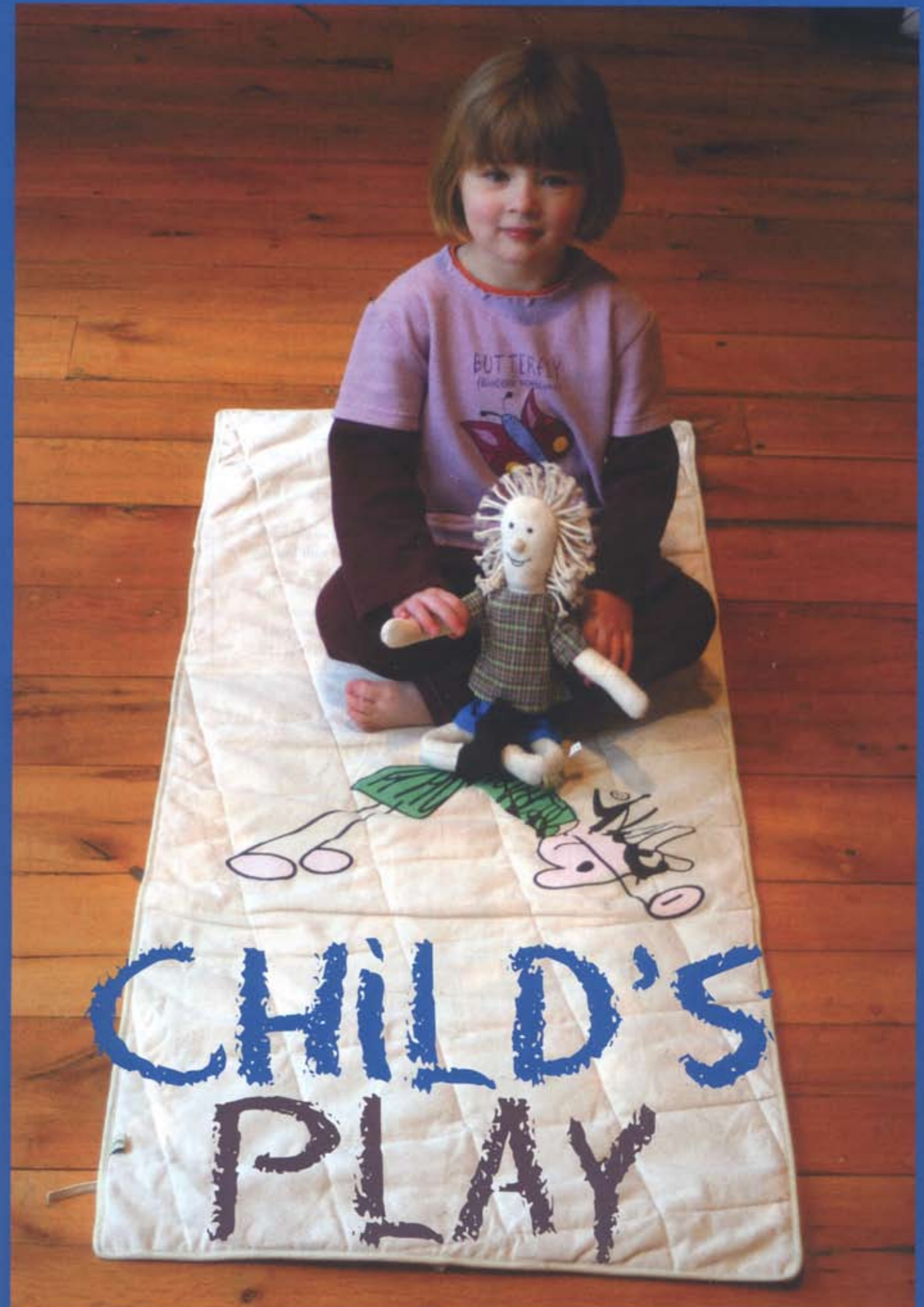
The choice they are offering with organic is not only to do with health and ethics. It is also about educating the children about natural, healthy lifestyles. Part of this healthy equation is that children need to be undertaking regular exercise. Naturally born yogis, they have an innate suppleness and flexibility, as well as possessing excellent breathing skills. Unless they continue to experience a wide variety and

range of movement once they are on their feet however, all too quickly this can be lost. It's amazing how many young children can't even touch their toes.

Paediatric physiotherapists have worked closely with yoga teachers in devising the programme and attend all the training workshops to ensure their teachers have a comprehensive working knowledge of the body. Anatomy, physiology and sensory integration provide the strong foundations that enable teachers to work effectively with children, and get the most out of their 45-minute sessions.

Equally as important they are also shown how to work with mental focus, imagination and self-belief. All of which work on expanding confidence and increasing self-value and reflection, vital to a child's holistic growth.

The sessions encourage that special bond between carer and child, with parents actively encouraged to get involved in the classes. It provides an opportunity for quality time with their little ones that can all too easily be lost in our time-starved 21st-century lives. "It is also nice to see the mums come down to the children's level," says Sam. "After a few weeks they are rolling





# I stood by the Giggle Tree and Laughed Out Loud

around on the floor laughing together.

"I felt that a lot of mothers hadn't really engaged at that level before. For instance, just to be able to lie on the mat with their child in relaxation and bond. I got a letter from one of the parents after she'd been coming to my classes, saying it had changed her attitude towards parenting. Everything was much more fun and spontaneous. It had opened another window for her."

It is parents that Sam is keen to encourage onto her teacher training courses too, as she believes: "They make the best children's yoga teachers. They are great communicators and can have a laugh. There is a teacher in everybody and we aim to work with mums on developing that."

Recently, Sam won a Social Enterprise Award. It was given in recognition of the positive social impact her company is having not only on the environment and working communities abroad, but on

mums, children and her local community. One of the ways she has been able to achieve this has been by offering mums a low start-up fee for her teacher training course.

"Why should the course be so expensive?" she says. "We want to help mums back to work and are making them happier as they are doing something for themselves and their family. This then extends into the community and onto their children."

The teacher training programme is now in its second year. Paula Brown was one of the first mums to attend a training weekend. She says that initially: "The low start-up fee was definitely appealing, particularly as I didn't know how it was going to go and didn't want to make a huge commitment. What I also liked about it was the idea you could take your kids with you on the training course."

Being a Tatty Bumpkin teacher has allowed her to integrate her work and her family life. "I think

it's important that your children can be part of your working life," she says. "I have Tatty lying around the house and the kids just get it. The other day my son fell over and landed in really awkward position, sideways with one hand up in the air. Then he looked up and said 'Look mummy, triangle pose'. It makes you realise it is all worth it."

Cassie Sedat is one of Tatty Bumpkins most recently qualified teachers. For her, the best part of the course has been that it acted as a bridge offering her a way to return to work after seven years off looking after her children. "It has also enabled me to earn a bit of money," she says, "without having to compromise on the time I get to spend with my boys."

Cassie, Paula and all the teachers who have trained with Sam are finding working solutions to balancing family and work life. They are solutions that are grounded in something uplifting. "You spend your life trying to teach your child

about morals and good behaviour," says Cassie. "And you work on instilling values you hope will lead them to be a happy, balanced individual. What is nice about Tatty Bumpkin is that with my work, I get to lead by example with them."

Switching back to the classroom environment and the children are on their way back from their jungle adventure. Tatty is leading them into guided relaxation, cuddled up on their mats with mum. Golden silence reigns in the room. It has been a wonderful adventure for all who have come – children, carers and teacher. Tatty Bumpkin and her own "mother" Sam have worked hard towards creating another positive day for all who have visited Wobble Farm.

For more information on Tatty Bumpkin classes, clothes and teacher training weekends you can log onto [www.tattybumpkin.com](http://www.tattybumpkin.com) or call + (44) 01732 812212.

