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# Serving Special Populations

One way to diversify your client base and increase your studio's bottom line is to offer private sessions and group classes that target specific groups. These five teachers implemented successful programming based on the needs of their local communities. Here's how they did it.

by Anne Marie O'Connor



PHOTO BY MOLLY BADGER

**Rhea Patterson Cano**, owner of *The Pilates Suite* and founder of *Mamahouse Pilates* in San Antonio

**OFFERS SPECIALIZED CLASSES FOR:** pre- and postnatal

**THE DEETS:** I offer privates and duets for pre and postnatal women. I also create short videos for mothers to do at home without the need for apparatus.

**THE BACKSTORY:** It happened pretty organically. San Antonio is a family-friendly city. My husband and I moved here from New York City after having our first son. I started with just one prenatal client. Word of mouth was how I received clients initially. Now they're officially part of my in-studio and virtual offerings. Getting out of the house late in pregnancy or with young children can be a challenge so I invite my postnatal clients to bring their pre-walking babies. In those instances I have to stay flexible and be creative. I've been known to bounce a baby on my chest to the beat of the Hundred's breath.

**HOW IT AFFECTED HER STUDIO'S BOTTOM**

**LINE:** This offering has introduced me to women with little to no prior Pilates experience, and 100 percent of my clients who've come to me while pregnant have stayed with me afterwards. They see the benefit of the work. They feel safe and taken care of which is so important during this time.

**THE PERSONAL FULFILLMENT FACTOR:** It's extremely personally fulfilling. I'm a mother of two

(I have a 4-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter). I practiced Pilates through both of my pregnancies. With this population, I am not only applying the method on the mat, but encouraging women to use it off the mat as well. All the principles of Pilates can be applied to mothering—nursing, lifting, baby wearing, playing etc. I encourage women to not only focus on getting their bodies back, but returning to life with a fresh perspective on what it means to be a strong and holistically healthy person. I think Joe would be proud of them!

**Kim Fielding**, director of teacher training at *Gramercy Pilates* in New York City

**OFFERS SPECIALIZED CLASSES FOR:** smart-phone-obsessed New Yorkers

**THE DEETS:** We have two "Pilates for Text Necks" and one "Bad Back Pain" classes a week. I also give clients homework to do in the form of written-out exercises with pictures. I want them to continue to practice healthy biomechanics and movement patterns—it's the 23 hours when they are not in class or session that are the most important.

**THE BACKSTORY:** I started this class around 2009 because I was seeing so many people having neck and upper back problems due to so much texting and smart-phone use. Everyone's posture was really bad all of a sudden. (Before I became director of teacher training at Gramercy, I had my own studio, Pilates

AT LEFT: A MOTHER HERSELF, RHEA PATTERSON CANO LOVES WORKING WITH OTHER MOMS AT HER SAN ANTONIO STUDIO. HERE, SHE ASSISTS ONE OF HER PRENATAL CLIENTS.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: KIM FIELDING HELPS SMART PHONE ADDICTS GET STRAIGHT; A FORMER BALLERINA, KERRY SHEA WORKS WITH DANCERS BOTH IN THE BALLET AND THE PILATES STUDIOS.

360 NYC, and worked at as a rehab and movement specialist at a physical therapy clinic.)

**HOW IT AFFECTS HER STUDIO'S BOTTOM LINE:** Having classes that people need has helped the bottom line and popularity of the studio. They bring in consistent clientele, plus half of the class participants have turned into private clients.

**THE PERSONAL FULFILMENT FACTOR:** Being a Pilates and movement professional allows us to educate our clients so that they can conduct their activities of daily living, take part in their sport or recreation of choice and generally have a pain free, happy and increased quality of life. This type of genuine feeling is infused into the studio and keeps clients coming back to get the best classes that elevate them in all dimensions of their lives.

**Kerry Shea, owner of Kerry Shea Pilates in Charlottesville, VA**

**OFFERS SPECIALIZED CLASSES FOR:** dancers

**THE DEETS:** I offer individualized coaching to dancers to support and improve their ballet technique using an integrative approach. We start in the ballet studio, where I observe the dancer's ballet classes, then I custom-design private Pilates apparatus sessions. We then return to the studio for a blend of Pilates and ballet class. This informs the body on how the Pilates work is being applied into ballet.

**THE BACKSTORY:** I'm a former professional ballet dancer and have been doing Pilates for over 25 years. Pilates was such an integral part of my career—for performance, injury prevention and rehabilitation—and it even helped my performance anxiety. I'm very passionate about dancers doing Pilates. After a long ballet career in New York and California, I retired and my husband and I moved to Charlottesville, where I have a small studio. It has been both exciting and daunting to be starting my Pilates business from scratch a second time.

I reconnected with Sara Jansen Clayborne, a former NYC dance colleague, who's now co-artistic director of the Charlottesville Ballet, who began

referring her students and professional dancers. Often, a dancer requires individual help with technique that's out of a ballet teacher's realm of expertise, and into more of a Pilates knowledge base. It's also impossible for a teacher to give the individual care needed in a ballet class with 10+ students. My Instagram account has also helped attract dancers and athletes, as has advertising in the Charlottesville Ballet's performance programs.

I also conduct master classes that are group mat classes. Recently, I've been creating a Pilates-based ballet class for ballet schools that would be included in a studio's weekly curriculum; in the near future, I will be offering Pilates classes for dancers online.

I've also assembled a network of trusted practitioners (chiropractor, PT, acupuncturist, massage therapist, nutritionist) who all work alongside each other to best support the dancer... because it takes a village to raise a dancer!

**HOW IT AFFECTS HER STUDIO'S BOTTOM LINE:** It's become a huge part of my business. It was a very natural progression after retiring from my professional dance career.

**THE PERSONAL FULFILMENT FACTOR:** Working with dancers has helped fill the void of leaving the ballet world, which was hard. I've learned and experienced so much during my career. I often pinch myself that now I get to share my life's passion with clients so they can reach their dreams.

**Kéthia Clairvoyant, freelance Pilates instructor and owner of Santé\_Shanti Pilates & Yoga, opening in August in Washington, DC**

**OFFERS SPECIALIZED CLASSES FOR:** black women

**THE DEETS:** Since last year, I've been hosting a series of specialized workshops called Black Girl(friend) Magic that introduces black women to Pilates and yoga. The session starts with a 45-minute Pilates class. We break for a short discussion on one or two wellness topics. The last part of the series is a gentle yoga class. It's priced at \$35 a session and has attracted students and professionals.

**THE BACKSTORY:** I started this series as a celebration of black women while demystifying the mind-body world; many of them might be intimidated because no one in the class looks like them. I believe everyone is deserving of the vast benefits of Pilates.

**HOW IT AFFECTS HER STUDIO'S BOTTOM LINE:** The workshop also helps to promote my brand and presence in the DC area and it's certainly helped my business grow. Roughly 35 percent of my current clients are Black Girl(friend) Magic alums. I believe that with more time and marketing, that number will continue to increase. I've gained more visibility and inquiries about future workshop sessions and my regular teaching schedule. The increase in business has been significant. I'd love to be the "Oprah of Pilates" through Black Girl(friend) Magic!

**THE PERSONAL FULFILMENT FACTOR:** For me, this is a prime example of turning one's passion into a business. Offering my Black Girl(friend) Magic series fulfills me on a personal level because I am my own target audience, thus truly the reflection of my target audience. When I serve my clients, I serve myself. I am them, and they are me.

**Melanie Byford-Young, co-owner Pacific Northwest Pilates in Portland, OR**

**OFFERS SPECIALIZED CLASSES FOR:** people with Parkinson's disease

**THE DEETS:** We have weekly group Reformer classes designed for people with Parkinson's disease. We also offer private and semi-privates for clients who need more individualized attention and we welcome their family members to observe or join in as able.

**THE BACKSTORY:** As often happens, one of our instructors was the spark for this program. She had a family member with Parkinson's, and was instrumental in learning about Parkinson's specific programming. She started the group classes years ago, and has mentored other instructors who have continued the program.

Also, Oregon Health Science University (OSHU) has been instrumental in researching and developing programs for people with Parkinson's. Its research team conducted studies related to how specific cues, movement sequences and motor programming can help people with Parkinson's. OSHU actively shared its results with movement professionals throughout the Portland area (Pilates, boxing, yoga etc.), and created a vast network of resources for people with this disease. Several of our instructors studied with this group and brought that information to our studio.

Also, our studio is a Licensed Training Center for Merrithew™ and STOTT PILATES®. We offer a course called Injuries and Special Populations that teaches instructors how to work with clients who have various conditions including Parkinson's disease.

**HOW IT AFFECTS HER STUDIO'S BOTTOM LINE:** It's actually not a significant revenue generator for the studio. We offer discounted class rates to clients with Parkinson's; no one ever chooses to develop it, and we respect that this diagnosis dramatically



affects the individual and the family of the person who has the disease. But our instructors who teach these classes often get referrals for private classes, and frequently also work with family members and friends; we also tend to have long-lasting relationships with them and their family members. We collaborate with many other facilities that are offering services specifically for people with this disease, e.g., boxing and physical therapy, and we refer clients back and forth.

**THE PERSONAL FULFILMENT FACTOR:** This program is incredibly fulfilling for us! The classes are fun and challenging. Our studio celebrates every "win" whether that be increased core control, decreased pain, better balance or better posture. **PS**

TOP TO BOTTOM: KÉTHIA CLAIRVOYANT CREATED BLACK GIRL(FRIEND) MAGIC TO INTRODUCE AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN TO PILATES AND YOGA; MELANIE BYFORD-YOUNG OFFERS CLASSES GEARED TO PARKINSON'S PATIENTS.

