

Compassionate Touch catches on

The Upledger Foundation's Compassionate Touch program has reached more than 500 kindergarten-through-second-grade students in eight states and two countries since its inception in 1997.

Data collected from classrooms using Compassionate Touch show that the program, which aims to increase positive social behavior through appropriate touch, significantly increases positive social skills and decreases problem behaviors.

The Upledger Foundation was formed in 1987 with a mission to create community programs that enhance health and well-being. Its Compassionate Touch program encourages children to use their "helping hands" and "happy thoughts," visions of things such as birthday cakes, rainbows and balloons, to make themselves and others feel better.

"[With Compassionate Touch], what I saw from the outside looking in was calm come over the classrooms in general," said Ruth Peterson, a teacher of 37 years and a craniosacral therapist. "It didn't just change the children, it changed the teachers, too."

Peterson currently teaches fifth grade at Lanier Elementary, in Tampa, Florida, where she helped implement the Compassionate Touch program in the kindergarten and first-grade classes in 2002.

Peterson said she approached her principal first about the program, and gave him materials and a video on Compassionate Touch available from the foundation.

"He said I should talk to each teacher individually about the program," said Peterson. "Each teacher made the decision separately, and all of them decided to go ahead with the program."

As part of the Upledger Foundation's Compassionate Touch Helping Hands Research Project, teachers assess their students using the Social Skills Rating System—a 57-item inventory of social skills, problem behaviors and academic competence—at the beginning and the end of the school year.

Of the 560 students who have already been assessed in classrooms throughout the nation, a statistician's analysis of the data states, "Students showed highly statistically significant increases in mean pre-test and post-test assessments in social skills, including cooperation, assertion and self-control, and highly statistically significant decreases in problem behaviors, including externalizing and hyperactivity."

According to Barbara Richmond, program director, the results of this study will be used in a press release to be sent to schools, craniosacral-therapy organizations, parent groups, media and other relevant parties, in an effort to expand the program to more schools throughout the nation and the world.

"We would love to see this in every elementary school," said Richmond. "I think that people will start to see that appropriate touch is very therapeutic."

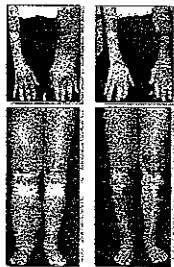
Besides expanding Compassionate Touch to more schools, the foundation also aims to broaden the program to reach older students, up through the eighth grade.

—Brandi Schlossberg

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