

Meet an Instructor

Jane McLennan



Jane is a Massage in Schools Programme (MISP) instructor, trained in 2008 and an IMPACT Wellbeing Programme instructor, trained in 2014. She is based in the East Midlands and works with a local group of therapists called The Holistic Health Team, whose aim is 'Making Health and Well-being Accessible to All'. The team have carried out two studies of the benefits of the MISP in 19 Nottinghamshire schools and are currently delivering IMPACT sessions to secondary schools, colleges, businesses and sports clubs.

What is your main area of work?

I am a complementary therapist specialising in Traditional Japanese Reiki and Reiki training, I also practise several different types of massage and colour and image consultancy, delivering hands-on massage therapies, Reiki and colour and image sessions and workshops.

What inspired you to train as a MISP instructor and then as an IMPACT Wellbeing instructor?

I first heard about MISP from Julie, one of our team who trained in 2007, she began making connections with schools and finding work and her enthusiasm was infectious! I love children and thought it would be an ideal area of work to explore and develop. Julie and Pip secured some funding to carry out a pilot project in 14 schools and I was keen to be involved. I had previously worked for five years as a University lecturer, so education was a familiar area, so in 2008 I trained to be a MISP instructor.

We later became involved in delivering peer massage to schools through a scheme called 'Children's University'. We had mostly been working with primary school children with MISP, but CU is open to children up to the age of 14, so I trained in IMPACT to learn new ways of working with peer massage which would be more suitable for secondary school children.

I was familiar with most of the aspects of the IMPACT programme, and was already delivering stress management and meditation workshops as well as peer massage. However, I found it beneficial to have a structure to work to and a recognised and accredited programme, which is specifically aimed at young people. This has given me more confidence in approaching schools.

How have you used the programmes and what have been the benefits?

I have worked in about 15-20 different schools with MISP and been involved in two studies to assess the benefits of peer massage with primary school children in Nottinghamshire. Our studies showed that peer massage reduced worry and anxiety and increased feelings of wellbeing. It also increased confidence in social situations and helped improve concentration in class. The world we live in today

is over stimulating and many children just don't know how to relax any more. It's magical to see a noisy class calm down and relax and to see a worried, anxious or unruly child calm down and smile again!

MISP tends to be implemented across the whole school, but with IMPACT the schools we have worked with so far seem to be using it in a more targeted way for their more vulnerable students. As a result I have worked with a lot more children with learning difficulties and disabilities. This has been more challenging but also really interesting and it's great to see that the kids who really need these skills are getting the additional support.

What have you most enjoyed about using the programmes?



I enjoy working with children and young people, as they are the future of our world. Life as a child is so much more stressful now than it was when I was a young and if we want to develop a society that cares and respects one another we need to teach them those skills from an early age. I love to see the effect the peer massage has on children, the deep feelings of calm and relaxation that very often they can't even put into words. With the older children seeing them suddenly 'get it' and realise that even though they may be living with a stressful situation they don't have to be stressed all the time, it's very heart-warming to see the changes it can have in children's lives.

What difficulties have you had to overcome?

As an independent instructor the main difficulty is always making contacts with schools and getting them to commit to funding the programmes. As a result we are finding that rather than deliver the full MISP or IMPACT programmes we often have to be flexible and creative, so that we can deliver something within the budget of the school, even if they can't afford the full programme.

Some of the groups I have been working with, particularly those with Autism, struggle to think creatively and find visualisation more difficult. I have had to be careful with the language I use; I often use analogies, but found that this can confuse some of them, so it's better to be as literal as possible. For children with attention-deficit type issues they are used to being constantly stimulated and when you try and get them to do something like relaxation breathing they just feel bored and struggle to engage. So I have had to focus more on activities, such as massage, which will relax them but still keep them active and engaged.

What would you say are your greatest achievements?



I have been working with a Boccia Ball team of young people with disabilities (mostly cerebral palsy). This has been challenging as they are a very diverse group in terms of age, physical and mental abilities and communication skills. I started delivering IMPACT workshops, but after a couple of sessions we decided to move to short one to one sessions with them, so we can tailor things more for their individual level of ability, and this seems to be working really well.

I am teaching them breathing, specific stretches to help correct their posture, massaging them and teaching them or parents/carers how to do some massage on the areas which are most problematic for each individual team member.

I think the beauty of MISP and IMPACT is that they both give a structure to work with, but allow for flexibility in the way you deliver the skills and techniques. I think schools prefer to adopt a recognised programme, and as a therapist it gives me more confidence in approaching schools that I am part of a larger organisation. For me it has been a great way to open up work in schools and with young people, influencing the next generation to be healthier and more relaxed. It's the best way I have found to change the world!

To find out more about Jane's work visit

www.reikinottingham.co.uk

www.holistichealthteam.com