



Peer massage in schools

Lynn Munro, MFHT, MIGHT, talks about her work as a peer massage instructor in schools

Over the years I have gained a wide range of therapy qualifications, but the training that has made the biggest impact – on my business, and me personally – has been providing peer massage training in schools.

It began back in 2005. My business, Absolute Energy, has a team of practitioners who provide a number of adapted holistic treatments to suit the workplace, office and corporate events. At the time, we were working in a primary school in Jarrow, where staff members were having massage as a reward from the head teacher for an excellent Ofsted report.

We were carrying out the treatments in the school library and the pupils kept watching us as they moved around the school. At lunchtime a number of them came up to us in the dining room and asked if they could have a massage as well. At the end of the day the head teacher said: 'Well, that's the staff sorted out – how about the children?' I told him I had recently seen something on TV where the children were massaging each other and that I would find out more and get back in touch.

I trawled the internet and eventually found the Massage in Schools Association. I called and immediately loved what I heard. The Massage in Schools Programme was new and innovative, and I was so impressed that I cancelled everything in my diary and, three weeks later, I was training in Lancaster.

The course was excellent and I couldn't wait to go home and get started. I designed my information packs and started calling the local schools, and my feet haven't touched the ground since. I have been into more than 90 primary and secondary schools in Northumberland, Newcastle and Gateshead and the results have been even better than I expected.

The vision of the Massage in Schools Programme is that every child attending school, everywhere in the world, experiences positive and nurturing touch, every day. Designed for four to 12-year-olds, this is indeed a pioneering programme and the schools have found it a new and exciting addition to the curriculum. It is based around shared respect and helps build self-esteem, improve communication and social cohesion, and reduce aggressive behaviour.

The massage recipient is always fully clothed and massage is restricted to the arms,



shoulders, upper back and neck, with the children seeking permission to massage each other (teachers do not massage the children). The sequences are made into games and stories, e.g. drawing a weather map, making a party pizza or building a garden on each other's backs.

I offer a full and comprehensive programme and visit each class several times. I teach the children the daily routine – the weather massage – as well as creative massage, where each class makes up their own special routines. We then invite families in for a 'celebration assembly', which is always a lovely experience.

I have also received funding through Northumberland Family Learning and have worked with families across the region, so they are able to take the massage home and use it as a bedtime routine, or merely as a way of bonding and spending quality time together.

More recently I have become a trainer in Child2Child Peer Massage, developed by Jean Barlow, teacher consultant for Rochdale's behaviour management and development team. This programme has been designed to promote improvements in concentration, attention and communication, and is used with school children of all ages, from four to

11-year-olds through to 12 to 16-year-olds.

It is a very short and simple initiative that can be used by children in school, in clubs or at home to support their self-management. As well as working with the children, the Child2Child programme also involves me training teachers and other staff, who then oversee the massage work that the children carry out on each other.

I already have a number of bookings in the diary and I'm looking forward to training all the staff for the Targeting Mental Health in Schools (TaMHS) project in South Shields.

Because I am working with children, there is obviously a fair bit of red tape involved, which includes a CRB check. Parental permission is also needed for each child taking part in the programmes, but the schools do this on my behalf and over the years there have been very few parents who have not allowed their child to take part. Risk assessments and health and safety checks are also necessary, but again, the schools have everything in place for my arrival.

The past four years have been hard work but so much fun. Working with peer massage in schools has introduced me to a whole new way of working. It is so rewarding when you see the results, and when you're told by the head teacher in a tough school: 'Thank you for changing their lives'.



For more information:

- www.absoluteenergy.co.uk
- www.misa.org.uk
- www.massagesinschools.com
- www.achild2child.co.uk