

IAIM Baby Massage Classes at Body & Soul

You may have read the feature in the last issue of Touch Matters about our collaboration with London based HIV charity, Body & Soul, which saw one of our CIMIs running a course with its parent members. In this issue we are delighted to share with you all the findings and feedback received from Body & Soul and the parents on the course.

Sanita Ellis came forward with great enthusiasm to volunteer her time to run this course and we are really proud to have her represent the UK Chapter. Here is her report:

I thoroughly enjoyed running this course. It took a while for it to happen, but I was so pleased it went ahead, and that it was run in the summer and not in the winter time as was originally planned!

The course was very well organised by the IAIM (Polly) and also Body & Soul's Anneke and Emily. Body & Soul arranged taxi transport for the parents, which made a huge difference to attendance and I think helped towards the success of the course. Some of these women travelled from quite far away and I was very humbled by their dedication and determination each week to arrive on time. However, due to the location of the charity all the mums did say it was quite challenging leaving that early in the morning, even though a taxi was collecting them. So it was amazing to see their commitment to attending the course.

On my first day I remember walking through the pouring rain to arrive a somewhat large building with no obvious sign or name, only



Sanita with ?? from Body & Soul.

the number of the road and some beautiful stained glass which read 'love, peace and hope' and those words resonated with me throughout the course.

Once I arrived indoors, all soaked, I was slightly in awe - those words were resonating throughout the building and the staff. The building was unreal. I really wasn't expecting it, but it was clean, airy, bright and smelt glorious and I was totally amazed at how uplifting it felt as soon as you walked in. This felt like a health and wellbeing therapeutic spa, I literally felt like I left all my travel stress and nonsense at the door.

From my personal experience in the field that I work in, when you walk into some charity organisations the staff often looks scruffy and like they don't want to be there. However, at Body & Soul everyone was beaming and radiating so much positive energy. It was truly beautiful!

During the course, we used the yoga room, the basement and then finally the bright room upstairs, which I thought looked like a Manhattan style loft apartment. "This place is

massive" I kept thinking when I discovered yet another room. The parents didn't mind that we were in different rooms each week and I really enjoyed experiencing the energy of each of the spaces we used.

At the first session I read out the mission statement of the IAIM. I felt really touched with my role and what the IAIM and baby massage was giving to these women and how the essence of the organisation can be seen through the volunteer work that we do. "I believe that every parent, regardless of personal philosophy, and every infant, regardless of birth history or disposition, should have the opportunity to experience the lifelong benefits that come from early bonds that are loving, healthy and secure."

These mothers did just that despite their birth history or disposition. They were so nurturing to their babies and you could see how much love flowed through their hands through each stroke they did and the connection between them and their baby. Their eyes danced, their hearts sang and we were connected through silence, peace and knowing that the babies were receiving so much more than the massage. There was always so much laughter, singing, cooing, sharing and positive praise from one mother to another, and they were united as one even if English wasn't their first language. There was one Spanish speaking parent in the group and I managed to get the strokes sheet in Spanish from the IAIM Office

for her, which she really appreciated.

The verbal feedback I received was amazing and so touching. One mother said "thank you, you have given me so much, I feel I can really help him now". Another who attended every week said that she really enjoyed it "no-one tells you you're doing well, there is no-one to help you, and these classes have been SO amazing".

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Feedback from Body & Soul

As we all know, baby massage offers a wonderful experience for parents to bond with their babies, as well as to learn how to communicate both verbally and non-verbally them. The feedback from this course has been so positive and valuable and shows us how important touch and the time to bond with you baby

can be.

For the mums who attend Body & Soul, they live or are affected with HIV and breast feeding their baby is not an option for them. Mothers miss out on one of the most natural bonding experiences, which can create attachment, bonding and communication challenges between mother and baby. Hannah Wallace from Children Services said of the course "It provided the parents with an opportunity to socialise with other members and equipped them with valuable techniques to relax and bond with their children. All the parents who attended the course loved it and would love to see it run again".