

# One Thousand Laughs

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## **Laughter Clubs: Think Globally—Laugh Locally**

By Claire Krulikowski

“Children laugh 400 times a day. Adults laugh only 15 times a day. Somewhere along the line, we’ve lost 385 laughs every day,” observes laughologist Teresa Verde of Seattle.

If the world or your personal life seems filled with difficulty, consider joining the Laugh Club Movement. “Therapeutic laughter began several years ago in India, developed by Dr. Madan Kitaria. Dubbed Laughter Club International, this movement was brought to the Americas in 1998. American Steve Wilson, self-described “Cheerman of the Bored,” made the arrangements with Kitaria. At present there are over 1000 Laughter Clubs around the world – and now they can be found in Seattle. Harborview Medical Center, for example, has an established Laughter Club to help reduce employee stress.

The particular focus of newly certified Seattle laugh-leader Teresa Verde is to establish Laughter Clubs in retirement communities, senior centers, and rehabilitation facilities. She holds classes at Phinney Neighborhood Center, the Northwest Senior Center in Ballard – and the list is growing. The program can be easily established at businesses, as part of a club program, and even within people’s homes.

What exactly happens during a Laughter Club session? Laughing – all kinds and lots of it! Led by a trained motivating leader, the group is led through a series of laughing, stretching, chanting, and breathing exercises. Verde’s repertoire of laughs includes: The Handshake Laugh, Dance Laugh, Rollercoaster Laugh, Cell Phone Laugh and Lion Laugh, among many others. Participants learn to generate their own laughter.

“Don’t wait to develop a sense of humor before you start laughing,” Verde recommends. “Just start laughing – and that creates a sense of humor.”

Verde explains: scientific testing verifies that the activity of laughter offers numerous physical, emotional, and psychological benefits.

“The program is a cardiovascular workout, stimulating the heart rate, lowering blood pressure, increasing lung capacity, improving blood circulation and oxygen supply,” she states. As a result, there’s also an increase in mental function, with greater alertness and creativity reported.

Health benefits can also include a strengthened immune system through increased levels of infection fighting antibodies and the decrease of cortisone levels. Laughter can reduce pain and stress due to the release of endorphins, our body's natural tranquilizers. Verde, a former preschool teacher, had not been able to work for several years she explains, "due to debilitating health issues." While admitting she can't prove scientifically that laughter cured her ills, she does point out that, "Being part of the laughter clubs has run simultaneously with my getting back on my feet." Psychological benefits, Verde says, include release of inhibitions, a positive outlook, increased joy and self-confidence. All this without telling a single joke!

"What's funny to one person may not be to another, and might even be offensive to someone," says Verde. "Laughter, though, is universal and it's physical."

Everyone interacts and participates in a Laughter Club. "You aren't a passive audience being entertained," she says. The ultimate mission of this movement, as established by Dr. Kitaria, is the promotion of health, happiness, and peace. Laughter's transformative power is largely untapped, yet as founder Kitaria stated, "Through the spirit of laughter, you come to a place of inner peace, and as we each find inner peace, it is reflected in the outer world." Not sure you believe that? Just try to hold a negative thought while you're laughing – really laughing. You can't do it! And that means the laugh's on you.