

Body in Balance: Fife's Best-Kept Secret?

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In a tiny and particularly picturesque corner of Fife, a training centre for complementary therapies is quietly developing into a centre of excellence with an international reputation.

Dysart is home to Mariette Lobo. Originally from Uganda, where her parents had moved to from South India, Mariette

studied for two years at Central College, Glasgow before building up a multi-therapy, complementary healthcare practice, first at Napier's Glasgow and then at The Buckingham Clinic.

Mariette then moved to Dysart, setting up her therapies practice as Body in Balance as well as working as a lecturer in Holistic Therapies in what is now Fife College. In 2013 Mariette left Fife College to set up her own training centre that offers vocational training in complementary therapies. (VTCT)

Mariette says, "VTCT is the leading international awarding organisation. It offers world class vocational qualifications and my aim is to help students achieve their full potential as therapists in a challenging yet secure and caring environment." Mariette also offers training in Reflexology leading to certification for the Bayly School Diploma in Reflexology, one of only two accredited satellite schools in Scotland.

Mariette's training centre is run on a very flexible basis. She teaches VTCT practitioners' courses which are available at weekends for people who are too busy to attend during the week. Classes comprise a maximum of four students and are run to suit students' personal timetables, unlike most other courses where students have to fit in with a college curriculum timetable.

Additionally, Mariette also offers *The Healing Arts*, an introductory, non-practitioner programme in complementary therapies. This is intended to provide a basic skill set in complementary therapies for non-practitioners who want to help family and friends. It also

provides potential practitioner students with an introduction to the profession that can help to inform a decision to commit to a practitioner level course.

Such is Mariette's reputation (she won a commendation in the Federation of Holistic Therapies Tutor of the Year Awards 2012) that she attracts students of the highest calibre from all over the world. Take Karen Coyne, 50, who currently works in Kenya and travels from there to Body in Balance once a month. She has a Masters Degree in Public Health in Developing Countries and has advised African governments on health and development as well as working throughout Asia and the Far East.

Karen had been looking for a course for some time that would allow her to study in Kenya but gain a UK qualification – an impossible-seeming task until she discovered Body in Balance.

The flexibility of Mariette's courses means that Karen can do a mixture of practical sessions and classroom-based learning in Dysart, while complementing this with email and Skype-based sessions in Kenya.



“I am very excited about the possibility of gaining a recognised UK Reflexology qualification even though I am not resident here. It's such an amazing opportunity, especially in such a small class,” says Karen.

Julia Mandle, 30, is another unusual student with impressive credentials. Russian by birth, she currently lives in Dunbar with her dentist husband and two young children, aged four-and-a-half and one year. She is also currently in year one of a course in Homeopathy.

Despite having a high-flying career in the financial world (and an MBA from the University of Birmingham), Julia decided to change direction. She has always been fascinated by complementary therapies and found Reflexology very helpful while she was pregnant.

Julia was looking for a course that was flexible, externally accredited, had small class numbers and focused on practice as well as theory. Her Homeopathy tutor recommended Mariette because she ticked all these boxes – particularly the practical aspect – and Julia now travels the extra miles to Dysart rather than studying in Edinburgh.

“Most courses don't start practicals until four or five months into the course. With Mariette's course, we study theory in the morning and then practise on each other and on Mariette,

from very early on. A great bonus of the small class size is getting to practise on the tutor and get invaluable, expert feedback,” says Julia.

Mariette also encourages her students to practise on friends and family in between the practical sessions at college. Not surprisingly, volunteers often have to form an orderly queue.

As well as being an award-winning tutor, Mariette also has a reputation in the treatment of sports injuries. Markinch man Liam Baillie, 36, contacted Body in Balance to help him prepare for the London Marathon 2013. Liam had recently been made partner at St James’s Place (SJP), the prestigious wealth management company. He wanted to give something back,

and the marathon provided the ideal opportunity. Mariette constructed a therapy schedule to complement Liam’s training schedule so that he would be in the best possible shape for the race.

However, disaster struck just two weeks before the big day, when he went over on his ankle and was in so much pain he didn’t think he would be able to compete at all. Mariette and the Bowen Technique literally came to the rescue. Three sessions later and Liam completed the marathon in a respectable 4 hours and 37 minutes.

“I firmly believe that without Mariette I would not have been able to complete the marathon on 21st April,” he says. “But I did, and I raised almost £3000 for the SJP Foundation which St James’s Place have matched and doubled to nearly £6000. This will go to a children’s foundation that predominately helps children with cerebral palsy.

With many satisfied clients who vouch that complementary treatments work for them, Mariette has been trying to encourage NHS Fife to follow up on the statement by Michael Matheson MSP, Minister of Public Health that “The Scottish Government recognises that complementary therapies may offer relief to some people suffering from a wide variety of conditions”.

She accepts that the issue of scientific evidence is an obstacle to progress in this area.

“The problem of providing evidence is a stumbling block. It is difficult to design clinical trials for the effectiveness of complementary therapies because you can’t give a fake reflexology treatment or a fake massage as a placebo to the control group.” says Mariette.

Nevertheless with so many people turning to complementary therapies, she would like to see health services recommending that GPs refer patients to complementary therapists for drug-

free treatments on prescription, similar to the initiative that led to doctors prescribing exercise regimes at gyms for patients.

Meanwhile Mariette's client list for therapies and waiting lists for training courses continue to grow and, if anecdotal evidence is anything to go by (see impressive testimonials at www.mariettelobo.com), many people locally and internationally are convinced of the effectiveness of complementary therapies at Body in Balance.

1,115 words excluding headline

Photo shows:

1. Karen Coyne carries out practical exercise on Julia Mandle as Mariette Lobo looks on
2. From left: Mariette Lobo, Karen Coyne and Julia Mandle in a classroom setting

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Proof of Fife