

## **An Inclusive Dance for Wellbeing Class**

### **About Louise**

Louise is a Yoga Alliance registered yoga teacher, with a BA in Applied Psychology and MA in Outdoor Education specialising in Group Facilitation. She has 8 years experience working in Special Needs Services, with an exclusive focus in recent years on individuals with Autism. She is also a musician and teacher of Irish group dances.

### **Elevate**

Louise has combined her academic background with her love of music and movement to design an Inclusive Dance for Wellbeing workshop for individuals with Autism and wider special needs.

The class begins with gentle stretching to calm, instrumental music and works up to movement to music that has a stronger rhythm. The mats are put away and the participants move around the room stretching to music. The participants are guided through some simple dance movements in between stretches. Depending on the abilities of the group, some more aerobic exercise may be engaged in, such as hopping, running or dancing to a particular structured dance routine.

The class is tailored to the preferences of the individuals within the group. The movements within the group are geared towards connecting participants with their bodies, and exaggerating self soothing behaviours which are present within the group.

Differing sensory needs are catered for. For example, participants with an aversion to loud noise can use ear defenders, and still gain from the sensory feedback from the movement and social interaction. If participants use weighted blankets, they are encouraged to use them for the end of class if deep pressure is something they benefit from.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Research has shown that the unique combination of music, yoga and dance is particularly effective in improving functioning and eliciting the Relaxation Response in children with ASD. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3221508/#B21>)

The Dance for Wellbeing class has been specifically designed to elicit The Relaxation Response, incorporating deep breathing exercises and visualisation to reduce stress levels, relax muscles and lower blood pressure (Benson & Beary, 1974). Joanne Lara is founder of Autism Movement Therapy which combines dance and movement and says the value is “an empowering sensory integration strategy that connects both the left and right hemispheres of the brain (interhemispheric integration)” (Lara, 2018)..

What Louise finds is most powerful is the sense of community that the music and dance creates between staff and individuals with ASD. It is a rare, truly shared experience.

The class may end with a specific, coordinated dance routine. Louise finds this element of repetition allows for a sense of mastery. Individuals may engage a little more each week as

they get used to the routine.

### **The benefits**

Cognitive

Improved flexibility

Social

Stress release

Sensory feedback from music

Integration of right and left brain

hemisphere through music and movement

A shared social experience with other individuals on the spectrum and with staff

Physical

Community Integration

Exercise

Improving circulation

Positive impact on digestion

Connection with community if using a community based space

Contact Louise at [info@louise.ie](mailto:info@louise.ie) for more information about her

workshops

### **References:**

Benson, H., Beary, J. F., & Carol, M. P. (1974). The relaxation response. *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*, 37(1), 37-46.

Rosenblatt et al., (2011). Relaxation response-based yoga improves functioning in young

children with autism: a pilot study. *Journal of Alternative Complementary Medicine*, 17, 1029– 1035

Lara, J. (2018). Retrieved on 01/12/2018 from <https://www.autismmovementtherapy.com/>