

## Woman to Watch: Anita Black

Sandy Sloane 7:24 p.m. EDT June 27, 2016



*(Photo: Walter Colley)*

As the associate program officer for the Greater Rochester Health Foundation (GRHF), Anita Black finds many opportunities to incorporate her love of yoga into her daily job.

A longtime yoga practitioner and part-time instructor for Breathe Yoga, Black utilizes aspects of the ancient discipline as she works on behalf of children's needs within the community.

"I aim to guide my yoga students to become the best versions of themselves, helping them find what they are truly meant to do with their energy. I bring that same mantra to the Health Foundation, answering my own call every day," she said.

She believes that GRHF's motto, "A strong community is built on a healthy foundation," can be said about yoga also.

With an educational background in psychology, child development, family studies, clinical social work, and extensive experience in the practice and teaching of yoga, Black's background was the perfect addition to the foundation staff.

According to John Urban, president and CEO of the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, "About 1 in 5 children suffers from a diagnosable mental illness. In this specific role, Anita serves as a change agent, enabling the community to improve its ability to meet the needs of children in the Greater Rochester area and positively affect their social and emotional health."

Each day presents Black with opportunities to make a difference in the lives of the children she advocates for. Her involvement with the Greater Rochester Initiative for Children's Social and Emotional Health focuses on the approximately 52,200 children in the nine-county greater Rochester area who need some form of mental health care.

"We must ask our children-in-need "what happened to you?" and then support them completely, making sure they know whatever happened is not their fault."

She believes we need to ascertain what is preventing our children from receiving quality care, and what changes are necessary for a more coordinated approach to their social and emotional health. It is only then that the foundation can determine the areas in greatest need of funding.

"My role is to connect the advocacy dots, including convening and supporting the decision-makers, and extracting information from communities already successfully addressing children's needs. The goal is to provide a collective, strategic, systematic effort to support children at all ages, across all systems."

Carly Weis of Breathe Yoga reflects on Black's passion for serving her family and the community, and how she seeks to empower the people in her life.

"She has a masterful way of creating connections between herself and others," says yoga director Weis. "Anita truly believes when you serve others, it is you who end up being served."

**Personal:** Single with three children, lives in Pittsford.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in psychology from Skidmore College, 1989; master's degree in child development and family studies, Syracuse University, 1991; master's in social work, University of Maryland, 1995 (clinical social work).

**My current work project:** The Health Foundation is convening an implementation task force of providers, payers and funders and a Parent-Professional Advocacy Group to address the issues of care, capacity and quality that impact this crisis in care for children; at the forefront of this work is trauma response, and the prevention of social, emotional and behavioral issues.

**Who inspires me:** My children, Sara, Andrew and Grace; and my 97-year-old grandmother who recently passed away. I'm blessed by their wisdom, resiliency and engagement.

**What I am reading:** Baron Baptiste's *Perfectly Imperfect*. Yoga is not only about stretching and strengthening. It's also about decreasing toxic stress, clearing the mind to make better decisions and opening up to possibilities within and around us.

**My career advice to young professionals:** 'Heed the call.' There is a deep knowing of what you need to do and your purpose. It may not be easy, but stay the path. You're worthy of the call. Your voice matters. Make your positive impact on the world.

*Sandy Sloane is a Rochester-based freelance writer. Connect with her at [sandy.sloane@solutionsbysloane.com](mailto:sandy.sloane@solutionsbysloane.com)*

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