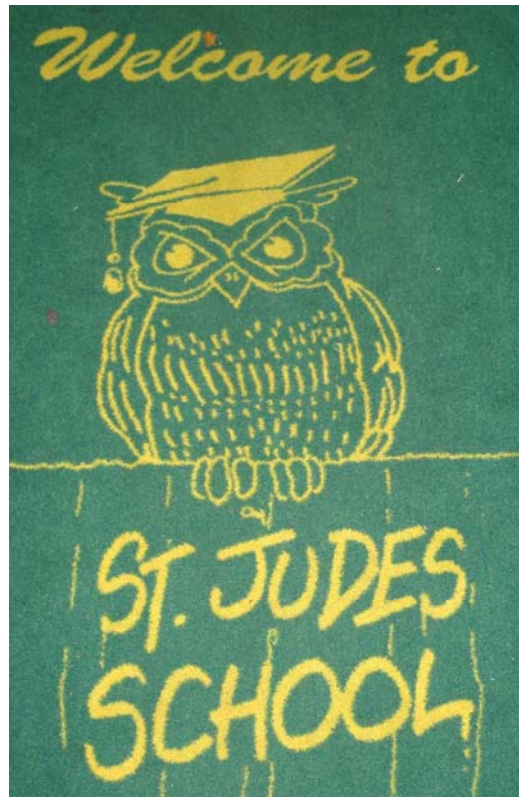


## **The Magic of Massage at St Jude's Primary School**



**Benefits of the Massage in Schools Programme in a School Setting  
A Case Study Produced by the Massage in Schools Association  
November 2006**

Thank you for your interest in the Massage in Schools Association (MISA) and the Massage in Schools Programme. As the membership organisation for instructors of the Massage in Schools Programme our vision is that every child attending school experiences positive and nurturing touch every day, everywhere in the world and you can help us achieve that.

The fact that you're reading this demonstrates that you're passionate about kinaesthetic learning techniques and their power to help children learn so the Massage in Schools Programme is definitely for you. However setting up this type of project can be difficult and raises many concerns, such as how to convince governors and other parents of the benefits. This case study has been produced to help address some of those concerns as well as to share the success of the massage in schools programme, highlight some of the excellent work being done by our instructors around the country and to give examples of best practice in delivering the programme within your organisation.

We know that you'll find the following case study inspiring and if you want more information about the programme or how to become an instructor simply contact us using the details below.

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## **The magic of massage at St Jude's Primary School**

### **Introduction**

Nestled on a side-street in the London Borough of Southwark in southeast London, St Jude's Primary is a small school with a big heart and a passion for the Massage in Schools Programme. Getting the programme started wasn't an easy task however two years after its introduction, nurturing touch has become a daily practice for the whole school. Head teacher Lynn Charlton and SEN Co-ordinator Linda Waterhouse share the highs and lows of establishing the programme, as well as their visions for the future. Both speak passionately about their school, its pupils and teachers and the Massage in Schools Programme.

### **Background**

In common with many inner-city schools, St Jude's has its fair share of cultural, ethnic, socio-economic and religious challenges to address. During the last nine years the school has been focused on improving behaviour, raising academic achievement and creating a secure environment that enhances the experiences of their pupils. Lynn described what makes the school so unique: "The majority of our children are of West African origin and we have some Black Caribbean children too. It's a Church of England school so a lot of our families are evangelical churchgoers but we also have a lot of traditions and backgrounds and about 20% are Muslim children from all over the world. On the whole it's a mixed community and they all seem to fit together very nicely.

Our aim has been to enrich the curriculum and give the children the security and self-esteem to benefit as much as they can from what we have to offer. And we're blessed with a staff team that works really well together; who will muck in and are very willing to try new things and to take risks. So one of the things that we did trial was a massage programme."

The school has adopted a holistic approach to teaching and learning using the massage programme as a tool for improving the children's interpersonal skills and teaching about the use of appropriate touch and dealing with others. The programme has been a huge success since it was fully implemented in 2004 however it didn't happen overnight and there were many twists and turns along the way. Now two years later, the rewards have far exceeded everyone's expectations.

## Ideas into action – implementing the massage in schools programme

After seeing a demonstration of the massage programme while attending a training workshop, Linda knew it was the perfect complement to the work already going on at St Jude's. She describes how she first came across the programme and how the process of bringing it into her school began.

“Originally I discovered about massage in schools while I was attending an event in Southwark called 'Schools Support Network' where I saw some boys from a school for boys with behavioural difficulties demonstrate it. At the time I was already interested in touch deprivation and its effects on children and babies and how as a teacher, I could use touch as a teaching mechanism to calm children when they're distressed. Funnily enough, the year before a friend of mine had written an article about the massage in schools programme for a magazine she was working on and I'd had the chance to do the training then but turned it down due to time pressures - I thought it was something too bonkers at that time!

But by the time I saw the boys demonstrate it at the event in Southwark, I started thinking about how I could use it here at St Jude's, particularly with two boys that we have in one of the classes who are very different but both have a diagnosis of autism. One is very touch-sensitive and the other needs a lot of deeper touch - so that was how I thought about bringing it into our school. I got funding from a charity to pay for myself and a teaching assistant to do the massage in schools training. It was very important that there were two of us in the school that were trained. We did the training in Dec 2003 at the Centre for Child Mental Health with Sylvia and Mia – the founders of the programme – who were very inspiring. We didn't rush into it because we wanted to get it right; it was six months between training and implementing the full programme.”

While Linda's enthusiasm became infectious, there were a few hurdles to overcome and the success or failure of the programme lay in winning over the school's governors, parents and pupils – not an easy task but one which she approached carefully and cautiously. She explains how the process got underway: “We put a lot of thought into how we were going to introduce the programme into the school and we began by selecting a Year 3 class with two autistic statemented boys in it. We decided that the best way to start would be to do a pilot project just to test it out. And because it was a pilot project, it was less scary for the staff; it wasn't like we were saying: “You WILL do massage everyday!” We just told everyone we were going to do it as a pilot. Our first step was to get the governors on side, so myself and a teaching assistant very nervously attended a governors meeting, where we asked for volunteers to experience the massage routine. We were pleasantly surprised as all the governors were queuing up to have a go! I must be honest, because of the evangelical beliefs of many of our governors, I was anticipating some stumbling blocks because often massage is associated with other religions such as Hinduism, which the evangelical faith is not so keen on, but we were very up-front and very buoyed up by the training we'd done and were determined that we were going to deal with any problems head on. We massaged all the governors and they were immediately won over!

Our next step was to sell the programme to parents and so we ran open evenings, where we showed the video and demonstrated the massage routine. Prior to the open evenings we'd had casual conversations with parents and sent out letters telling them all about it. It's important to put a lot of thought into creating a buzz about the programme and if you rush into it, you'll sabotage the programme before it gets a chance to get going. We put a lot more thought into selling it to parents and ran two sessions at times that were convenient for them to attend. With the first one we only got 2 parents – they were the tough-nut parents; the ones who come to complain. We knew that if we won over those parents, then we were onto a winner. Even though only two came, they spread the word!

Then the next step was to do a whole school assembly where we showed the massage to all the children and they loved it pretty much from the word go. After that, we knew the programme would be a success and it's just gone from strength to strength each year.

## Rising to the challenges

Even though the programme is running successfully, things have not always gone smoothly and there have been times when the teachers have had to skilfully persuade parents and some children of the benefits. It's taken persistence and infinite amounts of patience and St Jude's has reaped the rewards. Linda shares some of the problems that have occurred: "We've had times where one parent hasn't been keen on their child taking part in the programme and they've tried to discourage other parents and their children from taking part either. So in the early days we had to work very hard at not getting angry and just keeping the pupil in the room, allowing them to participate in the programme in another way; by being the instructor for example. We made a choice not to engage in the negativity because the parent was looking for a confrontation and instead we were very strategic in what we did.

Having said that, it's also very important to take on board parents' concerns about things like 'touching' and 'head lice'. Some parents do ask about the dirtiness of other children and I say that it's no more than their day-to-day or playground contact. I think sometimes those type of questions hide other anxieties."

But parents aren't the only ones that can be challenging...

"One of the negatives – and it's not *really* a negative – is that that child has the choice to take part in programme or not and sometimes they will exercise that choice just to see that they have it or to be sure that you mean it," said Linda. "Generally the programme works well but sometimes it just doesn't gel or you're not up to it or the children all decide they don't want to do it. My advice to others is: don't be put off if it doesn't go smoothly every time, just continue. Just like a lesson doesn't work sometimes there will be days when the children don't feel like it. If you know a child really wants to do it but isn't for some reason, then you can encourage them to take part if you know that in the long-term they would benefit from that 10-minute experience. They do always have the right to say no but if you know the child really well then you can gently persuade them."

## **The power of positive touch – the benefits to children, teachers and parents**

Having overcome all the difficulties of implementing the programme, St Jude's has benefited greatly from the massage in schools programme and have used the project to achieve some of the targets set out in Every Child Matters (ECM). The impact of the programme has had a positive effect on the children, teachers and even parents. Lynn describes how the massage sessions fit into the ECM agenda:

“We use the programme as tool for improving a child's welfare and their emotional security and although child protection isn't a direct issue in relation to massage, the programme allows the children to explore the issue of appropriate touch and relate it to other things that they may be experiencing in their lives. It does give them a sense of self and helps them to create the strategies to build up the confidence to say: 'that's alright and that's not'. Those are transferable skills a child can use to help them resist bullying for example. The massage programme has so many crossovers because it helps to provide the emotional security that they need in order to achieve. We all know that if a child is not feeling secure and happy in school, they are not going to achieve as well as they might. So in terms of Every Child Matters, the programme ticks a lot of boxes: staying safe, being happy and being looked after.

It's also a good opportunity for leadership for the children because they will lead the massage, they will demonstrate, they will be the instructor and that's all very confidence building for them and there's enjoyment all round. The programme also offers the children a chance to be still; it's an time to be reflective; it's an opportunity to take just a quiet, calm, oasis moment – and there aren't many of those in a school day or any other day come to that!”

Although some of the teachers were initially a little sceptical to start with, the success of the programme has brought surprise benefits and lead to increased confidence and enhanced teaching skills. Lynn gave an example: “There was a particular member of staff who can be a little nervous sometimes, in terms of finding different ways of managing behaviour. We had to do some convincing to start with but now they're actually doing the massage programme and seeing the effect it has on the children, their confidence has been boosted as they add another string to their bow. It's also been a huge resource for one of our teaching assistants and it's led her on to develop other kinaesthetic ways of learning.”

Another unexpected benefit has been the ways in which the children have been sharing the massage with their families at home. Linda shared one of those stories and explained: “We've had parents – particularly of boys aged 8 or 9 – say that the only loving contact they get now is when their son massages them, because at that age they don't often show affection. Most boys that age like rough play and giving the massage is the only moment where they have 'permission' to be soft with their mummies. That's so sad that even at 8 years old some boys are already part of the macho culture. But parents love it now. It's one of the biggest benefits that we've noticed; that children are going back home and using the massage with their families.

### **The future of massage in schools at St Jude's**

St Jude's has big plans for the future of their massage in schools programme and creating innovative ways of using kinaesthetic learning techniques.

"We have some very difficult children in our school with very complicated emotional needs, and they find the massage very calming," Linda explained. "They find that it is a way of being a part of the class – even if it's only for two minutes before they're distracted again – and that's an experience that can built on.

I want to try and bring touch into all lessons. I've wanted to do it for a year or so but just haven't had the opportunity to yet! That I'd like to do it so that we could teach science through a massage and other things – or at least use an element of it. But we'll take it slowly and choose a class to pilot it in first."

### **Top tips for introducing massage in schools:**

Finally Lynn and Linda share their top tips for anyone considering using the massage in schools programme:

"My advice to another school is that I would certainly encourage them to go ahead," said Lynn. "However don't rush it. Do it slowly, rather than going at it like a bull at a gate, because if it fails then you can't really re-introduce it. Take your time because it can be a sensitive area; parents do need to be reassured that it's working well and that their child is going to benefit from it. We use the programme as part of a holistic approach because in the end, we want the children to benefit from it but we want them to enjoy it as well and use the skills that they've learned and transfer them to other areas of their lives. And you can't do that overnight so take it a step at a time and really think about what you're doing."

Linda's advice is: "Before you think about doing the training and using the programme, definitely go into a school and watch it in practice because that's very useful. For me, the first time I saw the massage routine being demonstrated by those boys convinced me that it worked. So yes, take it slowly, have a look, be determined and then go for it!"

If you'd like to bring the power of positive touch into your school or organisation go to <http://www.messageinschools.com> for more information about the programme and to book a training course.

Alternatively you can contact us for more information about our work and for details of instructors in your area.

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MISA is a non-profit organisation formed in 2002 following the pioneering work of Mia Elmsäter of Sweden and Sylvie Héту of Canada, founders of the Message in Schools Programme. The Association works to promote the Programme and its vision along side providing quality Instructor training and support for all its members.