



Left: members of Nottingham Boccia Ball Club **Above:** (left to right) Kathleen Markham, Pip Bateman and Jane McLennan

Throwing well-being into touch

Holistic Health Team's Jane McLennan, MFHT, reflects on offering well-being sessions for members of Nottingham Boccia Ball Club

I'd been working as a Reiki practitioner for a couple of years when a mutual friend introduced me to Pip Bateman, MFHT, the founder and director of Holistic Health Team, in 2006. I jumped at the chance to become part of the team as I was keen to explore new areas of work with client groups that I was unlikely to encounter in my regular day-to-day practice.

Holistic Health Team is a group of 20 self-employed complementary therapists with a wide range of skills and specialisms, who come together to work on a variety of projects with charities, community groups, schools, colleges and corporate clients. The aim of the team is to 'make health and well-being accessible to all' by working on funded projects that are free at the point of access. Pip won an FHT Excellence in Practice award in 2014 (see picture above right) for her work in creating and leading the team.

For a number of years, Holistic Health Team has been running a range of workshops at an annual open-day event with Portland College in Mansfield, a specialist national college for students with disabilities. It was here that myself and Pip met Pete Edwards, the coach for the Nottingham Boccia Ball Club, who also works for Disability Sport. Boccia is similar to boules or bowls but is played with soft balls; a jack ball is thrown and two opposing teams try to get their balls as close to the jack as possible. It is a

Paralympic sport and all players compete in different classifications depending on their level of disability. Balls can be thrown overarm, underarm or for those with more limited arm movement, rolled down a ramp.

Nottingham Boccia Ball Club is a team of 15 male and female young people with disabilities. They are mostly teenagers with ages ranging from 12 to 28. The majority of the team have cerebral palsy and their physical abilities, mental abilities and communication skills vary greatly. Many of the team are wheelchair users, a few have hearing or visual impairment, and some struggle to communicate verbally. They all attend accompanied by a parent or carer. The club is highly regarded with a few teams that compete at National level.

Following discussions with Pete, members of Holistic Health Team were booked to deliver a series of one-hour sessions to Nottingham Boccia Ball Club every alternate week, over a six-month period, beginning in November 2014. One team of four players had begun to participate in the National Super League, a competitive league for the top six teams in the country. The standard of play was much

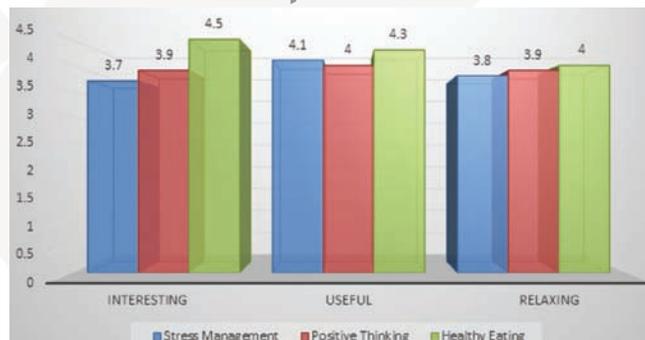
higher than they were used to and they were struggling to adjust to competition at the new level. The team captain's disability had also been recently and unexpectedly re-classified and he had lost his ranking as number four player in the UK. All this was affecting the morale of the team and club, so the aim of the sessions was to improve the team's well-being, resilience and outlook, both in general and with particular regard to their game.

It was planned that we would provide a series of workshop sessions, based on the IMPACT Wellbeing Programme, with additional sessions on healthy eating and positive thinking. I would be delivering IMPACT and healthy eating sessions and former FHT Vice-president, Julie Tasker, would be delivering positive thinking sessions. The IMPACT Wellbeing Programme is a mindfulness-based programme, which explores the causes and effects of stress. It uses techniques such as breathing, stretching exercises, relaxation, guided visualisation, self-massage and peer massage, which can all be carried out seated. It was developed by Touchline Training and designed as a flexible programme aimed at secondary school children in the classroom, adults in the workplace and those in a care environment. This was the first time the programme had been used in this context and it was acknowledged from the outset that we may need to adapt the form of delivery as the sessions progressed in order to suit the diverse needs of the group.

Workshop sessions and evaluation

We began with an introduction session on stress management, which was attended by team members, coaches, and some parents

Workshop evaluations



and carers. This session covered recognising stress and learning to manage it with some simple breathing and stretching exercises. The second session introduced positive thinking, considering posture and body alignment and relating it to how the players throw to give the session a more practical focus.

After the Christmas break we delivered a session on healthy eating. This included basic information on food and nutrition and some simple advice to follow. The group were divided into three teams and throughout the session given several tasks and activities to engage them and test their understanding of the information given. These were scored to turn the session into a game, with the three teams competing against each other.

A quick evaluation was carried out at the end of each of the three workshop sessions. Participants were asked to rate the workshop on a scale of one to five, with one being the lowest and five the highest, based on whether they found it interesting, useful and relaxing.

The graph below left shows the average results from each of the three group sessions.

Adapting the sessions

A core group within the team seemed to benefit from the workshops, and feedback was generally very good. However, due to the variation in abilities of the group there were some who struggled to engage at all, as it was beyond their capability, and some at the other end of the scale found that sessions were not challenging enough. It was also felt that the workshops were taking too much time away from boccia practice. We met to discuss how we could alter the sessions to help meet more of the individual needs of the group members. We explored several different options and eventually decided to abandon the group workshop format and work with each player individually in shorter one-to-one sessions. That way we could meet more of their individual needs with less interruption to their ongoing practice.

We worked with three team members during each session, spending about 25 minutes with each player for the remaining sessions. Working in a more individual way enabled Julie and myself to tailor each session to meet the physical needs and levels of capability of each player. The basis of the session was giving neck, shoulder, arm and hand massage. Cerebral palsy tends to affect the muscles, making them very tight; as a result many of the team members found it very hard to relax their muscles naturally. A few team members had problems in their legs and, although the legs are not used while playing, we worked on these areas, where appropriate.

We also assessed posture, gave specific stretching exercises, recapped the breathing techniques, and where appropriate advised parents how to continue with massage. For some of the more able players, we showed

them how they could massage their own neck, shoulders, arms or hands. We talked about mental attitude with some of the players and ways to remain positive even when playing badly or being beaten. Each team member could benefit from the sessions in ways that were appropriate for their individual needs.

Well-being evaluation

An informal self-evaluation was carried out using a simple questionnaire with a series of statements that linked to well-being themes, such as how often the team members felt relaxed and good about themselves. They picked responses that corresponded with how they felt about the statements and a well-being score was calculated based on their responses. A baseline evaluation was carried out before the start of the first workshop session in November and then again at the end of the final session in May.

Well-being evaluations



The average score before the sessions began was 49.1 out of 70, which is a fairly healthy score within the normal range. However, by the end of the programme we can see a rise of eight points in the team's well-being, taking their score up to 57.1. This represents an increase of 11.4 per cent.

Feedback

Team members were open in acknowledging the benefits of the sessions, with comments including the following:

- 'The self-esteem and massage session was useful'
- 'Relaxing techniques were particularly helpful'
- 'Self-massage and relaxation strategies were useful'
- 'The massage was useful for relaxing'
- 'Massage helped stretch my muscles'
- 'Massage helped me to relax properly'
- 'I felt more relaxed, with more flexible joints after massage'
- 'Sessions were better when more practical, rather than theoretical'
- 'It taught me a lot and I enjoyed it'.

Conclusion

Both the workshops and therapy session were generally well received. Some of the players had received therapeutic massage

previously and were enthusiastic, but others had never had massage before and were a little apprehensive about whether it would be suitable for them, given their disability. All seemed to benefit from the massage and many did not realise how tense their muscles were until after they had been massaged and were able to relax.

In terms of their performance, unfortunately the teams did not do well at national matches in November and January, but by May, shortly before the end of the Holistic Health Team sessions, their performance had markedly improved. The Super League team won the silver medal (beaten to gold by only a single point) and the regular team also did well in their National League matches.

We can conclude from the evaluation results and feedback comments that the sessions have helped to improve the team's well-being and may also have contributed to the improvement in their performance in playing boccia.



Read an article about Holistic Health Team, featured in Issue 111 Winter 2015, www.fht.org.uk/holistichealthteam



Jane McLennan has been practising as a complementary therapist since 2004. She specialises in traditional Japanese lineage reiki healing and training, and works with schools delivering peer massage and well-being activities as part of Holistic Health Team. She has been involved in two studies to evaluate the effectiveness of Massage in Schools (misa.org.uk). These were validated by Edge Hill University, which awarded her a PGCE. Jane's background is in interior architecture and university lecturing, but she gave up her career due to illness. Through her own healing process she discovered complementary therapy; her self-healing evolved into healing others, which then became her career.
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