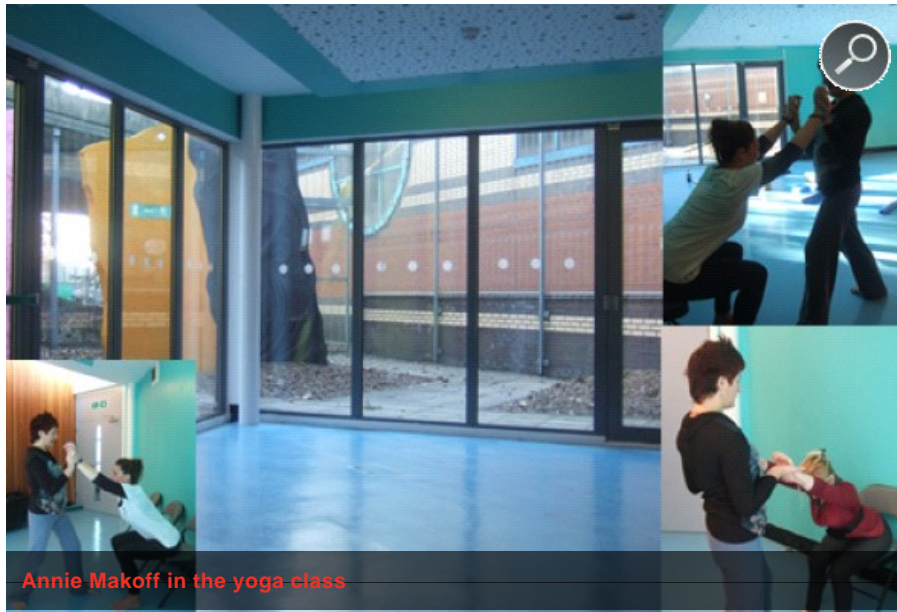


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Annie Makoff in the yoga class

## Adaptive yoga

 By **Disability Now** - 3 months 3 weeks ago

**A yoga class for disabled people might seem to clash with the concept of greater inclusion. But Annie Makoff is a fan**

A yoga class for disabled people might seem to clash with the concept of greater inclusion. But Annie Makoff is a fan. Let us know what you think. Anyone familiar with yoga and its various life-enhancing stretches will know it can be something of a challenge if you're not as supple or flexible as the majority of your yoga class. I attended several sessions when I was a not-so-sweet 17 and found the experience somewhat wanting. If I wasn't attempting to suppress the giggles at the sight of middle aged women with their rears in the air, I was trying to balance with a cumbersome plastic leg that made me feel like Pinocchio in a room full of ballerinas.

Fast forward 12 years and I'm ready to try again, albeit with more of an open mind. I was curious to see how accessible Adaptive Yoga really was and hopeful I could take away some new ideas to try at home. Actually, despite initial teething problems on arrival like being told the wrong start time and the general unhelpful attitude of the reception staff who gestured vaguely to a nondescript part of the building when asked for directions, the yoga class didn't disappoint. The classes take place in a huge sports complex by the side of the Westway flyover. For a sports-loathing woman like me, arriving in this huge complex packed with sweaty gyms and kids activity centres, I wasn't quite feeling the yoga vibe. But after the first instruction to 'breathe in, hold it, lift up, squeeze that brick and breathe out!' the sports environment felt almost irrelevant. It was a testament to the enthusiasm and passion of yoga teacher Frederique Sardais - or Fredee, as she's known - who takes these classes.

She familiarises herself with everyone's disabilities and needs, takes copious notes, and then launches into yoga teaching with the energy of a hyena. As there were no wheelchair users in class the day I attended, we did a mixture of standing and sitting postures, although these were adapted for us anyway so we could still get the most out of them with our individual disabilities. We started with a brick-hugging posture where we hugged a foam block between our thighs whilst in a perfectly balanced standing position with our arms raised and shoulders relaxed. Not as easy as it sounds, believe me! The dog pose, achieved by pressing against a wall-backed chair, keeping your arms straight and legs slightly bent as you felt the stretch in

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your knees was one of the most challenging as well as being the most liberating. I'd previously struggled with this on a mat in a non-disabled class, but the height of the chair makes it easy for anyone with balance issues and problems with their joints and bones.

Fredée is very hands on. She moved around the class, pressing on our backs or moving our hips until our posture created the optimum stretch whilst maintaining (almost) perfect balance. There was no sense of being treated differently or left to it, as I'd experienced in other yoga classes. Whereas I'd felt like an unsightly horse sporting a new and heavy horseshoe before, I felt lighter and more capable this time around. With Fredée's help and supporting hands, I was able to experience more yoga postures than I'd ever done and noticed for the first time how it felt to be perfectly balanced. The classes run until the end of December with the distinct possibility that they will run again in 2013. I for one am hoping they'll continue. To book or find out more, contact Frederique Sardais by emailing [shormas@hotmail.com](mailto:shormas@hotmail.com) or visit [yogawestlondon.co.uk](http://yogawestlondon.co.uk)

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