



Emily Brett, CEO of Ourmala

Emily Brett, 39, is CEO of Ourmala, a charity providing yoga therapy for refugees who have been victims of sexual trauma or violence. She lives in west London

MY ALARM GOES OFF...

At 7am, I do a 45-minute yoga and meditation practice before having a cup of hot water and lemon with a homemade chia seed and mango pudding. I'll wear jeans and a jumper; if I'm teaching, I'll change into leggings and a yoga top. At 8.30am, I'll take the bus, then walk the rest of the way to Hackney City Farm where Ourmala is based.

I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR...

Overseeing all aspects of my charity, Ourmala. We provide free yoga classes for refugees and asylum seekers who have been victims of traumatic experiences such as rape or forced prostitution. Our team of 50 volunteers work with humanitarian groups, such as the Helen Bamber Foundation and Freedom From Torture, to help those suffering from post-traumatic stress through my specially designed practices, based on Ashtanga yoga.

I GOT MY JOB...

After falling in love with yoga while studying for a creative writing MA at Sheffield University, I worked in communications after graduating



CLASSES MUST BE FINANCIALLY ACCESSIBLE SO ALL EQUIPMENT IS PROVIDED

but quit to study yoga in India in 2008. I returned to communications before starting the charity in 2011 while volunteering at the British Red Cross. I kept consulting to fund Ourmala but in 2016 dedicated myself to the charity full-time.

MY TYPICAL DAY...

Starts at 9.30am. I'll check my emails, usually client referrals from organisations like the British Red Cross, along with notes that help us modify our classes for them, for example, if they're having disturbed sleep. At 10.30am I teach a class of about 12 female students. I focus on techniques to help soothe their anxiety. Classes aren't sombre though; they're positive and full of smiles. A lot of women have



THROUGH HER CHARITY, EMILY HAS FOUND A WAY TO USE YOGA TO HELP OTHERS



YOGA HELPS VICTIMS OF SEXUAL TRAUMA RECONNECT WITH THEIR BODIES

disassociated from their bodies because of sexual violence so doing yoga is like coming home. After class the students and I share lunch. As refugees, they're isolated so being social is important. I'll also refund their travel – classes need to be financially accessible. I'll sit in the garden for 20 minutes to calm myself before working on projects. We've partnered with four studios – Lululemon, The Life Centre, The Shala and Hotpod Yoga – to provide public classes to raise income for the charity. I'll arrange promotion, teachers and allocate funds. Twice

a week I'll travel to Lewisham to teach a mixed class of Afghanistani refugees. I finish at 6.30pm.

MY MOST MEMORABLE WORK MOMENT...

Was when my first student told me her family had finally been granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. She was a Bolivian torture survivor; when we first met she was broken. I will never forget her smile when she said they were safe.

THE WORST PART OF MY JOB...

Is hearing about the violence inflicted upon people. We're so privileged in this country; I want to do anything I can to help.

THE BEST PART OF MY JOB...

Is meeting so many people who are testaments to human strength. You hear stories about being sold into the sex trade, and think, 'How are you sitting here, smiling?'

AFTER WORK...

Once a week I'll box, which is a great counterbalance to yoga. Otherwise I'll head home and have Japanese food for dinner. I'll read poetry and philosophy with a cup of tea before going to sleep at 11 pm.

My Plan B: Stage Actress

I love the theatre, I think I'd want to play Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire* or one of Tennessee Williams' other tragic heroines. My favourite playwrights are him, Tom Stoppard, William Shakespeare and Arthur Miller – the greats!